

Exploring the Lived Experiences of South Carolina Foster Parents Within Spartanburg County

Public Schools: A Phenomenological Study

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe foster parents' experiences with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area. The study utilized phenomenological methods of gathering information by way of interviews and focus groups. The study explored the lived experiences of foster parents across the state of South Carolina most specifically about the enrollment process of new placements and the overall academic success and support those foster parents perceived that the foster youth in their homes received from the school system. The researcher sought to answer the following questions: 1. How do foster parents feel they are viewed within the South Carolina school system in which their foster child(ren) is/are enrolled?, 2. How do foster parents describe the biggest barriers when interacting on behalf of a foster placement's educational experiences?, 3. How do foster parents describe inequities perceived regarding students in foster care versus those not in foster care? Limitations were addressed as also areas for future study.

Keywords: foster care, trauma, public school system, education, achievement

Dedication

Growing up, my dad always told me “The more you learn, the more you earn, baby girl.” He encouraged me to pursue my doctoral degree. I regret that I did not start that process until after his passing but have felt his encouragement through the entirety of the process. I would not have started this pursuit without his reassurance, and I felt his presence with me through the duration. The completion of this work is dedicated to his memory.

Acknowledgements

To my husband, Marty, thank you for your constant support and for reading countless papers and assignments for me. I love you and am beyond thankful for your love and acceptance of everything I bring to the table. To my boys, Max and Charlie, I hope that you both see that you can do hard things. I wish the world for you both and am so grateful that God allowed me to be your mom. To my mom, I am so thankful to have you as not only the best mom in the world but an incredible friend. I can trust you with anything and love you fiercely. To my brother, Jason, thank you for encouraging me and loving me through the hardest times of my life. To my co-workers at Chesnee High, thanks for keeping me sane through everything the past thirteen years but especially the last three of this degree. I was able to push through because of the support from everyone mentioned here. To loving foster parents, thank you for your sacrifices to ensure that children have a place they can call home and a family to call their own. Being a foster parent is a difficult task to undertake. I am thankful for each person who answered a call in the wee hours of the morning so a child could have a loving home to lay their head.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Based on a review of current literature, foster youth and their parents experience a myriad of situations throughout their time in care, most frequently would be out of home placements, which may or may not be completely positive as it relates to educational outcomes (Olsen & de Montgomery, 2018). These situations envelop every area of life including but not limited to home life, school, church, social settings, and obtaining a high school diploma (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2020). Life within the school system for foster youth is well documented in the literature; however, the experience of foster parents seems to be sparsely recorded (Leathers et al., 2019). Foster parents are discussed in literature alongside other advocates for foster youth such as mentors, caseworkers, or teachers (Mires et al., 2018). This study sought to gain insight of foster parents' perceptions as they worked with the public school system in South Carolina in regard to their high school foster youth placements.

Background

Individual states have compulsory education laws that require certain ages of children to attend school (i.e., 1976 SC Code of Law 59-65-10). The Supreme Court enacted compulsory education laws to require school-aged children in the United States to attend either public, private, or home-schooling, and foster youth are no exception to that law (*Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus*, 1925; Strike, 2006). The success of foster youth in the educational system is an agglomeration of various supports or lack thereof (Caplovitz et al., 2021). Those vast differences in how children adapt point to innate resiliency and also to the advocates present in their lives (Lamb et al., 2022). Current literature mostly examines the relationships that impact (i.e., foster parents, teachers, administrators, caregivers, etc.) foster youth in their journey through a system that has faults in the design with regard to support for

foster youth and parents (Anderson et al., 2016; Fernandez, 2019; Leon & Dickson, 2019).

Although some argue that the English Poor Laws in the 1500s where poverty-stricken families were indentured to other families were the first roots of foster care, a more common acceptance of its implementation comes from Charles Loring Brace in New York (Slack, 1995). Foster care traces back to the 1850s with the creation of the Children's Aid Society of New York by Charles Loring Brace (Askeland, 1998). Brace saw an immense need for shelter and safety for an increasing number of immigrant and homeless children that were sleeping on the streets in New York and took action searching for homes for them across the United States (Askeland, 1998). Brace's system was the model for what we see in modern-day foster care as foster youth are placed in group homes and most preferably foster homes that mimic a family environment (Askeland, 1998).

The idea of foster care has been widely debated with some vehemently opposing the idea of government involvement in a family's private matters, and the other side advocating for stricter guidelines and tough action in cases of abuse and neglect (Beam, 2014). Those calls for action on behalf of abuse and neglected children were met with enforcing mandated reporting laws (Clemens et al., 2018). By the late 1960s, all 50 states had passed laws requiring doctors and other medical professionals to report abuse or neglect in an effort to reduce abuse and neglect in children (Lau et al., 2008). While all individuals are encouraged to report activity that could potentially be abuse or neglect, currently, mandated reporters include healthcare professionals, educational professionals, employees of funeral homes, ministers, photo processors, computer technicians, childcare workers, counselors, law officials, and foster parents (Lau et al., 2008). Mandated reporters are also protected in most states when they make a report in good faith, meaning that if the reporter truly believes that abuse or neglect is taking place and

is reported, they cannot be brought under legal recourse by the court system if the report is determined to be untrue (Lau et al., 2008). Mandated reporting led to an initial increase in investigations that led to children being taken from their families of origin, in turn beginning the instability of placements that add to the disruption of a child's life (Clemens et al., 2018). While intentions may be to protect the child from abuse and neglect, research shows that any disruption to a student's daily life contributes to potentially negative educational impacts on student performance (Zorc et al., 2013).

Situation to Self

As a current high school professional school counselor and former foster parent, I have been privy to the South Carolina public school system's interaction with foster youth from both perspectives. As a professional school counselor who deals with the process of when a student transfers to our school, I have seen the frustration with obtaining the necessary materials needed for enrollment for foster youth. Unfortunately, because of various reasons (i.e., behavioral issues causing multiple placements, temporary placements, alternating between biological family and foster care, etc.), foster youth typically have attended a long list of schools. In the state of South Carolina, immediate enrollment for foster youth is required (South Carolina Department of Education, 2023). At the elementary and middle school level that is not a huge issue because these youth will attend similar courses and complete the grade level as they go. At the high school level, meeting all the requirements is necessary as Carnegie units are vital for earning a South Carolina high school diploma.

In South Carolina, Carnegie units are the 24 specific units of credit required for a high school diploma (South Carolina Department of Education, 2023). Those credits include four literature courses, four math courses, three science courses, United States history, one other social studies course, a half credit of government, a half credit of economics, a half credit of

financial literacy, one physical education course, one computer course, one world language or career course, and six and a half electives (South Carolina Department of Education, 2023).

When information is delayed, students repeat courses or waste time in unnecessary courses that delay their graduation. This delay can impact the foster youth's overall motivation to complete their education because they believe that it may never happen when all the roadblocks of foster care are in their way (Bartnikowska et al., 2022). Personally, I have seen foster youth that have retaken courses multiple times because the previous schools have not sent records in a timely manner. I have also had to watch with great sadness as a foster youth missed their appropriate graduation year because a previous school was on a different academic schedule and the credits earned did not line up with our schedule.

As a foster and adoptive mother who also works in education, it is imperative that I both understand and enlighten those around me about both the issues that plague both foster students and parents and ways that foster parents have experienced positivity within the public education system. As an educator on the front lines of where I could make a difference, I want to explore ways that foster parents feel left out or less than in the enrollment and educational process of their foster children. As a foster and adoptive mother, I want to make sure that both my children and those foster or adoptive children coming after mine are well taken care of and treated with equity.

As a foster and adoptive parent, I have been personally impacted by the treatment and expectations of foster parents and foster youth. My oldest son attended five different elementary schools prior to his third-grade year. As I looked back through the paperwork from each school once he was placed with us, I saw repeatedly places where things had been hastily done or even perceived to be completed with negligence. My own experience, sifting through the educational

records of my son, led me to investigate what other foster parents have experienced within the public education system in South Carolina. In each of my personal roles I am impacted by the results of this research and am driven to explore the foster parent experience.

Two different assumptions could be made from the information I discovered in my son's educational records. First, schools he attended did their due diligence, but the timeframe that he was enrolled did not allow them to fully gather data from his previous schools. In turn, those schools did not document their own information well when he transferred out. The second is because of their knowledge of the typical foster placement (i.e., foster placements can be short-term because of a myriad of reasons including but not limited to behavior issues or returning to the home of origin after court), they did not put forth an effort to obtain the necessary information because they assumed it was likely that his stay was going to be short. While one option is obviously more dismissive (i.e., when a school does not put forth the effort for the student because of an assumption that the student will not be with them long enough to matter since they are in foster care), both have similar ends. My son was academically behind and when he came to us, I remember him vividly stating that he was "stupid" and "no good at school." After helping him understand that the school he was being enrolled in would be his 'forever' school, he blossomed and finished elementary school with straight A's which gave him a sense of immense accomplishment. This speaks to the importance of stability for foster youth as we saw marked improvement in his educational success once stability was established.

Problem Statement

According to the literature, foster youth face a much greater obstacle when it comes to obtaining an education. This obstacle could be caused by multiple foster placements leading to multiple school changes, trauma prohibiting academic growth, lack of advocacy and voice for help, and a myriad of other issues preventing academic completion or overall success (Mihalec-

Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). The problem is that foster parents tend to be the last to know of information regarding their foster youth placements, due to lack of communication or simply communication with caseworkers or other agency workers or guardian *ad litem*s (Lamb et al., 2022). Current literature does not address foster parents' experiences or perceptions of the South Carolina public school systems; however, there is limited literature that addresses foster parent educational experiences outside of South Carolina (Bartnikowska, 2022). This study sought to answer the question of how South Carolina public schools are perceived by foster parents from the upstate of South Carolina and give insight into improving the relationship between the school system and foster parents in an effort to ultimately improve the success of foster youth.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe foster parents' experiences with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area. The seven districts include nine high schools in Spartanburg County: Landrum High (District 1), Chapman High (District 1), Boiling Springs High (District 2), Chesnee High (District 2), Broome High (District 3), Woodruff High (District 4), Byrnes High (District 5), Dorman High (District 6), and Spartanburg (Spartan) High (District 7). It should be noted that Dorman High (6) and Spartan High (7) have the highest concentration of foster youth enrolled in their schools due to the large number of group homes located in their attendance zone and the high rate of removals in those two districts (E. Baucom, personal communication, January 16, 2024). In this study, the foster parent experience was generally defined as the registration process for their foster youth placements, the academic communication between several Spartanburg County foster parents, and the overall satisfaction of general communication with the Spartanburg County school system about school activities and events.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addressed a gap in the literature relating to the perception of foster parents as they engage in the South Carolina public school system. An important aspect of this study was the inclusion of foster parent interviews. In current literature, foster youth's perspectives and opinions have been recorded, but rarely are foster parents asked about their experiences (Goemans et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2021). Foster parents have been listed as a significant and impactful resource in the lives of foster youth as they tend to be powerful advocates for their foster placements and this advocacy tends to drive overall foster youth success academically, emotionally, and mentally (Cameron et al., 2020; Cooley et al., 2017; Skilbred et al., 2019). The researcher in this study sought to address that gap in the literature that highlights a lack of foster parent perspective of the public school system, specifically those involved with Spartanburg County schools.

According to the South Carolina Department of Social Services reporting dashboard, Spartanburg County, where this study was researched, holds 5% of the total number of foster youths in South Carolina (i.e., 206 of 3469) (*Foster Care Dashboard*, 2024). Spartanburg has the second largest concentration of foster youth only behind Greenville County, a neighboring county (*Foster Care Dashboard*, 2024). While there are numerous group homes, there are also a great number of foster homes in Spartanburg County. As the number of foster youths is high, it is important to understand the best practices to implement to ensure the success of those foster youth, and also to know how the school system and foster parents can better communicate to facilitate more success on behalf of the foster youth represented in the county. If foster parents feel more heard and understood, the hope would be that they communicate that with those

around them and make foster parenting feel more worthwhile and not a futile effort where they are underappreciated.

In turn, if public schools can better understand the importance of the foster parents' role in the educational process of the students they serve, they can become a team working together instead of feeling dissension when it comes to releasing/sharing information. The hope of this study was to gather the information gleaned from foster parents and distribute it to school systems, even outside of Spartanburg County, to help them better understand the perception and help them adjust current procedures that may impede the growth of the relationship with the foster parent.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The central research question that was examined was: How do current/previous foster parents of high school students perceive the South Carolina public school system in Spartanburg County?

Literature covers foster youth's perceptions of their educational experience but seems to lack the perception of foster parents throughout their foster children's educational journeys (Miller et al., 2021; Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). The relationship between both the foster parents and student and the relationship between the foster parent and the school system greatly impacts the overall success of the student in transition (Lamb et al., 2022). The researcher aimed to examine the thoughts and experiences of foster parents in an effort to bridge gaps between the South Carolina public school system and foster parents to increase academic success and overall relationships with the foster care system and the school system.

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question that was examined was: How do foster parents describe their experiences with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area?

Literature that included foster parent perceptions were more about the overall lack of support with their foster children and other children in their homes (Caplovitz Barrett et al., 2021). Foster parents face unknown obstacles every day when it comes to caring for foster children; one aspect that eases the tension of those obstacles is feeling understood and supported by those around them (Clemens et al., 2018). Understanding specifically how foster parents think they are perceived in the community will lead to a better overall understanding of changes that can be implemented to work toward a more cohesive unit that encourages the growth and success of the foster youth in question.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question that was examined was: How do foster parents describe their interactions with school personnel in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area?

Current literature highlights the overall lack of information placements receive about the foster youth leaving them at an academic disadvantage in educational settings because caregivers and school officials often have little to no information about previous school involvement with the foster youth (Goemans et al., 2018). Cooley et al. (2017) details foster parents' experience of the number of people they had to interact with in regard to each placement. Also, important to note was how overwhelmed those individuals felt in the process of school enrollment and other education-related activities (Cooley et al., 2017). While there may have been an abundance of information shared, the amount of information foster parents were denied or that was incorrect about the child's situation was vast (Cooley et al., 2017). This question sought to address practical solutions in helping foster youth succeed from the perspective of the foster parent.

Sub-Question Three

The final sub-question that was examined was: How do foster parents describe their challenges in engaging with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area?

