

Extracurricular Opportunities Improve Resilience and Self-Efficacy in Foster Youth

Alumni

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Abstract

Foster care alumni (age 21 and older) are more likely to experience challenges than those adults who did not age out of the foster care system. In contrast with their peers who grow up in their families of origin, individuals who age out of foster care often report a perception of learned helplessness (Galan-Cisneros et al., 2015). Using interview questions, the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Brief Resilience Scale, participants completed an online survey to determine if participating in extracurricular activities as an adolescent produced self-efficacy and resiliency in their adult lives. This study used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the relationship between *extracurricular activities* in adolescence and its effect on *self-efficacy* and *resiliency* in adulthood ($n = 107$). The result indicated no significant impacts between extracurricular activities and self-efficacy or extracurricular activities and resiliency. Due to the COVID-19 virus that restricted individuals and organizations to social distancing, the original sample size of 107 participants was not reached after many months. This research was eventually revised to a pilot study, which included a total of 20 participants. Although results were not significant, the bootstrap analysis did show the potential for significance if the original sample size could have been met. This study should be continued following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: foster care alumni, extracurricular activities, resilience, self-efficacy

Chapter 1

In the United States, there is an overwhelming number of children in the foster care system. According to the Children's Bureau (2019), there are more than 400,000 children in foster care in the United States. The foster care system was developed to provide a stable living environment and basic needs to children whose parents cannot provide them with adequate safety and security. There are both state departments and private organizations that provide foster care services to children in need. Although reunification with families is a common goal of many organizations, there is a high volume of foster care children who age out of the system, which means they no longer are eligible for state services. In addition, many of these children are frequently moved to different foster care homes throughout their dependency.

Each year, an estimated 20,000 youth will age out of the foster care system (between 18–21 years of age) with high rates of mental health disorders, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, and drug dependence resulting in lifelong setbacks (Pecora et al., 2005). According to Cohen (2014), half of these youth will not graduate with a high school diploma or complete postsecondary education, leaving them in a fragile economic situation as they enter independent living. With such high rates of trauma-related outcomes for youth in foster care, it is imperative for educators, families, and supporters to gain an understanding of elements necessary for overcoming challenges as they make their way to adulthood.

Childhood and adolescence is often a time in which self-efficacy and resiliency are shaped, which are factors that help mitigate life challenges. Transitioning to adulthood is a major developmental milestone that often requires self-efficacy and

resiliency for a successful transition. Yet, little is understood about what helps promote self-efficacy and resiliency in foster care children. According to Haghghat and Knifsend (2019), youth in the general population who successfully transition to adulthood often have support structures in place, such as organized extracurricular activities and the role models who lead these activities. This study revealed opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities bring positive experiences and an increased rate of educational attainment and skills that relate to coping with life lessons (i.e., social cooperation, negotiation, planning, organization, emotional intelligence, persistence, and commitment). According to Gomez (2015), foster youth report lacking many of these attributes as they prepared for adulthood. Investing in these children by providing the support that helps shape self-efficacy and resiliency is essential to help guide them to adulthood (Kim et al., 2015).

Challenges Faced by Those in Foster Care

The foster care system's goal is to provide each child safety, security, nurturing, education, mentoring and possible reunification with the biological parents. Despite these organizations' best intentions, children continue to experience a variety of adverse experiences while in the care of foster homes. The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee (2018) reported the Early Childhood Adoption and Dependent Care have shown:

- 13% of foster alumni reported being *physically abused* by a caregiver,
- 4% reported *sexual abuse* by a caregiver, and
- 17% reported being *sexually abused* by someone other than a caregiver while in the foster care system.

Additionally, 33% of aged-out foster adults reported neglect (Courtney, 2009). These experiences in foster care add to the complexity of their trauma and negatively affect their mental health.

More than 3 million child abuse and neglect cases are reported each year in the United States, involving more than 5.5 million children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018). The abuse was described as physical injuries (e.g., bruises, burns, fractures) resulting from hitting, kicking, shaking, and other forms of violence to the body. It also includes sexual activity (e.g., fondling, anal or genital intercourse, voyeurism, pornography; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018). Child neglect is the more complicated forms of abuse to detect but includes withholding any aspect of day-to-day care (e.g., food, water, clothing, medicine) or emotional necessities (e.g., attention, love, and affection). According to the National Children's Alliance (2019) report, an estimated 1600 children die of abuse and neglect each year. Sadly, 4 out of 5 abuse victims are parents. These statistics help explain why there are so many children placed in foster care each year. However, it is equally important to understand how child abuse affects these children over their lifetime.

According to C. R. White et al. (2009), previous adverse childhood experience (ACE) studies have revealed a significant relationship between complex trauma (invasive and interpersonal trauma beginning in childhood with long-term effects into adulthood), in childhood and an increase of depression, suicide attempts, alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, domestic violence, cigarette smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, and sexually transmitted diseases between adolescence and adulthood. Despite the essential nature of foster care and its inherent potential for changing children's risk

trajectory, there is often significantly less support in place for foster children and youth than there is in homes of biological origin. Again, this does not call into question the motives of foster parents but is a reality associated with the fact that resources are spread more thinly in foster homes—and one of those resources is the amount of personal attention given to foster children (Adley, 2017). Often, caregivers of foster children have more than one foster child in the home, and the ability to give each child the emotional and physical support they need can be difficult.

When foster children are removed from the only family they know, it is traumatic (Steenbakkers et al., 2019). They may be left in the hands of strangers they do not know or trust while feeling fearful of what will happen to their biological family and wondering if they will ever see them again. Theorist van der Kolk (2005) mentioned when young people do not have adequate support to work through traumatic experiences, they are more likely to have a poor sense of self and behave more impulsively and aggressively towards others. Eventually, this leads to social isolation, which perpetuates the lack of trust and acceptance by others. According to Pecora et al. (2005), the lack of trust and acceptance may be why youth exiting foster care has an increased sense of *hopelessness*, leaving them in danger of criminality, unemployment, and homelessness.

For the average American, emphasizing independence is the key to success (Lamb, 2014), but for many adults aging out of foster care, striving for independence is frequently met with extraordinary challenges and confusion. For decades, research has shown foster children invariably face various risks such as fear of abandonment, abuse, neglect, anxiety, teen pregnancy, learned helplessness, and criminality. All are associated with a deficit in functioning across different developmental domains over their lifetime

(American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Early Childhood Adoption and Dependent Care, 2000; Combs, 2018; Dworsky, 2015; Gomez, 2015). In light of this, school and social functioning deficits are disproportionately higher among foster care youth (Benbenishty, 2018). They experience severe academic, social, and emotional challenges that eventually affect outcomes long after leaving the foster care system.

Transitioning to Adulthood From Foster Care

Adulthood is an inevitable prospect for all who survive. However, the transition to adulthood is not the same for everyone because of the complexities of biological makeup, social interactions, and experiences (Courtney et al., 2001; van der Kolk, 2005; Kim et al., 2015). According to Adley and Kina (2017), it is essential for people to feel a sense of purpose and growth, as social comparison and self-evaluation are indicators of being on track. However, results also showed people who struggle to keep up with society suffer from depression. With so many setbacks, it is no wonder foster youth have an increased rate of depression. C. R. White et al. (2009) reported foster youth have depression two times greater than average youth. However, foster youth who reported higher activity levels and therapeutic support reported fewer depressive symptoms over time. This is an indicator there is more to supporting an individual's growth than keeping them nourished, safe, educated, and secure. There needs to be more consideration of how trauma affects them mentally and physically as they age.

