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## **A Study of the Lived Experience of African American Males who Transition from Out-of-Home Care to Postsecondary Education**

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**A STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE  
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO TRANSITION  
FROM OUT-OF-HOME CARE TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The College of Human Science and Education  
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling

by

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Ed.S., Louisiana State University, 2017  
May 2018

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To the journey-

The hills, the mountains, the plateaus, the rivers and the valleys; but, not the rocks.  
For the rocks may never cry out for me....

In the morning:

*"I can do all things through He who gives me strength"*  
- Philippians 4:13

At noon day:

*"Even youths grow tired and weary, and strong young men stumble and fall; but those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*  
- Isaiah 40:30- 31

And, at dusk:

*"Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us,"*  
- Ephesians 3:20

***Soli Deo gloria***

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## **ABSTRACT**

While the literature is replete with studies of the factors contributing to the failure and social deviance of African American males (Ferguson, 2007; Kunjufu, 1989), few qualitative studies have been conducted to determine the factors that support the success of African American males, and virtually none have focused on the transition of African American males from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions. Despite the challenges faced preceding and during out-of-home care, African American males can transition to postsecondary educational institutions. There is a need to understand why some African American males who experience out-of-home care can accomplish this while others cannot. It is imperative that higher education administrators and student affairs professionals be knowledgeable about this unique student population and able to respond to its unique needs. Meeting this imperative would allow postsecondary institutions to achieve their recruitment goals and retain students of diverse backgrounds. This work equips educators, social workers, administrators and service providers in residential care to assist in the further development of policy and practices concerning aftercare supports for African American men who transition to postsecondary educational institutions upon discharge.

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO STUDY**

Postsecondary education has become increasingly important for young adults. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), college graduates between the ages of 25 and 34 earned \$15,000 more annually than high school graduates (\$40,000 vs. \$25,122) and earned \$22,000 per year more than high school dropouts (\$40,000 vs. \$18,000). The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the number of jobs requiring a college education will grow faster than the number of jobs for people with less than a college education. Over the past 20, enrollment at postsecondary educational institutions has increased. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the percentage of African American college students in the United States rose from 10 percent in 1976 to 14 percent in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although there has been significant achievement in college enrollment rates among African American students, the college matriculation rate for these students remains below that of their white counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). African Americans who enroll in postsecondary educational programs were only half as likely as their white counterparts to earn a degree (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

While African American youths are underrepresented in postsecondary educational settings, they are overrepresented in the nation's child welfare system (Roberts, 2002) and in its juvenile justice system. While the population of African American children in the United States is only 15 percent (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006) reported that 34 percent of children placed in out-of-home care are African American. According to Roberts (2002), African American youths experience longer foster care stays; they are also less likely to experience adequate services while in care or to experience either adoption or reunification with their families.

Puzzanchera and Hockenberry (2013) observed that although African American youths comprise 17 percent of the juvenile justice population in the United States, they account for 31 percent of all arrests. “Racial disparities have remained durable even as juvenile crime rates (and other related statistics, such as detentions) have fallen” (Royner, 2014, p. 2). According to Royner (2014):

The discrepancies do not stop with arrests. Among those juveniles who are arrested, black juveniles are more likely to be referred to a juvenile court than are white juveniles. They are more likely to be processed (and less likely to be diverted). Among those adjudicated delinquent, they are more likely to be sent to secure confinement. Among those detained, black youth are more likely to be transferred to adult facilities (p. 2).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2006) reports that at any given time, more than 500,000 children live in out-of-home care. The term out-of-home care has traditionally been used to refer to children placed into foster care. However, out-of-home care is frequently used as an intervention by child welfare systems, school systems, courts, and mental health systems. Agencies that provide out-of-home care vary in terms of the size and scope of programs offered to the youths placed in their care, but many serve youths from multiple service sectors in a single program. For example, a single service provider might serve two youths referred from juvenile justice, four youths referred from child welfare, and two youths referred by the local school district. However, most of the literature on out-of-home placement limits the area of study to the children and youth placed by child welfare systems. This study adopts the term residential care and uses it interchangeably with the term out-of-home care. The researcher takes the position that out-of-home care includes any placement arranged by formal systems – child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, etc. – with or without the consent of parents. Youth may be placed in out-of-home care for a variety of reasons, including: abuse and neglect, involvement in delinquent behavior, or educational purposes. From this position, youth who

experience out-of-home care (or residential care) are not distinguished by the source of their referral to out-of-home care in this study. Since any child or youth who experiences out-of-home care is, for that time, a foster child, he or she experiences the same kinds of challenges in the out-of-home placement as those who are formally placed by the child welfare system. Unrau and Grinnell (2005) found that youth with a history of out-of-home care had more physical and mental health problems compared to youth with no history of out-of-home care. Koegel, Melamid, and Burnam (1995) found a correlation between adult homelessness and childhood experiences with out-of-home care. The homeless adults in their study, when compared with the general population, had disproportionality experienced out-of-home care as a child. “In consideration of the longer length of stays in out-of-home care experienced by African American youth, they may be more vulnerable to the risk factors associated with out-of-home care” (Daining and DePanfilis, 2007, p. 1160).

Although the literature is replete with studies of the factors contributing to the failure and social deviance of African American males (Ferguson, 2007; Kunjufu, 1989), few qualitative studies have been conducted to identify the factors that support the success of African American males, virtually none have focused on the transition of African American males from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions. Despite the challenges they face preceding and during their out-of-home placements, African American males can transition to postsecondary educational institutions. There is a need to understand why some African American males who experience out-of-home care can accomplish this while others cannot. It is imperative that higher education administrators and student affairs professionals be knowledgeable about this unique student population and able to respond to its unique needs. Meeting this imperative would allow postsecondary institutions to achieve their recruitment

goals and retain students of diverse backgrounds. This work would also equip educators, social workers, administrators and service providers in residential care to assist in the further development of policy and practices concerning aftercare supports for African American men who transition to postsecondary educational institutions upon discharge.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to expand the literature to include the voices of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education, shedding light on their experiences and exploring their perspectives in order to uncover meaning and reveal implications for providers of out-of-home care and postsecondary educational institutions.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In formulation of a theoretical perspective for studying the variables related to the transition from out-of-home to postsecondary education for African American males, the researcher turned to the useful prototypes provided by phenomenological theory and critical race and phenomenological theories. A theoretical perspective of individualized systems of social capital was also useful for explaining the relationship between the agency exercised by African American males as they transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institution and the contributions made by social structures in shaping this transition.

### **Phenomenology**

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2017), phenomenology is “the study of structures of consciousness as experiences from the first-person point of view.” The Oxford English Dictionary (2017) defines phenomenology as, “the science of phenomena as distinct from being (ontology). b. that division of any science which describes and classifies its phenomena.” There are many types of phenomenology. The type most appropriate for this study

is transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenological focuses on the meaning that individuals derive from their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the essence – the nature – of experiencing the particular phenomenon.

Phenomenology can be both a theoretical framework and a research method. As a theoretical frame, phenomenology is a way of approaching the world to understand lived experience. As a research method, phenomenology is the process of examining the meaning of human experience (Husserl, 1962; Powers & Knapp, 1995). Phenomenological research aims to interpret and understand human experience as opposed to simply observing and predicting human behavior (van Manen, 1984). Researchers using phenomenology go beyond the aspects of life that taken for granted “to uncover the meanings in everyday practice in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized or sentimentalized” (Benner, 1985, p. 6). A process of phenomenological reduction is used in the discussion, fully portraying the reality of the experience to answer the question, “What is it like?”

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT), as used in the context of this study, is best described by Purdue Online Writing Lab (2017):

“Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice.”

CRT analyzes how social disparities between whites and other racial groups are perpetuated by the role of race and racism in America (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The purpose of CRT is to “unearth what is taken for

granted when analyzing race and privilege” (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54), and expose the patterns of exclusion that persist exist in American society (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Hiraldo (2010) contends:

CRT can play an important role when higher education institutions work toward becoming more diverse and inclusive. For example, in a predominantly White institution (PWI) simply working toward increasing the number of students of color enrolled is an insufficient goal if institutional change is a priority. Examining the campus climate efforts to have culturally competent and diverse staff, faculty, and administrators is a more effective way of becoming more diverse and inclusive. (p. 54)

Morgan (2013) used critical race theory and phenomenology perspective as a theoretical lens in which he explored the lived experiences of African American men enrolled in medical school. In this work, the author discussed the appropriateness of using CRT to explore topics situated in the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, stating:

“CRT enables discourse about race, gender, and class, and specifically how the intersection of race, gender, and class influences access to opportunities, contributes to social inequality, and informs identity. The intersectionality of race, gender, and economic standing is vital to understanding and analyzing the plight of young African American males. Critical Race Theory is suited powerfully for addressing educational issues because it does not look at things in isolation. Race and racism work with and through gender, ethnicity, and class as systems of power. For African American males, this intersection has been a major factor in their over representation in the criminal and juvenile justice system, poor educational outcomes, and negative images in the media.” (p. 209)

In this study of the transition of African American males from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions, CRT is well situated as an interpretive lens through which to view data. CRT promotes the agency of African American males to offer narratives that can counter the dominant narrative of their identities that, according to Howard (2008), are “frequently described as culturally and socially deficit, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual” (p. 975). Approaching the subject from this perspective will

provide a voice for participants and will confer respect and value on their collective and individual histories, experiences, and cultures.

