A Former Foster Youth’s Journey and Acceptance into a University:
A Qualitative Research Design
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Key Terms:

Foster child: A child without parental support and protection, placed with a person or family to be cared for, usually by local welfare services or by court order. The foster parent(s) do not have custody, nor is there an adoption, but they are expected to treat the foster child as they would their own in regard to food, housing, clothing and education. The local government or a state agency pays most foster parents.

Foster Care: This is a court-ordered care provided to children who are unable to live in their own homes, usually because their parents have abused or neglected them. Foster parents have a legal responsibility to care for their foster children, but do not have all the rights of a biological parent(s). For example, they may have limited rights to control and discipline the children, and to raise and care for them including health conditions. The foster parents do not become the child's legal parents unless the biological parents' rights are terminated by a court and the foster parents adopt or take full guardianship of the child. The goal of foster care is to provide transitory support for the children until they can be returned to their biological parents, but it does happen.

Resiliency: Overcoming the hardships of one's past and moving forward with their goals. Educational achievement is operationally defined as obtaining reliable resources to pursue higher education. It can also be defined as having high success in high school and moving on to college.

Aspirations: Having the desire or will to do something better than the current position in life. Goals may include one to finish high school, or pursue higher education such as college.
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Abstract

Educational statistics suggest that foster youth complete high school at a 30-40% rate. These staggering statistics suggest significant educational barriers faced by foster youth. Given foster youth’s limited educational progress; government officials have submitted numerous proposals for improving the current educational outcomes. Decision makers need information about educational achievement experiences and aspirations of youth in the foster care system. The researcher’s purpose for this research was to investigate how one former foster youth successfully made it to a university level. Implementing a qualitative design and using the psychosociocultural framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), the researcher conducted a case study shadowing a former foster youth at the University of California, Irvine. Exploratory in nature and aiming to contextualize educational experiences for foster children, this study examined the participant’s experiences with the foster care system, factors that contributed to her preparation, application to college, and her current college adjustment. Compiled data comprised of observations, interviews, daily contact, and weekly debriefings. Findings suggests, that with proper mentoring, support, and resiliency, former foster youth have a higher rate of pursuing a college education. Results provide insight for decision makers, policy makers, school and university administrators, and teachers and faculty on factors that assist foster youth in their educational journeys, transitions, and the key elements for college academic success.
A Former Foster Youth’s Journey and Acceptance into a University:

A Qualitative Research Design

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) there are approximately 300,000 young adults ages 18 to 25 years old who have spent at least one year in foster care. In 2003, the average stay of a child in a foster home was around 31 months, and the average age for a child to join the foster care system is around ten years old. Fifty-five percent of children in the foster care system return to their original parents or guardians after placement of foster care. Those who are not put into foster homes are placed into group homes or in alternative environments such as emergency foster care.

Children who are taken out of their home and moved around before or during their high school education have a higher tendency to have difficulties in life such as depression, behavioral issues, or psychological problems which may result in lack of educational skills. In addition, issues such as familial separation, concern with siblings and biological parents make it even more difficult for foster children to cope and adjust to a new school and foster family. Children faced with some of these concerns may also achieve below average in school, due to various levels of distraction ranging from their thoughts of personal belongings, food, and new placement feelings (Finkelstein, 2002). As a result, Finkelstein (2002) and Blome (1998) have concluded that there is an education gap between foster youth because they have more transfer records, take special education classes, and are less likely to be on a college academic track.

Furthermore, foster children graduate high school at a 50% rate nationally and in Orange County at a 30% rate in comparison to their peers (Orangewood Children’s Foundation, 2007). Whereas the overall graduation rate for high school completion in the nation is at 70% (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In addition to this unfortunate rate, the rate of acceptance and
graduation from college is even more deprived. Of the 50% graduating class of foster youth, only 20% attend college with a range of 1 to 5.4% who actually graduate with a degree.

Blome (1998) found that 45% of her family foster care sample had taken at least one college course when they were interviewed at roughly 20 years of age. Blome also found that postsecondary education was viewed differently from various foster youth due to different placements in the system. In another study completed by Blome (1997), one-third of a 171 person sample chosen from a restrictive setting (meaning a steady foster home with rules and delegation) was more likely to attend a college or university.

Problem Statement

The literature firmly supports that foster children have limited representation in college. There is dearth of information on the factors that contribute to foster youth’s college experience and their retention. Given that foster children are twice as likely as non-foster youth to leave school without obtaining a high school diploma (Altshuler, 1997; Parrish et al., 2001; Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea, 2003) and so few achieve to a university, many become vulnerable for academic failure. More specifically, while many foster youth aspire to pursue a college degree, many do not due to the multiple barriers and challenges they face toward application, enrollment, and persistence. Given such circumstances, the educational process for foster care children combined with the factors that assist persistence merit attention. When they do attend college, many foster youth face transitional challenges, lack knowledge regarding the education system, and have limited awareness of educational programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate and collect new information of one former foster youth, and to explore the life experiences in a university setting to give new information to
decision makers to improve foster care. This study was intended to fill literature gaps within higher education for former foster youth adults. The researcher has retraced how one former foster youth has accomplished the needed goals to obtain acceptance into a university. The researcher has looked into past history of placement, peer support, and current affiliations that have lead to the student’s achievement. Qualitative measurements, such as interviews and participant observation will be used to find the answers as to how former foster youth can excel into a university level.

The results of this study will help to improve the understandings of legislators, child welfare workers, and administrators as to what change is needed to provide more equal opportunities for a more equal opportunity for foster children. With the results of this study, policymakers and decision makers will be able to better understand the reasons for foster care placement and the factors that contribute to a highly functioning young adult who has surpassed the foster care system. The information obtained has been analyzed and used to generate implications and recommendations on the research and new practices for future studies on foster youth.

For the purpose of this research, a foster child is operationally defined as a child without parental support and protection, placed with a person or family to be cared for, usually by local welfare services or by court order. The foster parent(s) do not have custody, nor is there an adoption, but they are expected to treat the foster child as they would their own in regard to food, housing, clothing and education. The local government or a state agency pays most foster parents. Resiliency is operationally defined as overcoming the hardships of ones past and moving forward with their goals. Educational achievement is operationally defined as obtaining reliable resources to pursuer higher education. It can also be defined as having high success in high
school and moving on to college. Lastly, aspirations are operationally defined as having the
desire or will to do something better than the current position in life. Goals may include one to
finish high school, or pursue higher education such as college.

