Life After Emancipation: A Phenomenological Study of Emancipated Foster Youth and

Their Lived Experiences

A Dissertation by

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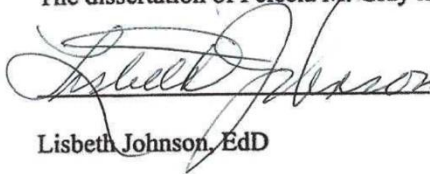
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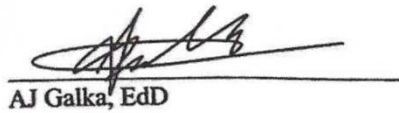
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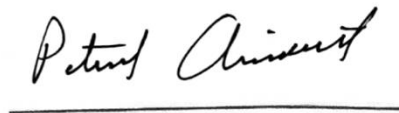
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to every foster youth with the unfortunate experience of heading out into adulthood alone. I hope I told your story well and hope that one day, we will all band together to ensure the absolute best outcomes for you.

To the Creator, thank you for allowing me the strength and ability to keep pushing through the tough times. Thank you for setting my path and giving me the power to walk down it.

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ABSTRACT

Life After Emancipation: A Phenomenological Study of Emancipated Foster Youth and

Their Lived Experiences

by Felecia M. Gray

Purpose: The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and

describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth (EFY) regarding the factors that

have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this

study was to describe the measures EFY considers essential for a successful transition

from foster care to independent living.

Methodology: This qualitative study identified and described the lived experiences of 12

emancipated foster youth from Los Angeles County, California. Respondents were

purposively chosen based on specific criteria. Data were collected, and themes were

formed with regard to five characteristics of the emerging adulthood theoretical

framework.

Findings: Qualitative data from this study identified that many of the emancipated foster

youth leave the foster care system without many essential skills necessary for a

successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

Conclusions: Emancipated foster youth are not prepared to become productive and

successful members of society once they are emancipated from foster care. Many of these

youths do not receive continued mental and behavioral health care once they have

emancipated from the foster care system. These youth require active support and

resources to navigate their journey into productive adulthood.

Recommendations: It is recommended that additional research around advocates and mentors that support emancipated foster youth as they transition into adulthood. Additional research should also be conducted on the mental and behavioral outcomes of emancipated foster youth as well.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

California emancipates over 4,000 youths annually from foster care (Rivera et al., 2007). Unfortunately, when a child reaches age 18, participation in foster care is not permitted. Consequently, emancipated foster youth (EFY) are some of the nation's most defenseless and least supported young people. Often, EFY face precarious situations with very little guidance in navigating the road ahead. In addition, EFY are foreseen to live and behave solitarily as adults. Not surprisingly, the objective of independence is common among EFY. Successfully reaching this goal is vital if they are to become productive members of society.

As their age increases, so does the number of EFY reporting unmet requirements for Independent Living Services (Katz & Courtney, 2015). According to the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, 25% of EFY are homeless in less than a period of 4 years of exiting foster care (Mallon, 2021). EFY face serious challenges maneuvering the developmental oppositions of young adulthood, such as education, employment, community involvement, and social and mental health (Yates & Grey, 2012). Additionally, many EFY also suffer from behavioral and mental health issues. Turney and Wildeman (2016) stated due to adverse life circumstances early on, the general population has better mental and physical health than EFY (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). Bronsard et al. (2016) found multiple relocations, low formal learning, and very few significant associations with others cause developmental and psychological problems EFY. The danger of unfavorable extended consequences is noteworthy if the needs of EFY are not met before emancipation (Bronsard et al., 2016).

Instability in housing, finances, and various other areas have been the underlying reasons for dilemmas during and post emancipation from foster care (Courtney et al., 2004). Ahrens et al. (2011) found because of constant placement changes while in foster care, many EFY will have a negative outlook on the world around them, including their progression to adulthood. Unfortunately, many EFY do not effectively transition to self-sufficient adulthood due to extended alterations in development because of disruptions in foster care. Courtney (2009) said, "Of course, youths who age out of foster care do not have the luxury for adulthood to emerge slowly" (p. 6). Life's obstacles at such a young age make it much more difficult for EFY to transition from adolescence to adulthood compared to youth in a functioning family setting (Smith, 2008).

Numerous EFY suffer from emotional distress due to trauma, such as abuse, neglect, or family separation (Richmond & Borden, 2021). EFY nearing adulthood and awaiting adult transition are equally traumatized (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2014) because support and resources provided to them as minors will cease, and decisions that have been made on their behalf will be solely in their control. EFY generally lack trust, have a history of adult abandonment, and lack cooperation, so the rapport of service providers must be established early on (Malet & McSherry, 2018). Nevertheless, research has shown that EFY need access to transition services as they move through the child-to-adult growth process (youth.gov, n.d.). States have endorsed several government programs that provide supplemental resources, such as money for housing and educational opportunities; however, additional resource funding is necessary (Thompson & Greeson, 2017).

Background

Children are placed into foster care for several causes, such as desertion, abandonment, or maltreatment (Williams-Mbengue, 2016). When young people less than 18 years old participate in the foster care system, assignment to either a residential group or foster home or engage in kinship care with family members is created. Relocation to another home usually means relocating to a new neighborhood and undoing a foster child's social, educational, and family attachments. Often EFY move several times while in foster care. As a result, constantly displaced EFY may experience heightened feelings of exclusion and challenges in creating attachments and trusting adults and other children (Dickson, 2019).

Research has indicated the future for EFY can be grim because many experience various difficulties. Difficulties include being involved in the legal system or no longer participating in high school (Day et al., 2011), going through an unplanned pregnancy (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007), succumbing to drug usage, homelessness, and being afflicted with psychological health problems (Shook et al., 2011). In addition, once EFY are emancipated, their transition from childhood into adulthood is instant, and Stein (2006) stated, "Their journey to adulthood is both accelerated and compressed" (p. 276).

Historical Factors in the Foster Care System

Charles Loring Brace in New York is noted as the originator of the foster care system (Voices for Children, 2020). Brace was worried about the massive amount of immigrant and local children without shelter in New York. He devised a strategy to house these children; thus, the humble beginnings in the foster care system were born. Today, this system intends provisions for the dependent, neglected, and abused children who

require removal from their biological families (Rymph, 2017). Reports have indicated over 437,000 children participate in foster care across the United States (Children's Law Center of California, 2023). In California alone, there are over 65,000 children assigned to foster care (Children's Law Center of California, 2023).

Youths emancipating from foster care face extraordinary obstacles. At age 18, many youths emancipate from foster care and must immediately make a life for themselves (Greeson, 2013). Unfortunately, although most young adults at 18 are blossoming and learning to be comfortable in their skin, their foster care counterparts who have emancipated enter society unprepared to face many of life's daily challenges. EFY often develops self-sufficient living skills sans the essential security of family, finances, and emotional support (Casey Family Programs, 2010).

EFY

According to federal data, approximately 250,000 youth in foster care in 2019, 8% (20,445) exited foster care through emancipation (Fostering Families Today, 2020). EFY are confronted with high precariousness and poor results after emancipation, which results in high financial and population costs to society (Rome & Raskin, 2019). Many EFY do not finish high school or enroll in postsecondary education (Rome & Raskin, 2019). They have a greater likelihood of being homeless or entangled with the criminal justice system and earn a far lower living wage than non-EFY (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

Statistics noted by the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare stated that 25% of youths will become homeless within 4 years of exiting the system (Mallon, 2021). The intent of foster care was and has continued to be to "serve dependent,

neglected, and abused children who need to be, at least temporarily, removed from their families of origin" (Rymph, 2017, p. 10). As a result, many EFY go out into society without guidance or any clear plan to care for themselves. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate transition programs for EFY has been the leading cause of homelessness among young adults ages 18–23 (Alternative Family Services, n.d.).

Transitional Services Foster Care System Offers

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA, 1999) constructed the Independent Living Program (ILP) for EFY. The ILP supplies current and EFY with preparation, resources, and subsidies to aid in accomplishing self-sufficiency before emancipation (FCIA of 1999, 1999). California counties can work with other federal agencies and create services to meet foster youth's needs (CA Department of Social Services, n.d.).

Additionally, research has indicated that EFY face considerable adversity heading into adulthood (Stott, 2012). Half of the youth emancipating from foster care do so without graduating high school, obtaining an occupation, gaining monetary stability, or obtaining shelter (Stott, 2012). These youths need informal and formal social support, which Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) found serves against unfortunate pitfalls, such as incarceration, lack of employment, and homelessness. Restrictions on services available to EFY, once they emancipate from care, can prevent EFY from accessing programs and services designed to support them (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

Emerging Adulthood Theoretical Foundation and Framework

Emerging adulthood is a theoretical framework based on the theory of psychologist Arnett (2004, 2016); his research identified a life stage different from

previous psychologists. Emerging adulthood takes place between the ages of 18–25. The stages of emerging adulthood include (a) identity exploration, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (c) feelings between adolescence and adulthood, and (e) a sense of future opportunities. Arnett (2016) stated adolescents must go through each stage to emerge into adulthood.

Identity Exploration

Identity exploration is when people seek different options in personal and professional areas (Arnett, 2004, 2016). Through trying out other possibilities, they develop self-image, including self-awareness, abilities and limits, core principles, and how to engage with society.

Instability

During this stage, Arnett (2004, 2016) suggested the feeling of instability is profound due to the constantly changing ideals of love and work. In the United States, adolescents ages 18–29 have higher relocation rates than any other percentage of residential change in U.S. society, which is greater for people aged 18–29 than at any other stage of life (Arnett, 2004).

Self-Focus

During the self-focus stage, youth move out of their parent's homes and find their way through life (Arnett, 2004, 2016). Youth are also focused on whether to get married or have children, their love interests, and what they enjoy as a profession during this stage.

Feeling In-Between Adolescents and Adulthood

When young adults reach their late 20s, a new attribute of emerging adulthood arises the feeling of being in between. Young adults are not adolescents anymore but have not yet reached full adulthood (Arnett, 2004, 2016).

Sense of Future Possibilities

The final stage is the sense of future possibilities (Arnett, 2004, 2016). Many future options are still open during this stage, and youth are optimistic about what they will achieve. Also, during this stage, youth think they have favorable chances of living better than their parents, even if their parents' divorce or end up with other undesirable outcomes.

Statistics on EFY

The change from adolescence to adulthood can be seen as a formative phase in a young adult's development. Greeson (2013) indicated young adults emancipated from foster care face adversity in adjusting to and navigating adulthood. During emerging adulthood, most youths have the support of their families to assist them in overcoming the hardships of becoming independent (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994; Schoeni & Ross, 2004). Once EFY leaves foster care, they are faced with the conundrum of this stage of development and endanger transitioning without family support (Greeson, 2013).

Oftentimes, once young adult reaches legal age, they acquire rights and responsibilities, move out of their parent's authority, enter the working society, engage in postsecondary education, and create amorous relationships (Masten et al., 2004). However, EFY entering the emerging adulthood stages place them behind in maturity with current societal norms (Collins, 2001). EFY are independent at younger ages than

other young people because of their extended youth phase for many of the past 30 years (Furstenberg et al., 2004). A person's evolvement to adulthood continues until their mid-to-late 20s. This results from financial and societal policy factors such as self-sufficiency, finding suitable housing, employment opportunities, and wages (Furstenberg et al., 2004).

Person of Color

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative reported over 60% of Black and Latino foster care youth have had dealings with the criminal justice system (AECF, 2023). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF, 2023) report also stated Black EFY were over 1.23 times likelier to emancipate sans families compared to white foster youths. Disparities of race arise at all influential points along the child welfare progression. Nationally, reports of suspected mistreatment are ever-present in Black families (Krase, 2013) and have higher rates of investigations by child protective services than other families (Kim et al., 2017). Furthermore, Black and Indigenous or Alaska Native children have higher chances than other children of actual cases of abuse and then being admitted into foster care (Yi et al., 2020).

LGBTQ++

EFY are confronted with multiple challenges in receiving the support and foundations needed to become healthy-functioning adults. Challenges are exacerbated for youth who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus). Unfortunately, these youths are often exposed to victimization, isolation, and rejection connected with their sexuality and gender or race. Disproportionately represented in foster care, 19% of youth are LGBTQ+ (Wilson & Kastanis, 2015). Furthermore,

Feinstein (2001) found youth identifying as LGBTQ+ were poorly treated in foster care and faced unique adversities (Feinstein, 2001).

Employment

Reilly (2003) reported, "A significant portion of youth exiting the foster care system face serious difficulty transitioning to life on their own" (p. 727). In addition, several EFY have failed to obtain or maintain regular employment. As a result, EFY have difficulties navigating adulthood's responsibilities and having trouble keeping employment.

Education

Geiger and Beltran (2017) reported that EFY face educational barriers through unhealthy or broken relationships with older individuals (i.e., social workers, teachers, or caregivers), undiagnosed psychological health problems, and being ill-prepared for postsecondary education. In addition, EFY viewed their distrust of social workers, foster parents, and the community as a major hurdle to education (Morton, 2015). Statistics have shown that only 50% of EFY received a diploma from high school by emancipation (Fostering Youth Success Alliance, 2020). It is estimated that 1%–11% of EFY will graduate from college (Emerson, 2006; Pecora et al., 2003; Wolanin, 2005).

Incarceration

The interrelationship linking a youth's rearing and the juvenile justice system could explain how approximately 90% of EFY encounter the justice system for minors (Juvenile Law Center, 2018). Examining foster children's interactions with the justice system for minors is crucial to advocating for children's well-being, especially those in foster care, because they are at a greater threat of becoming a part of the juvenile justice

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system. Unfortunately, foster care that was built to protect children has had tremendous deficits, which have allowed youth to experience situations involving law enforcement (Juvenile Law Center, 2018).

Homelessness

Lack of adequate transition programs for EFY has been the leading cause of homelessness among young adults ages 18–23 (Dworsky et al., 2013). In addition, EFY are often homeless soon after discharge. Previous incarcerations and substance abuse referrals are the most decisive risk factors for homelessness (Kelly, 2019). Other major risk factors were having repeated attempts to run away, receiving public food assistance, and being emotionally disturbed (Kelly, 2019).

<div align="center">

Legislation

</div>

Over the past 3 decades, several legislative laws have been implemented to assist foster youth before, during, and after their emancipation from care. The FCIA (1999) and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (JCFCIA, 2008) are two pieces of legislation allowing states to continue supporting EFY.

The FCIA

Before 1962, community services and programs for mistreated children were nonexistent (Rycus & Hughes, 1998). The Public Welfare Amendments written in 1962, restructured and retitled the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program and created policies that allowed states to support foster care programs governed by the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (Committee on Ways and Means U.S. House of Representatives, n.d.). Each state was federally mandated by legislation to create a child welfare system to include foster youth; hence, the FCIA (1999) was

created. The FCIA of 1999 was enacted to acknowledge the unmet support of EFY. The FCIA of 1999 expanded assistance available for EFY, motivating states to allow EFY to remain qualified for Medicaid through 21 years old, expanding provisions for education and job exploration, and increasing funding to aid transitioning into adulthood.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

In 1999, the initial legislation from 1986 was replaced with the JCFCIA (2008). The JCFCIA (2008) is a federally funded program used to help state agencies with youth emancipating from foster care (Freundlich, 2009). Ensuring all foster youth receive services (e.g., college preparation courses, financial management, stable housing, life skills, and employment preparation) helps them achieve genuine independence.

<div align="center">Problems Identified From Literature</div>

Successful individuals usually equate their achievements to having a mentor. In her dissertation, *Mentors and Their Impact on the Transitions of Foster Care Youth to Independent Living*, Kunkle (2019) stated, "Mentoring empowers FCGs to succeed" (p. 10). Kunkle (2019) found youth who participated in discussions with positive mentors had fewer adverse outcomes in the future and were less likely to end up homeless. Tyrell and Yates (2018) also found that EFY who had positive connections with adults and other community members had a better opportunity to become self-sufficient adults.

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

A small number of studies have assessed the degree to which EFY have gone through a period of critical support in their emerging adulthood (Tyrell & Yates, 2018). In addition, EFY are some of society's most vulnerable and misunderstood members.

Therefore, implementing processes and interventions before their emancipation from state care is necessary and can assist them in becoming more independent and productive.

Statement of the Research Problem

The sudden extraction of youth from their relatives can cause many different ill-effects such as psychological illness, dropping out of school, homelessness, and low employment probability (Bronsard et al., 2016). Young people removed from familiar surroundings are often found to have less stability and many undiagnosed mental and physical ailments. Undiagnosed mental and physical ailments, combined with hasty extractions from their homes, can lead to children losing their feeling of acceptance and self all while dealing with high levels of stress emotionally (Slayter, 2016). Undiagnosed mental and physical ailments can also create a greater opportunity for adult psychological problems, educational underachievement, and inadequate capacity to support themselves (Bronsard et al., 2016).

Several researchers nationwide have examined how EFY progress as they become independent. Fowler et al. (2017) studied EFY without familial or community relationships, and the results indicated that 24% of EFY (20–25 years old) reported they did not have secure housing at the onset of their emancipation, which extremely blocked their means to eat or work. Results also indicated a lack of educational completion, and postsecondary schooling was not an option at the time of emancipation. Kelly (2019) also featured the challenges associated with transitioning to independent living and self-sufficiency.

In her dissertation on transition-aged foster youth, Lavin (2013) reported 70% of the EFY did not obtain the practical ability to effectively handle standard functioning,

such as financial management, using resources from the community, going to college, or securing employment. EFY also disclosed feeling ill-equipped to locate shelter and handle medical situations. As a result, EFY were excessively exposed to physical and sexual persecution, joblessness, homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, incarceration, and public assistance dependency (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

Foster parents' or service providers' perspectives have been studied repeatedly in qualitative studies over the years (Radey et al., 2016). Few studies have incorporated the voices of EFY care in their childhood. Hearing the voices of EFY could provide valuable and relevant information about stress, coping, and coming to terms with the real world after emancipation. Therefore, from their point of view, there is a need for research on EFY who adjusted to life after foster care. Obtaining the adult's perspective in the current study could provide the chance to gain awareness and a clear understanding of how to support programs with clear and consistent policy directives (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Higher stability rates can be achieved by engaging individuals who have lived in foster care during management measures (Rock et al., 2013).

Further research is vital because it will allow the exploration of EFY's lived experiences and viewpoints. Federal and state governments acknowledge their responsibilities for EFY and enact transitional assistance for lodging, employment, and psychological and physical welfare in place (Reilly, 2003). Unfortunately, support services often go unfunded and underused. Comprehensive studies are needed to create all-encompassing transitional services that meet foster youth's physical and psychological needs in adulthood.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and describe the perceptions of EFY regarding the factors that have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this study was to describe the measures that EFY consider essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What factors do EFY perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

2. What measures do EFY perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Significance of the Problem

The National Foster Youth Institute (2023) reported that 23,000 youth are emancipated from foster care on average. Unfortunately, many EFY will end up homeless or in precarious situations due to a lack of access to and knowledge of transitional programs. EFY are at high chance for criminal activity, having children at young ages, and experiencing hunger and homelessness. The homelessness rate for EFY is a significant outcome due to this population's lack of preparedness for life outside of foster care.

EFY have struggles advancing compared to the general population. However, the federal government has implemented specific legislation to help all EFY find success and have better outcomes than in previous years (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). Furthermore,

the literature review conducted by the researcher provides data specifying the minimal studies, certain laws, and services for EFY. Unfortunately, many systems have failed due to the inaccessibility and knowledge of what EFY experience and their needs.

Findings from the current study may contribute to developing evidence-based practices for better results for EFY. They may also contribute to procedural changes and policy recommendations by state lawmakers. Finally, findings may also liberate, nourish, and encourage youth to establish fundamentals for successful outcomes.

Definitions of Terms

The subsequent functional and theoretical wording applicable to this study are depicted to establish elucidation and structuring for the reader. Functional definitions have several crucial features: (a) give guidance and steps for the researcher to use metrics for this study, and (b) give precise understanding to the reader concerning thoughts and views created out of prior studies.

Functional Definitions

Disproportionality. Disproportionality is when a specific race or ethnicity group of youth is presented in foster care at a greater or smaller number than other race or ethnicity groups (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.-a).

Emerging Adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage in life-extending from age 18 to 29 to transform and investigate life (Arnett, 2004).

Emancipation. Emancipation is defined as the termination of court authority and responsibility for foster care youth. The emancipation age varies from state to state (Children's Bureau: An Office of The Administration for Children and Families, 2012).

Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY). EFY means an emancipated nonminor dependent (NMD) who, prior to their 18th birthday, was in foster care (Law Insider, 2023).

Foster Care. Foster care is a semipermanent, safe, and stable living environment for youth who have been abused, neglected, or cannot be adequately cared for by their parents (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.-b).

Transition. Transition refers to the process of changing from one life stage to another. For foster care youth, the change is moving from living in foster care, where the state provides finances, food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and other needed services, to living independently outside formal care (AECF, n.d.-c).

Theoretical Definition

Phenomenological Study. A phenomenological study is a methodology focused on the study of experience from the perspective of the individual experiencing the event (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Emerging Adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage in life extending from age 18 to 29 to transform and investigate life. Emerging adulthood has become a distinct period of the life course for young people in industrialized societies. It is a period characterized by change and exploration for most people as they examine the possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000).

Delimitations

The current study was delimited to EFY in Los Angeles County, a specific region of California. The current study was also delimited to a population that includes only

aged-out or emancipated EFY. Another delimitation was emancipated. EFY represented in this study were between 21 and 30 years old.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I reviewed the research's background, problem statement, research questions, and methodology. Chapter II consists of a literature review that provides an unambiguous and succinct summary of the theory and research in the current literature as it affects this topic. Chapter III details the methodology and outlines the methods and rationale for conducting this research. Chapter IV gives a delivery and analysis of the information collected and analysis of the findings. Finally, Chapter V summarizes the study results, knowledge, implications, and recommendations the researcher identified as a result of the study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The goal of a literature review is to participate in a vital investigation of an issue to determine the "known" and "unknown" (Roberts et al., 2010, p. 20). The beginning of this section examines the historical factors of the nation's foster care system. Additionally, the chapter contains a comprehensive analysis of existing research and literature on statistics on emancipated and transition-aged foster youth and the existing legislation surrounding policies for support after emancipation to explain the research questions.