### **Individualized Systems of Social Capital**

Raffo and Reeves (2000), suggest using a theoretical perspective known as “individualized systems of social capital” to “explain the agency exercised by socially excluded young people and the contributions made by social ‘structures’ in shaping their transitions to adulthood” (p. 147). They define an individualized system of social capital as: “a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation and which provides authentic opportunities for everyday learning” (p. 148). They explain that this perspective:

recognizes that such systems of social relations both support and constrain individual actions and outcomes. It identifies the potential for some control by young people over their development and change but also accepts that the extent of individualized system of social capital evolves for each individual young person, and that this in turn is conditioned by the material and symbolic resources available to these networks or constellations (p. 147).

Using the concept of individualized systems of social capital as a theoretical perspective for this study will assist the researcher in developing a more holistic understanding of the relationship between the agency exercised by African American males during their transitions from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions and the contributions made by social structures in shaping these transitions. Using this perspective will highlight factors of resiliency related to the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education.

Phenomenological theory, critical race theory and individual systems of social capital will, together, provide the theoretical frame for this study (see Figure 1 below). Transcendental phenomenology is ideally suited for this study’s purpose of exploring the experiences and



perspectives of African American males who have experienced out-of-home care. Critical race theory provides an interpretive mode for exploring the role of race and racism in perpetuating the social disparities experienced by African American males. Individualized systems of social capital provide an appropriate perspective for the researcher's examination of agency and the goal of uncovering the strengths and factors related to the resilience of study participants. This theoretical frame is designed to answer the research questions proposed in this study.

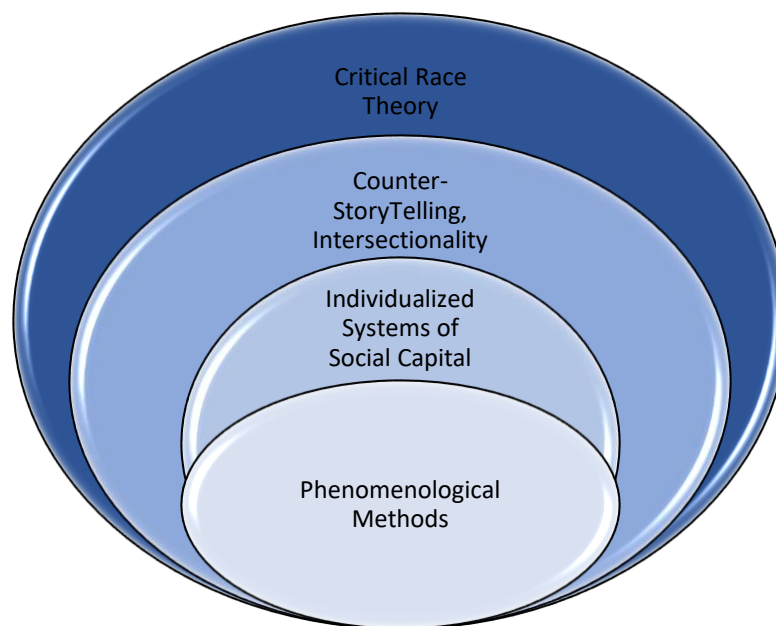


Figure 1. Theoretical framework for the study of the lived experiences of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education

### **Specific Objectives**

Some African American males are resilient – they overcome challenges associated with the out-of-home care experiences and transition into postsecondary educational institutions. Masten, Best, and Garmerzy (1990) defined resiliency as “the process of, capacity to, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). This

phenomenological inquiry seeks a deeper understanding of the internal and external factors related to the transition of African American males from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is it like to transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education?
2. What are the central meanings – the essence – of the transition and those factors, both internal and external, which contribute to their experiences?

### **Definition of Terms**

Several terms are used in this study of the lived experience of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education, some of which may be unfamiliar to readers of may possess different connotations to them. For the sake of clarity, three terms – lived experience, out-of-home care, transition, and postsecondary education – are identified here as key to this study and are defined below.

Perhaps the most complete and sufficient definition of lived experience, as related to and adopted for purposes of the proposed study, comes from the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Givens, 2008):

Lived experience, as it is explored and understood in qualitative research, is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge. Lived experience speaks to the personal and unique perspective of researchers and how their experiences are shaped by subjective factors of their identity including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and other roles and characteristics that determine how people live their daily lives. Lived experience, then, leads to a self-awareness that acknowledges the integrity of an individual life and how separate life experiences can resemble and respond to larger public and social themes, creating a space for storytelling, interpretation, and meaning-making. Lived experience allows a researcher to use a single life to learn about society and about how individual experiences are communicated. (409)

Lived experience in out-of-home care is a factor of focus in this proposed study. The term out-of-home care refers to placement away from biological family members in a residential

boarding school, treatment facility or orphanage-like facility. Traditionally, the term out-of-home care has been used in studies related exclusively to children in state custody. Participants in this study experienced out-of-home placement and were not considered wards of the state during their onset of their experience.

The term transition, according to dictionary.com, is defined as “movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc. to another; change.” While this study is mainly focused on the transition (or movement) of African American males from out-of-home care to postsecondary education, it is important to distinguish unique factors of this particular transition from other transition factors that participants in the study may co-experience during the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. These other transitions can include the transition from adolescence to adulthood, from school life to work life, from being single to being partnered, etc. While these transitions are not a focus of the proposed study, they all contribute to a collective understanding of what success looks like for each individual participant in the study. Thus, a successful transition from out-of-home care, for the purpose of this study, is one in which a study participant completes high school and enrolls in a postsecondary educational institution.

A postsecondary educational institution, for purposes of this study, refers to any physical setting providing education beyond high school. This includes community colleges, vocational and trade schools, colleges, and universities. The term excludes attendance at online institutions.

### **Significance of Study**

Educational research points to African American males as the population group that experiences the most negative educational outcomes – underachievement, low retention rates, etc. In recent years, terms such as “at-risk,” “marginal,” and “endangered” have been used

regularly to describe the plight and condition of education and society for men of color. The dismal condition of African American males is specifically highlighted and presented as the norm throughout existing literature. Although the literature is clear about the factors that contribute to or predict failure for African American males (Luthar, 2003; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), few studies have qualitatively explored those internal and external factors that promote the successful transition of African American males into adult roles. There is a need to understand why some African American males successfully transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education while others do not.

This work contributes to the literature by bringing forth the voice of these men to uncover the essence of their lived experiences, particularly as they interface with systems not originally designed to serve them. While recent literature has focused on the exit of youth from foster care and their educational outcomes, a review of the relevant literature reveals no phenomenological study of the lived experiences of African American males who have transitioned from residential care to postsecondary educational institutions. There is a need for scholarship that focuses on the strengths of individuals from “marginalized” communities to integrate their voices and experiences into the epistemology in higher education and social science. From the lived experiences of these young men, we are provided with a deeper understanding of the transition from residential care to postsecondary educational institutions for African American men.

The aims of this study are twofold. First, the researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences of five to seven African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to institutions of higher education. Secondly, the researcher seeks to uncover the central meanings – the essence – of the transition and those factors, both internal and external, that contributed to their experiences. The findings of this research may contribute to a better understanding of

resilience and how to incorporate resilience into programming and practice to improve outcomes for African American male students in postsecondary educational settings.

### **Summary**

The lack of academic success among men of color is among the most pressing and prevalent issues in facing education. Of significant note is the so-called performance gap that exists between white students and their inferior counterparts (all other students). Young African American men transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions face many challenges. This population is vulnerable to difficulties associated with their maltreatment history, their residential care experiences, as well as other factors for which they are overrepresented as a result of their demographic position – being from impoverished communities and being first-generation college students, for example. It is imperative that higher education administrators and student affairs professionals be knowledgeable about this unique student population and able to respond to its unique needs. Meeting this imperative would aid postsecondary institutions in achieving their recruitment goals and retaining students of diverse backgrounds. This work would also equip educators, social workers, administrators and service providers in residential care to assist in the further development of policy and practices concerning aftercare supports for African American men who transition to postsecondary educational institutions upon discharge.

