

CALIFORNIA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

**ATTACHMENT EXPERIENCES OF LATINO YOUTH EXITING THE FOSTER CARE
SYSTEM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

Diana V. Bojorquez

A dissertation submitted to the
College of Behavioral and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillments of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Psychology

Riverside, California
March 2023

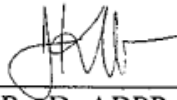
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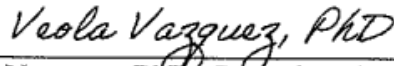
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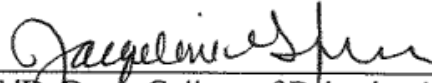
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the brave participants who demonstrated courage and vulnerability by sharing their stories; and to all the foster care children who have difficulty understanding or believing their lives were created with a purpose. Your life, story, and struggle have not been in vain. I firmly believe God created you with a purpose. I pray He will encounter you and you understand that “There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (*New International Version*, 2011, Proverbs 23:18).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Joshua Knabb, and committee members, Drs. Veola Vazquez and Alina Whitmore, for your valuable feedback and support. Without your assistance, I would not have been able to move forward. I greatly appreciate your time, support, and effort throughout this process. Dr. Knabb, your professionalism, character, and wisdom are exemplary qualities I hope to replicate in my career.

I also want to acknowledge my husband, family, and friends: Thank you for teaching me the meaning of “It takes a village.” Thank you for your prayers, encouragement, and relentless support through this journey. I could not have completed this without all of you! To my McNeil Scholar mentor, Dr. Maria Cornejo Garcia, thank you for your love, encouragement, and giving me the freedom and opportunity to process and overcome my cultural and individual challenges through this journey.

ABSTRACT

Every year the number of Latino/Hispanic children and youth who enter and exit the foster care system continues to increase. Many studies focus on relational experiences, however, several overlook Latino/Hispanic populations, including cultural differences. Therefore, this study focuses on the attachment experiences of Latino/Hispanic adults who exited the foster care system and how cultural differences impacted their outcomes. The study seeks to understand the attachment experiences of former Latino/Hispanic foster youth through retrospective accounts. The study examined which relational experiences provided ongoing support, where these supportive relationships and resources were found, and what made them helpful. A convenience sample of 12 former Latino foster youth emancipated from the foster care system or juvenile detention centers were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using grounded theory, NVivo software, and super-ordinate coding. The analysis produced seven qualitative themes: (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact From One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. Overall, former foster youth who reported having at least one significant relationship during or after their foster care tenure described a more positive outcome. The themes presented similarities (e.g., attachment disruptions, lack of support, etc.) and differences (e.g., collectivist values, Latino values, etc.) between Latino foster youth and their Caucasian and African American counterparts. Future research directions considers preventive measures, culturally sensitive services, generational differences, adverse childhood experiences, and countertransference.

Keywords: foster care system, Latino foster youth, attachment theory, grounded theory

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each year, approximately 20,000 youth in foster care will reach the age of 18 and become emancipated from the California foster care system (FCS) with the expectation they will be able to function as responsible adults. Social services may offer these Transitional Age Youth (TAY) medical services, transitional housing assistance, and educational grants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020) to assist them with their transition into adulthood. Despite the provision of these supports, foster youth experience higher levels of adverse outcomes, such as homelessness, housing stability, poverty, and public assistance (Berzin et al., 2011). Other challenges observed at a higher rate in former foster youth include earning lower wages, economic problems, incarceration, and needing welfare services compared to their counterparts (Berzin et al., 2011; Singer et al., 2013).

Removing children from their birth home and being placed into the FCS creates a need for healthy attachment experiences and an adaptive model of family environments (Samuels, 2009). Multiple studies have researched relational experiences, poor outcomes, risks, and protective factors (Ahrens et al., 2016; Bergström et al., 2020; Cushing et al., 2014; Greeson et al., 2015; Waid & Wojciak, 2019), while other studies have focused on social workers' impact and how social support affects foster youth pre- and post-transitions (Curry, 2019; Forenza et al., 2018). Nonetheless, few studies have examined the significance of race, ethnicity, or cultural factors on former foster youth and the added struggles faced during their foster care tenure and transition. Of the studies that have focused on race and ethnicity among foster youth, it was found that minority youth experienced further barriers, such as disparities in provisions, longer tenure in the FCS, and fewer reunifications (Scott et al., 2014; Watt & Kim, 2019).

Although the number of Latinos receiving social services continues to grow, disparities in the provision of child welfare services to Latino children and families are observable. The application and implementation of culturally appropriate and responsive evidence-based services remain unbalanced (Ayón et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Harichi, 2012). Latino community barriers (i.e., language obstacles and inaccessibility to resources and benefits) contribute to extended time in foster care for Latino children, fewer family reunifications, and fewer youth receiving mental health services when compared to Caucasian foster youth (Ayón et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2012). As noted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), Latino foster youth transitioning out of the FCS are at risk of encountering adverse outcomes and numerous cultural barriers, such as lack of social and community support and mistrust of government officials (Ayón et al., 2013).

Antle et al. (2009) discussed additional critical needs and obstacles faced by most foster youth leaving the child welfare system. They argued that foster youth require modeled interdependent living approaches, which teach them the importance of maintaining healthy and reliable attachments through relationships with their case workers and foster families. Many foster youth unable to form healthy attachments continue to face difficulty in trusting, communicating, and maintaining their future relationships (Antle et al., 2009). The inability to develop and maintain relationships in everyday life, families, and romantic connections limits their interdependent development (McWey, 2004). Reconnections with birth families can help establish healthy physical and emotional outlets (Ahrens et al., 2016; Antle et al., 2009; Bergström et al., 2020; Forenza et al., 2018). For Latino foster youth, family placements have also been associated with healthier and more stable outcomes (Scott et al., 2014). Building on this information, a brief background of the present study is provided, before discussing the

current problem and the study's purpose, significance, methodology, definitions, assumptions, and delimitations.

Background of the Study

Former foster youth can experience substantial disturbances in their transition to adulthood and difficulties with relational performances when facing unsupportive parental systems (Cushing et al., 2014). Cultural disciplining traditions, lack of the English language, and social policies that do not actively consider aspects of diversity, intersectionality, or cultural norms pose additional threats and risk factors often faced by minority foster youth (Correa Capello, 2006). In addition to ruptured parental relationships and cultural barriers, youth in foster care are also likely to encounter separation from biological siblings (Waid & Wojciak, 2019), an absence of multifamily affiliations (i.e., ontological security, trust, and allegiance) (Samuels, 2009), and frequent turnover of clinical, social, and case workers (Lionetti et al., 2015).

Reunification with birth families and fostering those relationships is vital to adulthood transition (Cushing et al., 2014). By promoting a sense of familial belonging and recreating the connections experienced by birth parents and siblings, foster youth learn to acquire resilience (Waid & Wojciak, 2019). Foster youth who have relationships with birth parents or caregivers report healthier outcomes than those with minimal connections. Even distressed sibling separations have resulted in better consequences after attending sibling reunification camps (Waid & Wojciak, 2019). Unfortunately, Latino foster youth face unique issues that hinder multifamily connections and create longer separations. Estranged parental relationships have led to higher risks and difficulty with finances, self-care, and support among foster youth (Cushing et al., 2014). Complicated citizenship statuses, poverty levels, and traditional approaches to physical discipline are also distinct concerns that prevent healthy, safe, and supportive relational

experiences and proper assimilation toward adulthood (Correa Capello, 2006; Garcia et al., 2012).

Curry (2019) discovered that biological and foster parents were not the only adults who created unstable relationships. Other challenges included high turnover rates of child welfare professionals, therapists, mentors, and facility staff. Curry also noted the continuous turnover of child welfare professionals damaged former foster youth's emotional and interpersonal health. Continual turnover from social workers and professionals occurs at approximately 30% to 40% per year, causing disruptions in foster youths' trust, relationships, emotions, and behaviors (Curry, 2019). Turnover ensues frequently, is unprocessed, occurs with all child case workers and professionals, and is considered a loss by former foster youth (Curry, 2019). Recent studies have uncovered that foster youth desire to participate in programs with caring adults, lasting relationships, and mentors with family-type traits (Berzin et al., 2011; Greeson et al., 2015). Needed family-type attributes consist of trust, mutual significance of the relationship, and independent modeling skills (Greeson et al., 2015). The rapid provider turnover rates and continual changes are considered detrimental losses to foster youth yearning for healthy and supportive relationships. The perseverance of healthy and supportive relationships is anticipated and crucial for youth and children (YC) in the foster system (Berzin et al., 2011; Curry, 2019).

Previous researchers have examined foster youths' experience coming out of the system through various theoretical frameworks like the relational dialectics theory, social learning theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Forenza et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2011; Thomas & Scharp, 2020). Thomas and Scharp applied relational dialectics theory to two groups of former foster youth and found two opposing perspectives. Some participants in the first group of former foster youth considered the FCS helpful since it provided reparative treatment to them

and their families. They also stated that foster care provided protection, safety, stability, and supporting adults. The second group of former foster youth perceived the FCS as broken and detrimental. Harmful experiences included individuals who hurt them, inconsistency, and unsupportive adults and institutions. The authors also reported foster youths' experiences intensified depending on whether they lived in a foster home, an institution, or a group home (Thomas & Scharp, 2020).

Instead of focusing on risk factors, Forenza et al. (2018) applied the social learning theory to emphasize intimate relationship patterns and conceptualize healthy and unhealthy relationships from foster youth perspectives. Their perceptions of ideal relationships, experiences, and lessons learned. Hong et al. (2011) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to examine empirical studies of foster children placed with relatives. Researchers conceptualized the relationships between foster care, the children in placement, and the child's lineage family. The micro level contained caregiver and child relationship, attachment, and the environment; the meso level consisted of biological families; the exo level included the support provided outside of the family structure; the macro level encompassed the family and child's race, ethnicity, and policies; and the chrono level involved the welfare and institutional systems. Hong et al. found that kinship family care resulted in fewer placements and fewer relational problems for children, but it remained unclear if infants had similar results.

A growing body of empirical research has also placed attachment theory as the theoretical framework for foster youth attachment and the consequences of absent or disrupted attachment (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017; Greger et al., 2017; McWey, 2004). Attachment theory works from two types of models, self and other/world. Self-models consist of personal beliefs about how others view one (e.g., lovability), while other/world models indicate attachment

figures' accessibility, support, and dependability (McWey, 2004). Attachment begins with one's caregivers but can also become a self or other/world model (i.e., a self-in-relationship model) constructed from expectations of relationships. Thus, McWey discovered that foster YC, who experienced lower parental emotional neglect, resulted in higher attachment quality and more stable placements. The number of placements a foster YC endures will likely affect their emotional state and attachment styles (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017). For example, foster children who encounter two or more placements by age six may display insecure attachment behaviors that continue to be negatively affected with additional unstable assignments. The attachment experiences of former foster youth are affected by various factors, settings, and people (McWey, 2004).

Description of the Problem

Although multiple resources are offered to TAY, 43% of foster youth have experienced homelessness, substance abuse referrals, and continual therapeutic treatment (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Family relationships, mental health, support, education, and employment are significantly impacted compared to non-foster youth. A large percentage of these youth return to state care through the prison, welfare, and other systems (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Latino foster YC are also at risk of losing their language and cultural identity due to the small number of licensed families who can continue Latino traditions and a child welfare system without culturally sensitive services (Ayón et al., 2013; Correa Capello, 2006). Establishing a balance between self-reliance and interdependence is vital for appropriate support during adulthood transitions. Teaching transitioning foster youth the importance of supportive relationships can positively influence their lives (Berzin et al., 2011; Hokason et al., 2019).

Previous studies have focused on attachment wounds, safe therapeutic settings, foster family care, and prevention programs that provide information for supporting foster youth coming out of the system (Berzin et al., 2011; Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017; Greeson et al., 2015; Hokason et al., 2019; McWey, 2004). Prevention programs addressing well-being, health, and self-esteem can be essential tools for avoiding unwanted risks (Greger et al., 2017). Intervention programs providing better child-rearing methods may also support families with difficulties (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017). While there are numerous studies and suggestions on these types of assistance, it is imperative to understand the overall impact these resources have had on former foster youth in the long term, particularly on minority foster youth that faced additional cultural obstacles. More importantly, for Latino adults looking back, an important question relates to which support systems resulted in more secure attachments. Secure attachments may benefit former foster youth by providing healthier relationship connections, beneficial coping skills, and the ability to succeed after foster care emancipation (Cushing et al., 2014; Kemmis-Rigs et al., 2018; McWey, 2004). Furthermore, studies show that secure attachment styles are associated with positive mental health, emotional stability, and better physical health outcomes (Miranda et al., 2019; Tucker & MacKenzie, 2012).

Study Purpose

This study aimed to further understand the attachment experiences of former Latino foster youth who have transitioned from the FCS, relying on a retrospective account. The study also sought to discover (a) which relational experiences provided ongoing support, (b) where Latino foster youth encountered these supportive relationships and resources, and (c) what made these relationships helpful.

Professional Significance of Study

Previous investigations have focused on the general social and interpersonal well-being of former and current foster youth between the ages of 17-22 (Cushing et al., 2014; Greeson et al., 2015; Singer et al., 2013). However, the number of Latino children in the child welfare system increases without the representation of culturally sensitive approaches, ensuring their safety, prevention services, or equitable access to public services and resources (Garcia et al., 2012). The present study is meaningful because it focuses on the attachment experiences and support systems of former Latino foster youth who aged out of the FCS after turning 18 years of age. Notably, it explores what, if any, relational experiences during transition remained beneficial, how foster youth were supported, and what positive outcomes remained in their adult years. Moreover, this study can potentially identify what people Latino foster youth turned to for guidance, where they encountered their support systems, and how long supportive figures remained in their lives.

Overview of Methodology

This study utilized a grounded theory methodology and 60-minute semi-structured interviews with a qualitative questionnaire. Attachment theory was used to explore the relational experiences of foster youth who transitioned from foster care after turning 18 years of age. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 12 Latino adults placed in out-of-home foster care before turning 18 years old and emancipated from the FCS or the juvenile detention center.

Definitions of Key Terms

In this study, foster youth attachment is viewed as “an innate psychobiological system (the attachment behavioral system) that motivates them to seek proximity to significant others

(attachment figures) in times of need” (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005, p. 25). Developing safe caregiver-child bonds creates healthy “working models” (p. 27). These connections can strengthen an individual’s confidence and security when forming new relationships. A lack of safe caregiver-child bonds places youth at risk for unhealthy attachments (Samuels, 2009).

Attachment theory contains three attachment styles: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, and ambivalent/anxious attachment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Persons with secure attachments believe others will be receptive and caring as needed and are generally more optimistic. Secure attachment also entails a positive view of self and others, emotional permanence, and confidence that assistance will be available in distressful circumstances (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Individuals exhibiting ambivalent/anxious attachment worry about the support and care of others during times of need. They anxiously seek love and care, have a negative view of self and others, and display lower levels of emotional control (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019; Perlman et al., 2016). Avoidant attachment is expressed through distrust of others’ motives, defensiveness, and a continual desire to maintain emotional independence. Individuals with an avoidant attachment will also perceive themselves and others as harmful, reject intimacy, and attempt to handle hardships alone (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

The study used caseworkers, child welfare, and social service workers interchangeably. The terms encompass “case managers, therapists, the staff at congregate-care facilities, guardians, mentors” (Curry, 2019, p. 374), psychiatrists, and social workers. The FCS and the child welfare system are used reciprocally throughout the paper. According to the Children’s Bureau (n.d.), foster care is defined as follows:

A temporary service provided by States for children who cannot live with their families. Children in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated foster parents. Foster

care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living. (para. 1)

The process of removing YC occurs after Child Protective Services (CPS) receives an abuse report, and the allegations are substantiated (Youth Law Center, 2016). Once there is proof of abuse or neglect, courts decide if they will

(1) Keep the child in the home, file a petition in juvenile court to declare the child dependent, and provide the family with court-supervised family maintenance services.

(2) Remove the child from the home and file a petition in juvenile court (within 48 hours of the child's removal, excluding non-judicial days) to declare the child.

dependent (Youth Law Center, 2016, p. 2)

Removing children in California creates a 15-day initial hearing to determine if the abuse and neglect are sustained (Youth Law Center, 2016). If abuse or neglect is found, a disposition hearing occurs within ten days to determine the type of placement, family plan, family placement, and if family reunification will be an option. Every six months after placement, a Dependency Status Review Hearing determines if the YC can return home or if the parent(s) will be given an additional six months, until the twenty-fourth month, to complete the mandated plans (Youth Law Center, 2016). The courts determine adoption, guardianship, or planned permanent living arrangements for YC whose parents did not complete the mandated plans by the eighteenth month (Youth Law Center, 2016).

The FCS provides various types of placements for YC. According to the Youth Law Center (2016), typical placements include an approved relative or kinship home, a licensed foster family home, Foster Family Agency (FFA) certified home, group care, and Supervised Independent Living Settings (SILS). Youth who are 16 years of age and older may also be placed

in Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs). Approved relative or kinship home placements involve relatives or non-related extended families who meet the requirements for fostering. Licensed foster family home placements consist of licensed family residences with up to six children, or eight if it is a sibling group (Youth Law Center, 2016). FFA-certified homes are comprised of licensed family homes that provide Treatment Foster Care (TFC) and Nontreatment Foster Care (NTFC) to YC that require intensive care (e.g., children or adolescents with mental and cognitive disabilities or severe traumas) (California Department of Social Services, 2021a). Group care consists of licensed care facilities providing 24-hour care for seven to 100 children by paid staff (Youth Law Center, 2016).

SILS and SILPs contain Transitional Housing Placement Programs (THPP) and transitional housing placement programs plus foster care (THP+FC) (Youth Law Center, 2016; California Department of Social Services, 2021c). THPP and THP+FC work with 16- to 18-year-old youth to help them successfully emancipate and transition from the system (California Department of Social Services, 2021c). The law requires that caseworkers and other representatives of the youth “assist youth with developing a transition plan that is in place 90 days before aging out,” “assist and support [them] in developing the plan,” and ensure “that the plan be guided by the youth” (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Transition plans should also contain options for “housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors, and other supports” (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

TAY commonly refers to youth who are between the ages of 16-21, are “[evolving] from children to ‘adulthood’ and become responsible for their care and well-being” (California Coalition for Youth, n.d.). TAY also denotes a period in an adolescent’s life that can be crucial, shapes their identities, and drives them towards autonomy (California Coalition for Youth, n.d.).

For the purposes of this study, TAY will refer to youth who are between the ages of 18-21. Successful or positive transitions refer to TAY that became accountable for their own welfare, lived financially independently, maintained a stable job, and/or sustained college enrollment (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

Finally, the word Latino(s) refers to people of Latin America descent, including South and Central America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil (i.e., not including Spain) (Pew Research Center, 2020). Hispanics will typically refer to people who trace their heritage to Latin America or Spain and Spanish is a native language (i.e., not including Brazil). However, both terms have been embraced and accepted or rejected by people from Latin America and Spaniard decent, regardless of gender (Pew Research Center, 2020). Some published studies have also used the term Hispanic (Alvarez-Rivera et al., 2010; Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, 2015; Scott et al., 2014), which was used interchangeably with the word Latino. In fact, in more than 15 years of polling by Pew Research Center, half of Americans who trace their roots to Spanish-speaking Latin America and Spain have consistently said they have no preference for either Hispanic or Latino as a term to describe the group (Pew Research Center, 2020). Although some platforms have tried to apply the term Latinx to the Latin American community, Pew Research Center (2020) has found the following:

[Latinx] use is among the highest for Hispanic women ages 18 to 29—14% say they use it, a considerably higher share than the 1% of Hispanic men in the same age group who say they use it... While some Hispanics say Latinx should be used as a pan-ethnic term, few say they prefer it over others. A majority [90%] say they prefer Hispanic...or Latino. Meanwhile, just 4% say they prefer Latinx to describe the Hispanic or Latino population [and 5 % say they prefer another term]...Some described the term as an “anglicism” of

the Spanish language, while others say the term is “not representative of the larger Latino community.

Because this study aims to understand the Latino community and be culturally sensitive, the terms preferred by the group will be used throughout the paper.

Delimitations

Several limitations may be associated with the present study. First, the sample of foster youth will only be from a few foster care agencies in California, causing a limit in generalizing their experiences (Ahrens et al., 2016). Second, the semi-structured interviews will be one-sided recollections from years prior (Curry, 2019). Although tracking down all the people and professionals from the interview may be possible, their perspectives will not be included in this study. Third, due to former foster youths’ retrospective viewpoint, their memories may have distortions (Curry, 2019; Hokanson et al., 2019). Next, there is currently not enough research examining attachment styles in foster care settings, limiting information on how they affect YC in the child welfare system. Finally, finding former foster youth with poor attachment or poor outcomes may be difficult due to inaccessibility. These limitations will potentially create disparities in finding participants with negative relational experiences. With the above information in mind, the author will now review the relevant literature for the present study, discussing an overview of the FCS, FCS relationship impacts, the Latino experience of foster care, and attachment experiences in foster care.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020) indicates there are more than 400,000 foster care YC in the U.S., and these numbers continue to rise annually. Each year, around 20,000 foster youth will turn 18, exit the child welfare system, and transition to adult life (USDHHS, 2020). Recent studies have examined differences in adolescents who were in the FCS versus those living with their biological families; areas included mental health impacts (Bergström et al., 2020; Berzin et al., 2011; Hokanson et al., 2019), interventions (Greeson et al., 2011; Greger et al., 2017; Pane Seifert et al., 2015), and relational impacts (Ahrens et al., 2016; Antle et al., 2009; Forenza et al., 2018). A few publications have centered on foster youths' attachment experiences in the system (Goldsmith et al., 2004; McWey, 2004; Okpych & Courtney, 2018), and even fewer studies have focused explicitly on the experiences of Latino youth who were in the FCS (Perez & Romo, 2011). To integrate current findings, increase an awareness of Latino youth attachment experiences, and provide arguments for beneficial support systems, the present review analyses foster youths' mental health, received interventions, and relationships. Attachment theory was incorporated as it pertains to the public, foster youth, and Latin American culture.