In the administration of a comprehensive analysis of the literature, several authors sought information from and used it. JSTOR, SAGE Journals Online, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, books, peer-reviewed journals, online news publications, and organizational websites were referenced for most of the research. Terminology contained emancipated foster youth (EFY), aged-out foster youth, transition programs for foster youth, transition-aged foster youth, and statistics on EFY. Because the study was qualitative, additional terminology contained qualitative research, sample population, and interview protocol for qualitative research. In Appendix A, the synthesis matrix identifies themes noted from references used in the literature review.

The literature review is structured into five sections. The first section starts with an investigation into the historical background of the nation's foster care system. The second section focuses on the theoretical foundation and framework of J. J. Arnett's emerging adulthood theory. Arnett proposed this as a new concept in development for teens in 2004. The third section focuses on statistics on EFY. The fourth section focuses on foster care legislation, and the fifth summarizes the literature review.

Historical Factors in the Foster Care System

Since biblical times, the oversight of children who have been neglected or abused has been the responsibility of the village or society. According to the Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (n.d.), the earliest evidence of children being supported in what is known as foster homes is found in the Old Testament and the Talmud. Both texts stress the significance of society in providing for all children. In the late 19th century, caring for the necessities of young people was seen as a societal problem that required an immediate and structured remedy (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children – Travis County, n.d.). The National Foster Parent Association (n.d.) stated the Poor Laws, established in the United Kingdom, were assumed by the United States to assist impoverished families by putting children with other families as indentured servants until they became adults. Unfortunately, the Poor Laws did not highlight child neglect and abandonment, except for cases of child mistreatment that required them to be handled by governmental courts.

Charles Loring Brace in New York is noted as the originator of the foster care system (Voices for Children, 2020). Brace was worried about the massive amount of immigrant and local children without shelter in New York. He devised a strategy to house these children; thus, the humble beginnings of the foster care system were born. Today, the foster care system intends to provide for dependent, neglected and abused children who require removal from their biological families (Rymph, 2017). Children's Law Center of California (2023) reported over 437,000 young people are in foster care across the nation. California alone has over 65,000 children assigned to the foster system (Children's Law Center of California, 2023).

Youths emancipating from foster care face extraordinary obstacles. At age 18, many youths emancipate from foster care and must immediately make a life for themselves (Greeson, 2013). Unfortunately, most young adults at 18 are developing self-awareness and comfortability in themselves as legal adults. EFY often develop self-sufficient living skills without the crucial safety net of family, financial resources, or emotional support (Casey Family Program, 2010)

Background on EFY

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF, 2018) defines foster care as an interim living circumstance for children whose parents can no longer provide for their well-being, and the state must now provide for their needs (AECF, 2018). During their time in foster care, children are placed with relatives, foster families, or in group facilities. About one-half of the children placed in the care of the state go back to their parents or guardians (AECF, 2022). Fowler et al. (2017) found there are over 20,000 EFY annually in the United States. The California foster care system emancipates 4,000 youths annually (Rivera et al., 2007). Unfortunately, half of EFY do not have a high school diploma, employment, financial stability, or stable housing (Stott, 2012).

According to the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, 25% of EFY are homeless inside of 18 months of emancipation (Mallon, 2021). Furthermore, once they reach age 18, participation in the institution that protected them is no longer allowed. As a result, EFY are some of the nation's most unprotected and least supported young people (Courtney et al., 2004). Often, EFY face precarious situations with very little guidance in navigating the road ahead (Furstenberg et al., 2004). In California, an individual's first experience with foster care is vastly different depending on what type of

placement is provided. Some placements are with relatives, called kinship care. Foster agency homes are licensed agencies that find placements for foster youths. Foster homes are individual families that are verified by the state to be eligible for foster placements. Group homes are where several children, depending on the level of service, are housed. Figure 1 is a chart of the different placements of children in California in the years 2010–2012 and 2016–2018.

Figure 1

Foster Youth Placements
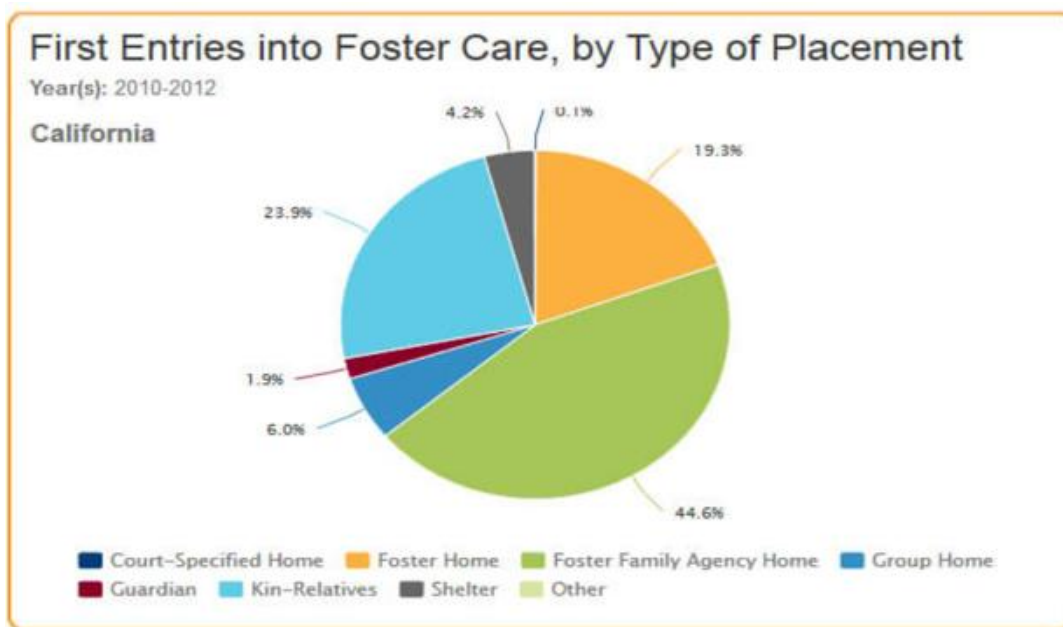
Note. From *California Child Welfare Indicators Project Reports*, by D. Webster et al., UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, 2019 (link).

Transitional Services

EFY face many dilemmas, and they have requirements for receiving continued services and support beyond the age of 18. These requirements include meeting one of

five participation requirements: (a) working to complete a secondary-level diploma or GED, (b) enrollment in postsecondary education, (c) working minimally 80 hours monthly, (d) participating in a program that aids with job placement or meeting monthly with a case worker or parole officer, and (e) inability to participate due to a medical condition that prevents employment (Public Defender Office, 2023).

Many states are taking necessary steps to ensure supports are in place for EFY to continue their education, find a job, and find a suitable place to live after they have left state care. The Department of Human Services has several helpful programs accessible for assisting young adults transitioning from foster care together with EFY (Foster Care Transitional & Supportive Services, 2023). Additionally, creation of an independent living plan provides partakers help with creating a transitional independent living plan (TILP) and career supports to include funding for higher education or vocational training (Supporting Transition-Aged Foster Youth, 2023). Courtney and Dworsky (2006) noted 13.8% of participants stated they did not have access to transitional programs during and after emancipation.

Department of Children and Family Services EFY Housing

Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provides several types of housing placements for emancipated foster youth (EFY)s. EFY frequently use a supervised independent living placement (SILP). During their study on EFY, Pecora et al. (2017) noted several EFY reported having knowledge of participation in the EFC but often felt unable to take advantage of the program. One participant in Pecora et al.'s (2017) study said, "Yeah, I knew it was there, but I was always told that only the good kids were able to stay. I wasn't a good kid" (p. x). SILP's purpose is to supply nonminor

dependents (NMDs) with the option of independent living in addition to continued

financial provisions and supportive transition services. SILP arrangements are for NMDs

who prove to be developmentally capable of living on their own and for nonrestrictive

environments. SILP funding may be used toward apartments, rented room(s), and

dormitory/university housing (DCFS, 2019).

Independent Living Program

The Independent Living Program (ILP) was developed by the Foster Care

Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA, 1999). The ILP supplies present foster care youth and

EFY with training, support, and provisions to help in obtaining independence before and

after emancipation. Each county in California has the versatility to create programs to

approach the distinct needs and situations of EFY and work with other Federal and State

agencies assisting EFY (CA.gov Department of Social Services, n.d.). In a 2006 study on

ILP services in California, Bossett (2016) asked participants if they had transitional

housing during the ILP services; 22 participants (78.6%) stated the choice to pick

transitional housing was provided, and six participants (17.9%) stated it was not

provided.

Services provided by the ILP cover everyday tasks, financial management,

educational resources, and many others. Eligibility for participation in the ILP consists of

being between ages 16–21 and meeting specific criteria for program placement. In

Alameda County, California, foster youth and EFY have access to several programs,

including life skills workshops, employment training and placement, educational

counseling and planning, housing assistance, and social events (ILP, 2023). Several other

counties (i.e., Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino) all have programs to assist EFY with navigating into independence.

The Healthy Transition to Adulthood Program

The Healthy Transition to Adulthood program helps foster youth ages 14–23 effectively move into to adulthood while also minimizing homelessness (Minnesota Department of Human Services, n.d.). EFY often require assistance creating independent existence plans, locating economical housing, locating important documents, acquiring financial training, establishing at least one unending bond with a supportive caretaker, receiving a high school diploma, obtaining medical protection, and finding and maintaining a job (Fryar et al., 2017).

Transitional Housing Programs

Assembly Bill (AB) 12 constructed the transitional housing placement-plus foster care program (California Department of Social Services, 2015). Transitional housing placement-plus foster care was created for NMDs in the care of the state, in addition to individuals under supervised probation (California Department of Social Services, 2015). This option gives transitional housing and supportive resources acquired from the TILP.

Transitional housing placement-plus gives young adults not yet 24 but older than 18 the chance to engage in a housing program. The program gives them a safe living environment and aids young adults in creating life methodologies for effective independence (California Department of Social Services, 2015). The transitional housing placement-plus program administers structured transitional-living housing and helpful resources acquired from the TILP. The TILP was created by the EFY, the ILP

Coordinator, and additional support personnel and provides the goals and rationales

required for adulthood (California Department of Social Services, 2015).

Emerging Adulthood Theoretical Foundation and Framework

The progression from adolescence to adulthood is considered a major

developmental phase for young adults (Masten et al., 2004). It is a period when unique

challenges and possibilities emerge. Once a young person reaches a certain age, many

engage in several activities, such as moving out of their parent's home, getting a job or

attending higher education, and finding loving relationships with others (Masten et al.,

2004). Yet, for EFY, entering emerging adulthood causes disruptions in institutional

structures (Collins, 2001) because EFY are living independently sooner than their non-

EFY peers (Furstenberg et al., 2004). Psychologists contend every human goes through

developmental stages.

Erikson's (1968) eight stages of psychosocial development is considered one of

the oldest theories on the developmental stages throughout life. Erikson concentrated on

social attributes rather than sexual ones, unlike his mentor Sigmund Freud's theory.

Further, Erikson propagated Freud's theory outside of adolescence to add three

distinctive stages of adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Figure 2 represents Erik Erikson's stages

of psychosocial development.

Figure 2

Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development
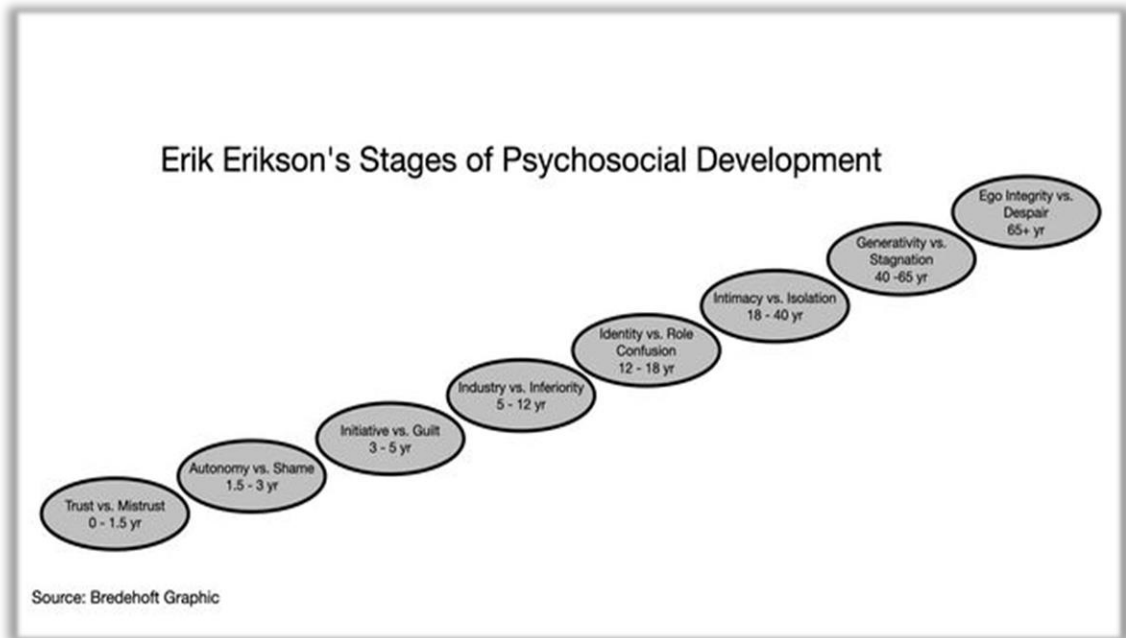
Note. From *Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development*, by S. Mcleod, Simply Psychology, 2023, (https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html).

Emerging adulthood is a theoretical framework founded on the theory created by psychologist Arnett (2000). Arnett identified a stage of life in young adolescence and young adulthood. This stage lasts between ages 18–25. Arnett (2015) stated, "Emerging adulthood can be said to exist wherever there is a gap of at least a few years between the end of puberty and the entry into stable adult roles in love and work" (p. 26).

In the framework, there are five specific characteristics: (a) identity explorations, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (d) feeling in between adolescence and adulthood, and (e) a sense of possibilities for the future. Arnett (2004) asserted the characteristics of emerging

adulthood are cultural. Arnett (2004) anticipated cultures will include emerging adult phases that are crafted in dissimilar principles.

Arnett (2015) developed the characteristics from his first research administered in the 1990s. He interviewed over 300 U.S. citizens between 18 and 29 years of age from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. His studies have included nationwide surveys made up of over 1,000 participants: The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (2012), The Clark University Poll of Parents of Emerging Adults (2013), and the Clark University Poll of Established Adults (2014).

Arnett stated envisioning emerging adulthood as a growth-related stage has advantages that outweigh its constraints (Trible, 2015). Additional methodological analytical studies have been added to Arnett's research, including the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Children 2016 (Midwest Study 2016), the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health of 2018 (ADD Health, 2018), and the Casey National Foster Care Alumni Study 2019 (Casey National Study, 2019). The conclusions from all these studies indicate that emerging adulthood is a helpful structure for gaining knowledge about the difficulties EFY are compelled to assume in adult roles and obligations they have before many are prepared to do so. Presently, arriving at adulthood does not predict one's capability to live by themselves (Greeson, 2013).

Five Characteristics

The five characteristics of emerging adulthood are stages young adolescents must endure to emerge into adulthood (Arnett, 2004). The stages include: (a) identity exploration, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (d) feelings between adolescence and

adulthood, and (e) a sense of future opportunities. Arnett (2004, 2006) stated adolescents must transition through each stage to emerge into adulthood.

Identity Exploration

During the 1950s, Erikson implored young people struggled with identity questions throughout adolescence. Erikson (1968) spoke about a trend during the early 1950s and 1960s of a "prolonged adolescence" (p. 156) in modernized societies. Identity exploration is analyzing many different options in relationships and employment. Through testing other options, young adults create an identity, including understanding their personalities, abilities, limits, beliefs, and values, and their purpose in society (Lazzara, 2020). Exploring emerging adulthood identity is envisioned as covering relationships, employment, viewpoints, and how life is to be created (Arnett, 2000, 2015).

In their study on foster youths, Tyrell and Yates (2018) found EFY reported having challenges in their transition that hindered their ability to explore the sense of self. Tyrell and Yates found only a small amount of EFY characterized this as a period to figure out one's character, personality, concerns, or society. Often, EFY reported feeling anxiety and restrictions regarding their ability to investigate. One participant in Tyrell and Yates's (2018) study reported:

> It's just scary being—being an adult, cause so much goes on, and you think you've finally found yourself, and it's just a façade, and I feel like we go through life trying to see who we are cause we don't have a childhood, and we just go through life like aimlessly wondering, like oh I wonder what's next, not having any like, goals and stuff, cause we didn't have our—our parents there who would generally like explain everything to us and teach us everything. (p. 10)

Instability

During the instability stage, Arnett (2015) suggested due to the constant changing of ideals of love and work, the feeling of instability is profound. Frequencies of housing change in the U.S. population are at the highest between the ages of 18–29 (Arnett, 2004). Every change aids the emerging adult in considering what they do or do not want. Modifications in the plan affect identity, making emerging adulthood thrilling and frightening (Arnett, 2016). Additionally, when adolescents examine the numerous possibilities available, life often becomes very unstable.

Unfortunately, when it comes to foster youth, residential instability is not a new concept. Youth who remain in foster care for at least 2 years have an average placement rate of five or more (Children's Law Center of California, 2023). A placement rate is how many times a young person is taken from one placement and put into another (Children's Law Center of California, 2023). Tyrell and Yates (2017) discovered in a month after emancipating from foster care, EFY relied on another person to pay for their living expenses because they were not financially able to nor could they contribute to the rent or mortgage (Arya, 2021). Youth in foster care need permanence, a reason for why assistance is significant. Still, compared to younger foster youth, the greater the amount of time in care, the greater the chances of instability (AECF, 2020).

Self-Focus

During the self-focus stage, youth move out of their parents' homes and find their way through life. Also, youth are focused on something other than marriage or having children; they simply try to see what they enjoy as a profession and love interests. As a result, young adults have higher self-focus in their choices and behaviors.

Emerging adults create their abilities for daily living, create a knowledge of their identity, and start to find structure of adulthood. The objective of self-focusing is self-sufficiency to gain knowledge of how to be as a self-sufficient person. Unfortunately, self-sufficiency long-term is unseen (Arnett, 2004).

Self-focus is essential to the development of self-sufficiency (Stockdale, 2019). A significant endeavor in creating self-sufficiency is the change from education to employment (Stockdale, 2019). Permitting young adults to emancipate from foster care lacking proper education and work experience creates negative outcomes. Not having a plan for employment upon emancipation can result in their dependency on state assistance once again after emancipation. Self-sufficiency is the desired achievement of every EFY, but data indicate many EFY have very little support upon their exit from foster care (Stockdale, 2019).

Feeling In-Between Adolescents and Adulthood

A different distinguishing characteristic of emerging adulthood is feeling in-between, which is no longer an adolescent but also not adulthood either (Arnett, 2000). Amid the progression starting at adolescence and moving into adulthood, growing maturation comes with requirements of self-responsibility, making decisions, and becoming self-sufficient (Arnett, 2000). Complying with everyday responsibilities for themselves and working to achieve economic independence are real challenges EFY are confronted with daily. Many EFY state the feeling of adolescence is no longer there, but they also do not yet feel as if they have reached adulthood (Lazzara, 2020).

Arnett (2003) conducted a study of 600 participants, of whom all were considered emerging adults aged 18–29. The purpose of the study was to establish if the transition to

adulthood was different for young Americans in minority groups. When questioned, "Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?" (Arnett, 2004, p. 10), most emerging adults did not state positively or negatively. Many gave an obscure answer, such as "in some ways yes, in some ways no" (Arnett, 2004). Until their late 20s and early 30s, many young people do not feel like an adult. Many emerging adults have reported having distinct feelings of living in a shifting stage of life, being an adult but they are not there yet.

Sense of Future Possibilities

The final stage in emerging adulthood is the sense of future possibilities (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, many future options are still open, and youth are full of optimism when it comes to what they are going to achieve. Also, during this stage, youth believe they have a good chance of living better than their parents, even if their parents ended up in divorce or other undesirable outcomes (Lazzara, 2020). Emerging adults have reported feeling a sense of possibility when future planning, and they would be correct. Being open to new ideas and ways of life can give a positive outlook on what is ahead of them (Trible, 2015). On the contrary, EFY have low optimism toward the future and often feel as if their dreams will not come true (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Figure 3 is a graphic of the five characteristics of emerging adulthood theory.

Figure 3

The Five Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood
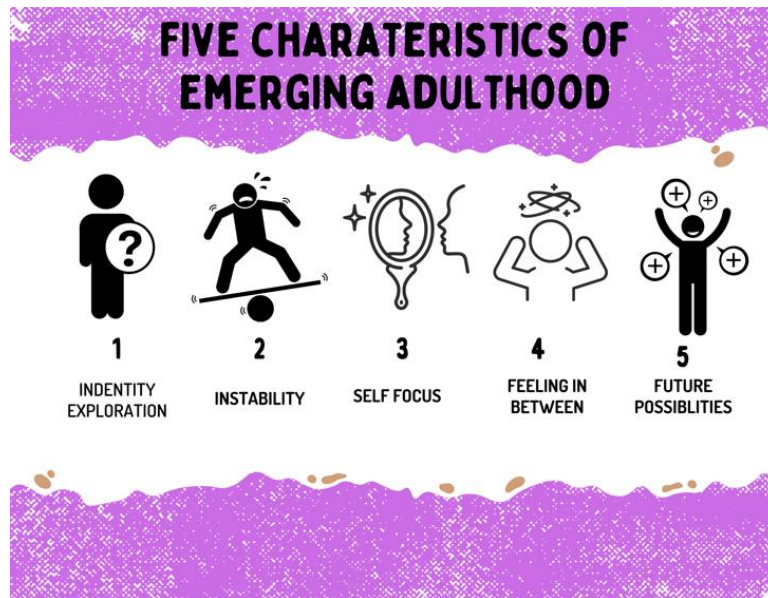
Note. From *The Five Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood. What is an emerging adult?*, by Cornerstones of Maine, n. d. (https://cornerstonesofmaine.com/our-clients/what-is-an-emerging-adult/).