This study was pursued within a psychosociocultural framework (Gloria & Rodriguez,
2000), examining students’ educational experience from three dimensions: psychological, social,
and cultural elements. This framework was designed particularly for research in education and
was chosen because it fit the research questions and design of this study. The
psychosociocultural framework was used to distinguish influences from each perspective;
deﬁning importance of each factor in a speciﬁc community, (for this research it will be used for
the foster youth community) has traced overlapping effects between the perspectives. Given the
background and problem of foster youth as mentioned above, the researcher has compiled
questions for this study.

The research question for this study asks: What are the paths to higher education for
former foster youth? The researcher was able to gather the self-reported experiences of one
former foster youth about her educational experiences and achievement abilities while attending
a university.

Literature Review

While examining literature in the area of foster care systems, three common themes
emerged addressing college admission. These themes include: psychological, social, and cultural
factors. These fundamentals have a major impact on the education that students receive and
demonstrate what they need to achieve success.

*Psychological Factors: Self Esteem, Motivation, Coping, Stress, Resiliency*
Personal Aspirations, self-esteem, and stress have been seen as fluctuating factors when considering higher education after high school graduation. Foster youth have the desire to go to college while they were in the foster care system, but never persisted with their goal upon emancipation or “aging out” of the system (McMillen, 2003). In a Wisconsin study, done by Courtney in 1998, 79% of young people in the foster care system wanted to go to college. In the sample studied of 249 youth, 90% of the children reported to expect a high school degree, and two thirds expected to attend college. Although the numbers and rates sound high in this particular study, the authors wondered if they just sampled a very motivated and high functioning group.

Not all children in the foster system have a desire or need to go to college, let alone finish high school. Some authors bring up the term resiliency, which brings more to question the achievement and aspirations shown through exceptional foster youth. Some former foster children succeed from not looking back on their past. They can move forward with the negative things which they have experienced in life and use them to never let them down (McMillen, 2003). Foster parents from various studies (McMillen & Blome, 1998) have claimed that some children are born with the desire no matter how bad their lives may end up, and some foster children sink down in the negative aspect of their childhood learning experiences.

Self esteem plays a role in the former foster youth’s lives because of their personal and life challenging experiences that they hold onto. Changing schools often tears friendships, therefore lowering self-esteem when making new friends. Becoming the “new kid” on campus makes it very difficult for a foster youth who is already marginalized feel worse, thus causing even lower self-esteem. In addition to moving, acceptance into grade level material has been a problem as well. Some foster youth are placed into special education classes due to being behind
grade level from either not going to school or bouncing in and out of school to often, which makes the child behind in the classroom. Being older than the peers in the classroom as well as being marked “below” average lowers self-esteem for many youth, not just foster youth.

Stress contributes to the educational gap as well. Children moving around, in and out of different foster homes have to try to preserve the “child” youth inside of them, although it is very hard when being forced into the situation. The 2007 Report on Children in Orange County California also mentioned that foster children tend to carry their parent’s burden of any kind of abuse including substances. Some children tend to think that they are the problem of their placement, and they stress where they are going next day to day. Stress also builds up over time, causing youth to think about their life problems instead of their school problems, which in turn keeps them further behind their peers.

For some foster youth, the term resiliency comes into play when overcoming their life challenges and struggles from their past. The term resiliency is used in previous research to show how some children may have the ability to overcome life risks and overwhelming odds. Although children in the foster care system may be put into a life situation that they can not control, many young people are able to cope with their life stress and lead very successful lives (Gilligan, 1997). In addition to coping and becoming resilient, children who obtain this trait tend to also posses: self-esteem, self-confidence, a sense of self-efficacy, and social abilities within their environment (Casey Family Programs, 2001). While these developments fall into place, the children who hold these values also tend to become more motivated for many obstacles that may come in their lifetime.
Social Factors: Family Involvement, Peers, Resources

Foster children need to understand that their family as well as their friends will be in their life no matter what mistakes or downfalls may happen. They need the sense of security that every thing will be okay with their family so they can understand themselves internally. In conjunction with the psychological factors that foster children need, the children need to undergo a process of individuation. This is a process to separate themselves from their family and to find where they fit in society as an individual (Casey, 2001). When children are taken out of their natural setting of family suddenly, the process is much more difficult for them to understand due to confusion with the term family. When children are forcefully removed with out the preparation for family separation, the simple tasks such as finding values, morals, and expectations are much more difficult for them.

In addition to family, peers make an impact on students at any age or grade level in school. Furthermore, high school pupils are faced with different life choices, such as where to go to after school is over, and if college is an option. Being around peers who do not have a desire or need to go to college may highly impact the choice of any student. This is another answer as to why foster youth may not succeed to college or graduate high school. Peers can make an impact on foster youth if they are close in relationship as well. Most foster youth do not have a role model to look up to, so if their peers are not on a college track, the likelihood of them being different than their peers is very minimal to unlikely. Foster youth also look for acceptance from their peers, which may also cause them to follow other’s views on college due to their environment (Casey, 2001).
Cultural: cultural identity, access to information-social workers, educational experiences

For foster youth, finding self-identity after being forcefully removed from their original family environment can be very challenging and confusing. When developing an identity, the identification. Other factors include: race, gender, culture practice, ethnicity, religion, and economic class (Casey, 2001). Foster children may become confused when asked about where they come from or what their family practice consists of. Religion plays a concern as well if the placement of the child (i.e.: foster home, group home) does not practice the child’s certain belief. Family practice, values, and religious beliefs are not considered when children are placed into a different environment, which may exclude some of those components. Not knowing one’s self identity puts much uncertainty onto whether or not they fit in with their surroundings. For this context, the acceptance from school peers and decision-making, such as valuing education is dampened due to an insecurity of where foster youth stand in society. When foster children become lost in themselves, relying on outside resources for help in many areas such as their education, he/she may not be a focus point for their personal conception.

In addition to the foster or group homes that children are placed in, they are also forcefully given a social/case worker, which is a custom in the foster care culture. The meaning of having a social worker is often confusing as well, when figuring out what family means and identifying one’s culture. Furthermore, when children are given a social worker, they are unsure if they will receive a knowledgeable person with the right tools to help them succeed in their new environment. One study found that both supervisors and social workers had relatively low levels of awareness of the educational system and of personal involvement in the educational process (Zetlin, 2004). The study investigated the knowledge of social workers, and their ability to provide for their cases. The results of the study revealed that there had been no improvement on
the knowledge supervisors assisted within the social workers and their performance levels within the foster care system. One reason may be that social workers are not mandated to know all of the details for the children’s education.