YC enter the child welfare system after difficult life circumstances, and some may remain until they exit at 18 to 21 years, depending on the state laws (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019; Greger et al., 2017). As youth enter the system, they have usually undergone multiple traumas and are affected by a lack of resources (Thomas & Scharp, 2020). After emancipation, most former foster youth continue to face numerous challenges (Samuels, 2009; Berzin et al., 2011). Unfortunately, even some youth who can reunite with their kinship family still face inadequate

living dynamics (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Compared to the general population, foster youth are more likely to suffer inferior outcomes in relationships, education, and employment or return to state care through public welfare or the criminal justice system (Okpych & Courtney, 2018). Moreover, Latino foster youth face additional cultural, socioeconomic, and immigration challenges (Ayón et al., 2013). Thus, researching overall foster youth relationship experiences and specific Latino youth trials is necessary for understanding how their attachments formed.

Amid multiple adverse obstacles during foster care transition, other studies have found that relational factors may contribute to healthier emotional functioning in youth with positive transitions (Forenza et al., 2018; Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017; Greeson et al., 2015). Cushing et al. (2014) found significant differences in foster youth who received and did not receive guidance in care, finances, and supportive adult relationships. Foster youth who encountered at least one healthy relationship throughout foster care, during the transition, and after emancipation often displayed the ability to succeed (Antle et al., 2009). However, the samples of most studies with positive findings contained 45-80% Caucasian participants, minimal Latino participants, or no Latino participants (Antle et al., 2009; Cushing et al., 2014; Greeson et al., 2015). In an effort to better comprehend the impact of relationships with Latino youth during and after their foster care tenure, studies focusing on multiple factors with foster Latino youth populations are included in the literature review.

Therefore, the following literature review explores critical components of the FCS, such as support, interventions, and relationships. The research also examines the experiences, trials, and protective factors encountered specifically by Latino foster youth. Moreover, attachment theory, FCS attachments, and Latino attachments are discussed to better understand relational impacts.

Foster Care System Overview

The FCS involves various social services departments, multidisciplinary teams, and community involvement. The department of social services (DPSS) places YC in numerous settings (i.e., FFA, SILS, THPP), intending to give them a safer environment until they can reunify with their families or be placed in adoption services (California Department of Social Services, 2021a). The reality of these placements is that although YC may be placed in safer environments, their emotional needs are not addressed (Pane Seifert et al., 2015). Foster care placement settings are usually not equipped to assist with the traumatic events experienced by YC. Thus, the DPSS strives to support YC through various methods and interventions (Chodura et al., 2021; Waid et al., 2017).

Complex Trauma

Countless YC entering the child welfare system have suffered multiple accounts of traumatic events, including neglect, domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Foster children are at significant risk for internalized behavior difficulties, mental health diagnoses, and posttraumatic stress (Greeson et al., 2011; Greger et al., 2017). Moreover, difficult separations from their birth parents or caregivers further intensify their traumatic experiences (Greeson et al., 2011).

In 2019, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) found that 38% of children in the U.S. FCS under the age of 3 had encountered circumstances (e.g., neglect, physical abuse) requiring removal from their birth parents. Greeson et al. (2011) conducted a study discovering that out of 2,251 foster youth (aged 0 to 21 years), 1,584 participants had experienced traumatic events: At least 12% reported five types of trauma, 20% described four types of trauma, 20% indicated three types of trauma, and 20% expressed two

types of trauma. Furthermore, participants demonstrated elevated clinical ranges for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and at least one other clinical diagnosis. In addition to these undesirable outcomes, participants with a history of abusive situations have been shown to develop low self-esteem, detrimental self-perceptions, and destructive self-behaviors (Greger et al., 2017).

Foster Care System Placement Settings

Child welfare services place YC in foster family care, kinship care, group homes, and residential care (Wulczyn, 2020). The most recent placement settings for YC in 2019 were foster family homes (46% non-relatives); foster family homes (32% relatives); and institutions (6%) (AFCARS, 2019). For every 1,000 days in system care, foster YC have moved an average of 4 settings (Waid et al., 2017). Youth with more significant psychiatric diagnoses (e.g., psychotic, dissociative) will often be placed in residential programs (i.e., group homes, institutional settings) instead of foster homes. Studies have found that a large percentage of youth in residential programs are at risk of suffering physical abuse, sexual abuse, and community violence during their foster care tenure (Goemans et al., 2015; Pane Seifert et al., 2015). The FCS makes an effort to implement various types of support (i.e., individual counseling, group therapy, housing); However, Goemans et al. (2015) discovered that studies with larger samples conducted for longer than one year resulted in foster youth with negative adaptive functioning.

Foster care environments may affect YC attachment styles by promoting secure or insecure attachments (Goemans et al., 2015; Pane Seifert et al., 2015). Although there is not enough research, we know that FFA settings will usually provide greater one-on-one relationship experiences with a maximum of six YC per home (California Department of Social Services, 2021a). Nonetheless, group or institutional homes may contain six to 100 YC, potentially

receiving fewer opportunities to develop healthy attachments to a caregiver (California Department of Social Services, 2021a). Because we have not examined attachment styles in different placement settings, conclusive data on the overall effects are lacking.

Foster Care System Support

The FCS attempts to support YC experiencing mental health concerns via symptom reduction, which is typically displayed through high-risk behaviors and emotional dysregulation (Greeson et al., 2011). According to Greeson et al., support-related goals emphasize health, emotional functioning, social behaviors, academics, and decreasing home placements. Goemans et al. (2015) conducted a 30-year longitudinal study among foster youth examining adaptive functioning, externalizing problems, and internalizing foster care children's challenges. A meta-analytic sample of 2,000 participants found no overall improvement in adaptive functioning after placing the child in a foster home. Externalizing problems resulted in no overall improvement for 1,729 children. Likewise, no progress was found in a sample of 1,984 foster children for internalizing problems. While some research suggests that home placements provide a cultivating environment (Cushing et al., 2014; Thomas & Scharp, 2020), Goemans et al. (2015) argued that foster care has no impact on adaptive and behavioral functioning in children entering the system due to their severe traumatic experiences. Thus, professionals knowledgeable in assessing trauma exposure and employing trauma treatments are ideal for treating foster youth suffering from complex traumas (Greeson et al., 2011). Furthermore, successful interventions also give clear directions for what is helpful during foster youth's interaction with the child welfare system.

Foster Care System Interventions

Multiple studies provide information on the usefulness of foster system interventions (Bergstrom et al., 2020; Chodura et al., 2021; Waid et al., 2017). Such interventions may focus on foster YC (Greger et al., 2017), foster parents (Chodura et al., 2021), or both parties (Bergstrom et al., 2020). While professional therapeutic services are crucial, foster parents' influence on foster children's development of secure attachments cannot be overlooked.

Kemmis-Riggs et al. (2018) conducted a systemic review that analyzed foster family interventions and therapy factors. They focused on seventeen randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-RCTs studying child behavior problems, placement settings, attachment, and relational problems. Effective interventions for parent-child connections consisted of relational skills and caregivers' skill development. Interventions addressing behavior problems in children included managing the behavior and boosting family interactions such as parent engagement. Interventions aimed at remediating negative relationships between parents and children contained attachment theory guidelines. These guidelines centered on parents' emotional management, empathy development, and attention to the child's needs. Overall, Kemmis-Riggs et al. found that foster children require child-centered interventions that target their needs and allow caregivers space to develop their parenting skills. Clearly identified population subgroups and study replications are needed to verify if these results are consistent across studies.

Bergstrom et al. (2020) conducted a systemic review of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) examining interventions for foster care youth and foster care families, including parent selections, interventions, preservice preparations, and facets of care for children. The 28 RCTs included 5,357 foster children and 18 interventions. Five studies examined foster children's support, eight explored foster parent support, and five focused on foster children and foster

parents' assistance. The studies addressed externalizing symptoms, self-determination, placement stability, somatic health, quality of life, educational outcomes, and employment. While more than 18 interventions were reviewed, only three interventions provided improved support. Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC), Incredible Years Parenting Program (IYPP), and Take Charge (TC) were three interventions displaying the most improved attachment behaviors, externalized behaviors, and children's self-determination. ABC interventions focused on attachment and nurturing caregiver behaviors. IYPP utilized group therapy, behavior modeling, and role-playing parenting skills by a facilitator. TC addressed self-determination in at-risk foster youth and foster youth with special needs. In their review, Bergstrom et al. called for ethical practice that prioritizes evaluating new programs and implementing evidence-based services.

Transitional Aged Youth Interventions

Federal and state laws provide other interventions and assistance that support TAY. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 created Independent Living Programs (ILPs) to assist TAY when turning 18 (California Department of Social Services, 2021b).

The ILP provides training, services, and benefits to assist current and former foster youth in achieving self-sufficiency prior to, and after leaving, the FCS. In California, each county has the flexibility to design services to meet a wide range of individual needs and circumstances and to coordinate services with other Federal and State agencies engaged in similar activities. (California Department of Social Services, 2021b, p. 1)

ILPs can provide TAY with daily living skills, money management, and building self-esteem. They can also provide financial assistance with college or vocational schools, educational resources, housing, and employment (California Department of Social Services, 2021b).

Assembly Bill 12 (AB12): Non-Minor Dependent Youth and Extended Foster Care (EFC) was added in October 2011 to extend foster care benefits to age 21 (California Department of Social Services, 2011). The act states that case managers must begin to develop case plans with foster youth approaching age 17 years and five months and contain the benefits of EFC and ILP (California Department of Social Services, 2011). These benefits include placement considerations (i.e., SLA, THP-Plus-FC), out-of-county placements, out-of-state placements, or a 90-day transition plan. Additionally, case managers must also discuss goals, permanent connections, visitation requirements, and consequences of noncompliance with the case plan (California Department of Social Services, 2011). Interventions provided to TAY focused on independent living, financial autonomy, and positive emancipation. Although relationships are not always addressed in case planning, making sense of their impact among foster care youth is essential for identifying how their attachment styles continue to develop into adulthood.

Foster Care System Relationship Impacts

Relationships affect numerous components of foster care youths' lives (Cushing et al., 2014; Samuels, 2009). Relationships can vary between birth parents, foster parents, case workers, siblings, peers, and mentors (Waid & Wojciak, 2019). Singer et al. (2013) researched how former foster youth transitioned, their social assistance, resource utilization, and overall support quality. In their qualitative study, they interviewed 20 foster youth between 18 and 21. Support was categorized into four categories: guidance, emotional, financial, and appraisal. The link between receiving support, efficiency, and permanency differed for each youth. While a few youths had current and permanent help within their network, many found older meaningful relationships still helpful even when they were no longer in contact. Findings also revealed

interruptions in foster youths' support networks, unrealistic views of anticipated results, and financial and appraisal assistance scarcity also affected outcomes.

Sibling relationships have also been shown to significantly impact foster care tenure (Waid & Wojciak, 2019). Waid and Wojciak (2019) found that sibling relationships provide foster YC with a sense of belonging, familiarity, and can mediate trauma and internalizing symptoms when placed in the same housing. Moreover, Waid and Wojciak's research found that sibling connections can improve mental health and increase resilience and emotional wellbeing. Even though siblings can support positive behaviors, sibling separation frequently occurs throughout foster care and further increases feelings of sadness, despair, and guilt (Wojciak, 2017). Overall, former foster youth have found their birth families and extended relatives helpful, providing emotional and instrumental support (Hokason et al., 2019). Thus, the child welfare system should try to keep siblings together when placed in foster care.

Relationships that help people develop and flourish are needed for survival and to provide psychological well-being (Chodura et al., 2020; Singer et al., 2013). One lasting relationship in a foster youth's social network that can promote diligence and provide mentoring is incredibly beneficial and can decrease destructive outcomes (Curry, 2019; Greeson et al., 2015). Greeson et al. (2015) explored the belief system that older foster youth take away from mentoring interventions and supportive nonparental adults. Researchers used a 12-week mentoring intervention called Caring Adults R Everywhere (CARE), which focused on human development theory, resilience, and relational-cultural theory. Results found a need for caring adults and lasting relationships; mentors with family-type traits, trust, and mutual significance; and learning independent skills. Specifically, common themes arose for connection, time to build trust, and the ability to be significant to others (Greeson et al., 2015).

As mentioned by older youth in the system, the desire and need for lasting and supportive mentors indicates the importance of positive relationships (Curry, 2019; Cushing et al., 2014; Greeson et al., 2015). Relational needs from formal and informal relationships and the formation of policies and programs that promote positive shifts to adulthood are essential (Singer et al., 2013). Likewise, other studies have revealed that foster youth with positive outcomes received encouragement from at least one supportive adult, regardless of family ties, and call for prosocial adult relationships (Greeson et al., 2015; Hokason et al., 2019).

Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are also impacted as foster youth transition out of the system (Antle et al., 2009; Forenza et al., 2018). Insecure attachment styles and the inability to solve conflicts have been connected with susceptibility to abusive relationships in adolescents (Bonache et al., 2017). Bonache et al. state that adolescents with destructive problem-solving skills tend to choose partners with similar attachment styles. During the adolescent stage, limited emotion regulation and interpersonal skills sustain a pattern of unmet needs and the desire for meaningful connections (Antle et al., 2009).

Ahrens et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study to examine how patterns, actions, responses to earlier experiences, and defensive factors influence former foster youths' sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. Researchers interviewed 22 current or former youth between the ages of 15-21 and applied theoretical thematic analysis to analyze fundamental themes. Results revealed that trust, communication, and risky behavior were associated with emotional regulation struggles. Interventions were more successful with peer mentors when they attended group therapy, and both the caseworker and caregiver worked together to support the youth. Trauma-related strategies and interventions providing emotion regulation skills and

assertiveness appeared to help reduce foster youth STIs and pregnancy. According to Ahrens et al., communication skills training, screenings for dating violence, and thorough sex education were beneficial for former foster youths' healthy romantic relationships. Supporting TAY with these interventions can prove lifelong skills even after emancipation from the FCS.

Non-Minor Dependents

In California, TAY become non-minor dependents (NMDs) at age 18 if they choose to remain in the FCS (California Department of Social Services, 2011). Regardless of the housing they choose (i.e., FFA, SLIP, LIP, THP-Plus-FC), NMD settings are expected to provide opportunities for independence and have minor constraints. Case workers begin working with TAY, before their 18th birthday and plan according to the youth's developmental needs (California Department of Social Services, 2011). NMDs also have the option to leave the FCS at any time and return before reaching 21 years. During their NMD tenure, case workers are required to do monthly visits, and the option for wraparound services is provided. Wraparound "is a process that values the engagement of the youth and [their] family in a manner that shifts from a problem focused view of issues to building on individual strengths to improve family and youth well-being" (California Department of Social Services, 2011, p. 12).

The transitioning period from the FCS into the adult world is crucial because it creates a foundation for their future (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Positive transitions provide TAY the opportunity to become independent adults in their housing, financial, and emotional areas (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Constructive family reunifications are essential because they can provide TAY with a better outcome than youth without family support (Hokason et al., 2019). The FCS supports and affects families in various ways. Likewise, it is important to understand the experience of Latino families who enter the FCS.

Latino Foster Care System Experiences

Latinos experience several factors that propagate their involvement with the child welfare system. While the reasons for entering the system, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, remain the same, ideals and norms from their cultural background influence their experience within the FCS (Watt & Kim, 2019). Moreover, several system policies and agencies working with Latino families can aggravate the problems due to limited culturally-sensitive approaches (Correa Cappello, 2006): County facilities and resource offices with limited hours, paperwork without Spanish translations, and timelines that birthparents have difficulty meeting due to family duties or employment (Garcia et al., 2012). Moreover, Latino families have experienced a yearly increase in foster placements during the last two decades (AFCARS, 2019). As such, there is a dire need to provide efficient preventative support and services. Various components affect Latino youth's overall experience in the FCS and distinctive cultural factors.

Cultural Factors That May Influence Latino Foster Care System Placements

Acculturation. In a qualitative study with 19 social workers, Garcia et al. (2012) found that Latino acculturation creates obstacles to effective Latino parenting behaviors. Although most YC successfully acculturate to mainstream culture, parents continue to carry their traditional values (Zamudio et al., 2020). These differences in behavior and values contribute to family conflict, constant disruptions, and instability. Furthermore, a lack of awareness may blur Latino parents' understanding of what factors make up child abuse and neglect. While parents may not physically harm their children, leaving a young child alone while they work is considered neglectful abuse that parents may not be aware of until after a child abuse report. The AFCARS (2019) report found that neglect accounted for 63% of circumstances associated with a child's removal. Latino parents may be adhering to their upbringing or believe that their

decisions are for the family's overall good in the long run. However, even migrant workers face child neglect repercussions and require knowledge of the U.S. child welfare system (Garcia et al., 2012).

Immigration Status. Immigration concerns can affect families without U.S. citizenship status or undocumented children whose parents have been deported (Garcia et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2014). Undocumented children receive fewer family placements and may be under state conservatorship (Scott et al., 2014). While family placements have led to overall fewer arrangements and fewer attachment problems (Hong et al., 2011), immigrant and legal permanent residency (LPR) status children have the lowest percentage of kinship home placements (Scott et al., 2014). Scott et al. found that Latino youth with a legal immigration status were placed in family homes 30.17% more than undocumented Latino youth. Mixed immigration status in the household is another reason that limits family placements (Ayón et al., 2013). To qualify for a foster care license, families must provide specific documentation, fingerprints, and backgrounds difficult to deliver with undocumented family members. Therefore, many kinship families cannot care for their relatives for fear of deportation and anti-immigration policies mandating immigration status reports (Ayón et al., 2013).

Poverty. YC are also more susceptible to enter the child welfare system due to conditions correlated with poverty, such as neglect (McGuinness & Schneider, 2007; Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, 2015). Parents with lower socioeconomic status are at a higher risk of maltreatment, providing unsatisfactory care, higher stress levels, stricter parenting, and recurring child abuse (McGuinness & Schneider, 2007). According to the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) (2020), for every four Latino children, one will be living in poverty. Statistics from the CDF (2020) also found that, in 2018, children of color made up 49.7% of children under the age of 5 who were

living in poverty. Additionally, children of color suffer from homelessness, food-insecure households, a lack of health coverage, a lack of access to early childhood education, and academic underachievement in elementary, middle, and high school. An increase in child abuse, neglect, and incarceration has been observed and led to the placement of children of color in foster care (CDF, 2020). Adequate fiscal support is also limited or non-existent for kinship foster families ineligible for licensing due to the immigration status of a child or a family member (Ayón et al., 2013; Correa Cappello, 2006).

Domestic Violence. Domestic violence has been found to interfere with foster care YC's reunification with their birth families after being placed in the FCS (Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, 2015). Families that fell victim to domestic violence were 53% less likely to make sufficient progress in reuniting (Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, 2015). Garcia et al. (2012) found that domestic violence had increased among Latino families in recent years, and Latina mothers were inclined to minimize the abuse. Additionally, Garcia et al. found that some Latina mothers have lost custody of their children for not adhering to no-contact court orders with the father. In a study examining racial and ethnocultural factors between Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian caregivers who were victims of domestic violence, Hispanic women were less likely to have social support and more likely to be living with their intimate partner (Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, 2015). It is not feasible to say that living with an abusive intimate partner and having minimal social support leads to the dismissal of court-ordered no-contact; however, these factors further affect the reunification in addition to language barriers and poverty issues of Latino YC with their families. Identifying cultural factors affecting Latino youth in the FCS illuminates some of their unique struggles. In addition, Latino youth may also face institutional and agency factors

that further hinder their encounter with the FCS (Ayón et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2014).

Institution and Agency Factors That May Influence Latino Foster Care System Placements

Access to Services and Agency Policies. Garcia Quiroga et al. (2017) found that early intervention programs that assist families with difficulties and help them to practice better child-rearing methods can help prevent youth entry into the foster system. Nevertheless, various institution policies lack culturally sensitive approaches to meet parents' needs (Garcia et al., 2012). Latino foster families also face difficulties when institutions lack appropriate language training (Ayón et al., 2013). Ayón et al. (2013) stated that "Foster care licensing requirements are based on Anglo middle-class values...limiting many potential foster kinship placements among people of color whose values and practices differ" (p. 93). Foster care license requirements can include the foster parent's ability to read and write, the ability to speak English, and for household members to be US citizens or legal residents (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Latino YC were also found to receive fewer mental health services, substance abuse treatment, social worker visits, and foster parent support (Watt & Kim, 2019).

System collaboration was another factor that prevented Latino families from attaining care or receiving the necessary treatments (Garcia et al., 2012). Unfortunately, agencies (FCS, education, mental health, juvenile justice) serving Latino children and families may lack collaboration when attempting to meet individualized goals. Moreover, Garcia et al. also discovered a lack of access due to minimal Spanish-speaking therapists, timing provided for court dates, and limited agency operation schedules. Several parents have also been pulled over during traffic stops and deported, leaving their children behind and under state conservatorship.

Recruitment and Placement. The growing number of Latino YC entering the child welfare system has created difficulty in finding Spanish-speaking foster families who continue to model their cultural values. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of placing foster YC in secure foster homes that do not change continuously (Ayón et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2014). After traumatic separations, Latino children placed in homes that do not speak their language or function similarly to how they grew up may further increase the traumatic experience (Correa Cappello, 2006). However, Latino families seeking to become foster parents encounter multiple obstacles that hinder their ability to help. Correa Cappello (2006) found that the lack of Spanish-speaking professionals, interpreters, and Spanish material and documents deters many families from attempting or continuing to join. The author also argued that a state's commitment to placing Latino children should match the motivation and desire of relatives, friends, and Latino families who wish to foster. Instead, they may encounter a lengthy process, a lack of cultural competence, and a lack of collaboration that discourages their foster parent certification (Ayón et al., 2013; Correa Capello, 2006).

Lack of Awareness of Latin America Subgroups

Latinos encounter various names that identify their background, which may contribute to a lack of awareness that impacts their FCS experience. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defined Latino as “a native or inhabitant of Latin America” or “a person of Latin America origin living in the U.S.” (para. 1). It also defined Hispanic as “of, relation to or being a person of Latin American descent and especially of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin living in the U.S.” or “of or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Furthermore, the United States Census 2020 (n.d.) categorized Latinos as

The category “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” includes all individuals identifying with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central, and South America, and other Spanish cultures. Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, and Colombian. “Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin” also includes groups such as Guatemalan, Honduran, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Venezuelan, etc. If a person is not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, answer “No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.” (para. 4)

While people of Latin America origin are lumped together as one group with various names (Latinos, Hispanics, Spanish, etc.), little attention is given to subgroups and cultural differences from each Latin American country (Scott et al., 2014). Most studies will use Latino or Hispanic terms, instead of Mexican American, Brazilian, Cuban America, etc., and not disclose the origin of their Latin American background (Perez & Romo, 2011; Watt & Kim, 2019; Wulczyn, 2020). In fact, Latin America origin can influence immigration reasons requiring specific social services that address areas such as limited financial resources, violence, political repression, or asylum-seekers (Correa Capello, 2006). Therefore, Latin America families and foster youth may feel unseen or unsupported by assumptions and interventions that do not support their traumas and difficulties (Alvarez-Rivera & Fox, 2010).