## **CHAPTER 2. RELEVANT LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the proposed phenomenological study is to explore variables related to the successful transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education for African American males. Few studies have qualitatively explored the internal and external factors that promote their successful transition into adult roles. There is a need to understand why some African American males successfully transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education while others do not.

In this phenomenological study, the researcher:

- seeks to understand the lived experiences of five to seven African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to institutions of higher education; and
- seeks to uncover the central meanings – or the essence – of the transition and to identify those factors, both internal and external, that contributed to their experiences.

This work will build on the literature related to the resilience of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. Using three concepts or theories as a framework– critical race theory, phenomenology, and individualized systems of agency – this study promotes a counter-narrative in the literature that has traditionally focused on the underachievement and disadvantages faced by African American males. By engaging the voices of this marginalized population and exploring their lived experiences, the researcher will display their agency, strength and resilience. The study will also contribute to a better understanding of resilience and of how to incorporate resilience into programming and practice to improve outcomes for African American male students in postsecondary educational settings.

## **Out-of-Home Care**

Out-of-home care refers to placements and services provided to children, youths and families when children and/or youth must be removed from their homes due to safety concerns or serious parent-child conflict, or to treat serious physical or behavioral health conditions that are not able to be adequately addressed within the family (U.S. Legal, 2017). Included in the term out-of-home care are placements a variety of situations and arrangements for providing care, physical custody or control of children and youth, including detention facilities, shelters, crisis care facilities, foster homes, group homes, mental health institutions, residential treatment centers and care facilities, educational service centers, hospitals, and medical clinics. At any given time in the United States, almost 500,000 children and youth reside in out-of-home care, with the majority living in foster care situations (Rosen, 1999). According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), in 2016 of the 250, 248 youth exiting care in 2016, 22% (55,391) were African American. Much of the literature involving out-of-home care focuses on the population of children and youth in foster care. While this study is not limited to the foster care population, it is informed by existing research in this area and particularly those studies that target children and youth in residential treatment facilities, also referred to as residential care or residential services.

Bullard, Gaughen & Owens (2012), describes residential services as “an essential component in the continuum of child welfare services” (p. 498). The goal of residential care is to address the unique needs of children and youth who require more intensive services than can be provided in a family/home setting. These programs provide and/or arrange for educational, medical, psychiatric, and clinical/mental health services, as well as case management and recreation (Child Welfare League of America, 2004).

Since colonial times, responsibility for the care of children and youth rested with families and the church. The colonial view of solving the problem of dependent or delinquent children and youth stemmed from a religious need for salvation and placed the church in charge. The family, headed by the father, had absolute authority and power that it derived from the church. Disobedient children would be sent out as apprentices.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the country became more concerned about producing good citizens and maintaining law and order. The establishment of prisons, juvenile reformatories, asylums, and orphanages proceeded at a rapid pace during this time (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). Around the same time, the country experienced increasing concern about education and health of children. Private philanthropies assumed the burden of caring for orphaned children, and public social welfare agencies began to replace the family's role in caring for at-risk children and youth.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a trend emerged that moved residential care for children from a custodial care model to a treatment model (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). Many programs providing out-of-home care were restructured into treatment facilities, and many new facilities were established (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). The concept of a therapeutic environment was introduced. Behavior modification was introduced into out-of-home care facilities (Adler, 1981). During this time, a considerable amount of information was developed and written on behavioral systems, mainly by providers of out-of-home care in conjunction and stemming from their facility treatment modality. No literature was generated from the perspective of the young people who were the beneficiaries of these services.

Out-of-home residential care has become an accepted means of working with children and youth who have emotional disturbances. The deinstitutionalization movement in the juvenile



justice and mental health systems fueled the expansion of residential care. Providers broadened their program options to include family support, family counseling, individual and group therapy, family therapy, and independent living and life skills. According to Braziel (1996), the residential treatment center and the community-based group home were the two dominant forms of out-of-home residential care during this period. Community-based programs kept children and youth connected with their community, while still providing them with the necessary supervision and treatment (Rosen, Peterson, & Walsh 1980).

Currently, out-of-home care includes residential care provided by child welfare agencies throughout the country. Residential care may be offered on campus-based facilities, within community-based programs, or in secure facilities. The facilities range in size from small group homes that serve four or five youth to campus-based institutions serving more than 200 children and youths. In these settings, children, youth, and their families are offered a variety of services, including therapy, counseling, education, recreation, health, nutrition, daily living skills, independent living skills, reunification services, aftercare, and advocacy (Braziel, 1996). Residential services are provided in a variety of settings, and all of them provide out-of-home care on 24-hour basis.

### **The Transition From Out-of-Home Care to Postsecondary Education**

The economic benefits of postsecondary education are well documented throughout the literature. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, Americans with a bachelor's degree earned more than those with a high school diploma, equivalent diploma or less, and the gap in median income between college graduates and high school graduates continues to increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In 2005, young adults who had a bachelor's degree earned 61 percent more than those with only a high school or equivalent

diploma (Planty et al., 2007). In addition to these economic benefits, Baum & Ma (2007) suggests that graduating from a postsecondary institution can also have non-economic benefits.

Postsecondary education is important for young people making the transition from out-of-home care. Studies of this population reveal consistently low attendance and graduation rates from postsecondary educational institutions. Although estimates of the percentage of youth who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education vary depending on the age at which educational attainment is measured, most range from as low as one percent to as high as 11 percent (Emerson, 2006; Pecora et al., 2003; Wolanin, 2005). In contrast, approximately 30 percent of the 25-29-year-olds in the general population have at least a bachelor's degree (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008).

The lower rate of attendance in postsecondary educational institutions among young adults who transition from out-of-home care reflects multiple realities. First, youths who experience out-of-home care are less likely to attend college than the general population. Courtney et al. (2007) found that approximately 53 percent of 21-year-olds in a nationally representative sample had completed at least one year of college, compared to just 30 percent of 21-year-olds who had transitioned from out-of-home care. Lower rates of high school completion explained some of the difference (Burley & Halpern, 2001). Wolanin (2005) estimated that approximately 50 percent of youth in out-of-home care complete high school by age 18, compared with 70 percent of their peers in the general population. Courtney et al. (2007) analyzed a nationally representative sample of 21-year-olds and reported that 77 percent of the 21-year-old youths who transitioned from out-of-home care had a high school diploma or GED, compared with 89 percent of those without that background. Brandford & English (2004) suggested that youth who transition from out-of-home-care are less likely to attend

postsecondary educational institutions than other young adults in the general population even after they have completed high school. Wolanin (2005) estimated that approximately 20 percent of youth in out-of-home care who graduate from high school attend college, compared with 60 percent of high school graduates in the general population. Courtney et al. (2007) found that 39 percent of the 21-year-old youths transitioning from out-of-home care who had a high school or equivalency diploma had completed at least one year of college, compared with 59 percent of the 21-year-olds who had a high school or equivalency diploma in a nationally representative sample.

Wolanin (2005) suggested that retention rates are another contributor to lower postsecondary attendance and graduation rates among youth transitioning from out-of-home care. Even when youths in out-of-home care do pursue postsecondary education, they are less likely to complete program requirements that lead to a degree. For example, Davis (2006) studied college attendance and graduation of former foster youth and found that 26 percent of participants in the study had earned a degree, compared with 56 percent of the participants in the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey.

One could argue that youth who transition from out-of-home care have less desire to pursue postsecondary education, but the literature suggests that many youth in out-of-home care do have college aspirations (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003; Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004). However, the existence of numerous barriers makes it difficult for these youths to achieve their educational goals.

First, the systems, services and program that serve children and youth traditionally have done a poor job of encouraging them to pursue postsecondary education (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005). Many youths who experience out-of-home care are not given

opportunities to explore educational options or are not provided with information about applying to schools (Davis, 2006). This could be, as the literature repeatedly suggests, because these young people are not expected to achieve much when it comes to education, with the low expectations promoting messages of hopelessness (Wolanin, 2005). Alternatively, it could result from the fact that service providers are not adequately trained to help them navigate the path to postsecondary education.

Another barrier is the fact that even if they have a high school diploma, youth transitioning from out-of-home care may not be prepared for the academic demands of college (Emerson, 2006). This might be the case if frequent school changes disrupted their education, as often happens in this population (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Pecora et al., 2005), or if they were denied access to college prep tracks for college-bound students (Wolanin, 2005).

Youths who transition from out-of-home care also encounter obstacles to their education goals because many of them cannot depend on their parents to help them pay for college (Wolanin, 2005) and do not receive emotional support from parents as they matriculate (Emerson, 2006). This, coupled with the academic demands of postsecondary education, can result in feeling overwhelmed.