Knowledge of school workers, as well as availability of guidance resources also makes an impact on a student when choosing to go to college in high school. If a student is placed into a high school where there are limited resources available, the chances of knowing how to apply and the application process of going to college are very minimal. This lack of resources can affect the rate of foster youth graduating high school as well due to lack of information. One limitation found in Zetlin’s study, was that some of her cases were closed within her time frame of 18 months and she could no longer obtain the valuable information on her sample.

Lastly, educational experiences such as: low college preparation high schools and high transfer rates have also been known to affect the outcome of former foster youth’s admissions into a college or university. Furthermore, educational experiences have varied throughout many studied samples of children in the foster care system. In a national convenience sample of older youth in the foster care system, 48% reported being in an extracurricular activity while in school. In another study done by Festinger (1983), 26% of former foster youth reported dissatisfaction with the quality of education they received while in care.

Most foster families are not equipped with much wealth provided by the state. Foster families receive funds ranging from $1,000-$1,500 per child depending on how stable the child is. If the child is diagnosed having ADD or any other disorder the foster family will receive more aid. Unless another guardian in the home contributes with a salary over $40,000 or more, it creates a financial deficit. This problem may force foster children to attend a poor, low academic achieving school, which only leads to poor success. In addition to going to impoverished
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schools, foster children also have to face transferring to many different schools in their lifetime in the foster care system. Students attending many schools tend to lose many units and obtain different track records for different schools, which forces the child to be behind once again, or being enrolled into the wrong, or lower classes than necessary due to lack of records from moving too often.

Summary of Literature

The researcher noticed various limitations in which occurred throughout the review of the literature. The first limitation in the studies of foster care is the lack of information on foster children while in foster homes such as placements and behavioral issues (McMillen, 2003). The second limitation was the validity of the data, which showed that foster youth were less likely to be in college preparatory classes in high school even though they had similar test scores and grades as the non-foster youth (Blome 1997). The validity was questioned by the researcher because within the literature there was not a significant way to determine how smart the student was at the time, or to see if they were at the same level as non-foster youth. This unequal balance caused an educational achievement gap for the foster children; the limitation was lack of information on the foster children’s cases. After completing the review of literature within the factors, which contribute to path to higher education for foster youth, the researcher will use specific guidance questions for the participants, which will be parallel to the psychosociocultural framework to guide the study. These questions will help guide the study and give the researcher a better understanding of the real experiences of former foster youth in college.

Methods

For the purpose of this study, the acceptance into a university for a former foster youth will be analyzed from the three perspectives: psychological, social, and cultural. The methods
sections of the research will consist of site selection, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and a conclusion.

Site Selection

The administration building for Orangewood Children’s Foundation was used for this study, located in Santa Ana city, California. The foundation has an Independent Living Program and a Guardian Scholars Program, which is where the student for this study was selected. This confirmed to the researcher that the student is a former foster youth. The next site, which was used, was the University of California, Irvine. The locations of the interviews for the participants were conducted within these sites. Lastly, one former foster youth female student from the University of California, Irvine was used for this study.

Participants

The participant chosen for this study was a female of nineteen years old, as well as a former foster youth from Orange County, California. The participant was named Madison (This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant). The participant in this study was Latina. The participant was a second year at the University of California, Irvine. In addition, Madison was a current Guardian Scholar. A Guardian Scholar is operationally defined as being a former foster youth in Orange County and obtaining acceptance into a university that is partnered with Orangewood Children’s Foundation. A Guardian Scholar receives financial aid and grants to pay for tuition, books, housing, and other resources. The requirements to be a Guardian Scholar are to be accepted by the host university, and maintain a 2.0 or above the entire four years in college.

The participant was enrolled in 20 units during the study period and was observed on her performance in class, amongst her peers, family members and asked about her academic
advocates. In addition to the focus on Madison for the purpose of this case study, her former foster parents were used in this study as well for additional data collection. The foster mother was a female of approximately 45 years old and was a high school teacher. Madison’s foster father was a male of approximately 50 years old and was a retired high school teacher.  

Instrumentation  

This study was conducted in a qualitative format. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used interviews with one former foster youth, the former foster family, and informal data collection with the biological mother and younger sister to understand the life experience of a former foster youth in a university setting. The researcher participated as an active participant at the University of California, Irvine and collected analytical field notes and observations with the selected case study participant. With these methods, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding as to how former foster youth make it to a university level, and the life experiences they go through while in a transition to adulthood. Below are questions that assisted the researcher to shape the interview questions throughout the study.  

The first question was: What role do personal aspirations have on former foster youth’s pursuit to college? The second was to look into the role that the environment and social resources (e.g.: social workers, family, school guidance counselors, peers) affect their pursuit to college. These questions were asked because the researcher knows that it is hard for cases to remain stable if the foster child’s parents are not stable and do not do the necessary changes the court asks of them, and many youth have different aspirations to go to college. The last question was too see if social workers and advisors were more informed by their supervisors, could they be more informed to let foster children know of available resources to be more of an assistance to them when entering college or finishing high school? These questions were asked through out
the research to look into why this is a social phenomenon in the foster youth community. All data was extensively evaluated, coded and analyzed through the lens of the psychosociocultural framework.

**Procedures**

After approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of California, participation was selected by a list of names that are currently UCI Guardian Scholars. The director of the Guardian Scholars program provided this information given that the information is public. All procedures were in the timeframe of 15 weeks.

The researcher asked the participant when interested in the study and after listed on the Guardian Scholars list at the University of California, Irvine to read the consent form produced by the researcher, and asked the participant to sign in order to understand the investigation and procedures. The consent form was given in person at the University of California, Irvine. The written informed consent form was provided and arranged at the University of California, Irvine’s student Services Building.

Privacy was protected by a pseudonym chosen by the participant, and identification was used by date of birth. The records are locked in a cabinet, and only the lead researcher is able to access information with consent, but there is currently no identifiable information on data collection. Co-researchers are able to view the unidentifiable information if necessary, but highly unlikely.