Latino Youth Exiting the System

As another influence, in a sample of 138,000 foster youth (ages 10 to 17) from the U.S., Latino youth were found to run away from their placements 24 more times than Caucasian and African American youth (Wulczyn, 2020). Several foster youth have disclosed they run away hoping to reunite with their families (Perez & Romo, 2011). Family principles (e.g., unity,

loyalty, perseverance) have led most former foster youth to seek their birth families before seeking outside resources (Perez & Romo, 2011). However, many Latino youth find reuniting difficult due to families that continue with dysfunctional cycles or deaths (Perez & Romo, 2011). Once exiting the system, a lack of family relationships has led to residential mobility and periods of homelessness (Perez & Romo, 2011). Other adverse outcomes may include poor health, unplanned pregnancies, substance abuse, criminal activity, human trafficking, and poverty upon exiting the FCS (Wulczyn, 2020). Shared values and culture among former foster youth with related circumstances can provide significant relationships during their transition (Perez & Romo, 2011). Although Latino youth in the FCS may face cultural and institutional adversities, they can also be comforted by the culture's protective factors.

Protective Factors and the Foster Care System

Cultural disparities among Latino families have been shown to exacerbate child welfare intervention (Correa Capello, 2006; Scott et al., 2014); however, protective factors have also been observed (Watt & Kim, 2019; Wulczyn, 2020). *Familismo* (familism) is described as the significance and worth of family unity that entails solidarity, allegiance, reciprocity, and respect (Garcia et al., 2012). *Familismo* can be observed through attitude (prioritizing family); behavior (placing family needs first); and structure (extended family) (Zamudio et al., 2020). Moreover, *familismo* has been linked to resilience and hope in the lives of many former foster youth (Correa Capello, 2006). Even after their foster care tenure, a majority of former Latino foster youth were found seeking their birth families and finding support among family and extended family members before outside social networks (Perez & Romo, 2011; Singer et al., 2013). Latin American culture in foster YC is often embedded from birth and continues to influence their lives, even after foster care and emancipation (Perez & Romo, 2011).

Traditional values such as family responsibility are valued and essential among most Latino families and are seen as a critical aspect of the culture (Perez & Romo, 2011). Before birth, many parents seek and find *compadres* (co-parents) or *padrinos* (godparents) amongst their trusted families or family-like friends. Their verbal or religious agreement comes with a mutual understanding that if the parents cannot care for the child, then the *compadres* or *padrinos* will take guardianship (Ayón et al., 2013). Although the U.S. does not honor verbal agreements over custody, foster YC can still find support and guidance from their *padrinos* (Ayón et al., 2013; Perez & Romo, 2011). The importance and lasting effect of *familismo* in Latino cultures can be utilized as a protective factor that develops beneficial and lasting relationships (Perez & Romo, 2011). Moreover, as Greeson et al. (2015) discovered, one lasting and healthy relationship can help avoid multiple adverse outcomes in the lives of former foster youth.

Family ties and relationships are essential when considering the experiences of foster youth. These relationships can affect the development of their attachment styles by creating secure attachments or insecure attachments (McWey, 2004). Attachment theory can help to clarify how attachments are formed before, during, and after foster care.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory can be explained as a combination of psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and ethology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). The framework centers on affect regulation, emotional bonding, and interpersonal relationships from birth to adulthood. Specifically, the theory focuses on how parental or caregiver relationships create the groundwork for future relationships. Thus, infants are born with a desire to seek proximity to their attachment figures when needed. The accessibility, sensitivity, and assistance of such figures will create secure or insecure attachments (Shaver &

Mikulincer, 2005). Secure and insecure attachments lead to “mental representations” or “attachment working models,” “working models of others,” and “working models of self” (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005, p. 27). Working models include real and perceived aspects of the relationship with primary caregivers, the self, and others. They also allow people to forecast potential interactions with others and how to react (Perlman et al., 2016).

Eventually, working models create three specific attachment types in individuals that guide their interactions: secure attachment, anxious attachment, and avoidant attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Securely attached people have developed healthy relationships, view their interactions positively, and can regulate their emotions (Perlman et al., 2016). Anxiously attached individuals are often worried about their relationships and display maladaptive emotional skills, even if there are no threats (Perlman et al., 2016). Avoidantly attached persons commonly suppress their worries and lack adaptive coping skills during distress (McWey, 2004).

Insecure attachments (avoidant and anxious) can develop during childhood maltreatment and traumatic events by parents and primary caretakers. They correlate with psychopathology and the inability to respond appropriately to perceived stress (Perlman et al., 2016). Thus, many foster infants, children, and youth with a history of complex traumas exhibit insecure attachments that guide their emotions, behaviors, and responses (Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Perlman et al., 2016).

Attachments in Foster Care

Miranda et al. (2019) reviewed the implications of attachment outcomes on foster care alumni. Although children begin to develop their attachment style from infancy, foster care placements and experiences with the child welfare system may impact their overall attachment

maturation. The inability to form secure attachments to their birth parents is worsened by continual placement disruptions that hinder their ability to form bonds with foster parents (Miranda et al., 2019). YC who reunify with their biological families may continue to experience difficulties building secure attachments because the underlying relationship building problems are not addressed (Miranda et al., 2019; Perez & Romo, 2011). Unfortunately, insecure attachments can increase the likelihood of “psychopathology, depression, anxiety, difficulties in maintaining relationships throughout life, and behavioral problems” (Miranda et al., 2019, p. 27).

Tucker and MacKenzie’s (2012) empirical research on 3,448 foster children in foster care found that attachment theory is strongly supported as a “transactional and process theory of change” (p. 2214) because it helps to deepen an understanding of foster care dynamics. Their research examined relationships, placement changes, child characteristics, and rates of change; more specifically, how the elements of foster care YC determine placement changes and exits through caregiver interactions. Their hypothesis stated that older youth were at an increased risk of being removed from home foster care placements sooner if they had insecure attachments. Tucker and MacKenzie’s assumption corresponded to attachment theory’s claim that children need relational security, and the risk of relationships failing is greater during the beginning stages. Thus, youth who enter the FCS at an older age and are closer to emancipation have greater difficulty forming strong attachments to their caregivers or forming relationships that will last post-foster care placement (Tucker & MacKenzie, 2012).

YC entering the FCS may enter with either secure or insecure attachments, depending on their previous emotional bonds (Lionetti et al., 2015). Experiences throughout their stay can affect and change their working models (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). In a meta-analysis examining the attachment of institutionalized children, Lionetti et al. found that 18% had secure

attachments, 28% had insecure attachments, and 54% displayed disorganized or unclassifiable attachments. Children with disorganized attachments often had abusive or emotionally unstable parents, abusive primary caregivers, or were placed in institutional care. In contrast, children reared from home had 56% secure attachments, 24% insecure attachments, and 21% disorganized or unable to classify attachments. Lionetti et al. could not determine if children entered the institution with insecure and disorganized attachments, if they developed them, or if their attachment styles changed during their stay. However, their research shows that children's attachment styles can adjust, and maltreatment or abuse has detrimental effects, specifically for institutionalized YC.

Okpych and Courtney (2018) studied the role of avoidant attachment among foster care youth and their college experience. Their 10-year longitudinal study followed 331 foster youth and found that avoidant attachment diminished college motivation and graduation. Perceived social support during their college experience was a mediator between avoidant attachment and college effects. Okpych and Courtney considered how past abuse and relationship instability in foster youths' experiences are possible predictors of college accomplishments. Notably, former foster youth who experienced more abuse scored higher on the avoidant attachment scale and had less favorable outcomes. Implications for negative outcomes with highly avoidant foster youth point to mental health problems, substance abuse, and behavior problems.

Goldsmith et al. (2004) explored the usefulness of attachment theory when making placement decisions for foster youth and the effects associated with abuse and separation from their biological parents. They focused on the hardship and anxiety youth face trying to build secure attachments to their foster parents while grieving the loss of their biological parents and family. Many children will long for reconciliation with their birth family regardless of

maltreatment history and undergo emotional distress. Before a foster youth's psychological needs (e.g., responsive and reliable caregivers) are considered, parents' legal rights, caseload, laws, and court proceedings take precedence (Goldsmith et al., 2004). Although infants and children may experience the ability to form secure attachments to their foster parents, adolescents that have experienced abuse and multiple separations from their birth parents are at risk for developing attachment disruptions (Berzin et al., 2011; Cooke et al., 2019).

Research indicates that secure attachments can be protective factors for preventing psychopathology and long-term psychological trauma (Goldsmith et al., 2004). "Type of attachment style is shown to be a predictive characteristic for mental health, relationship, criminality, emotional stability, and physical health outcomes throughout an individual's life, with insecure attachment styles correlating to more deleterious effects" (Miranda et al., 2019, p. 396). Understanding the attachment styles of youth exiting the foster care system is essential for preventative and holistic care (Goldsmith et al., 2004; Tucker & MacKenzie, 2012). Furthermore, socialization differences in Latin American culture can influence how attachment styles are formed.

Latin American Culture and Attachment Theory

Although distinctions exist among Latinos in the U.S., the socialization process for minority children may be different compared to their European American counterparts (e.g., conformity versus independence) (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017; Zayas & Solari, 1994). Initial socialization encounters may develop Latino children's attachments to their family members. A majority of Latino parents socialize their children within the family's culture, regardless of cultural norms. In addition to diverse beliefs, behaviors, culture, and socioeconomic circumstances, Latino children could be raised in a society that may decide their worth based on

skin color (Garcia et al., 2012; Zayas & Solari, 1994). If this is the case, higher levels of mistrust and anxiety may be normative in Latino children (Shelton & Wang, 2017).

Many developmental goals for Latino children are based on situations their parents have faced. Family interactions largely influence the individual development of children: Lower socioeconomic families may rely on family members for childcare, allowing the child to form attachments with several adult relatives (Zayas & Solari, 1994; Zamudio et al., 2020). As reported by Zayas and Solari, adaptive strategies develop in ethnic minorities as a consequence of negative stereotypes or socioeconomic adversities. Thus, some Latino families (e.g., birth parents, grandparents, extended relatives) impart socialization goals through survival skills and generational traditions. Moreover, Latino children who experience this socialization process may also attain group membership, improved self-esteem, and a sense of self (Garcia et al., 2012; Zayas & Solari, 1994). These early socialization encounters can help shape Latino children's attachments to their birth parents and multiple family members (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017).

According to Zamudio et al. (2020), cultural and contextual attachment differences are also found in Latinos living in the U.S. versus Latinos living in their Latin American home country. Their study examined adult attachment, social self-efficacy, *familismo*, and psychological well-being among 235 Mexican American university students in the U.S. and 360 Mexican university students in Mexico. Social self-efficacy was important to understand because many Latinos embrace a collectivistic culture, where tranquility is achieved through interpersonal relationships, rather than autonomy and individuality. *Familismo* was higher in more traditional Mexican families contrasted with Mexican American families. Moreover, Latinos immigrating to the U.S. at age five or below may find themselves more assimilated into the American culture than their parents. Both samples found similar frequencies of avoidant

attachment styles, while anxious attachment styles were slightly higher in the Mexican American populations. Zamudio et al. concluded that because the Mexican sample rated the social self-efficacy scale and *familismo* higher than the Mexican American populations, they may encounter higher support from their communities and parents. Although cultural and contextual differences were found in their study, Zamudio et al. believed that attachment theory may be an efficient framework for Latino populations. Considering these results, attachment theory may be valuable for understanding the relational functioning of Latino populations.

The emotional bonding and emotion regulation explained by attachment theory can help to make sense of Latino attachments. Nevertheless, few studies have confirmed cross-cultural differences in attachment, attachment experiences, and how attachment is comprehended through Latin American culture (Shelton & Wang, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2020). The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR) is a commonly used scale to identify attachments. However, when administered to minorities, differences were found in Latino, Asian American, and Caucasian communities (Shelton & Wang, 2017). While a mother's sensitivity to her child is typically observed in securely attached children, Japanese mothers were inclined to anticipate and care for their infant's needs before the infant communicated them (Shelton & Wang, 2017). Latina mothers had a tendency to display physical sensitivity through affection and indulgence, while Caucasian mothers focused on "self-maximization," instead of "sociocentric" goals (Shelton & Wang, 2017, p. 18). Ergo, Shelton and Wang described different parental practices across cultures that affect how a child's attachment is formed. Other areas that may affect ECR scores, especially for the Avoidant subscale, include an overall level of cultural mistrust due to discrimination and microaggressions (Shelton & Wang, 2017).

Other research comparing cross-cultural infant attachment and maternal behaviors found that Puerto Rican and Dominican mothers had the most physical interactions and interventions in a playground when compared to Caucasian, German, and Japanese mothers (Zayas & Solari, 1994). Physical proximity, responsiveness, affection, and relatedness were traits emphasized in the Latino culture (Correa Capello, 2006; Zayas & Solari, 1994). “Both [Caucasian] and [Latina] mothers rated the securely attached child as more typical and likable than the insecurely attached children” (Zayas & Solari, 1994, p. 202). While there may be various classifications of securely attached children cross-culturally, a “secure infant is the modal classification across cultures” (Zayas & Solari, 1994, p. 202).

As another type of attachment among Latino youth, a quantitative study by Alvarez-Rivera and Foz (2010) examined the institutional attachments of 298 Puerto Rican high school students. Cultural components guided attention toward the attachment styles that institutions like family, church, school, and friends may have on Latino populations. Participants with secure attachments to their parents were highly connected to religious institutions and schools and less likely to engage in deviant behavior. However, male Puerto Rican high school students attending private schools displayed greater insecure attachment to their parents and higher deviant behaviors. Similar to other findings in the literature (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017; Lionetti et al., 2015; Perlman et al., 2016), students with secure parental attachments exhibited healthier lifestyles than students with insecure parental attachments.

YC who enter the foster care system will have experienced many hardships, and they may continue to undergo difficulties throughout and after their stay (Ahrens et al., 2016; Kemmis-Riggs et al., 2018; Pane Seifert et al., 2015). The support provided by the child welfare system may help assist with some physical, emotional, and mental health needs; however,

research shows that many of the older youth entering the system will not have positive emancipations, even with the help provided by the state (Bergström et al., 2020; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Unfortunately, Latino youth who enter the foster care system and are emancipated may experience additional cultural barriers, such as a lack of resources or access to services (Ayón et al., 2013; Garica et al., 2012). Attachment theory may help individual who work with this population understand and process many relational adversities that Latino foster YC endure (Miranda et al., 2019; Perez & Romo, 2011).

This study can help the foster care system be more culturally sensitive by presenting a better understanding of Latino youth's unique attachment experiences and needs. Although the child welfare system encompasses different branches of control (i.e., investigative services, continuation services, and adoption services), Latino attachment experiences are affected differently at each level. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the attachment experiences of Latino youth who exited the foster care system through a qualitative study addressing their relations experiences. The following chapter describes the study, including the participants, procedure, measures, and grounded theory analyses of the data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The current study examined the attachment experiences of 12 Latino adults who exited the foster care system. This study aimed to apply attachment theory to comprehend the attachment experiences of former Latino foster youth. Participants had been in the FCS (e.g., non-kin family homes and residential homes) for at least one year. They had also experienced emancipation through the FCS, a transitional assistance program, or juvenile detention centers. Emancipation occurred after their 18th birthday when foster care services were no longer rendered, or they were transferred from a juvenile detention center. The author focused on the participant's ongoing support systems, where the support was experienced, and the participant's perspectives on why the support was beneficial.

This method chapter includes four subsections. A purposeful sample was elected based on Latinos who were emancipated from the FCS. Next, the procedure for recruitment is explained. Then, informed consent documents, the ECR-Spanish Version, and the interview questions are described. Finally, a description of grounded theory and the qualitative software package, NVivo, are provided.

Participants

Based on the current literature, a participant pool of 12 Latino adults was recruited for this study (Ahrens et al., 2016; Hokanson et al., 2019). Participants recruited were placed in out-of-home foster care and residential settings for at least a year at the time of the interview. Transitioning from foster care can occur at the age of 18 years, after they complete the NMD program, or were released from a juvenile detention facility. Recruitment was primarily done

through participant referrals, but assistance from foster care agencies, social workers, and professors was also utilized.

Demographics

Twelve former Latino foster youth (7 female, 4 males, and 1 transgender female) from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties in California were chosen. Participants identified as Hispanic (6), Latino/a (4), and biracial (2) (e.g., Mexican/Columbian and Mexican/“Black”), with Latin American backgrounds from Mexico, Columbia, El Salvador, Peru, and Spain. Ages ranged from 18 to 48 years, with a mean age of 31.7 years old. Education levels were as follows: a master’s-level of education (4), a bachelor’s level of education (2), an associate’s level of education (2), a high school or GED level of education (2), and did not graduate high school (2). Furthermore, 5 participants identified as Christian, two as atheist, two as agnostic, two as followers of more than one religion (e.g., Christian, Catholic, Buddhist), and one as Catholic. Finally, participants reported their foster care placements included both home and residential settings (10), only a foster home setting (1), and only a residential location (1). Overall, four participants shared they were also housed in juvenile detention centers. Interviews were conducted over an 11-month period from 2022 to 2023.

Procedure

Recruitment

The author initiated the recruitment of participants by contacting local foster care agencies, former and current social workers, and professors from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties in California. The following four foster agencies were contacted by email: Department of Social Services-Riverside, Department of Social Services-San Bernardino, Department of Social Services-Los Angeles, and Olive Crest. After the author introduced herself

and explained her dissertation topic, she requested a contact point who could help connect her to the needed participants or other valuable resources (Hokanson et al., 2019; Singer et al., 2013). However, most participants were obtained through referrals of participants that shared the recruitment flyer. All the participants initiated contact by calling or texting the author. Once the initial contact was made and all questions were answered, participants were emailed the consent form and a Zoom link. All interviews were conducted through Zoom, and participants were given a \$20 payment for full participation. Consistent with the qualitative literature, a sample size of 12 participants was chosen (Curry, 2019; Forenza et al., 2018), along with one-hour semi-structured interviews (Ahrens et al., 2016; Curry, 2019; Hokason et al., 2019).

Measures and Interview Questions

Participants were first given an informed consent document describing their rights and the procedures for confidentiality, recording, transcription, and software usage (see Appendix D). All participants were notified that the interviews were voluntary and could be discontinued at any time. In an effort to be culturally sensitive, all documents were translated into Spanish, and participants were given the option to choose English or Spanish as their preferred language for documents and the interview process. Documents were translated by the author, who is a native Spanish speaker, and revised by an individual with professional experience translating social service documents from English to Spanish (Brown & Torres-Harding, 2021). If participants chose to conduct their interviews in Spanish, their responses would be transcribed verbatim, and the method of “translation back translation” (Shelton & Wang, 2018, p. 18) would be conducted by the author and revised by the same professional who translated the documents. However, none of the participants choose this option, and all interviews were conducted in English.

Attachment theory was used to understand Latino foster youths' attachment experiences; hence, Shelton and Wang's (2018) ECR-Spanish Version (with bilingual English and Spanish questions) was used to develop open-ended questions on attachment types. The ECR-Spanish Version is a "self-reported adult attachment [measure], developed in English [and] translated...for validation with Latinos in the United States" (Shelton & Wang, 2017, p. 16). Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) model of adult attachment was also utilized because "the model of the self and the model of the others as conceptualized by Bowlby can be combined to describe prototypic forms of adult attachment" (p. 227). The model addresses secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful dimensions that support types of attachment former foster youth may be experiencing. Knabb et al.'s (2008) questionnaire on adolescent experiences of parental divorce was also adapted in light of the key relationship component. Each participant was given an approximately 60-minute semi-structured interview using specific questions inspired by the aforementioned published literature (the qualitative questionnaire can be seen in Appendix A). The semi-structured interviews followed Harrel and Bradley's (2009) guidelines: "Expressing interest, asking questions, expressing cultural ignorance, giving and obtaining explanations, repeating, taking asymmetrical turn-taking...and incorporating the respondent's terms" (p. 71). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, facilitated the research's transcribing and coding process. NVivo software "[provides] a transparent account and facilitate[s] many aspects of the iterative process associated with grounded theory" (Hutchinson et al., 2009, p. 285).

Analyses

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was the chosen method of qualitative analysis because it explores meanings and insights, incorporates a range of data collection methods, and seeks to interpret meaning from research established in data (Mohajan, 2018). Additionally, grounded theory focuses on “contextual factors that marginalize a group of people,” “formulates and builds new theories,” and “understands the meanings that people make from day to day life” (Mohajan, 2018, p. 24). Since this study focused on the attachment experiences of Latino adults who were emancipated from foster care, the participants’ observations and perceptions were conceptualized through the framework of grounded theory. Thus, theories can be constructed from the unprocessed Latino experiences rather than the previous studies that lack diverse samples, particularly Latinos.

According to Hutchison et al. (2009, p. 284), grounded theory entails the following:

1. An iterative process.
2. Sampling aimed at theory generation.
3. Creating analytical codes and categories from the data itself.
4. Advancing theoretical development throughout.
5. Making systemic comparisons.
6. Theoretical density.

The six steps of grounded theory helped to generate theory from the observations of former Latino foster youth by incorporating the population’s language, symbols, and cultural background (Mohajan, 2018).