Fourth, youths transitioning from out-of-home care are often unaware of the financial aid for which they are eligible (Davis, 2006). As wards or dependents of the court, they are “financially independent,” which means they may qualify for additional assistance since the income of parents or guardians is not considered (Emerson, 2006).

Another obstacle for this population group is the fact that they are much more likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral problems than their peers in the general population (McMillen et al., 2005; Shin, 2006), and this disparity continues into early adulthood (Pecora et al., 2005).

These emotional and behavioral health problems may interfere with the ability of these young people to succeed in postsecondary education, particularly if the treatment they were receiving while in care is does not continue post-discharge (Courtney et al., 2005; McMillen & Raghavan, 2009).

Finally, the student affairs personnel at most postsecondary institutions are not familiar with or prepared to address the unique needs of this population (Emerson, 2006). Even programs that target low-income and first-generation students were not designed to meet the specific needs of youth transitioning from out-of-home care.

### **African American Males**

Racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity exist within residential care (McMillen et al., 2004; Wright, 2003) and children of color remain in the child welfare system for greater lengths of time (Advocates for Children & Youth, 2008; Chapin Hall 2009). The disparities affecting African American males are increasingly visible. Equity gaps in education, criminal justice, health, socio-economic status and many other areas of community life are by now well documented. Much of the literature describing the experiences of African American men and boys has been deficit-based, using individual and cultural factors to explain away the experiences of inequity that shape the lives of African American males, with the experiences being more complex than is acknowledged in the literature. The cumulative and continuing effects of institutional racism have had (and continue to have) profound effects on the well-being of African American males (Trammel, Newhart, Willis & Johnson, 2008).

The educational disparities experienced by African American males are also well documented. While the academic performance of African American children has improved over time, there still exists an achievement gap between the performance of African American males

and their white counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). African American males remain more likely than their white counterparts to drop out of high school, be suspended or expelled from school, and be retained in the same grade (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz & Casserly, 2010). They are also more likely to be victimized by zero-tolerance disciplinary policies than white students, even for the same offenses (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

Disparities in rates of juvenile justice-system involvement for African American males have been similarly well examined. Despite concentrated efforts over more than a decade to eliminate racial disproportionality in detention, African American youths continue to experience high rates of detention and longer lengths of stay (Bradford, 2013; Gottesman & Schwarz, 2011). Inequities that face African American males involved with state and local child welfare systems are less studied. Within these efforts, however, little attention has been given to the experiences of African American males. Even less attention has been paid to the strategies and interventions that reduce these inequities and support improved well-being for African American males.

As mentioned earlier, critical race theory, phenomenology and individual systems of social capital combined to provide the theoretical frame for this study. Transcendental phenomenology aligns with this study's aim to explore the experiences of African American males who have experienced out-of-home care. Critical race theory provides an interpretive mode for exploring the role of race and racism in perpetuating the social disparities experienced by African American males. Individualized systems of social capital provide the perspective from which the researcher will examine agency to uncover the strengths of study participants and the factors related to their resilience.

## **Brief Description of the Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

As a theoretical framework, CRT is comprised of five tenets: counter-storytelling; permanence of racism; whiteness as property; interest conversion; and the critique of liberalism (Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006; Hiraldo, 2010). This section explores the tenets of the CRT framework as related to the proposed study.

### **Counter-Storytelling**

The first tenet of CRT is counter-storytelling. The use of counter-stories in analyzing the climate of postsecondary educational institutions provides people of color a voice for telling their narratives involving marginalized experiences. The purpose of this research is to do just that – provide a voice for and highlight the agency of African American male students arriving at postsecondary educational institutions from these marginalized situations and from marginalized communities. Perhaps this first tenet is the most relevant to this study and among the chief reason for choosing this frame.

### **Permanence of Racism**

The second tenet – the permanence of racism – acknowledges the force exerted by racism on U.S. social and economic policy. Critical race theorists see racism as an inherent part of American life, with whites being privileged over people of color in most areas of life. This is largely evidenced by the educational statistics shared earlier and in the history of education policy in the United States regarding African Americans. Even the most well-intentioned institutional diversity practices can continue to promote racism when the existence of systematic racism is ignored and is not informed by the lived experiences of those that institutions are designed to serve, leading to outcomes for these students that counter institutional plans for diversity and inclusion.

## **Whiteness as Property**

The third tenet of CRT is whiteness as property. According to Hiraldo (2010), “the idea of whiteness as property has been perpetuated as an asset that only white individuals can possess” (p. 55). Ladson- Billings (1998) explains that, during enslavement, Africans were objectified as property. This system of ownership and the legacy of that system further reinforce and perpetuate the system of white supremacy because only white individuals can benefit from it.

## **Interest Convergence**

Interest convergence is the fourth tenet of CRT. Interest convergence recognizes whites as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). DeCuir and Dixon (2004) content that “Early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that had been enjoyed by whites for centuries. These civil rights gains were in effect superficial ‘opportunities’ because they were basic tenets of U.S. democracy” (p. 28). Hiraldo (2010) argues that recruitment efforts at predominately white institutions can be seen as a form of interest convergence:

Given that many international students do not qualify for financial aid according to U.S. regulations, institutions place strong efforts in recruiting students of color who have financial means to pay for their education. Colleges and universities benefit financially from bringing international diversity to their institution. Further, their student bodies become more cultured at the expense of the international students, while the institutions’ rankings may increase. (p. 56)

In essence, Whites benefit the most from structures initially implemented to offer equal opportunity to people of color.

The fifth tenet of CRT – the critique of liberalism – challenges ideas of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Colorblindness serve as a mechanism that calls people to ignore systematic racism and perpetuate social inequity



(DeCuir & Dixon, 1999). Postsecondary educational institutions must recognize the detrimental effects of colorblind policies and work to dismantle them. African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education have unique needs that will remain unmet in colorblind cultures.

The five tenets of critical race theory address different, but interconnected, themes, providing context for this study. The tenet of counter-storytelling is particularly applicable and useful. As Hiraldo (2010) notes, “Counter-stories can assist in analyzing the climate of a college campus and provide opportunities for further research in ways which an institution can become inclusive and not simply superficially diverse” (p. 54). The proposed study is an attempt to further the research aimed at this endeavor. However, counter-story telling alone will not sufficiently respond to the aims of this study of lived experiences. Beyond a counter-story, the researcher is interested in the essence of the unique transition experiences of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions. Therefore, the counter-storytelling framework from CRT is coupled with phenomenological theory.

### **Intersectionality**

Another concept closely related to and embedded in CRT is intersectionality. Intersectionality is the overlapping, interconnected nature of social constructs such as race, class, and gender as they apply to marginalized populations. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term and used the concept to describe the employment experiences of black women and the interactions of the social constructs of race and gender. She illustrated that many of the experiences of black women in the workplace are complex interactions of social constructs that cannot be captured in their entirety by separately looking at race and gender. In the same vein, this current research explores the intersections of race, sex and class.

## **Phenomenology: A Research Method and Theoretical Frame**

The primary object of phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced without being obstructed by pre-conceptions. As a research method, phenomenology is the study of appearances, dedicated to describing the structures of experience as presented to consciousness without recourse to theories, deductions or assumptions from other disciplines (Spiegelberg, 1975; van Manen, 1984, 1990).

Phenomenology as a theoretical framework began with the work of Hegel (1770-1831). He believed that the mind, while having a universal structure, changed its content from time frame to time frame (Spiegelberg, 1975). Thus, reality is always becoming; and we come to know the mind as it is through studying its appearances (van Manen, 1990). He did not, however, pursue the development of this concept as a theoretical frame, philosophy or methodology.

The development of phenomenology as a philosophy began with Husserl (1962), who studied the world as actually lived. Husserl's approach as a theoretical framework and method of research spread during the 20th century and influenced the arts, humanities, law, politics, psychology, ecology, nursing and education. For Husserl (1962), the intentional reflection on lived experience was the source of all knowledge. Thus, phenomenology focuses on the essence of lived experience apart from the experience itself. From this stance, the researcher is concerned simply with *what* things are, not *whether* they are. The context of the experience is a given reality. Spiegelberg (1975) identified commonalities in phenomenological study. These include:

- direct investigation, analysis and description of the phenomenon, conducted as freely as possible from presuppositions, and probing for the essential structures and relationships of structures;
- being attentive to the ways that phenomena appear in different perspectives;

- exploring the way a phenomenon takes shape in consciousness;
- detachment of the phenomenon from everyday experience; and
- interpreting hidden meanings that are not immediate and direct.