According to Courtney (2009), only 32% of foster youth reported feeling prepared to hold a job and manage money, 31% felt ready to obtain housing, and 29% felt unprepared to live independently. Additionally, foster youth reported minimal social support and preparation for adulthood, 37% of young adults reported a challenging

transition to adulthood (i.e., rape, physical and sexual assault, homelessness, incarceration) within the first 12–18 months of leaving foster care. Being a potential victim is a highlighted concern in the foster care system. However, too often, many of these youth *shift* and become the perpetrators. According to Courtney (2009), 25% of the respondents reported committing “seven or more” acts of delinquency (e.g., theft, assault, selling illegal drugs, driving without a license) while in out-of-home care. This shift in power may seem drastic, but according to van der Kolk (2005), the layer of trauma makes adolescents in foster care less likely to extend themselves to build relationships with future supporters and healthy role models. Instead, they organize their lives to prevent abandonment or victimization, leading to maladaptive functioning and possibly prevent resiliency, self-efficacy, the focus of building healthy relationships, pursuing an education, or setting future goals. This information emphasizes the importance of creating and encouraging more positive activities, experiences, and positive social interactions that are safe and compatible with foster youth.

Foster Care Alumni

According to the National Youth in Transition Database (2018), foster alumni are at a higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, and incarceration following emancipation than the general population. According to the Casey Family Services report, 33.2% of aged-out foster youth had household incomes at or below the poverty level, which is three times the national poverty rate. Another 33% had no health insurance, which is double the national rate of 18% for ages 18–44 years old, and the employment rate for *alumni* foster care individuals in the Northwest (according to a foster care alumni survey) is 47% lower than the general population (U.S. Department of

Labor, 2019). Lastly, Casey Family Services reported 22.2% of foster care alumni experience *homelessness* after leaving foster care. According to Pecora et al. (2005), director of research for Casey Family Programs, foster alumni experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at twice the rate of U.S. war veterans. These associated risks affect their long-term trajectory as they struggle to find themselves in the complexities of social acceptance, personal development, education, financial security, and daily tasks.

The chance that foster alumni will leave care and build resilience and self-efficacy on their own is not likely without positive role models and experiences to show them the way. Ideally, they would take these positive role models and experiences with them into their adulthood. Benbenishty et al. (2018) compared foster care adolescents with their traditional schoolmates, found more positive role models, experiences with personal interests, and skills were an asset to increase resilience and self-efficacy for their future. It would appear to be beneficial to consider more solutions to aging out of foster care successfully.

Possible Solutions

According to Adley (2017), children in foster care grow up experiencing more shame due to their trauma and out-of-home living situation than their peers. The complexity of feeling “different” can keep them from trusting or reaching out to others. This research study considers extra support and relationship-building opportunities “tailored” just for them. Extra support is essential when youth age out of the system and begin to experience disruption from various supporters in their life. According to Courtney et al. (2001), introducing youth to community role models such as coaches,

teachers, and other supporters before aging out of the system will contribute to their overall well-being in adulthood. These outcomes imply that foster youth need more opportunities to engage positively with others. van der Kolk (2005) reported foster youth need more positive experiences to help them through trauma-related triggers to gain a sense of self-efficacy and resilience. He emphasized that with the amount of complex trauma foster youth face, it is crucial to provide them with a much-needed sense of unity, comradery, and social self-awareness to learn to trust again.

O'Connor et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study on developing emerging adults, foster youth who are preparing to age out of the foster care system. The purpose was to look for correlative factors of positive development. The study included 1,158 participants from infancy to adulthood. Results showed youth who had strong relationships with their parents and peers, as well as greater community engagement, showed higher levels of development. Those connected to school activities (e.g., sports, music, clubs) were more likely to avoid risky behavior and adopt prosocial behaviors. Lastly, parents who invested in their children's overall well-being were more likely to mediate successful steps to adulthood. This brings us to the topic of extracurricular activities.

T. S. White et al. (2018) found foster youth who were involved in extracurricular activities reported higher high school graduation rates, better grades, and higher education goals than those who did not participate in extracurricular activities. These extracurricular programs that help individuals learn life skills will help youth from foster homes and hopefully transfer into their biological parents' homes at some point. Findings

of this study showed extracurricular activities and resources, theoretically, can become essential to the child's growth and maturity over a lifetime.

The deficits of foster care environments make them good candidates for these types of enrichment programs. This study does not indicate the solution to aging out of foster care, but it addresses the possible correlation of extracurricular activities on resilience and self-efficacy in foster care alumni.

Operational Terms

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities take place outside the required educational curriculum. Examples of these include participation in organized sports teams, fine art competitions, and interest-based clubs. According to a study by Rathunde (1993), extracurricular activities show the highest likelihood of engagement for teenagers. The conclusion came from the fact that, for teenagers, extracurriculars combined the challenge of focusing on significant goals with the sense of spontaneous and autonomous choice to become involved. Students who achieved goals in extracurriculars were more likely to perceive their skills as higher than they did after succeeding at classwork and socialization, the two most frequently emphasized skills taught during the school day as part of the curriculum. For this study, extracurricular activities can include organized sports, clubs, band, dance, scouts, etc.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy describes an individual's beliefs about their abilities to wield control over challenges while maintaining control over their functioning (Aydogdu et al., 2017; Agustiani et al., 2016). In the face of adversity, they can still pursue goals, manage daily

tasks, and problem solve as needed. When stress, adverse circumstances, and other forms of challenges arise, people who possess self-efficacy can achieve goals, take care of routine tasks, and solve problems as they arise (Agustiani et al., 2016).

A longitudinal study by Luszczynska and Schwarzer (2005) reported individuals with positive self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to feel a sense of control over themselves and their future. These individuals were more accepting of life challenges and showed increased sensitivity to others. Additionally, individuals who can self-regulate are more likely to experience a sense of effectiveness in life's challenges. These findings complement the research by Tedeshi and Calhoun (1996), who reported self-efficacy beliefs might enhance some dimensions of advantage discovery, such as personal growth or acceptance of life imperfection after a traumatic life event (Tedeshi & Calhoun, 1996).

Researchers Rutter (1990) and Osterling (2006) are among many researchers who have shown individuals report improved self-efficacy and more resilience when others encourage their abilities (i.e., coping skills, athleticism, intellectual ability, creativity) and beliefs despite difficult times. When provided positive interactions, the feedback helps to enhance confidence for future struggles when they only have themselves for support.

Bandura (1982) identified four primary sources of beliefs that make up self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional and physiological states. Self-efficacy is not a global state but is specific to each skill. When many skills are mastered, there is a generalization that develops, and the individual will begin to believe there are many things they can do when they set their mind to it.

Mastery experiences refer to instances in which people take on new challenges and experience success. According to Akhtar (2008), practicing a particular skill will help learn that skill and improve performance over time. He explained practice improves the individual's skill in that area, but it also teaches the individual they can gain new skills.

Vicarious experiences refer to instances in which people have role models whom they can observe and imitate. Positive role models who possess and demonstrate adequate levels of self-efficacy pass many of those traits on to those observing them. Older relatives, teachers, coaches, counselors, and mentors are positive role models available for emulation (Akhtar, 2008).

Verbal persuasian refers to how words can influence a person's sense of self-efficacy. An example of this would include encouraging a child by telling them they can take on any challenge that might come their way. This verbal affirmation can motivate and encourage and bolster a sense of confidence (Akhtar, 2008). Furthermore, *emotional and physiological states* refer to how overall health plays a role in developing and maintaining a sense of self-efficacy. Conditions such as depression or anxiety, or physiological maladies, can make it more challenging to feel self-efficacious, negatively affecting an adolescent's ability to build stable relationships and achieve academic success (Agustiani et al., 2016).

According to Hasl (2019), academic achievement is the foundation in preparing for adulthood. However, research has determined youth without positive self-efficacy in academics are less likely to challenge themselves for fear of discomfort and failure (Agustiani et al., 2016). This study elaborates that being uncomfortable to take on academic challenges makes it more difficult for students to plan for future endeavors

such as higher education and employment as opposed to youth with higher self-efficacy and the ability to navigate self-regulated learning skills. Results indicated when youth can accept challenges, manage their time, have some control over their physical environments, and ask for help, it increases their awareness and positive self-regard to move confidently through challenges.