Using Strauss' methods, ideas and concepts were categorized through open, axial, and selective coding (Mohajan, 2018). The video interviews were transcribed and examined using Strauss' methods and grounded theory methodology. Open coding was the first step in analyzing text and consisted of "identifying important words, or groups of words...and labeling them accordingly" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). The current data was organized using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, that provided 403 *autocodes* (i.e., open codes) for all interviews. The open codes were further analyzed by hand and regrouped, producing substantial open codes (379) without repetition. Axial coding involved the "explanation of phenomenon [through] fleshing out and linking subcategories" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). After further regrouping and synthesizing, 16 axial codes were produced. Finally, selective coding involved "finding a core category, and relating it with the other major categories for generating a [theme]" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). Through the process of selective coding, vital concepts were identified in the axial codes, and given meaning which produced seven themes. Lastly, using Creswell's (2014) reliability design, the research process and data analyses were peer-reviewed by the second, third, and fourth authors.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The qualitative coding process for the 12 interviews conducted with former foster care youth produced 379 open codes, which were then condensed into 16 axial codes. These axial codes were reduced into seven themes, establishing the base for grounded theory in this study. Participants were asked about their pre-foster care experiences, experiences during foster care, and post-foster care experiences. The seven themes that developed throughout their foster care tenure were (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. The following sections describe these themes presented by the former foster youth. Aliases and alterations were created for all quotations used to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Pre-Foster Care Experiences

Pre-foster care experiences refer to any relational memories and occurrences that participants could recall before entering the foster care system (FCS). Four participants reported being three years old or younger when they entered the system and could not remember their experiences other than what they were told or read in court reports. Seven participants were between the ages of 10-14 years and described the death of both parents or chaotic and abusive homes, ultimately leading to admittance to the FCS. Only one participant was over 16 years old when they entered the FCS: This participant reported entering group homes due to “alleged” criminal behavior, but they described a safe home environment from a one-parent household.

The theme of forgotten or distorted memories about their parental relationships was described by 11 out of the 12 participants.

Forgotten or Distorted Memories

Participants were asked to describe their relationships with their parents/caregivers before entering the FCS. Lost or distorted memories was a theme that emerged in 11 of the 12 participants. Four participants reported being three years old or younger and having difficulty recalling their life before entering the FCS. Seven participants entered the FCS between the ages of 10 and 14, described chaotic and insecure relationships with their parents. Only one participant reported being 16 years old and described their parent as “a good person, who did everything he could to keep me safe and provide for me.”

One participant reported the following when asked about their relational experiences before entering the FCS:

From my understanding and from court documents, I entered care when I was one. I didn't get to meet my bio parents until I was 14. So no, I don't remember anything about my parents. I did enter care with my sister. I was very attached to her. I was always following her around because she was the one person that I was able to connect with and kind of spoke for me. Just growing up, she was always the one that voiced for both of us.

Another participant who reported being 12 years old when they entered that FCS stated,

With my mom, [the relationship] was almost nonexistent. She lived in another state...I didn't have as much contact with her, phone calls occasionally. With my dad like it's still really tough, but back then I really had almost like a skewed view of them [father and grandmother], where they just instilled a mute loyalty. Loyalty, family first, no matter

what they do to you...I had almost like a really intense, like love and care for them even though I didn't fully feel like I could trust them or that they would take care of me.

One participant described the relationship with her parents as

Not very good, from what I remember. Just given the fact that they both dealt with their addictions. My mom...she developed a drug addiction with meth. And then, my father, he became an alcoholic. My mom developed her addiction when things started getting a little bit rough in the marriage. With my dad, I don't have a very good relationship. It's very on and off. And even at the time, it was very on and off. My dad was very violent with my mom, so that kind of ruptured a bit of our relationship. And my mom was also pretty abusive towards us. It was very inconsistent. There were times she was very loving, and there were times she was very abusive. It was very inconsistent. But from what I remember overall, I would say that it was not very well.

Most participants could recall some memories, but would admit that their memory was

“blurred,” mention, “I don't remember too well,” or say, “I think I block it out sometimes, don't really want to fully remember it.”

Experiences During Foster Care

Experiences during their foster care tenure describes participants' relational events while in the FCS. The former foster youth who entered the FCS had various experiences of being reunited with their biological families. Many participants recounted a back-and-forth cycle of unstable housing, group homes, running away, and juvenile hall. Some participants described distressful attempts to reunify with their birth families but ended back in the FCS. Moreover, many participants reported feeling their intimate biological family extended to other relatives (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) who were active in their lives.

Notably, 10 out of the 12 participants communicated living in both foster care homes and group or residential settings. Furthermore, two participants reported living only in a foster care home setting, but with at least two different families. Four out of the 10 participants also disclosed experiences while living between group homes and juvenile detention centers. The three emerging themes found during the participants' foster care experiences were an overall lack of support, a lack of meaningful contact with their biological families, and undergoing repeated abuse and traumas.

Lack of Support & Instability

All the participants reported feeling instability and a lack of support from at least one, if not multiple, significant relationships (e.g., biological parents, siblings, relatives, foster care parents, staff from group homes, social workers, etc.). In this study, support incorporates emotional, relational, financial, and informational assistance; instability refers to unpredictable situations for relationships and living arrangements.

One participant reported being taken to a foster care home for a couple of days, before running away and being sent to a group home. They described their relationships as non-existent: "Both my parents died when I was 14, so that was that. I went to live with some family at first, but I just remember being really angry. And having no one to talk to." Some participants described always feeling "alone" or "having no one I could really trust" or feeling "I was on survival mode. I couldn't depend on anybody. I was angry at the world." When asked who provided support, another participant stated,

Let's see just myself and God. You know me myself. And I know, I'm a strong person, I've been through a lot of things, and if it wasn't for me not just giving up or not quitting on my end, like a lot of things would have different reactions.

Another participant noted,

They were always isolating me in my room. I wasn't allowed to play with their biological daughter. They would treat the bio daughter a lot different than what they would treat me...I stayed in my room a lot. It was just a lot of me being isolated. And then I left that home when I was 12, and from there it was just group homes and group homes and group homes.

There was a pattern of describing instability with both their sources of support (i.e., someone to depend on) and their living circumstances (i.e., a stable home). Three participants described their youth as a revolving door between group homes, juvenile hall, homelessness, or staying with people they considered a “friend” at the time. One interviewee reported,

I didn't have much relationships. Sometimes you made friends [at the group homes], but they got moved or ran away, so it was everyone for themselves, same at juvi. I just remember being really angry and always wanting to run away...I drank, did drugs, you know. I was living life. But I guess I also met the wrong people. Did illegal [activity]. Got caught...The group [home] was well. What do you expect when you place a bunch of angry boys going through puberty?

Another participant explained,

I felt like I couldn't depend on anyone, not my social workers, not my caregivers, not anyone. And I went inward and felt like I had to do everything for myself, which is part of the reason why in between some of these foster homes, I ran away because I felt like, screw this, what's the point?

Interviewees reported feeling they lacked emotional, relational, financial, and informational support from adults who were “supposed” to be a source of safety and security. The participants

also reported their unstable housing enhanced the feeling of being unsupported and hindered their ability to make connections with people or youth who could have been sources of support.

Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families

Ten out of the 12 participants reported having contact with their families during foster care, but the levels of meaningful connections varied. Meaningful in this study is defined as “having a meaning or purpose” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). There were two participants who reported their biological parents had died before or during their foster care experience:

No, I wasn't supposed to have any contact with her [referring to biological mother]. I guess what she did was really bad, so she went to jail for it. She lost all parental rights, and she died in jail, when I was like 16, I think. Yeah, I don't think I'll ever talk to her again...I never met my father, don't know who he was or is.

Five of the eight participants expressed additional disruptions after reconnecting with their biological families during foster care. One participant described a disappointing experience after reconnecting with their biological mother:

After I reunited with my [biological mother], I stayed with her for about six months. I was a runaway, and I stayed with her. And then we got into a disagreement, and she said, “I'm going to drop you off where I found you.” And she took me to a children's holding center or something, and she left. She left me there. And at the time, I was really confused and kind of shocked...But I didn't understand at the time.

Another participant recalled,

We had regular visitations, but I mean they [referring to her biological family] were pretty flaky about it, because they didn't have transportation. After we got taken away they lost the house, and they ended up becoming homeless because they were living off

of the money they got for taking care of us. A lot of the times I'd get ready to go visit, and then we'd get a call as we were backing out of the driveway...and they would say, "Oh, I'm sorry I can't make it." I remember one moment when they called me, and said that. I literally cried and just handed the phone to my foster parent. It was, they've just, always been a huge disappointment.

One participant remembered,

My mom pretty much lost visitation rights because she wouldn't drug test. She refused to drug test. My dad wasn't really in the picture. He pretty much kind of dipped out and just never really came around. I feel like I didn't matter, just because when you matter, you [referring to her biological parents] are going to stop using drugs and you're not going to disappear for months at a time.

Only two people described an appropriate or meaningful experience with their biological families during their foster care tenure. One participant described pleasant memories:

We'd watch sports together, you know. She would play soccer with us...all that stuff would always take place. We would go to picnics, you know, have fun, make memories. She never drove so we would walk to the liquor store. Get snacks, watch movies, like all the normal stuff.

The other participant explained his visits being in a residential setting:

My dad would visit, like once a month, for like an hour, 45 min. [Our relationship] was good. It was good. You know, like any father would just ask how I was doing, [tell me to] "keep a good head on my shoulders"...My dad would tell me like, "I love you" and everything. But it was just more like self-love, like "I love you." That was the emotional support he gave me.

One interviewee described endless disappointment, where their birth mother never believed they had been abused by both their stepfather and biological father:

It was mostly just trying, trying to maintain a relationship. Even to this day, with my mom. I guess it wasn't really much of a relationship. We would just argue over the same things. Every time that we did talk. Mostly about what happened with my stepdad and dad. She never believed what had happened to me, even after they put me in foster care.

Repeated Abuse and Traumas

All 12 participants described an ongoing cycle of repeated abuse and traumatic events while they were in the FCS. Their abuse was experienced through either one or various forms: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Most participants were hesitant to give details about their experiences with sexual abuse and were forthcoming about it, stating, “I don’t want to talk about it,” “I’ve blocked some of it out,” or “I only have pieces that I do not want to remember completely.” One participant stated,

I went through it all. I was physically, sexually, all of it abused. I got locked in dark rooms all the time. We [referring to themselves and their siblings] didn't get fed. I remember being hungry all the time. They [referring to the foster parents] would take the end of their cigarette and put it out on my back. She [referring to a different foster parent] began to torture me by sticking needles under my nails...She would always say that I was a demon child, tell that she hated me.

Another interviewee noted,

I wasn't allowed to talk to him [referring to the foster father]...His wife was jealous, which was strange. I was only 14, but it also reminded me a lot of my own home situation, because a lot of the trouble between me and my mom and the reason why she

would beat me as a child, was because she thought that I had something with my father. It was really weird, to experience that again, in the foster care system...I don't know if he [referring to the foster father] was drunk that night. He came into my room, and he told me he can give me whatever I wanted, and he gave me lingerie and asked me if I could put him on for him, and I was very creeped out by the situation. I didn't know what to do. I was already going through a lot, and I had no one.

Other participants described experiences that have caused long lasting painful memories. For example,

I didn't have any good relationship with any of them [referring to the foster family]. The first one, we were being abused in, so we were removed from that home and then placed in another one. And then that second home, me and my sister were separated, and I stayed, and she got sent away. A lot of physical abuse. My sister remembers a lot of the sexual abuse. I don't remember that portion. And I don't know if it's because maybe they didn't do it to me or because I just blocked that out and I would rather not get into that part. And I do remember a lot of the physical abuse. I remember the foster mom was always angry and she would hit us with, like, spoons. I have this one vision in my head where I'm being hung from the top of the stair railing, like, over the stairs, and I can just see, like, I'm looking down and all I see is the stairs. And I see it so vividly just all the time.

Another participant shared,

I keep trying to forget it, and I remember they had a cockroach problem...One day everyone [foster family] went out and they left me and my sister in our room with the door closed, because then they bug bombed the house and they left us in the house. We

lived across the street from a park and there was a lot of homeless people there...I remember getting a headache and feeling kind of sick and the dogs were in a crate...and they were barking...This homeless man was...yelling at us, like, "Shut that dog up!" And you know I was just so afraid because it was just me and my sister, and I was like he was like threatening to get in there and kill the dog, and I grabbed a bat. I was just waiting.

Yet another participant reported,

She [referring to the foster mother] wouldn't give us water or anything to drink after a certain time. And my sister had a wet bed wetting problem. I feel like that's probably from the sexual abuse, but she would always wet the bed and we would always get in trouble for it. So at night, my sister and I would sneak into the bathroom to drink out of the toilet because we were just really thirsty. I remember we would sleep in the closet, me and my sister. I remember just not having a lot of toys or things at all.

One person described their experience in a group home: "You can't be in there without fighting. Like you're gonna have to fight. And that's the thing." Another participant diminished their neglect, stating,

We weren't really abused, she [referring to the foster mother] just like not met our necessities, like toothbrushes, but we didn't ask for it [referring to the toothbrush and other necessities]. We were timid...We [referring to themselves and their sibling] got her in trouble. She was hiding things from the social worker. The social worker asked who lived there, and I mentioned other people. She [the foster mother] became really like upset. She was the kind of people who do it for the money, you know, breaking the rules and stuff...But that's how she was, you know, parenting like single a mom you just kind of winging it.

Post-Foster Care Experience

Post-foster care experience illustrates the participant's experiences after they were emancipated from a FCS placement (e.g., a foster care home with one family, a group/residential home, or a juvenile detention center) or were adopted by their foster family. Participants described events that demonstrated having had a positive impact from at least one stable relationship, a continued relationship with their biological families as an adult (i.e., positive or negative), and the challenges they now have in forming and preserving healthy relationships as adults.

Positive Impact of One Stable Relationship

Nine of the 12 participants described the positive impact experienced from at least one stable relationship. Three participants reported feeling they “never” had a mentor or steady relationship in which they felt safe or cared for. Moreover, two of the three interviewees who did not report a significant relationship also disclosed they transferred from juvenile hall into county jail on their 18th birthday. They explained that their biological families currently provide “a place to stay, sometimes” or monetary assistance and a type of connection. Still, they did not perceive this support as significant. The third participant, undergoing a transitional assistance program, reluctantly reported the only person who they could ask for help was their new case manager because they had never felt they “could trust anyone or anyone has really been there for me.”

Furthermore, the nine participants who reported at least one stable relationship also pursued higher education (e.g., an associate, a bachelor's, or a master's degree). Although they described negative experiences throughout their journey, they also noted at least one positive outcome. One interviewee reported,

She [referring to the positive mentor] followed me everywhere...She would visit me like once or twice a month. She sends me letters all the time, even to this day, and she always signs, "Your friend forever"... She always laughs because I tell her every time I talk about her I cry so much [as tears rolled down their cheek]. She taught me how to drive a car... She drove me to college...[She helped me see myself] as someone who could be like finally taken care of. She's really amazing, and I think I really looked up to her. And that's why I want to be like her...I want to be confident. I want to be helpful. I want to be calming to people, like her. I think she really was a big reason for why I became so kind to people, while I was able to get rid of all the hatred.

Another interviewee described a relationship that has continued to provide consistency and emotional, financial, esteem, and informational support:

My mom is amazing [referring to her last foster mother]. Amazing. She's a great support. She has been a great support since I was placed in her home. That support is invaluable...She provided me a home, an actual home, not just a place to sleep, not just a place to eat, but an actual home. I still talk to her till this day. I just started seeing her as my mom, as a mother figure. I'm very grateful to have her in my life, then and now, because I think I needed that. I didn't consider myself to be lovable, but she taught me: "You deserve to be loved, and this is the way that I'm going to show you that you deserve to be loved." I didn't understand unconditional love and support. I didn't understand that because I never had it. So in the beginning, I didn't know, and I was pushing her away. But after, I want to say maybe a year and a half into the relationship with her, I can definitely say that I learned, like, okay, she does love me.

When asked about supportive and positive relationships, one participant noted a mentor that assisted with emotional, financial, and informational support:

I had a mentor when I was in community college that really helped me see the light and kind of own my trauma, because you get trauma from the type of experience that I had to go through. I struggle even to this day, with holding appropriate relationships, not just intimate, but just in general with friends. I think [they] paid my electric bill one month. When our electricity got shut off, [they] helped with finding me a cheap fridge. When I finally got an apartment, it made me feel like I'm important, too, because I didn't feel that before.

During their time at a group home, one interviewee recalled a staff member:

[They] were very eager. [They] were very attentive, and [they] were a very kind person. You know the type that makes you want to care more about yourself. When you see people like that, you just kind of like care more about yourself...It just opens a lot of visual things...I never had a [parent] like that like...tell me certain things...Or like even come see me. [They] would come like how a [parent] would come. Professional, too, all at the same time. Only good, great people can do that all.

Only one participant described making a network of meaningful connections through their religious affiliations:

I got invited to a youth group. I would go on and off for like a year, wasn't too much into it. And then, around 16, I went to a camp, accepted Jesus as my savior, and got saved. That changed my whole path. Well, He [referring to God] changed my life and how I viewed myself, others the world...They [referring to other church members] were always

there. In fact, when I got kicked out at 18, I stayed with church friends. We're still friends to this day.

After inquiring about their social worker interactions, only two participants stated they encountered a long-term social worker who was helpful in the process. One participant said, "I remember one [social worker] very specifically, and it's not that I liked her, but she became consistent for me. You know what she was like. I knew I would see her, no matter what house I went to." Another participant was unable to form a strong relationship with any of their social workers, but described their experiences with social workers as follows:

I think that the unfortunate part of being placed in foster care is that a lot of the social workers are burnt out. So I feel like they kind of check-in in and pretty much check off a checklist, and then that's pretty much it. So there wasn't that much rapport there.

Adult Connections with Biological Families

Eleven of the 12 participants described adult connections with biological families. The participant who did not report a connection to his birth family after their foster care experience mentioned their biological mother was no longer alive and they had never met their biological father. This participant also stated, "[My biological family (e.g., grandparents, cousins, and aunt)] tried to contact me when I was 16, but my mom [referring to their adoptive/foster mother] wanted me to wait till I was 18, and I guess I just never went through with it." The eleven participants that reported keeping in touch with at least one member of their biological family described either positive or negative relationships and feelings towards them. One participant stated, "I hate that I love them. You know, it makes it really hard, because if I didn't love them, it'd make it easier to move on and not be so sad." Another participant described an estranged relationship with their biological mother:

I don't call her mom, and she knows that...She's never been in our life for any of the important things or any of the bad things. She's always, from what I've seen, used people to her advantage. Like, my older [sibling], [they] make a lot of money, so she's always asking my [sibling] for stuff. "Can you buy me a plane ticket? Can you pay my phone bill? Can you do this?" My [sibling] pays her phone bill monthly...She's never worked. She's lived off welfare her whole life. And I know she comes with her own set of trauma...and I feel like every time all the [siblings] get into an argument or something, she's behind it.

Some participants described a positive relationship with at least one member of their biological family. One participant noted,

It's very meaningful. I always say that only [they, referring to their sibling] really know what we went through, and I think [they] know more than I do. Just given that [they] went through a lot more, I feel [they] witnessed a lot more because I was placed out of the home, and I believe [they] stayed, and I don't know why until this day why they let [them] stay, but because of that, [they] witnessed more.

Another participant reported,

Yeah, we all [referring to their birth family] live together now, like in the same household. My mom, too. We've been living together for the last like nine years, like we've all been out of foster care and all that, but actually live in the same household. It's been like nine years now.

Other participants described a relationship held by guilt and a desire to be the caregiver of their parents or siblings. One participant indicated,

And our relationship is strained because she was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. She kind of triggers me cause she reminds me of everything that I left behind. I feel so much responsibility for [my sibling]. But at this point, I can't always be the one to fix things, and you know, give [my sibling] money, and you know, and [my sibling] asks a lot of things from me and when I say no. [My sibling] acts like I'm like abandoning [them] and I'm the worst person in the world. So, it's really hard. It's a very confusing relationship.

Another participant disclosed,

I was constantly trying to help everyone in any way that I could. And it just took so much from me. It's like I don't know, like I was just trying to save them. You know, they have their own stuff, too. And there are certain things I can't change in certain people. I think I'm just not ready to give up hope with them [referring to their siblings]. You know, [my siblings] still have it in them, I believe in [them], and I know that [my siblings] can do it. They have proven to me that they appreciate the assistance. I'm just not ready to give up on everyone.

Furthermore, two participants described relationships with their biological families that provided financial or emotional support, even though they did not perceive the relationship as “strong.” For example, one participant said,

I'm not sure it's hard to trust people. I mean. I talked to my dad. He's in prison, but we talk sometimes. One of my brother lives with my mom, and I've lived with them on and off. They help me out sometimes.

Another participant noted the following:

I guess the only people I have are my family and my kids. [The relationship] isn't the best cause, you know, I've been in prison most of my life, so I was never there for them. But they try to be as inclusive as they can and support me. My uncles and aunts, too. But again, like I said, it's just kind of like moving around couch surfing. So it really isn't the best support. But I get by. I do the best I can.

Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Eleven out of the 12 participants described an inability or difficulty forming healthy relationships. Three participants mentioned having received mental health services during their foster care tenure or after their emancipation, and they were able to describe their difficulties better. However, they still mentioned struggles with meeting other people, trusting others, and maintaining relationships. One participant noted:

I'm lacking even with those lasting relationships. And I think that's just like a long-term thing, I'm gonna have to work on. But I do. I mean, I can't make long-term relationships. Sometimes I just feel like I'm the cause of when they fall apart.

Another participant explained,

It was always difficult for me to make meaningful connections with people. I just didn't trust. Throughout my life, I never felt like I could trust anyone, and I didn't feel supported by anyone, least of all my family, and those closest to me. So, and I think that developed into like fear and mistrust, like I just did not trust people, and it really affects me a lot.

One participant stated,

I want to say that it [referring to the FCS] taught me the negative aspect about forming relationships. It taught me how to not ask for help, which means that I've learned that

about myself. Or I would much rather do it myself rather than ask someone for help, which is not a good thing all the time. And I think that's one of the bad things.

When asked about their ability to form relationships, one participant noted,

I don't have good coping skills. I've noticed that I'm constantly trying to acknowledge, or be mindful of, my feelings and my emotions, because I don't want to snap. I don't [want to] talk in a mean tone, or anything like that, or anything that resembles anything that my mom ever did. So I definitely don't ever want to lash out in anger, but at the same time, I struggle with it a lot. Like, I lack good coping mechanisms. Because I wasn't taught how to regulate my emotions, or how to deal with things, I've kind of learned along the way and I've done a pretty great job at it, I think, compared to like the alternative, but I definitely still struggle. I have to be mindful of it, because I don't ever want to be rude or anything.

Another participant noted,

I don't see myself as lovable. I don't really. I mean, if I'm being honest, I don't really have much of a relationship with anyone. And to me personally, that just makes me feel like I'm just gonna see people here pass by every now and then. That's probably gonna be it. Just whoever is there at the moment, and, like, you know, however long that lasts, if it does.