### **Individualized Systems of Social Capital**

Raffo and Reeves (2000) suggested a theoretical perspective known as “individualized systems of social capital” to “explain the agency exercised by socially excluded young people and the contributions made by social ‘structures’ in shaping their transitions to adulthood (p. 147).” They defined an individualized system of social capital as: “a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation and which provides authentic opportunities for everyday learning” (p. 148). In order to develop a more holistic understanding of how African American males with lived experiences in out-of-home care experience and transform their transitions from out-of-home care to postsecondary education, there must be some recognition of the potential young people have for controlling their growth and development. Raffo and Reeves (2000) explain the perspective, saying that it:

recognizes that such systems of social relations both support and constrain individual actions and outcomes. It identifies the potential for some control by young people over their development and change but also accepts that the extent of individualized system of social capital evolves for each individual young person, and that this in turn is conditioned by the material and symbolic resources available to these networks or constellations. This perspective is grounded in socialization, individualization and underclass theories. (p. 147)

In their study of youth transitions and social exclusion, Raffo and Reeves (2000) identify four different individualized systems of social capital: weak, strong, changing, and fluid. Narrative examples were also provided to illustrate the developed typology (see Table 1).

Table 1. Individualized Systems of Social Capital

<b>Individualized Systems of Social Capital</b>	
<b>Weak</b> system of social capital	A network of social relations that is relatively small, provides little practical informal knowledge through the interactions of that network, is often not practice driven, and has little access to material and symbolic resources, resulting in a relatively passive/ static articulation of individual change and development.
<b>Strong</b> system of social capital	Social capital derived from a concentration of opportunities for developing informal and practical knowledge and understanding. Although external constraints impact heavily on their lives, there is an indication that they have developed survival strategies and approaches to help them combat the potential of slipping into an underclass of dependency and hopelessness
<b>Changing</b> system of social capital	Repetitive pattern of social reproduction created within particular, individualized social network, and similarities between earlier school transition and present predicament. Absence of other significant external influences results in narrow horizons and provides evidence of the constraining and structuring effects of individualized networks.
<b>Fluid</b> system of social capital	Exhibits a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and the changing biography of the young person. Social capital is the result of a diversity of individuals, reflective of a wide range of relationships developed in a number of different contexts, and providing a broad base of constantly updated reflexive knowledge
<b>Note.</b> Individualized systems of social capital, from “Youth Transitions and Social Exclusion: Developments in Social Capital Theory,” by C. Raffo and M. Reeves, 2000, <i>Journal of Youth Studies</i> , 3(2), 147-166.	

According to Raffo and Reeves (2000), a young person with a weak individualized system of social capital experiences “a network of social relations that is relatively small, provides little practical informal knowledge through the interactions of that network, is often not practice driven, and has little access to material and symbolic resources, resulting in a relatively passive/static articulation of individual change and development” (p. 156).

Strong individual systems of social capital are “derived from a concentration of opportunities for developing informal and practical knowledge and understanding. Although external constraints impact heavily on their lives, there is an indication that they have developed

survival strategies and approaches to help them combat the potential of slipping into an underclass of dependency and hopelessness” (Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 158).

Raffo and Reeves (2000) describe changing individualized systems of social capital being as characterized by a “repetitive pattern of social reproduction created within particular, individualized social network, and similarities between earlier school transition and present predicament. Absence of other significant external influences results in narrow horizons and provides evidence of the constraining and structuring effects of individualized networks” (p. 161).

A young person’s individualized system of capital is fluid when he or she “exhibits a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and the changing biography of the young person. Social capital is the result of a diversity of individuals, reflective of a wide range of relationships developed in a number of different contexts and providing a broad base of constantly updated reflexive knowledge” (Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 162).

Using individualized systems of social capital as a theoretical perspective for this study will assist the researcher in developing a more holistic understanding of the relationship between agency exercised by study participants during transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institution and identify the contributions made by social structures in shaping their transitions. Using this perspective will highlight factors of resiliency related to the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education.

## **Summary**

Phenomenological theory, critical race theory and individual systems of social capital together provide the theoretical framework for this study. Transcendental phenomenology aligns with this study's aim to explore the experiences of African American males who have experienced out-of-home care. Critical race theory provides an interpretive mode for exploring the role of race and racism in perpetuating the social disparities experienced by African American males. Individualized systems of social capital provide the perspective from which the researcher will examine agency to uncover the strengths of study participants and the factors related to their resilience.

In using phenomenological methods, a researcher seeks to understand another's reality by being open to identifying with that reality for himself or herself. This experience is one of striving to understand the reality of the study participant as if it were the researcher's own reality (Noddings, 1984; Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald, 1988). All qualitative research requires the researcher to enter an empathetic relationship with the study participant, but in phenomenological research, this intuitive engagement is primary.

According to Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988), the phenomenological method involves locating, gathering, sorting, retrieving, condensing and verifying the data. It promotes an understanding of human beings in whatever environment they live. Phenomenology shows us the worlds that people live in, the ranges of human experiences that are possible, how these experiences may be described, and how language has powers to disclose the worlds in which we live (van Manen, 1990). Studying the phenomenon of the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education may expand existing literature to include new understanding of the experiences of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary

education, shedding light on their experiences and perspectives, revealing meaning in the experiences, discovering implications for out-of-home care providers and for postsecondary educational institutions, and giving new directions for professional practice and research.

## **CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Introduction**

To contribute to the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, this study sought to gain an understanding of the lived experienced and perceptions of African American males who experienced out-of-home care and enrolled in postsecondary education upon graduation. The two questions below guided this study.

1. What is it like to transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education?
2. What are the central meanings – in other words, the essence – of the transition, and what are the factors, both internal and external, that contributed to their experiences?

This chapter presents the research methods used in this study; as well as a description of the participants, the research design, and rationale. Additionally, this chapter includes discussion of phenomenological theories and approaches to qualitative research relevant to this study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In consideration of appropriate research design, all researchers must consider the distinct properties of both quantitative and qualitative research design. Creswell (2014) explains quantitative research as an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. Quantitative researchers tend to use a positivist worldview and experimental design, and they use surveys and experiments as strategies of inquiry. They ask close-ended questions and use predetermined approaches and numerical data. The quantitative researcher typically tests or verifies theories or explanations, identifies variables to study, relates variables in questions of hypothesis, uses standards of validity and reliability, observes and measure information numerically, uses unbiased approaches, and employs statistical procedures.



Quantitative methods yield broad and generalizable findings that are presented in a predetermined way. Because quantitative methods rely on predetermined sets of standardized responses, these methods fail to provide insight into the individual, personal experiences of participants' in quantitative studies. In these studies respondents are not able to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their own words. Quantitative researchers are supposed to play a neutral role in the research process (Patton, 2002). Thus, the meaning participants ascribe to the phenomenon studied is largely ignored.

Unlike quantitative studies, which are concerned with generalization, prediction and causal relationships, qualitative studies are concerned with process, context, interpretation, meaning, and understanding. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem. Qualitative researchers use constructivist/ transformative knowledge claims as philosophical assumptions for their research.

Qualitative strategies of inquiry include: phenomenology, grounded theory ethnography, case study, and narrative. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text, or image data. They collaborate with the study participants to collect participants' meanings focused on a single concept or phenomenon, and bring personal values into the study to examine the context or setting of participants. They validate the accuracy of findings and make interpretations of the data. Qualitative research usually results in an agenda for change or reform (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative studies require an in-depth examination of people's lives. By asking open-ended questions in individual interviews, the researcher can understand the world as experienced by study participants, and present that understanding in the study findings. Direct quotations are analyzed to elicit meaning from feelings, experiences, and thoughts and to ascribe meaning form

the individual perspectives. This makes qualitative findings longer, more detailed and more variable in content than findings from quantitative studies. Qualitative research and a phenomenological design was determined to be the appropriate method for this study, given its goal of gaining understanding of the lived experiences of African American males who have transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education.

### **Phenomenological Approach to Qualitative Research**

Phenomenology originated as a philosophy in the work of Edward Husserl and has since then developed as an approach to qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994). McCaslin & Scott (2003) defined phenomenology stating that “phenomenology is described as the study of the shared meaning of experience of a phenomenon for several individuals” (p. 449). Creswell (2007) commented that the phenomenological approach to qualitative research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (pp. 57-58).

There are many different approaches to phenomenological research. Transcendental phenomenology is one that focuses on capturing the essence of lived human experience (Creswell, 2004; Moerer-Urdahl & Moustakas, 1994). This researcher chose the transcendental approach for this study, as it allowed the researcher to focus “less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on the description of the experiences of participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). According to Moustakas (1994) “the core processes that facilitate derivation of knowledge” for transcendental phenomenology are comprised of the three steps listed below (p. 33). The three steps guided the researcher’s path toward discovering the essential elements of the experiences of transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education.