Statistics on EFY

EFY face major challenges navigating the developmental obstacles of young adulthood expanding several areas, such as learning, working, social engagement, relationship security, and mental health (Yates & Grey, 2012). Research has shown EFY face adversity in adjusting to and navigating adulthood. Unfortunately, about half of EFY do not have a high school diploma, employment, financial stability, or housing security (Stott, 2012).

Courtney et al. (2018) also found roughly 35,000 present EFY attended California colleges. Of the 35,000, 4,000 received entrance into the University of California or the California State University, and the remaining 88% attended one of California's 115 community colleges (Courtney et al., 2018). Developing research also suggests extending financial assistance helps these young people. Nathanael Okpych, the coauthor and project director for the CalYOUTH study, found each additional year of support after turning 18 increases a youth's chances of earning a professional job-related credential by the age of 21 by 8% (Courtney et al., 2018).

Foster youths are also exposed to volatile foster placements, school changes, and different challenges connected with placement disruptions that cause consequential moves. Histories including foster placements, school changes, and different challenges connected with placement disruptions suggest EFY face ample opposition during the change to adults (Collins, 2001). However, EFY' obtainment of primary support, opportunities, assistance, and supportive services over the years has diminished significantly (Courtney et al., 2001).

Person of Color

In 2018, Black children made up 14% of the total population of children, although 23% of total children were assigned to foster care (AECF, 2018). The national percentage of foster care placements among Black and non-Hispanic youth over 14 years old was 2.74 times higher than those who were White and non-Hispanic. Hispanic placements were 1.34 times higher than those who were White (JCYOI, 2020). Figure 4 is a demographic chart of children in foster care as of 2018.

Figure 4

Children in Foster Care by Race and Hispanic Origin by Percent
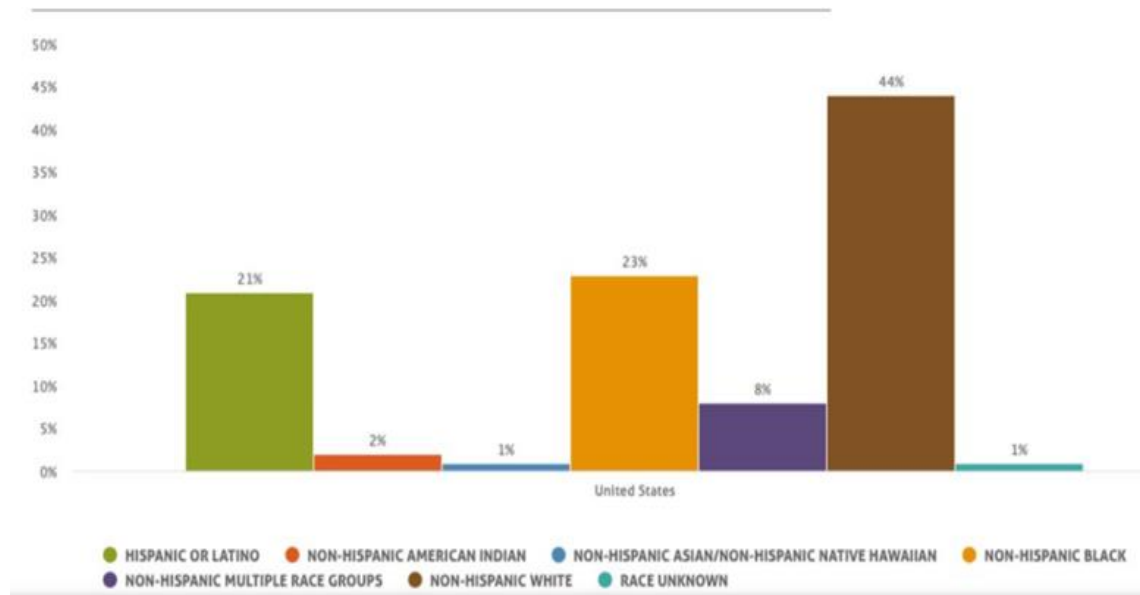
Note. From *Children in Foster Care by Race and Hispanic Origin in the United States*,

by The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Kids Count Data Center, n.d.,

(https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race-and-hispanic-

origin#detailed/1/any/false/2048).

Literature suggests Black youth have endured various obstacles prior to and

during emancipation. While in foster care, Black children are exposed to longer periods

of time in the system and they lack vital resources, which leads to less favorable results

and placements in more authoritarian households (Miller et al., 2019). Black children

endure several placement changes to home and school, which can lead to various levels

of self-doubt, low self-esteem, and failing grades, along with challenges becoming an

adult (Leathers et al., 2019).

Research has also reported having several placements has been correlated with instability. Varying levels of constancy or mentorship for Black children has been shown in the research as well. Thus, Black children are unprotected and feel as if their transition to adulthood after emancipation is unsuccessful (Capello, 2006).

Culturally competent services are vital to efficiently embracing the desires of ethnic foster children and advocating for them. A critical part of fulfilling a foster child's basic socioemotional needs is to ensure they are placed with culturally competent parents (Capello, 2006). Placement with culturally competent parents lessens the by-products of childhood trauma following abuse, neglect, and splitting from their biological caregivers. Capello (2006) found youth who are connected to their communities either by heritage or culture have a better outlook and feel more a part of society than those who are not.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative reported over 60% of Black and Hispanic young people in foster care had dealings with the juvenile justice system, and Black youths were 1.23 times likelier to emancipate from foster care sans familiar securities than their White counterparts (AECF, n.d.-b). In Los Angeles County, 931 adolescents were emancipated in 2000 (DCFS, 2001). Furthermore, December 2000 data reported 16% of foster youth in Los Angeles County were White, 40% Black, 39% Hispanic, and the rest were from various races/ethnicities. Figure 5 shows the race and ethnic groups of foster children in California in 2018.

Figure 5

Children in Foster Care by Ethnicity
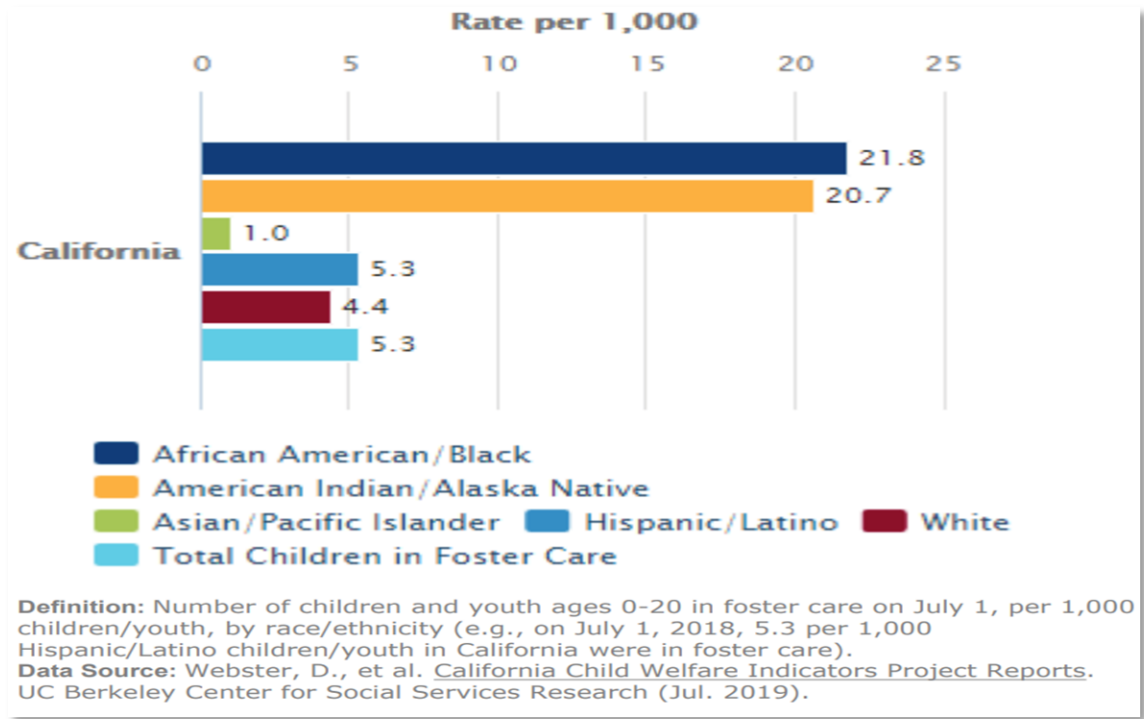
Note. From *Children in Foster Care by Ethnicity,* by D. Webster et.al., California Child Welfare Indicators Project Reports. UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, 2019, (link).

LGBTQ+

EFY face challenges related to acquiring the necessary support to become effective adults. Challenges are worsened for LGBTQ+ youth, who are often exposed to victimization, isolation, and rejection connected with their sexual and gender statuses (Mallon et al., 2002). Adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+ make up 19% of those in foster care (Wilson & Kastanis, 2015). Researchers found adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+ are regarded negatively and face unfavorable situations during foster care (Mallon et al., 2002; Wilson & Kastanis, 2015). This is even more evident for those who identify as transgender and nonbinary (Mountz et al., 2018). Table 1 shows the

demographics of foster adolescent ethnicities who identify as LGBTQ+ in Los Angeles

County.

Table 1

Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: Assessing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles

Demographics of youth in foster care	LGBTQ+ %
Latino	54.6
American Indian	3.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.9
African American	28.5
White	6.4
Biracial, multiracial, or ethnic	4.7
Born out of the United States	9.7
One or both biological parents born out of the United States	32.4
Assigned female at birth	61.4
Assigned male at birth	38.6

Note. From *Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care*, by B. D. M. Wilson et al., UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, 2014, (https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/sgm-youth-la-foster-care/)

Investigations by the CalYOUTH study reported LGBTQ+ foster youth were susceptible to higher levels of harassment and abuse in several situations and reported having fewer amounts of resources, negative or very few social networks, and participation in very few favorable social situations compared to heterosexual and cisgender youths (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). LGBTQ+ youth reported victimization and rejection from caregivers (Newcomb et al., 2019). Despite the overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ foster youth (Baams et al., 2019), there are very few studies investigating which subgroups of LGBTQ+ youth have greater chances of entering foster care and its correlation to suicide risk among this group.

The Trevor Project's (2020) National Survey studying LGBTQ+ adolescent psychological well-being found correlation between foster care and suicide risk among

LGBTQ+ young adults. LGBTQ+ young adults who disclosed participating in foster care had 3 times the chances of telling a prior suicide attempt, unlike nonfoster care youth. In general, 4.1% of LGBTQ+ young adults 13–24 years of age stated foster care participation related to 2.6% of the overall population of the nations' adults ages 18 and over (Nugent et al., 2020). Transgender and nonbinary young adults had higher chances of entering foster care in comparison to cisgender LGBTQ+ youth (The Trevor Project, 2020). LGBTQ+ minorities also had greater odds of entering foster care in comparison to White LGBTQ+ young adults. Native/Indigenous LGBTQ+ young adults had the highest chances of being exposed to foster care, followed by multiracial LGBTQ+ young adults, Black LGBTQ+ young adults, Latinx LGBTQ+ young adults, and Asian/Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ young adults (The Trevor Project, 2020).

Employment

EFY have more challenges than their nonfoster peers in finding and maintaining gainful employment. EFY often have unstable upbringings and have not developed the mental and emotional skills needed to succeed in the workforce (Reilly, 2003). According to statistics from the Cities, Counties, and Schools Partnership (2007), 50% of EFY experience elevated unemployment rates. EFY' earnings are at or below $6,000 annually, greatly lower than the federal poverty level of $7,890 for a single individual.

Dworsky and Courtney (2001) found EFY experience high unemployment and earn lower wages from unstable jobs than those in the overall population. Courtney (2006) found youth who stay in foster care longer experience better results in employment than those who exit foster care at 18. These youth also may have received more training and employment-related skills than those who exit foster care at 18.

Providing life skills training to EFY can lead to better outcomes in education and employment (Pokempner et al., 2009). For example, Inspire Life Skills Training (2023), a California-based nonprofit organization, supplies housing aid, life skills education, education, and job resources for EFY. Inspire Life Skills Training has been in existence since 2005 and has helped over 300 EFY. Of those who have participated in the program, 93% went on to attend college, and 82% gained employment while in the program (Inspire Life Skills Training, 2023).

Woodgate et al. (2017) found programs that include job training have a positive effect on those who participate. The AECF (2023) reported prolonging access to resources into the first 3 years of adulthood can make a profound difference in the life of an EFY; they can create important life skills, relationships, and support systems that can assist them into adulthood. Additionally, Courtney et al. (2018) found, in their CalYOUTH report, remaining in foster care beyond 18 years old significantly increased the chances that young adults graduated high school, increased their chances of being admitted into college by 10–11%, lowered the chances of pregnancy between the ages of 17–21 by 28%, and lowered the chances of an arrest for EFY aged 17–21 by 41%.

Peters et al. (2016) found EFY respondents reported some type of employment or work experience. However, most work experiences were part time or informal odd jobs, and many participants reported holding multiple jobs simultaneously. Even for respondents who held formal jobs instead of seasonal or part-time jobs, the minimum wage was widespread, and jobs most frequently held were in retail, fast food, or with temp agencies. Respondents also reported they encountered many barriers in their attempts to secure gainful employment, including difficulties with transportation,

childcare considerations, medical concerns, and balancing their school and work

schedules (Peters et al., 2016). Although Peters et al. only studied 38 EFY, Courtney et

al. (2018) conducted a study with 612 EFY aged 21, in California and reported mean

wages earned was $12.48, with some youth indicating they were making less than the

state's minimum wage of $10 per hour. Given very few youths have been granted

financial assistance, it is alarming more funds are not being allocated to supplement their

income during the years following their emancipation. Figure 6 shows the percentage of

EFY earning a livable wage by age 24.

Figure 6

Percent of EFY Earning a Livable Wage, Age 24
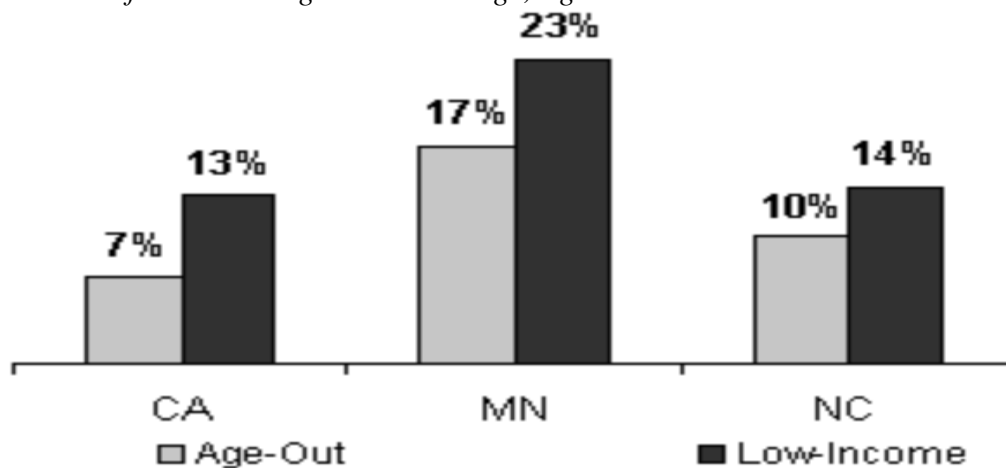
Note. From *Coming of Age: Employment Outcomes for Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care Through Their Middle Twenties* by L. Radel et al., The Urban Institute, n.d. (https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/coming-age-employment-outcomes-youth-who-age-out-foster-care-through-their-middle-twenties-1)

Most emerging adults can borrow money from parents or someone else from their

extensive support network, but for EFY, this option is generally unavailable. In a study of

52 EFY, Osterling and Hines (2006) found over 10% of respondents reported there was

no one in their life from whom they could borrow $50 if they needed financial support.

Not being able to borrow money becomes increasingly problematic when EFY lose a job, are not employed full time, or are only making minimum wage. Rome and Raskin (2019) followed 36 youth over a year-long period and found employment was the most challenging domain for EFY; one third of respondents had a period of at least 3 months of unemployment during the study's duration, and one sixth of respondents were unemployed for almost the entire year.

LifeWorks (2016) found EFY have a lower average wage than non-EFY: $207.70 monthly compared to $1,006.60. In addition, Dworsky and Gitlow (2017) asserted the employment rates of EFY tend to stay lower. Even with the establishment of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) in 1999, many EFY still are unable to fully support themselves financially. A lack of gainful employment prevents EFY from developing the financial independence required in adulthood and can cause problems in housing and other domains of transitioning out of care. Further, due to difficult financial circumstances, almost 25% of respondents had dealt drugs, and over 10% had used sexual intercourse as currency to pay bills (Reilly, 2003). Given an EFY's substandard income from lawful employment and the inability to access needed funds from other sources, sometimes the only option is criminality.

Education

EFY trail academically in comparison to their counterparts, with 33% graduating from high school, compared to 50% of the general population (Reilly, 2003). Entry into foster care results in the likelihood of being retained in grade level and poor performance on standardized assessments compared to students with similar ages (Smithgall et al., 2004). Foster youth usually attend low-performing schools (Smithgall et al., 2004). With

extended time in foster care, they will continue to struggle behind nonfoster constituents (Courtney et al., 2011). Figure 7 shows the percentage scores of foster youths on the California Smarter Balanced Assessments from 2014–2018.

Figure 7

Foster Children's Performance Smarter Balance Assessment in California
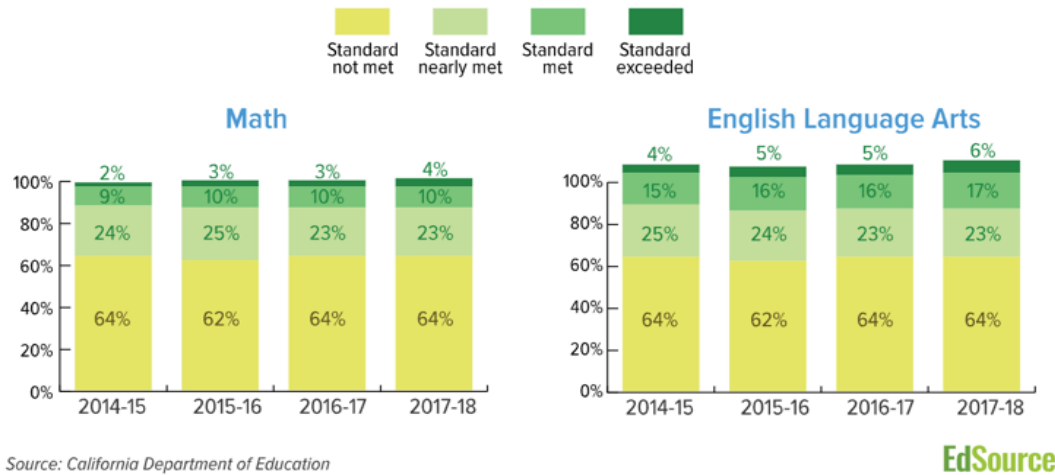
Note. From *Quick Guide: Students in Foster Care*, by A. Montero, EdSource, 2019, (https://edsource.org/2019/students-in-foster-care-a-quick-guide/621586).

School changes happen frequently due to placement instability. In their study of Illinois EFY, Shin and Poertner (2002) reported 30% of youth shared placement changes resulted in missing at least 1 month of school, but 44% indicated placement changes led to three or more school changes. School changes are related to unfavorable academic achievement and truancy (Gasper et al., 2011). Students who change schools alter their social attributes and connected support systems from the previous school and must assimilate into a new school and social network.

Unprotected student groups (e.g., those enduring homelessness, juvenile justice participation, disabled students, and very transient youth) usually have higher achievement gaps (Armenta et al., 2020). In particular, foster students' high school

completion rates and college admittance are the lowest of any unprotected student

population (Armenta et al., 2020). Furthermore, although the national dropout percentage

is going down, it is consistently increasing for foster youth (National Center for Statistics,

2016). Furthermore, Benbenishty et al. (2016) reported in-school encounters are liable for

the poor academic results acquired by EFY, which means foster youth's dealings with

teachers, administrators, and other adults on campus will have either good or bad effects,

both academically and socially.

Nationally, 50% of foster care youth finish secondary education, and fewer than

3% graduate from college (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Many states have implemented

strategies to improve postsecondary outcomes, including tuition waivers, extended foster

care, scholarships, and campus support programs (Pecora et al., 2003).

In research investigating the academic experiences of EFY, Clemens et al. (2017)

reported young adults had distinct ideas concerning how teachers should treat youths who

have experienced trauma. Clemens et al. (2017) stated:

> The teachers and staff need to be trained, and a lot of young people experience a
>
> lot of traumas, and so I think it is essential to have, like, trauma-informed care
>
> training, so they understand when kids are behaving negatively, or they are acting
>
> out instead of trying to discipline them. (p. 74)

Results noted in Clemens et al.'s study are uniform to others in relation to the

significance of traumatic events on learning, and the impact of educators' understanding

of how trauma is attributed to academic exposure (Pecora, 2012).

The AECF (2018) report supplied national statistics on EFY and reported the

opposition they endure in achieving a high school diploma. EFY had less academic

achievement by age 21 than non-foster youth (AECF, 2018). Several components appear to promote poor educational outcomes of EFY, such as a track record of abuse or neglect, school mobility, placement in low-achieving schools, and personal goals (Hook & Courtney, 2011). In addition, homelessness also influences the skills of foster youth to achieve an education because the shortage of stability creates challenges in enrolling in school due to not having necessary documentation and fundamental supports, like clean clothing and hygiene. Conditions such as these, build obstacles to homeless young people's attendance (Hook & Courtney, 2011).