Current literature does not address enrollment procedures directly, but its relevance to the entire academic process of the foster youth's experience and the foster parent's process was addressed in this study. The enrollment process at the high school level includes obtaining educational records from all previous schools (South Carolina Legal Services, 2018). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires public schools to immediately enroll foster youth. Without the correct information, foster youth are often placed in courses where they have previously earned credit, making the courses unnecessary for the student or are in the incorrect courses until their records can be obtained (Clemens et al., 2018). This process of obtaining accurate prior educational records is beneficial not only because foster youth need to be in school, but also because withholding or ignoring relevant information is detrimental to proper course placement to earn the correct Carnegie units for a South Carolina high school diploma (McMillan & Barber, 2020).

Definitions

1. *Foster youth*- Children who are removed from their homes of origin or other permanent placements and are under the care of the state they reside in (Leathers et al., 2018; Olsen & Montgomery, 2018).
2. *Foster parent*- Individuals who commit to being temporary or sometimes permanent caregivers for foster youth (Leathers et al., 2018).
3. *Out-of-Home Placement (or Placement)*- A temporary or permanent dwelling for foster youth that can be with either a foster parent or in a group setting (Leathers et al., 2018).

4. *Carnegie Unit* - A unit to measure student achievement based on a set time spent on educational material (McMillan & Barber, 2020).
5. *Mandated Reporters* – A group of people required by law to report possible abuse or neglect of a child (Lau et al., 2009).
6. *Advocates* - Individuals who work to make situations and circumstances better for the foster youth (Lamb et al., 2022).

Summary

This chapter serves to introduce the study at hand and provide an overview of the background and need for further insight into foster parent perspectives of the South Carolina public school system. The problem is that foster parents tend to be the last to know of information regarding their foster youth placements, due to a lack of communication with caseworkers, other agency workers or guardian *ad litem*s (Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the phenomenon of foster parents' experiences with the South Carolina public school system specifically in the upstate of South Carolina including Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties. The study was important as it addresses a gap in the current literature of foster parents' lived experiences within the South Carolina public school system and their high school foster youth placements.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Foster parents play an imperative role in the lives of their foster placements because in some situations a foster parent's consistency and advocacy is the first time someone has shown interest in the foster child's educational career or life in general (Berlin et al., 2019; Chodura et al., 2021; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Neal, 2017; Rayburn et al., 2017; Storer et al., 2014). If foster parents are not given access to educational information and feel inadequate or unable to help their foster placement be successful, the disconnect for the student may be unsurmountable (Bartnikowska et al., 2022). The lack of information and accessibility could have a significant impact on the student's long-term progress and goals (Bartnikowska et al., 2022, Berlin et al., 2019). A look into the differences between how biological or otherwise specified guardianship and foster families are treated in the school system is needed, based on the gap in the current literature. The gap in literature is also vast with regard to the enrollment process of high school foster youth. This research sought to explore the experiences of foster parents during the enrollment process of public high schools in the upstate of South Carolina. Overall perceptions of foster parents and their views of the public school system in the upstate of South Carolina was also explored.

In most schools, enrollment procedures, communication, and other forms of school-home interactions were built for a biological or at the very least a more permanent family placement (Clemens et al., 2017). The literature has shown that foster children benefit greatly from advocacy and their educational success hinges on supportive people in their lives (Berlin et al., 2019; Cudjoe et al., 2022). This research covered the gap in literature of how foster parents perceive the public school system in the upstate of South Carolina and will document their lived

experiences during the enrollment process and school placements. This research also addressed the assessibility foster parents have experienced within the public school system with regard to local public high schools. The research sought to identify the current gaps in literature with regard to foster parent's overall view of the school system and procedures (i.e., enrollment, home-to-school communication and relational communication between teachers and foster parents). Chapter Two provides an overview of the proposed research, theoretical framework, related literature and a summary section. The goal of the research is to explore the perceptions foster parents have on the school districts in which they interact.

Theoretical Framework

A transformative framework shapes this study, as foster children and foster parents can find themselves marginalized (Jackson et al., 2018). Once this knowledge is brought to light, one must decide what to do with the knowledge since the knowledge is not neutral (Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), that knowledge holds power and authority. The goal is to use the information to transform situations for those impacted (Brown, 2006). This research sought to address the gap in literature with regard to South Carolina foster parents and their perceptions of the public high schools in the upstate of South Carolina, specifically focusing on the high school enrollment process during transition periods for their foster youth placements. As an educator on the front lines within Spartanburg County, I can use the information gathered in the study to help educate those in leadership to better assist and serve both foster students and their foster parents.

Dr. Claire Cameron has written numerous articles and also contributed to many articles on foster youth and their educational experiences (Cameron et al., 2020a; Cameron et al., 2020b). Serving as a professor of social pedagogy in London, England, Cameron has co-

authored a book specifically targeted to improve the educational lives of students in state care (Cameron et al., 2020a). The inequities that foster parents have perceived in school systems as they work to help their foster placements is most directly highlighted in Cameron's research (Cameron et al., 2020a, Cameron et al., 2020b; Jackson & Cameron, 2015). Jackson and Cameron (2015) overview current conditions of educational access for foster children and their caregivers and then give practical solutions for those less than favorable conditions. Cameron's research shows how a security-first mindset (i.e., putting the foster youth's security above education and other necessities in children's lives) led to lower educational attainment in foster youth (Cameron et al., 2020b). Helping foster parents, foster students, and educators collaborate for the best interest of the child seems to be a common thread in Cameron's research (Cameron et al., 2020a; Cameron et al., 2020b; Jackson & Cameron, 2015).

Sally Donovan has authored two books recognized by educators to be beneficial to understanding the role teachers play in the lives of foster students and the journey of foster placements as a whole (Donovan, 2013; Donovan, 2014). Both a foster and adoptive mother, Donovan is an advocate for educational equity for those students in foster care (Donovan, 2013; Donovan, 2014). Donovan's (2014) guide highlights the differences between biological and foster youth's interactions with the world around them and is imperative to explore for the possible inequity that exist between those students and their caregiver's experiences.

Research suggests that the foster parent role is more difficult than biological or traditional caregivers within the public school system (Donovan, 2014). These difficulties come from lack of information about their placements and lack of knowledge in the areas foster youth need help with (Donovan, 2014). Foster parents have an incrementally more difficult time finding the paperwork required for various aspects of everyday life for their foster placements as paperwork

is lost or destroyed in the transient nature of care (Donovan, 2013). Donovan's work highlights the gap in research of foster parents as they navigate enrollment procedures for public high school (Donovan, 2013; Donovan, 2014).

Nathanael J. Okpych is an assistant professor in Connecticut who has researched post-secondary outcomes for foster youth, which he attributed mainly to the advocacy that foster youth had during their high school years (Okpych, 2022). Okpych (2022) utilized National Youth in Transition (NYTD) data (i.e., perceptions on caregivers, advocacy of caregivers and other stakeholders, and overall foster youth perceptions of their educational careers) to provide possible revisions that could be made in an effort to obtain more useful data from foster youth. Having more accurate and pointed information (i.e., needs of foster youth in a public educational system or needs from foster parents about what would make the process easier) about what foster youth need would allow for the data to be used to change current policies and practices to assist foster youth with their most important needs (i.e., enrollment procedures or academic assistance for transitional periods of placements) (Okpych, 2022).

Okpych and Courtney (2019) propose that foster youth who extend their time in foster care for the purpose of receiving assistance in their independent living transition have a higher likelihood to complete their post-secondary endeavors. Extending time in care is most often equated to foster youth who have experienced great advocates during their time in the foster care system whether that be through foster parents, teachers, or other stakeholders (Avant et al., 2021; Morton, 2015; Okpych and Courtney, 2019; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). It is important to understand the trends that keep foster youth from being successful academically and socially in order to help facilitate processes to help increase that success.

While Cameron, Donovan, and Okpych have made important contributions to the study of foster youth and their experiences, there is little in the literature that addresses foster parent experiences. There is even less literature that covers school experiences in South Carolina. The goal of this research is to discover the lived experiences of South Carolina foster parents in the upstate in order to facilitate conversation and change between the foster parent and the school districts in which they interact. This research fits well with a hermeneutical, phenomenological approach with regard to participants' lived experiences. Hermeneutical approaches focus on the participants' lived experiences as opposed to transcendental approaches, which focus on data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Two main theories drive this research, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Foucault's Theory of Power. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that there are five basic needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). In this research, the perspective of how foster parents' needs are met is of utmost importance as the lived experiences of those foster parents are explored. As one examines the pyramid that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs follows, basic needs are at the bottom (i.e., food and water) and self-actualization is at the top (Maslow, 1970). In looking at how those correlate to this particular research, one can assume that foster parents' first job is to meet the basic physiological needs of their placement providing them with food and water (Maslow, 1970). Next, a foster parent works up the pyramid to safety (Maslow, 1970). Safety can be a tough task to provide for a foster youth since they can present as inherently untrusting of those around them (Miller et al., 2021). Foster youth struggle with attachment because of the abandonment they have experienced either by biological family members or others as a result of being in multiple placements (Cleary et al., 2018; Clemens et al., 2017).

Love and belonging are next on the pyramid, which foster parents seek to provide as a result of the relationship they attempt to establish with placements, which again, can be difficult due to the transient nature of foster care (Maslow, 1970; Olsen & de Montgomery, 2018; Zorc et al., 2013). Another barrier to love and belonging for foster youth is the inconsistency they have experienced of those who show them love (Fawley-King et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2019). This inconsistency can lead to issues such as reactive attachment disorder (RAD) that further complicates foster youths' ability to form relationships (Caplovitz et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2018). Next is self-confidence and respect, which when looking at the foster parent role, can be one of difficulty as well (Maslow, 1970). Foster parents are often given little to no information about their foster placements, leaving them with little confidence to move forward with the school system they are enrolling the student in (Bartinikowska et al., 2022; Berlin et al., 2019). Finally, in looking at the final stage of self-actualization, a foster parent may only be able to reach this stage once all the stakeholders coincide with a common goal for the foster youth in question (Maslow, 1970). Once that final stage is met, both the foster parent and foster youth may experience more fluidity in both their relationship with one another and the relationship in the student's educational journey.

Foucault's Theory of Power challenged the idea that knowledge is power and that power is knowledge (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011). Foucault sought to discover the underlying truths of the lived experiences of research subjects instead of looking at the clearly recognizable and conscious renderings of the subjects (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). Foucault's Theory of Power also asserted that power strives to make the activating person or event more obedient and, in turn, it becomes more useful (Lynch, 2010). In line with this information, one can assert that if all things are in place and stakeholders are working together to ensure fidelity in the public school

system enrollment process, usefulness increases for all involved with regard to ease of accessibility. In regard to power, Foucault asserts that opposing the powerful and powerless against one another creates an imbalanced relationship (Christenson, 2023). No matter which direction the power is imbalanced, whether with the school system or the foster parent, the foster youth suffer because of the power struggle between the two entities (Farnsworth et al., 2022; Fernandez, 2019; Meetoo et al., 2020).

In this research, it was important to not only look at what is said from participants but also what is underlying in their lived experiences. As foster parent's experiences are documented, the power relationship can be explored between foster parents and the public-school systems in which they are involved. In exploring the relationships between foster parents and the school system, dynamics can be explored to clarify where or if issues are present. Identifying issues and illuminating stakeholders of the issues can help alleviate potential detrimental consequences of the power dynamic that Foucault addresses (Christenson, 2023; Lynch, 2010; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013).

Related Literature

Trauma in Foster Children

Children do not come into foster care because they have ideal childhood experiences. Children come into foster care having experienced sometimes the most unimaginable trauma due to physical, emotional, or mental abuse or neglect (Caplovitz et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2018; Clemens et al., 2017; Fawley-King et al., 2017). According to Clemens et al. (2017), the most frequent reason that children enter foster care is due to neglect which is mostly reported by the school system in which the child is a student. Unfortunately, sometimes that trauma does not end when they come into foster care (Caplovitz et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2018). Much like many

areas where help is needed, foster caregivers are sparse, and therefore, children can be transitioned from one placement and school to another, void of any stability (Clemens et al., 2017; Fawley-King, 2017). The lack of stability associated with foster care can lead to disruption in all areas of a child's life and can lead to them feeling out of control and exhibiting troublesome behaviors which could lead to more movement within foster homes (Fawley-King et al., 2017). Because of the typically traumatic background of foster youth, it is important to examine their mental health status frequently and address those needs immediately (Parker et al., 2019). The role of foster parents within the mental health status of their placements is imperative as the research will address the importance of advocacy and the difference that advocacy can make in the lives of foster youth (Chodura et al., 2021; Gil Llarío et al., 2013; Jacobsen et al., 2018; List et al., 2021; Parry et al., 2021). One of the most difficult tasks a foster parent can accomplish is seeing through facades that foster youth may present because they grow tired of answering questions or explaining their life stories to people they view as temporary and transient (List et al., 2021).

The nature of foster care involves children and teenagers waking up in a completely different location within a stranger's home after being removed from the only home they may have ever known (Fawley-King et al., 2017). While situations of removal may look dire to those on the outside, many times those children do not realize the severity of their situations because they do not know any different (Chodura et al., 2021; Fawley-King et al., 2017; Parry et al., 2021). When removed from their familiar home environment, children can experience fear, anger, and confusion, yet the student is still expected to continue going to school as if their entire world has not been disrupted (Goemans et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2019). Children tend to value their family of origins even if there is significant dysfunction or even abuse and neglect present

(Chodura et al., 2021; Parry et al., 2021). This lack of stability includes not only changes in living arrangements for the foster student but also changes in school placements leading to a disruption in their academics (Goemans et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2010).

The multiple placements that many foster youths have to deal with make school attendance an issue that creates ripple effects (Parker et al., 2019; Zorc et al., 2013). Even if a student enters the exact same class at a different school, teachers move at different paces, leaving the student who has just transferred into a brand-new environment feeling lost or confused (Olsen & de Montgomery, 2018; Zorc et al., 2013). There are times that children are moved not only across the state but sometimes across state lines because foster placements are sparse (Blakeslee, 2015). Zorc et al. (2013) contend that this avoidable absenteeism associated with placement changes must be a priority for the student to experience academic success and ultimately continuity of the educational experience and information. When a student feels lost or out of control in the classroom, engagement lessens and behaviors (i.e., talking out, disruptions, tantrums, and other problem behaviors) tend to increase (Olsen & de Montgomery, 2018).