1. **Epoche:** During this step, the researcher was required to refrain from judgment or assumption related to the phenomenon.
2. **Transcendental phenomenological reduction:** During this step, each experience was categorized singularly and depicted through a textural description that captured, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.
3. **Imaginative variation:** In this step, the researcher focused on the structural description of the experience, identifying how, where, and the manner in which the experience with the phenomenon took place. (p. 33)

## **Population**

The population for this study consisted of six African American men who enrolled in postsecondary education upon graduation from out-of-home care – in this case, a residential high school – between 1996 and 2006. An identified maximum of 10 years since completion of the postsecondary educational experience was set to allow for more accurate reflections of the experience.

## **Research Sites**

All study participants transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. The participants had no present relationship with the institution in which they enrolled or with the residential high school from which they graduated. Semi-structured interviews were held at locations that were identified by the participants and were conducive to research. Three of the six participants were interviewed at their residences, and two of the six participants were interviewed at local coffee shops. One of the six participants was interviewed at his or her place of business. All interviews were conducted in the United States. All participants were placed in out-of-home care in the United States and entered postsecondary education in the United States.

## **Participant Access**

Participation in this study was voluntary. A participant enrollment form was used to determine the eligibility of all participants (Appendix B). This study was designed to be conducted in a manner that suspended judgment and respected each participant's unique experiences and contribution to the research. The researcher accepted the perceptions and interactions provided by each participant. The participants' lived experience of the phenomenon was accepted as real, with the understanding that their perceptions are their reality and, therefore, are true for them.

## **Data Collection**

The researcher used phenomenological methods to create the research questions and conducted semi-structured interviews with six African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions. Each participant in the study brought a unique perspective and experience. Each perspective was checked for validity and contribution to the formation of themes, meanings, and descriptions. Direct quotes and themes were analyzed to form evidence of each participant's perspective. According to Creswell (2007), "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop meanings of their experiences" (p. 20). With that in mind, the researcher honored each contribution in the analysis and was careful to assure that each participant's perspective was constructed according to his lived experience.

## **Bracketing**

A phenomenological pure experience has its real components. One arrives at this meaning or pure essence through intentional analysis and the suspension of all presuppositions and assumptions normally made about the experience – a process called bracketing. The purpose

of this reduction is to obtain pure and unadulterated phenomena before they are criticized by prior interpretation and beliefs (Cohen, 1987).

Bracketing is a process in which researchers suspend personal belief regarding the things they think they know about the experience and ask participants to explain what the experience was like for them (Thibodeau, 1993). Bracketing, according to Munhall (1994), is an attempt to achieve a state of mind of unknowing as a condition to openness. She explained the process of unknowing is a paradox in knowing that one does not know and is essential to the understanding of subjectivity and gaining of perspective in the conduct of human science research. “Unknowing requires the researcher to be fully present in her/his personal world of values and perceptions and to be, at the same time, authentically open in interacting with the unknowingness about the life experience of the subject” (Connell, 2008). According to Connell (2008): “A researcher studying a phenomenon can never completely ‘un-know.’ Through reflective journaling and dialogue, personal beliefs and interpretations can be examined and held in abeyance” (p. 35).

The core of this study was to fully enter the experiences of another. It required being intuitively present and aware of the inner meaning for the other. In this way, the researcher was able to arrive at the collective meaning behind the experience.

### **Study Procedures**

This study was conducted in four phases over a period of 120 days. During each phase, specific research activities occurred. The four phases are defined as: Phase I (the enrollment phase), Phase II (the interview phase), Phase III (the validation phase), and Phase IV (the closure phase). These activities commenced immediately upon approval of the doctoral committee and the institutional review board.

**Phase I: Enrollment interview.** During the enrollment phase, a telephonic interview was arranged with each potential participant identified through a purposeful sample of representatives of study population who were known to the researcher. In this interview, the researcher verified that enrollment criteria were met, provided a description of the study, and obtained agreement to participate in the study. Contact information was collected using the study enrollment form (Appendix B). The Phase II interview was also scheduled to occur during this phase. Two dates and times were scheduled, with the first set for the interview date and the second planned as a back-up.

**Phase II: Interview session.** The interview phase was the first face-to-face contact between the interviewer and the participant. Prior to beginning the interview session, the researcher reviewed and secured the informed consent, confidentiality, and data security agreement, and the permission for audio/videotaping the interviews for research purposes.

**Phase III: Review and validation.** During phase three, the researcher and participant reviewed individual transcripts, analysis, and notes from the interviews to check for accuracy and to validate the data collected. Each participant certified that the transcript used in the final analysis was an accurate depiction of their voice and experiences.

**Phase IV: Closure.** During the closure phase of the study, the researcher sent letters of appreciation to each member of the study, thanking them for their contributions to the work.

## **Participants**

Participation in this study was voluntary. Informed consent was required for participation and was obtained via signature on the informed consent form authorized for use in this study. Participant criteria were as follows: male gender, African American ethnicity, graduated from high school or obtained a GED, experienced out-of-home care, and is attending/has attended a

four-year college or university. Detailed demographic information is provided in Chapter 3. Each participant was asked two broad, general questions, and the interview was modified as needed with follow-up questions aimed at achieving the objectives of this study (Moustakas, 1994, as cited by Creswell, 2007, p. 61). The two questions are listed below.

- What have you experienced transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institution?
- What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences related to this transition?

### **Data Security**

The researcher took the four steps listed below to secure the data and ensure that the confidentiality of study participants was maintained.

1. All collected data was securely stored electronically in a password-protected capacity. Consent forms and transcripts were kept in a binder and safely stored when not under analysis.
2. Each participant was assigned a unique pseudonym to protect his identity.
3. The data was coded with each participant's pseudonym and stored either electronically in a password-protected capacity or safely stored when not under analysis.
4. To minimize risk of errors in data collection, the researcher collected data using field notes and audiotaped recordings that were cross-referenced for accuracy before beginning data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) spoke of the phenomenological researcher as one who intuitively understands the other's reality by being open to identifying with the other's reality as a possible reality for himself. Noddings (1984) captured the experience of intuiting others' reality, explaining that the researcher strives to understand as if the other's reality were his or her own. Qualitative research thus requires researchers to enter an empathetic, caring relationship with the participant-partner. In a phenomenological study, this intuitive engagement is primary. Although there are different techniques for data analysis in phenomenological research, LoBiondo and Hubec (1998) describe general steps in the movement from the participant's description to the researcher's synthesis of the data. These steps include:

1. thorough reading and sensitive presence with the transcription of the participant's description;
2. identification of shifts in participant thought resulting in division of the transcript into thought segments;
3. specification of the significant phrases in each thought segment, using the words of the participant;
4. distillation of each significant phrase to express the central meaning of the segment in the words of the researcher;
5. preliminary synthesis of central meanings of all thought segments for each participant, with a focus on the essence of the phenomenon being studied; and
6. final synthesis of the essences that have surfaced in all the participant's descriptions, resulting in an exhaustive description of the lived experience. (p. 225)

The researcher sorted and analyzed the interview data to uncover common themes emerging from the interview (Lofland, Snow Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Data was then



transcribed to allow for thematic categorization and analyzed to reveal major themes pertaining to the research questions. Next, the data was organized into themes through a process of coding, with the coded and organized data presented through figures, tables, and discussion (Creswell, 2003, 2005). In addition, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews, to add to and amend their statements. This process, known as member checking, served to increase the validity of the study by allowing participants the opportunity to confirm that the information was realistic and complete (Creswell, 2005).

### **Summary**

Phenomenological investigation of phenomena important to postsecondary knowledge and practice is an epistemological balance to quantitative research methods. It is a partner with quantitative methods of research to make sense of the world as it is lived, and to do so from the perspective of the individuals living it. It provides the weft on the tapestry of life by which experience is blended into the whole picture of research. This method involves locating, gathering, sorting, retrieving, condensing and verifying the data (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988). It promotes an understanding of human beings in whatever environment they happen to be. This approach into the phenomenon of the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education may provide new understanding to existing literature regarding the experiences of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education, shedding light on their experiences and perspectives, uncovering meaning and implications for providers of out-of-home care and for postsecondary educational institutions, and giving new direction for professional practice and research.