Incarceration

The interconnection between a young person's rearing and the juvenile justice system could explain why approximately 90% of foster children have interactions in the juvenile justice system (Juvenile Law Center, 2018). The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD, 2014) disclosed EFY incarcerated in 24 months of emancipation differed with age. Mitchel et al. (2015) reported 25% of study participants disclosed being incarcerated in jail, prison, or juvenile correction center. Shook et al.'s (2013) study of 1,361 EFY found EFY had higher or comparable rates of juvenile and criminal justice involvement (i.e., 24% and 19%, respectively) compared to EFY who did not age out of care (i.e., 22% juvenile justice involvement, 20% criminal justice involvement), and both groups had significantly higher percentages of criminality than emerging adults who do not have a history of foster care placement (i.e., 11% and 10%). Additionally, regarding gender differences, Southerland et al. (2009) reported male EFY are 6 times more likely to be incarcerated than female EFY. Table 2 compares percentages of EFY,

former foster youth, and emerging adults who have had involvement with juvenile and

criminal justice.

Table 2

Percentages of Emancipated Foster Youth, Former Foster Youth, and Emerging Adults Involved With Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems

Criminal Involvement	EFY	FFY	EA	Source
Juvenile justice system	24%	22%	11%	Shook et al. (2013)
Criminal justice system	19%	20%	10%	Shook et al. (2013)

Note. From "How Different are Their Experiences and Outcomes? Comparing Aged Out and Other Child Welfare Involved Youth," by J. J. Shook et al., 2013, *Children and Youth Services Review*, *35*(1), p. 11–18.

Rates of incarceration for EFY were also found to be inversely correlated with

education level; specifically, a lower education level corresponded with a higher

likelihood of incarceration (Reilly, 2003). Trouble with the law as a juvenile was also

correlated with lower school enrollment rates at age 21. Furthermore, EFY who did not

graduate from high school or acquire a general education degree by age 19 had higher

chances of involvement with criminal behavior/activities by age 21. Conversely, EFY

who had completed secondary education were unlikely to have legal involvement at age

21, even if they had criminal involvement as juveniles, suggesting educational attainment

acts as a mediator for criminality during the transition to adulthood (Lee et al., 2015).

Examining this paradox is pivotal to advocating for children's well-being,

especially those assigned to the foster care system who had a greater chance of entering

the juvenile justice system. Covenant House (2023) reported 30% of 100,000 young

adults, regardless of being an EFY or not, who leave the juvenile justice system and then

are released to relatives displaying domestic violence, drug abuse, psychological health

impairments, and poverty, return in 3 years.

Homelessness

The lack of adequate access to transition programs for foster youth is the number one cause of homelessness among EFY (Kelly, 2019). In addition, young adults released from state care are often homeless soon after discharge. Previous incarcerations and substance abuse referrals are the most decisive risk factors for homelessness. Other critical risk characteristics were having a history of running away, receiving assistance for food, and being emotionally unstable (Kelly, 2019).

Several attributes have been found to impact the likelihood of homelessness among EFY. Many factors relate to their history of placements, including extraction from the original household due to behavior or emotional circumstances, fleeing from placements, instability of temporary home, and residing in group or residential treatment centers (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). Gender also has been seen to influence the chances of homelessness (i.e., men have the highest likelihood to endure homelessness), displaying criminal actions, juvenile justice system participation, family members' criminal history, past victimization, mental health predicaments, and being homeless at an earlier time (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009).

Dworsky et al. (2013) reported adolescents who left their home or other placements will endure a lengthy transition to becoming an adult. In the past 3 decades, the process for young adults moving out of the home has shifted significantly due to employment options, higher education choices, and living independently (Furstenberg, 2015). Chang et al. (2013) contended homeless EFY have higher chances for several challenges, such as not having a job, poor educational opportunities, and drug abuse. Research suggests the lack of survival planning, limitations on housing, and

socioeconomic components are thought to be critical danger factors for becoming homeless among EFY. Fowler et al. (2017) contended additional studies are needed to determine the beginning, how often, and lasting effects of homelessness with EFY. There is an insufficient amount of research being conducted or tracked to know the effects of homelessness on young people (Fowler et al., 2017).

Substance Abuse

EFY experience higher risk and vulnerability to substance use in the 1st year of emancipation (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010). Narendorf and McMillen (2010) reported EFY had more elevated rates of substance abuse than those who did not age out of care. Throughout their research, Narendorf and McMillen's supported the notion that although being under the guardianship of a court system is seen as a protective instrument against substance abuse, it does place youth at an intensified risk of subsequently creating a substance abuse problem (Cooper & Victoria, 2020).

Although marijuana use was higher in foster care populations, alcohol use was seen to have a similar usage from those who self-reported in non-foster care groups (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010). Additional attributes that may lead to higher rates of substance abuse include being White and male, having a history of abuse, peer or sibling use, and prolonged time in the foster care system. Additional determinants include frequent school exclusion and living in shared accommodations, which are common in foster care (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010). Substance abuse correlates with lack of housing, because Narendorf and McMillen (2010) suggested individuals who are found to be homeless have greater risk of a substance abuse problem.

Murphy and Tobin (2012) established homeless EFY have an increased inclination to participate in self-destructive behaviors, including alcohol and drug usage. Wilens et al. (2013) found although half of addiction can be traced to genetics, environment can also aid in substance abuse. Several EFY stated their environment involves living on the streets. To cope with the hardships of homelessness, many EFY turn to substance usage (Bender et al., 2014).

Ill-prepared EFY enter adulthood looking to drug dependence as a way to manage stress (Wilens et al., 2013). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) found the nation's primary health concern with young adults is the use of drugs and alcohol.

Foster youth have higher chances for substance-abusing behaviors due to higher levels of exposure to substance abuse-related situations, such as their parents or guardian's substance abuse, obstruction of encouraging social groups, and elevated psychological and behavioral issues (Aarons et al., 2008; Taussig, 2002). Greeno et al. (2017) also revealed young adults who see themselves as LGBTQ+ have greater chances of substance abuse than those who are not.

Legislation

In the past, supporting youth who were mistreated, neglected, or exploited was managed primarily by local authorities. As time went on, singular states created answers to cases of child endangerment. Throughout the past 40 years, the federal government has played an increasing part in child well-being. Federal child support policies and laws are not infinite. To some degree, many federal policies establish funding procedures to allow individual states to make themselves available for federal funds if they agree with the many provisions created by policy makers. Lawmakers increased Social Security and

Medicaid funds to aid local governments in creating resources for current foster youth and EFY (CA.gov Department of Social Services, n.d.).

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 provided nationwide provisions to entice the adoption of youth out of foster care. Adoption assistance was provided to lower financial hurdles for adoption. In addition, different kinds of assistance are accessible to assist with medical or other health-related care. The California State Legislature crafted the Adoption Assistance Program with the purpose of providing the support and stability of a permanent home by way of adoption (CA Department of Social Services, n.d.).

The FCIA

The FCIA of 1999, which advises laws and finances, was established to assist with the unsatisfied needs of adolescent foster youth, focusing on EFY. The act increased support accessible to foster young adults, inspiring states to allow EFY to remain able to qualify for Medicaid up to age 21, increasing financial assistance for schooling and employment planning, and expanding money available to aid in moving into adulthood. Also, subsidies provide for "personal and emotional support to children aging out of foster care, through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults" (FCIA of 1999, 1999, p. 3) and supplies of such resources and programs "to complement their effort to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood" (FCIA of 1999, 1999, p. 3).

The FCIA is often misunderstood as a funding allocation act that maximizes monies for state ILPs. On the other hand, the FCIA creates the atmosphere for courtroom proceedings for all EFY. In conjunction with EFY case planning governed by Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, juvenile and family courts can be sure young adults preparing for emancipation have access to and receive the ILS needed for independence (Carroll, 2002).

Carroll (2002) discovered over 12% of EFY interviewed were homeless in the past, 28% had past incarcerations, and 32% received public assistance. Additionally, 40% of EFY in a Wisconsin study reported having difficulty getting medical care in spite of major physical, mental, and behavioral health needs (Carroll, 2002). Carroll showed these young adults achieve lower education, probably single parents, and have higher chances to be without a job compared to non-foster care populations.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Act

Prior to the year 2000, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (JCFCIA, 2008) was crafted to replace initial legislation from 1986 as a federally funded program to assist state agencies with EFY (Freundlich, 2009). Providing youth with services, such as college preparation courses, financial management, stable housing, life skills, and employment preparation, helps them achieve genuine autonomy. Although the JCFCIA legislation supports youth from state to state, many struggle to transition from state-dependent youth to independent young adults (Freundlich, 2009). The JCFCIA did not speak to the significance of relations with family in young people's lives, reference permanence, realize the seriousness of giving young adults chances to create life-long relationships with others, participation in structured opportunities, and develop various

diverse groups and social support (Freundlich, 2009). Therefore, outcomes for most of these youth are poor compared to those not in foster care (Freundlich, 2009).

The JCFCIA (2008) includes federal funding of $140 million annually, including allocation of additional money and better adaptability in supporting ILS by the state. It additionally expands the eligibility to age 21 for EFY. Permission is granted to states to spend less than 30% of the monies for housing and feeding, and extension of Medicaid coverage for EFY occurs until age 21 (Collins, 2001). After establishment of the Chafee Independent Living Act of 1999, many researchers have reported only the outcomes of EFY.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCSIA, 2008) was enacted by President George W. Bush. Reported from the National Center for Homeless Education (year), this act aids many adolescents in the foster care system by encouraging permanent families by means of kinship and adoption, which will improve education and medical care. Furthermore, the FCSIA allows federal provisions for EFY until 21 years old. FCSIA shall provide Native American young adults' crucial governmental provisions and resources (FCSIA of 2008, 2008).

Reported by the North American Council on Adoptable Children (2023), the FCSIA shall expand governmental resources to local governments to place additional children permanently with their biological or adoptive parents and increase assistance to foster young adults. The FCSIA also allows foster youth to have improved outcomes, such as permanency with relatives, by providing notice to related families when children enter care, kinship programs, and guardianship funds for relatives. Additionally, FCSIA

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cleared the way for states to conduct reimbursable adoption care or guardianship

allowance funding for young adults up to age 21 if they met several requirements.

Requirements include the following: (a) young adults must be engaged in secondary,

postsecondary, or vocational education, and (b) work minimally 80 hours per month

(Curry & Abrams, 2015).

NYTD

The Chafee Program gives states the ability to fund programs that help EFY to

move toward a healthy and self-sufficient adulthood. The JCFCIA (2008) also mandates

the Administration for Children and Families to create an information collection system

to track ILS, local governments use to support young adults and develop outcome

measures that analyze state's adherences to their ILPs. Based on the many issues

researchers have found in successfully transitioning EFY toward independent adult

survival, Courtney et al. (2001) advocated for states to improve their laws to support EFY

more to be successful.

As a result, the NYTD was formed during 2010 as the conclusive data collection

factor for transitioning youth from foster care for every state and provinces to evaluate

ILPs. The first data report was issued in May 2011. Mandatory reporting allows the

federal government to learn about various areas of need for emancipated youth. However,

the NYTD only began officially reporting on ILS in 2016.

The NYTD is a countrywide snippet for finding awareness of this unprotected

population's dilemmas. As reported by Scannapieco et al. (2016), the Transition

Resource Action Center favorably inspires young adults getting ILS. Scannapieco et al.

defined the studies on procedures and policy for NYTD. Because of this, governments

continuously garner exponentially dependable information for NYTD and determine advantages for supplying resources to young people making the transition to adults (Children's Bureau, 2019). Prior to this point, it is vital to analyze the results of this study as a singular of information that could assist in bringing knowledge to state transition arrangement resources, methods, and procedures (Children's Bureau, 2019). Studies have established the noteworthiness of investigating NYTD as a countrywide portion for becoming knowledgeable on situations plaguing this unprotected population. Six conclusions made by the NYTD are financial independence, educational achievement, influence by elders, experiences being homeless, risky behaviors, and accessibility to medical insurance using NYTD (Children's Bureau, 2019).

The Social Security Act (SSA)

The Social Security Act (SSA) instructs government agencies to be responsible for foster youth adults with transition assistance resources (Katz & Courtney, 2015). The SSA is a government strategy that gives suitable financial assistance and other resources for EFY including methods for obtaining medical insurance, stable residency, schooling, occupation, and coaching. In addition, SSA along with Federal Supplemental Security Insurance benefits for foster youth, have been expanded to those who are emancipated from care. AB 1331 is a newly adopted bill under the SSA and supplemental security insurance for foster youth and it requires counties to screen foster youth prior to exiting foster care at 18 for their potential eligibility for SSI. AB1331 was intended to guarantee youth who qualify for SSI benefits acquire the financial resources they need, which was not provided in all counties across California.

Problems Identified From Literature

Successful individuals have usually equated their achievements to having a mentor in their life. In her dissertation entitled, *Mentors and their impact on the transitions of foster care youth to independent living*, Kunkle (2019) stated, "Mentoring empowers former foster youth to succeed" (p. x). Kunkle (2019) showed EFY who participated in discussions with positive mentors had fewer adverse outcomes for their futures and were less likely to become homeless.

Mentors take on a pivotal character in many young EFY. Policy surrounding mentorship programs should explicitly outline their purpose and function (Arya, 2021). The need for mentorship programs continues to be of the utmost importance for EFY and foster children. Mentorship programs not only provide youth with training in necessary independent living skills but may also reduce EFY' need for formal mental health interventions and other adverse situations.

Mentoring programs are methods of giving the assistance needed most by EFY. Unfortunately, many EFY find the change challenging (Greeson et al., 2015). Researchers suggest EFY who have mentors providing education to mediate and assist, do well. Greeson et al. (2015) organized an empirical study in which they explored the results of mentorship on EFY; their study showed graduates considered mentors to be assistive in emancipation. However, although Kunkle (2019) found favorable results regarding mentors by EFY, Greeson et al. proposed room for improvement.

An additional problem found in the literature was noting and understanding the life-long adverse effects of participating in and emancipating from foster care has on youth. Hazen (2013) analyzed the oppositions connected with EFY and their hardiness.

Results established percentages of 39%–65% of foster children graduate high school prior to emancipation, noting EFY showcase resiliency toward schooling due to many enduring traumas throughout their childhood. Resiliency research toward foster youth as a whole found similar results (Yates & Grey, 2012). Yates and Grey (2012) investigated resilience, consisting of educational obtainment, job search, self-esteem, and psychological health, and found one half of the study participants established these abilities.

Many EFY demand higher quality mental health knowledge all through the foster care system, as shown by the very little mental health system use by EFY (Foster et al., 2015). Upgraded mental health knowledge takes into consideration mental/psychological issues and all that comes with that knowledge. In intergenerational research designed to examine the correlation between prior foster youth and parenting, Foster et al. (2015) reported low parenting skills, EFY depression, and a higher chance for foster placement of EFY' children. Foster et al.'s study was comprised of 742 EFY who parented at least one biological child. EFY fathers exhibited poor mental capacities, and EFY mothers were mostly diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (Foster et al., 2015). Foster et al. (2015) highlighted the necessity for present policies to discuss psychological needs of EFY and biological families. Results could be beneficial to the area of psychology by allowing the betterment of understanding, not just the psychological issues of EFY, but also the intergenerational consequences of foster care among alumni with children.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature pertaining to the challenges youth face as they emancipate from foster care. The literature review for this study showed EFY have

oftentimes lived through various traumas and unwanted significant life events from their emancipation to adulthood. Traumas and intrusive major life events can include psychological, mental, and emotional abuse and/or neglect, several placements, and insufficient training and education (Katz & Courtney, 2015).

Studies reviewed in this chapter identified major challenges, including psychologically disordered EFY in sections of mental health, education, employment, homelessness, monetary resources, the criminal justice system, and health care needs. The literature reviewed showed continuous psychological and physical instability, both in and after foster care, that can result in mental illness, substance abuse, and adverse effects on psychological development as EFY transition into adulthood (Bronsard et al., 2016). Discussion in the studies reviewed focused on how young adults in foster care system have oftentimes experienced various psychological traumas and intrusive major life events by the time they begin their transition to adulthood (Katz & Courtney, 2015).

The National Survey of Children's Health (2011–2012) established EFY display higher degrees of psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression, attention deficit disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and behavior issues when analyzed next to youth who are living with biological parents (Hayek et al., 2014). Keller et al. (2010) examined and assessed EFY and determined 30% of study participants achieved the lifetime diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder. Keller et al. noted foster care placement is frequently prefaced by a catalyst of stressful situations (e.g., physical and psychological abuse).

Chapter II explored the literature, and Chapter III explains the study's methodology and the research design. Additionally, Chapter III discusses the sample population, data collection, analysis procedures, and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The current phenomenological study explored how emancipated foster youth (EFY) perceived their transition to adulthood. In addition, the current study also explored EFY' perceptions of the access essential to specific programs and resources upon exiting the foster care system that could benefit successful transitioning for EFY. Chapter III investigates the current study's research methodology, including the purpose statement, research questions, population, sample, reliability, data collection, data analysis, and limitations; the chapter concludes with a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and describe the perceptions of EFY regarding the factors that have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this study was to describe the measures EFY consider essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What factors do EFY perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

2. What measures do EFY perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Research Design

Qualitative research describes a phenomenon (e.g., person, program, or institution) to disclose how the phenomenon develops in certain conditions (Farquhar, 2012). The researcher used a qualitative method and phenomenology design using interviews to investigate the lived experiences of EFY. Qualitative research gives groundwork to understand and identify the definition of human or community problems (Creswell, 2009). In addition, qualitative studies aid researchers in understanding the issues found to be difficult or an issue behind participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers can examine participants' lived experiences by creating ideas and themes from participants who partake in the same situations with the qualitative method and phenomenological design.

A phenomenological approach was adopted for the current study, as Patton (2015) defined as bringing focus "on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as a shared meaning" (p. 118). Thus, explaining participants' lived experiences as a portrayal of their core was the focus of the current phenomenological study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher studied the lived experiences of each EFY and reported any similarities among the 12 emancipated EFY interviewed.

Population

Creswell (2009) described a population being a "group of individuals who have the same characteristics" (p. 151). Also, Patton (2015) defined a population as the group the researcher is intrigued by. The current study also aimed to view EFY residing in

California, a population totaling approximately 60,000 youth (Annie E. Casey

Foundation [AECF], 2018).

Target Population

A target population "defines those units [or subjects] for which the findings of the

survey are meant to generalize" (Lavrakas, 2008, para. 1). Creating a target population

involves choosing participants who identify everyday occurrences that support

comprehensive insights into the research questions. In addition, target populations are

identified as people for whom the study findings will be universal (Creswell, 2009).

The target population for the current study were EFY. Specifically, this current

study's target population focused on EFY in Los Angeles County. Nationally, at the time

of the study, Los Angeles County was the most populated county in the United States

with a total of 10,150,558 people (World Population Review, n.d.). Los Angeles County

had 51 foster care agencies. Approximately 800 foster youth have been emancipated from

those agencies annually (AECF, 2018). Figure 8 includes a map of the foster care

agencies in Los Angeles County

Figure 8

Map of Foster Agencies in Los Angeles County
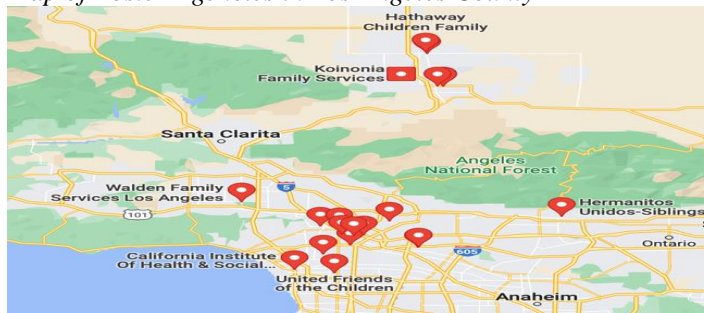
Note. Adapted from *Map of Foster Agencies in Los Angeles County*, Google Maps, July 23, 2023,
(https://www.google.com/maps/search/foster+agencies+in+los+angeles/@33.7796503,-
119.6183712,8z/data=!3m1!4b1?entry=ttu).

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated when conducting a research study, samples are chosen out of larger groups, and the information gathered will refer to the group as a whole. Unlike quantitative studies, which focus on bigger sample groups, Patton (2015) stated qualitative studies strategically concentrate on a limited sample chosen for an objective. Patton (2015) also imparted are "no rules to sample size in qualitative studies" (p. 311). Patton (2015) acknowledged the relevance of a bigger amount of participants if the research's objectives are to find a range of experiences, but also discussed the value of comprehensive research needs of a low number in a collection of participants if "cases are information-rich" (p. 311). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined qualitative samples as purposive, which means they are chosen under their ability to supply understandings related to the phenomenon under examination. The researcher aimed to generalize the data analysis and conclusions from the sample group.

For the current qualitative study of EFY, 12 participants were included in the sample from the Antelope Valley in Los Angeles County. A sample size of 12 aligned with McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) suggested scope of less than 40. For the current study, the sample was made up of 12 EFY who lived in in Los Angeles County, California, and were representative of five different foster care agencies in the Antelope Valley. The agencies included were: (a) Koinonia Family Services, (b) Walden Family Services, (c) Inner Circle Foster Care, (d) Shelton Foster Family Home, and (e) Penny Lane Center. The five agencies in Los Angeles County were chosen because they are all in a 30-mile radius and share the same demographic makeup. Figure 9 includes a map of the foster care agencies chosen for the current study.