Morton (2018) reports that the trauma foster youth endure only intensifies the likelihood of difficulties within the school system which in turn creates a disturbance in most other areas of their lives. Once a student has multiple behavior offenses or even one event that is deemed severe, they can be placed in an alternative school setting (Hobbs et al., 2021). If that setting is not a good fit or there are other issues, the juvenile justice system becomes involved (Höjer et al., 2018). Occasionally, students can attend an online or night program to speed up their time in the alternative setting while attending other behavior modification classes (DuBois-Comtois et al., 2015; Gelkopf, 2018). For some, this placement is helpful because as Gelkopf (2018) noted, trauma begets trauma. A large portion of foster students have higher ACE (Adverse Childhood

Experience) scores, and typically students who have experienced trauma are drawn to one another because they feel understood by someone who has had similar experiences (Gelkopf, 2018).

ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, (defined as birth through seventeen years of age) and were researched first in an unreleased report to the public data (Dube, 2020). ACEs are fairly common overall with over half of all Americans experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience before eighteen (Center for Disease Control [CDC], n.d.). While not in the name, ACEs are often closely tied to trauma (Dube, 2020). Typically, youth suspected of experiencing trauma are given a questionnaire to measure the extent of the trauma. The ACE questionnaire consists of 10 yes or no questions. The questions are to be answered in reference to the first 18 years of life (Appendix B). For each yes question one point is scored with the higher the score the more adverse childhood experiences occurred, theoretically leading to an increase in future risks (Wheeler et al., 2020). Although, on rare occasions a foster child may have low scores on the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) scale, typically trauma, foster care, and ACEs are closely tied together (Clemens et al., 2018). When one understands the types of trauma foster youth have endured, stakeholders can come together to work out a plan that best fits the needs of that particular student (Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). Foster parents are the front runners in advocacy for their foster placements who may have high ACE scores (Liming et al., 2021). With foster children experiencing one or more ACEs, it is important that foster parents and other stakeholders take those experiences into consideration and make the transition of schools as seamless for them as possible.

While there seem to be various views about what constitutes an ACE, it is fair to assume that a child in foster care has not had an ideal childhood (Lacey & Minnis, 2020). More

important to note, is that these ACEs typically produce other adverse outcomes such as lower academic and social performance and behavior issues (Korpics et al., 2021). The behavior issues, if not addressed with either an intervention (i.e., therapy or a natural negative consequence of the behavior), lead to an increased risk of incarceration as an adult (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2020; Hobbs et al., 2021). Screening tools vary in assessing ACEs in youth, but the overall goal of each assessment is to track a youth's experience. When scoring ACEs one of the main concerns is that scores are not truly indicative of future outcomes as resilience within youth cannot be predicted (Lacey & Minnis, 2020). Once foster parents and other stakeholders understand the whys behind the behaviors that may be troubling, empathy is more likely to occur and communication about how to move forward can take place (Liming et al., 2021). Looking at other research, it seems to point back that foster parents and other stakeholder's actions of advocacy or the foster youth's access to supports and ease of educational access play a larger role in future outcomes (Berlin et al., 2019; Chodura et al., 2021; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Neal, 2017; Rayburn et al., 2017; Storer et al., 2014).

Foster youth are fortunate to finish high school, and are likely not to continue on to post-secondary endeavors without significant support (Liming et al., 2021). When comparing foster youth and non-foster youth, 2% of foster youth completed a bachelor's degree or higher in comparison to their non-foster youth peers at a 27.5% bachelor's completion rate (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Educational neglect occurs when a child's educational needs go unmet (Children's Law Center, 2005). This could happen because a child is chronically absent from school or if a caregiver impedes the educational process in a way that causes the child to not be successful academically (i.e., does not enroll the child in school or refuses to make their child attend school)

(Children's Law Center, 2005). Overall, the importance of educating those adults and other stakeholders involved in students' lives about ACEs proves to be imperative for both educational and societal success to occur for foster youth (Liming et al., 2021; Morton, 2018).

Foster Care Considerations Within School

The bedlam that is foster care is only exacerbated within the public school system as most foster children can rarely establish continuity of educational services or social supports due to moves and changes (Fawley-King et al., 2017). Moyer and Goldberg (2019) report that foster students recognize teachers treating them differently, having lower expectations for them than their peers, and treating them like an outlier without working to understand their backgrounds. Bartnikowska et al. (2022) report that foster children typically have a higher likelihood to have needs for special education either from emotional, behavioral, or social standpoints. Foster youth are three times more likely to need accommodations through special education than their non-foster youth peers (Gee, 2022; Montserrat & Casas, 2018). Sanders and Fallon (2018) suggest that these academic difficulties tend to affect foster youth's academic achievement, their self-worth, and eventually can lead to a decline in overall health.

Mwoma and Pillay (2016) deduce that education is a basic right of children and when proper support is put into place for foster youth to succeed, the benefits are immense. Those benefits include but are not limited to an overall more positive worldview for the foster youth, increased self-worth and higher levels of academic and vocational success (Mwoma & Pillay, 2016). Farnsworth et al. (2022) examines the legalities of those involved directly in the educational outcomes of foster children. The need for special education comes with mandatory meetings called individualized education plans (IEPs) that must be implemented to ensure the appropriate modifications and accommodations (Bartnikowska et al., 2022). Educational records

such as IEPs for foster youth are often completed quickly to meet deadlines and can take place without a caseworker, foster parent, or another advocate for the child present (Bartnikowska et al., 2022). Overall insufficient resources such as these can cause problems across the board with the agency placing the child, the school, the student and the foster parent (Bartnikowska et al., 2022).

Although they have been displaced from their homes of origin, students in foster care desire to be treated like any other student and not pitied by teachers, peers, and others (Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). While some foster youth have an innate resiliency to succeed aside from any outside encouragement or support, many foster youths need support from someone that they can trust (Holmes et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2021). Without innate resiliency or support, foster youth can become victim to learned helplessness, which produces an overall mindset of despair (Miller et al., 2021; Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). Due to this discrepancy in treatment, there is hesitancy about what foster youth report and to whom (Anderson et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2021). This hesitancy proves that trust is difficult to build likely because of the lack of care continuity in the students' lives; therefore, finding an educator they trust is important (Holmes et al., 2018; Farnsworth et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2021). Understanding that foster children come to school with traumatic events that already interfere with their learning outcomes, researchers sought to uncover the most helpful ways to navigate the educational journey of a foster child (Blakeslee, 2015; Farnsworth et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2021; Moyer & Goldberg, 2019). As the foster youth experience within the educational system is explored, a pattern of advocacy being important is discovered (Anderson et al., 2016; Blakeslee, 2015; Clemens et al., 2017; Goemans et al., 2018; Lamb et al., 2022).

Social Emotional Development for Foster Youth and their Caregivers

The development of youth in foster care is often delayed at the onset of abuse or entrance into care (Chodura et al., 2021). This impact can be due to physical abuse or mental abuse leading to neurological deficits (Chodura et al., 2021). Knowing that foster youth often are not at the age-appropriate developmental levels as their non-foster youth peers, it is imperative for foster parents to be trained in trauma-informed care (Parry et al., 2021). The trauma that foster youth have endured directly impacts their abilities to develop emotionally, mentally, and even physically, and those involved directly with foster youth must seek to understand this in order to provide support to these students (List et al., 2021). When a foster parent is willing to emotionally invest in a child and is aware of the influence their parenting and direction have in a child's life, research has shown that those children's socio-emotional functioning will increase (Jacobsen et al., 2018).

This strong emotional attachment that is formed by this emotional investment allows foster youth the opportunity to build self-confidence and facilitates cognitive development which can be advantageous as the child navigates school and the world around them (Gil Llario et al., 2013). It seems that, regardless of geographical location, children everywhere desired to feel safety and security and within those confines seem to perform better socially, emotionally, and academically, and those that care for them encounter similar experiences (Apedaile et al., 2022; Cameron et al., 2020a; Mwoma & Pillay, 2016). When a child lacks safety and security, they are more likely to be diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) which keeps them from establishing and maintaining healthy relationships through their lifetimes (Caplovitz et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2018).

Foster Youth Experience

Miller et al. (2021) explore the educational experiences of foster youth through interviews and gives a voice to the foster youth community. Foster youth are often without an advocate when it comes to most things in life but especially education as there may be a high rate of turnover in school placement due to changing home placements (Hass et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2021). Goemans et al. (2018) highlight the discrepancies in educational success and overall educational relationships between foster children and those in non-foster home settings. Goemans et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of studying foster children's school engagement as it closely aligns with academic success. Hass et al. (2014) identify resiliency as a key factor in the success of foster youth noting that they have to navigate uncharted waters as they shuffle through the broken system of foster care. Many moves in placement are directly related to problematic behaviors exhibited by foster youth; the behaviors are typically caused by the feelings of chaos in the foster youth's life (Goemans et al., 2017). In the vein of resiliency, foster youth tend to have higher rates of early parenting which contributes to a more complicated but often successful educational experience (Schelbe et al., 2022).

While reunification is typically the goal of foster care, sometimes it is not best, which brings a new set of issues (Mires et al., 2018; Montserrat, 2020; Nadorff et al., 2021). These issues can include returning to an unhealthy environment or continuing a cycle of abuse that follows the child for their entire lifetime (Mires et al., 2018; Montserrat, 2020; Nadorff et al., 2021). Foster and adoptive parents are often well-educated; therefore, internal values of education may be strained by their adoptive children who often face struggles educationally (Goldberg et al., 2021). Placing foster youth with a relative is called kinship care (Birchall & Holt, 2022). Another placement of foster youth is fictive kinship care when the caregiver is not biologically related but is willing to take custody without formally becoming a foster parent

(Birchall & Holt, 2022). As one looks at enrollment paperwork in the school system, forms can and typically still have dated language of “mother and father” on the forms instead of “guardian”. The different avenues of custody (i.e., foster home, kinship care, fictive kin) can make the school paperwork process complicated due to the many caregivers involved (Mires et al., 2018; Nadorff et al., 2021).

Foster Care Globally

Television and radio commercials, churches and other avenues to push toward educating the general public about foster care in the United States seem to be a regular occurrence even if the need for foster care remains the same (Davi et al., 2021; Smith, 2016). In other countries, child abuse and neglect leading to out-of-home placements are present as well (Parry et al., 2021; Pirttimaa & Väliavaara, 2018). Similar research with regard to educational attainment and overall academic success has been studied across the world as well (Apedaile et al., 2022; Cameron et al., 2020b; Raby et al., 2017). Much like research from the United States, Finland studies report that foster youth have lower levels of success socially, emotionally, and academically (Pirttimaa & Väliavaara, 2018).

Interestingly in Kenya, children who are placed in institutions as opposed to single-family homes, seem to have a higher educational attainment and overall success (Apedaile et al., 2022). However, in England and Sweden, parents who placed emotional security ahead of educational attainment seemed to have more academically successful outcomes in their foster placements (Cameron et al., 2020a). Höjer et al. (2018) report the negative impact of multiple placement changes while in foster care. These changes can have a significant influence on how foster youth navigate life not only academically but socially which mirrors the issues that foster youth face in the United States. Mwoma and Pillay (2016) discuss the importance of educational

support and the difference it has made for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in South Africa.

Advocacy in Care

Without a consistent advocate in the child's life, the child will face educational hardships throughout their years in the school system, which will also impact their future beyond their school years (Mires et al., 2018). All students, not just foster youth, can benefit from that feeling of connectedness to someone whom they perceive as on their side and supportive of them (Lamb et al., 2022; Perkins et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2022). For foster youth, however, it is of utmost importance for them to establish a healthy relationship with an adult who will support and advocate for their needs since they lack a consistent parental figure (Fernandez, 2019; Lamb et al., 2022; Mires et al., 2018). Interestingly enough, Leon and Dickson (2019) report that youth who are placed into kinship care as opposed to foster homes of non-relatives report a slightly higher level of satisfaction (i.e., increased self-worth, increased post-secondary and vocational success) after high school. This information proves that while advocacy of any kind is important, familial connection does have a marked impact on foster youth satisfaction (Fernandez, 2019; Lamb et al., 2022; Leon & Dickson, 2019; Mires et al., 2018). Fernandez (2019) highlights the importance of stability for foster students in regard to their long-term educational success in Australia. Fernandez (2019) emphasizes the need for all stakeholders in a foster student's life to work together to ensure not only educational success but success across their lifespan as well. When foster parents and schools can work together to ensure ease of transitions, students have the potential to benefit greatly.

Students benefit from resources meant to engage the familial unit (Anderson et al., 2016; Blakeslee, 2015; Moyer et al., 2019). However, Anderson et al. (2016) found that support for

foster youth and their supporting schools is most beneficial when schools take action and responsibility for their roles in foster youth's educational journeys. When it comes to education and whose responsibility it is to ensure, foster youths are given a suitable chance at succeeding, even though it can seem like one person passes that responsibility down the line to the next foster parent, teacher or caseworker (Montserrat & Casas, 2018). The importance of support for foster youth who are exiting care directly impacts post-secondary plans for some of those youth where enrollment processes can prove to be difficult to navigate for foster youth leaving high school (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Pecora et al., 2006). The idea that supports must be in place for foster youth to be successful speaks to the importance of advocacy at all levels (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Weinberg et al., 2014). Students who received the help from outside sources (i.e., foster parents, mentors, teachers, clergy and lay-elders, caseworkers) listed support reported higher levels of overall satisfaction and also reported feeling like those stakeholders that had advocated for them were their family (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Weinberg et al., 2014).

School Perceptions of Caregivers

Conversations about parental involvement in schools are long-standing as schools work to increase parental involvement with hopes to improve academic and social success for students (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Flaker, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Yang et al., 2023). In response to the perception schools have about the lack of parental involvement, schools have implemented strategies to improve their engagement (Yang et al., 2023). Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of parental involvement has been a sensitive topic as students have struggled academically to recover the time out of school (Yang et al., 2023). Schools report that parental involvement has decreased from pre-COVID since students returned to schools after the pandemic (Yang et al., 2023). It seems to be more prevalent for parents to be

involved outside of the school system (i.e., community sports, church activities, volunteer work) rather than during school-based services and activities (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). There is a disparity of parental involvement within certain ethnic/racial and socioeconomic groups, which can be attributed to various factors (i.e., transportation, employment status, overall opinion of the proposed activity and their need for involvement) (Day & Dotterer, 2018).

Most notably the literature concludes that there is no definitive description of what it means for caregivers to be involved in the lives of students (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Hagenars et al., 2022; Isernhagen et al., 2014; Leenders et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2023). Some teachers believe that parents should be in nearly constant (i.e., daily) communication about their student's progress, while others believe that as long as they are reachable by email or phone and attend parent-teacher conferences, then they are actively involved (Isernhagen et al., 2014; Leenders et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2023). Because of the lack of the definition of caregiver involvement, it is difficult to quantify the overall perception of how public-school systems view caregiver involvement.