**Formal and Informal Interviews**

Interviews were held every other week with participant at the University of California, Irvine in study rooms. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in a chronological manner. Interviews were held for approximately 30 minutes to one hour depending on availability with the participant. While conducting the interviews, the researcher took careful notes to the nonverbal communication and observations which took place. The total amount of
hours to conduct the interviews was approximately ten hours, and approximately twenty-five hours to transcribe.

The researcher used $20.00 incentives for each task completed from each participant. After each task was completed as directed by the researcher, the participant used was compensated $20.00. With these methods, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding as to how a foster youth can become resilient with their past life experiences and excel to acceptance into a university. The researcher used previous literature and qualitative methods as mentioned above to conduct the results of the ethnographic study. The researcher was actively involved in the participant’s student life on campus and interviewed the participant frequently to understand her experience on campus.

The researcher also completed a structured interview with the participant’s last foster care home to evaluate the parent’s effectiveness and role in the participant’s life while in college. The parents were both high school teachers, and took care of the participant and her sister in 2004. The interview lasted one hour at their home. The parents gave feedback on the participants study habits from high school, friends, and customs they noticed while the participant was in care. The participant resided at their home for approximately one year and a half. The former foster parents were also compensated $20 for their efforts and contributions to this study.

Analysis of Data

The researcher applied various techniques to analyze the data that was collected for this particular study. Before preliminary analysis, the researcher reviewed the original statement of the problem and purpose of the research. The researcher coded items and data collected to match themes and patterns seen throughout the study. Shapes and characters were used to distinguish
themes and to identify moods and feelings of the participants. The researcher used a wide variety of techniques to see patterns and themes in the data that was collected.

Codes were used such as: communication, active student, foster and biological parent’s interactions, affection towards others, negative impact, sluggish mood, tired and no participation. The reasons for these symbols are to see the patterns quickly within the data and to find patterns in participation and attitude towards learning, motivation and success.

After marking the symbols within the data, the researcher boxed terms, which included: education, relationships, motivation, self-esteem, academic progress and progression. The boxed terms were to see more patterns, which were more difficult to address. They were patterns in which the researcher had to find and make sense of, then to see if the patterns were true to the findings in the data. Under the boxed terms the researcher used underlining and circle methods, which include general information, which was also highlighted in pink marker. A big long circle was also used to notify the researcher of important terms or information in the data, and a wiggled line underneath words or phrases were used to help the researcher find themes and patterns.

Fields notes compiled by the researcher were reexamined after each session observed on and off campus. The researcher also incorporated a section after the primary field notes to include the researcher’s notes and comments. Informal discussions with peers and advisors with the participant were also color-coded and analyzed to match reoccurring themes.

After the first half of observation and participation, the researcher first reexamined all questions asked in formal and informal interviews. Thereafter, the researcher reexamined field notes and literatures to conceptualize patterns to match themes of the ethnographic study. Field notes were captured on a regular basis on observations present on campus and off campus. To
ensure internal validity, the researcher carefully revisited all field note entries and documents twice and compared notes with other researchers in educational ethnographic studies. Once items were classified with characters, the researcher calculated the characters and codes to differentiate similarities and dissimilarities. Data was then identified into specific groups. The field notes were thoroughly analyzed and sorted into categories to find patterns and themes in the data.

The researcher also examined patterns and themes. Specific words or phrases found in field notes were categorized to matching themes and categories. Validity of the collected data was achieved by triangulation, comparing data collected with various sources collected by the researcher. The researcher developed an analytical model to demonstrate and imitate the data collected and identified correlation patterns (See Appendix I). Similarities and dissimilarities of the data collected from field notes and observations will be discussed further by the researcher.

Research Ethics

Within this ethnographic case study, the researcher collected data from adults and followed the Institutional Review Board’s regulations throughout all procedures. As an active participant, the observer worked one on one with one participant for the case study, as well as other peers and family members to find similarities within previous literature. The researcher gathered in-depth information regarding important information for the research study. All participants that were used in this study were advised that confidentiality and privacy were concerns for the researcher. The researcher followed by all laws and regulations dealing with participants. The researcher issued a consent form to each participant for this case study. Names were alternated for the protection of the participants.
Results

The results of this ethnographic case study are presented in three main sections. Each section identifies a factor that is related to the original research question. The sections include: psychological motivation, family involvement within culture, and social support. Within these sections the researcher has found valuable information regarding the factors that influence success within a university setting for the former foster youth community.

Psychological Motivation

Motivation was seen as an influence on the participant’s academic success. While observing in the classroom, off campus, and around family and peers, the researcher found a high rate of motivation seen through the case study participant’s actions. Madison was the case study participant in this research as well as two outside informants through informal and formal interviews. Madison helped the researcher find surprising data seen through numerous encounters of high motivation and self-confidence. To describe this pattern of motivation, below is a conversation between the researcher and the participant during week eight of observations:

During the second interview, with a focus on motivation and confidence, the researcher asked Madison to describe what keeps her motivated to work hard in school. She replied, “My strive to want to go to graduate school and law school and using my past experiences is what drives my motivation, getting good grades is my focus, I want to do really well in college, to do well I have to work hard.”

After the research noticed that the participant claimed that her past experiences motivated her, the researcher asked, what about your past motivates you? Madison replied, “I think coming from a background where my step father who constantly told me I was worthless and other mean things to me, it was so traumatizing to where I believed him and that I was nothing, he was so
good at making myself believe I was nothing. Once I reached a turning point in high school, realizing that those were just words and I can overcome that, I started succeeding on my own, I started to use the fear as a challenge, and I used what I thought I couldn’t do to push myself even harder. That’s basically the reason I started to see it as a challenge to succeed at what I was told I could not do. So, with the foster care, seeing all of the stats and stereotypes, like how they become homeless and other things, people saw me as a statistic on paper like as a foster child, poor and in an abusing relationship with my stepfather, then all of the past experiences became combined with my stepfather to bring out this internal drive in myself, to like prove them wrong, and say no! I am not a statistic I can make it just like anyone else in this world, so that is what motivated me, and has been motivating me. I hated all of that, and it became an internal drive to prove everyone wrong and to show that I could make it and it has motivated me.”