Figure 9

Map of Foster Care Agencies in Antelope Valley
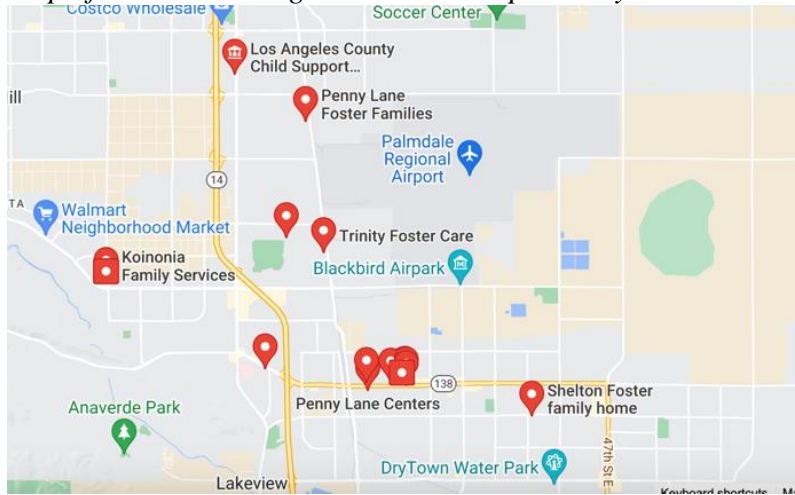
Note. Adapted from *Map of Foster Care Agencies in Antelope Valley in Los Angeles County,* Google Maps, July 23, 2023, (https://www.google.com/maps/search/foster+agencies+in+antelope+valley/@34.6769986,-118.2896754,12z/data=!3m1!4b1?entry=ttu).

The researcher attempted to enlist an equal number of female and male participants to comprise the 12 EFY in the sample. All participants had the following characteristics:

- They were emancipated from foster care on or after their 18th birthday.

- They had been emancipated for a minimum of 2 years.

- They resided in Los Angeles County in the state of California.

- They were between the ages of 21–30 years old.

- They were from 5/51 agencies in Los Angeles County.

Figure 10 presents a summary of the alignment between the population, target population, and sample for the current study.

Figure 10

Alignment Between the Population, Target Population, and Sample for the Current Study

Population	Annual emancipated foster youth in the state of California totaled 4,355
Target Population	Annual emancipated foster youth in Los Angeles County totaled approximately 800 from 51 agencies across the county
Sample	12 Emancipated Foster Youth (ages 21-30) Emancipated Foster Youth from five agencies were in Los Angeles County
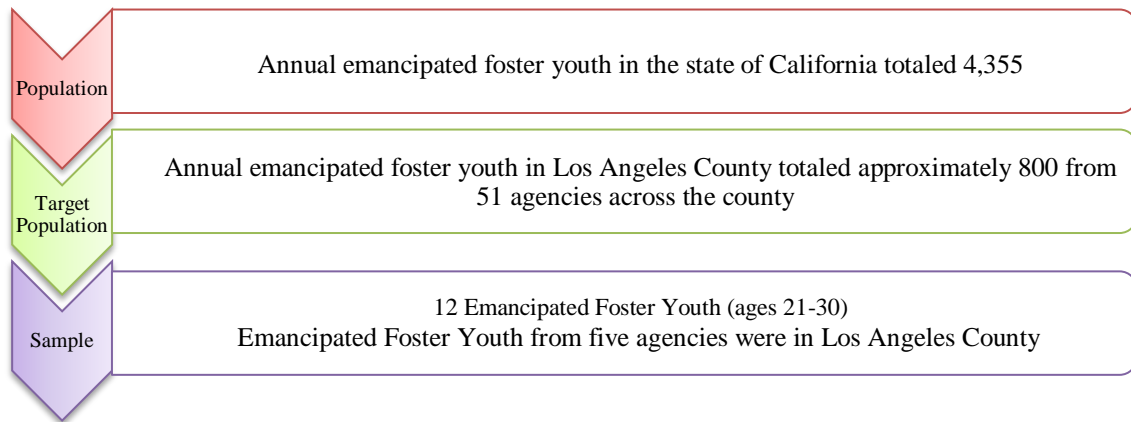
Note. Adapted from *Choosing Your Sample*, by Research PHT404, 2017, (https://physio.uwc.ac.za/pht404/choosing-your-sample/).

Sampling Procedures

Patton (2015) stated, "Sampling is a means to an end. The end, or purpose, is generating knowledge and deepening understanding" (p. 307). Even though qualitative research does not collect statistical information, the method and sample used offered participants a platform. In the current phenomenological study, the researcher used the following sampling approaches to acquire EFY.

Homogenous Sampling

Patten and Newhart (2018) stated homogeneous sampling seeks to "sample people who are similar to one another from a population that is larger and more diverse" (p. 100). For the current study, the homogeneous sample revealed commonalities; all participants were EFY from California and between the ages of 21–30 and had been emancipated for at least 2 years. The homogeneous sample used in the current study included EFY from Los Angeles County.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to choose certain features and details of the sample that corresponded with the study span that would adequately embody or support data in matters of curiosity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The major characteristic of the sampling method was EFY' personal experiences and perspectives of their transition into adulthood. Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative researchers are more likely to select a purposive sample of individuals whom the researchers believe are key informants in terms of social dynamics, leadership positions, job, and responsibilities" (p. 19). The specific EFY samples were chosen due to the realistic knowledge pertaining to the phenomena the researcher explored (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Specific inclusion criteria for participation were established. The 12 participants: (a) were emancipated from foster care before, on or past their 18th birthday, (b) had been emancipated for a minimum of 2 years, (c) resided in Los Angeles County, California, and (d) were between the ages of 21–30 years old. Once a participant contacted the researcher, verification of the participant's eligibility criteria was established by the researcher.

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling is defined as a collection of participants selected because of being attainable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At the time of the study, this researcher had been working and lived in Southern California as an educator for over 10 years. Hence, it was convenient for the researcher to interview participants who resided in Los Angeles County.

Due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of foster youth's records, the researcher contacted several foster care agencies in Los Angeles County. The directors were emailed a copy of the study overview and the participant request letter (see Appendix B). Directors were provided with a copy of the study's research overview along with a flyer with the researcher's contact information. Directors were asked to distribute the information to any EFY they felt fit the criteria for the study. The researcher's contact information was provided so participants were able to voluntarily reach out and schedule a meeting to speak with the researcher. If the researcher is unsuccessful with reaching a director via email, the researcher will reach out via phone and set up an appointment with the director to speak with them in person about the study.

After participants contacted the researcher, a participant letter of invitation (see Appendix C) was sent to every person via email or text pertaining to the current study's content, including requesting participation in the current study and explaining the data collected would remain confidential. The letter additionally requested participants' permission to be interviewed and recorded. In the same manner, the researcher clarified participants were able to request clarification questions to gain a better comprehension of anything sent to them and could decline to respond to questions throughout the interview. All applicable authorizations and forms were issued and signed prior to the interview. Participants were scheduled for a 60-minute interview with the researcher.

Instrumentation

Patton (2015) summarized the phenomenological method as consisting of interviews focusing on participants' lived instances. Instrumentation, defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2014), is the "effect of variations in measurement" (p. 112).

Thus, the researcher conducted interviews with each study participant as the instrumentation process of collecting data.

Five variables gleaned from the theoretical framework and synthesis matrix (see Appendix A) framed this research: (a) identity exploration, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (d) feeling in between adolescence and adulthood, and (e) sense of future possibilities. These elements were used as a guide to develop the interview instrument under the guidance of expert faculty advisors, to develop probing, semi-structured, open-ended, and conversational interview questions included in the EFY Interview Protocol (see Appendix D). The interview questions in the EFY Interview Protocol were designed to align the research questions, the theoretical framework and the literature in the synthesis matrix.

Additionally, the current study engaged a semi-structured interviewing approach to permit participants to respond to open-ended inquiries and share openly concerning their actualities. Fylan (2005) stated a part of the semi-structured interviewing method is when "you get to talk to people to find out about what they have experienced and what they think and feel about something that you are interested in" (p. 65). Each participant was told each interview would last approximately 1 hour. The researcher used exploratory questions during the semi structured interview to collaborate with participants, create connections, and gain particular understandings.

Interviews

Phenomenological interviews for the current study centered on participants' lived experiences in a relaxed interpersonal way in which participants recalled experiences, stories, and developments (Patton, 2015). Questions were phrased in a solely open-ended arrangement, because "qualitative in-depth interviews are noted for their probes and

pause than for their particular question formats" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 357). To gain more valid data, the researcher must create assurance, be authentic, maintain eye contact, and use a steady cadence and voice (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Semi-structured independent interviews used a set protocol created from a preplanned number of interview questions (see Appendix E) that was consistent with the research questions and the theoretical framework. An expert gave feedback on the questions to ensure they were appropriately phrased, identical, and coherent (Lapan et al., 2011). The researcher took the feedback from the expert and made any necessary changes to the interview questions. The researcher created a former foster youth interview protocol (see Appendix D) to develop a precise script to discuss interview questions.

Bias

The researcher completed the enlistment and gathering of data and universalized the results. Being the primary information-collecting vehicle conducting the interviews, the researcher observed her self-bias closely while administering the current study. An interviewer increases impartiality with self-acknowledgment, which Patton (2015) stated "refers to considering the research problem about the interviewer's background and attitudes before conducting the interviews" (p. 163). Also, the researcher in the current study tried to decrease bias by adhering to a precise and unvarying interview protocol. Reduction of bias is when the researcher knows of the bias and tries to identify and stay clear of biased tendencies (Patton, 2015). The researcher has never been in foster care but has several family members and friends who were. The researcher was aware of possible bias within the research and attempted to remain aware of and avoid it.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity "refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). Validity was managed for this study through data triangulation and having participants review their transcripts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reported four approaches to triangulating information: (a) various approaches, (b) several data sources, (c) multiple investigators, and (d) numerous theories to confirm emerging results. The researcher ensured internal validity and increased the credibility of the results by using multiple data sources, which included interviews and gathering artifacts in line with the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Additionally, each participant gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded. With the informed consent form (see Appendix F), participants were made aware of the research method to guarantee validity during the interview with participants. After their interview, the researcher supplied every participant with copies of the transcripts to analyze and adjust responses for correctness (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Following the EFY interview protocol (see Appendix D), the researcher altered interview transcriptions as necessary, contingent on participants' answers, after reviewing the interview transcript.

The 1-hour interviews allowed the researcher to note nonverbal cues and body language expressions, which increased the gravity of the information obtained and documented in the researcher's field notes. A confidential transcriptionist transcribed the digital recordings of the interviews. All 12 participants had the chance to examine the

transcript of their interview for authenticity. Data collection was conducted between August 2023 and September 2023.

Field Test

To establish validity, a field test supported by a pilot interview with an expert with qualitative research experience was conducted before data collection. The expert used for the field test had experience in qualitative research and possessed a doctoral degree. The participant's data in the pilot interview were not considered in the data analysis for the current study. A field test can give a researcher an understanding before working with study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The expert oversaw the researcher executing the pilot interview and presented feedback on the researcher's interview protocol and abilities using the interview feedback reflection questions (see Appendix G). The researcher examined all feedback before administering interviews with the study participants.

Reliability

With qualitative research, reliability is the regularity of findings over time and whether the findings properly represent the entire population (Joppe, 2006). The researcher kept notes and arranged the interview recordings founded on the open-ended semi-structured questions in accordance with the EFY interview protocol throughout data collection (see Appendix H; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the 1-hour interviews, the researcher used identical methods and script to guarantee every participant's process was the same. Combined with requesting interviewees review interview transcripts, the researcher analyzed transcripts for mistakes, matched transcripts with field notes, and developed thorough documentation to confirm the same experience for study participants

(Creswell, 2013). Additionally, ATLAS.TI software (Lumivero, n.d.) noted recurring themes throughout the interviews.

Ethics

Qualitative research design requires ethics to be pivotal and promotes procedures, such as "informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and caring" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 338). Before administering each interview, participants endorsed an informed consent statement. Also, prior to the interviews, participants were emailed the researcher's introduction, a summary of the research study, and information on how to reach the researcher. During transcription of interviews, the researcher omitted all recognizable data related to the study's participants (e.g., names) to confirm confidentiality and privacy. The current study mandated institutional ethics to secure human subjects. The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative's Human Subjects Research Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers training on May 17, 2022 (see Appendix I).

Data Collection

Before data gathering, the researcher gained approval from the University of Massachusetts Global Review Board (see Appendix J) to administer interviews for the current study and acquire data. All EFY participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the current study and agreed to be recorded. All EFY participants were given the opportunity to decline their interview at any time. Additionally, all EFY participants were provided with a copy of the research participant's bill of rights (see Appendix H).

The researcher protected all information seen as controversial, and data were deleted from the transcripts (i.e., specific names and locations) and intentionally redacted to provide anonymity for the EFY. The rights and confidentiality of all participants were garnered throughout the current study in accordance with the University of Massachusetts Global guidelines. The recording file for each interview was retained in an online utility storage and saved for 3 years.

Triangulation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated to find "patterns in the data" (p. 379), researchers use "triangulation" (p. 379) or "cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, periods, and theoretical schemes" (p. 379). The researcher analyzed the artifacts participants presented to triangulate the data. The theoretical framework used to develop the interview questions was also used to create the theoretical framework artifact review form (see Appendix K) to code the artifacts and ascertain emerging themes. Representation of artifacts comprised of pictures, certificates, letters, or brochures for resources presented to the EFY upon emancipation from foster care.

Patton (2015) mentioned triangulation as beneficial due to it "strengthens a study by combining methods" (p. 316). Researchers are able to use triangulation in any research by merging methodologies, for example, combining "interviews, observation, and document analysis" (Patton, 2015, p. 316). Along with administering interviews for the current study, the researcher gathered and analyzed artifacts linked to participants' time in foster care or their emancipation. The researcher asked participants to disclose artifacts, including court documents, certificates of completion, or emancipation. The names of participants who produced the artifacts were removed for anonymity. Artifacts

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were coded using the theoretical framework artifact review Form. Additional examples of artifacts included pictures, certificates, letters, or brochures for resources that were presented to the EFY upon emancipation from foster care.

Data Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated data collection processes as linear and iterative. Data collection actions include (a) data organization, (b) transcription, (c) coding the data, (d) describing data, (e) creating categories, and (f) identifying patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher applied McMillan and Schumacher's methodology for data analysis to ensure accuracy.

Data were gathered and analyzed from each participant's story. For qualitative studies, data analysis stipulates thematic examination and analysis of the information to identify similar perception trends by preparing and clarifying data gathering in abundant facets (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Moustakas (1994) defined the procedure in the phenomenological study as epoché. Epoché is the first step in the phenomenological research methodology. Epoché is where the mind is cleared, making it necessary for the researcher to participate in continuous self-reflection to establish openness, awareness, and presence (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher should be intently listening and stay unbiased. Epoche helps the researcher establish an organic viewpoint of the phenomenon and be aware of its entirety (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche' assisted with using the ATLAS.TI software for tracking the emerging themes from the participant transcripts.

To provide consistency in the data collection process, the researcher followed the following steps in using Epoche':

1. In order to begin Epoche', the researcher sat in a quiet room and listened to low-

frequency meditation music. This will allow the body and mind to relax.

2. Clearing of the mind required the researcher to focus only on the sounds around them and nothing else.

3. Once the researcher was in the state of clearance for five minutes, she began to review the transcripts of each participant.

4. As themes began to emerge, the researcher wrote down the theme and transferred it to ATLAS.TI.

5. The researcher then coded the data using ATLAS.TI software, examining the regularity of themes to dictate if they effectively answered the research questions. Frequency tables and charts were created to aid in the analysis and management of themes to establish the study's findings.

6. After coding the data, the researcher collaborated with an expert with experience in qualitative research to verify, through intercoder reliability, for data coding accuracy.

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability is a process used to establish if independent coders will conclude identical or comparable findings (Lombard et al., 2002). Interrater reliability was attained by a second researcher analyzing each participant's transcripts. The second researcher holds a doctoral degree, has published several qualitative studies, and has used ATLAS.TI 11 software (Lumivero, n.d.) to code data. Using ATLAS.TI software, the researcher categorized 10% of the information to establish themes from the interviews. The researcher and the second researcher coded the data, then cross referenced it to

obtain interrater reliability. The coding method was reliable up to 90% of the time, which is a satisfactory rate of interrater reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Limitations

Study limitations represent weaknesses in a research design that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the research. Researchers have an obligation to the academic community to present complete and honest limitations of a presented study (Ross & Bibler, 2019). Therefore, the limitations of this study are the following. The first limitation was the current study concentrated only on EFY. Additionally, another limitation was the selection of EFY between the ages of 21–30. Another limitation was that all EFY had to reside in Los Angeles County.

Summary

Chapter III restated the purpose statement and research questions and consisted of the methodology, population, sample, and instrumentation. The actions to ensure validity and reliability were explained. Data collection, data analysis, and limitations were also discussed. Chapter IV includes the study's findings, and Chapter V has recommendations for future research and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth (EFY) regarding the factors that have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this study was to describe the measures EFY consider essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living. The theoretical framework for this study was the Emerging Adulthood framework from J.J. Arnett. The five characteristics identified from this framework were—identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feelings of being in between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of future possibilities. The researcher sought to research the perceptions of emancipated foster youth regarding what they believed are essential factors that create successful transitions into adulthood.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth (EFY) regarding the factors that have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this study was to describe the measures EFY consider essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living. The data from the analysis includes participant interviews and a review of artifacts provided. Findings are provided at the conclusion of this chapter.

Research Questions

1. What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

2. What measures do emancipated foster youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Research Methodology and Data Collection Procedure

Qualitative research describes a phenomenon (e.g., person, program, or institution) to disclose how the phenomenon develops in certain conditions (Farquhar, 2012). The researcher used a qualitative method in the phenomenology design by conducting interviews to identify and describe the lived experiences of EFY. Qualitative research provides the groundwork to understand and identify the definition of human or community problems (Creswell, 2009). The researcher sought to identify what factors EFY perceive as essential to their transition into adulthood. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to identify "practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing concrete problems" regarding the emancipation process of foster youth (Patton, 2015, pg 152).

This study was undertaken because research showed there was an absence of information available relating to what EFY perceived as effective and essential to their preparation for adulthood and independent living after emancipation from the foster care system. In addition, the literature review showed an absence of information regarding the impact of the resources and supports available to EFY. Finally, a deeper dive into specific types of support and resources provided to foster youth before and after emancipation were areas where prior research was lacking.

Data Collection and Participants

Prior to collecting the data, the researcher's study was authorized by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board (UMGIRB) (Appendix K), and the researcher received a National Institute of Health (NIH) certificate (Appendix J). After receiving approval by UMGIRB, the researcher identified participants who met the following criteria to be part of the study:

- Participants were emancipated from foster care on or after their 18th birthday.

- Participants had been emancipated for a minimum of 2 years.

- Participants resided in Los Angeles County in the state of California.

- Participants were between the ages of 21 and 30.

- Participants were from five out of 51 selected agencies by the researcher in Los Angeles County.

Interview Data Collection

The researcher conducted participant interviews once directors identified participants from each of the five researcher-selected agencies: Koinonia Family Services, Walden Family Services, Inner Circle Foster Care, Shelton Foster Family Home, and Penny Lane Center. The directors were emailed a copy of the study overview and the participant request letter (see Appendix B). Directors were provided with a copy of the study's research overview and a flyer with the researcher's contact information. Directors were asked to distribute the information to any EFY they felt fit the criteria for the study. The researcher's contact information was provided so participants could voluntarily reach out and schedule a meeting to speak with the researcher.

Then, once participants contacted the researcher and permission was granted via all appropriate consent forms (Appendices H and I), the researcher scheduled a time to meet with each participant. The participants could opt out of the process before or during the interview if they chose to and were reminded of this fact at the beginning.

The researcher interviewed 12 participants who matched the criteria and agreed to be in the study. All 12 participants were interviewed in person at a location of their choosing and were asked the same unstructured and semi-unstructured questions, which were posed to dig deeper into the participants' experiences and provide clarification and understanding. The interviews lasted from 40-65 minutes, depending on the participants' verbal responses, which varied substantially, even though the researcher used the same interview protocol with each participant. The interviews were audio recorded and were saved on the researcher's computer under password protection. All participants agreed to the audio recording of their interview, and consent was signed. (See Appendix F). No participant opted out of the interview. Interviews were transcribed and then provided via email to each participant for feedback. Participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy and make corrections or add additional information in areas they felt were poorly explained. The researcher used feedback to ensure the accuracy of information provided by the participants during the interviews and to allow them an opportunity to clarify the information provided. After the participants returned the transcripts and the researcher reviewed any changes the participants provided in the transcripts, data analysis was conducted.

Triangulation

Artifacts were collected, reviewed, and analyzed by the researcher and utilized as data to triangulate the analysis. According to Patton (2005), "It is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to the credibility of the research by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn" (p. 661). Out of the 12 participants, only three were able to provide artifacts for the researcher's review. Artifacts included photographs of certificates of emancipation, and all artifacts were returned to the participant after review and data collection. These documents were scanned, organized, and placed into various digital folders associated with the relevant participants (Appendix K for the Artifact Review Form). Many participants did not share artifacts with the researcher due to the sensitive nature of the items. The researcher-built trust for those who did share and ensured that all items would remain confidential and not be displayed publicly. The data sources of interviews allowed the interview data to be substantiated during the qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2014).

<div align="center">

Population

</div>

The population for the study included emancipated foster youth throughout the state of California. At the time of the study, the emancipated foster youth population in the state of California was approximately 4,355 youth (Annie E. Casey Foundation [AECF], 2018). Additionally, at the time of this study, approximately 800 youth were emancipated from foster care within Los Angeles County. Moreover, it is important to

note that the sample was selected based on the participant's ability to meet the criteria (McMillian &Schumacher, 2014).

Study Sample

The target population for the current study were emancipated foster youth (EFY). Specifically, this current study's target population focused on EFY in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County had 51 foster care agencies. Approximately 800 foster youth have been emancipated from those agencies annually (AECF, 2018).

Patton (2015) stated that there are "no rules to sample size in qualitative studies" (p. 311). He acknowledged the relevance of a bigger number of participants if the research's objectives are to find a range of experiences, but also discussed the value of comprehensive research needs of a low number in a collection of participants if "cases are information-rich" (p. 311). A sample size of 12 aligned with McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) suggested scope of less than 40. For the current study, the sample was made up of 12 EFY who lived in in Los Angeles County, California, and were representative of five different foster care agencies in the Antelope Valley. The agencies included were: (a) Koinonia Family Services, (b) Walden Family Services, (c) Inner Circle Foster Care, (d) Shelton Foster Family Home, and (e) Penny Lane Center. The five agencies in Los Angeles County were chosen because they are all in a 30-mile radius and share a similar demographic makeup. Figure 9 includes a map of the foster care agencies chosen for the current study. The researcher identified and utilized specific procedures for sampling that included homogeneity, purposefulness, and convenience.