Summary

This study focused on the attachment experiences of 12 former foster YC, before going into the FCS, while they were in the FCS, and after they were emancipated from the FCS. Seven themes emerged from the study, which were (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and

Traumas, (e) Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. The former foster youth shared their relational experiences, challenges, and lasting memories. The qualitative data focus on their relational experiences before, during, and after the FCS.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the attachment experiences of former Latino foster youth who were emancipated from the FCS. Additionally, the study focused on examining (a) ongoing sources of relational support, (b) where the supportive relationships and resources were found, and (c) the impact of these relationships. The previous interviews were coded and organized into seven themes: (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. All participants described growing up in environments that created and perpetuated insecure attachments (i.e., instability, repeated abuse, lack of emotional connections, etc.). Eleven participants indicated they continue to struggle with healthy relationships (i.e., trust, creating relationships, maintaining secure relationships, etc.). This chapter focuses on the relational and cultural effects endured by former Latino foster youth, as well as limitations and future recommendations.

Theme Interpretation

Repeated Abuse and Traumas

An emergent theme found among all participants was a repeated cycle of abuse and traumatic events, creating complex traumas (Greeson et al., 2011; Greger et al., 2017). The former foster youth recalled experiencing at least one type of ongoing abuse, if not multiple types, during their foster care tenure: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Similarly, Thomas and Scharp's (2020) study found that foster youth had mentioned harmful

experiences throughout their time in the FCS, specifically in residential settings. However, most of the reported abuse in this study occurred while participants were in a foster home rather than a residential setting. It is also possible that some participants did not disclose every traumatic event or they have forgotten some painful memories (e.g., “I’ve blocked some of it out”).

Many participants reported that the abuse led to consistent running away, even when it created unsafe environments and going to juvenile hall, which ultimately produced additional complex trauma and abuse. Furthermore, most of the participants who reported running away at some point in their foster care tenure noted running away to an extended relative or their biological parent at least once. These reports were also found in Wulczyn’s (2020) study demonstrating that Latino foster youth were 24 times more likely to run away than Caucasian and African American youth in the FCS. Likewise, Perez and Romo’s (2011) study revealed that *familismo* principles, such as loyalty and unity, led foster youth to reach out to their biological families before looking for other resources. The participants who mentioned running away to a family member noted the FCS did not allow their family reunifications for various reasons (i.e., biological parents not completing requirements), creating more dysfunction within their families and the FCS. Perez and Romo also discussed the power of family values (e.g., prioritizing family, solidarity, and allegiance) in Hispanic culture, despite ongoing relationship difficulties.

Similar to Perlman et al.’s (2016) and Mikulincer and Shaver’s (2019) research, individuals with insecure attachments tend to seek out love and care and lack emotional control (e.g., anxious) or distrust others, be on the defensive, and attempt to deal with hardships alone (e.g., ambivalent). The participants in this study discussed running away (lack of emotional control or distrusting others) and looking for their birth families (seeking love and care). However, most family reunifications only confirmed that others were harmful and maintained a

negative view of themselves and the world. Furthermore, their insecure attachments were also preserved by the continuous abuse from their FCS caregivers, proving the world was unsafe and people could not be trusted (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

Lack of Support

All 12 participants reported feeling they had limited or a lack of support from at least one, if not multiple, significant relationships (e.g., birth parents, siblings, extended relatives, foster care parents, social workers, etc.). Participants described lacking emotional, relational, financial, and informational support. The feeling of having no one to turn to in times of need created various beliefs, such as always being alone, being in survival mode, and having to learn independence at a young age. Unfortunately, lacking support from significant relationships is seen across the FCS in multiple studies examining sources of support and secure attachments (Curry, 2019; Greeson et al., 2015; Miranda et al., 2019).

Moreover, participants reported the absence of support occurred due to different challenges, such as FCS bureaucracies (e.g., staff turnover, overworked social workers, and unstable housing), mental health challenges from their biological families, separation from siblings, and not having an adult who could provide long-lasting security. The data are consistent with McGuinness and Schneider (2007), who reported higher stress levels (due to lack of support) and unsatisfactory care. Waid and Wojciak's (2019) findings were also consistent with sibling separation creating ruptured relationships.

The interviewees also described a lack of support due to unstable housing and an inability to form relationships with other foster youth with whom they had connected. Eleven participants in this study reported they started their foster care tenure by age 14 and they emancipated from the FCS. Thus, at an early age, the participants began experiencing inconsistent housing, feeling

unsupported, and unable to form lasting relationships with other foster youth they felt could have been a positive connection. Waid et al. (2017) found that an average of four settings will be experienced for every 1,000 days in foster care, supporting the ongoing housing changes the current participants experienced. Although it would be beneficial for foster youth to encounter relationships modeling trust and mutual significance, these findings coincide with Waid and Wojciak's (2019) and Lionetti et al.'s (2015) studies, which also reported that youth in foster care would experience housing instability that intensifies their lack of security and trust.

Garcia Quiroga et al. (2017) and McWey (2004) discussed the effects of multiple placements on foster YC's attachment styles and emotional states. McWey noted that children displaying insecure attachments who had experienced more than two placements before age seven would typically continue a pattern of destructive relationships. The constant placement instabilities, caregiver changes, and lack of meaningful contact with their birth families also sustained relational problems and insecure attachment styles.

Forgotten or Distorted Memories

Eleven participants reported they did not remember their relational experiences with their parents before foster care or that their memories were "blurred." Forgetting their relational experiences prior to their foster care tenure was expected after four participants reported being three years old or younger. Seven participants expressed being between 10 and 14 years old and having blurred memories, but described chaotic, unstable, and abusive relationships. Although participants primarily reported forgotten or distorted memories before their foster care tenure, the theme was reported throughout the interviews, particularly when participants attempted to recall their abuse or engagement in criminal activity. While the literature does not necessarily focus on

lost or distorted fostered YC memories, this information may be helpful for future research or therapeutic settings.

One participant, who entered the FCS at age 16 due to criminal activity, reported having a “good father” who kept him safe and “did his best.” This participant also reported feeling they had good coping skills to deal with the negative experiences during their foster care tenure and feeling their father was an ongoing source of support. Miranda et al. (2019) also found that a sense of security with caregivers provided emotional stability and healthier connections. Furthermore, McWey (2004) explained that YC who had experienced lower emotional neglect would typically display more secure attachment styles (i.e., positive view of self and others, trusting in support during times of need).

Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families

Most participants in this study expressed they lacked meaningful contact with their birth families during their foster care tenure. Two mentioned they did not communicate with their birth family due to death and a court order. Although ten participants reported seeing or talking to their biological parents at some point, not all contact was perceived to have provided meaningful emotional support, love, or a sense of security. Participants recalled having contact through visits, phone calls, and sometimes after running away and seeking their birth families. However, only one participant recounted significant contact with their biological parent, leading to reunification after being emancipated from the FCS. Similarly, Cushing et al. (2014) noted significant parental relationships were not as common during the reunification process, and the impact often led to a lack of self-care and support.

All the barriers to visits were unknown or undisclosed by the participants. However, one participant mentioned poverty, homelessness, and mental health problems deterring their father

and grandma from visiting. Another participant communicated that their mother refused to take a drug test, and their father disappeared, leading to no contact with them during their foster care tenure. Similarly, Ayón et al. (2013) found that Latino families may undergo a lengthy process to initiate contact and are less likely to receive the resources (e.g., mental health services, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, etc.) they need for reunification.

Half of the participants that reported visits happening only “here and there” or menial contact with their birth families mentioned various reasons. Some reasons included poverty, mental health problems, court orders, lack of transportation, and estranged relationships with their parents. These reports coincided with Cushing et al. (2014) and Garcia et al. (2012), who found similar challenges for parents trying to visit their children in the FCS. Furthermore, while all participants identified as Latino or Hispanic, only one participant reported experiencing foster homes with similar traditional values (e.g., foods, family, discipline, loyalty, etc.). These findings coincide with Ayón et al.’s (2013) and Correa Capello’s (2006) studies describing the cultural challenges (i.e., not learning their language or actualizing their cultural identities) faced by Latino youth.

Goldsmith et al. (2004) discussed the yearning that foster YC have to reconcile with their birth families, despite maltreatment experiences. This longing and disappointment continue to foster anxious and ambivalent attachments in the midst of their grief and parental losses. The experiences recounted by participants align with Miranda et al.’s (2019) and Perez and Romo’s (2011) research noting that foster YC who communicate with their birth families will maintain insecure attachments because the underlying problems are never addressed. Furthermore, while the attachment styles of the foster YC’s parents were not discussed in this study, it is likely it

also impacted their ability to model how to build healthy relationships and form more secure attachments.

Adult Connections with Biological Families

Eleven of the 12 participants reported they continue to contact their birth families (e.g., parents, grandparents, or extended relatives). Only one participant reported having no contact with their biological family due to incarceration and death. For some participants, the communication continued after emancipation, even if their family member(s) were and continued to be abusive, and the relationship remained estranged. Fernandes-Alcantara (2019) also found that foster youth who reunite with their families may face inadequate living dynamics and continuous relationship ruptures. Furthermore, Perez and Romo's (2011) study discussed the importance of finding identity within networks that share similar values, particularly Latino family principles (e.g., unity, loyalty, perseverance). Therefore, it is likely that in seeking identity, the former foster youth continued pursuing their biological family relationships even when they remained estranged or abusive.

Two participants described their beliefs on how cultural practices have influenced their family connections. One participant described how *familismo* negatively affected their ability to set boundaries and move forward. They described a sibling relationship that left them feeling exploited and emotionally drained. However, the other participant expressed how *familismo* benefited them and helped them to overcome adverse outcomes. They described the sense of community, loyalty, trust, and belonging.

Similarly, Perez and Romo (2011) discussed family values as an essential and critical aspect of Latino culture. Regardless of how participants described their birth family relationships (i.e., positive or negative), the birth families are available and provide the former foster some

provision. The participants who found their birth families and extended relatives helpful described different types of support (i.e., financial, emotional, housing, instrumental, etc.). Likewise, Hokason et al. (2019) discovered that birth families could provide former foster youth with emotional and instrumental assistance.

Sibling Connections. Unfortunately, the only participant who described a positive sibling relationship was the same youth who reunited with their family and was in the same foster home with their sibling. The two participants who reported their parents had passed away did not mention knowing about any siblings or half-siblings. Of the multiple participants who mentioned having siblings, no one said they were sent to the same foster or group home long-term or maintained a meaningful relationship during or after their foster care tenure. Even when the former foster youth reported connecting with their birth families, the sentiment was typically described as, “Every so often, we talk, but it's not like your regular brother and sister relationship.” Other participants described failed attempts to rebuild sibling relationships and the resignation of believing there would be no future attempts. Similarly, Waid and Wojciak’s (2019) research found that sibling separations in foster care are common and lead to increased adverse outcomes (e.g., depression, despair, guilt, etc.).

Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Not surprisingly, 11 of the 12 participants reported they struggle to create and maintain healthy relationships. Likewise, Curry (2019) discovered that YC in the FCS face unstable relationships from multiple sources: parents, siblings, therapists, social workers, facility staff, and mentors. His study found that constant turnover further damages foster youth’s emotional health and creates a pattern for unstable relationships. The 11 interviewees from this study also reported they believed their relationship challenges were due to the inconsistencies and inability

to learn how to maintain appropriate relationships. Moreover, these 11 participants reported having adverse foundations with caregiver relationships and describing having negative attachment styles (i.e., forecasting potential negative interactions and emotional dysregulation) (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005).

The one participant who did not report difficulties creating or maintaining relationships expressed a secure attachment style (i.e., emotional permanence and positive view of self and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). The participant communicated they maintained significant contact with their biological mother, were housed with their siblings during foster care, and have all been living together for the past nine years. Furthermore, this participant reported the positive impact of being placed in foster homes with Latino foster parents who modeled similar cultural values: “She [referring to the foster mother] had a similar parenting style. She took us to her family events, and they all treated us [referring to themselves and their siblings] like family, not foster kids...She let us live with her even after with turned 18, rent free, and continued to love us and take care of us...That’s unheard of.” This finding is consistent with Correa Cappello (2006), who noted that Latino children placed in homes with similar language and family values may decrease foster children’s traumatic experiences. This participant described Latino values, *familismo*, loyalty, and trust, indicating mutual and significant connection benefits.

Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship

Nine participants described the positive impact of at least one secure relationship. Singer et al.’s (2013) study with former foster youth yielded similar results, linking meaningful relationships to positive outcomes, even if the former foster youth were no longer in contact. Overall, the nine participants in the current study reported their significant relationship provided emotional connection, hope, love, support, peace, and a feeling of “finally belonging.”

Additionally, their secure relationships modeled appropriate interactions, provided the former foster youth with financial and informational support, and encouraged them to pursue higher education or improve themselves. These relationships were found in various backgrounds: a CASA worker, a college professor, a group home staff member, a former boss, a sibling, foster parents, and friends made through a church youth group. Berzin et al. (2011) and Hokason et al. (2019) also described the importance of establishing interdependence and self-reliance during the transition into adulthood. Their studies focused on the positive impact of supportive relationships with transitioning foster youth.

Three participants reported they had felt alone and unsupported most of their lives, and when asked who they would seek out for support, they could not provide strong support systems. Two of these participants reported they had transferred from a juvenile detention center into a county jail. Although they did not mention having a mentor or significant relationship, they did say that their birth families assisted them with occasional housing and finances. The third participant had recently turned 18 years old and was receiving transitional assistance. This participant reported severe mental health problems (e.g., depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm behaviors) and reported not having a best friend, family support, or feeling that they could form meaningful relationships. The information provided by the interviewees aligns with Curry (2019) and Greeson et al. (2015), suggesting one permanent connection in a foster youth's social network can provide dependability and reduce harmful outcomes.

The experiences recounted by the former foster youth focus on the lack of receptiveness, sensitivity, and support from caregiver relationships that led to insecure "mental representations" and negative "working models of others" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Although the FCS is set with a goal of safety and family reunification, the system's bureaucracy may work against foster

YC, leaving them without hope, safety, or the ability to learn how to form secure attachments and regulate their emotions. Thus, in the current study, it was apparent that former YC who entered the FCS with insecure attachments seemed to maintain anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Research has revealed that the inability to bond with caregivers, develop healthy relationships, or learn adaptive coping skills can lead to depression, anxiety, and lifelong difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships (McWey, 2004; Miranda et al., 2019).

The one participant that reported a secure attachment (i.e., trusting others, feeling supported, feeling loved) also noted perceived support from their birth and foster mothers and remaining with their siblings during foster care placements. Moreover, this participant understood and expressed the positive impact of having safe caregivers and being raised in a home that upheld and taught strong Latino *familismo* values. Accordingly, he found it easy to reunite with his biological mother and siblings at the end of his foster care tenure. This participant's experiences indicate that while one secure relationship is essential, incorporating cultural values and being fully seen as a Latino individual may have helped to form a long-lasting and secure attachment style.

Finally, the study found that the nine participants who reported having had at least one positive relationship in their life also noted a change in their perception of relationships: “[They] are the reason I became kind and want to help others” (view of others/world) and “[They] taught me [I] deserve to be loved” (view of self). Although previous research has focused on positive attachment during foster care (Lionetti et al., 2015; Okpych & Courtney, 2018), the participants reported they had encountered their supportive person at various times during and after their foster care tenure, some as far as 29 years old. For this reason, their experiences demonstrate that it is never too late to begin working on transforming our working models and emotional bonds.

While one secure attachment may not repair years of abuse, complex trauma, and instability, it can be a step toward mending, healing, and developing hope.

Limitations

It should be noted that this study produced several limitations. First, the semi-structured interviews were one-sided recollections, possibly affecting the interviewee's retrospective accounts and leading to distortions. Secondly, due to the topic's sensitive nature, it was clear some participants were reluctant to share all the details and feelings associated with their traumatic experiences. Although the researcher took several steps to inform participants of their anonymity, many participants had difficulty sharing and reliving their experiences. Thirdly, while the sample size ($N = 12$) is appropriate for a qualitative study, the results may not adequately represent the larger foster care populations, limiting generalizability. Next, the sample represents various demographics (e.g., sexual orientations, ages, foster care tenure timeline, number of transitions, criminal history, types of detention facilities, etc.). However, the sample was too small to identify substantial differences between each demographic. Moreover, different demographic categories (i.e., age, number of transitions, types of detention facilities, etc.) may impact attachment styles and each participant's experiences. For example, a child entering the FCS at age three versus an adolescent entering the FCS at age 16 or a YC living in one home placement versus various residential settings would likely create different experiences.

Another limitation of this study was that all twelve participants reported abuse throughout their foster care tenure. Thus, former foster youth who did not experience further traumas while in the FCS, may have reported different outcomes. Finally, while there appeared to be various similarities between the relational experiences of the former foster youth, their age differences

(ranging from 18 to 48 years old) also represented different periods, laws, and resources available during the emancipation process that may have altered the results.

Future Directions and Research Recommendations

Preventative Measures

Several studies have attempted to understand the impact of clinical interventions during a YC's foster care tenure and have found positive outcomes (Bergstrom et al., 2020; Goemans et al., 2015; Pane Seifert et al., 2015). The results have concluded that outcomes can be improved with systemic interventions (e.g., ABC, IYPP, and TC) and ethical practices. Nonetheless, Latino families were found to have received fewer mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and foster care services (i.e., social worker visits and foster parent support) (Watt & Kim, 2019) than their Caucasian and African American counterparts. Therefore, it would be valuable to have more research on the outcomes of utilizing preventative measures that assist Latino parents, children, and families before being admitted into the FCS.

Seven participants reported at least one of their parents suffered from a mental disorder or had a problem with substance abuse that primarily contributed to their admission into the FCS. Preventative measures assisting with mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and parenting classes may help decrease the foster care admittance of Latino youth. Furthermore, 11 participants reported difficulty forming and maintaining secure, healthy relationships and substantial contact with their biological families after their foster care tenure.

Preventative care can be applied through the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM), a theory that focuses on the possibility of development, hoping parents adapt appropriate behaviors (Robbers, 2009). The TTM may help parents who desire to remain in their children's lives and provide love and security through the "pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action,

and maintenance” phases between prenatal and postnatal (Robbers, 2009, p. 125). Providing parents with psychoeducation, such as the TTM, can help them to develop secure attachments in their children’s lives. For parents struggling with substance abuse or mental health problems, future research and help to examine effective strategies that will facilitate ongoing relationships with family members while YC are in the FCS. Moreover, research studying the impact of preventative measures before children are admitted to the FCS may provide Latino families with valuable resources that reduce abuse, family separation, and long-lasting adverse effects.

Culturally Sensitive Services

Ayón et al.’s (2013) and Correa Capello’s (2006) research found that Latino foster care YC may lose their cultural identity due to the small number of Latino licensed foster care families that can continue modeling and teaching cultural practices. Only two participants could adequately describe cultural practices they were taught (one remembered the values taught before their foster care tenure). Moreover, only two participants in this study stated they were bilingual and understood their native tongue. Future research can focus on identifying the strengths of maintaining collectivistic values, language, and traditions. Recognizing the impact of being placed with families who hold collectivistic values may help provide former foster youth with different support networks and coping skills. Furthermore, it may also help those who work with foster youth better understand when Latino values (e.g., loyalty, respect for authority, group accountability, etc.) are not adequately used and are causing emotional turmoil and additional harm (Perez & Romo, 2011).

Research by Waid and Wojciak (2019) discovered that *familismo* can foster belonging and the ability to develop resilience. Nevertheless, five participants described family dynamics that continued to create discord and negative experiences. As described earlier, one participant

was left with guilt and the inability to move forward. In contrast, another participant explained how *familismo* allowed them to overcome adversity and have a sense of belonging. Moreover, Waid and Wojciak's study also found that creating a balance between interdependence and autonomy is crucial for appropriate support throughout adulthood.

Bicultural Identity Integration (BII). A longitudinal study conducted by Schwartz et al., (2015) examined how BII, defined as “the ability to synthesize one’s heritage and receive cultural streams and to identify as a member of both cultures” (p. 440), could predict mental health and family well-being of Hispanic youth that had recently immigrated into the US. Their study found that participants who felt part of a combined culture, both from their Latin American culture and the American culture, reported higher self-esteem, optimism, prosocial behaviors, parental involvement, and better family communication than participants who could not integrate their heritage and US culture. Although not all Hispanic foster youth in the US come from recently immigrated families, the importance of understanding and integrating a youth’s culture (e.g., language, values, roles, etc.) is crucial across settings. Thus, research focusing on the impact of helping YC in foster care to understand and adapt their heritage can provide possible protective factors, allow them to understand themselves better, and promote *familismo*. Future research should also focus on the specific elements of *familismo* that lead to adverse versus resilient outcomes.

Sibling Placements and Relationships. Research shows that foster YC who are placed with their siblings and continue these relationships have more positive outcomes (e.g., resilience, emotional wellbeing, positive behaviors, etc.) than separated siblings (Hokason et al., 2019; Wojciak, 2017; Waid & Wojciak, 2019). While eleven participants reported separations and relationship ruptures with their siblings, one participant in this study described being

permanently placed with their siblings and having a healthy relationship. Future research should explore the impact that the FCS has on sibling relationships and the effect on the number of placements foster YC go through.

Generational Differences

The current study focused on former foster youth and aimed at interviewing participants who had emancipated from the system. The interviewee's ages in this study ranged from 18–48 years old. Ultimately, the FCS has undergone several legal changes and has changed the type of assistance given to youth to support them better. Participants aged 35-48 years old reported, “I was given \$250 and told, ‘Good luck!’” Another participant in this age range stated, “They gave me a backpack with housing items, a bent skillet, and told me to ‘move out.’” Four former foster youth aged between 27 and 34 reported they did not recall being offered assistance and trying to make it independently. Another two denied the support because they had children and did not want their children to be in the same system they had survived. However, two participants stated they were either in the process or had received transitional assistance and had benefited from the support. However, not all laws focus on relational or mental health services, but attempt to provide housing and finances. Future research could focus on how newer laws and system changes have affected TAY and the long-lasting outcomes.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) connection to Latino Populations

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a framework that helps to identify traumatic experiences children under 18 years old endure and prevention approaches to mitigate their damage (Munoz et al., 2022). ACEs encompass children who may experience neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, incarceration, and parents who suffer from substance abuse, domestic violence, or traumatic events. Munoz et al. focused on the link between hope theory

and attachment theory in adults who have experienced ACEs. While attachment theory focuses on emotional bonding and interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019), hope theory suggests that hopeful thinking is driven by goal-oriented thoughts, pathways/strategies to attain goals, and agency or motivation to exert effort for achievement (Munoz et al., 2022).