## **CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of qualitative data gathered from interviews, from researcher observations, and from field notes. Six African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education institutions in the United States were participants in this study. The coding and analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes yielded five themes. A rich description of the themes is provided through verbatim representations from the participants who are identified by pseudonym. These themes, and the findings that emerged, are highlighted for significant ideas from the literature that are aligned with or that counter existing theory, research and practice in higher education.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to lift the voice of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education into the literature, shedding light on this experience from their perspective to uncover meaning and implications for providers of out-of-home care and postsecondary educational institutions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is it like to transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education?
2. What are the central meanings – in other words, the essence – of the transition, and what are the factors, both internal and external, that contributed to the experience?

### **Participant Demographics**

Six men who self-identified as African American were included in this study. Of the six participants, one identified himself as both African American and bi-racial, listing African American and Puerto Rican ethnicities as comprising his ethnic make-up. The participants were

alumni of secondary residential schools who had transitioned into postsecondary education between 1994 and 2004. Average length of time in out-of-home care for the participants was five years and 4 months. At the time of the interviews, the participants' ages ranged from 31 to 42 years old. All participants were employed at the time of the interview. One of the six participants had earned a graduate-level degree, and three of the six had completed trade certifications. Table 2 below provides demographic information pertaining to each participant.

Table 2.  
Participant Demographic Details

<b>Jose</b>	<b>Justice</b>	<b>Shack</b>
Age at time OHC began: 10 Age at PSE enrollment: 18 Current age: 36	Age at time OHC began: 14 Age at PSE Enrollment: 18 Current Age: 42	Age at time OHC began: 15 Age at PSE Enrollment: 19 Current Age: 38
Private, HBCU (did not complete), community trade school, mechanic certification	Private, Christian college (did not complete), community trade school, bartender certification	Public, state university (did not complete)
Current occupation: Uber driver/retail delivery	Current occupation: night club manager	Current occupation: retail delivery
<b>Paris</b>	<b>Zika</b>	<b>Doug</b>
Age at time OHC began: 16 Age at PSE enrollment: 19 Current age: 33	Age at time OHC began: 14 Age at PSE enrollment: 18 Current age: 36	Age at time OHC began: 14 Age at enrollment: 18 Current age: 31
Public, state university (did not complete), online school, Bachelor's degree in process	Public, state university, earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees	Private, HBCU, community trade school
Current occupation: licensed cosmetologist, certified nursing assistant	Current occupation: licensed professional counselor	Current occupation: truck driver

## Themes

Five primary themes emerged from the analysis of interviews, researcher observations and field notes. A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data, honing in on the significant statements made by participants during the study (Moer-Urdal & Creswell, 2004, Moustakas, 1994). The five themes were: (a) precursors to placement in out-of-home care, (b) the experience of placement in out-of-home care, (c) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (d) importance of relationships, and (e) impact on academic performance. Each primary theme presented contained sub-themes illustrated in Table 3 below and described in greater detail later in the chapter.

Table 3.  
Primary Themes and Sub Themes

Primary themes	Sub themes
Precursors to placement in out-of-home care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple paths to out-of-home care</li><li>• Attitudes about education prior to out-of-home care</li></ul>
The experience of placement in out-of-home care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of quality of care</li><li>• Impact of placement in OHC on attitudes about education</li><li>• Preparation for postsecondary education</li></ul>
Postsecondary educational experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Motivations to attend/end PSE</li><li>• Feelings of isolation, awkwardness, fear</li><li>• Experiencing stereotypes, prejudice and bias</li><li>• Connection with others</li></ul>
Importance of relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relationship with family</li><li>• Social Relationships</li></ul>
Impact on academic performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of the impact of OHC on academic performance during postsecondary education</li></ul>

### Theme 1: Precursors to Placement in Out-of-Home Care

Precursors to placement in out of home care emerged from descriptions provided by the African American male participants of their life experiences prior to being placed in out-of-home care. The participants described how significant life circumstances had an impact on their

attitudes towards education. Two sub-themes emerged in their descriptions: (a) multiple paths to out-of-home care, and (b) attitudes about education prior to out-of-home care.

**Multiple paths to out-of-home care.** As discussed in Chapter 2, young people are placed in out-of-home care for multiple reasons. Two of the six participants in this study, Doug and Shack, were placed in out-of-home care by child welfare agencies after the death of their primary caregivers. Three of the six participants – Zika, Justice, and Jose – were placed by juvenile justice authorities after being adjudicated as delinquents. One participant, Paris, was placed by a local school district that determined out-of-home care would be the least restrictive environment due to mental health issues.

The death of a parent is difficult. Doug recalled, “Man, I remember it like it was yesterday. All of the foster homes, going from this relative to that relative. And then the group homes.” Doug lost his mother to a drug overdose when he was eight years old. He never had a relationship with his father, and at the time of the interview was unable to recall the last meaningful interaction with him. Doug entered out-of-home care after his placement with his aunt and step-uncle became intolerable. “Dude was a drunk, he used to always come home and yell and cuss, and I just wasn’t used to all that. I mean, shit wasn’t all peachy with my mama and her situation, but it was better than the way we was living.” Doug requested that the court place him in out-of-home care.

Shack also entered out-of-home care after the death of his primary caregiver and the inability of other family members to provide care due to conflict with his family. He had multiple out-of-home care experiences, including juvenile detention, psychiatric hospitalization, and other group homes, before being placed in an out-of-state facility by child welfare authorities. He shared:

Man, I've been in group homes since the age of ... what, I left my grandfather house when I was like eleven and a half, maybe 12 years old. The first place I was at was Chicago Lake shore. That was in Chicago, 4800 North Marine Drive. And then I went there, I went to another place from there, because I exhausted my grandparents insurance and they wouldn't pay for it no more, so they sent me to a state place and I was in the state place for like a week and they put me out. They said there wasn't nothing wrong with me (Shack) Then I went back to my grandfather's house and it was just the same old stuff. I wind up back in another group home. I went to St. Josephs. I was in St. Josephs Day program at first and then I became a residential student.

Zika was adjudicated delinquent by the juvenile court. He was presented with two options: entering the OHC program or serving jail time. He chose to attend the OHC program.

He shared:

I was out there in the streets gangbanging. My whole family gangsters. I grew up watching my mama sell weed. Pops was in jail then and in jail now. So when they sent me to [OHC facility], it really wasn't nothing to me. I had already been to the Audey Home (local name for juvenile detention center) like five times for weapons possession, narcotics, you name it and all of this was before the age of 14.

Justice was presented with similar options – a choice between treatment or jail. Justice, with strong encouragement from his family, chose to enter the OHC program. He said, “I was mean, ornery, disobedient ... I didn't listen. Got locked up a few times for drugs. I was like 13 and making money, had mad respect out here too.”

While Jose was also placed in OHC after being adjudicated delinquent; his view of the precursors to his placement in out-of-home care stemmed from abuse experienced in his home.

He shared:

I come from a broken home, as per se. I didn't have my father and my mother wasn't much help either. You know, she wasn't around. And I was troubled in school. Got into a lot of fights and dealt with a lot of different avenues, per se, in life. So I was interviewed because I was good in sports at a young age and I liked sports. So I was interviewed to go to a treatment center in Arkansas. It was just starting out in Chicago and Chicago had just started doing that, so they asked me did I want to go? And at the time I was ready to leave Chicago because of the gang violence and, you know, the trouble with the police and the gangs. So I chose to try a different route because I wanted to live, I didn't want to die. You know, I was told I'd be dead before the age of 13, and I was nine so that wasn't too far away. So I went to school there and graduated (Jose).

Paris also described a history of abuse that contributed to mental health issues. Paris identified as a gay male during the out-of-home care experience. Paris identifies now as a transgender woman and is referred to with feminine pronouns in this study. Paris shared about dealing with her family's acceptance of her lifestyle, a process that she believes contributed to her problems. "I was going through a lot dealing with my sexuality and stuff and being accepted by my family who wanted me to change but, obviously, I wasn't going to change. I just wanted to die. So I tried to kill myself. And then they sent me to a Christian boarding school."

Participants in this study entered out-of-home care for various reasons. Though multiple paths to OHC exist, and although each participant in this study reported a journey unique to them, they were all linked by a common thread of trauma prior to entering placement in OHC. Undoubtedly, these experiences impacted the participants' early attitudes about education and influenced their decisions to enroll in postsecondary education.

**Attitudes about education prior to out-of-home care.** All six participants made significant statements regarding their attitudes about education prior to placement in out-of-home care. Before placement in OHC, only Zika had previously considered attending college. He shared:

I wasn't no dummy. When I was in the streets, I just didn't go to school. It wasn't that it was hard or nothing. I just wanted to be on the block. And when I did go. I aced that shit. So, I knew I wanted to go to college. I wasn't like focused on it, but it crossed my mind plenty of times when I was a shorty. I was never held behind or nothing like that. But, I did have a major attendance problem before I got sent off.