The researcher asked the former foster parents in a structured interview during week 12 to look deeper into the motivation aspect of the participant (see appendix E). The researcher asked, what do you think has motivated the participant? The former foster mother’s response was, “I think Madison received a lot of her motivation and strength from her birth mother. I know her mother really cared about her going to college. Her mother would always tell her and her younger sister to do well in school so that they could start a great life. Of all things that her mother would do for the girls, I think the one thing that helped them the most was their mother pushing them to do well, and to have the mindset to go to college.” The participant also remarked during an unstructured interview that she had the idea of college since she was about eleven years old due to many factors such as school resources and her family involvement on her biological mother’s part.
**Family Involvement and Culture**

Family involvement was another important variable that many individuals overlook in the education process and student achievement within the foster youth community. The participant came from a broken home, which made an unstable environment for communication and involvement in educational success. The participant’s biological mother left her first husband due to abuse when they lived in Mexico in 1999. The participant’s mother then remarried into another abusive relationship in the United States, which resulted in abuse with the children in the home. The biological mother has only received the education of an eighth grader, and the biological father of the participant has only passed the sixth grade in Mexico, where he currently resides. The mother told the participant many times as they were growing older to always do well in school and to not be like her parents in the future. “When I first came here, to the United States, I did not know any English, but during the summer of my fifth grade school year, my mom took me to the library many times and let me check out as many books as I wanted. I really learned so much that summer. By the time I came back that fall, I was speaking English just as well as my peers. My mom encouraged me a lot when I was younger and always talked about us going to college one day.”

Another factor of culture in which the researcher looked into was the education environment and the foster family’s household environment. The researcher asked the participant how her resources to educational information were, she replied, “I think I had everything; I love my high school for that reason. I think they had a good writing department, which made me a good writer. I think they constantly kept us on our toes on how to go to college. They told us deadline and everything! We even had workshops to learn all of that. I feel my school was a
great provider. Maybe I feel special because I got the most support than a general student because the teachers all knew me and helped me more and used their resources. I didn’t miss out on anything.”

As for the foster family environment, the researcher asked the foster family if there were books in the house. They said there were many books available in the house. The foster parents also said that they would help the participant with her homework when she needed help since they were both teachers at her high school. When asked how the participant was achieving while in high school, the foster parents replied, “Madison did very well in high school, always did her homework, but we had to be very strict on the time she went to bed. We had difficulties with her time management. She would stay up all night if we let her, but we didn’t. Other than that, she was a very bright and motivated young girl, we are very proud of her success.”

When asked who helped the participant the most while transitioning into college, the participant stated, “Myself, I think throughout my high school years I had a huge transition, I emancipated at 17 and the only thing that stayed constant was myself. Yeah my mom was supportive and the foster parents were supportive too, but it would have meant nothing if I was not strong with myself, I was my own reminder. I did everything with out some person carrying me through it. I was so ready I wanted to do it on my own, and I did.” As the participant did claim to have achieved on her own, there were identified factors which seemed to help as well. The researcher noted that the participant had a collective amount of supporters helping her through the transitions in life. The participant had a mentor, supportive parents, supportive friends, and a support system from Orangewood Children’s Foundation Guardian Scholars program.
Looking deeper into the cultural aspect of the participant, the research asked the participant if she practiced any religious beliefs. The participant said that she was raised Catholic, but the biological family was not heavily religious. Madison said, when she was placed with her foster parents they did not practice any religion. “I lost faith at around maybe 13 or 14 I knew there was a God but I chose Christianity when I met my boyfriend at age 16, by 17 he introduced me to the bible. I started to become religious with him during my high school years, but now I do not go to church on a regular basis, but I do pray often and still keep my faith. I am not a diary writer; by praying it takes things off my chest. I feel like I am heard when I tell God my worries...somebody with power.”

As family involvement and cultural values are immense contributions to educational success, having a high social network with peers and support connections can also increase the success rate within a former foster youth.

*Social Support and Networks*

Lastly, social support and social networks were crucial when looking into the academic success of the participant. For the purpose of this study, a social support network is defined as having connections surrounded between social networks. These networks may include teachers, professors, advisors and peers in this case for the study of educational success. When looking into social networking it is important to look at all connections that surround the participant in this study. The research mapped out the connections between Madison in high school including: teachers, counselors and peers. The researcher also mapped the links between college resources and other supportive persons who contributed to Madison’s success. When looking in the past within Madison’s high school years, she was connected with her golf coach who knew of other teachers who knew Madison as well. In addition, Madison’s economics teacher was related to
her golf coach in that she was his wife. The two teachers knew of Madison’s situation and talked to a school counselor who knew of a way for the two teachers to help Madison. The counselor knew of a person to legally make the two teachers become foster parents so that they could help Madison leave her abusive situation at her home. In college currently, Madison has many social connections. She knew of a woman who was in charge of the Orangewood Guardian Scholars Program, who then connected Madison to a man at the University of California, Irvine, who knew the associate dean of the school of her choice. With these connections, Madison was able to get insight of the college process and selection before she was admitted. She also created relationships with her connections, and they helped her make her choice on which college to attend after high school. Within the social connections while transitioning into her adult life, Madison was able to be removed from her home and placed into a safer and stable environment to help her succeed in high school to move on to college.

Madison said, “My high school had so many resources, I did not have trouble applying to college. With the help of my teachers and connections with Orangewood, I was able to get information on the Guardian Scholars program, which in the end gave me a full ride to UCI. I was accepted into all of the colleges I applied to; it was just a matter of who was going to help me the most. When I made connections with the directors and higher people at UCI, they assured me that I was in safe hands and that they were going to take care of me if I chose UCI, so I did, and I do not regret any of my choices I made while choosing a college.”

The researcher found themes within the field notes, which linked support from her peers in college as well her boyfriend of three years. When asked about the participant’s social support in college with her friends, she said that she currently has three best friends who she can reliably count on for anything. When asked who helped her the most, she said, “My boyfriend would be
considered my ultimate best friend because I tell him everything, and I trust him with all I have because I know he really gets me when I talk to him, and he gives me support when I need it. I tell him everything, more than I tell anyone.”

In addition to her friends, Madison also mentioned that she currently has a mentor provided by the Orangewood Foundation, located in Santa Ana, California. When asked about her support from her mentor, Madison stated, “She plays a huge role in my life, whenever I feel like I need to make a decision I talk it over with her always and she gives me really adult advice. She tells me to never give up, and she believes in me, which gives me more confidence. I feel that it is a safety net for me to run to when I need someone to talk to or lean on when I am unsure of life decisions.”