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

The researcher ensured a balance of 12 participants reflected gender diversity and well as ethnicity and sexual orientation. Out of the 12 participants, there were seven males and five females. Likewise, two females were African-American, two were White and one was Hispanic, and two females identified as LGBTQ+. Additionally, two males were African-American, two were White, two were Hispanic, and one was of multiple races. One male identified as LBGTQ+. Participants represented five foster agencies within the Antelope Valley, which included 3 (one male and two female) from Koinonia Family Services; 2 (two males) from Walden Family Services; 1 (one female) from Inner Circle Foster Care; 1 (one male) from Shelton Foster Family Home; and 5 (two female and three males) from Penny Lane Center. Directors from each of the agencies verified the emancipation of the participant(s) from their center. Table 3 below outlines the demographic makeup of the participants interviewed for this research.

Table 3: Characteristics and Demographics of Research Participants

Characteristics	Number of Participants (N=12)
Gender	
Female	5
Male	7
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	4
Hispanic or Latino	3
White or Caucasian	3
Multi-Race	2
Age	
21-24	6
25-30	6
Highest Level of Education	
No HS Diploma	3
High School or GED	3
Some College	3
College Degree	3
Employment	

	Number of Participants	Types of Services
Employed Full Time	5	
Employed Part Time	3	
Unemployed	4	
LGBTQ+		
Female	2	
Male	1	
Foster Agencies	**Number of Participants**	**Types of Services**
Koinonia Family Service (Total) (Female) (Male)	3 (2) (1)	Foster Care Child Advocacy Residential Therapeutic Program Behavioral Health
Walden Family Service (Total) (Male)	2 (2)	Youth Services Transitional Housing Foster Care/Adoption LGBTQ Services
Inner Circle Foster Care (Total) (Female)	1 (1)	Foster Care Child Advocacy Youth Services
Shelton Foster Family Home (Total) (Male)	1 (1)	Group Home Facility Transitional Housing
Penny Lane Center (Total) (Female) (Male)	5 (2) (3)	Transition Aged Youth Drop-in Centers Mental Health Services LGBTQ+ Services Transitional Housing Permanent Supportive Housing Substance Use Disorder

Study Participants

Twelve emancipated foster youths who resided in Los Angeles County met the criteria, agreed to participate in the study, and were identified as participants. Any information that was obtained in connection to the study was kept confidential and password protected. Additionally, all of the data was presented without reference to an individual. Therefore, the research participants were each assigned an alpha-numeric code in order to maintain their anonymity. As a part of the literature review, it was found

that EFY from special populations such as Latino, Black, and LGBTQA+ were more likely to experience more episodes of homelessness, higher rates of incarceration, and multiple placements in foster care. Participants of this study proved this information to be valid as 25% were of Hispanic origin, 33% were African American, 25% identified as LGBTQA+, 50% stated they were homeless at or around the time of emancipation, 60% had been either incarcerated or had dealings with the juvenile justice system, and 66% had been in over ten placements throughout their time in foster care.

Presentation and Data Analysis

This study's findings were extrapolated from the data drawn from the interviews and artifacts that the emancipated foster youth provided regarding their emancipation from the foster care system. These findings described and recognized the essential characteristics of EFY perceived as essential factors necessary for a successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

Data Analysis

The structured and semi-structured interview was the source of the first set of data collected from the 12 participants. Additionally, artifacts were collected from three participants, as the additional nine participants did not provide artifacts even though they were requested. All data was coded to identify themes from the interviews and artifacts; frequency tables were created based on the themes. The interviews were transcribed utilizing a digital transcription service called Transkriptor. Once the data had been transcribed, all transcripts and artifacts were analyzed and evaluated to identify themes regarding factors EFY identified as essential in the transition into adulthood. Once the 12 interview transcripts were reviewed and transcribed, they were uploaded into ATLAS.TI,

a qualitative coding application. Moreover, each developing theme was assessed `based on the percentage of each emerging adulthood characteristic.` When the coding process was completed, the researcher tallied the number of times the theme was referenced across all data sources in order to determine the frequency of responses. The responses to interview questions identified these characteristics, and the artifacts from the participants allowed for triangulation. Of 12 participants, the frequency response of participants ranged from 82% to 100%. The researcher identified themes that were elicited from a threshold of not less than two individuals providing a similar response.

Data Compiled by Research Question

Research Questions

1. What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

2. What measures do emancipated foster youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Responses to Research Question 1

What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

Based on the interviews, the researcher found that participants identified the following factors that impacted their successful transition into adulthood (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Participants' beliefs regarding impacting factors to a successful transition into adulthood.

Participants Beliefs Regarding Impacting Factors to Succssful Transition Into Adulthood

SENSE OF FREEDOM: 8
LACK OF MATURITY: 9
FEELING SCARED/UNPREPARED: 10
HOMELESSNESS: 6

■ Participants Belief of Impacting Factors to Succssful Transition Into Adulthood
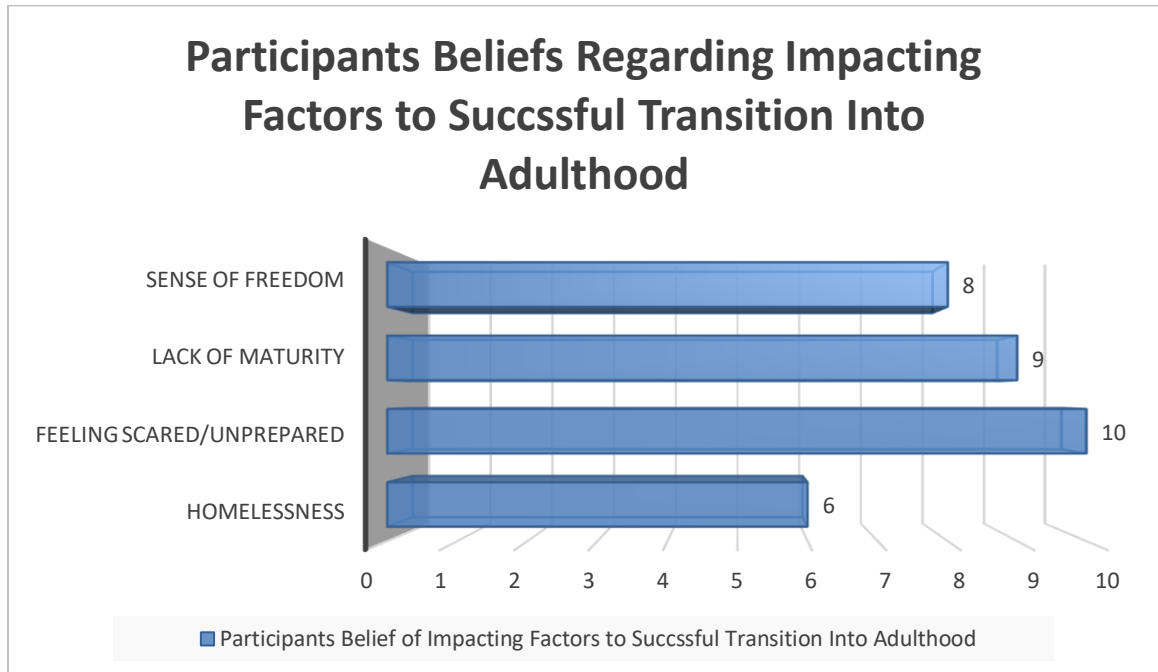
Feeling scared or unprepared emerged as one of the most important factors impacting EFY' successful transition into adulthood, with 10 out of 12 or 83% of participants identifying this as an impacting factor. *Lack of maturity* was another factor with nine out of 12 or 75% of participants identifying it as an impacting factor. *Sense of freedom* was also identified as an impacting factor with eight out of 12 participants, or 66%, and homelessness was identified in six out of 12 participants, or 50%.

Identity Exploration

Identity exploration is one of the factors in the theoretical framework for this study. Identity exploration is when people seek different options in personal and professional areas (Arnett, 2004, 2016). Through trying out other possibilities, they develop their self-image, including self-awareness, abilities and limits, core principles, and how to engage with society. The data revealed an emerging theme regarding identity exploration: a sense of freedom.

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During the interviews, 8 out of twelve participants or cited a *sense of freedom* as an impacting factor in their successful transition into adulthood (See below Table 4). Participant D2 stated, "No one could tell me what to do anymore. I felt free." Participant R2 stated, "It was as if a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders." Participant N1 stated, "I was free, and that was all that mattered at that time." Participant D2 said, "Yes, I was scared, but I didn't have to report to anyone because I was free now." Several participants stated that there was always a feeling of being "trapped" within the foster care system, and with emancipation came the freedom to go and do as they please.

A second emerging theme from identity exploration was the *lack of maturity* as an impacting factor. During the interviews, 9 out of 12 or 75% of participants stated that their *lack of maturity* was an impacting factor to their successful transition into adulthood. Participant R2 stated, "I thought I knew it all. I was going to be Billy-badass and no one could tell me different." Participant N1 stated, "The adult in me now says…hell no, I wasn't mature enough, but me at that time was so ready to get out, I didn't think of anything else." Participant A1 said, "Everyone always told me I was mature for my age but I didn't see or feel it." Participant S1 stated, "I don't think I'm mature now, so I know I wasn't mature enough then. I didn't know nothing." In Table 4 below the responses show participants identifying their sense of freedom, with 66% of participants responding, and also identifying a lack of maturity, with 75% of responses, as the coded emerging themes under Identity Exploration.

Table 4 *Identity Exploration Themes*

Theme/pattern	Number of Respondents	% based on N	Interview Sources
Sense of Freedom	8	66%	8
Lack of Maturity	9	75%	9

Note. The *N* for interview participants = 12.

Instability

During the instability stage, Arnett (2015) as researched as a part of this study's theoretical framework, due to the constant changing of ideals of love and work, the feeling of instability is profound. Frequencies of housing change in the U.S. population are at the highest between the ages of 18–29 (Arnett, 2004). During the interviews, six out of the 12 participants or 50% stated they were homeless at the time of emancipation and it was a major impacting factor to their transition into adulthood.

Participant D2 recalled, "I was homeless the day I signed the papers. My grandmother had told me that I couldn't go live with her and no one else in my family would let me stay with them." Participant D1 stated, "I was living with my grandmother in kinship care but once I turned 18, I had to be out of her house. I was homeless in a matter of days after my 18th birthday." Participant T1 noted, "while I wasn't exactly homeless, I didn't have a permanent place to live. A buddy of mine would let me sleep on his couch a few nights a week but that was it."

A second emerging theme within identity exploration was feeling scared and unprepared, which impacted the successful transition into adulthood. Participant A1 stated, "I had never felt so alone and not ready to be out on my own. No one prepared me for that change." Participant N1 stated, "I did a few workshops for paying bills and stuff like that, and that was it. I didn't know how to open a checking account or how to pay bills. I didn't know where to go for help. I was just lost." Participant M1 reported, "I wish I had known more. I wish someone would have taught me something. I was just so lost and scared." Participant S1 stated, "I wasn't prepared to be out on my own. I wasn't ready. I thought I was ready but I so wasn't ready." Table 5 identifies participant

responses to homelessness, with six out of 12, or 50% of participants, responding and

feeling scared and unprepared, and with 10 out of 12, or 83% of participants responding

as the coded emerging themes under instability.

Table 5. *Instability Themes*

Theme/pattern	Number of Respondents	% based on N	Interview Sources
Homelessness	6	50%	6
Scared/unprepared	10	83%	10

Note. The *N* for interview participants =12.

Research Question 1 asked participants what factors they perceived impacted their

successful adulthood transition. Four themes emerged from the interviews: a sense of

freedom, lack of maturity, homelessness, and feeling scared or unprepared. A sense of

freedom was identified by eight out of 12 participants, or 66%. Lack of maturity was

identified by nine out of 12 participants, or 75%. Homelessness emerged with six out of

12 or 50% of participants stating it was an impacting factor to their successful transition

into adulthood, and feeling scared or unprepared emerged with 10 out of 12 or 83% of

participants identifying it as an impacting factor to their successful transition into

adulthood.

While there are five factors to the theoretical framework by Arnett (2004), the

participants focused in their responses on only two of the factors for Research Question

1, which included Identity Exploration and Instability Themes. Under Identity

Exploration, two themes emerged from the participants' interviews: a sense of freedom,

with eight out of 12, or 66% of participants, reporting it as an impacting factor to their

successful transition into adulthood and lack of maturity, with nine out of 12, or 75% of

participants reporting this as an impacting factor to their successful transition into

adulthood. Under Instability, homelessness emerged as an impacting factor to a

successful transition into adulthood, with six out of 12, or 50% of participants identifying this factor. Finally, feeling scared or unprepared emerged, with 10 out of 12 participants, or 83% of participants, believing it impacted their successful transition into adulthood.

Responses to Research Question 2

What measures do emancipated foster youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Based on the interviews, the researcher found that participants identified the following measures as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living (See Figure 12).

Figure 12. Participants' beliefs regarding essential measures for a successful transition from foster care to independent living.
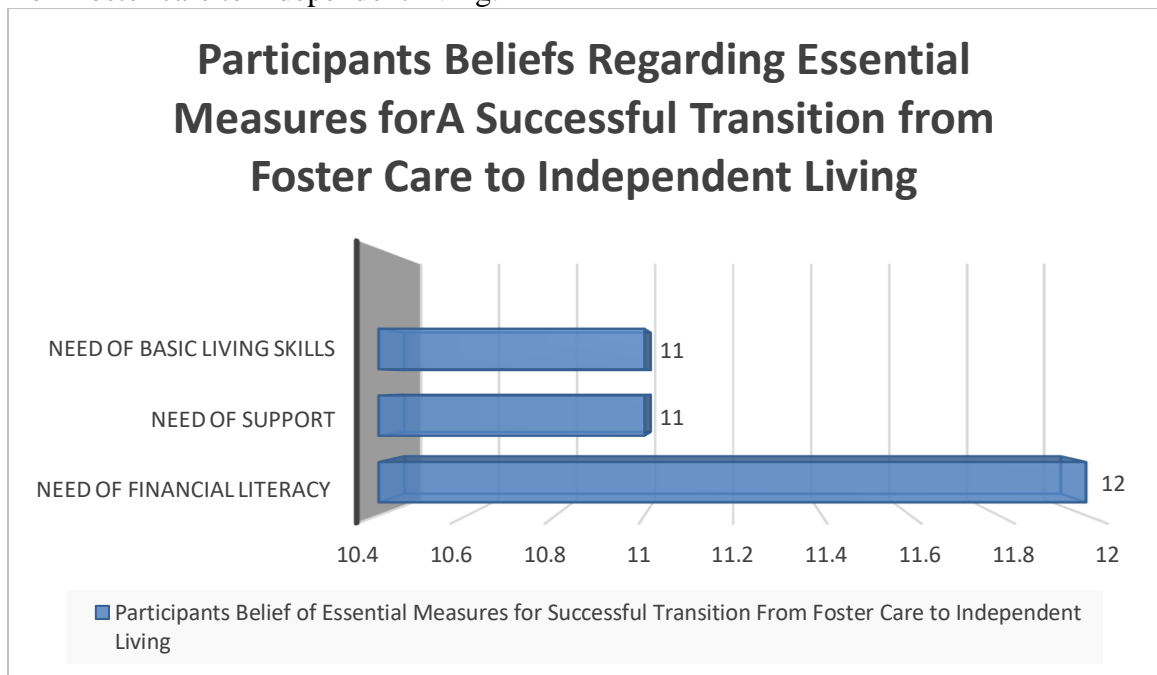
Need of financial literacy emerged as the most essential measure for successful transition from foster care to independent living as reported by 12 out of 12 or 100% of participant responses. *Lack of support* was another emerging theme, with 11 out of 12 participants, or 91%, noting it was essential. Finally, *basic living skills* tied with lack of

support, with 11 out of 12 participants, or 91%, stating this measure was essential to the successful transition from foster care into independent living.

Self-Focus

As part of the theoretical framework, Arnett (2016) identifies the objective of Self-Focus for individuals as self-sufficiency to gain knowledge of how to be a self-sufficient person (Arnett, 2004). Unfortunately, long-term self-sufficiency is not demonstrated in those who have been emancipated from the foster care system. Self-sufficiency is the desired achievement of every EFY, but data indicate many EFY have very little support upon their exit from foster care (Stockdale, 2019). During the interviews, 12 out of 12 respondents, or 100%, stated the need for financial literacy was essential to the successful transition from foster care to independent living (See Figure 12).

Need of Financial Literacy emerged as the most essential measure needed for a successful transition out of foster care into independent living with 12 out of 12, or 100% of participants reporting this characteristic. Participant M2 stated, "They need to teach kids about money and how to budget. I didn't know anything about that stuff." Participant R3 stated, "I felt like an idiot. I didn't know how to check my credit score or how to open a checking account." Participant D3 said, "When I was in the group homes, they didn't teach the kids how to do anything. I wish someone would have shown me how to budget or buy groceries or other things." Participant S1 shared, "When kids are close to aging out, there needs to be a rule that says they need to know about checking and savings. They need to know how to cook and clean themselves. I knew a lot of kids that had horrible hygiene issues because nobody ever taught them what to do." Table 6

identifies the need for financial literacy, with 12 out of 12 participants, or 100%,

responding as the coded emerging theme under Self-Focus.

Table 6. *Self-Focus Theme*

Theme/pattern	Number of Respondents	% based on N	Interview Sources
Need for Financial Literacy	12	100%	12

Note. The *N* for interview participants =12.

Feeling in Between

Another variable in the theoretical framework was Feeling In-Between. When

young adults reach their late 20s, a new attribute of emerging adulthood arises: the

feeling of being in between. Young adults are not adolescents anymore, but they have not

yet reached full adulthood either (Arnett, 2004, 2016).

Need for support given to participants before, during and after emancipation

emerged as a coded theme with 11 out of 12, or 91% of participant responses. This was

also noted as an impacting factor to the successful transition into adulthood for EFY.

Participant R3 stated, "I never heard from my social worker and didn't have any family. I

was so alone." Participant M1 stated, "I had an older uncle that kinda helped me out but it

wasn't much help. I was given verbal support but no physical support." Participant M2

said, "I hated my social worker and I am sure she hated me. We didn't get along and I

was just out on my own. Nobody helped me do nothing. I had to figure it out as I went

along."

When asked what specific types of support participants felt was needed,

emotional, vocational and educational were the top three types of support. Participant R3

stated, "I didn't know how to fill out a job application nor how to fill out an apartment

application. I needed help with those types of things and I didn't get any". Participant S1

stated, "I wanted to go to college but there was no one to help me with the paperwork so I never did anything". Participant D2 stated, "Yeah, many people told me about the different programs out there, but I needed someone to **show** me where to go and how to fill out the applications. Don't just tell me that there is something out there, show me how to get it".

Many of the participants noted they wish resources were more available to them along with ensuring all kids have a plan prior to emancipation. Table 7 identifies need of support, with 11 out of 12 or 91%, responding as the coded emerging theme under feeling in-between.

Table 7 *Feeling In-Between Theme*

Theme/pattern	Number of Respondents	% based on N	Interview Sources
Need of Support (Emotional) (Vocational) (Educational)	11 5 11 8	91%	11

Note. The *N* for interview participants =12

Future Possibilities

The final stage in the theoretical framework by Arnett (2004) is emerging adulthood and is the sense of future possibilities. During this stage, many future options are still open, and youth are full of optimism when it comes to what they are going to achieve. Unfortunately, that is not always the case with many EFY. During the interview, when asked if participants had plans to attend college or had a job after emancipation, only four out of 12, or 33%, responded yes. The emerging theme coded during the interviews was a lack of basic skills that hindered the EFY from successfully transitioning to independent living. T1 responded, "Yes, I did have a plan to go to college, but I didn't know what to do or where to go for help." Participants D2, along

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with S1, R2, R3, and M2, all stated they had been emancipated from foster care without their high school diploma. Participant D2 recalled:

"I was so done with moving from place to place. People telling me what to do and not really knowing how to do anything for myself that I just gave up. I didn't have any basic living skills nor anything that mattered to really help me with living on my own. I had to figure it all out. I was scared shitless every day. I wanted help, but I had absolutely no clue where to look. My case worker wasn't any help and my family pretty much had written me off."

Table 8 identifies the need for basic living skills, with 11 out of 12, or 91%, responding as the coded theme under future possibilities.

Table 8. *Future Possibilities Theme*

Theme/pattern	Number of respondents	% based on N	Interview Sources
Need of Basic Living Skills	11	91%	11

 Note. The *N* for interview participants =12.

Research Question 2 asked participants what measures they perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living. Based on the interviews, the researcher found that participants identified the following measures as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living: the need for financial literacy, with 12 out of 12, or 100% of participants stating it was essential. The need for support, which includes emotional, vocational, and educational support, was identified by 11 out of 12 participants, or 91%, who believed it was essential to the successful transition from foster care to independent living. Finally, the need for basic living skills emerged, with 11 out of 12 participants, or 91%, identifying it was essential to a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

While there are five factors to the theoretical framework by Arnett (2004), the participants focused in their responses on only three of the factors for Research Question 2, which included Self-Focus, Feeling in Between, and Future Possibilities Theme. Under Self-Focus, one theme emerged: the need for financial literacy as an essential measure for a successful transition out of foster care into independent living, with 12 out of 12, or 100% of participants, reporting this characteristic. Under Feeling in Between, the need for support given to participants before, during, and after emancipation emerged as a coded theme with 11 out of 12, or 91% of participant responses. More specifically, emotional, vocational, and educational support were noted as the types of support that were essential measures needed for a successful transition out of foster care into independent living. Under Future Possibilities, the need for basic living skills, with 11 out of 12, or 91%, responding as the coded theme as the essential measure needed for a successful transition out of foster care into independent living.