In 2017, researchers Aydogdu et al. found individuals with positive regard for self and interpersonal awareness had increased psychological resilience. In particular, individuals who are competent at regulating emotions and uses emotion to facilitate thought have a less fragile inner self and are less affected by how the typical person perceives them, the future, and social expectations.

As previously mentioned, healthy relationships with others were a predictor of how individuals perceive themselves and their capabilities (O'Connor et al., 2011; Osterling, 2006; Rutter, 1990). If youth receive a balance of emotional closeness, they are less likely to be approval seekers and more likely to adapt to new environments and handle challenges. This level of emotional self-efficacy was consistent in all three studies, showing individuals with psychological resilience had higher interpersonal sensitivity and belief rates. What is more, these individuals were less likely to suffer from mental disorders such as depression, somatic disorders, and addiction.

Resilience

Resilience is an area of study that dates back to the 1970s when psychologists and psychiatrists first identified it as a factor in children who were at risk for developmental problems and psychopathology because of genetic factors or circumstances in their experience (Masten, 2001). Words such as *invulnerable* or *invincible* were used to

describe children who showed this characteristic. Over time, such researchers as Masten (2001) noticed resilience is much more common than initial studies had suggested. Masten also noted resilience appears to be a necessary component of adaptation in a society of complex systems.

Over time, researchers have come up with a definition of resilience that requires two specific sorts of classificatory judgments to qualify. One has to do with the presence of a threat; people have also shown resilience when they have experienced, or currently experience, a danger to their normative development (Garmezy & Masten, 1985; Kraemer et al., 1997). Some of these include growing up as the biological child of a person with schizophrenia, low socioeconomic status, exposure to violence, exposure to mistreatment, and other predictors of developmental difficulties (Masten & Wright, 1998). More recently, a study by Karairmak and Figley (2017) found resilience is not heavily weighted by gender or ethnicity but by an individual's ability to remain realistically optimistic during adverse life events.

Resilient individuals adapt around adversity and make developmental steps despite challenges. Observable patterns of these satisfying expectations are determined by one's culture or society (Elder, 1998; Masten & Wright, 1998). A question that remains is what predicts who will thrive under the pressure of adverse life events and who does not. Others have used the absence of such adverse outcomes as psychopathology or substance abuse, or at least a relatively low level of signs of impairment, as a sign of resilience (Conrad & Hammen, 1993). The third type of approach combines both of these, informing the second judgment (Dubow et al., 1997).

For years, resilience was believed to be a personality trait rather than a result of environment and interpersonal connectivity. Although there are minimal studies to determine the results of such a quandary, researchers Kariarmak and Figley (2017) found resilience is not a personality trait but is associated with social support, particularly for youth.

Relevant Theories

Bronfenbrenner

Concerning resilience, self-efficacy, and development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) devised a framework for development with five ecological systems. In these, people interact with their society, environment, and one another in ways that can influence their development. At an elemental level, formal education, family, peers, and neighborhood all influence one's development. After this comes the back-and-forth between teacher, family, and community. There are also social or cultural settings beyond the control of the individual. Also, there are cultural contexts at a broader level, such as factors specific to a state, nation, or cultural group that can form beliefs, values, and behaviors (Baygi et al., 2017). With this in mind, it is crucial for policy planners and providers to emphasize how developing goals for mastery and natural sources of motivation play a significant role in the understanding young adults have of their potentialities and capabilities (Ames 1992). Duties teachers have in this context include helping students find mastery goals that lead to success, not only to receive grades that will lead to success, but also that they experience confidence and beliefs that fulfill their sense of self. According to Ames (1992), mastering skills can encourage students to gain knowledge for the sake of learning and boost their skills for further development.

According to Elliot and Murayama (2008), the interaction between teachers and students in higher education is appropriately different from elementary, middle, and high school years. However, it is still true that students benefit from developing a rapport with their teachers, including constructive feedback about areas of improvement. When this happens, students are more likely to pursue excellence.

Students in the foster care system are at a significant deficit for encouragement and positive messaging (Dweck, 1986). This study found it crucial to help students in the middle and high school years find the encouragement that comes from the benefits of building rapport. It is not helpful to “give” students positive outcomes they do not deserve because they are aware of when they have received benefits without earning them, which can often undermine self-esteem (Dweck, 1986).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy asserts four primary sources of influence regarding how people feel about their abilities. One of these is mastery experiences. These might be the most obvious, as it makes sense that success leads to a feeling of encouragement, that one can also reach success in other endeavors (Bandura, 1982).

A second source is the vicarious living of experiences, as observed through actions from other models. According to Bandura (1982), people tend to seek out role models who already possess the skills they want to attain through their own lives. Finding these role models can play a substantial role in reaching self-efficacy.

A third way to reach self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1982), is through social persuasion. Social persuasion involves hearing accurate positive messages from others about one's capabilities and taking those messages to heart. Bandura noted it is easier to

undermine one's sense of self-efficacy than to construct it through social persuasion alone. The fourth way is to reduce stress in people's responses to situations, changing how they respond emotionally to situations. Cognitive behavior strategies can play a role in making these modifications, such as reframing (Bandura, 1982).

Bandura's theory on social persuasion and cognitive-behavioral strategies was tested by Zainal and Newman (2019). Following an 18-year longitudinal study to test the trajectories between major depressive disorder (MDD), generalized anxiety (GAD), panic disorder (PD), and cognitive-behavioral strategies, they found “higher initial levels of goal persistence and positive reappraisal predicted subsequent smaller increases in [mental] disorders” (Zainal & Newman, 2019, p. 295). In other words, individuals who learn how to reach their goals even when uncomfortable, challenging, and inconvenient (i.e., goal persistence) are more likely to receive praise and acknowledgment repeatedly (positive reappraisal and social persuasion) for their effort, improving *self-efficacy*. According to Bandura (1982), individuals who practice these cognitive-behavioral strategies are better equipped for future demands than those who have never experienced success by working through challenges. If this is true, foster youth who are provided opportunities to reach goals in situations of interest will likely gain a sense of accomplishment and social praise, guiding them toward self-efficacy at a pivotal point in their lives.

Differential Impact Theory

Differential impact theory (DIT) provides a somewhat alternative approach to explaining how resilience works and facilitating personal growth and recovery after experiencing adversity (Theron & Ungar, 2018). DIT focuses on protective resources,

analyzing processes to determine which ones are most effective in shielding people from adversity. Rather than focusing on differences in individual circumstances, DIT focuses on more universal or holistic factors beyond the individual, which are most likely to increase the probability of positive results after dealing with adversity. Researchers focus on which factors have the most significant difference for children at varying degrees of adversity (Theron & Ungar, 2018).

Resiliency factors were researched by Ungar and Hadfield (2019), which included external influences such as the quality of family, engagement in school and the community. The study included 449 youth between the ages of 11–19 years old. Participants lived in communities with increased challenges such as domestic violence, lower socioeconomic status, and a high proportion of visible minorities. Results showed the quality of community has the most significant impact on an individual's vulnerability and resilience. As reported by other researchers, youth with higher levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, engagement, and resilience are more frequently identified by those who have healthy supporters and community involvement (i.e., extracurricular activities).

Interactions Between Traits and Outcomes

Extracurricular/Resilience

To better understand the importance of meeting individual needs, it is essential to identify and acknowledge the interests of youth. Extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, music, etc., are ways individuals explore their interests, gain insight into their innate skills, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and experience more social connections. As discussed earlier, resilience may be a competing factor against depression as people navigate life adversities (Kariarmak & Figley, 2017). Because

extracurricular activities have varying difficulty for each participant, it is an opportunity for individuals to learn from and watch others adapt and make adjustments for improvement.