Combining the psychological motivation, along with her family’s environment and her social connections, the researcher has found patterns and themes throughout the literature, field notes, and observations, which reveal that the participant has maintained a positive attitude towards learning and has succeeded beyond what statistics would prove. While all case studies are all different in their own way, the participant in this study has revealed a high resiliency pattern and motivation pattern within herself and has proven that even with the negative aspects in her life, she was able to pull though it and to succeed past expectations.

Discussion

The data collected in this ethnographic study aligns with the psychosociocultural perspective. The following sections will discuss the findings in comparison with the previous literature reviewed.

Psychological Factors
Within a psychological frame, the research looked into identifying and matching personal aspirations, self-esteem, and stress within the data analysis in comparison to previous literature. While the participant in this study was evaluated and analyzed through interviews and observations, the researcher found high motivation and resiliency patterns within the data. Previous literature proves that most former foster you have to overcome their family issues before they can progress into the stage of having a high motivation and developing resiliency. In addition, personal Aspirations, self-esteem, and stress have been seen as fluctuating factors when considering higher education after high school graduation (McMillen, 2003). In comparison to data collection, the participant showed high self-esteem and was shown as having a sensible distress mechanism. The participant was able to remove her negative emotions from family issues, moved forward after high school into college. The participant described herself as confident, sure of her self, and prepared for her future. The participant stated that she uses her challenges in her personal life to overcome her challenges in college. In addition, the participant created her own distress technique to calm her mind and body when stress is accumulated from school and family. The participant explained that she uses her support system of her close friends to talk the problems out with others to vent. This method was used by the participant to prevent buildup over time of stress which has ended in panic attacks in the past if not used.

Social Factors

The research findings within this study proved that peers and academic environment can make a difference in a former foster youth’s academic journey. Within the findings, the participant revealed having at least two close peers at all times, in high school and in college. The participant stated that her peers were active in school and also had desires to go to college. This may have played a role in the participant’s success along with other factors such as the high
school environment. Within the finding of this study the participant was placed in a high achieving high school with a high success rate of student proceeding college after graduation. This educational environment was a benefit to the participant when looking for resources to go to college. In addition, the participant was fortunate to have highly accredited and qualified teachers to help her with her writing and analytical skills. The participant was very fond of her high school education, and gives full credit of her high school providing her with the necessary essentials to pursue a college path.

In light of having an equipped high school, the participant claimed to have motivational downfalls with her assigned social worker while in the foster home during her junior year. The participant stated that the social worker told her that foster children never go to college and that she should not think about going to college because she will never make it. Although the researcher can not verify this is true with the social worker, the foster parents also confirmed that the social worker was not a help for the foster children in their house. The participant stated that she believed her social worker, only until she realized that she was able to go to college with a 3.9 GPA, despite of her status as a “foster child.”

Cultural Factors

Along with motivation, social support, and being surrounded within a healthy school environment; having a knowledgeable social worker while in foster care is essential for educational success. Through the findings of this study, the participant was unfortunate to have a social worker to assist her through the foster care system. The participant reported that the social worker would visit about once a month at the foster home, did not know their names, and discouraged the idea of college. Within literature, having a qualified social worker is important,
although in this study the participant was able to manage without an informed social worker of the educational process for foster youth.

After high school, the participant was voluntarily given a mentor through the Orangewood Children’s Foundation for the Guardian Scholars. The participant stated that the mentor currently helps her with her problems outside of college. The participant mentioned that it is important to have a person outside of friends and family, who is older and who understands what a college student is going through. The research findings proved that role models in a person’s life can make a difference in their academic journey. A positive role model can influence students to establish higher goals for themselves.

Living with supportive family members was also a factor in the participant’s success to college. The participant lived with her biological family until she was fifteen, and then lived with her foster family until she was seventeen. Within the research findings, the biological mother was found to be very supportive in the idea of college and always talked about the subject to her three daughters. The biological mother took the participant to libraries over the summer of her fifth grade year so that she could learn English. The participant stated that her biological mother pushed the idea college because her mother only finished through the eight grade.

In addition to having a supportive birth mother, the foster parents also encouraged school success within the family household. The foster parents were both teachers with college graduate education and supported the participant with all of her extra curricular activities while in high school. The foster home was also equipped with many books to read for the children. The foster home also let the foster children choose their idea of religion to express self identity.

The participant in this study was raised Catholic with her biological family, and later transitioned into Christianity during her senior year in high school. The participant found her
new religion though her boyfriend and started to read the bible and learned more information by attending church.

Although the participant was religious during her last years of high school, there was no significance influence in the participant’s success while in college as stated by Madison during an interview. At the time of the study, the participant claimed to not attend church at the moment, but prays at least every other night. The participant stated that praying at night helps her clear her mind knowing that there is a higher power to relieve her stress at the end of the day.

Limitations

The design of this qualitative research constructed minor limitations. The first limitation was the fifteen-week time frame. Further investigation of education levels and progress was needed for more accurate research and conclusions. If more time was accumulated, finding may have changed. Secondly, this study was a case study which only focused on one foster youth’s past and present experiences in college. The results of this study can not be generalized due to the small sample size of one. In addition, the study did not focus on the aspect that the participant was Latina. This plays a significant role for the participant’s perseverance, in combination of having the burden of being marked as a foster youth. The combination of being an ethnic minority as well as a foster child is a double minority status for the participant, which creates a heavier burden than white foster youth. Further research should look deeper into the effects of being an ethnic minority in connection with foster care status to see if there is a difference in success due to the additional factor. Another limitation was conflict of interest with journal writing and the participant. If in depth journal writing was provided by the participant, the research may have been able to find another pattern otherwise not seen in physical contact with the participant. Lastly, due to limited information on the focus of religion, the researcher was
unable to correlate religion to academic success, but identified a technique for the participant to relieve stress while in college. With further investigation on the mind and religion, findings may have altered on the factors of success for the participant.

Relevance to Education

This research is intended for educators, parents, and other individuals who are interested in this subject. Educators may understand the important terms and dynamics if the findings and do further investigation on this topic. This research is beneficial to parents as it may give them another perspective of how they view education with their own family. Overall, this research is proposed to help individuals understand the different factors that can influence a student’s academic achievement when coming from a broken home and making it to a university level.