An interesting viewpoint comes from Landeros (2011) who states that parental involvement would be more accurately listed as good mothering. Less involved caregivers reported that they felt those students with more involved parents were given more preferential treatment such as more focused attention for those students or increased access to academic assistance (Landeros, 2011). Various other responsibilities kept those caregivers from volunteering during the school-day, with most reporting jobs being the barrier to attending school-related activities (Landeros, 2011). When educators were asked their opinions about whether or not those students with more involved caregivers were granted preferential treatment, most quickly responded no; but others hesitated and admitted that those with more involved

parents were perceived as a more desirable student (Landeros, 2011; Zulaug-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2020). Even though educators and parents seem to agree that caregiver involvement is important, one must be careful not to allow the involvement or lack of involvement of caregivers to impact how a student is treated academically (Landeros, 2011; Zulauf-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2020).

Foster Parent Involvement in the Educational Lives of their Foster Placements

Skilbred et al. (2016) explore the involvement of foster parents in the educational lives of their foster placements. A look into the lives of 13 foster families and their educational practices and successes is reviewed. Skilbred et al. (2016) gave insight into the importance of daily activities performed in the foster home and their transformative effect on educational performance in the educational setting. Foster parents are provided trainings at the onset of their license then occasional trainings that maintain their license to learn skills to engage the family unit (Cleary et al, 2018; Cooley et al, 2017). These trainings typically include trauma-informed care aspects to help foster parents understand the lives of their placements and what foster youth have perhaps endured prior to entering their homes (Cleary et al., 2018; Cooley et al., 2018; Skilbred et al., 2016). Cameron et al. (2020a) focus on a younger demographic in foster care, early childhood, and the importance for foster parents to take an active role in the educational piece instead of depending solely on education to take place in a school environment. Foster parents who have high school aged placements need help as they navigate Carnegie units and the credits necessary for their placements to actually complete the high school graduation requirements. While research has not yet been conducted regarding the logistics of navigating the enrollment process for foster parents at the high school level, this research will attempt to close the gap of information in that particular area.

Across the United States there has been implementation of early intervention tools for parents or other guardians to determine if they feel additional support is needed for their children to succeed whether that be academically, socially, or emotionally (Cleary et al., 2018; Cooley et al., 2017; Davi et al., 2021; Harding et al., 2020). Cooley (2017) focuses on the overall stressors of being a foster parent as they learn to navigate the foster care system along with other challenges related to being a foster parent. Cooley (2017) details foster parents' experience of feeling like the number of people they had to interact with in regard to each placement was overwhelming. The individuals foster parents were engaging with were, more often than not, sharing misinformation (Cooley et al., 2017).

Research shows that advocates, whether they are foster parents, teachers, community leaders or friends, play a role in the educational success of foster youth (Fernandez, 2019; Lamb et al., 2022; Mires et al., 2018). One of the reported issues of these foster parents, as related to the educational success of the children in their home, was the frustration with the lack of support from the school system. Additionally, the foster parents reported that some of their own past experiences with the school system made advocating for their foster child difficult (Caplovitz Barrett et al. (2021). Berlin et al. (2019) examines the relationship between the educational attainment of the foster parent in relation to the educational success of the foster youth in their care. Ultimately, the study showed either no connection or a weak connection between foster parents' educational attainment and foster youth educational success (Berlin et al., 2019). Again, research shows that outside of a strong relationship formed with an advocate, other variables do not seem to play a bigger role in the overall success of foster youth (Berlin et al., 2019; Fernandez, 2019; Lamb et al., 2022; Mires et al., 2018). Trauma histories of those caregivers can serve many purposes depending on the individual, anywhere from strengths to

barriers to overall motivation for wanting to enter into a foster parenting role and in turn, how they perceive their overall experiences within the foster youth experience (Caplovitz Barrett et al., 2021).

During the enrollment process, if a good relationship has been established, the conversations can shift to a deeper focus on what tools and assistance needs to be implemented for the success of that student. Since enrollment processes include choosing courses for the student to take, foster parents need to establish a good relationship to ensure they know what the student's post-secondary goals are so they can plan accordingly during the enrollment process.

School Enrollment Process

The process of educational enrollment at any level can be a complicated and tedious process (Chamilco et al., 2023; Creaner et al., 2021; Hegde et al., 2019; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2021; Weixler et al., 2020). From early childhood education procedures, the complexity of the enrollment process proves to be a barrier (Weixler et al., 2020). Even when caregivers show an interest in the services available, the intricacy of enrollment can impede action (Chamilco et al., 2023; Hegde et al., 2019; Weixler et al., 2020). As students aged to adulthood, their lack of motivation to complete education prohibited their re-enrollment more so than the actual process of enrollment (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2021). Creaner et al. (2021) recognized the complexity of the enrollment process of adult learners as they attempt to complete professional development courses. Participant's feedback listed efficiency as a key improvement that could be made in the process as many questions seemed to be asked multiple times, and the process was repetitive allowing more room for error as participants rushed through similar material (Creaner et al., 2021).

Hegde et al. (2019) state that not only was the enrollment process tedious for those completing, the information actually gleaned from the enrollment was also not beneficial to those collecting the data. In a technological world, digitizing enrollment processes have also been explored as a way to streamline procedures for both the persons filling out the forms and the ones receiving the information (Chamilco et al., 2023). Efficiency is the goal for tasks as efficiency saves time and money (Chamilco et al., 2023). With technology driving efficient enrollment procedures, participants report more positive experiences (Chamilco et al., 2023; Hegde et al., 2019). Again, the gap in literature proves to be vast with regard to the high school enrollment process. Not only is there a gap in literature for foster youth, but there seems to be a gap for enrollment procedures for any student at the high school level.

Perceptions of Public Schools by Caregivers

Caregivers and educators alike agree that a strong home-school relationship is important for the success of students (Leenders et al., 2018; Wolf, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). Parents do not always feel that their opinions and efforts are valued by the school system and often can feel uninformed and not included in their student's educational process (Wolf, 2020). Of those parents who feel positively toward the public school system, most are actively involved in attending parent-teacher conferences, extracurricular activities, and are in regular communication with their student's teachers (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Yang et al., 2023). Many times, socioeconomic status and work schedules keep caregivers from taking a more active, present role in their student's academic careers (Isernhagen et al., 2014; Wolf, 2020). Because of this discrepancy, caregivers who do not have the means to be as involved often have a negative view of the schools largely due to their perception that schools have of their involvement (Mijis & Nieuwenhuis, 2022; Wolf, 2020).

When caregivers feel judgement over their lack of involvement, it can be difficult to engage in a relationship that is mutually beneficial for all parties (Isernhagen et al., 2014, Mijs & Nieuwenhuis, 2022; Wolf, 2020). Because of the shame associated with their particular situations, caregivers may struggle or be reluctant to ask for help during enrollment procedures or any other event or activity that their student may be involved in (Wolf, 2020). When those lines of communication are closed, students suffer as a result (Berlin et al., 2019; Fernandez, 2019; Lamb et al., 2022; Wolf, 2020).

Impacts of COVID-19 on Public School Perceptions

The global COVID-19 pandemic had a widespread impact the way public schools both ran and interacted with its stakeholders (i.e., students, parents and staff). (Gershy & Katz, 2023; Hagedaars et al., 2022; Schueler & Miller, 2023). While some students thrived in a virtual setting, some schools reported losing contact with students (Gershy & Katz, 2023; Schueler & Miller, 2023). Parental/caregiver communication also saw increased contact with some guardians and total loss of contact with others, leaving some students to navigate online learning completely alone as their guardians had to continue working (Gershy & Katz, 2023; Schueler & Miller, 2023). Much like circumstances outside of the pandemic, student success increased when there was steady engagement between parents and teachers (Gershy & Katz, 2023).

Most discouraging for teachers was the increased gap in the lower income family's communication (Hagedaars et al., 2022). In order for parents and teachers to build an effective working relationship that increases student success, parents must be able to maintain a continuous two-way communication (Hagedaars et al., 2022). Guardians who are forced to work long hours to meet their family's needs often are not able to support their children in the way teachers expect (Gershy & Katz, 2023; Hagedaars et al., 2022). This income disparity was also

present as students from lower income families needed help accessing their education because they may not have the capability to be successful in an online environment if internet access was not already available to them at home (Gershby & Katz, 2023). Because enrollment procedures typically take place either in person or via the internet, an income disparity, which may cause lack of transportation or lack of internet services in the home, would be a barrier to the enrollment process for caregivers.

Perceptions from caregivers shifted during the pandemic as well, leaving enrollment in public schools on a 2% decline after returning from COVID-19 after a typical 0.5% annual growth (Dee & Murphy, 2011). Looking into the details of why parents chose options other than public schools (i.e., charter schools, private schools, virtual schools), the most reported reason was to give students more individualized, focused attention (Dee & Murphy, 2011). Parents and educators agree that smaller class sizes with more individualized attention along with advocacy from a caregiver increase overall academic success, though the details of what that looks like to each party may differ greatly (Landeros, 2011; Powell et al., 2008, Zulauf & Zinsser, 2020).

Enrollment at Public Schools

While the actual enrollment process is not mentioned in literature often, the steady decline of enrollment in public schools has been discussed in detail (Chamilco et al., 2023; Creaner et al., 2021; Dee & Murphy, 2011; Flaker, 2014; Schueler & Miller, 2023). While the global COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of parents opting out of public-school enrollment, research prior to the pandemic has shown that there was a decline pre-pandemic as well as a result of various reasons (i.e., the desire for smaller settings, the desire for certain programming within a school setting, a dissatisfaction with current public-school policies, etc.) (Dee & Murphy, 2011; Flaker, 2014; Schueler & Miller, 2023). The increasing number of

charter school options with specialized curriculum, lower classroom sizes, and decreased mandatory testing for students seem to be a big draw for parents opting out of public-school enrollment (Flaker, 2014). These schools also have more flexibility to help parents with the enrollment process and often have time set aside to assist in the enrollment process leaving public schools at a disadvantage because of resources. This research will address the gap in how the enrollment process may hinder enrollment in the public school system.

Cohen (2023) highlights the insatiable desire for change in the realm of public schools. The rise of school choice and specialty private and charter schools partnered with the lack of resources and manpower of the public-school system has led to a growing disparity in public-school enrollment (*Foster Care Dashboard*, 2024). In South Carolina, there seems to be disproportion of race and socioeconomic status when comparing private versus public school enrollment across the state (Zhang et al., 2010). As caregivers look to find the best placement for their students, all aspects of education must be taken into consideration (i.e., ease of enrollment, transportation, services offered, academic curricula, extracurricular opportunities) in order to provide the best overall educational outcomes for students (Cohen, 2023).

Caregivers Strengths, Motivations, and Barriers

While ultimately, responsibility for a child's education falls on the custodial guardian, there are times when outside supports need to be put into place for the caregiver (Farnsworth et al., 2022; Meetoo et al., 2020; Van Wert et al., 2018). Another aspect that was highlighted was that regardless of religious affiliation, caregivers reported feeling misunderstood and undervalued by caseworkers and teachers (Meetoo et al., 2020). Caregivers felt their knowledge of the children in their home was most important when working together to provide the best care; therefore, all stakeholders must work together to ensure continuity of care (Farnsworth et al.,

2022; Meeto et al., 2020). Supportive teachers also had a significant impact on getting foster parents and biological parents engaged with the school system allowing for a more unified approach with the student (Yulianti et al., 2022). Even while a child is in foster care, it may be necessary to involve biological families in the decision-making processes for their child's education, which can be facilitated best when everyone works together, which speaks to the overall importance of continuity of care with the foster youth's best interest at the forefront of decision making (Farnsworth et al., 2022).

The Impact of Advocacy for Foster Youth

Due to the inconsistency of foster care in general, foster youth often have no support from specific, dependable people (Morton, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). These supports do not have to be biological family members, they should just be people willing to stand up for those foster youth affected (Morton, 2015). Teachers, administrators, church members, clergy, foster parents, community members or anyone willing to step up for foster youth can hold this advocacy space for them (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Avant et al. (2021) examined the lived experiences of seven youths who had spent time in foster care during their educational careers. Several interviewees stated that the support they received from foster parents and other influential adults was crucial to their success (Avant et al., 2021). Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) examined the lived experiences of former foster youth and the support they received or wished they had received while in care that would have been helpful to their overall success. Except for two, each of the interviewees stated that the support they received made a substantial difference in their overall educational and social success (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). That support came from former foster parents, biological family, friends, and other influential adults in their lives (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Most participants reported that the support they had

from those influential adults helped them to pursue the educational goals they had for themselves (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Caregivers' and friends' encouragement and support helped foster youth gain the confidence in self-advocacy they needed to ensure their future success (Avant et al., 2021).

Stapleton and Chen (2021) explored the connection between school systems and foster parents and the overall success of the foster child. The group this study focused on specifically were foster homes that were considered homes to higher needs foster children, otherwise known as therapeutic foster homes (Stapleton & Chen, 2021). Therapeutic foster homes can house foster youth who exhibit a myriad of emotional, mental or behavioral issues (i.e., sexual misconduct, pyromania, severe disabilities, multiple mental health diagnoses, severe trauma backgrounds, etc.) of which impact the level of care needed in the foster home (Stapleton & Chen, 2021). Stapleton and Chen (2021) utilized an approach from Christenson and Sheridan known as the “Four A’s.” This approach asserts that to accomplish a cohesive, collaborative relationship, stakeholders must look at approach, attitude, atmosphere, and actions (Stapleton & Chen, 2021). Using this approach, Stapleton and Chen (2021) found that the main difference in academic success for foster children was engaged foster parents and other stakeholders.

Morton (2015) examined the educational experiences of former foster youth and the support they attribute to their success through a phenomenological study. These supports could have included anyone from foster parents, teachers, administrators, coaches, caseworkers, or another stakeholder in the foster youth’s life (Morton, 2015). Again, one sees that there is no specific event that must occur or person that needs to be the advocate for foster youth (Avant et al., 2021; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). There only must be someone willing to take that role for the student (Avant et al., 2021; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Caseworkers and foster parents,

although not in the same focus group as the youth, seemed to agree that foster youth had little to no stake in the decisions typically made for them and thus argued how it could be beneficial for future success to include them in the decision-making processes for their lives (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Many times, because of the process of the foster care system, foster youth and their parents are legally mandated to remain separate while the foster youth is underage, but there are no restrictions once that child reaches adulthood (Havlicek, 2021).