In 2000, the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) conducted a 3-year longitudinal study (1995–1998) that examined 620 African American, elementary-age children living in the Washington, DC area. The purpose of this study was to evaluate a young child's perception of safety, their academic achievement in math and reading, participation in organized extracurricular activities, level of support, and how these variables affect resiliency in high school (Nettles et al., 2000). As many have already experienced, high school can create many challenges for youth as they learn to navigate an environment that provides less protection and more autonomy.

Results found a correlation that by 10th grade, students who participated in more extracurricular activities (including religious activities) were more self-efficacious, resilient, and optimistic about themselves and their future. These results support this current study by showing more frequent opportunities to develop positive relations, including nonparental supporters, are more likely to have better academic outcomes, social competencies and be more future driven. Goldstein et al. (2012) conducted a study regarding the relationship between internal resilience (including self-esteem), smoking, alcohol, and depressive symptoms among foster care alumni. The study showed no correlation between child maltreatment, smoking, and alcohol. However, results indicated individuals with higher resilience, more community involvement, and support had fewer depressive symptoms and displayed more growth and positive expectations over the

context of risk. It is essential to acknowledge foster parents are primary supporters for their children; therefore, it is vital to consider their level of resiliency and how they navigate challenges in life. According to Dubowitz et al. (2019), parents with depressive symptoms are less likely to foster resilience in youth, which may result in a reciprocal interaction. Because depression is not a disqualifying measure within the application of being a foster parent, offering more social opportunities could be the difference between foster youth aging out with the ability to overcome challenges and those exposed to more adversity. Highlighted are just a few reasons foster youth supporters need to enhance preventative programs, such as extracurricular activities. Improving resiliency and self-efficacy is an essential aspect of coping with difficult circumstances in adulthood, and one way to do this is by improving cognitive stimulation, environment and promoting positive social development in youth (Sattle & Font, 2018; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016).

Extracurricular/Self-Efficacy

According to theorist van der Kolk (2005), there is good news for foster children who have difficulty finding stable forms of social support in their family of origin or in their household where they find care. Through extracurricular opportunities, they can also find stable social support. Not only does participating in extracurricular activities provide a new social circle, but the positive experiences that can accompany these experiences can also provide opportunities for positive reinforcement of skills, along with the confidence that comes with rewards through performance.

According to Kins (2010), emerging adults, also known as adolescents, have reached a point in life where such experiences as the development of self-esteem, formation of moral reason, and exploration of identity provide them with the confidence

they need to live autonomously and effectively outside the home. It is that exploration of identity that leads to self-efficacy, and successful self-efficacy leads to a sense of resilience. Homing in on personal interests, limitations, and skills is an essential part of that process.

van der Kolk (2005) also has findings relevant to the connection between extracurricular activities and self-efficacy. Taking part in clubs, sports teams, fine art organizations, and other interest-based activities provide young people with a set of like-minded friends and peers who have the same areas of interest. However, this can also bring some adversity. On sports teams, there is often competition for starting positions and playing time and positive feedback from the coach(es). There is also competition for accolades in fine arts organizations as starring roles in theatrical performances, section leaders in the choral, band, and orchestral groups, and the like. Finding ways to deal with this adversity eventually leads to a sense of self-efficacy as one works through finding which experiences are pleasurable—and meaningful.

According to researchers such as Rutter (1990) and Osterling (2006), when youth receive positive feedback for coping mechanisms, athletic ability, intellectual prowess, creativity, and the like, outcomes have included increases in self-efficacy and resilience—as well as personal reflection. The incidence of positive interaction allows young people to build a foundation to help them cope with future adversity when they do not have a social network around them to encourage but instead only have themselves to rely on for support.

One could reasonably ask why public school systems have started to deemphasize extracurricular activities when there are so many practical benefits to this sort of activity.

One possible answer has to do with the funding priorities of the federal government. According to Deutsch (2019), the educational and presidential administrations have been working hard to defund programs that benefit children who do not have the advantage of affluence. One example of this is the proposal to end funding from the federal government for student programs after school. Several of these programs include funding for field trips by clubs organized to allow students to take advantage of areas of interest they have developed outside the classroom.

The amount of money these programs spend from the federal budget is approximately \$1.2 billion. Studies have shown programs such as these can help students who are struggling to stay afloat academically as early as kindergarten to boost not just their grades but also their engagement in the entire academic process. Over 60 after-school programs in the United States have demonstrated they show impact using the rigorous standards established by the Every Student Succeeds Act; these metrics include gains in enrollment, attendance, graduation rates, promotion rates, and achievement in math and science (Deutsch, 2019).

As stated previously, when it comes to children in foster care, the level of disadvantage is even higher, as the majority of foster youth do not have the support their peers who live with their family of origin have, not just in terms of emotional affirmation but in the more tangible realms of socioeconomic status. However, many foster care youth may have it better than if they had been left in their family of origin.

Self-Efficacy/Resilience

Personal attributes critical for transitioning to adulthood are resiliency and self-efficacy (Diehl et al., 2010). A study conducted by Deihl et al. (2010) described

individuals of all ages experiencing higher levels of resilience and self-efficacy when they have personal control over their daily activities. This does not mean *all* activities but specifically activities that bring about *positive* experiences. This study suggests individuals who have more positive experiences than negative experiences have increased self-concept/self-efficacy and resiliency because they feel a sense of control over the outcome—good or bad. The study also revealed individuals are more likely to have incoherent self-efficacy, be more psychologically disorganized, and unpredictable without these positive experiences, making it difficult to feel a sense of growth and adjustment. Milioni et al. (2015) conducted an 8-year longitudinal study on 450 Italian adolescents to determine if *ego-resiliency*, self-regulation in the face of challenges, and *emotional self-efficacy* influence thought, beliefs, motives, and action, can help them transition to adulthood. Results found both positive and negative ego-resiliency predicts emotional self-efficacy and positive and negative emotional self-efficacy predicts ego-resiliency. Understanding resiliency and self-efficacy are significantly correlated provides essential information that these characteristics can be strengthened through role modeling, mastery, and social support when youth can face challenges that increase emotional competence. Opportunities allowing adolescents to experience themselves as resourceful and capable of adapting despite environmental challenges provide further interpersonal strengthening, leading to increased self-efficacy (Milioni et al., 2015).

Understanding resilience in foster youth is critical as they have experienced trauma by the nature of being in foster care. According to Schofield and Beek (2005), it emanates low self-esteem within this context of trauma and has determined a child's

environment and social supports are protective factors for low self-esteem. However, this only provides external security but does not speak to the inner world of these children.

To gauge the interaction between risk and resilience accurately, Schofield and Beek conducted a study to examine resilience as a pliable characteristic rather than a fixed characteristic, argued from the standpoint of nature and nurture. This longitudinal study (1997–2002) included 58 foster care children from surrounding areas in Europe under 12. Each child was considered high risk, which included experiencing multiple forms of neglect and abuse, various foster care placements, and near adoptions that did not materialize. They also displayed abnormal ranges of behavior and emotional problems. From a biopsychosocial perspective, this study looked at three areas: (a) behavior and relationships within the foster family, (b) social functioning outside of the foster family, and (c) sense of permanence within the foster family. Results found adolescents who fared the best were those with a secure base and an emotional bond with their foster parents. This interactive model became the foundation and support necessary for successful foster youth to move toward external activities and supporters with internal confidence, self-efficacy, focus, cognitive flexibility, and a sense of resiliency. Children in this group were with and without disabilities, but all had families that supported extracurricular activities such as swimming, fishing, cycling, horse riding, and organized youth clubs. These families reported their children as more calm and content than they were 3 years prior. This study provides additional evidence that helping children manage challenges from their past and present requires more than foster parents. It requires social scaffolding at home and within the community to attend to a foster child's insecurities and build positive self-efficacy and resilience.