Recommendations for Research

Biological parental participation should be studied and encouraged in further research. Parents play an enormous role in the outcome of a student’s educational accomplishments. Future studies should also complete studies in different regions to compare the similarities and differences that emerge in the educational system. It would be helpful to understand the differences that may result due to cultural differences from different parts of the world. Having mentors, a supportive biological mother, and supportive foster parents helped Madison. Having a religious background in Christianity also relieved stress for the participant, but was claimed to be a significant level of support stated by Madison. The religion was a feeling of hope for Madison, as praying at night let her clear her mind. While these worked for Madison, it may not work for all former foster youth with similar backgrounds. More research in higher education for foster youth is needed to better understand the foster care environment and community, as well as more information on psychological factors.
Recommendations for Practice

There are various recommendations that agency workers, policymakers, and decision makers can put into place to be valuable for all parties in the educational system. Foster children should be given a statement of the state in which they are placed in a foster home which explains all of their legal rights. If foster youth were given this document, it would better assist them in knowing their environment and future plans as foster youth. Most foster youth do not know the journey of the child welfare system (Appendix F) which is what may cause their uncertainty of the next steps in their foster care plan. Madison claimed that this legal statement would have helped her in her transition to emancipate at the age of 17. Knowing her legal rights as a foster child would have helped her while in court pleading to be on her own. Madison did not know at the time that she was able to access her rights.

In addition, foster youth should be given a right to choose another social worker, if the child feels that the social worker they are given are not qualified to their needs. If this is impossible to implicate, it may be helpful to supply an evaluation for foster youth and the foster parents to assess how well their social worker is for their specific needs. This assessment may be used to assign a social worker who can fulfill any special needs of foster youth and or their foster family. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that social workers should be trained with higher education knowledge to pass on to their cases. It may be beneficial if there is documentation that social workers are also trained on psychology of foster youth as well as self-esteem training to help the youth. If these were done, they may improve the educational success rate for foster youth due to more knowledgeable social workers on education plans for the youth.
Lastly, foster youth should be given documents with resource guides on scholarships and grants for qualified students who are leaving the foster care system and pursuing college. These documents should be given by the foster care agency and or the social worker. There are many free scholarships in California which assist former foster youth such as the Casey Foundation, the CHAFEE grant, Positive Resistance, Guardian Scholars, and Pathways Foundation. Many scholarships and grants are never used by former foster youth each year due to lack of knowledge and lack of attainment in college. If these steps were improved, foster youth will be able to better understand their future after foster care, while making their academic plans.

Conclusions

High school completion rates for foster youth of 30-40 percent have lead to proposals for improving educational outcomes necessary to make new changes. Decision makers need information beyond educational achievement experiences and aspirations of youth in the foster care system. Little is known about how former foster youth succeed through their life challenging obstacles and make it to a university. With this qualitative study, the researcher was able to ask one participant individually how her experiences were in the foster care system and how she prepared to move on to college. The participant claimed that the Guardian Scholars program from the Orangewood Children’s Foundation helped her financially, academically, and mentally. The participant was prepared with financial aid, scholarship funds, guaranteed housing, free tutors, mentors, and academic resources within the University of California, Irvine. In addition to having available resources, the study also revealed a high success rate for the participant with the support of peers and family members. Combining all psychological, social, and cultural factors into the study, the results revealed an increase in self motivation and confidence which allowed the participant to succeed in college. With new knowledge on how to
help future foster youth transition into higher education, many agency workers, policymakers, and decision makers will be able to further assist them.

References:


Appendix A

Recruitment method

Looking for current former foster youth at the University of California, Irvine who are also current Guardian Scholars to participate in a 15-week study. The purpose of this research study is to investigate and collect new information of one former foster youth, and to explore the life experiences in a university setting. This study is intended to fill literature gaps within higher education for former foster youth adults. The researcher will retrace how one former foster youth can accomplish the needed goals to obtain acceptance into a university. The researcher will look into past history of placement, peer support, and current affiliations that lead to the student’s achievement. Qualitative measurements, such as interviews and focus groups, will be used to find the answers as to how former foster youth can excel into a university level. If willing to participate you will be compensated $20 per session with researcher. All meals and activities done within the research will be paid for.

If interested contact: Kimberly Snodgrass, snodgrak@uci.edu, (562) 587-9980
Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT

A Former Foster Youth’s Journey and Acceptance into a University:

A Qualitative Research Design

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM*

Lead Researcher:
Kimberly J. Snodgrass
School of Social Science
(562) 587-9980

Faculty Sponsor:
Casear Seresers, Associate Dean
School of Social Science

Other Researchers:
Dr. Thurston Domina
Education Department
(949)-824-6374

Study Location(s):
University of California, Irvine

Study Sponsor(s):
(UROP) Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to investigate and collect new information of one former foster youth, and to explore the life experiences in a university setting. This study is intended to fill literature gaps within higher education for former foster youth adults. The researcher will retrace how one former foster youth can accomplish the needed goals to obtain acceptance into a university. The researcher will look into past history of placement, peer support, and current affiliations that lead to the student’s achievement. Qualitative measurements, such as interviews and focus groups, will be used to find the answers as to how former foster youth can excel into a university level.
SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you are the foster parent of the guardian scholar participating in this study.

Exclusion Requirements
You are not eligible to participate in this study if you are not the foster parent of the guardian scholar participating in this study.

Number of Participants and Time Commitment
This study will include approximately 3 subjects and will involve approximately 1 hour of your time.

PROCEDURES
The following procedures will occur: You will have a structured interview for approximately 40 minutes.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include: increased ability to knowledge of the campus life at the University of California, Irvine and access to resources in which are available to former foster youth.

Benefits to Others or Society
The results of this study will help to improve the understandings of legislators, child welfare workers, and administrators as to what change is needed to provide more equal opportunities for a more equal opportunity for foster children. With the results of this study, policymakers and decision makers will be able to better understand the reasons for child care placement and the factors that contribute to a highly functioning young adult who has surpassed the foster care system. The information obtained will be analyzed and used to generate implications and recommendations on the research and new practices for future studies on foster youth.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
You will be paid $20 per each activity involved with the researcher for your time.

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

Reimbursement
You will be refunded for the following expenses that you incur: parking fees

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY

*Subject Identifiable Data*

- All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection.
- All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

*Data Storage*

- All research data will be maintained in a secure location at UCI. Only authorized individuals will have access to it.
- All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected or has encryption software.
- The audio recordings will also be stored in a secure location and transcribed. The recordings will be retained with the other research data.