Researchers noted that higher levels of hope were associated with resilience and found that attachment insecurities were associated with lower hope expectations and called for further research to examine how ACE interventions may promote hope and secure attachments (Munoz et al., 2022).

Based on the ACEs conditions, all the participants from the current study can be considered ACE survivors. Although Munoz et al. suggested research on interventions with attachment security and levels of hope, their sample consisted of 72% Caucasian participants. It was unclear what percentage of their minority participants were Hispanic and if there were any cultural differences with attachment securities and worldviews on hope. Other studies (Scott et al., 2014; Watt & Kim, 2019) focusing on racial differences found additional barriers (e.g., disparities in provisions, longer tenure in the foster care system, and fewer reunifications) for minority foster care youth. Future research can explore the impact of ACEs interventions, attachment impacts, and ways to decrease abuse (ACES) while in the FCS. Furthermore, the emphasis on finding hope within the Latino population and how cultural differences impact the outcomes may also provide effective protective factors.

Countertransference

The interviewees in this study displayed courage in being open to sharing their sensitive experiences. At least six participants disclosed this interview was the first time they had the opportunity to share their stories and process their journey. The discussion of past abuse and

traumatic events carried great weight for both the speaker and the interviewer. Listening to the vulnerability and pain of the participants created moments of profound pain for the interviewer. It produced symptoms of vicarious trauma (e.g., lingering feelings of sadness and anger, preoccupation for the interviewee after the interview, etc.) for the researcher (Leung et al., 2022). Future researchers should be aware of the countertransference that may occur and be mindful of the self-care that should follow.

Conclusion

The growing number of youth emancipating from the FCS continues to grow annually, and, unfortunately, the negative impacts of forming and maintaining healthy and secure relationships also follow. This study found the positive effects of one secure connection on negative attachments and its ability to instill hope and relationship receptivity. While only one participant reported a secure attachment, they also reported reliable and loving caregivers that modeled Latino values (e.g., *familismo*, community, trust, etc.), indicating the importance of both secure relationships and cultural components.

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APPENDIX A
QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Qualitative Questionnaire

1. Pre-Foster Care Experience

- a. Briefly describe what your relationship with your birth parents/caregivers was like and the length of time you lived with them before entering foster care.
- b. Overall, what, if anything, did this relationship provide for you during this time?
What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

2. Foster Care Experience

a. Foster Parents

- i. Briefly describe your relationship with your foster parents and social workers and how many foster homes or residential homes you resided in and for what length of time?
- ii. Overall, what, if anything, did these relationships provide for you during this time? What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

b. Birth Parents

- i. Were you allowed to have contact and visitations with you birth parents? If so, briefly describe the experience. How often did you have contact? For what length of time did you have contact?
- ii. How, if at all, did you make sense of this relationship during this time? How did you view yourself in this relationship? How did you view the other person in this relationship?
- iii. Overall, what, if anything, did this relationship provide for you during this time? What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

3. Post-Foster Care Experience

- a. Looking back on your foster care experience, what relationships, if any, provided the most support? What was most helpful about these relationships?
 - i. How, if at all, did you make sense of these relationships during this time? How did you view yourself in these relationships? How did you view the other people in the relationships?
 - ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?
- b. How, if at all, have these relationships while in foster care influenced your current relationships?
 - i. How, if at all, did you make sense of this relationship during this time? How did you view yourself in this relationship? How did you view the other person in this relationship?
 - ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?
- c. Looking back on your foster care transitional experience, what relationships, if any, provided the most support during your emancipation process? What was most helpful about these relationships?
 - i. How, if at all, did you make sense of these relationships during this time? How did you view yourself in these relationships? How did you view the other people in the relationships?

- ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?

APPENDIX B
CUESTONARIO CUALITATIVO

Cuestionario Cualitativo

1. Experiencia en Cuidados Precrianza

- a. Describa brevemente cómo era la relación con sus padres biológicos y el tiempo que vivió con ellos antes de entrar en el cuidado temporal.
- b. En general, ¿qué le proveía esta relación durante este tiempo? ¿Qué fue lo más útil? ¿Qué fue lo menos útil?

2. Experiencia de Cuidado Temporal

a. Padres de Crianza Temporal

- i. Describa brevemente su relación con sus padres de crianza temporal y trabajadores sociales.
- ii. Describa brevemente ¿en cuántos hogares de cuidado temporal vivió y durante cuánto tiempo?
- iii. En general, ¿qué le brindaron estas relaciones durante este tiempo? ¿Qué fue lo más útil? ¿Qué fue lo menos útil?

b. Padres Biológicos

- i. ¿Le permitieron tener contacto y visitas con sus padres biológicos? Si se lo permitieron, describa la experiencia. ¿Con qué frecuencia pudo tener contacto con el/ella/ellos? ¿Por cuánto tiempo tuvo contacto?
- ii. ¿Cómo entendió la relación durante este tiempo? ¿Cómo ha entendido esta relación? ¿Cómo ve a la otra persona en esta relación?
- iii. En general, ¿qué le brindaron estas relaciones durante este tiempo? ¿Qué fue lo más útil? ¿Qué fue lo menos útil?

3. Experiencia Posterior al Cuidado Temporal

- a. En su experiencia de cuidado temporal, ¿qué relaciones proporcionaron el mayor apoyo? ¿Qué fue lo más útil de estas relaciones?
- i. ¿Cómo entiende la relación durante este tiempo? ¿Cómo ha entendido esta relación? ¿Cómo ve a la otra persona en esta relación?
 - ii. ¿Qué tan amado se veía usted mismo en esta relación? ¿Qué tan confiable veía a esta persona en la relación? ¿Como respondió esta persona a sus necesidades en esta relación?
- b. ¿Cómo afectaron las relaciones pasadas de cuidado temporal a sus relaciones actuales?
- i. ¿Cómo entiende esta relación durante este tiempo? ¿Cómo ha tenido en cuenta en esta relación? ¿Cómo ve a la otra persona en esta relación?
 - ii. ¿Qué tan amado se veía usted mismo en esta relación? ¿Qué tan confiable veía a esta persona en la relación? ¿Como respondió esta persona a sus necesidades en esta relación?
- c. ¿En su experiencia de transición del cuidado temporal, qué relaciones proporcionaron la mayoría del apoyo durante su proceso de la emancipación? ¿Qué fue lo más útil acerca de estas relaciones?
- i. ¿Cómo entendió esta relación durante este tiempo? ¿Cómo ha entendido esta relación? ¿Cómo ve a la otra persona en esta relación?

- ii. ¿Qué tan amado se veía usted mismo en esta relación? ¿Qué tan confiable veía a esta persona en la relación? ¿Como respondió esta persona a sus necesidades en esta relación?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

Institutional Review Board Approval Form

IRB 025-2122-FULL Approval

Institutional Review Board <IRB@calbaptist.edu>

Tue 2/15/2022 4:29 PM

To: Diana Vanessa Bojorquez <DianaVanessa.Bojorquez@calbaptist.edu>

Cc: Institutional Review Board <IRB@calbaptist.edu>; Joshua Knabb <jknabb@calbaptist.edu>

CC: Institutional Review Board

RE: IRB Review

IRB No.: 025-2122-FULL

Project: Attachment Experiences of Latino Youth Exiting the Foster Care System: A Qualitative Study

Date Complete Application Received: 10/18/21

Date Final Revision Received: 2/10/22

Principle Investigator: Diana Bojorquez

Faculty Advisor: Joshua Knabb

College/Department: CBSS

IRB Determination: Approved – Student research using confidential interviews; no minor participants; risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: Approval is granted for one year from date below. If you would like to continue research activities beyond that date, you are responsible for submitting a Research Renewal Request with enough time for that request to be reviewed and approved prior to the expiration of the project. In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: February 15, 2022

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO ACT AS HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT/PARTICIPANT

INVESTIGATOR(S): Diana Bojorquez, MA, PsyD Student; Dr. Joshua Knabb, Professor of Psychology, California Baptist University

TITLE: Attachment Experiences of Latino Youth Exiting the Foster Care System: A Qualitative Study

PURPOSE: The study seeks to understand the attachment experiences of former Latino foster youth through a retrospective account that inquires about (a) which relational experiences provided ongoing support, (b) where these supportive relationships and resources were found, and (c) what made these relationships helpful.

VOLUNTARY STATUS: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by the individuals listed above. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose whether or not you want to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty, although you will not be compensated if you do not finish the full one-hour interview or answer all the questions to the best of your availability. Before you can make your decision, you will need to know what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits of being in this study, and what you will have to do in this study. The below section offers a brief overview of this information. You may also decide to discuss it with your family or friends before agreeing to participate. You may find some of the language difficult to understand. If this is the case, please ask the lead researcher about this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

PROCEDURES: To participate in this study, you must (a) be at least 18 years old, (b) have been placed in out-of-home foster care, and (c) have transitioned from the foster care system for at least a year before the interview takes place. If you are interested in participating, you may email the lead researcher your interest and a phone call will be scheduled to discuss your understanding and voluntary participation. During the phone call an in-person or Zoom video chat will be scheduled, to proceed with the interview. Interviews will be done by the lead researcher who is fluent in Spanish and has experience providing bilingual mental health services. The day of the interview, you will be asked several questions about your relational experiences before, during, and after being in the foster care system. If some of the questions do not apply to you, you may be asked to explain. The entire interview will be completed in person or online and take approximately one hour.

RISKS: It is expected that participation in this study may lead to some discomfort and/or distress, given you will be asked to answer questions about your relationship experiences throughout your foster care tenure that may include stressful/traumatic life events. We are aware that answering questions about stressful/traumatic events could lead to an increase in the frequency and intensity of trauma-related thoughts and symptoms. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, you can choose to stop the study at any time by not answering the remaining questions. If needed, the researcher completing the interview can provide a list of referrals to mental health organizations in your area for you to pursue at your own discretion and cost. Also, if at any time you believe that you are in a crisis situation, you are encouraged to call 9-1-1 or go to a local emergency room. Additional foreseeable risks in this study include an accidental disclosure of your private information due to the use of online software. Finally, please keep in mind, the lead researcher can choose to discontinue this study at any time.

BENEFITS: By participating in this study, you will help the researchers better understand relational experiences of Latino Youth who were in the foster care system, why these relationships were important, and how they were maintained.

COMPENSATION (if any): \$20 for completing the full interview and answering all the questions. If you choose to discontinue the interview prior to completion or not respond to the questions, no compensation will be provided. If some of the questions do not apply to you, open ended questions may follow for clarification. If the lead researcher chooses to end the interview because the interview questions are not being answered, no compensation will be provided. However, if the lead researcher chooses to end the interview due to personal reasons, you will still be compensated.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Various steps will be taken to protect your identity and anonymity. While the interviews will be audio recorded, the recordings will be destroyed once transcribed. The transcriptions will not contain your name or any other identifying information. The transcribed interviews will be kept on a password protected computer, and only the main researcher will have access to the interviews.

If you require any information about this study or would like to speak to one of the researchers, please email Diana Bojorquez at dianavanessa.bojorquez@calbaptist.edu at California Baptist University. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, please contact CBU's Institutional Review Board (irb@calbaptist.edu).

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on the relational experiences of foster care tenure, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Principal Investigator Information:

Diana V. Bojorquez, MA

California Baptist University

8432 Magnolia Avenue

Riverside, CA 92504

dianavanessa.bojorquez@calbaptist.edu

APPENDIX E

FORMULARIO DE AUTORIZACION

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA ACTUAR COMO SUJETO/PARTICIPANTE DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN HUMANA

INVESTIGADOR(ES): Diana Bojorquez, M.A, Estudiante de PsyD; Dr. Joshua Knabb, Profesor de Psicología, California Baptist University

TÍTULO: Experiencias de apego de los jóvenes latinos que salen del sistema de Cuidado Temporal: Un estudio cualitativo

PROPÓSITO: El estudio busca comprender las experiencias de apego de los jóvenes latinos que han salido del sistema de Cuidado Temporal a través de un reporte retrospectivo que investiga sobre (a) qué experiencias relacionales proporcionaron apoyo continuo, (b) dónde se encontraron estas relaciones y recursos de apoyo, y (c) qué fue lo que hizo que estas relaciones fueran útiles.

CONDICIÓN VOLUNTARIA: Se le invita a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por las personas arriba indicadas. Su participación es voluntaria, lo que significa que puede elegir si desea o no participar. Puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin penalización, aunque no se le compensará si no termina la entrevista completa de una hora o no responde a todas las preguntas lo mejor que pueda. Antes de tomar una decisión, deberá saber de qué trata el estudio, los posibles riesgos y beneficios de participar en él y lo que tendrá que hacer en este estudio. La siguiente sección ofrece un breve resumen de esta información. También puede decidir comentarla con su familia o amigos antes de aceptar a participar. Es posible que parte del lenguaje le resulte difícil de entender. Si es así, pregunte al investigador principal por este formulario. Si decide participar, se le pedirá que firme este formulario.

PROCEDIMIENTOS: Para participar en este estudio, debe (a) tener un mínimo de 18 años, (b) haber sido colocado en un hogar de cuidado de menores fuera del propio hogar y (c) haber salido del sistema de cuidado de menores durante al menos un año antes de que tenga lugar la entrevista. Si está interesado en participar, puede enviar un correo electrónico al investigador principal para comunicarle su interés y se programará una llamada telefónica para discutir su comprensión y participación voluntaria. Durante la llamada telefónica se programará una videoconferencia en persona o mediante Zoom, para proceder a la entrevista. Las entrevistas serán realizadas por el investigador principal, que habla español con fluidez y tiene experiencia en la prestación de servicios bilingües de salud mental. El día de la entrevista, se le harán varias preguntas sobre sus experiencias relacionales antes, durante y después de estar en el sistema de acogida. Si algunas de las preguntas no se aplican a su caso, es posible que se le pida una explicación. La entrevista completa se realizará en persona o en línea y durará aproximadamente una hora.

RIESGOS: Se espera que la participación en este estudio pueda provocar cierto malestar y/o angustia, dado que se le pedirá que responda a preguntas sobre sus experiencias de relación a lo largo de su estancia en el hogar de cuidado temporal que pueden incluir acontecimientos vitales estresantes/traumáticos. Somos conscientes de que responder a preguntas sobre acontecimientos estresantes/traumáticos podría provocar un aumento de la frecuencia e intensidad de los pensamientos y síntomas relacionados con el trauma. Si se siente incómodo o angustiado, puede optar por detener el estudio en cualquier momento, o no respondiendo a las preguntas pendientes. Si es necesario, la investigadora que complete la entrevista puede proporcionarle una lista de referencias a organizaciones de salud mental en su área para que usted pueda buscarlas a su propia discreción y costo. Además, si en algún momento cree que está en una situación de crisis, se le recomienda llamar al 9-1-1 o acudir a una sala de emergencias local. Otros riesgos previsibles en este estudio son la divulgación accidental de su información privada debido al uso

de software en línea. Por último, tenga en cuenta que el investigador principal puede decidir suspender este estudio en cualquier momento.

BENEFICIOS: Al participar en este estudio, usted ayudará a los investigadores a entender mejor las experiencias relacionales de los jóvenes latinos que estuvieron en el sistema de cuidado temporal, por qué estas relaciones fueron importantes y cómo se mantuvieron.

COMPENSACIÓN (si procede): \$20 por completar la entrevista entera y responder a todas las preguntas. Si decide no continuar con la entrevista antes de terminarla o no responde a las preguntas, no recibirá compensación alguna. Si algunas de las preguntas no se aplican a su caso, es posible que se le hagan preguntas de aclaración. Si el investigador principal decide poner fin a la entrevista porque no se está respondiendo a las preguntas, no se proporcionará ninguna compensación. Sin embargo, si el investigador principal decide poner fin a la entrevista por motivos personales, se le seguirá compensando.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD: Se tomarán varias medidas para proteger su identidad y anonimato. Aunque las entrevistas se grabarán en audio, las grabaciones se destruirán una vez transcritas. Las transcripciones no contendrán su nombre o cualquier otra información de identificación. Las entrevistas transcritas se guardarán en una memoria digital protegida por contraseña, y sólo el investigador principal tendrá acceso a ellas.

Si necesita cualquier información sobre este estudio, o desea hablar con uno de los investigadores, envíe un correo electrónico a Diana Bojorquez por dianavanessa.bojorquez@calbaptist.edu en California Baptist University. Si tiene alguna otra pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante en esta investigación, por favor, póngase en contacto con la Junta de Revisión Institucional de la CBU (irb@calbaptist.edu).

He leído (o me han leído) la información anterior relativa a este estudio de investigación sobre las experiencias relacionales de la estancia en hogares de acogida, y doy mi consentimiento para participar en este estudio.

_____ (Nombre impreso)

_____ (Firma)

_____ (Fecha)

Información del investigador principal:

Diana V. Bojorquez, MA

California Baptist University

8432 Magnolia Avenue

Riverside, CA 92504

dianavanessa.bojorquez@calbaptist.edu

APPENDIX F

Table 1 – Results

Table 1

Results – Themes

Number of Participants	9	10	11	12
A. Pre-Foster Care Experiences				
1. Forgotten or Distorted memories			x	
B. Experiences During Foster Care				
2. Lack of Support & Instability				x
3. Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families	x			
4. Repeated Abuse and Traumas				x
C. Post-Foster Care Experience				
5. Positive Impact of One Stable Relationship	x			
6. Adult Connections with Biological Families			x	
7. Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships				x

APPENDIX E
CURRICULUM VITAE

Diana V. Bojorquez

dianavanessa.bojorquez@calbaptist.edu

PERSONAL PROFILE

A highly skilled, empathetic, and solution-oriented professional. As an effective communicator and motivator, I have an innate ability to establish rapport quickly, build trust, interact with and relate to individuals on all professional levels. I have a strong ability to work independently or in a team environment.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Psychology, Clinical Psychology
California Baptist University, Riverside CA

Degree Anticipated August 2023

Master of Arts, Clinical Psychology
California Baptist University, Riverside CA

July 2020

Bachelor of Arts, Communications-Public Relations
California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino CA

December 2013

SUPERVISED CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

California State Prison – Sacramento
Represa, CA

August 2022 - Present
Supervisor: Jessica Aho, PsyD

Clinical Psychology Pre-Doctoral Intern

- Use evidence-based treatment strategies in both individual and group settings to help patients develop the skills necessary to live independent, productive lives, and improve their overall well-being.
- Offer assessment, consultation, and therapeutic services to adult males with psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, and co-occurring diagnoses in English and Spanish.
- Provide psychological services to patients in the Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP), from the Mainline (ML), the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU), and the Administrative Services Unit (ASU).
- Administer, score, and interpret comprehensive psychological assessments in English and Spanish.
- Facilitate weekly individual and group therapy in English and Spanish.
- Document client records in Electronic Records Health Management System (EHRS).
- Contribute to weekly individual and group supervision.
- Participate in weekly didactic training and monthly seminars, including case presentations on clinical and professional issues.

Gateways Hospital - Normandie Village
Los Angeles, CA

August 2021 – July 2022
Supervisors: Brynne MacPhail, PsyD & Chari Bondurant, PsyD

Practicum Trainee

- Provide assessment, consultation, and therapeutic services to adult males with psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, and co-occurring diagnoses.
- Administer, score, and interpret comprehensive psychological and neuropsychological assessments.
- Facilitate weekly individual and group therapy, utilizing a person-centered approach, a recovery model, CBT, ACT, and DBT to conceptualize, diagnose, and develop treatment plans.
- Assist clients with case management affairs (i.e., Social Security income, court trials, clinic appointments, family visits, etc.).
- Document and update client records and progress notes in Clinitrak.
- Attend and contribute to weekly individual and group supervision, by participating in discussions and presenting cases.
- Attend and contribute to interdisciplinary and treatment planning meetings involving the care of clients.

Brea Olinda Unified School District
Brea, CA

August 2020 – July 2021
Supervisor: Janira Jacobs-Beye, PsyD

Practicum Trainee

- Provide assessment, consultation, and therapeutic services to students in grades K-12.
- Conduct intakes and consultations with Spanish speaking clients.
- Utilizing brief solution therapies, CBT, and psychodynamic therapy to conceptualize, diagnose, and develop treatment plans.
- Administer, grade, and interpret cognitive assessments focused on the evaluation of learning and cognitive deficits.
- Facilitate group therapy for adolescents with special needs.
- Develop individual and group goals for the Individualized Education Programs.
- Participate in special education meetings.
- Provided services face to face and online.
- Contribute to weekly individual and group supervision.

Psychological Services of Riverside
Riverside, CA

August 2019 – August 2020
Supervisor: Laura Freeman, PsyD

Practicum Trainee

- Built a caseload of therapy clients residing in the Riverside community.
- Therapy demographics included people of all genders, ages, and ethnicities.
- Provided services face-to-face and online.
- Documented client records in TherapyNotes.

- Utilized ACORN system to monitor and assess client outcome formally.
- Utilized audio and video recordings in supervision.
- Participated in weekly individual and group supervision and contributed in bi-monthly staff meetings.
- Participated in community outreach by presenting clinical topics centered on evidence-based research to local organizations (e.g., school district, church).
- Networked to help promote the clinic.

EMPLOYMENT

California Baptist University
Riverside, CA

September 2021 – May 2022

Graduate Assistant

Assist the department of social and behavioral sciences with academic, research, and administrative activities. Create and grade tests for undergraduate and graduate students. Guest lecturer for an Introduction to Sociology course (Fall 2021).

Riverside County DPSS- Child Protective Services
Hemet, CA

April 2021 – August 2021

Social Services Practitioner III7010

Evaluate client needs and collaborate with a multi-disciplinary team to establish treatment plans that meet emotional, physical, and mental health needs. Provide individual, home-based, group, case management, and crisis intervention services to a diverse population of children and their families. Facilitate solution focused therapy for clients with traumas, grief, mental health concerns, and developmental disorders. Write court reports, case plans, and court recommendations.

Redlands Christian School
Redlands, CA

September 2017 – March 2020

Preschool Teacher/Spanish Immersion Substitute Teacher

Plan and implement a dynamic curriculum and fun learning developmentally appropriate activities. Deliver instruction for English and Spanish Immersion classes. Incorporate emotional, cognitive, and social learning techniques. Foster a warm, nurturing, and exciting atmosphere conducive to learning. Assist students in controlling their behavior, using constructive and appropriate strategies. Interact and encourage children in any activities they are doing. Communicate with teachers, administrators, and parents.