Significance of the Study

The present study will analyze the value of opportunities to experience extracurricular activities during the youth years to experiencing resiliency and self-efficacy in adulthood. It is hypothesized that participation in extracurricular activities as an adolescent in foster care will predict self-efficacious characteristics. Additionally, self-efficacy will impact resilience in adulthood, making the mediation model significant. It does not indicate the solution to adulting out of foster care, but it investigates specific variables (i.e., extracurricular activities) that could guide state policies to consider additional assistance, preparedness, and resources for out-of-care youth. Theoretically, successful extracurricular activities should lead to resilience

According to theorist van der Kolk (2005), if a foster child cannot find stable social support in their family of origin or out-of-home care, there is still a chance they can find it in the world through extracurricular opportunities. Like infants who need a secure attachment to build trust, foster youth also need opportunities to build secure attachments. The difference is that it requires more opportunities to build trust because the distrust has already been internalized. Foster youth need social reassurances from multiple levels of engagement (i.e., teachers, coaches) before they are confident they can make good things happen and know they can handle difficult situations.

Researchers O'Connor et al. (2010) investigated protective factors in middle school and high school youth. Findings suggest more community activities in middle school (i.e., sports, clubs, music) may produce the best outcomes for creating prosocial peer relationships and strengthening the sense of family support. During middle school, family support was still considered necessary at this stage of development. Additionally,

the critical element of social competence, feelings of accomplishment, and social participation are self-regulating, which predicts positive development. This study points out the importance of positive development in adolescence also increases socioeconomic status and community engagement in adulthood.

Maslow's (1987) hierarchy provides a similar theory regarding human development. He created a classification system that reflects the needs of humanity through behavioral motivation. Maslow used physiological, *safety, belonging and love, social needs or esteem, and self-actualization* to describe the pattern through which human motivations generally move. If Maslow's theory is correct, then each prior level must be satisfied for motivation to occur at the next level. Each of these levels contains a certain amount of internal sensation that must be met for an individual to complete their Hierarchy. The goal in Maslow's theory is to attain the fifth level or stage: self-actualization. Technically, there is no self-efficacy level in Maslow's hierarchy, but theoretically, this could be the next level and result of self-actualization. Theoretically, if the individual develops a sense of self-efficacy in attaining self-actualization, they succeed.

Emerging adults who have personal encounters with their strengths, weaknesses, disappointments, successes, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, social abilities, financial abilities, and learned skills are going to be more apt to maneuver fluidly through adulthood because they have not only lived life defensively but offensively (Maslow, 1987). By providing opportunities directed towards an individual's interest and ability, it allows those with rigid thinking (commonly seen in individuals with past trauma) to gain more flexible and creative thinking—offering hope, insight, and appreciation for the

“silver lining” that would otherwise make life hard at times. What makes it most rewarding is the social support extracurricular activities can bring.

When youth are given self-actualizing experiences [appropriate to them] while having competent adult support in place, they will be more confident in holding a job, preparing a plan, and attaining goals. They will be more self-reliant and more likely to overcome adversity in adulthood, all of which will result in self-efficacy and a more positive outlook on life (Maslow, 1987).

Giving foster youth the right to explore their interests and abilities would help them counteract the negative messages, depression/anxiety, and influences left by their trauma (Maslow, 1987). Gaining insight into their desires and attributes may help them discover advantages to their situation and eventually apply this insight to their budding ambitions (self-efficacy).

Research Question/Hypothesis

The overarching question for the study is: To what extent do extracurricular activities influence self-efficacy and resilience in foster care alumni? The question was broken down by identifying which extracurricular activities individuals participated in and how often. By examining self-efficacy and resilience in adulthood, the study contributed to understanding to the following questions:

Q1: Does participation in extracurricular activities as an adolescent in foster care predict resiliency in adulthood?

Q2: Does participation in extracurricular activities as an adolescent in foster care predict self-efficacy in adulthood?

Hypotheses

H1: Extracurricular activities (quantity) will predict higher resiliency.

H2: Extracurricular activities will enhance self-efficacy.

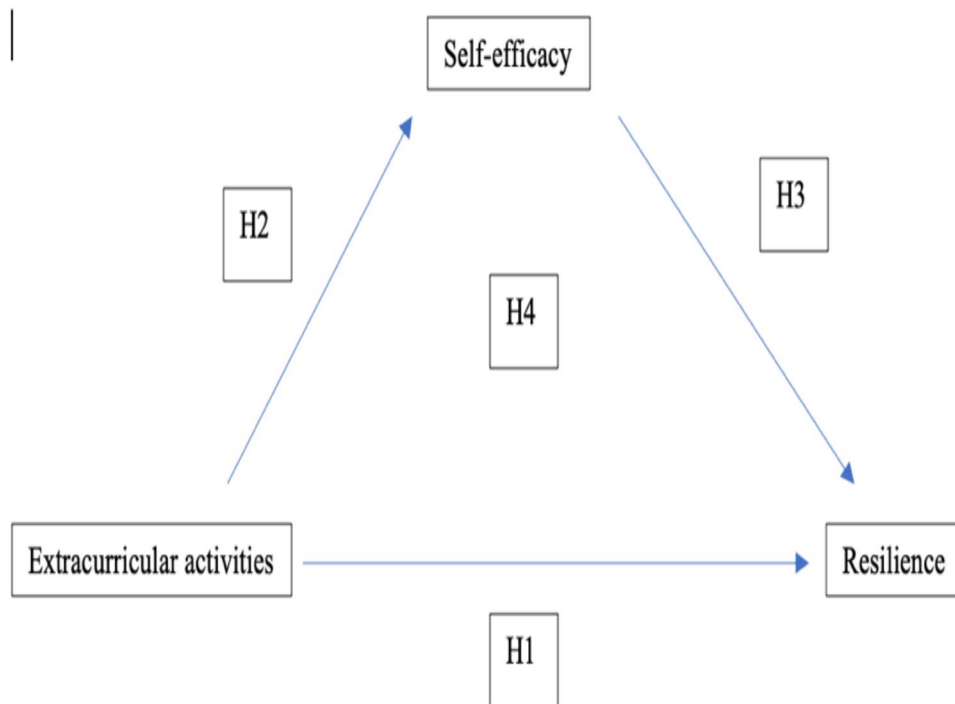
H3: Self-efficacy will positively predict higher resiliency.

H4: Self-efficacy will significantly mediate the relationship between extracurricular activities.

A model of the proposed hypotheses are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Hypothesis Model



Chapter 2

Method

This chapter begins with an explanation and overview of the quantitative data analysis procedure designed before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. Prior to the pandemic and collecting data, a power analysis determined the required sample size of 107 participants. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made it challenging to collect data as our nation socially distanced and attempted to navigate the unexpected. At the approval of the IRB, this study became a pilot study after 4 months, with a probability level of .05, power equal to .95, one predictor in Set A, two predictors in Set B, and an effect size of .15 for Set B. Final study participants included 20 foster care alumni.

Participants

Twenty participants completed the study. Of those, 30% identified as men, and 70% identified as women. Participants' ages included 15% between the age of 21–25 years old, 15% between 25–30, 5% between 30–35 years old, and 65% were over 35 years old. Participant self-reported race as White (65%); Black (15%); Latino or Hispanic (5%); multiethnicity (10%); and preferred not to say (5%). Education demographics included: some high school (5%); high school (15%); some college (30%); bachelors degree (25%); masters degree (10%); PhD or higher (10%); and trade school (5%). Relationship status of the sample was 40% were single; 45% married 10% divorced, 5% did not respond. Income ranges for participants consisted of 15% reported their annual household income as less than \$25,000 25% reported household income between \$25,000–\$50,000, 40% reported annual household income between \$50,000–\$100,000 and 20% reported annual household income over \$100,000 (20%). Employment status of

the sample included 15% reported being unemployed (15%); 60% reported full-time, 10% reported part-time employment, and 15% reported seeking opportunities. The sample endorsed the following: 25% reported zero children, 5% reported one child, 25% reported two children, 15% reported three children, 15% reported four children, and 15% did not report. Only 10% of the participants identified as having a developmental disability (e.g., ADHD; ni/pi) and 10% of participants endorsed have an acquired disability (e.g., PTSD and bipolar).