Advocacy works best when all stakeholders have a common goal (Avant et al., 2021; Bartnikowska et al., 2022; Bustillos et al., 2022; Caplovitz Barrett et al., 2021; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Donovan, 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Mires et al., 2018). The enrollment processes of public high schools must be examined to ensure ease of access and ease of completion for all caregivers, including foster parents. If foster parents and other caregivers outside of the biological family can experience ease of access and a smooth enrollment process, students can have an educational experience that encourages and promotes their success both during school and beyond.

South Carolina Schools

Little literature covers educational processes in the state of South Carolina, but the ones that have covered South Carolina have the recurring theme of socioeconomic status and geography as it relates to school climate or healthy behaviors (Brown & Medway, 2007; Camp-Spivey et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2010). Brown and Medway (2007) concluded that schools that served primarily poor African-American populations in South Carolina seemed to be dependent on teacher expectations and instructional practices rather than parental involvement. Current literature counts the socioeconomic barriers to racially divided areas across South Carolina as the largest indicator of involvement and ease of access to resources through the school system

(Brown & Medway, 2007; Camp-Spivey et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2010). Although, parental involvement is important, and often highly influential in the academic success of students, teachers and school personnel must sometimes practice strategies to overcome the lack of that involvement (Isernhagen et al., 2014).

The vast discrepancy across South Carolina regarding socioeconomic status seems to be the most impactful factor within the public school system and parental involvement (Ben Arieh et al., 2008; Brown & Medway, 2007). Patterns show that students from lower socioeconomic status homes have on average 40% less parental involvement in public school systems than average socioeconomic families (Loft & Waldfogel, 2020). Across the United States as a whole, smaller more rural sectors tend to mimic the socioeconomic status of South Carolina (Ben Arieh et al., 2008; Brown & Medway, 2007; Landeros, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Yang et al., 2023; Zulauf-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2020). Research tends to show that those lower socioeconomic status communities have less school- to- home involvement which can lead to a strained relationship between the two entities (Brown & Medway, 2007; Isernhagen et al., 2014; Landeros, 2011; Yang et al., 2023). This research will address a gap in the upstate of South Carolina with regard to school-to-home involvement and seek to gain insight from foster parents about their perceptions regarding that gap.

Summary

Current literature speaks in great depth of the importance of advocacy for children in the foster care system (Avant et al., 2021; Bartnikowska et al., 2022; Bustillos et al., 2022; Caplovitz Barrett et al., 2021; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Donovan, 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Mires et al., 2018). Research also speaks to the impact of advocacy in care and the difference in educational success that those foster youth who have advocates are achieving (Stapleton & Chen, 2021; Rutman &

Hubberstey, 2016; Watt et al., 2013). Little research has been done not only about the experience of foster parents as they navigate the public education system but also any caregiver's enrollment experience with the public education system. This research sought to address the gap in literature relating to foster parent's perceptions of the public school system in the upstate of South Carolina.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe foster parents' experiences with the school system in which their foster child(ren) is/are enrolled in South Carolina. This research attempted to decrease the gap in literature regarding the overall experiences of foster parents as they enroll their high school aged foster placements in several public high schools in the upstate of South Carolina. Foster parents were asked to self-report information about the educational lived experiences of both their experiences along with those of their foster placements. The focus of those lived experiences must include interactions with high school aged foster youth within the confines of the upstate of South Carolina public schools. This goal of this study was to discover the impact of the roles of foster parents and what, if any, inequities existed from a foster parent's perspective regarding equal educational opportunity for students in foster care.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

This qualitative, phenomenological study was used to gain knowledge related to the perspectives of South Carolina foster parents as they partner with the South Carolina public school system to provide educational services for the children placed within their homes. Interviews and focus groups were utilized to gather information and record the participants' lived experiences. In this chapter, the design of the research, along with the research questions will be identified. Additionally, the setting, participants, and procedure of the study will be addressed. Information regarding the researcher's role will be conveyed to the reader as well. Finally, a discussion on data collection will be included in detail along with the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Design

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), phenomenological studies explore a specific phenomenon that has occurred within a group of individuals. In the case of this research, a group of six to eight foster parents who have all experienced the enrollment process of their foster students within the public school system in South Carolina was interviewed and their perspectives explored. These experiences reported both positive and negative outcomes and processes. This research fits well with a hermeneutical, phenomenological approach with regard to participants' lived experiences. Hermeneutical approaches focus on the participants' lived experiences as opposed to transcendental approaches, which focus on data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher chose this approach because foster parents live out their experiences daily with regard to interacting in everyday life but also within the school system. Gathering this information from a qualitative approach allows for rich information to be gathered from those

who have been closest to the information required for this study.

With the approval of Liberty University's Institutional Review Board, an informational letter was sent to the presidents of the Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union County Foster Parent Associations. The upstate of South Carolina was targeted because of the high number of foster placements and higher number of high school foster care placements than surrounding counties. Once the connection with the presidents was made, a recruitment letter was sent out within the foster parent associations to explain the purpose of the study along with an informed consent form. Once the researcher received information and participation agreements back from foster parents with previous or current high school placements, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Having high school student placements was preferred because of the Carnegie units attached to earning a South Carolina high school diploma and the enrollment process because that is a more in-depth process. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants the freedom to answer with their own experiences. These questions were designed to gather an understanding of the various experiences that foster parents in the upstate of South Carolina have within the public school system and to gain insight into those foster parent's perspectives.

Research Questions

1. How do current/previous foster parents of high school students perceive the South Carolina public school system?
2. How do South Carolina foster parents feel they are viewed by the public school system?
3. How do foster parents describe their experiences within the South Carolina public school system?

4. How do foster parents describe their enrollment process of their high school foster student within South Carolina public school systems?

Setting

The setting for this study was completed in the upstate of South Carolina where there was a potential for representation from 12 high schools across Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties. Ideally interviews would have been conducted in person but due to scheduling conflicts and increasing COVID-19 numbers in the area used for this research, all of the participants felt more comfortable using Microsoft Teams. Using these high schools allowed for representation from one of the largest classifications of high schools to the next to smallest high school in the state of South Carolina. In South Carolina, public high schools range from 1A schools under 500 students to 5A schools of over 2,500 students. With the wide spread of schools used, the researcher was able to gather information from lower income schools to one of the most affluent schools in the upstate of South Carolina. To ensure accessibility to participation, foster parent educational groups were targeted across the upstate, which typically meet in places such as the Department of Social Services building and local churches that have volunteered to hold the meetings and provide childcare. While Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties each have individual associations, they typically have joint meetings.

Participants

The participants were selected using purposeful sampling of homogeneous foster parent association members. Participants contained both male and female representation and contained members aged 25 and up. Heppner et al. (2020) speak to the lack of generalizability of a homogenous group, but a heterogeneous group would have not allowed for the data needed for the study. Purposeful sampling was used because participants needed to have students in their homes

or previously in their homes who had attended a public high school in the upstate of South Carolina (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participants were informed of the study and its goals and could volunteer to provide information via a questionnaire and participate in interviews when they were selected. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ensure that foster parents had experience with South Carolina public high schools. Using answers from the questionnaire, participants who met the desired group specifics were invited to participate in semi-structured individual interviews detailing their experiences with South Carolina public high schools.

Procedures

The study began with reaching out to the three foster parent association presidents for the upstate of South Carolina. The researchers then requested a meeting via phone call with each president to allow the opportunity to explain the importance and purpose of the study. Within this meeting, gaining permission for all forms of data collection was requested. Had the researcher been unable to gain permission for the study, the researcher would have broadened the scope of participants until reaching five to eight participants for the interviews. Each president was allowed to review the demographic questionnaire and the in-person individual interview questions prior to making their decisions in proceeding with meeting with possible participants. The researcher then met with each association and requested participants' informed consent prior to distributing the questionnaires. Once the questionnaires were distributed, participants were given a two-week deadline to complete the questions. All participants turned their forms in immediately forgoing the two-week deadline. Questionnaires were returned directly to the researcher as the researcher. Had participants needed time to complete the questionnaires, they were told that the researcher would meet foster parents to pick up the forms to ensure their confidentiality and security. Participants had the option to complete both the questionnaire and

in-person interview under a pseudo-name if they preferred. In-person individual timelines were given to the presidents of each association as well. Each president was informed of the collection (i.e., my in-person collection of the questionnaires), storage (i.e., locked filing cabinet in my home office when not being used for research purposes), and recording of the data collected in each setting (i.e., each president and participant will be informed of my dissertation process and procedure).

The Researcher's Role

I am a current school counselor, licensed professional counselor (LPC), and former foster parent. In my opinion, I have witnessed the inequity foster students are subject to both as a school counselor and a foster parent. My overall goal is to educate stakeholders in positions of influence to create opportunities for change within the current public school system. With more than a decade spent in the public education system and as a foster and adoptive mother, I am passionate about highlighting and eliminating discrepancies in how foster students are treated within the public school system. I grew up with a mother who worked in the foster care division at the Department of Social Services. My whole life I have been involved with foster care in some facet. While I was previously involved with the Spartanburg County Foster Parent Association, and have adopted two children from foster care, my husband and I closed our foster home license in 2018. My role as a Spartanburg/Cherokee foster parent association member has been ended for over five years and I have not had contact or involvement within the foster care realm during that time prior to this study.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected by way of two approaches: a demographic questionnaire and in-person individual interviews. First, the researcher obtained informed consent from all

participants. Next, a sample demographic questionnaire was emailed/mailed to each of the three foster parent association presidents and then the researcher personally handed out the questionnaires to possible participants during a meeting. This questionnaire provided information about which foster parents have had experience with high school student's enrollment process in the upstate of South Carolina. Next, to narrow down and obtain rich, personal, lived experiences, in-person individual interviews were conducted with participants who have foster high school age students. These interviews were conducted with those participants who were willing to participate in interviews to gather information about the lived experiences of foster parents and their involvement with South Carolina public schools.

Demographic Questionnaire

The questionnaire was researcher created in an attempt to gather a specific data set of participants who have had high school aged foster students in their homes. This questionnaire also prepared members of each foster parent association for future involvement in the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews serve to collect data firsthand from an individual who has experienced the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Heppner et al., 2020). Creswell and Poth (2017) state that interviews are used to explore the interviewee's perception of the world and discover the meaning of their experiences. While semi-structured interviews allow for adaptation from individual participants, the disadvantage is how to determine how much structure the interviewer should force in the interview (Heppner et al., 2020). Homogeneous sampling will be utilized, which Creswell and Poth (2017) describe as a way to simplify and facilitate future group interviewing after individual interviews take place.

Interview Questions:

1. Take a moment and describe the family dynamics of your home (i.e. who is in your home and how long have you been a foster parent).
2. Approximately how many foster students have you enrolled in high school in the public school system during your time as a foster parent?
3. What was the process for your first high school foster student enrollment in the public school system?
 - a. If you have had more than one high school foster placement, has the process been different for enrollment each time or stayed similar to the first experience?
4. How do you feel foster parents are viewed within the South Carolina school system in which your high school foster child(ren) is/was enrolled?
 - a. If you have biological children that you have enrolled in a high school setting, do you feel that the process or experience of enrollment varied from that of your foster student's enrollment?
5. How do you describe the biggest barriers when interacting on behalf of a high school foster student's educational experiences?
6. How would you describe your experiences for those high school students in foster care versus those not in foster care during the school enrollment process?
7. What is difficult or easy about navigating the high school setting in public school system as a foster parent?
8. Would you describe a high school foster student enrollment experience that you felt went well?
9. What has been the most important piece of knowledge you have gleaned through working with a public high school in the upstate of South Carolina as a foster parent?

10. How have your experiences shaped the way you view public education in South Carolina?

Question one is an icebreaker question to create comfortability and begin the conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Questions two and three are knowledge questions the researcher used to gather specific, detailed information about each participant's experiences. The researcher used question four to ask participants to share their own perceptions prior to fully engaging in the interview. Asking the questions in this order allowed for the answer to be less skewed by subsequent questions. Questions five and six addressed negative associations for the foster parent with regard to perceived inequities and other barriers they may have or may not have encountered. Questions seven through nine sought to uncover foster parents' experiences both positive and negative with the school system. Finally, the researcher used question ten to request a general picture and perception each foster parent has of the South Carolina public education system based on their personal experiences and interactions. This final question also allowed the participant to include information that may not have specifically been asked but which they feel strongly is important to share.

Data Analysis

Open coding is used to segment data into smaller pieces in an effort to identify reoccurring themes and concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher then identified the "core" phenomenon in order for the researcher to create categories around the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Composite description includes both textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher described the 'essence' of the participant's experiences regarding the phenomenon which is the key point of a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher included a paragraph in

the findings chapter to highlight both how and what the participants experienced regarding the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential and includes examining credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Heppner et al., 2020). These aspects will be addressed by three different methods for this study. Member checking is defined by Creswell and Poth (2017) as the process of asking participants to review the findings of the study for accuracy and fidelity. Member checking has been regarded as a prodigious tool to establish credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participants were asked to review the findings after completion to ensure that the researcher had accurately and with fidelity reported the findings.

Audits are used to determine if the findings of a study are backed by the data presented and to ensure that an auditor should have no connection to the data or the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

External audits allow for validation of research findings from an outside source furthering credibility in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reflexivity is achieved when the researcher is clear about any experiences or biases regarding the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This is a practice implemented to ensure the reader understands the viewpoint of why the research took place to begin with (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher was upfront with all participants about her prior role as a foster parent and her current role as an educator. Also, the researcher shared how her experiences led her to see this research as imperative to benefit foster parents, students and the South Carolina public educational system as a whole. None of the participants

had further questions about the researcher, the research process, or the study in general upon receiving the information provided by the researcher.

Credibility

Member checking will be utilized as a way to establish credibility as participants will review the findings for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2017). An external audit was utilized to further establish credibility as an auditor with no connection to the data or study can determine if the data that is presented backs the findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Dependability and Confirmability

The interview questions are meant to elicit a rich data on the lived experiences of foster parents in the upstate of South Carolina with relation to their lived experiences with the high school public school setting. Rich information from participants is a key component of a qualitative, phenomenological study as it allows for the lived experience perspective of the participants that phenomenology research is based on (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Transferability

Utilizing member checking allows for clarification and accuracy of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participant feedback allows the research the ability to ensure that future studies would have similar outcomes if the same phenomenon is being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Heppner et al., 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Because of the shortage of foster parents, the same foster parents remain involved in the school system over and over. As a response, to protect their relationships with the school systems they are involved with, pseudonyms were utilized in an effort to create as much confidentiality as possible. Each of the participants opted to utilize the pseudonym option to

protect their identity moving forward. The researcher committed to securely maintaining data collected by means of locked filing cabinets and password-protecting any research information and audio recordings that contain any identifiable information.