*Data Access*

The research team, authorized UCI personnel, the study sponsor, and regulatory entities such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP), may have access to your study records to protect your safety and welfare. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed by these entities without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Research records provided to authorized, non-UCI entities will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

*Data Retention*

- The researchers intend to keep the research data until analysis of the information is completed.
- The researchers intend to keep the research data until the research is published and presented.

*Investigator Financial Conflict of Interest*

No one on the study team has a significant financial interest related to this research project.

NEW FINDINGS
If, during the course of this study, significant new information becomes available that may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the researcher team listed at the top of the form.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed at the top of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed at the top of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact UCI's Office of Research Administration by phone, (949) 824-6068 or (949) 824-2125, by e-mail at IRB@rgs.uci.edu or in person at University Tower - 4199 Campus Drive, Suite 300, Irvine, CA 92697-7600.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with UCI or your quality of care at the UCI Medical Center. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

Subject Signature* __________________________ Date

Printed Name of Subject *

Legally Authorized Representative/Guardian Signature __________________________ Date

Printed Name of Legally Authorized Representative/Guardian’s

Legally Authorized Representative/Guardian Signature __________________________ Date

Printed Name of Legally Authorized Representative/Guardian’s

Researcher Signature* __________________________ Date
Appendix C

Demographic Sheet:
Completed on January 18, 2008 3:26pm

Recording Setting: Study room of a library of the University of California, Irvine
Steps of interview:
1. Go over procedures of confidentiality, sign consent forms
2. State the procedure of the interview process

State Pseudo Name: Madison
Year in school: Second year
Age: 19, D.O. B: June 1, 1988
Current Cumulative GPA: 3.87

Current Organizations involved on campus: Te Deans Ambassadors counsel, Global Connect, UROP- independent research on Mexican border policy, interest in international politics and bilateral relationships between nations. Topic sounds interesting and good topic to look into. The associate Dean helped pick the topic. UROP- funding.
Do you Work? Yes, one job I am a peer mentor for former foster youth, and I work for the Orangewood Children’s foundation for ILP.

Hours per week for work: 4
Units currently enrolled in: 20
Hours per week scheduled for free time: umm, maybe 12 hours per week
Ethnicity: Latino
Do you receive any scholarships? Please describe: The Guardian Scholars-$6,000 financial aid that’s it. Oh sorry the Change of Life foundation $7,500

Number of people in your life you can currently rely on: 3
Reason of placement into foster care: Sexual molestation by step father
Age of placement into foster care: 15
Length of stay in foster care: 2 years
Status of former foster family: Still in contact? If so, with how many members? I do have contact both foster parents. There were no siblings, except my sister.
Status of biological family: Still in contact? If so, with how many members? Still in contact with mom and two sisters. 23 and 17 are the ages of the sisters.
Appendix D

Interview with Participant Winter 2008

1. Rate your quality of education received in high school or current quality of education.

   Education Quality (Circle)
   Never been better
   I learn what I need, but no help is offered
   I have classes and I go to school but the teachers to not teach me to learn
   I do not get help at all and I am failing or have failed before
   Other (please specify)

2. Please explain your experience as a foster child, where and when were you placed and how long? Be specific as possible.

3. Did you always want to go to college? If so who helped you get there?

4. Are you happy with how you were treated in the system? If not please explain. What was wrong with your education?

5. Did any one inspire throughout your lifetime? (give an artificial name)

6. What was your hardest struggle while going through high school?

7. Describe your experience while applying to college. Were you confused? Did you know the process? Who helped you apply?
Appendix E

Foster Family Interview

1. What are your occupations?
2. Did you both go to college?
3. Did you two talk about college?
4. Were there books in your house at the time of placement?
5. Did you take your foster children to museums?
6. Did you talk about how to improve in high school?
7. Did you help with high school guidance such as homework problems?
8. What were some rules you had while you had foster children?
9. Did you ever have problems with the participant following these rules?
10. Can you think of a time when you were really proud of the participant?
11. How would you describe the participant academically?
12. When do you think you first noticed her academic potential?
13. How close are you all now?
14. Do you consider her as a daughter?
15. Please describe the support you give the participant while in college.
16. Can you think of a time when the participant had to go through a lot of stress in which you had to help her cope with the stress?
17. Do you remember any friends come over to the home to visit the participant?
18. Did your family practice any religion while taking care of the participant?
19. What do you think keeps the participant going academically?

20. How would you describe her motivation?

Appendix F
The following chart provides a graphic representation of the typical progress a youth makes through a state child welfare system.

**Figure 1. A Child’s Journey through the Child Welfare System**

Appendix G

Data Charts: Foster Youth Honors Thesis Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reunify with Parents or Caretakers</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term Foster Care</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Other Relatives</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Not Established</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Charts: Foster Youth Honors Thesis Project

Ages in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th># of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 1-5</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>128,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 6-10</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>116,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 11-15</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>158,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 16-18</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>92,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older than 18</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10,321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity Break Down

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>In Foster Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the touching circles in this diagram represent a correlation to finding academic success within foster youth who are currently in college. This model was designed after research findings with a 15 week time frame of a case study on one former foster youth at the University of California, Irvine.
Biography of Author

Kimberly Snodgrass is a Social Science major at the University of California, Irvine with a specialization in Public Community Service, and a minor in Education. Kim has been working on her honors thesis to improve foster care this year as well as working as a teaching assistant at UCI and the Early Childhood Learning Center as an instructional Aid for special education students. Kim has also recently finished volunteering 200 hours with Orangewood Children’s Foundation, as the CEO’s intern to grasp a better understanding of a non-profit in California for foster children. Kim has found time to get involved with Global Connect where she teaches high school students once a week on global issues, and is on the board for the Community Service Leadership Program (CSLP) to improve student involvement with volunteer service projects, two School of Social Sciences programs she says allow her to give back to the community while preparing her for a career devoted to public service. Kim has participated in the UCI Summer Bridge Program, UCI Summer Academic Enrichment Program, to conduct further research on foster care issues, as well as an Americorps member for Jumpstart for America, where she devoted 300 hours to serve low income pre-school children for one year. After attending Princeton University’s Public Policy and International Affairs Program (PPIA) studying the juvenile justice system, Kim developed a deeper interest in policy to help create change for all disadvantaged youth. Kim’s short term goals are to attend a graduate program to study public policy and higher education to do extensive research on the foster care system, and to have her second completed children’s book published by 2009. Her long term goals are to open her own non-profit to serve the foster youth community in need of services, and to become an active policy maker and university professor to improve the foster care system as her career.