One hundred forty-six individuals attempted to complete the survey. However, most participants were not eligible to participate because the inclusion criteria included anyone who was a former recipient of the foster care system during their adolescence for 2 years or more, aged out of foster care services, and 21 years older. Exclusions to this study include anyone with a physical disability—limitation on a person's physical functioning (i.e., visual and hearing limited), mobility, dexterity or stamina, or severe mental disability—intellectual disability as these factors may have prevented them from participating in extracurricular activities. Participants were excluded if they did not complete all three surveys.

Materials

Demographic survey. A survey collected information regarding demographic variables such as age, developmental disabilities, disabilities acquired, marital status, ethnicity, level of education, socioeconomic status, employment status, and gender. Also, questions regarding their foster care experience are included, such as how long they were in foster care, what ages they were in foster care, and whether or not they aged out of foster care. Finally, the survey addressed if they participated in extracurricular activities,

which extracurricular activities they participated in, the duration of the participation in the activities, and their perception of success in the activity.

General Self-Efficacy Scale

The confidence level to adapt to life's challenges will be measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The scale is a 10-item psychometrically sound scale that assesses an individual's confidence level to adapt to life's challenges. The scale measures on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *not true* to 4 = *exactly true*. Confirmatory factor analysis has been used with over a hundred thousand participants, showing the Cronbach's alpha between .76 and .90. For the GSE, the total score ranges between 10 and 40, with a higher score indicating more self-efficacy and confidence in one's ability to manage life hardships successfully. The GSE scale correlates emotion, optimism, and work satisfaction. Negative coefficients were found for depression, stress, health complaints, burnout, and anxiety.

Brief Resilience Scale

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) is a self-report measure that assesses the ability to recover from stress. The BRS scale was initially tested on four samples of undergraduate students. This study included six questions related to personal characteristics, coping styles, social relationships, and healthy-related outcomes. The questionnaire measures on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Confirmatory factor analysis showed Cronbach's alphas between .80 to .91. The total score ranges between 6 to 30 and then divided by the number of questions for the final score. Scoring ranges were as follows: 4.3 to 5 indicates a higher resiliency, 3 to 4.3 is within the normal range, and 1 to 2.99 indicates low resiliency. Positive

coefficients related to higher resiliency is the ability to recover from stress, which is correlated with optimism, purpose in life, active coping, and positive reframing. Negative coefficients were pessimism, alexithymia, negative interactions, stress, anxiety, depression, negative affect, and physical symptoms.

Procedures

The research design involved collecting data through an online survey distributed through Qualtrics to all organizations and social media platforms that support foster care alumni such as Casey Family Programs, FosterClub, National Foster Care Youth and Alumni, Foster Care Alumni of America, FaceBook, Instagram, SurveyCircle, etc. All organizations were provided an agency recruitment letter with IRB approval, and formal request to recruit participants and conduct data collection. A sample of this letter can be found in Appendix A. Additionally, every agency was provided a recruitment flyer to post to their website. A sample of this flyer can be found in Appendix B.

Following, the organization was asked to forward the survey link to participants where they were introduced to the opportunity to participate in this study. Introduction to the study can be found in Appendix C. Deception was not used in this study. Participants were told the primary aim of this study is to address the research question, “Can self-efficacy and resiliency be improved in foster care alumni if they experience positive extracurricular activities in adolescence?” If the individual was interested in participating, they were directed to a 3-question survey to verify their eligibility. Participants completed a 10– to 15–minute online survey administered via Qualtrics. The eligibility questionnaire can be found in Appendix D. If the participant answered each eligibility questionnaire with a “Yes,” they were asked to read

and sign the consent prior to data collection. Consent to participate can be found in Appendix E. Once they agreed to participate, they were taken to the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F). Next, they completed the General Self-Efficacy Scale (see Appendix G) and the Brief Resilience Scale (see Appendix H). Upon completing the study, they were thanked for their participation. The debriefing page contained more information for resources if they experienced any distress while completing the survey. Responses have been used to investigate foster alumni's previous experience with extracurricular activities, identify the activities, and evaluate, based on individual responses, whether these experiences had any effect on their self-efficacy and resiliency in adulthood.

Analytic Strategy

A quantitative methodology was used to examine the effect of extracurricular activities in foster care adolescence and its impact on self-efficacy and resilience in adulthood. The study used a cross-sectional survey design and was analyzed through hierarchical regression.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between *extracurricular activities* (independent variable) in adolescence and its effect on *self-efficacy* (covariate) and *resiliency* (dependent variable) in adulthood. The independent variable, *extracurricular activities*, includes four levels: the number of years the individual participated in extracurricular activities, YES/NO to participating in extracurricular activities, the number of extracurricular activities participated in, and specific extracurricular activities (sports, music, clubs) participated in. The dependent variable measured the impact the individual believes their participation in extracurricular

activities during adolescence has had on their self-efficacy and resiliency in adulthood.

Data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 23) to report appropriate statistical analysis.

Chapter 3

Results

Individuals reporting participation in organized extracurricular activities: 80% reported YES to participating in organized extracurricular activities, 10% reported NO to participation in organized extracurricular activities and 10% of participants did not report. Of those 80% participating in extracurricular activities, 60% reported participating in sports (e.g., volleyball, basketball, gymnastics), 20% reported participating in clubs (e.g., chess, drama, 4-H, scouts), 25% reported participating in dance (e.g., drill team, cheer, ballet), 15% reported participating in band (e.g., drums, trumpet, violin). There was an option for individuals to fill in an extracurricular activity that did not fit the above descriptions. Two participants reported participating in choir; one participant reported participating in church youth group and choir, and one participant reported participating in ROTC.

Individuals were asked to select the number of extracurricular activities they participated in during their adolescence. Of those reporting, 15% participated in zero extracurricular activities during adolescence, 10% participated in one extracurricular activity during adolescence, 15% participated in two extracurricular activities during adolescence, 15% participated in three extracurricular activities during adolescence, 15% participated in four extracurricular activities during adolescence; 10% participated in five extracurricular activities during adolescence, and 5% participated in 10 extracurricular activities during adolescence. The belief that extracurricular activities improved the ability to become an independent adult, 85% of participants, reported YES; 10% of participants reported NO, and one participant did not report.

Results of the tests of simple main effects are not shown for values on the covariate. For individuals who reported participating in organized extracurricular activities, the mean for resiliency is estimated to be 3.11 with a standard deviation of .55, respectively. For individuals who reported the quantity of organized extracurricular activities for which they participated, the mean was 2.7 with a standard deviation of 2.3. For individuals who reported participating in organized extracurricular activities, the mean for self-efficacy is estimated to be 32.3, with a standard deviation of 5.2.

Extracurricular activities (quantity) will predict higher resiliency A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether participating in organized extracurricular activities in adolescence improved resiliency and self-efficacy in foster care alumni. The correlation between participating in extracurricular activities and resiliency, $r = .03, p = .45$. The correlation between extracurricular activities and self-efficacy, $r = -.35, p = .07$. The correlation between resiliency and self-efficacy, $r = -.22, p = .18$.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of organized extracurricular activities in adolescence and its overall effect on resiliency and self-efficacy in foster care alumni. There were a total of four hypotheses. The first hypothesis that higher participation of extracurricular activities during adolescence would predict higher resiliency in adulthood was not significant, $R^2 = .001, F(1, 18) = .02, p = .89$. The second hypothesis that higher participation in extracurricular activities during adolescence would enhance self-efficacy in adulthood was not supported, $R^2 = .12, F(1, 18) = 2.50, p = .13$. The third hypothesis that higher self-efficacy would positively predict higher resiliency was not significant, $R^2 = .05, F(1, 18) = .92, p = .35$. The fourth

hypothesis that self-efficacy would significantly mediate the relationship between extracurricular activities was not supported, $R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 17) = .89$, $p = .36$.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether foster alumni had improved resiliency and self-efficacy after participating in organized extracurricular activities during their adolescence.