Summary

The researcher in this study aimed to determine foster parents' perception of the South Carolina public education system. Data collection through a questionnaire and in-person individual interviews helped gather information to determine lived experiences of those foster parents. This chapter included the research design and participants.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The researcher of this qualitative phenomenological study looked to examine the lived experiences of foster parents who had fostered high school aged students in one of the seven Spartanburg County schools. A review of the literature left much to be discovered about the enrollment process in public school systems. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of foster parents in the upstate of South Carolina as they navigate public high schools with their foster placements. The overall perception of how foster parents view the educational system in the upstate of South Carolina was also examined.

This chapter includes the results of semi-structured interviews with the participants. The researcher aimed to ask questions to discover the lived experiences of these foster parents. These foster parents described their experiences as they navigated the Upstate South Carolina public schools where they enrolled foster placements. Of the seven districts in Spartanburg County, only three of the nine high schools are represented.

Participants

A total of six foster parents were interviewed, including one married couple. Each participant was over the age of 25 and either a current or former foster parent who had enrolled a high school aged foster student in public school in one of the seven Spartanburg school districts. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants as there are few foster homes in the area that are licensed for high school aged foster youth. Each of the interviews was held virtually through Microsoft Teams and lasted no longer than 30 minutes each. Of the six participants, five were White and one was biracial; additionally, four females and two males were represented in the participants.

Table 1*Participants*

Pseudonyms	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Total Years Foster Parenting
Mary	Female	White	45	5
Jerry	Male	White	61	10
Linda	Female	White	56	3
Tim and Angie	Male/Female	White	55	6
Marissa	Female	Biracial	43	5

Mary

Mary is a homeschooling mother of six biological children. She is a current foster mother with only one experience enrolling a high school aged foster student, as she typically reserves the ‘beds’ (this participant along with two others used this terminology to discuss availability for placements within their homes) in her home for younger placements due to the age of her biological children. Mary stated many times that she has nothing against the public education system as a whole, but chooses to home school her children and wishes that was an option for foster youth placed in her home. Mary stated that foster children are required by the state to be enrolled in the public school within the foster parent’s attendance zone and cannot be homeschooled by the foster parent even if the biological children in the home are homeschooled. Mary’s experience with the high school aged foster student was a little over a year ago, and she describes the overall experience as positive yet chaotic at the onset of the process.

Mary first spoke to beginning the process of enrollment as she is zoned for a large high school. All the stakeholders in her foster placement’s life felt a smaller high school would be best. She, along with the support team around her placement, felt that it was in the best interest of the student to attend a smaller high school and petitioned the district office to ensure that happened. She completed the online registration for the student and expressed frustration that

there was not more universally friendly verbiage used throughout the process. She clarified that many of the questions still had language like mother/father instead of guardian or more neutral caregiver names. Mary also stated that the information asked of her was irrelevant for her foster son's enrollment process. Since her home was only a temporary residency for him, she did not understand why all of her tax and property information was necessary for the school. She felt that the foster parent agreement placing her foster son in her home should have sufficed for his enrollment. Instead, she was asked to provide two forms of residency and give detailed personal information for herself even though her foster son's caseworker would need to be the first point of contact for the school in a serious incident.

Once past the online enrollment process, Mary encountered an issue with records for her foster son. Mary's foster placement had been moved around so frequently his records were mostly incomplete or missing information altogether. Mary expressed frustration that the school personnel, although kind and mostly accommodating, refrained from starting her foster son in classes because they were waiting for records. Mary felt her son lost valuable instruction time waiting on things outside of the control of both her "son" and Mary. Mary mentioned that she had confidence that she would not have to encounter that again because at a recent training she learned of the immediate enrollment form. She stated that if she were to take another high school aged student as a placement, she would ensure she had that form completed before entering the school. She felt that the immediate enrollment form would lessen the amount of missed school days for future foster placements.

Jerry

Jerry is a single 61-year-old former foster parent who adopted three children through foster care. The oldest two were high school aged when they came into his home. Jerry stated

that his only experience enrolling high school students was with foster students, so he has no comparison to a biological child enrolling. He stated that the most difficult part was navigating administrators, teachers and other school personnel in the school system that did not understand the dynamics of his relationship with his children. He recalled one incident in particular where an administrator attempted to tell him that he needed to recognize that his child had special needs when Jerry felt very certain he knew of his child's needs better than the administrator who had just met the student. He said that he felt certain that the administrator simply made a "rash judgment" on his child only because he was a foster child not because of any tangible information he had about the student. Jerry expressed his desire for that administrator to leave the meeting and continued without him.

Jerry acknowledged the difficulty of educators' jobs, and with his own employment in the state system (outside of education), he understands how much state employees of all kinds are overworked. He mentioned that he felt the enrollment process itself was not a difficult process; however, obtaining records for his foster student's educational experiences was challenging. The biggest difference in enrolling each of his students was the fact that after the first student he enrolled, enrollment went completely online. Jerry states that this made the process a little easier although some of the questions, just as in the paper enrollment, did not make sense for a foster parent to fill out. While Jerry has some negative emotions toward the South Carolina public school system, overall, he has a positive outlook, mainly because he empathizes with what he calls an employment/work gap, meaning that he believes the people in place are doing the best they can-- they are just overworked due to lack of staffing. The biggest area for improvement that Jerry mentioned was similar to what Mary mentioned about having more universal verbiage in the enrollment forms.

Linda

Linda is a married 56-year-old, current foster parent with two foster students, both girls, aged 17 and 18. The 18-year-old student also has a 1-year-old that has been placed in Linda's custody as well. Linda has been a foster parent for three years and began the journey after she saw a need for placements for teenagers. Linda mentioned that one of her foster placements was in a virtual setting through the Cyber Academy and the other was in a brick-and-mortar placement in one of the seven Spartanburg school districts. The student that enrolled in the brick-and-mortar placement missed several days of school while waiting to receive educational records from previous schools. Linda was excited to learn at a recent foster parent training about the immediate enrollment form in South Carolina for foster students. She stated how helpful that knowledge would have been in helping her get her foster student enrolled in the brick-and-mortar setting without missing even more days of school than she already had. She spoke about how beneficial she could see the immediate enrollment form being for future placements and looked forward to seeing the process firsthand with the form for her next high school placement.

Overall, Linda says there is work to be done when it comes to the partnership between foster parents and the public schools in South Carolina. In the previously mentioned training that Linda attended, she was shocked to learn that foster students make up less than 1% of high school aged students in South Carolina. She said that changed her perspective on how schools interact and will lead her to proceed with more grace moving forward as some teachers/administrators may have never had a foster student in their classrooms/schools. Linda spoke of the need for advocacy for her placements but that the lack of information even she receives makes it hard for her to advocate on their behalf. She stated that while there had been difficult moments during her enrollment process with the high school she is zoned for, she felt

that overall, most of those involved wanted to help the process go smoothly for both she and her student.

Tim and Angie

Tim and Angie are a married 56-year-old couple, former foster parents who adopted their son at 17. Tim and Angie have two biological sons who are both married with families of their own. Tim and Angie decided after their biological children were out of the home that they had the desire to help those in foster care. After about a year of mentoring foster youth, Tim and Angie decided they wanted to take the next step to bring them into their home. Through education from their church, they became involved and eventually got licensed to take primarily older children, to which they spoke of the joy of many workers because most foster parents tend to want younger children. Tim and Angie spoke of the ease of working with the high school in their zone. Angie did highlight the difficulty in obtaining prior educational records for their son and listed that as their major barrier when working to ensure their son could graduate on time with his correct class.

Both Tim and Angie spoke to the benefit of both Angie working in the school system and also knowing people within the school that they were enrolling their foster student. Angie believed that without the help of those she knew, the process would have been much more difficult. Tim emphasized the isolation that they both felt in trying to obtain educational information for their foster placement. There had been both previous foster experiences and a failed adoption where homeschooling took place. The homeschooling information proved to be most difficult to obtain and the biggest barrier to their son's academic journey because he had to repeat most of those courses he had completed in homeschool.

Marissa

Marissa is a 43-year-old biracial, former foster youth herself, now married with one biological child who is currently serving in the military. Marissa saw a need of placements for teenagers and decided to take action. She has enrolled five foster teenagers into her zoned high school. Marissa shared experiences of her own youth as a driving force to become licensed for teenage foster youth. Marissa stated that her own records were lost in the shuffle of her many placements and she has continued to see that pattern with foster youth she has had as placements. Marissa's closeness to the situation creates a strong sense of advocacy for those students placed in her home and as a result, she feels like she has mastered the enrollment process in her home district.

However, her first experience with enrollment she described as an emotional disaster. Marissa went into the school expecting to enroll the student that day but was sent away with tasks to complete prior to the student being placed in classes. Her first placement was a senior expecting to graduate in a few short months and felt panicked over the time missed in her courses. Marissa worked hard to get what the school needed, but still waited almost two weeks before her placement was allowed to be in courses. After that experience, Marissa did research to see what avenues were available to assist the educational journeys of foster youth. She discovered that the state of South Carolina has an immediate enrollment policy for foster youth as an attempt to ensure continuity of educational services. From that point on, Marissa came to the school armed with the immediate enrollment form and never had a student miss more than one full day due to enrollment procedures again. Marissa states that her experience with this form gave her the confidence to speak up for her foster placements to get them the services they needed. Marissa stated that while there was resistance initially from school officials, ultimately the enrollment process was much faster with the form.

Results

The data acquired from semi-structured interviews was utilized to answer the four main research questions. Each interview was transcribed first by Otter.ai, an online transcription service and then reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. After the transcriptions were checked for accuracy, the researcher utilized a paid subscription to Atlas.ti to discover themes. Table 2 shows the themes and frequency of this study.

Table 2

Recurring Themes

Themes	Frequency Mentioned by Participants
Records	15
Barrier	14
Advocacy	14
Collaboration	8
Support	7

Theme Development

Utilizing the open coding and interview transcripts themselves, five major themes emerged from the data, with which each interviewee felt confident that those five themes adequately described their experiences. Those five themes were: (1) records, (2) barriers, (3) advocacy, (4) collaboration, and (5) support. The core phenomenon that permeated each participant's experience was the difficulty of obtaining complete and accurate records for their placements. Each of these themes will be further explored to include participant quotes about these themes to highlight the core phenomenon of the participants and their experiences. How each were impacted in their foster care journeys with high school aged foster youth within Spartanburg County is also explored.

Records

Linda and Marissa had the most extreme situations when it came to records and obtaining the correct information for their placements to start school. Linda's foster placement was out of school for months while schools, caseworkers and even Linda herself worked to get the correct records to get her student enrolled in the correct courses. Marissa's foster placement had to sit in a study hall period for over six weeks as her records were obtained from the three previous high schools that she had been in over a period of two months. Four of the six participants described obtaining records, especially at the high school setting where the appropriate credits must be earned to obtain a high school diploma is a tedious process. Tim and Angie spoke to the frustration of not having complete records for their son due to various circumstances. Angie stated:

I think there was something, he missed a class, he had to repeat a class. He had run away three months before the school year was over. So, he got credit for some of that stuff, because his grades were high enough, and then there was the math class he did not get credit for because of his attendance from running away. So, he had to do the APEX to get caught up on his math. Had we not had the connections we had, me being a school teacher, one thing, and having guidance counselor connections personally helped us too. I mean, it was still a struggle trying to piece it together and get the credits he needed and make sure he can graduate on time. But I think it would have been a lot harder had we not had the guidance counselor piece. Because really, that was the most work that was done. And some of his schooling was homeschool to previous adopted, and that was hard too, and they would not give us or the school any information which made it more difficult for him to continue with school because he knew that he had already completed classes that

now this new school was asking him to retake. Ultimately, he understood, but having accurate records could have saved us all a headache and extra work.

Barrier

Hand in hand with previous themes, the most talked about barrier for these foster parents was obtaining records for their placements. Marissa states, “I think that the biggest barrier is not having enough knowledge about their education. Just being told by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and half of the time, DSS doesn't know so it's just more relying on the kid. That just lack of information. You don't know what's really true and what's not until you get the records and that can take a while.” This quote itself speaks to the concern for obtaining timely records and that they are accurate. Linda spoke to this barrier as well:

When we tried to get my placement enrolled in school, we could not get her records from her previous school. Once they did send the records the receiving school said that wasn't everything they needed. That we had to go back to the previous school and tell them what we needed. Instead of them working together to figure out what they needed. I was kind of in the middle of trying to figure out what they needed and how to get it, who to talk to and it was a nightmare.

Several of the participants mentioned other barriers they described as false perceptions that school personnel had about their foster students from the time of enrollment. Linda, Marissa and Jerry experienced this barrier with at least one foster placement. Jerry spoke about his experience with this barrier:

I think foster kids get labeled as bullies...and it's because they're damaged. I mean, I don't, I guess I don't mean that in a negative way. But most of the children that are in foster care, have gotten a serious past, and they're damaged. And I think that, you know,

you can't treat kids differently, but I do think you need to have some accommodations to handle behaviors and things that the trauma that they've been through. I know, my son got picked on a lot, but then he would retaliate. And then he was the bully.

Advocacy

A major theme of the interviews was advocacy for their foster placements. Jerry, Mary, and Marissa spoke to the ways they were advocates for their foster placements, while Tim and Angie focused on the ways that school employees and other friends were advocates for their foster son. Jerry focused mainly on the ways that he had to advocate to ensure that he or his sons were not treated differently simply because they were in foster care. Jerry states, "You just have to be an advocate for your child, no matter what they are your priority to get them the best possible outcome in the educational system." Meanwhile Mary's story of advocacy talks about how she would advocate differently now, knowing more than before. Mary spoke about how she would handle things differently now that she has the experience at the high school level:

When we did start to have some behavior, situations, and it was our first experience with high school and with significant behavior, situations. I learned a lot and I think I would have advocated and thought differently, had I known kind of some things I know now. But I feel like it wasn't bad. But just I think it was sort of this waiting for something to happen. And then of course, the minute it did, and we're just going to draw a line in the sand and there's no going back. And that's a tough place to be because the one situation we had the student was expelled from his school. He did all the things that he needed to do. But we did not feel like he could come back to that school, even though he had done what he needed to do outside of school. And that's, where advocating comes into play.