Triangulation

The interview data was triangulated with three artifacts. The researcher was able to collect one certificate of emancipation from one participant and two pictures of certificates from two participants. Participants also provided pictures of themselves during the time of emancipation. Based on the artifacts provided by the participants, the researcher was unable to correlate the artifacts with the five characteristics of emerging adulthood. However, the artifacts did provide evidence of emancipation and participants were able to give details surrounding the timeframe.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question:

What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

The data collected from participants from RQ 1 included the following:

1. *Lack of maturity* was identified by 75% or 9 out of 12 participants as impacting the successful transition into adulthood.

2. *Sense of freedom* was also identified by 66% or 8 out 12 participants as impacting measures to a successful transition into adulthood.

3. *Scared or unprepared* was identified by 83% or 10 out of 12 participants as being an impacting measure to a successful transition into adulthood.

4. *Homelessness* was identified by 50% or 6 out of 12 participants as being an impacting measure to a successful transition into adulthood.

The responses from Research Question 1 also aligned with J.J. Arnett's theoretical framework variables in areas of Identity Exploration and Instability:

Identity Exploration

Lack of maturity was identified by 75% or 9 out of 12 participants as impacting a successful transition into adulthood.

Sense of freedom was also identified by 66% or eight out 12 participants as impacting measures to a successful transition into adulthood.

Instability

Scared or unprepared was identified by 83% or 10 out of 12 participants as being an impacting measure to a successful transition into adulthood.

Homelessness was identified by 50% or 6 out of 12 participants as being an impacting measure to a successful transition into adulthood.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question:

What measures do emancipated foster youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

The data collected from participants from RQ 1 included the following:

1. 100% of participants stated that the *need for financial literacy* was an essential measure for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

2. The *need for support* was coded 11 out of 12 times, or 91% of participants identified it as an essential measure for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

3. The need for basic living skills was coded 11 out of 12 times, or 91% of participants identified it as essential for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

The responses from Research Question 2 also aligned with J.J. Arnett's theoretical framework variables in areas of Self-Focus, Feeling In-Between, and Future Possibilities:

Self-Focus

100% of participants stated that the *need for financial literacy* was an essential measure for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

Feeling In-Between

The *need for support* was coded 11 out of 12 times, or 91% of participants identified it as an essential measure for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

Future Possibilities

The need of basic living skills was coded 11 out of 12 times, or 91% of participants identified it as an essential measure for transitioning from foster care to independent living.

Summary

This chapter focused on the data and findings regarding the two main research questions used in this study. Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) identified characteristics found in the theoretical framework for this study regarding emerging adulthood in the areas of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and future possibilities that lead to successful transition into adulthood and independent living. Additionally, within the data, themes emerged within each characteristic of emerging adulthood: homelessness, sense of freedom, lack of maturity, feeling scared/unprepared, the need for support, the need for financial literacy, and the need for basic living skills. Chapter V presents conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, closing remarks, and a reflection.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter V summarizes the research study. It also reiterates the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample of the research study. Furthermore, this chapter lists the key findings as well as the conclusions drawn from the key findings. The theoretical framework for this study was the Emerging Adulthood framework from J.J. Arnett. The emerging adulthood stage lasts between ages 18 and 25. Arnett (2015) stated, "Emerging adulthood can be said to exist wherever there is a gap of at least a few years between the end of puberty and the entry into stable adult roles in love and work" (p. 26). The five characteristics identified from this framework were— identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feelings of being in between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of future possibilities. The researcher sought to research the perceptions of emancipated foster youth regarding what they believed were essential factors that create successful transitions into adulthood. The unexpected findings will also be discussed in this chapter. Additionally, Chapter V describes the implications for action and recommendations for further research surrounding this topic. At the end of the chapter, the researcher shares final comments and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth (EFY) regarding the factors that have impacted their successful transition into adulthood. The secondary purpose of this study was to describe the measures EFY considers essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living. The data from the analysis includes participant

interviews and a review of artifacts provided. Findings are provided at the conclusion of this chapter.

Research Questions

1. What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

2. What measures do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Methodology

Phenomenological research studies how people interpret the world, and the primary assumption of a phenomenological study is that there is a shared meaning related to commonly occurring phenomena within a culture (Creswell, 2014). A phenomenological design is also particularly suited to individuals and groups with little published research (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). Additionally, Qualitative research describes a phenomenon (e.g., person, program, or institution) to disclose how the phenomenon develops in certain conditions (Farquhar, 2012). The researcher used a qualitative method in the phenomenology design by conducting interviews to identify and describe the lived experiences of emancipated foster youth (EFY). Qualitative research provides the groundwork to understand and identify the definition of human or community problems (Creswell, 2009). The researcher sought to identify what factors EFY perceive as essential to their transition into adulthood. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to identify "practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing concrete problems' regarding the emancipation process of foster youth (Patton, 2015, pg. 152).

Population and Sample

The population of a research study is defined as the total group of individuals who possess a common set of characteristics to which the study results can be generalized (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, all 12 participants had to be identified with the following purposeful characteristics:

- Participants were emancipated from foster care on or after their 18th birthday.

- Participants had been emancipated for a minimum of 2 years.

- Participants resided in Los Angeles County in the state of California.

- Participants were between the ages of 21 and 30.

- Participants were from five out of 51 selected agencies by the researcher in Los Angeles County.

Major Findings

The phenomenological approach of this study produced findings from the lived experiences of 12 EFY who lived in in Los Angeles County, California, and were representative of five different foster care agencies in the Antelope Valley. The agencies included were: (a) Koinonia Family Services, (b) Walden Family Services, (c) Inner Circle Foster Care, (d) Shelton Foster Family Home, and (e) Penny Lane Center. The study sought to identify factors research participants believed impacted their successful transition into adulthood. Measures that research participants believed were essential to the transition from foster care into independent living were also identified. The study participants shared their lived experiences and perceptions during semi-structured

interviews. The qualitative data were analyzed, and the major findings of the research are as follows.

<div align="center">**Research Question 1: Major Findings**</div>

What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

Major Finding 1

The first major finding was that EFY were emotionally unprepared for the transition into adulthood and independent living. This finding was coded 10 out of 12, or 83% of participants indicated that feeling scared or unprepared once they were emancipated from foster care. EFY are compelled to assume adult roles and obligations before many are prepared. Presently, arriving at adulthood does not predict one's capability to live by themselves (Greeson, 2013). According to Sheehy et al. (2002), EFY's readiness for emancipation is not based on developmental aptitude or maturity but rather on the age of majority. Participants stated that as they reflected on how they felt and the level of preparation they had at the time of emancipation, many were only 18 years of age and felt very scared and unprepared to go out into the world on their own. Participant M1 stated, "There was a ticking time clock that was constantly in the back of your mind and you knew your time was almost up. I was so scared. I didn't have any family or nobody to go to for help. I was not ready to leave but I was constantly reminded that my time was almost up and there was nothing I could do to slow it down." Additionally participant D2 stated,

> "Man, I was so freaking scared. I mean like, scared, scared. Like shit your pants
>
> scared. I wasn't ready to be on my own. I didn't know nothing. I was already mad

at the world and all that I had to go through up to that point and now they wanted

me to be out there on my own… no way man."

Major Finding 2

The second major finding was that a lack of maturity impacted their successful

adulthood transition. This was coded 9 out of 12 times, or 75% of participants identified

it as an impacting factor to a successful transition into adulthood. Tyrell and Yates

(2018) found EFY reported feeling anxiety and restrictions regarding their ability to

investigate their personality and maturity during and after emancipation. Participant N1

stated, "The me now can look back and see how immature I was thinking I was ready to

take on the world on my own. I know now that it was so dumb. I was nowhere near

mature enough to handle what was ahead of me." Participant A1 stated, "I don't feel

mature now, so I know for a fact I was not mature enough to make the kinds of decisions

that I needed to make for myself."

Major Finding 3

The third major finding is in order to find stable living options, adults of any age

need to have resources, transition into a home and monetary support. EFY identified

homelessness as impacting their successful transition into adulthood. This finding was

coded six out of 12 times or 50% of participants stated they were homeless at the time of

emancipation. Kelly (2019) also found that young adults released from state care are

often homeless soon after discharge. The lack of adequate access to transition programs

for foster youth is the number one cause of homelessness among EFY (Kelly, 2019).

Previous incarcerations and substance abuse referrals are the most decisive risk factors

for homelessness (Kelly, 2019). Participant A1 stated during her interview,

"I was at a foster home for a while, and then once I turned 18, the mom told me
that I had to leave and that I was no longer allowed to be there. I hadn't even
graduated yet, and she was kicking me out. I was so afraid and didn't know what
to do. I ended up dropping out and living with a friend's mom, who let me stay
with her."

Major Finding 4

The fourth major finding was that because the foster care system had been the
significant parenting function in many EFY's lives from childhood when they
transitioned, having a parenting support system in the form of an identified mentor or
advocate could make the transition successful. Having a mentor was coded 4 out of 12
times, or 33% of participants stated it was something they needed before, during, and
after emancipation. Releasing foster youth without a successful mentor or advocate
during this transition can be determinantal to the successful transition into adulthood and
independent living. Youth mentoring has been used as one of the interventions to
promote positive outcomes and prevent negative effects caused by the foster youth's
disadvantaged background or traumatic experiences.

In their meta-analysis, Dubois et al. (2011) suggested that at-risk youth, especially
with problem behaviors, presented greater improvements from a mentoring relationship
than youth with lower levels of risk. This implies that youth mentoring programs may be
an effective strategy to mitigate challenges presented by foster youth with significant
internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. Participant M1 stated, "I needed a
mentor. Someone who knew the system and could help me out." Participant N1 stated, "I

needed someone to walk me through it all. Someone who would be there for me and let me know what to do."

<div align="center">**Research Question 2: Major Findings**</div>

What measures do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?

Major Finding 5

The fifth major finding identified financial literacy as essential for transitioning from foster care to independent living. This finding was coded 12 out of 12 times, or 100% of participants identified it as an essential factor for independent living. True Tamplin (2023), a contributor for Forbes Magazine, stated that having financial literacy "Equips you with the knowledge to make informed decisions, leading to greater monetary stability, less stress, and a higher quality of life." Tyrell and Yates (2017) discovered that a month after emancipating from foster care, EFY relied on another person to pay for their living expenses because they were not financially able to, nor could they contribute to the rent or mortgage. Johnson (2023) noted that financial literacy is an important life skill for young adults because it empowers them with the knowledge and tools needed for making informed financial decisions, avoiding debt, building assets, and becoming more resilient.

Additionally, many EFY reported needing to learn how to open a banking account or how to apply for a credit card. Participant R3 stated, "I was never taught how to open a checking account. I felt really stupid when I asked my boyfriend how to do it. I was so embarrassed." Participant T1 said, "Yeah, I had no idea what to do about money. I knew I

had to find a way to make money, but no one ever showed me how to open a bank account or even pay bills. I had to learn all of that on my own."

Major Finding 6

The sixth major finding identified was that EFY needed support, specifically in the areas of emotional, vocational, and educational support, which were noted as the support types essential for a successful transition out of foster care into independent living. This finding was coded 11 out of 12 times, or 91% of participants identified it as essential for transitioning from foster care to independent living. EFY trails academically compared to their counterparts, with 33% graduating from high school, compared to 50% of the general population (Reilly, 2003). Dworsky and Courtney (2001) found EFY experience high unemployment and earn lower wages from unstable jobs than those in the overall population. Providing life skills training to EFY can lead to better outcomes in education and employment (Pokempner et al., 2009). For example, Inspire Life Skills Training (2023), a California-based nonprofit organization, supplies housing aid, life skills education, education, and job resources for EFY. Of those who have participated in the program, 93% went on to attend college, and 82% gained employment while in the program (Inspire Life Skills Training, 2023).

When asked if they had plans to attend college or have a job after emancipation, participant M1 stated, "My cousin Philip got me started with college but I dropped out because I didn't understand how I was going to be successful." Participant S1 stated, "I had planned on getting a job and getting my diploma, but I didn't understand where to go or what to do. I was kinda left out on my own." Participant M2 stated,

"I really needed someone to help me with everything. My caseworker didn't like

me and I hated her, so that was that. I had no support from family and honestly,

all I ever wanted was someone to tell me 'hey you're messin up and you need to

get your shit together' but no, everyone was like, 'you're grown now so figure it

out. I was scared and lost. Yeah, that's the best word…lost."

<div align="center">**Unexpected Findings**</div>

As a result of this study, the researcher discovered two unexpected findings. The

unexpected findings reflect the data analysis in Chapter IV and are supported by the

literature review in Chapter II.

Unexpected Finding 1

RQ 1 posed the question: *What factors do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY)*

perceive as impacting their successful transition into adulthood?

The first unexpected finding was that mental health support was not provided or

recommended but discontinued once EFY transitioned out of foster care. Youth with

behavioral health disorders aging out of foster care are found to have adverse transition

outcomes (Kang-Yi & Adams,2017). When the EFY was asked what other things they

felt had an impact on their transition into adulthood, 33% of study participants stated that

mental health or therapy was needed to continue after emancipation. During interviews,

several EFY stated they had been mandated to therapy due to mental or behavioral

problems, but it was discontinued once they were emancipated from foster

care. Participant D2 stated, "I had to go see a therapist once a week because of the things

I had went through before I got put into the system. I had been abused by my mother and

held a lot of anger. I was also placed in several group homes where I got jumped on a daily basis so yeah, I was full of anger."

Unexpected Finding 2

RQ 2 posed the question: *What measures do Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) perceive as essential for a successful transition from foster care to independent living?* The second unexpected finding was that EFY did not have specific life skill preparation before emancipation. When EFY were asked if anyone prepared them for emancipation, 100% of participants said no. Each participant had not received any preparation or what they felt was preparation to live independently. Foster youth struggle with the same barriers that all youth face when considering the venture from home to independence. Unfortunately, many lack the support or resources that non-foster youth possess. Participant M2 shared, "When I left foster care, I had nothing, and I knew nothing. I mean, I was so mad at the world that I didn't know how to cook or clean for myself. Even now, in this transitional home, I see others who just don't know how to take care of themselves. They don't know how to shower or cook. It's sad."

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

Based on this study, three conclusions were drawn regarding EFY beliefs of impacting factors and essential measures to transition into adulthood successfully and independent living.

Conclusion 1

The first conclusion of this study is that foster agencies need to provide follow-up with EFY after their emancipation. Many EFY stated that once emancipated from the foster care system, there was no follow-up, nor did they receive any information or

training before or after emancipation. Foster agencies must develop, in conjunction with foster youth, a plan for what they will do when leaving foster care. In addition to making the plan, agencies need to ensure monthly progression updates on the plan during the first year after emancipation. Foster agencies should assign a post-emancipation social worker or case manager to ensure EFY successfully transitions into adulthood and independent living. If it is found that EFY are experiencing difficulties with their transition, recommendations for support programs should be provided. Participant D3 stated, "My social worker never called or checked up on me once I left. She really didn't like me but I could have used her help for sure."

Conclusion 2

The second conclusion of this study is that there needs to be more effective independent living programs geared towards providing basic living skills to EFY before emancipation from the foster care system to obtain long-term self-sufficiency. These programs could provide the following support systems: To prepare EFY for independent living, classes such as financial and budgeting instruction, domestic skills such as cooking and cleaning, health and hygiene care, and basic social skills should be made mandatory before emancipation.

Programs such as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood provide funding to support youth/ young adults in EFY in their transition to adulthood. The program is funded through formula grants awarded to child welfare agencies. These funds are used to assist youth/ young adults in various areas designed to support a successful transition to adulthood. Activities and programs to include help with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional

support, and assured connections to caring adults (youth.gov, n.d.). Another program, such as Youthbuild, focuses on providing an alternative education pathway that encourages youth to obtain a high school diploma or GED while advancing toward employment while developing leadership skills, and serving the community (youth.gov, n.d.).

While all of the participants in this study shared that their preparation for independence was insufficient, they agreed that independent living programs are essential to a successful transition into independent living. Programs that are more comprehensive and address youths' emotional needs while teaching practical life skills will garner better outcomes for EFY. Additionally, EFY experience multiple physical and mental health issues that continue to be problematic after emancipation. The Affordable Care Act extended coverage to emancipated youth to age 26 to address these issues.

Nevertheless, utilization of health services is low. Perhaps difficulty understanding and navigating the system is discouraging. Therefore, processes to access services should be simplified and modified to make them more accessible and understandable to EFY. Participant T1 shared, "When I left foster care, I had a lot of mental problems and health problems but I didn't know where to go for help. When I was in foster care, there was mandatory therapy but once I got out, I was left on my own to find the help. I didn't know where to go or even who to ask for help."

Conclusion 3

The third conclusion of this study was that connections with supportive persons, such as mentors and advocates, are significant to EFY, making the transition to adulthood less perilous. Therefore, advocates or mentors should be active, supportive persons,

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establishing positive relationships with EFY. California Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) speaks up for children in foster care by bringing their needs to lawmakers' and policymakers' attention.

Local, state, and national legislators call upon California CASA, a respected authority on child welfare, to provide the CASA perspective (californiacasa.org, n.d.). For instance, EFY reported needing more emotional, vocational, and educational support. Advocates or mentors, such as CASAs, could assist EFY in locating resources to assist them in finding employment, educational opportunities, and therapies as needed. These individuals can provide guidance and serve as a sounding board for any concerns or problems arising after emancipation. Participant D2 stated, "It would have been nice to have someone walk me through all of it. I was so lost. People kept telling me that there were programs out there, but no one would ever take the time to sit down with me and go through it all. Fill out the forms. So I just gave up."

Conclusion 4

The fourth conclusion of this study was if mentors were to be implemented into the foster care system, formal training would be necessary to improve long-lasting positive results. Research suggests that over time, youth in foster care who experience positive relationships with mentors and others can alter their working models of relationships to enable them to form healthy relationships (Tassig & Weiler,2017). Mentors should be trained in the areas of working with youth within the foster care system, how to build successful relationships with others and not just the mentor, intensive services and mentor support of positive outcomes for foster youth, and creating

and sustaining long-term relationships for youth in foster care (youthcollaboratory.org, 2019).

Conclusion 5

The fifth conclusion of this study was EFY who received mental health services during their time in foster care should continue to receive those services at least three years after their emancipation from foster care. According to the California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions, up to 80% of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to 18-22% of the general population (2022). American Academy of Pediatrics stated that mental and behavioral health is the largest unmet health need for children and teens in the foster care system (2021). EFY need to continue to have access to resources to assist them with any mental and behavioral issues they may incur throughout their transition into adulthood.

Conclusion 6

The sixth conclusion of this study was that foster families would not be allowed to remove a child from their home prior to their high school graduation as long as they are on track to graduate within six months of turning 18. Once the youth has reached the age of maturity, the foster family must work with the fostering agency to ensure that once the youth has emancipated, they have a stable living situation along with a plan for future employment, vocational training, or post-secondary education. Ensuring that EFY has a plan after emancipation will ensure less likelihood of homelessness. Participant A1 stated, "I was kicked out of my foster home two weeks before I graduated high school. I had just turned 18 and didn't have anywhere to go."

<center>**Implications for Actions**</center>

The above conclusions show that EFY who contributed to this study provided insightful feedback, suggestions, and transparency regarding their beliefs regarding essential measures impacting their successful transition into adulthood and independent living. In the following sections, the researcher includes implications for action derived from the conclusions of this research study. The three implications for action are adapted from this study's findings and literature review.

Implication 1

The first implication for positive social change is providing subsidized housing for EFY while they are enrolled in college or vocational training. Policy writers should find a way to create legislation that aims to implement community programs which will stabilize the EFY housing situation since this can negatively influence EFY's ability to succeed on their own. In this study, many EFY reported being unable to attend college or vocational training due to a lack of housing or the housing guarantee once admitted. As such, for EFY to obtain subsidized housing, future policies might require that EFY they must be enrolled full-time in either college or a vocational training program. Before emancipation, EFY would meet with a counselor or sponsor of the vocational program to ensure understanding and completion of the enrollment process.

Researchers showed that homelessness is a significant public health issue and that individuals who suffer from homelessness, particularly young people, experience physical, emotional, and spiritual health impacts (Sznajder-Murray et al., 2015) to remain in school and focus on their studies, even if this means housing the students in dormitories. An EFY who is emancipated without a family to support them is exposed to

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homelessness and exploitation (Boldiş, 2014). It would seem a logical step in the rescue process to stabilize and help a person complete school. Additionally, if EFY were to be provided housing during this time, the likeness of homelessness would not occur and thus not adding to the ever-growing population of homeless individuals within our society.

Implication 2

The second implication for positive social change would be offering mental and behavioral health support before, during and after EFY transition through emancipation. It has been found that after exiting the foster care system, EFY need more resources to increase their opportunities to build a significant network that allow them to have a chance at success after emancipation. This includes access to mental and behavioral health services. These impacts increase their chances of having mental health issues that become barriers to a successful transition into adulthood. Those who experience mental illness may need more emotional, educational, and financial support from their families or a support system while also striving for independence in these areas (Skehan & Davis, 2017). Social change also implies making a difference in the lives of people who do not have the right resources to improve their lives on their own. It is about having equal opportunities to make life better. Having connections to mental and behavioral health support and other support systems directed to education, employment, and housing opportunities are essential building blocks for EFY success into independent adulthood.

Implication 3

The third implication would be a societal reframing of the timeframe of emancipation of foster youth. The transition to adulthood, as a more gradual than abrupt process, may help increase opportunities for connections and support. The slower

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transition to adulthood is presently occurring for youth without a history of foster care has been well documented in the emerging adulthood literature (Arnett, 2007). Many have suggested that the benefits of this extended development would be beneficial for youth emancipating from foster care as well (Stott, 2012). The emancipation of foster youth should be over a two-to-three-year period and not just once the age of majority is reached.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the lived experience of emancipated foster youth and the impacting factors and essential measures they believed were vital to the successful transition into adulthood and independent living. The researcher humbly recommends the following proposals for future research.