Unfortunately, the regression analysis showed no significant contributors between any organized extracurricular activities and resiliency or self-efficacy. However, according to the bootstrap specifications, if the study could have met the original sample size, there would have likely been a significant association between organized extracurricular activities in adolescence and resiliency or self-efficacy in adulthood.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Hypothesis 1, *extracurricular activities (quantity) will predict higher resiliency*, was not supported. This is not consistent with previous research conducted by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risks (Nettles et al., 2000). Therefore, the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties was not directly impacted by the number of extracurricular activities an individual engaged in for this sample. The majority of the sample indicated they had engaged in extracurricular activities. On average, participants in this sample engaged in three extracurricular activities and endorsed average resilience. An explanation for these unexpected findings could be that rather than activities building resilience, it may be that kids who are already higher in resilience seek out these activities at higher rates than their peers who are lower in resilience. In addition, the sample was underpowered, which may explain nonsignificant results. Although the primary hypothesis was not statistically significant, qualitatively, the majority of participants believe extracurricular activities improved the ability to become an independent adult.

Hypothesis 2, *extracurricular activities will enhance self-efficacy*, was not supported. This is not consistent with previous research conducted by Kins (2010). Therefore, the sense of autonomy and effectiveness outside of the foster care system was not directly impacted by the number of extracurricular activities an individual engaged in for this sample. Most of the sample indicated they had engaged in extracurricular activities. On average, participants in this sample engaged in three extracurricular activities and endorsed moderate self-efficacy. An explanation for these unexpected

findings could be that rather than activities enhancing self-efficacy, it may be the skills they are learning are not directly tied to living independently and managing daily responsibilities commonly navigated in adulthood. Another explanation could be that extracurricular activities point out inadequacies and poor self-efficacy. Also, the sample was underpowered, which may explain nonsignificant results. Although the primary hypothesis was not statistically significant, qualitatively, most participants believe extracurricular activities improved the ability to become an independent adult.

Hypothesis 3, *self-efficacy will positively predict higher resiliency*, was not supported. This is not consistent with previous research conducted by researchers (Deihl et al., 2015; Milioni et al., 2015; Schofield & Beek, 2015). Therefore, the confidence to feel effective in adulthood did not impact one's ability to feel as though they will recover quickly from difficulties. An explanation for these unexpected findings could be that individuals who experience past trauma may learn practical strategies to manage negative experiences but not necessarily have the confidence to return to a sense of agency. Also, the sample was underpowered, which may explain nonsignificant results.

Hypothesis 4, *self-efficacy will significantly mediate the relationship between extracurricular activities*, was not supported. This is not consistent with previous research conducted by Rutter (1990) and Osterling (2006). Therefore, the capacity to feel effective in a specific extracurricular activity does not necessarily transfer to other extracurricular activities. An explanation for these unexpected findings could be that individuals who did not receive positive feedback from supporters during their extracurricular endeavors left them feeling inadequate and uncertain as they considered other options. Again, the sample was underpowered, which may explain nonsignificant

results. Although the primary hypothesis was not statistically significant, qualitatively, the majority of participants believe extracurricular activities improved their ability to become independent adults.

I predict these results were likely due to the inability to reach power, 107 participants. However, even with minimal participants, there was a correlation between those who participated in organized extracurricular activities and higher self-efficacy reports. Previous researchers support this study's results, showing youth who participate in organized extracurricular activities display more independent characteristics (Kins, 2010; Osterling, 2006; Rutter, 1990; van der Kolk, 2005).

This study could not determine that higher self-efficacy resulted in higher resiliency, as mentioned by (Diehl et al., 2010). However, it would not be appropriate to determine from this study that resiliency and self-efficacy are not related to some degree. With more research and an increased participant sample, it is highly probable that, according to bootstrap specifications, there would be a significant correlation between resilience and self-efficacy.

What can be hypothesized from the results of this study is that participation in extracurricular activities helped foster care alumni see themselves as survivors. However, it does not speak to one's self-confidence or belief in their abilities to overcome hardships. Resiliency is the ability to “springing back” to maintain a positive emotion following a setback. This study may be emphasizing what many already know—that is, that optimism and energy for life do not go hand in hand with survival. Survival does not require a positive mindset but a desire to stay alive.

Strengths and Limitations

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it adds to the sparse research related to positive outcomes in foster care alumni. Second, it supports the premise that organized extracurricular activities during adolescence contribute to self-efficacy in adulthood. Lastly, existing research on extracurricular activities and personal growth has primarily focused on youth; this study broadens that line of inquiry by demonstrating organized extracurricular activities can have lasting effects over a lifetime.

Although this study did not demonstrate significant influence on resiliency or self-efficacy through extracurricular participation, 85% of participants reported they believed it improved their ability to become independent adults. This information is valuable and would make an excellent platform for future research.

The current study was limited by the COVID-19 (2020–2021) restrictions, making it challenging to access adults who have aged out of the foster care system. During the pandemic, organizations have had to layoff employees who are typically accessible to provide services and in-person support for foster alumni. Additionally, prior to the pandemic, organizations that support foster alumni have held in-person events where foster care recipients, alumni, advocates, and researchers could attend. Pre-COVID, these events offered exceptional insight into this population along with the opportunity to meet and discuss experiences in person.

This study was limited to foster alumni who seek online support, education, and services by relying solely on online platforms. Another limitation was that many organizations had not updated their websites since the COVID-19 outbreak, which meant fewer views. Additionally, in an attempt to seek support for this study and future foster

alumni, many organizations did not respond to the researcher's correspondence. Lastly, an individual's employment and socioeconomic status may have been substantially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic causing them to report an abnormal set of circumstances than what would have been previously reported.

Future Directions

This study aimed to advance counseling psychology regarding positive experiences in foster youth and the impact of these experiences in adulthood. Across the United States, foster youth and families are frequently directed to counselors to address behavioral and emotional problems linked to trauma. The results of this study are just the beginning. As research moves forward, this information may provide counselors with clear evidence regarding extracurricular activities and its effect on self-efficacy and resiliency as youth age into adults. This information will help counselors and foster families and supporting organizations of foster youth, schools, and social workers.

The benefits of this research also include the sort of guidance for the planning and implementation of government policies that could benefit youth who have moved beyond care settings. These policies could lead to improved outcomes for each of these former foster care youth, leading to increased productivity in adult life, which benefits society through increased contributions to the economy and reducing costs associated with delinquency, crime, and other adverse outcomes.

Ideally, this study will become longitudinal and qualitative. The existing research on extracurricular activities and personal growth has primarily focused on youth, and this study broadens that line of inquiry by demonstrating organized extracurricular activities can have lasting effects over a lifetime. As the researcher, I believe the evidence will be

significant when we can hear from more foster alumni about the leaders in their youth, the feedback they received, and the lessons they learned through extracurricular activities.

Conclusions

This study showed inconclusive evidence that foster care adolescents who participate in organized extracurricular activities will report higher self-efficacy and resiliency levels in adulthood. It offers preliminary evidence that foster youth who participate in extracurricular activities will report higher self-efficacy in adulthood; however, having a sense of effectiveness is not enough. Because power was not reached in this study, it would be ideal to continue this research before implementing measures to fund more extracurricular activities for foster youth.