Marissa's advocacy came from a place of remembrance of those that had advocated for her during her time in foster care. She says, "I think it's difficult to advocate for foster kids, because they move so much, and because of how they're viewed (she previously mentioned that she felt like schools viewed foster placements as troubled and potentially problems). That is what makes advocating for them that much more important." Lastly, Tim and Angie spoke to the advocacy of those involved in both their lives personally and professionally for the success of their foster placement. Angie stated:

For us, we were fortunate to have excellent guidance counselors that we knew from personal experience that connected us with his counselor at the enrolling school who also had foster parenting experience. That helped us along the way, because we did not know how to navigate any of getting a high school aged foster student enrolled. So, I think that was very important. Being at a smaller public school, I think that helps as well because there were teachers, principals and coaches that wanted to see him succeed and helped him and us along the way.

Collaboration

Mary, Tim and Angie each spoke of how collaboration helped their enrollment processes for their foster placements. Tim and Angie also spoke to the detriment of the lack of collaboration between them, the school, and their foster student's former adoptive family. This lack of collaboration had tremendous impact getting their foster student's educational records.

Tim shared:

Some of his schooling was homeschooling from his previous adopted family, and that was hard too. They would not give you us or workers any information. So, I mean, they've had another child runaway since then, and same thing. They won't give out any

information. So, then they have to repeat things. And you know, we were fortunate that (name redacted) was willing to repeat it. I don't think they kept the records in the previous home. So that was part of the problem. Luckily, he had spent most of his high school years at an actual high school. If he had been homeschooled prior to being put in the system, there's no way to duplicate that information.

Mary came to understand that collaboration “makes all the difference in ensuring foster children’s success, especially in the high school setting where credits are important to earn a diploma.” Collaboration for Linda, Jerry and Marissa was mentioned as a benefit when they were able to experience it. Marissa spoke to the contrast of how lack of collaboration can produce major setbacks for placements:

I was actually so tired of going through all that and actually had to tell DSS that the next child they put in my home, they will need to go and enroll them in school, because I was just tired of going back and forth. It is a hard process when they're fighting, trying to get records and say that he can't go to school until we have records but that's not how the law stipulates. It's supposed to be immediate enrollment, but when they fight back on that, instructional time for those students is lost.

Support

The researcher’s last theme of support was mentioned many times as a desire of foster parents, but only a few participants felt they received support from the school system. Mary, Tim and Angie all state times where they felt school support changed the trajectory for their placement’s pathways. Mary states:

I do think that, you know, the high school that we have to work with is very good and the teachers care, and they are willing to work with us and support us. And I feel like, you

know, in our situation, you know, there were people who went above and beyond when we did have an incident to take care of our students and to help us.

Similarly, Tim and Angie spoke of support from the school system as a primary factor that their foster son did not want to drop out of school. Tim shared their story of feeling supported:

So, we were fortunate we had enough connections to help us navigate through that. Yeah, a lot of foster kids withdraw before they finish. Because they are so far behind from making the transitions like (redacted), he was already behind the math class. Imagine you got three or four of those classes, you're behind. And now you're supposedly a junior, and they're telling you you're in ninth grade. How frustrating if you don't have that family and school support, they walk away. The school fought to get completed records, calling multiple schools and districts, the counselor was relentless to get (redacted) the educational records he needed so he did not have to repeat anything and he could graduate on time.

For other participants the idea that support could have been the hinge point in changing the outcome of their foster student's experience, although there was an uncertainty of where that support should originate. Linda stated:

I know we had one of the speakers who was a teacher and she said, you know, that only a small percentage of the students that she teaches are actually in foster care. And I guess we see it as foster parents that there's a lot of kids in foster care, but you know, in their classroom, they may or may not ever have a foster child in their class. So, I don't think it's necessarily the teacher's role. I think it's more of an administrative type of thing during that process is like, children and foster parents know what resources they have available. Because we're just trying to help the kids and we run into these roadblocks and you look

at the teachers, okay, they're trying to that's why they're teachers. But the administrative part of it seems to fall short where they could be the initial people providing support.

Research Question Responses

The researcher ultimately sought to, through the lived experiences of South Carolina foster parents, uncover the core phenomenon or essence of their experiences with the school district they interacted within Spartanburg County. The researcher sought to identify strengths, weaknesses, and commonalities of the participant's lived experiences. Each research question will be addressed and answered based on the participant's individual responses. Through the interview process, five themes emerged from the participants responses.

Central Research Question

The first research question examined in this study was, "How do current/previous foster parents of high school students perceive the South Carolina public school system in Spartanburg County?" The theme of barriers seems to be the primary response of these foster parents. According to the participants, the barriers the participants encounter working with Spartanburg County schools seem to hold foster students back from obtaining the immediate educational needs they each have. For example, Linda spoke of the wasted time during the enrollment process, leading to a nearly four-month gap in her placement's critical junior year. Each foster parent encountered barriers that they deemed unnecessary and non-existent to non-foster youth. Marissa states that schools having strict, no-compromise statues in place like materials turned in was a huge barrier to her enrollment and wasted valuable time for her student that could have been earning credits toward graduation. She mentioned a time she encountered such a barrier:

So, on my second child, they said that he could come to school, but would have to sit in study hall all day until they got his transcripts. Then, previous school didn't want to give

his transcripts because he had not turned in his Chromebook. He didn't know where his Chromebook was because since leaving that school, he had been displaced three times. Linda spoke of the time lost for her senior foster student needing credits to graduate on time who spent nearly six weeks in the wrong classes because her previous school would not release her records before fees had been paid by the Department of Social Services. Both of these situations speak to the need for flexibility and working together with foster parents and caseworkers to ensure that students are not left behind their non-foster youth peers. This discrepancy with foster students verses non-foster students was seen in each participant who had enrolled both foster children and their biological child. Marissa aptly mentioned the transition of her biological son from one high school to another was a seamless process whereas each and every foster placement enrollment was met with some "hiccup."

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question to be examined is: How do foster parents describe their experiences with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area? The largest topic for the group was the issue of schools obtaining records and not following proper laws when it comes to enrolling their foster placements. Marissa had prior knowledge of the immediate enrollment form from South Carolina Department of Education and still experienced issues with willingness from the school of enrollment:

It was absolutely horrible. The school district did not want to accept them, because they were actually still enrolled at a different school. And so, after I explained to them that under the law that they are supposed to go ahead and enroll them, they still did not want to actually do that. I had to go to the school district office just to get them to enroll them. So, once they did, and enrolled them, they didn't have what the first one needed, they

didn't have no transcripts or anything. So, they just talked with the child and asked her like, what classes she was in previously and then they just then enrolled her inside of those classes. It was a major issue because once they actually got the transcripts, it wasn't what she had said and they had to go back and change a few things.

Mary had a unique perspective as a homeschooling mom enrolling a foster placement in a public-school setting:

I feel like there's a lot of wasted time. Time isn't used necessarily efficiently. But I do feel like our teachers, at least in our experience, care about the students and want them to be successful once they can get past maybe those preconceived notions. And so, I mean, I would have no inhibitions about sending another child to the public high school that we used. And so, I think I've seen that, you know, even though we might not agree from the system from a personal conviction or direction, I do think that, you know, the high school that we have to work with is very good and the teachers care, and they are willing to work with us and support us. And I feel like, you know, in our situation, you know, there were people who went above and beyond when we did have an incident to take care of our students and to help us.

Sub-Question Two

How do foster parents describe their interactions with school personnel in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area? Jerry's first encounter with a preconceived notion creating barrier for his placement was when a principal inserted themselves when he had never once laid eyes on the student or his educational records:

When my oldest first came to school, I had a principal tell me, we were having an IEP meeting, he proceeded to let me know that I needed to know better that this child had

special needs. He patted me on the hand and said, 'you realize he does have special needs'. I was kind of offended. I mean, the only thing he was going off of was that he was in foster care.

In contrast, Tim and Angie speak highly of the interaction they had with those involved in their foster youth's placement. Angie spoke of the ease of the process with her high school placement and his setting:

And I don't think, and this is just the one experience with the high school, but as far as fostering, I don't think we were never treated differently about being his foster parents at the time. And in fact, to anyone, he was just our son. You know, I mean, anyone, not too many people even knew. They were pretty shocked when the news came out that he was adopted. So, I think, you know, as far as the paperwork and enrolling them in the school, we were never treated differently by any means.

Sub-Question Three

How do foster parents describe their challenges in engaging with high schools in the Spartanburg, South Carolina area? Linda spoke about the lack of knowledge on the side of educators about foster youth and their experiences as a whole. She discussed how it is her passion but perhaps a completely distant thought for those in education because they are unaware of the circumstances foster youth find themselves in:

I know we had one of the speakers (at a recent foster parenting training) that was a teacher and she said, you know, a small, small percentage of the students that she teaches are actually in foster care. I guess we see it as there's a lot of kids in foster care, but you know, in their classroom, they may or may not ever have a foster child in their class. So, I don't think it's necessarily the teacher's role. I think it's more of an administrative type of

thing during that process is like, children and foster parents know what resources they have available. Because we're just trying to help the kids and we run into these roadblocks and you look at the teachers, okay, they're trying to that's why they're teachers. The administrative part of it seems to fall short with communication and learning themselves then in turn, educating the teachers about these student's circumstances.

Summary

The information gleaned from semi-structured interviews and theme development provided overall themes of inadequate record keeping, barriers to the educational environment, advocacy for foster youth, collaboration with all stakeholders, and support from all of the individuals involved throughout the process. Through these interviews, foster parents were poignant in pointing out the gaps in care for their foster placements but also gracious in understanding the complexities of public education as it seeks to educate every student. While many themes such as support, behavior issues, obstacles, training and collaboration emerged the five main themes found throughout each interview were: (1) records, (2) barrier, (3) advocacy, (4) collaboration, and (5) support. Implications, delimitations and limitations and recommendations for future research will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

With this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher aimed to examine the lived experiences of South Carolina foster parents as they navigate the enrollment process in South Carolina public schools in the upstate. This chapter has six sections and covers a summary of findings from the research including core themes of foster parents lived experiences, discussion relating back to the information found in the review of literature, theoretical, empirical and practical implications, delimitations and limitations and finally recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The researcher explored the lived experiences of six foster parents as they navigated the enrollment process for their high school aged foster placements in Spartanburg County schools. As a response to the first research question participants described a wide array of emotions as they thought about how they felt they were perceived by the public school system in which they were involved. While Mary mentioned that she thought occasionally she was viewed as somewhat of a superhero in an exaggerated way, Tim and Angie both were quick to say that they felt supported and cared for by their schools. Mary had a unique experience in that her placement did not attend the school in the district that she was zoned for which could have posed an issue. Mary stated that as she advocated, the school district personnel agreed and supported the decision to send her placement to the smaller of the two high schools and Mary felt that support trickle down in the teachers and staff that worked with her placement. Tim and Angie had connections throughout the community in which they enrolled their foster son. They both

spoke to the support that the high school they worked with gave and felt they went above and beyond for both them and their placement.

On the other hand, Jerry, Linda and Marissa agreed that there is work to be done within the school system when it comes to foster youth. Jerry felt numerous times that he was viewed as less than an expert on the students living in his home and felt that both he and his placements were labeled from the beginning as troublesome. Marissa noted a marked difference between enrolling her biological son with each of the foster placements she enrolled. Marissa focused on the resistance for the school to even begin enrollment for the students even when she mentioned the immediate enrollment requirement for foster youth. Linda had a similar experience where her foster placement was required to miss school time while waiting on records for a total of nearly six weeks. Linda stated that the school had a very nonchalant and cold tone toward her during the entire process.

Moving along with regard to the second research question there was consensus amongst the entirety of the participants that access educational records for their placements. Even Mary, Tim and Angie, who had positive experiences, said that time was wasted in getting proper records for their students. Jerry, Linda and Marissa each mentioned the valuable educational time that was lost for their foster placements while waiting on records. Finally, Marissa spoke to the disparity in the difference between foster and non-foster youth when enrolling students in high school. She stated that she had no issues whatsoever with enrolling her biological son, but with each placement, she encountered multiple issues whether it be with records or school personnel. Marissa stated that she believed that the foster youth she enrolled were labeled from the moment the school found out they were in foster care. She felt like the school made it more difficult and had several people ask her the length of stay of each foster placement implying, to

her, that they felt the effort was not necessary since the student would not likely be in their school very long.

Discussion

Theoretical Discussion

In looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Foucault's Theory of Power as discussed in Chapter Two, both of those theories are represented in the results of this research. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that there are five basic needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). In looking through the interview transcripts, the rare occasion when each of these basic needs have been met in the lives of these foster parents, the overall view of how processes went was viewed as positive. When these basic needs are not met, the foster parents feel marginalized. Each participant spoke to some area where they felt this marginalization. Mary felt that the school she worked with asked for unnecessary information that did not directly impact the foster student she had in her care and his educational services. Jerry felt that the school principal had a preconceived notion of the type of student his child would be simply by the knowledge that he was in foster care. Linda spoke to the "lackadaisical" system which the school utilized to collect former educational records. Tim and Angie spoke to the delay in receiving educational records and the missing records that led to their student having to repeat courses. Marissa mentioned the lack of support for immediate enrollment of her placements and only felt action was taken when she initiated enrollment with the federal form for foster students.

Since the enrollment process was only minimally covered in previous research, this research sheds light on the complexities of the enrollment process and information that foster parents are asked that has no relevance on their enrollment. In relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of

Needs the educational journey of foster students benefits from having supports in place that create a sense of safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization. In each interview, the lack of these supports led to delays or irritation on behalf of foster parents/students. Because these participants mentioned several ways these needs were not met, the researcher presumed that meeting those basic needs would lead to a more fulfilling and positive educational journey for all stakeholders.

With his Theory of Power, Foucault asserts that opposing the powerful and powerless against one another creates an imbalanced relationship (Christenson, 2023). In the realm of school enrollment, schools tend to have a perception of power because of the rules and procedures set in place that are fixed, primarily for a biological family unit (Clemens et al., 2017; Donovan, 2013; Donovan, 2014). Over and over the participants stated where they felt powerless in the process to get their students enrolled and in class, earning the credits they need toward graduation. The power can be more balanced when all stakeholders work together to form an alliance for the student in question (Fernandez, 2019; Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). When all stakeholders work together, situations like Mary, Tim and Angie experienced can be the norm for all foster youth (Fernandez, 2019). If stakeholders cannot work together to ensure fidelity in enrollment for the foster youth in question, time is lost and those foster youth may end up aging out of the high school setting without ever obtaining a high school diploma, thus undermining the overall goal of public education (Farnsworth et al., 2022).