Volt Workforce Solutions
Riverside, CA

March 2016 – August 2017

Recruiter

Strong decision-making skills pertaining to job recommendations, hiring selections, and worksite injuries. Conducted interviews: one-on-one and group. Assisted with weekly payroll for over 200 employees. Provided career coaching and when required disciplinary action. Managed customer and associate

inquiries and complaints. Contacted clients daily and informed them of employee status, adjustments, and releases. Consulted with customers to evaluate needs and determined the best options. Created job descriptions and successfully filled positions. Assisted all Spanish-speaking candidates through the registration and hiring process. Established and maintained a positive working relationship with clients, other branches, co-workers, and employees.

City of Fontana
Fontana, CA

August 2011 – July 2014

After School Community Services Assistant

Supervised after-school site, including six staff members and 150 children, and worked with students in grades K-6. Supervised and organized recreation activities and monitored programs in compliance with laws, rules, and regulations. Prepared and organized recreation clubs for after school programs. Distributed, monitored, and maintained equipment and supplies. Supervised and organized events that taught students physical and nutritional health. Assisted in special events throughout the community.

City of Riverside
Riverside, CA

August 2011 – July 2013

Recreation Leader

Worked with students in grades K-6. Supervised and organized recreation activities and monitored programs in compliance with laws, rules, and regulations. Distributed, monitored, and maintained equipment and supplies. Opened and locked down the community center. Received payments for summer classes, afterschool program, and recreation classes. Registered participants for various community classes. Filled out daily accounting information. Recruited, trained, and managed volunteers. Assured community center rentals ran efficiently. Assisted in special events throughout the community.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

- Bilingual: can speak, read, and write Spanish. Able to provide clinical services in Spanish.
- Administration and data entry.

ADMINISTERED CLINICAL ASSESSMENTS

California State Prison – Sacramento
Represa, CA

October 2022 – Present

- Beck Depression Inventory, Second Edition (BDI- II) English & Spanish Version
- Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)
- Miller Forensic Assessment of Symptoms Test (M-FAST)
- Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-IV (MCMI-IV) English & Spanish Version
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF) English & Spanish Version
- Structured Interview of Reported Symptoms, 2nd Ed (SIRS-2)
- The Rorschach
- The Rorschach Performance Assessment System (R-PAS)
- The Trauma Symptom Inventory-2 (TSI-2)

Gateways Hospital - Normandie Village
Los Angeles, CA

August 2021 – July 2022

- Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System (D-KEFS)
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF)
- Rey Complex Figure Test and Recognition Trial (RCFT)
- Test of Memory Malingering (TOMM)
- The Rorschach
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Fourth Edition (WAIS-IV)
- Wisconsin Card Sorting Task (WCST)

Brea Olinda Unified School District
Brea, CA

September 2020 – July 2021

- Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (Beery VMI)
- Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing Second Edition (CTOPP-2)
- Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test Second Edition (KBIT-2)
- Roberts Apperception Test for Children (RATC)
- Test of Auditory Processing Skills Fourth Edition (TAPS-4)
- Test of Visual Perceptual Skills- Fourth Edition (TVPS-4)
- Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI)
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fifth Edition (WISC-V)
- Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability (WNV)
- Woodcock Johnson IV Tests of Oral Language (WJ-IV-OL)

TRAINING IN CLINICAL ASSESSMENT

California Baptist University
Riverside, CA

September 2019 – June 2020

Fall 2019

- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2)
- Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-IV (MCMI-IV)
- Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI)
- 16PF

Spring 2020

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Fourth Edition (WAIS-IV)
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fifth Edition (WISC-V)
- Wide Range Achievement Test Fifth Edition (WRAT5)
- Wechsler Memory Scale Fourth Edition (WMS-IV)
- The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III)

Summer 2020

- The Rorschach

PRESENTATIONS

Bojorquez, D. (2020, January 18). *Depression and Suicide in the Church*. [Conference session]. Mental health seminar, Palm Desert, CA, United States.

Bojorquez, D. (2023, March 32). *Protective Factors of Latino Youth and its Relevance to the Church*. [Poster presentation]. Christian Association for Psychological Studies Conference 2023, Louisville, KY, United States.

CERTIFICATIONS

- Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) Certified.
- CPR & First Aid Certified

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

McNeil Scholar
American Psychological Association

September 2021- Present
September 2018 - Present

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Evermore Church

Riverside, CA

Translator

2016 – May 2022

Responsible for listening to, understanding, and translating spoken statements from one language to another during services, conferences, and events. Reproduce statements in another language for various listening audiences.

Children’s Ministry Teacher

2014 – July 2022

Supervise and teach infants and children between the ages of 1-13 years. Create a welcoming environment to help children grow and learn. Implement additional activities, games, and crafts to promote learning. Oversee other teachers and develop monthly schedules for volunteers.

Ministry Coordinator

2013 – 2020

Planned, organized, and supervised special events to promote well-being, restoration, and fellowship. Responsible for budget preparation, recording expenses, and coordinating events. While on outings, accountable for the safety and security of participants and the facility's physical environment. Assigned and supervised tasks to members and volunteers. Managed member and visitor requests and concerns. Responsible for the flow of information and correspondence. Created and updated reports and documents.

Life Group Leader

2013 – 2019

Led Bible study groups for children, youth, and adults between the ages of 5 and 35. Helped to develop critical-thinking and interpersonal skills in adults, adolescents, and children for a positive direction towards their futures. Cultivated relationships with groups and individuals to build trust, enhance problem-solving, and make healthy choices.

APPENDIX G
MANUSCRIPT

Attachment Experiences of Latino Youth Exiting the Foster Care System:

A Qualitative Study

Diana V. Bojorquez

College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, California Baptist University

Abstract

Every year the number of Latino/Hispanic children and youth who enter and exit the foster care system continues to increase. The study seeks to understand the attachment experiences of former Latino/Hispanic foster youth through retrospective accounts. The study examined which relational experiences provided ongoing support, where these supportive relationships and resources were found, and what made them helpful. A convenience sample of 12 former Latino foster youth emancipated from the foster care system or juvenile detention centers were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using grounded theory, NVivo software, and super-ordinate coding. The analysis produced seven qualitative themes: a) Forgotten or Distorted memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact From One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. Overall, former foster youth who reported having at least one significant relationship during or after their foster care tenure described a more positive outcome. The themes presented similarities (e.g., attachment disruptions, lack of support, etc.) and differences (e.g., collectivist values, Latino values, etc.) between Latino foster youth and their Caucasian and African American peers. Future research directions consider preventive measures, culturally sensitive services, generational differences, adverse childhood experiences, and countertransference.

Keywords: foster care system, Latino foster youth, attachment theory, grounded theory

Attachment Experiences of Latino Youth Exiting the Foster Care System: A Qualitative Study

The US Department of Health and Human Services (2020) indicates there are more than 400,000 foster care youth and children (YC) in the US, and these numbers continue to rise annually. Each year, around 20,000 foster youth will turn 18, exit the foster care system (FCS), and transition to adult life (USDHHS, 2020). Recent studies have examined differences in adolescents who were in the FCS versus those living with their biological families; areas included mental health impacts (Bergström et al., 2020; Berzin et al., 2011), interventions (Pane Seifert et al., 2015), and relational effects (Curry, 2019). A few publications have centered on foster youth's attachment experiences in the system (McWey, 2004; Perlman et al., 2016), and even fewer studies have focused explicitly on the experiences of Latino youth in the FCS (Perez & Romo, 2011). To integrate current findings, increase an awareness of Latino youth attachment experiences, and provide arguments for beneficial support systems, the present review analyzes foster youth's mental health, received interventions, and relationships. Attachment theory is incorporated as it pertains to the public, foster youth, and Latin American culture.

Defining Latinos and Hispanics

The word Latino(s) refers to people of Latin America descent, including South and Central America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil (i.e., not including Spain) (Pew Research Center, 2020). Hispanic(s) will typically refer to people who trace their heritage to Latin America or Spain, and Spanish is a native language (i.e., not including Brazil). However, both terms have been embraced and accepted or rejected by people from Latin American and Spaniard decent, regardless of gender (Pew Research Center, 2020). In fact, in more than 15 years of polling by Pew Research Center, half of Americans who trace their roots to Spanish-speaking Latin

America and Spain have consistently said they have no preference for either Hispanic or Latino as a term to describe the group (Pew Research Center, 2020). Although some platforms have tried to apply the term Latinx to the Latin American community, Pew Research Center (2020) has found that 94% of Latinos and Hispanics do not recognize or embrace the term. Some described the term as an "anglicism" of the Spanish language, while others say the term is "not representative of the larger Latino community. Because this study aims to understand the Latino community and be culturally sensitive, the terms preferred by the group will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

Latino Foster Care System Experiences

Latinos experience several factors that propagate their involvement with the FCS. While the reasons for entering the system, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, remain the same, ideals and norms from their cultural background influence their experience within the FCS (Watt & Kim, 2019). Moreover, several system policies and agencies working with Latino families can aggravate the problems due to limited culturally sensitive approaches (Correa Cappello, 2006): County facilities and resource offices with limited hours, paperwork without Spanish translations, and timelines that birthparents have difficulty meeting due to family duties or employment (Garcia et al., 2012). Furthermore, Latino families have experienced a yearly increase in foster placements during the last two decades, creating a need for cultural adaptations (AFCARS, 2019).

Attachment Theory

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory can be explained as a combination of psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and ethology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). The framework centers on affect regulation, emotional bonding, and interpersonal

relationships from birth to adulthood. Specifically, the theory focuses on how parental relationships create the groundwork for future relationships. Thus, infants are born with a desire to seek proximity to their attachment figures when needed. The accessibility, sensitivity, and assistance of such figures will create secure or insecure attachments (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Secure and insecure attachments lead to "mental representations" or "working models of others" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005, p. 27). Working models include real and perceived aspects of the relationship with primary caregivers, the self, and others. They also allow people to forecast potential interactions with others and how to react (Perlman et al., 2016).

Working models create three specific attachment types in individuals that guide their interactions: secure attachment, anxious attachment, and avoidant attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Securely attached people have developed healthy relationships, view their interactions positively, and can regulate their emotions. Anxiously attached individuals are often worried about their relationships and display maladaptive emotional skills, even if there are no threats. Avoidantly attached persons commonly suppress their worries and lack adaptive coping skills during distress (McWey, 2004).

Latin American Culture and Attachment Theory

Although distinctions exist among Latinos in the US, the socialization process for minority children may be different when compared to their European American counterparts (e.g., conformity versus independence) (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017). Initial socialization encounters may develop Latino children's attachments to their family members. Many Latino parents socialize their children within the family's culture, regardless of cultural norms. In addition to diverse beliefs, behaviors, culture, and socioeconomic circumstances, Latino children

could be raised in a society that may decide their worth based on skin color (Garcia et al., 2012). If this is the case, higher levels of mistrust and anxiety may be normative in Latino children.

Many developmental goals for Latino children are based on situations their parents have faced. Family interactions largely influence the individual development of children: Lower socioeconomic families may rely on family members for childcare, allowing the child to form attachments with several adult relatives (Zayas & Solari, 1994). As reported by Zayas and Solari, adaptive strategies develop in ethnic minorities due to negative stereotypes or socioeconomic adversities. Thus, some Latino families (e.g., birth parents, grandparents, extended relatives) impart socialization goals through survival skills and generational traditions. Moreover, Latino children who experience this socialization process may also attain group membership, improved self-esteem, and a sense of self (Garcia et al., 2012; Zayas & Solari, 1994). These early socialization encounters can help shape Latino children's attachments to their birth parents and multiple family members (Garcia Quiroga et al., 2017).

The emotional bonding and emotion regulation explained by attachment theory can help to make sense of Latino attachments. According to Zamudio et al. (2020), cultural and contextual attachment differences are also found in Latinos living in the US versus Latinos living in their Latin American home country. Social self-efficacy is important to understand because many Latinos embrace a collectivistic culture, where tranquility is achieved through interpersonal relationships, rather than autonomy and individuality. *Familismo* (familism) was found higher in more traditional Hispanic families contrasted with assimilated Hispanic families (Zamudio et al. (2020). *Familismo* is described as the significance and worth of family unity that entails solidarity, allegiance, reciprocity, and respect (Garcia et al., 2012). *Familismo* can be observed through attitude (prioritizing family); behavior (placing family needs first); and structure

(extended family) (Zamudio et al., 2020). Moreover, *familismo* has been linked to resilience and hope in the lives of many former foster youth (Correa Capello, 2006). Therefore, this study seeks to understand the attachment experiences of Latino youth who exited the foster care system through a qualitative study addressing their relational experiences.

Method

The current study examined the attachment experiences of 12 Latino adults who exited the FCS by applying attachment theory. The author focused on the participant's ongoing support systems, where the support was experienced, and the participant's perspectives on why the support was beneficial. Participants recruited had been placed in out-of-home foster care and residential settings for at least a year. Participants experienced emancipation through the FCS, a transitional assistance program, or juvenile detention centers. Emancipation occurred after their 18th birthday when foster care services were no longer rendered or they were transferred from a juvenile detention center to a county jail.

Demographics

Twelve former Latino foster youth, (7) female, (4) male, and (1) transgender female from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties in California were chosen. Participants identified as (6) Hispanic, (4) Latino/a, and (2) Biracial (e.g., Mexican and Columbian & Mexican and "Black"), with Latin America backgrounds from Mexico, Columbia, El Salvador, Peru, and Spain. Ages ranged from 18 to 48, with a mean age of 31.7. Education levels were as follows: (4) a master's level of education, (2) a bachelor's level of education, (2) an associate's level of education, (2) a high school or GED level of education, and (2) did not graduate high school. Furthermore, 5 participants identified as Christian, two as atheists, two as agnostic, two as followers of more than one religion (e.g., Christian, Catholic, and Buddhist), and one as

Catholic. Finally, (10) participants reported their foster care placements included both home and residential settings, (1) only a foster home setting, and (1) only a residential location. Overall, four participants shared they were also housed in juvenile detention centers. Interviews were conducted over eleven months, from 2022 to 2023.

Recruitment

The author initiated the recruitment of participants by contacting local foster care agencies, former and current social workers, and professors from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties in California. The following four foster agencies were contacted by email: Department of Social Services-Riverside, Department of Social Services-San Bernardino, Department of Social Services-Los Angeles, and Olive Crest. However, most participants were obtained through referrals of participants that shared the recruitment flyer. All the participants initiated contact by calling or texting the author. Once the initial contact was made and all questions were answered, participants were emailed the consent form and a Zoom link. All interviews were conducted through Zoom, and participants were given a \$20 payment for full participation. Consistent with the qualitative literature, a sample size of 12 participants were chosen, along with one-hour semi-structured interviews (Curry, 2019; Hokason et al., 2019).

Measures and Interview Questions

Participants were first given an informed consent document describing their rights and the procedures for confidentiality, recording, transcription, and software usage. To be culturally sensitive, all documents were translated into Spanish, and participants were given the option to choose English or Spanish as their preferred language for papers and the interview process. However, none of the participants chose this option, and all interviews were in English.

Attachment theory was used to understand Latino foster youths' attachment experiences; hence, Shelton and Wang's (2018) ECR-Spanish Version was used to develop open-ended questions on attachment types. The ECR-Spanish Version is a "self-reported adult attachment [measure], developed in English [and] translated...for validation with Latinos in the United States" (Shelton & Wang, 2017, p. 16). Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) model of adult attachment was also applied because it utilized self and world models "conceptualized by Bowlby to describe... prototypic forms of adult attachment" (p. 227). The model addresses secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful dimensions that support types of attachment former foster youth may be experiencing. Knabb et al.'s (2009) questionnaire on adolescent experiences of parental divorce was also adapted in light of the key relationship component. Each participant was given an approximately 60-minute semi-structured interview using specific questions inspired by the aforementioned published literature (See Appendix A for the qualitative questionnaire). The semi-structured interviews followed Harrel and Bradley's (2009) guidelines: "Expressing interest, asking questions, expressing cultural ignorance, giving and obtaining explanations, and incorporating the respondent's terms..." (p. 71). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, facilitated the research's transcribing and coding process.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was the chosen method of qualitative analysis because it explores meanings and insights, incorporates a range of data collection methods, and seeks to interpret meaning from research established in data (Mohajan, 2018). Additionally, grounded theory focuses on "contextual factors that marginalize a group of people," "formulates and builds new theories," and "understands the meanings that people make from day to day life" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 24). Since this study focused on the attachment experiences of Latino adults who were

emancipated from foster care, the participant's observations and perceptions were conceptualized through the framework of grounded theory.

Analyses

Using Strauss' methods, ideas and concepts were categorized through open, axial, and selective coding (Mohajan, 2018). The video interviews were transcribed and examined using Strauss' methods and grounded theory methodology. Open coding was the first step in analyzing text and consisted of "identifying important words, or groups of words...and labeling them accordingly" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). The current data was organized using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, that provided 403 *autocodes* (i.e., open codes) for all interviews. The open codes were further analyzed by hand, and regrouped, producing substantial open codes (379) without repetition. Axial coding involved the "explanation of phenomenon [through] fleshing out and linking subcategories" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). After further regrouping and synthesizing, 16 axial codes were produced. Finally, selective coding involved "finding a core category, and relating it with the other major categories for generating a [theme]" (Mohajan, 2018, p. 10). Through the process of selective coding, vital concepts were identified in the axial codes, and given meaning which produced seven themes. Lastly, using Creswell's (2014) reliability design, the research process and data analyses were peer-reviewed by the second, third, and fourth authors.

Results

The qualitative coding process for the 12 interviews conducted with former foster care youth produced 379 open codes, which were then condensed into 16 axial codes. These axial codes were reduced into seven themes, establishing the base for grounded theory in this study. Participants were asked about their pre-foster care experiences, experiences during foster care,

and post-foster care experiences. The seven themes that developed throughout their foster care tenure were (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. The following sections describe the former themes presented by the former foster youth. Aliases and alterations were created for all quotations used to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Pre-Foster Care Experiences

Pre-foster care experiences refer to any relational memories and occurrences that participants could recall before entering the FCS. Four participants reported being three years old or younger when they entered the system and could not remember their experiences other than what they were told or read in court reports. Seven participants were between the ages of 10-14 years and described the death of both parents or chaotic and abusive homes, ultimately leading to admittance to the FCS. Only one participant was over 16 years old when they entered the FCS: This participant reported entering group homes due to "alleged" criminal behavior, but they described a safe home environment from a one-parent household. The theme of forgotten or distorted memories about their parental relationships was represented by 11 out of the 12 participants. Most participants could recall some memories, but would admit that their memory was "blurred," mention, "I don't remember too well," or say, "I think I block it out sometimes, don't really want to fully remember it."

Experiences During Foster Care

Experiences during their foster care tenure describes participants' relational events while in the FCS. The former foster youth who entered the FCS had various experiences with family

reunifications. Many participants recounted a back-and-forth cycle of unstable housing, group homes, running away, and juvenile hall. Notably, 10 out of the 12 participants communicated living in both foster care homes and group or residential settings. Furthermore, two participants reported living only in a foster care home setting, but with at least two different families. Four out of the 10 participants also disclosed experiences while living between group homes and juvenile detention centers. The three emerging themes found during the participants' foster care experiences were an overall lack of support, a lack of meaningful contact with their biological families, and undergoing repeated abuse and traumas.

All the participants reported feeling instability and a lack of support from at least one, if not multiple, significant relationships (e.g., biological parents, siblings, relatives, foster care parents, staff from group homes, social workers, etc.). In this study, support incorporates emotional, relational, financial, and informational assistance; instability refers to unpredictable situations for relationships and living arrangements. One participant explained:

I felt like I couldn't depend on anyone, not my social workers, not my caregivers, not anyone. I went inward and felt like I had to do everything for myself, which is part of the reason why in between some of these foster homes, I ran away because I felt like, screw this, what's the point?

Ten out of the 12 participants reported having contact with their families during foster care, but the levels of meaningful connections varied. Meaningful in this study is defined as "having a meaning or purpose" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Participants described feeling "alone" and "having no one I could really trust" or feeling "I was on survival mode. I couldn't depend on anybody. I was angry at the world." Another participant described a disappointing experience after reconnecting with their biological mother:

After I reunited with my [biological mother], I stayed with her for about six months. I was a runaway, and I stayed with her. And then we got into a disagreement, and she said, “I’m going to drop you off where I found you.” And she took me to a children’s holding center or something, and she left. She left me there.

All 12 participants described an ongoing cycle of repeated abuse and traumatic events while they were in the FCS. Their abuse was experienced through either one or various forms: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. One participant reported:

She [referring to the foster mother] wouldn’t give us water or anything to drink after a certain time. And my sister had a wet bed wetting problem. I feel like that’s probably from the sexual abuse, but she would always wet the bed and we would always get in trouble for it. At night, my sister and I would sneak into the bathroom to drink out of the toilet because we were just really thirsty. I remember we would sleep in the closet.

Post-Foster Care Experience

Post-foster care experience illustrates the participant’s experiences after they were emancipated from a FCS placement (e.g., a foster care home or a residential home), a juvenile detention center, or were adopted by their foster family. Participants described events that demonstrated having had a positive impact from at least one stable relationship, a continued relationship with their biological families as an adult (i.e., positive or negative), and the challenges they now have in forming and preserving healthy relationships as adults. Nine of the 12 participants described the positive impact experienced from at least one stable relationship. Three participants reported feeling they “never” had a mentor or steady relationship in which they felt safe or cared for. Moreover, two of the three interviewees who did not report a significant relationship also disclosed they transferred from juvenile hall into county jail on their

18th birthday. Nine participants reported at least one stable relationship noting at least one positive outcome. One interviewee reported:

She [referring to the positive mentor] followed me everywhere...She would visit me like once or twice a month. She sends me letters all the time, even to this day, and she always signs, "Your friend forever" ... She always laughs because I tell her every time I talk about her I cry so much [as tears rolled down their cheek]. She taught me how to drive a car... She drove me to college... [She helped me see myself] as someone who could be like finally taken care of. I want to be like her...I want to be confident. I want to be helpful. I want to be calming to people, like her. I think she really was a big reason for why I became so kind to people, while I was able to get rid of all the hatred.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the attachment experiences of former Latino foster youth who were emancipated from the FCS. Additionally, the study focused on examining (a) ongoing sources of relational support, (b) where the supportive relationships and resources were found, and (c) the impact of these relationships. The previous interviews were coded and organized into seven themes: (a) Forgotten or Distorted Memories, (b) Lack of Support, (c) Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families, (d) Repeated Abuse and Traumas, (e) Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship, (f) Adult Connections with Biological Families, and (g) Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. All participants described growing up in environments that created and perpetuated insecure attachments (i.e., instability, repeated abuse, lack of emotional connections, etc.). Eleven participants indicated they continue to struggle with healthy relationships (i.e., trust, creating relationships, maintaining

secure relationships, etc.). This chapter focuses on the relational and cultural effects endured by former Latino foster youth, as well as limitations and future recommendations.