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Appendix A

Agency Letterhead

To Whom This May Concern:

I am writing to express my interest in working with your agency as a way of advocating for foster youth. At present, I am a doctoral student (PsyD) preparing for my final year at Northwest University. I have a strong desire to advocate for foster youth, as I have adopted children of my own and have served in areas of advocacy (CASA) over the years. Currently, I am preparing my dissertation research on extracurricular activities on foster youth and how these opportunities effect resilience and self-efficacy as they age out of the foster care system.

In this connection, I would like to ask you to please extend the invitation to participate in this study to all foster care alumni served by your organization. Attached, you will find the flyer. Please feel free to post it, email it, and/or attach it to your website. I would deeply appreciate your partnership as we continue to find resources to strengthen this community.

If you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns, please do not hesitate to email me at: xxxxx@northwestu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Karen Trujillo, LMHCA

Northwest University

Doctoral Student of Psychology (PsyD)

Appendix B**Organization Recruitment Flyer**

Research Opportunity for Foster Care Graduates

If you...

1. Aged out of foster care
2. Resided in foster care in Washington State
3. Are 21 years or older

To participate, please visit the study website below:

Double click to editor

If you have any questions feel free to contact Karen Trujillo, the principal investigator, at karen.trujillo16@northwestu.edu.

"What helps foster care graduates succeed in life?"

We're looking for adults who have graduated from foster care to participate in an online study. The area of interest is in exploring people's experiences during their high school years such as extracurricular activities. This survey is anonymous and only takes 10-15 minutes to complete.

Appendix C

Participation Invitation

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Karen Trujillo and I am a student in the PsyD program at Northwest University. I would like to cordially invite you to participate in my research study that I am conducting as part of my doctoral dissertation.

I am hoping to examine the unique experiences of foster youth and how it affects the resiliency and self-efficacy of adults who have aged out of the foster care system. You are eligible to participate if you meet the following criteria:

- Are 21 years of age or older
- Aged out of the foster care system
- Were a resident of the foster care system

Why participate?

Participation in research studies helps researchers to understand the world around us and enriches our awareness of how different phenomena occur. The information from this study will help me and other mental health professionals in their clinical work with clients who as foster care alumni. In an effort to provide informed consent, there are minimal risks associated with this study, however there is a possibility that completing this questionnaire could bring up uncomfortable emotions. I understand that engaging in this process requires participation from you.

What's involved?

To actively participate in this study, a link inviting you to participate will be provided below using a HIPAA compliant platform. I have arranged some questions regarding your participation in extracurricular activities in foster care, the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Brief Resiliency Scale ahead of time to keep the focus on the related topic. Depending on variances in the questionnaire process, I anticipate the survey taking between 10-15 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If at any point during the survey you would like to stop, simply exit out of the browser. Your answers to the survey questions will not be stored

If you are interested in participating, please contact me by phone, text message or email. Thank you! (xxxxx@northwestu.edu/(XXX) XXX-XXX)

Appendix D**Eligibility Questionnaire**

1. Did you reside in foster care?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

2. Were you in foster care for a minimum of 2 years during your adolescence?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

3. Are you 21 years old or older?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

Appendix E

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Northwest University. The study is being conducted as a program requirement for the doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to understand how extracurricular activities impact self-efficacy and resiliency in adults who have aged out of the foster care system.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to fill out a demographic and activity related questionnaire, complete the General Self-efficacy Scale, and Brief Resiliency Scale. To actively participate in this study, you will be provided a link below inviting you to complete the survey. The survey is anticipated to take between 10 to 15 minutes to complete. You will not be asked to use your name or any personal information that could identify you to protect your privacy.

There are minimal risks associated with participation. Some individuals may be uncomfortable answering personal questions. Your identity and all of your responses will be kept confidential. Additionally, while this survey will be conducted via a secure, platform, there are risks associated with conducting research in this manner. Surveys are subject to connectivity issues and there is an increased risk of a breach of privacy.

A benefit of taking part in this study is the opportunity to participate in the research process as a research participant. Your input and participation could boost the opportunities for other foster youth and that is good news.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this study at any time and for any reason. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you refuse to participate. You may refuse to answer any questions asked. All responses will remain confidential. I encourage participants to print and keep a copy of this consent form for their records.

If you feel concern or worry while taking the survey, feel free to exit out of the survey, or choose not to answer any of my questions. If you have concerns after completing the survey, you may call the Volunteers of America Crisis Line at 1-800-584-3578. I am also available to help you find a counselor if you would like.

The results from this study will be disseminated and may also be published in a professional journal at some point in the future. Dissemination may include publication, presentation of a paper at a professional conference, a formal report of results to a clinic or entity evaluated, or an approved planned speaking engagement. No identifying information about participants will be divulged during dissemination. After I have the completed the research results, the data will be erased on or before August 1st, 2021.

If you have any questions about this study or rights afforded to participants, or if you wish to express a concern, you may contact: the principal researcher Karen Trujillo PsyD student, (XXX) XXX-XXXX, Email: xxxxx@northwestu.edu. If you have further questions, please contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Jenny Harris, (509) 723-7757, Email: jenny.harris@northwestu.edu. You may also contact the Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Dr. Cherri

Seese, 425-985-7070, Email: cherri.seese@northwestu.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Karen Trujillo
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
xxxxx@northwestu.edu
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Jenny Harris, PhD
Professor
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
jenny.harris@northwestu.edu
(509) 723-7757

If you are 21 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, please choose "yes, I consent" below.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: Karen Trujillo Date July 12, 2020

Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What gender do you identify as?
 - A. Cisgender/Man
 - B. Cisgender/Woman
 - C. Transgender Man
 - D. Transgender Woman
 - E. Nonbinary

2. What is your age?
 - A. 21-25 years old
 - B. 26-30 years old
 - C. 31-35 years old
 - D. 35+
 - E. Prefer not to say

3. Please specify your ethnicity.
 - A. Caucasian
 - B. African American
 - C. Latino or Hispanic
 - D. Asian
 - E. Native American
 - F. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - G. Two or More
 - H. Other/Unknown
 - I. Prefer not to say

4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
 - A. Some High School
 - B. High School
 - C. Some College
 - D. Bachelor's Degree
 - E. Master's Degree
 - F. PhD or higher
 - G. Trade School

5. What is your marital status?
 - A. Single
 - B. Married
 - C. Divorced

6. What is your annual household income?
 - A. Less than \$25,000
 - B. \$25,000 - \$50,000

- C. \$50,000 - \$100,000
 - D. \$100,000 +
7. What is your current employment status?
- A. Unemployed
 - B. Employed Full-Time
 - C. Employed Part-Time
 - D. Seeking opportunities
 - E. Retired
8. How many children do you have? (fill in the blank)
9. Do you have a developmental disability?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
10. If so, what?
11. Do you have an acquired disability?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
12. If so, what?
13. As a student of high school age, did you participate in organized extracurricular activities (e.g., organized sports, music, church youth group)?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
14. What organized extracurricular activities did you participate in during adolescence?
- A. sports (example: volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, etc.)
 - B. clubs (example: chess, drama, 4-H, scouts, etc.)
 - C. Dance (example: drill team, cheer, ballet, etc.)
 - D. Band (example: drums, trumpet, violin, etc.)
 - E. Other (fill in the blank)_____
15. How many different organized extracurricular activities did you participate in during adolescence?
16. Do you believe extracurricular activities improved your ability to become an independent adult?
- A. Yes
 - B. No

Appendix G

General Self-Efficacy Scale

General Self-Efficacy Scale	Not at all true	Hardly true	Moderately true	Exactly true
1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough				
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.				
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.				
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.				
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.				
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.				
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.				
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.				
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.				
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.				

Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). *Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale*. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston (Eds.), *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35–37). NFER-NELSON.

Appendix H

Brief Resiliency Scale

	Brief Resiliency Scale	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	5	4	3	2	1
3.	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	5	4	3	2	1
5.	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	5	4	3	2	1

Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 15*(3), 194–200.