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation is for a qualitative research case study to identify and collect data from individuals who have been emancipated from foster care and were residing in group home facilities due to higher-level needs such as incarceration, disabilities, behavioral problems, or unavailable placements. Conducting a study of residential group home participants would provide insight into the programs and life skills established in that setting and the percentage of individuals who become independently successful when exiting these homes. Additionally, determining participants' recommendations, in this case, a study on what a successful transition into adulthood looks like from their experiences, would add to the breadth of knowledge about EFY's success in independent living.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation is for a qualitative grounded theory case study conducted around the mental and behavioral health of emancipated foster youth. According to existing research, emancipating foster youth experience more life-changing adversities and long-term mental health outcomes than youth not in the foster care system. Federal and state governments acknowledge their responsibilities to function as parents for transitioning youth and have put transitional support services for housing, employment, and psychological and physical well-being in place. Unfortunately, these services often go unfunded and underused. Continued research is required to develop more comprehensive transitional services that address the social and emotional needs of foster youth moving into adulthood.

Recommendation 3

The third recommendation is to conduct a Delphi study with a mixture of Foster Care directors, EFY and social workers, and mentors that is focused on understanding and describing the essential characteristics of appropriately skilled mentors specifically able to address the issues of EFY and their transitions from foster care to independent living nationwide. Having a mentor or advocate was repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews of participants. Many stated they wished someone was there before, during, and long after their emancipation to guide and support them.

Recommendation 4

The fourth recommendation is to conduct a qualitative comparative study that is focused on the outcomes of emancipated youth of specific racial groups such as African-American and Latinx, and additionally, those who identify as LGBTQA+ in the

community. While there are a few studies and statistics on these groups inside of foster care, there is much still to learn about their plight after they are released from foster care.

Recommendation 5

The fifth recommendation is to conduct a Delphi study on foster care agency directors. The study would aim to identify what they believe are the essential measures needed for foster youth to prepare before and after emancipation for a successful transition into adulthood.

Recommendation 6

The sixth recommendation is to conduct a comparative analysis study where the researcher would compare various EFY group's transitioning success based on the amount of time since emancipation. For example, comparative groups include one-year past emancipation, five years, and ten years past emancipation. The study would aim to identify how each group defined their success in the transition from foster care to independent living.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of emancipated foster youth and what they believed were impactful factors and essential measures for transitioning into adulthood and independent living. For many emancipated youth, this is the beginning of a series of frustrating and disastrous experiences, as they are not prepared for the harsh realities of life. Providing a meaningful platform for the voices of these participants to convey their stories will provide additional knowledge or a different perspective that will stimulate change. Increasing public awareness may bring vital attention to this important phenomenon. Once these youths are emancipated from the foster care system, they are

often out of mind and out of reach for any supportive services. They are often left to figure out the world alone with little preparation.

As I went through each interview, I saw the life struggles of each individual. It seemed that each participant felt more disappointment and pain than the last. Nevertheless, this study was interesting and motivating, as it is a topic I am very passionate about. These individuals need their stories told and heard. Policymakers need to look closer at the actual outcomes of their laws regarding this population. I was grateful and appreciative that all participants were willing to share their deep and sorrowful stories of trials and tribulations while still attempting to persevere and make the most of their lives.

I have constantly wondered how we, as a society, could allow such atrocities to happen to children and youth. Why are we not, collectively, incensed or appalled enough to fight for change and refuse to stop until something is done? I keep asking questions, but the equation seems disturbingly insoluble. Research suggested that 25% of this population discontinue mental health services and experience employment loss within a few months of foster youth emancipation. Forty-three percent of emancipating youth experience at least a single night of homelessness within 30 days of emancipation (Katz & Courtney, 2015). For this reason, phenomenological qualitative research is so essential, as it gives, at a minimum, a voice and face to the numbers that are often cavalierly presented. Numbers can be misunderstood, misconstrued, or even ignored; voices and faces command invaluable attention. Change in the institutions serving these invisible children and youth must be made to create an alternative transformative reality.

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Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Aarons et al. (2008)											
Advocacy. (n.d.)	X		X								
Ahrens et al. (2011)				X							
Allen (2017)	X										
Alternative Family Services (n.d.)			X	X			X				
Altschuler et al. (2009)											
Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018)	X					X					
Armenta et al. (2020)				X	X						
Arnett (2000)	X										
Arnett (2004)	X										
Arnett (2016)	X										
Arya (2021)			X	X		X					
Baams et al. (2019)										X	X
Benbenishty et al. (2016)							X		X		
Bossett (2016)						X			X	X	
Bronsard et al. (2016)	X			X	X		X				
Brown et al. (2008)		X									
California Department of Social Services (2015)			X	X	X	X	X				
Capello (2006)										X	
Child Welfare Legislative History (n.d.)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
CDC (2021)			X		X		X			X	
CLCC (2023)			X	X	X						
Clarke & Braun (2017)		X									
Collins (2001)										X	
Cooper & Victoria (2020)						X	X		X		
County of Los Angeles - Law Office of the Public Defender	Division of								X			

Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARCERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Juvenile Justice (DJJ) (2023)											
Courtney et al. (2004)			X		X	X			X		
Courtney (2009)			X		X	X	X	X			
Courtney & Dworsky (2006)			X								
Courtney et al. (2017)			X	X	X	X	X	X			
Courtney & Hook (2017)					X	X	X	X	X	X	
Creswell (2013)		X									
Day et al. (2011)			X	X		X					
Daining & DePanfilis (2007)			X	X							
Dickson (2019)			X	X	X		X				
Dikko (2016)		X									
Dworsky & Courtney (2009)					X				X		
Dworsky et al. (2013)					X						
Emancipation (2020)			X		X		X				
Emerson (2006)						X					
Engel & Schutt (2010)				X							
Ensuring the Future of At-Risk Youth (2023)			X	X							
Erikson (1968)	X										
Factor & Rothblum (2008)											X
Farquhar (2012)		X									
Child Welfare Information Gateway (2011)				X							
Children's Law Center of California (2023)				X							
Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (1999)				X	X						
Foster Youth Resources (2019)				X							
Fowler et al. (2017)			X	X							

Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARCERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Furstenberg (2015)	X	X									
Freundlich (2009)			X	X							
Fostering Youth Success Alliance (2020)			X	X	X						
Gasper et al. (2011)	X			X					X		
Gay et al. (2009)		X									
Geenen & Powers (2007)			X	X	X				X		X
Geiger & Beltran (2017)						X					
Goldscheider & Goldscheider (1994)	X										
Greeno et al. (2017)											
Greeson (2013)			X	X							
Hook & Courtney (2011)					X						
Hurst et al. (2015)		X									
Jacob & Furgerson (2012)		X									
John H. Chaffee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (2008)				X							
Katz & Courtney (2015)						X				X	X
Kang-Yi, C. D., & Adams, D. R. (2017)				X	X				X		
Kelly (2019)	X		X								
Kim et al. (2017)								X			
S. Kimberlin & Lemley (2010)			X								
C. L. Kimberlin & Winterstein (2008)									X		X
Kiraly & Humphreys (2014)				X							
Krase (2013)										X	
Kunkle (2019)								X		X	X
Lavin (2013)				X	X		X		X		
Lavrakas (2008)		X									
Lazzara (2020)	X										

Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Leathers et al. (2019)										X	
Lee et al. (2015)	x							x	x		
Leung (2015)		X									
Lumivero (n.d.)		X									
Mallon (2021)	X				X	X		X			
Masten et al. (2004)	X		X	X							
Merriam & Tisdell (2016)	X		X	X							
McMillan & Schumacher (2010)		X									
McNamara (2009)		X									
Mehra (2002)		X									
Miller et al. (2014)									X	X	
Minnesota Department of Human Services						X			X		
Morse et al. (2002)		X									
Morton (2015)						X					
National Alliance to End Homelessness (n.d.)					X						
National Foster Parent Association (n.d.)			X	X							X
Narendorf & McMillen (2010)					X				X		
Newcomb et al. (2019)										X	X
Nugent et al. (2020)					X				X		
Osterling & Hines (2006)			X		X		X				
Patton (2015)		X									
Pecora et al. (2003)				X	X		X	X		X	X
Peters et al. (2016)	X						X				
Pokempner et al. (2009)						X	X				
Radey et al. (2016)			X		X	X			X		
Richmond & Borden (2021)					X						
Reilly (2003)			X								
Rivera et al. (2007)			X		X						

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Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARCERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Rivers (2014)											
Roberts et al. (2010)	X	X							X		
Rock et al. (2013)						X	X				
Rome & Raskin (2019)			X					X			
Rutman & Hubberstey (2016)			X	X							
Rymph (2017)					X						
Rycus & Hughes (1998)				X							
Schoeni & Ross (2004)	X		X	X							
Schenk, L., et al. (2018)		X		X					X		
Shin & Poertner (2002)						X			X		
Shook et al. (2011)					X			X	X		
Slayter (2016)						X					
Snowden (2006)				X							
Southerland et al. (2009)				X					X		
Stein (2006)											
Sullivan & Knutson (2000)			X					X		X	X
Swanson & Schneider (1999)			X					X		X	X
Stott (2012)				X	X				X	X	X
Sznajder-Murray, et. al (2015)			X		X						
Title IV-E Foster Care (2012)			X								
The Annie E Casey Foundation (2023)							X	X	X	X	
Thomas & Magilvy (2011)		X									
Thompson & Greeson (2017)			X	X					X		
Trible (2015)				X					X		X
Turney & Wildeman (2016)				X					X		
Taussig (2002)							X	X	X		

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Synthesis Matrix	EMERGING ADULTHOOD	RESEARCH	EMANCIPATION	Foster Youth Services	HOMELESSNESS	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT	INCARERATION	TRUST/SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	PERONS-OF-COLOR	LGBTQ+
Juvenile Law Center (2018)			X					X			
Wilens et al. (2013)					X				X	X	
Williams-Mbengue (2016)									X		
Wilson & Kastanis (2015)							X			X	X
Woodgate et al. (2017)											
Wolanin (2005)						X					
Yates & Grey (2012)					X	X	X				
Yi et al. (2020)								X	X	X	
Youth in Transition (Aging Out) (2022)			X	X							
Youth Status Report Series (2023)				X	X	X	X				
Youth.gov (2019)											
Voices for Children (2020)			X	X							

FOSTER AGENCY PARTICIPANT REQUEST LETTER

Date: _____

Dear Participant Agency:

My name is Felecia Gray, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts Global Education in Organizational Leadership Program. I am very interested in the experiences of former foster youth who are living and working in society after aging out of the foster care system. I am completing a dissertation that investigates how emancipated foster youth perceive their preparation for leaving foster care when aged out and also their perceived access to transitional programs outside of foster care or upon exiting the foster care system. I am reaching out to request your help in identifying participants (former foster youth) who have been emancipated from the foster care system. You are experts in working with current and former foster youth. I am hoping that you will be able to provide me with either contact information or pass on my contact information to anyone whom you feel may meet the requirements of the study.

The criteria for the participants this research study will include are youth who:

·Were emancipated from foster care on or after their 18th birthday

·Have been emancipated between the years 2012–2023

·Reside in Los Angeles County

·Are between the ages of 21–30.

I will be calling to schedule an appointment and briefly talk with you about this research. But in the meantime, can you share my contact information with anyone you feel meets the above criteria and would be voluntarily willing to participate in the study? Attached, you will find a letter to distribute to the individuals for their reference as well. Your help with this research is much appreciated.

Once the research is complete, I would be happy to provide the results to your organization. Confidentiality is critical to the research process and as a result, no one will be identified by name or personal information in this study.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have any questions about the research, I am available to provide you with additional details about the study.

Felecia M. Gray

Doctoral Candidate

XXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX C:

PARTICIPANT'S LETTER OF INVITATION

STUDY: Life After Emancipation: The Lived Experiences and Realities of Emancipated
Foster Youth

Date:

Dear Prospective Study Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. I am Felecia Gray, a doctoral candidate in

Organizational Leadership at the University of Massachusetts Global. My dissertation topic is

about how emancipated foster youth describe their perceptions of the aging out process and the

factors that create a successful transition after being in the foster care system. I am very interested

in this topic because I have family members that have been part of and are currently in the foster

care system. I want to be able to assist in finding ways to better help, not only my family but

others across the nation as well.

I am hoping that you will want to voluntarily participate in an interview that will take

approximately an hour to identify your perceptions once you left the foster care system. The study

includes your participation in an approximately 60-minute in-person interview and examination

of relevant artifacts. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the

study at any time without consequences. Your interview information will be kept entirely

confidential. Please review the attached Bill of Rights to see the protections this study offers to

you.

I am excited about your willingness to accept this invitation. Your insight and thoughtful

participation will add to the body of literature on transitional programs, adulthood preparation,

and other factors that will benefit foster youth as they age out of the foster care system.

If you are an emancipated foster youth living in Los Angeles County, are at least 18 years

old and have emancipated from care, you are perfect for this study. Please complete the attached

"Informed Consent Form" and return to me at the e-mail address below my name to accept this

opportunity to interview for this study. You can contact me at the E-mail address below if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Felecia Gray

XXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu

Interview Participation Form

PURPOSE: The primary purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth who have aged out of the foster care system about the factors that create a successful transition after being in the foster care system.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, then you may proceed with a short form to confirm age (born after 2005) and residing in Los Angeles County in California, eligibility. Once eligibility is confirmed, you will be asked if you would like to participate in a voluntary interview.

> The researcher will then contact the first 12 participants who meet the criteria and reply to schedule an interview. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to understand your perception of the factors that lead to successful transition from foster care.

> With your permission, I will make a confidential audio recording of our conversation and transcribe it for your review. I will send the transcription to you via confidential email after your interview for your feedback to make sure that I have accurately captured our conversation.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient to spend up to 1 hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held in person, at an agreed-upon time, to minimize this inconvenience.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your input and feedback could help add to the research regarding the emancipation of foster youth. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants, upon request.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at fgray@mail.umassglobal.edu. You can also contact Dr. Lisbeth Johnson, who is my dissertation chair, by email at ljohnso3@umassglobal.edu.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341- 7641.

Respectfully,

Felecia M. Gray

Doctoral Candidate

XXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX D:

EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:

Time:

Interview Participant Code:

Introduction and Brief Description

Hello. I am a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at UMass Global. As part of my doctoral research, I am interviewing former foster youth who have been emancipated from the foster care system, who are at least 18 years of age and live in the Los Angeles County area. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study and be interviewed.

The primary purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth who have aged out of the foster care system about the factors that create a successful transition into life after being in the foster care system.

The interview I will be requesting you to schedule will take approximately 60 minutes. To ensure that all interviews in my study are consistent, I will be asking the same questions to all the participants who voluntarily agree to participate in this study. We will be meeting at a mutually agreed-upon location to conduct the interview.

Informed Consent

Before we begin, I want to assure you that your privacy is essential, and everything

connected with your participation will remain confidential. Your name and any

identifying information will be kept in a secure place and not released for any purpose.

With your permission, I will make an audio recording of our conversation and transcribe

it for your review. I will send the transcription to you via confidential email after your

interview for your feedback to make sure that I have accurately captured our

conversation.

CONSENT: Please select your choice regarding participation following the indication that you

meet the age and employment criteria. Selecting "agree" indicates that you have read the

informed consent form and the information in this document that you voluntarily agree to

participate and that you meet the age and employment criteria.

□ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and "Bill of Rights."

I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

□ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in the study.

Thank you for confirming that you have received the Informed Consent and UMass

Global Bill of Rights. Do you have any questions about the document? Please know that

at any time during the interview, you may stop your participation, skip a question, or

withdraw from the process. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Context Questions

First, I have a few short questions to gain an understanding of your background and

history with foster care.

1. How long were you in the foster care system?

2. How long ago was your emancipation process from the foster care system?

3. Can you explain the emancipation process?

Interview Questions

Question 1: Thinking back to your emancipation or around the time of emancipation,

what was your living situation?

  Prompt: What was that like?

Question 2: What were you thinking or feeling during this time?

  Prompt: Can you expand on that?

Question 3: Did you have any help from family or social workers?

  Prompt: Can you tell me about the support you experienced?

Question 4: What, if anything, did you find difficult or did you not understand about the

emancipation process?

  Prompt: Can you tell me more about how you handled that?

Question 5: Did you feel ready to live on your own?

  Prompt: Why?

Question 6: Did you know of any resources or supports that were available to you?

  Prompt: What were, if any, supports offered?

Question 7: What were some things you felt you needed before, during, and after your

emancipation?

Prompt: Were they met? If not, how could they have been met?

Question 8: Did you have a job or a plan to attend college after you emancipated?

    Prompt: Any experience with a counselor about college or career opportunities?

Question 9: How did it feel to go from a "ward of the state" to "independence"?

    Prompt: Do you feel you were supported?

Question 10: Did you do anything to prepare yourself to be an independent adult?

    Prompt: Did you feel you were ready?

Question 11: Did anyone around you prepare you for adulthood/emancipation?

    Prompt: What did they do?

Question 12: Did you ever experience being homeless or not having enough to eat?

    Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

Question 13: How mature do you feel you were when you were emancipated?

Question 14: How do you think the foster care system helped you in being out in society without support?

    Prompt: In what ways? Do you think there are areas of support that need

    improvement?

Question 15: Did you ever have an adult or mentor while in foster care?

    Prompt: Was it beneficial to you?

Question 16: How did you feel when it was time for you to emancipate from foster care?

    Prompt: In what ways? Do you feel it was premature?

Question 17: What recommendations, if any, do you have about providing support for

emancipated foster youth?

Interview Conclusion

Thank you so much for your time and participation; this concludes our interview. Do you have anything else you would like to add or share regarding your experiences as a former foster youth related to emancipation from foster care and your level of preparedness?

I will send you the transcription of this interview in the next week via email. Would you confirm the best email to send it to so that it is confidential? If you have any corrections or additions, feel free to send them to me. I will let you know when I have completed my research and would be happy to send you a copy of the final findings of this study. Again, thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my research.

APPENDIX E:

ALIGNMENT OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research question	Interview questions	Theoretical framework
1. What are the perceptions of youth transitioning from the foster care system to independent living about their experiences attempting to create a productive transition to independent living after being raised in the foster care system?	IQ: Thinking back to your emancipation or around the time of emancipation, what was your living situation?	Instability Phase
	IQ: How did it feel to go from a "ward of the state" to "independent adult" after emancipation?	Identity Exploration Phase
	IQ: Did you ever experience being homeless or not having enough to eat?	Instability Phase
	IQ: Do you feel you were mature enough at the time of emancipation?	Identity Exploration Phase
	IQ: How did you feel about yourself at the time of emancipation?	Identity Exploration Phase
2. What are the primary factors foster youth perceive as necessary for a productive transition to independent living after these youth have experienced being raised in the foster care system?	IQ: Did you know of any resources or supports that were available to you?	Self-Focus Phase
	IQ: What are some things you felt you needed before, during and after your emancipation?	Instability Phase
	IQ: Did you have help from family or your case worker?	Sense of Future Possibilities
	IQ: Did you have a job or plan to attend college after you emancipated?	Sense of Future Possibilities

	IQ: Did you do anything to prepare yourself to be an independent adult?	Feeling In Between Phase
	IQ: Did you have a mentor or an adult you looked to for help before, during and after emancipation?	Self-Focus Phase
	IQ: Did anyone prepare you for emancipation?	Sense of Future Possibilities

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The University of Massachusetts Global, 16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD IRVINE, CA 92618

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Life After Emancipation: The Lived Experiences and Realities of Emancipated Foster Youth

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Felecia Gray, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Consent to Participate in Research

PURPOSE: The primary purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth who have aged out of the foster care system about the factors that create a successful transition after being in the foster care system.

PROCEDURES: In participating in this research study, I agree to participate in a semistructured interview. The interview will take place, in person, at a predetermined day and time, and will last approximately an hour. During the interview, I will be asked a series of questions designed to understand my perception of the emancipation and transitional process of foster care youth.

I agree to provide artifacts such as pictures, certificates or any other documents to be reviewed by the researcher. The researcher will not publish artifacts and will keep the information protected for the privacy of the participants.

I understand that:

a) The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at an agreed-upon date/time, to minimize this inconvenience.

b) I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to add to the research regarding emancipated foster youth. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators. The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Felecia Gray, University of Massachusetts Global Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Felecia Gray may be contacted by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by email at XXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Lisbeth Johnson at XXXXX@umassglobal.edu.

d) I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, this researcher may stop the interview at any time.

e) The study will be audio recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio/video and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of 3 years by the investigator in a secure location.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed, and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

CONSENT: Please select your choice regarding participation following the indication that you meet the age and employment criteria. Selecting "agree" indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document that you voluntarily agree to participate and that you meet the age and employment criteria.

□ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and "Bill of Rights."

I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

□ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in the study.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

Age criteria: I was born after 2005.

♦ Yes ♦ No

Residence: I live in Los Angeles County.

♦ Yes ♦ No

Emancipation: I have been emancipated from the foster care system for at least 2 years.

♦ Yes ♦ No

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G:

INTERVIEW FEEDBACK REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and their effect on the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher, you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. After completing the interview field test, you should also discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer'. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?

2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?

4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be, and how would you change it?

7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process

APPENDIX H:

PARTICIPANT BILL OF RIGHTS

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research

Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

UMass Global IRB   Adopted   2021

APPENDIX I:

CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE

Completion Date 17-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48938303

This is to certify that:

Felecia Gray

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US
www.citiprogram.org

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?waaaeecfe-8730-4819-a7a7-fc2d14428de5-48938303

APPENDIX J:

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Felecia Gray <fgray@mail.umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved As Submitted: Felecia Gray
1 message

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>   Mon, Nov 20, 2023 at 7:41 AM
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: fgray@mail.umassglobal.edu
Cc: ljohnso3@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Felecia Gray,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@umassglobal.edu. If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.umassglobal.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
David Long, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
IRB Chair
dlong@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX K:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ARTIFACT REVIEW FORM

Artifact Description	Identity Exploration	Instability	Self-Focus	Feeling in Between (Adolescent and Adulthood)	Sense of Future Possibilities	Evidence