Theme Interpretation

Repeated Abuse and Traumas

An emergent theme found among all participants was a repeated cycle of abuse and traumatic events. The former foster youth recalled experiencing at least one type of ongoing abuse, if not multiple types, during their foster care tenure: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Similarly, Thomas and Scharp's (2020) study found that foster youth had mentioned harmful experiences throughout their time in the FCS, specifically in residential settings. However, most of the reported abuse in this study occurred while participants were in a foster home rather than a residential setting. It is also possible that some participants did not disclose every traumatic event, or they have forgotten some painful memories (e.g., "I've blocked some of it out").

Many participants reported that the abuse led to consistent running away, even when it created unsafe environments and going to juvenile hall, which ultimately produced additional trauma and abuse. Furthermore, most of the participants who reported running away at some point in their foster care tenure noted running away to an extended relative or their biological parent at least once. These reports were also found in Wulczyn's (2020) study demonstrating that Latino foster youth were 24 times more likely to run away than Caucasian and African American youth in the FCS. Likewise, Perez and Romo's (2011) study revealed that *familismo* principles, such as loyalty and unity, led foster youth to reach out to their biological families before looking for other resources. The participants who mentioned running away to a family member noted the FCS did not allow their family reunifications for various reasons (i.e., biological parents not

completing requirements), creating more dysfunction within their families and the FCS. Perez and Romo also discussed the power of family values (e.g., prioritizing family, solidarity, and allegiance) in Hispanic culture, despite ongoing relationship difficulties.

Similar to Perlman et al. (2016) and Mikulincer and Shaver's (2019) research, individuals with insecure attachments tend to seek out love and care and lack emotional control (e.g., anxious) or distrust others, be on the defensive, and attempt to deal with hardships alone (e.g., ambivalent). The participants in this study discussed running away (lack of emotional control or distrusting others) and looking for their birth families (seeking love and care). However, most family reunifications only confirmed that others were harmful and maintained a negative view of themselves and the world. Furthermore, their insecure attachments were also preserved by the continuous abuse from their FCS caregivers, proving the world was unsafe and people could not be trusted (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

Lack of Support

All 12 participants reported feeling they had limited or a lack of support from at least one, if not multiple, significant relationships (e.g., birth parents, siblings, extended relatives, foster care parents, social workers, etc.). Participants described lacking emotional, relational, financial, and informational support. The feeling of having no one to turn to in times of need created various beliefs, such as always being alone, being in survival mode, and having to learn independence at a young age. Unfortunately, lacking support from significant relationships is seen across the FCS in multiple studies examining sources of support and secure attachments (Curry, 2019; Miranda et al., 2019). Moreover, participants reported the absence of support occurred due to different challenges, such as FCS bureaucracies (e.g., staff turnover, overworked social workers, and unstable housing), mental health challenges from their biological families,

separation from siblings, and not having an adult who could provide long-lasting security. The data is consistent with McGuinness and Schneider (2007), who reported higher stress levels (due to lack of support) and unsatisfactory care. Waid and Wojciak's (2019) findings were also consistent with sibling separation creating ruptured relationships.

The interviewees also described a lack of support due to unstable housing and an inability to form relationships with other foster youth with whom they had connected. Eleven participants in this study reported they started their foster care tenure by age 14 and they emancipated from the FCS. Thus, at an early age, the participants began experiencing inconsistent housing, feeling unsupported, and unable to form lasting relationships with other foster youth they felt could have been a positive connection. Waid et al. (2017) found that an average of four settings will be experienced for every 1,000 days in foster care, supporting the ongoing housing changes the current participants experienced. Although it would be beneficial for foster youth to encounter relationships modeling trust and mutual significance, these findings coincide with Waid and Wojciak's (2019) and Lionetti et al.'s (2015) studies, which also reported that youth in foster care would experience housing instability that intensifies their lack of security and trust. Garcia Quiroga et al. (2017) and McWey (2004) discussed the effects of multiple placements on foster YC's attachment styles and emotional states. McWey noted that children displaying insecure attachments who had experienced more than two placements before age seven, would typically continue a pattern of destructive relationships. The constant placement instabilities, caregiver changes, and lack of meaningful contact with their birth families also sustained relational problems and insecure attachment styles.

Forgotten or Distorted Memories

Eleven participants reported they did not remember their relational experiences with their parents before foster care or that their memories were "blurred." Forgetting their relational experiences prior to their foster care tenure was expected after four participants reported being three years old or younger. Seven participants expressed being between 10 and 14 years old and having blurred memories, but described chaotic, unstable, and abusive relationships. Although participants primarily reported forgotten or distorted memories before their foster care tenure, the theme was reported throughout the interviews, particularly when participants attempted to recall their abuse or engagement in criminal activity. While the literature does not necessarily focus on lost or distorted fostered YC memories, this information may be helpful for future research or therapeutic settings.

One participant, who entered the FCS at age 16 due to criminal activity, reported having a "good father" who kept him safe and "did his best." This participant also reported feeling they had good coping skills to deal with the negative experiences during their foster care tenure and feeling their father was an ongoing source of support. Miranda et al. (2019) also found that a sense of security with caregivers provided emotional stability and healthier connections. Furthermore, McWey (2004) explained that YC who had experienced lower emotional neglect would typically display more secure attachment styles (i.e., positive view of self and others, trusting in support during times of need).

Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families

Most participants in this study expressed they lacked meaningful contact with their birth families during their foster care tenure. Two mentioned they did not communicate with their birth family due to death and a court order. Although ten participants reported seeing or talking

to their biological parents at some point, not all contact was perceived to have provided meaningful emotional support, love, or a sense of security. Participants recalled having contact through visits, phone calls, and sometimes after running away and seeking their birth families. However, only one participant recounted significant contact with their biological parent, leading to reunification after being emancipated from the FCS. Similarly, Cushing et al. (2014) noted significant parental relationships were not as common during the reunification process, and the impact often led to a lack of self-care and support.

All the barriers to visits were unknown or undisclosed by the participants. However, one participant mentioned poverty, homelessness, and mental health problems deterring their father and grandma from visiting. Another participant communicated that their mother refused to take a drug test, and their father disappeared, leading to no contact with them during their foster care tenure. Similarly, Ayón et al. (2013) found that Latino families may undergo a lengthy process to initiate contact and are less likely to receive the resources (e.g., mental health services, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, etc.) they need for reunification.

Half of the participants that reported visits happening only "here and there" or menial contact with their birth families mentioned various reasons. Some reasons included poverty, mental health problems, court orders, lack of transportation, and estranged relationships with their parents. These reports coincided with Cushing et al. (2014) and Garcia et al. (2012), who found similar challenges for parents trying to visit their children in the FCS. Furthermore, while all participants identified as Latino or Hispanic, only one participant reported experiencing foster homes with similar traditional values (e.g., foods, family, discipline, loyalty, etc.). These findings coincide with Ayón et al.'s (2013) and Correa Capello's (2006) studies describing the cultural challenges (i.e., not learning their language or actualizing their cultural identities)

faced by Latino youth.

Goldsmith et al. (2004) discussed the yearning that foster YC have to reconcile with their birth families, despite maltreatment experiences. This longing and disappointment continue to foster anxious and ambivalent attachments in the midst of their grief and parental losses. The experiences recounted by participants align with Miranda et al. (2019) and Perez and Romo's (2011) research noting that foster YC who communicate with their birth families will maintain insecure attachments because the underlying problems are never addressed. Furthermore, while the attachment styles of the foster YC's parents were not discussed in this study, it is likely it also impacted their ability to model how to build healthy relationships and form more secure attachments.

Adult Connections with Biological Families

Eleven of the 12 participants reported they continue to contact their birth families (e.g., parents, grandparents, or extended relatives). Only one participant reported having no contact with their biological family due to incarceration and death. For some participants, the communication continued after emancipation, even if their family member(s) were and continued to be abusive, and the relationship remained estranged. Fernandes-Alcantara (2019) also found that foster youth who reunite with their families may face inadequate living dynamics and continuous relationship ruptures. Furthermore, Perez and Romo's (2011) study discussed the importance of finding identity within networks that share similar values, particularly Latino family principles (e.g., unity, loyalty, perseverance). Therefore, it is likely that in seeking identity, the former foster youth continued pursuing their biological family relationships even when they remained estranged or abusive.

Two participants described their beliefs on how cultural practices have influenced their family connections. One participant described how *familismo* negatively affected their ability to set boundaries and move forward. They described a sibling relationship that left them feeling exploited and emotionally drained. However, the other participant expressed how *familismo* benefited them and helped them to overcome adverse outcomes. They described the sense of community, loyalty, trust, and belonging. Similarly, Perez and Romo (2011) discussed family values as an essential and critical aspect of Latino culture. Regardless of how participants described their birth family relationships (i.e., positive or negative), the birth families are available and provide the former foster youth some provision. The participants who found their birth families and extended relatives helpful described different types of support (i.e., financial, emotional, housing, instrumental, etc.). Likewise, Hokason et al. (2019) discovered that birth families could provide former foster youth with emotional and instrumental assistance.

Sibling Connections. Unfortunately, the only participant who described a positive sibling relationship was the same youth who reunited with their family and was in the same foster home with their sibling. The two participants who reported their parents had passed away did not mention knowing about any siblings or half-siblings. Of the multiple participants who mentioned having siblings, no one said they were sent to the same foster or group home long-term or maintained a meaningful relationship during or after their foster care tenure. Even when the former foster youth reported connecting with their birth families, the sentiment was typically described as, "Every so often, we talk, but it's not like your regular brother and sister relationship." Other participants described failed attempts to rebuild sibling relationships and the resignation of believing there would be no future attempts. Similarly, Waid and Wojciak's (2019)

research found that sibling separations in foster care are common and lead to increased adverse outcomes (e.g., depression, despair, guilt, etc.).

Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Not surprisingly, 11 of the 12 participants reported they struggle to create and maintain healthy relationships. Likewise, Curry (2019) discovered that YC in the FCS face unstable relationships from multiple sources: parents, siblings, therapists, social workers, facility staff, and mentors. His study found that constant turnover further damages foster youth's emotional health and creates a pattern for unstable relationships. The 11 interviewees from this study also reported they believed their relationship challenges were due to the inconsistencies and inability to learn how to maintain appropriate relationships. Moreover, these eleven participants reported having adverse foundations with caregiver relationships and describing having negative attachment styles (i.e., forecasting potential negative interactions and emotional dysregulation) (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005).

The one participant who did not report difficulties creating or maintaining relationships expressed a secure attachment style (i.e., emotional permanence and positive view of self and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019)). The participant communicated they maintained significant contact with their biological mother, were housed with their siblings during foster care, and have all been living together for the past nine years. Furthermore, this participant reported the positive impact of being placed in foster homes with Latino foster parents who modeled similar cultural values: "She [referring to the foster mother] had a similar parenting style. She took us to her family events, and they all treated us [referring to themselves and their siblings] like family, not foster kids...She let us live with her even after with turned 18, rent free, and continued to love us and take care of us... That's unheard of." This finding is consistent with Correa Cappello (2006),

who noted that Latino children placed in homes with similar language and family values may decrease foster children's traumatic experiences. This participant described Latino values, *familismo*, loyalty, and trust, indicating mutual and significant connection benefits.

Positive Impact of One Secure Relationship

Nine participants described the positive impact of at least one secure relationship. Singer et al.'s (2013) study with former foster youth yielded similar results, linking meaningful relationships to positive outcomes, even if the former foster youth were no longer in contact. Overall, the nine participants in the current study reported their significant relationship provided emotional connection, hope, love, support, peace, and a feeling of "finally belonging." Additionally, their secure relationships modeled appropriate interactions, provided the former foster youth with financial and informational support, and encouraged them to pursue higher education or improve themselves. These relationships were found in various backgrounds: a CASA worker, a college professor, a group home staff member, a former boss, a sibling, foster parents, and friends made through a church youth group. Berzin et al. (2011) and Hokason et al. (2019) also described the importance of establishing interdependence and self-reliance during the transition into adulthood. Their studies focused on the positive impact of supportive relationships with transitioning foster youth.

Three participants reported they had felt alone and unsupported most of their lives, and when asked who they would seek out for support, they could not provide strong support systems. Two of these participants reported they had transferred from a juvenile detention center into a county jail. Although they did not mention having a mentor or significant relationship, they did say that their birth families assisted them with occasional housing and finances. The third participant had recently turned 18 years old and was receiving transitional assistance. This

participant reported severe mental health problems (e.g., depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm behaviors) and reported not having a best friend, family support, or feeling that they could form meaningful relationships. The information provided by the interviewees aligns with Curry (2019) and Greeson et al. (2015), suggesting one permanent connection in a foster youth's social network can provide dependability and reduce harmful outcomes.

The experiences recounted by the former foster youth focus on the lack of receptiveness, sensitivity, and support from caregiver relationships that led to insecure "mental representations" and negative "working models of others" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Although the FCS is set with a goal of safety and family reunification, the system's bureaucracy may work against foster YC, leaving them without hope, safety, or the ability to learn how to form secure attachments and regulate their emotions. Thus, it was apparent that former YC who entered the FCS with insecure attachments, maintained anxious and avoidant attachment styles. The inability to bond with caregivers, develop healthy relationships, or learn adaptive coping skills has led to depression, anxiety, and lifelong difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships (McWey, 2004; Miranda et al., 2019).

The one participant that reported a secure attachment (i.e., trusting others, feeling supported, feeling loved), also noted perceived support from their birth and foster mothers and remaining with their siblings during foster care placements. Moreover, this participant understood and expressed the positive impact of having safe caregivers and being raised in a home that upheld and taught strong Latino *familismo* values. Accordingly, he found it easy to reunite with his biological mother and siblings at the end of his foster care tenure. This participant's experiences indicate that while one secure relationship is essential, incorporating

cultural values and being fully seen as a Latino individual may have helped to form a long-lasting and secure attachment style.

Finally, the study found that the nine participants who reported having had at least one positive relationship in their life also noted a change in their perception of relationships. "[They] are the reason I became kind and want to help others" (view of others/world), and their ability to view themselves, "[They] taught me, [I] deserve to be loved." Although previous research focused on positive attachment during foster care (Lionetti et al., 2015; Okpych & Courtney, 2018), the participants reported they had encountered their supportive person at various times during and after their foster care tenure, some as far as 29 years old. For this reason, their experiences demonstrate that it is never too late to begin working on transforming our working models and emotional bonds. While one secure attachment may not repair years of abuse, trauma, and instability, it can be a step in mending, healing, and developing hope.

Limitations

It should be noted that this study produced several limitations. First, the semi-structured interviews were one-sided recollections, possibly affecting the interviewee's retrospective accounts and leading to distortions. Secondly, due to the topic's sensitive nature, it was clear some participants were reluctant to share all the details and feelings associated with their traumatic experiences. Although the researcher took several steps to inform participants of their anonymity, many participants had difficulty sharing and reliving their experiences. Thirdly, while the sample size ($N = 12$) is appropriate for a qualitative study, the results may not adequately represent the larger foster care populations, limiting generalizability. Next, the sample represents various demographics (e.g., sexual orientations, ages, foster care tenure timeline, number of transitions, criminal history, types of detention facilities, etc.). However, the

sample was too small to identify substantial differences between each demographic. Moreover, different demographic categories (i.e., age, number of transitions, types of detention facilities, etc.) may impact attachment styles and each participant's experiences. For example, a child entering the FCS at age three versus an adolescent entering the FCS at age 16 or a YC living in one home placement versus various residential settings would likely create different experiences. Another limitation of this study was that all twelve participants reported abuse throughout their foster care tenure. Thus, former foster youth who did not experience further traumas while in the FCS, may have reported different outcomes. Finally, while there appeared to be various similarities between the relational experiences of the former foster youth, their age differences (ranging from 18 to 48 years old) also represented different periods, laws, and resources available during the emancipation process that may have altered the results.

Future Directions and Research Recommendations

Preventative Measures

Several studies have attempted to understand the impact of clinical interventions during a YC's foster care tenure and have found positive outcomes (Bergstrom et al., 2020; Goemans et al., 2015; Pane Seifert et al., 2015). Nonetheless, Latino families were found to have received fewer mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and foster care system assistance (i.e., social worker visits and foster parent support) (Watt & Kim, 2019) than their Caucasian and African American counterparts. Seven participants reported at least one of their parents suffered from a mental disorder or had a problem with substance abuse that primarily contributed to their admission into the FCS. Preventative measures assisting with mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and parenting classes may help decrease the foster care admittance of Latino youth.

Furthermore, eleven participants reported difficulty forming and maintaining secure and healthy relationships and substantial contact with their biological families after their foster care tenure. Thus, providing parents with psychoeducation on helping their children to develop secure attachments and their overall impact would likely be beneficial (Cushing et al., 2014; Kemmis-Rigs et al., 2018; McWey, 2004). Research studying the impact of preventative measures before children are admitted to the FCS may provide Latino families with valuable resources that reduce abuse, family separation, and long-lasting adverse effects.

Culturally Sensitive Services

Ayón et al.'s (2013) and Correa Capello's (2006) research found that Latino foster care YC may lose their cultural identity due to the small number of Latino licensed foster care families that can continue modeling and teaching cultural practices. Only two participants were able to adequately describe cultural practices they were taught (one remembered the values taught before their foster care tenure). Moreover, only two participants in this study stated they were bilingual and understood their native tongue. Latino foster care YC should have the option to decide if they would like to continue their cultural traditions based on preference and not unfamiliarity. Identifying the impact of being placed with families who hold collectivistic values may help provide former foster youth with different support networks and coping skills. Furthermore, it may also help foster youth better understand when Latino values (e.g., loyalty, respect for authority, group accountability, etc.) are not adequately used and are causing emotional turmoil and additional harm (Perez & Romo, 2011).

Generational Differences

The current study focused on former foster youth and aimed at interviewing participants who had emancipated from the system. The interviewee's ages in this study ranged from 18–48

years old. Ultimately, the FCS has undergone several legal changes and has changed the type of assistance given to youth to support them better. Participants aged 35-48 years old reported, "I was given \$250 and told, 'Good luck!'" Only two participants reported they were in the process or had received transitional assistance and had benefited from the support. However, not all laws focus on relational or mental health services, but attempt to provide housing and finances. Future research could focus on how newer laws and system changes have affected TAY and the long-lasting outcomes.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) connection to Latino Populations

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a framework that helps to identify traumatic experiences children under 18 years old endure and prevention approaches to mitigate their damage (Munoz et al., 2022). ACEs encompass children who may experience neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, incarceration, parents who suffer from substance abuse, domestic violence, or traumatic events. Munoz et al. focused on the link between hope theory and attachment theory in adults who have experienced ACEs. While attachment theory focuses on emotional bonding and interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019), hope theory suggests that hopeful thinking is driven by goal-oriented thoughts, pathways/strategies to said attain goals, and agency or motivation to exert effort for achievement (Munoz et al., 2022). Researchers noted that higher levels of hope were associated with resilience and found that attachment insecurities were associated with lower hope expectations. They call for further research to examine how ACE interventions may promote hope and secure attachments.

Based on the ACEs conditions, all the participants from the current study can be considered ACE survivors. Although Munoz et al. suggested research on interventions with attachment security and levels of hope, their sample consisted of 72% Caucasian participants. It

was unclear what percentage of their minority participants were Hispanic and if there were any cultural differences with attachment securities and worldviews on hope. Future research can explore the impact of ACEs interventions, secure attachments, and hope on the Latino population and how cultural differences may impact the outcomes.

Conclusion

The growing number of youth emancipating from the FCS continues to grow annually, and unfortunately, the negative impacts of forming and maintaining healthy and secure relationships also follow. This study found the positive effects of one secure connection on negative attachments and its ability to instill hope and relationship receptivity. While only one participant reported a secure attachment, they also reported reliable and loving caregivers that modeled Latino values (e.g., *familismo*, community, trust, etc.), indicating the importance of both secure relationships and cultural components.

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Appendix A

Qualitative Questionnaire

1. Pre-Foster Care Experience

a. Describe your relationship with your birth parents/caregivers and the length of time you lived with them before entering foster care.

b. Overall, did this relationship provide for you during this time? What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

2. Foster Care Experience

a. Foster Parents

i. Briefly describe your relationship with your foster parents/social workers and how many foster homes/residential homes you resided in and for how long?

ii. Overall, what, if anything, did these relationships provide for you during this time? What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

b. Birth Parents

i. Were you allowed to have contact and visits with your birth parents? How often did you have contact? For what length of time did you have contact?

ii. How, if at all, did you make sense of this relationship during this time? How did you view yourself in this relationship? How did you view the other person in this relationship?

iii. Overall, what, if anything, did this relationship provide for you during this time? What was most helpful? What was least helpful?

3. Post-Foster Care Experience

a. Looking back on your foster care experience, what relationships provided the most support? What was most helpful about these relationships?

i. How, if at all, did you make sense of these relationships during this time? How did you view yourself in these relationships? How did you view the other people in the relationships?

ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?

b. How, if at all, have these relationships while in foster care influenced your current relationships?

i. How, if at all, did you make sense of this relationship during this time? How did you view yourself in this relationship? How did you view the other person in this relationship?

ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?

c. Looking back on your foster care transitional experience, what relationships provided the most support during your emancipation process? What was most helpful about these relationships?

i. How, if at all, did you make sense of these relationships during this time? How did you view yourself in these relationships? How did you view the other people in the relationships?

ii. How lovable did you view yourself in this relationship? How dependable did you view this person in this relationship? How well did this person respond to your needs in this relationship?

APPENDIX B**Table 1 – Results****Results – Themes**

Number of Participants	9	10	11	12
A. Pre-Foster Care Experiences				
1. Forgotten or Distorted memories			x	
B. Experiences During Foster Care				
2. Lack of Support & Instability				x
3. Lack of Meaningful Contact with Biological Families	x			
4. Repeated Abuse and Traumas				x
C. Post-Foster Care Experience				
5. Positive Impact of One Stable Relationship	x			
6. Adult Connections with Biological Families			x	
7. Difficulty Creating and Maintaining Healthy Relationships				x