Empirical Discussion

The participants in this study spoke to the importance of obtaining educational records, reducing barriers, advocacy for their placements, collaboration with all stakeholders and support for the educational journey of their foster placement by those involved. Addressing the

importance of obtaining educational records, Clemens et al. (2018) highlights that missing, incomplete or inaccurate records can lead to foster students being placed in the incorrect courses, forcing students to miss seat-time, and therefore, not getting the necessary credits for timely graduation. Each participant shared how missing or late educational records created unnecessary setbacks for their high school aged students. Next, participants mentioned barriers as being an issue when enrolling their high school aged foster children. Current literature highlights access to technological resources or overall interactions with school personnel as barriers to the school system for all guardians enrolling students in school (Brown & Medway, 2007; Camp-Spivey et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2010). Participants in this study spoke to the change between paper registration to digital registration and the unnecessary personal information they felt they were asked during the enrollment process.

Advocacy permeates current literature with regard to educational success for all students (Avant et al., 2021; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Morton, 2015; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016; Stapleton & Chen, 2021). Research from Cudjoe et al. (2022) states that advocacy for foster youth is potentially the largest factor impacting foster youth's success. Participants spoke to the need they felt to advocate for students in their care who, for some, had never experienced someone advocating on their behalf. For some of those students, that meant getting to graduate on time because their foster parent advocated for the school systems to request additional records from previous schools. Current literature describes a collaborative relationship between all stakeholders in a student's life to be an immense indicator of that child's future educational success (Stapleton & Chen, 2021). The ability for several of this study's participants to collaborate with their respective schools to ensure the fidelity of the information received for the foster student in question, proved to be a positive experience for all parties, allowing them to all

gain a better understanding of working together and the progress that can achieve. Together with collaboration, support is a vital aspect of successful educational journeys (Caplovitz et al., 2021). Participants in this study had either experienced support that made a difference in the success of their student or longed for a support that would impact the outcome of their foster student's educational careers.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The researcher found that this study supports both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Foucault's Theory of Power. The final stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). With regard to this study, when foster parents and foster youth needs are being met by all stakeholders, the common goal of the foster student's educational success is positively impacted. Each participant was able to identify at least one aspect where help from an outside educational source helped them throughout their experience. When this occurs fluidity in the relationship of all stakeholders is strengthened and impacts how future situations are handled within the school system (Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). Foucault's Theory of Power states that opposing the powerful and the powerless against one another creates an imbalanced relationship (Farnsworth et al., 2022; Fernandez, 2019; Meeto et al., 2020). For the purpose of this research, the researcher identifies the enrolling school as the powerful and the foster parent as the powerless since the foster parent has little control over the actual timeline of enrollment of their foster youth. Once the power dynamic is balanced all stakeholders can benefit from a more mutually beneficial relationship (Chodura et al., 2021; List et al., 2021; Parry et al., 2021).

In an effort to both meet that final stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and balance the power dynamic presented by Foucault, action steps must take place to educate both sides to the underlying need of the foster youth in question. As previously discussed, one can assert that if all things are in place and stakeholders are working together to ensure fidelity in the public school system enrollment process, usefulness increases for all involved with regard to ease of accessibility (Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). When stakeholders can work together to reduce conflicts and increase accessibility with enrollment processes, the foster youth is the ultimate victor, receiving the educational resources needed to be successful (Caplovitz et al., 2021).

Empirical Implications

While previous studies have documented the difficulty of enrollment processes for school in general, there was a gap of information regarding high school foster youth enrollment (Clemens et al., 2017). Previous studies have also documented the lack of communication and accessibility between school personnel and caregivers of students (Lamb et al., 2022; Mihalec-Adkins & Cooley, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2010). This study's findings of foster parents having difficulty obtaining records for their foster youth aligned with McMillan and Barber (2020) as their research highlighted the detrimental impact improper educational record keeping had on students in high school working to earn Carnegie units for a South Carolina High School diploma.

This study's findings also aligned with the importance of advocacy for foster youth for their sustainable success within the educational system by Bartnikowska et al., (2022). The present study adds to the existing literature regarding educational record keeping and the accessibility of resources such as communication with educators and administration.

(Bartnikowska et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2017). Policies that establish stability in education are intended to do so in order for students to experience continuity in their educational experiences (Clemens et al., 2017). Because school stability is an important factor in the overall educational success of students, these policies are utilized to ensure that students are not moved unnecessarily. Eliminating a gap in enrollment and expediting the records transfer between schools can ensure continuity of educational services for youth in foster care (Clemens et al., 2017). Optimizing the care of foster children within the public school system is a priority that is in place to ensure flexibility as well as stability, all while promoting conversations and collaboration between all stakeholders in the foster youth's educational experience (Bartnikowska et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2017).

Practical Implications

The results of this study evoked a call to action for trainings for school personnel who are involved in the enrollment process for high school students. Those individuals should be the first line of advocacy for foster youth, presenting the option for immediate enrollment without the foster parent feeling as if information for immediate enrollment is being withheld. Helping others understand the plight of a foster youth's educational experiences, sometimes entering and leaving schools within weeks in no control of their own, has emerged from this study as a need for all stakeholders to be trained to support the transitional process for foster youth. Support is necessary for ensuring the success of foster youth no matter the length of time they are in the current school.

Education and training such as webinars, informational sessions with social workers or independent school-initiated educational sessions for stakeholders is recommended. Each and every situation that school personnel encounter provides an opportunity for advocacy and

support. This advocacy and support builds relationships with the foster youth and foster parents to create a partnership where the ultimate goal is high school graduation and success afterwards. One of the participants described flawless record keeping and credits earned for students. All the other participants in this study recounted instances where records were lost in transition and caseworkers. As a result, school counselors and foster parents have been working to piece records together in a collaborative effort to ensure fidelity of information. According to the participants of this study, even one situation where students are ensnared in an endless cycle of lost records or transferring schools, is too many.

The next course of action is to advocate at the state level for continuity of services statewide. One student could transfer from a seven period, year-long schedule to a four block, semester schedule and lose at least three credits. This is happening not only within the state of South Carolina but also across the country. This discrepancy affects many students but likely affects foster students more as their transitions are more frequent than the average student (Blakeslee, 2015); Zorc et al., 2013). The overall goal would be that every high school in the state earns the same number of credits each year in a similarly built schedule (i.e., either a seven-period day with 45-minute, year-long courses totaling at least seven credits per school year or a four-block day with 90-minute semester courses totaling a possibility of at least eight credits per school year).

Christian Worldview

James 1:27 states, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” In addressing this situation, it should be the call of every believer of Jesus to ensure the care of these foster youth in question. When taking this perspective into a secular world, one can focus

on the goal of education as educating every child no matter the circumstances surrounding their enrollment. In my own work, I can take the findings from this research and educate the audience I have access to through faculty meetings, conference presentations and scholarly writings. As an educator, former foster parent, and adoptive mother, it would be my desire that the results of this research incite change within not only my local school but the education system as a whole. Even though foster youth do not make up a large portion of high school students in the state of South Carolina, they are just as important as any other student and should be advocated for and looked after in ways that lead toward graduation and a successful post-secondary experience.

Delimitations and Limitations

This phenomenological study was conducted to examine the lived experiences of foster parents in Spartanburg County who had enrolled high school aged placements within one of the seven school districts. To limit the outcome of the study, Spartanburg County foster parent associations were targeted to ensure a better chance that foster parents met the original criteria. Working within Spartanburg County allows the opportunity to utilize the results of the study to educate and improve current conditions surrounding foster youth and their parents with regard to the enrollment process and overall perceptions of the school district.

The delimitation listed above could be viewed as a limitation as now, after research is complete, it is clear that the sample of foster parents statewide that fit the criteria may be small. Another limitation of the study was the ethnicity of participants with mostly White and one biracial participant. When discussing this observation with the president of the Foster Parent Association, she mentioned that a large portion of licensed foster parents in Spartanburg County were White although she did not have the precise numbers. If the research were expanded to include the entire state, perhaps a larger spread across ethnicities would be represented.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the limitations of this study, expanding the review of foster parents across the state of South Carolina and even a Southern region would be valuable in gaining a larger grasp of the statewide situation with regard to high school aged foster youth within the public school system. A look into a wider scope of race/ethnicity of foster parents would be beneficial in gaining insight into how various sub groups within foster parents view their experiences. Further research including foster youth perspective on the public-school experience could provide another perspective of the entire process from a first-hand experience seeing both how they view those advocating on their behalf and their personal experiences in how they feel they are viewed by those in the educational system.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe foster parents' experiences with the school system in which their foster child(ren) is/are enrolled in South Carolina. Six participants from the Upstate of South Carolina participated in this study. After a review of the data, five major themes emerged including, (1) records, (2) barriers, (3) advocacy, (4) collaboration, and (5) support. The two primary take-aways from this study are the need to optimize records information for all students, especially transient foster youth, and to focus on the importance of collaborative relationships between all stakeholders in a foster youth's life. The records of a foster child may be difficult to locate, depending on the amount of moves and schools they have attended. While there may be no way to avoid that transient, vanished information, when stakeholders work together to ensure continuity of care during their transitional periods, valuable time can be saved for all involved.

Practical implications include local trainings and state-level meetings to advocate for foster youth in general and processes to be changed within the school system in an effort to create equity for all students and guardians. Incorporating training to help individuals who encounter foster parents in the enrollment process provides information to assure all stakeholders feel heard and valued. The findings of this study indicate a need for communication, support and advocacy to ensure fidelity for foster youth seeking a South Carolina high school diploma. Overall, this study indicates that foster parents have a desire to ensure their foster placements graduate and some participants have felt support while others have felt opposition.

Participants in this study expressed an understanding of the difficult job that school personnel face in the current educational climate and felt that, given assistance, change was possible that would be mutually beneficial for all involved. Participants voiced high levels of concern that foster youth were a population often overlooked, sometimes because of the lack of experience and sometimes because of stigmas attached to foster youth. Some of those stigmas include students who cause issues, or students who will drop out of school, therefore, lowering graduation rates for the member schools. Taking into consideration all of the lived experiences of the participants created a drive to induce change in the area that I can impact.

As someone who this research relates to on a personal and professional level, it is of utmost importance to take action. I became aware of a difference in the processing of enrollment between foster youth and non-foster youth several years ago and decided to access information that would afford me the opportunity to make an impact on the community around me and that I have been a part of myself. As I watched foster parents within groups explain their processes, I became enamored with learning more about the process from an educational perspective. This research allowed me the opportunity to understand what foster parents needed from the school

system. In turn, I can take the results of this research and provide informative sessions to educators across my scope of influence. My hope is that this information does not stop at this study but continues to grow until foster parents and public schools can collaborate and unite in a way that positively impacts the future of foster youths' educational journeys.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Foster Parent,

As a post-graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research about the experiences of foster parents in the upstate of South Carolina with regard to public high schools as part of the requirements for a doctor of education degree. The purpose of my research is to obtain an understanding of the lived experiences of foster parents in the upstate of South Carolina to ensure that a favorable experience is provided for both foster parents and foster students, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a current or previous foster parent with children who have attended high school in the upstate of South Carolina within the past three years. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and an audio recorded interview (either in-person or via Microsoft Teams). Upon completion of the interview, participants will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. Finally, participants will be asked to review the final results for accuracy before the researcher finalizes the research. The interview should take approximately 1-2 hours to complete. The additional requirements such as reviewing the transcript and final results should take the participant approximately one hour total. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participants' identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please complete the attached demographic survey and hand it back to me once complete. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

A consent form is attached to this document. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me prior to our interview.

Sincerely,

Ashley W. Height

Researcher

██████████

██████████████████

Appendix B: ACE Questionnaire

- Did a parent or other adult in the household often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
- Did a parent or other adult in the household often push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
- Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or try to actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
- Did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
- Did you often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- Was your mother or stepmother often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something harder? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?

- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
- Did a household member go to prison?

Appendix C: A Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your current age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your marital status?
5. Are you a current or former foster parent?
6. Do you currently or have you had high school aged foster children in your home?
7. How long have you been a foster parent?
8. What school district are you zoned for in Spartanburg County?
9. Please list your name and contact (phone/email) below.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Take a moment and describe the family dynamics of your home (i.e. who is in your home and how long have you been a foster parent).
2. Approximately how many foster students have you enrolled in high school in the public school system during your time as a foster parent?
3. What was the process for your first high school foster student enrollment in the public school system?
4. If you have had more than one high school foster placement, has the process been different for enrollment each time or stayed similar to the first experience?
5. How do you feel foster parents are viewed within the South Carolina school system in which your high school foster child(ren) is/was enrolled?
6. If you have biological children that you have enrolled in a high school setting, do you feel that the process or experience of enrollment varied from that of your foster student's enrollment?
7. How do you describe the biggest barriers when interacting on behalf of a high school foster student's educational experiences?
8. How would you describe your experiences for those high school students in foster care verses those not in foster care during the school enrollment process?
9. What is difficult or easy about navigating the high school setting in public school system as a foster parent?
10. Would you describe a high school foster student enrollment experience that you felt went well?
11. What has been the most important piece of knowledge you have gleaned through working

with a public high school in the upstate of South Carolina as a foster parent?

12. How have your experiences shaped the way you view public education in South Carolina?

Appendix E: Consent

Title of the Project: Exploring the Lived Experiences of South Carolina Foster Parents Within Spartanburg County Public Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Ashley Height, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a current or former foster parent that have or have had foster youth who you completed the enrollment process for at one of the high schools in Spartanburg County. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of Spartanburg County, South Carolina foster parents in the public school system with high-school aged children in their home. To uncover what, if any, inequities exist for foster parents during the educational lives of their high-school aged foster placements.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that will take no more than 5 minutes.

2. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded and transcribed interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript and/or video to ensure accuracy. This will take no longer than 2 hours.
4. You will have the opportunity to review the results of the study to ensure accuracy of the data collected. This should take no more than 2 hours.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, disabled person, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer or in a locking file cabinet for hard copies. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings until after the final analysis and report.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study Ashley Height. You may ask any questions you have now.

If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. LaRonda Starling, at

[REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study

after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date