The other study participants reported that, prior to out-of-home care, they never considered that one day they will attend postsecondary education at a college or university. Paris explained, "Schooling-wise. When I was in Chicago, I didn't go to school because my mom, she was on drugs, so I was taking care of me, so that means I'm hustling. That means I don't got time

for ABCs. I'm trying to eat.” Justice shared that he had very little interest in education at all, prior to his out-of- home placement. He said that education was not a priority, adding, “All I was thinking about is gang banging. Like I'm sitting there in the class, you know. Gang banging or being silly. Not thinking about none of this like how important this is, or [that] I should be paying attention.” When asked if he ever thought that he would attend college prior to being placed in OHC, he commented:

No, because I wasn't brought up in that atmosphere. My mom was going to jail a lot. So, we [were] moving around and when you're not around that type of teaching. Where people are like ... or their parents and teachers make them, you know, "You have to do your schoolwork, or study, or read for an hour." They don't teach you that, that becomes absent in the next generation.

Similar to Justice, Jose had little interest in education. Like Paris, he too felt as if he had to “hustle” to meet his basic needs. He said:

Man, my mom was in her own world, she didn't have the capacity to care about us. She was more concerned about her boyfriends. My brothers and sisters had a different father, so they would always be gone with them. I had to get it on my own. And besides, nobody even cared if I went to school. It wasn't until truancy got involved that they even said something but even still the only reason they were concerned was because somebody had to come to the house because of me.

The term “hustle” is used in many ways, most commonly as defined by Webster's New World Dictionary: “to move hurriedly or unceremoniously in a specific direction.” Informally, the word “hustle” is also used to describe actions taken to obtain needed resources. In the context of this study, the participants use of the word “hustle” is informal. Hustling also influenced Doug's early attitudes about education. He said:

I ain't gonna lie, I went to school and stuff every day until like the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I failed 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, so I was behind a year but, I didn't really care because most of my homies were behind like two or three years. I guess we thought it was cool to be dummies. But, I remember that summer between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I made like two thousand dollars. So from then on, I was serving (selling drugs). All of my charges were drug charges. And to tell you the truth, I believed that I would be dead or in jail by 18, definitely not at some college.



Shack's description of his attitude toward education prior to placement in out-of-home care seemed fluid. He explained, "I just went with the motion. I was in so many different places, I just went with it. I didn't think about it. I sure didn't think about going to no college."

As discussed in the representation of this theme and the related sub-themes, it was revealed through this research that each participant entered OHC due to unique life circumstances that contributed to adverse childhood experiences. The participants described how their life experiences prior to out-of-home care impacted their attitudes about education prior to out-of-home care. Five of the six participants reported that they did not consider attending postsecondary education prior to the experience of placement in out of home care.

## **Theme 2: The Experience of Placement in Out-of-Home Care**

Similar to the multiple, varied paths to placement in out of home care, the actual placement experience itself emerged through significant statements provided by the participants. Each participant identified details that depict their unique out-of-home care placement experiences. Three sub-themes emerged from descriptions provided by the participants: (a) perceptions of quality of care, (b) impact of placement in out-of-home care on attitudes about education, and (c) preparation for postsecondary education.

**Perceptions of quality of care.** All six participants described their experience in OHC and shared perceptions about the quality of the care they received. While there has been greater emphasis placed on measuring experience of care for young people who transition out of OHC in recent years, there is currently no consensus among OHC providers regarding methods of collection of this important data or regarding how to apply it (Alexander, 2016). Until now, none

of the participants in this study had ever participated in any study, post-intervention debrief, or follow-up after spending multiple years in OHC.

Participants revealed both positive and negative perspectives of their experience in out-of-home care. Jose, who spent eight years placed in an OHC facility, discussed the poor quality experience related to treatment for mental health needs:

There really wasn't any treatment. There really wasn't any treatment as far as like speaking to somebody who wasn't judgmental. Because you would have a social worker but the social worker's the same person that if you do something wrong, you know, they're going to punish you. So, if you felt a certain way, you couldn't speak about that because you would get in trouble.

While mental health treatment was a significant part of his support plan, Jose did not feel that his mental health needs were met by placement in OHC. When asked by the researcher about specific treatment interventions (e.g. individual, group therapy), he continued:

No, none of that. I mean, I didn't even know I was bipolar until later years. So, I mean, I didn't get the proper like treatment as far as like getting to see a psychologist, a true psychologist who wasn't there to, you know, just getting paid. And if you did something wrong, there wasn't no confidentiality.

Confidentiality was essential for Jose's efforts to build a therapeutic alliance with the providers of his OHC experience. He further described his experience concerning confidentiality and mental health treatment in OHC:

Like as far as the mental problems, you know, you didn't get any help with it. So it was sort of you do what you're told or else you're in trouble, you know? So as far as that placement center, you know, it wasn't like the best for like as far as like getting treatment. Because you would talk to the same person of how you feel and they'd turn around and use it against you. You know, so if you felt a certain way, you know, you couldn't truly speak your mind because you would get repercussions which were repercussions you didn't want to deal with.

Though he felt that his mental health needs were unmet during his time in OHC, he enjoyed playing on the basketball team, where he experienced a level of success and accomplishment as an athlete. "We traveled like we were in the league, and I was good," he said.

Zika also highlighted membership on the basketball team as a highlight of his experience in OHC, saying:

I never really played basketball before I went to (OHC facility) but, when I got there that was like the only real activity they had going on down there. That and riding horses and I wasn't on that at first but, eventually they got me on one and I started riding horses too. But, yeah the basketball program was a good outlet from the everyday bull.

Beyond the basketball program, however, Zika felt that the program lacked accountability. He shared:

They just sent us down there (to OHC placement) man. Imagine all of the trouble kids in Chicago, from all sides of the city, in all different kinds of gangs converging in one location where the staff are preachers and deacons and shit and think that they gone pray you straight. I was down there several years and the people from Chicago only came once a year, around graduation. And, everybody- all the residents- knew how to act when they were there. That place had no accountability. It was a holding ground for bad kids.

Justice's experience was, overall, a positive one. He reflected, "My mom, I feel like she saved my life by sending me down there." He described his experience as "completely a culture shock," explaining:

That [placement in OHC] was a different experience. I said earlier a culture shock because I was completely opposite of what I was used to. It was like you had to be put out in this wooded area, so you wouldn't escape. You know what I'm saying? It's almost like a mental prison if you want to call it.

He recalled his arrival to the OHC placement facility, explaining his reluctance to go and the encouragement he received from the individual taking him to the facility:

In the middle of nowhere. Pretty much. I mean, good luck. That's what I always said. Unless you know how to drive, you stuck. But just being all the way out there then I remember going down there I remember my mom was always like ... you know even though I was pissed. I was mad I was down there. But I was trying to do it for my mother. I just remember thinking like, "Man, I should have just ran (away)." You know what I'm saying? Why did I come down here? You know what I'm saying? Go to this place? My transport, the person who brought me down convinced me talking about "Man just give me five days. And I promise if it doesn't work I'll send you back." Like he knowing I really don't want to be there. I know now that was the gift for gab. But looking at that and then all it was when you got down there you be coming around all these different people. It's hard to adjust to that. You know what I'm saying?

Though Justice initially approached the OHC placement experience with a level of contempt, as evidenced by his contemplation of running away during his transport to the facility, he shared that he began to acclimate to the program:

When you finally get to adjusting you make friends with people, it takes your attention. I was like, "Man, am I'm going to go over this five days." Or, "Okay, he said another 10 days." And now I'm acclimated with everybody. It's just like, I wasn't one of them kids that was antisocial. I kicked it with everybody. I don't care your race, you know, none of that. Even though I didn't grow up around that. It was just if you a good person, you treat me good, I'm a be cool with you.

Justice said he believes that this personal demeanor contributed to his positive placement experience in out-of-home care. He explained:

So that's how I carried it with everybody out there. Never believe in the bullying and all that shit. It was more like being down there, didn't want to listen they had to get restrained a couple of times and they had to ball up a couple times. I'm just saying that, you know what? You can't beat them you either just try to figure out like how to get along with everybody because it makes things harder if you weren't trying to live down there.

Justice summarized his experience by stating: "Being down there ... you know, getting cool with a lot of like people and I was pretty much friends with everybody down there. So, my experience there just being there I'm glad I was able to go down there."

Shack reported that he experienced OHC placement at several facilities prior to arriving at the OHC experience of focus in this study. Though his OHC experience was extensive, this study focused specifically on his experiences in the placement immediately prior to enrollment in postsecondary education. Of this experience, Shack lamented, "That was a weird place," and continued:

Growing up in Chicago, south side Chicago. Just pretty much waking up one day and then you're in the middle of nowhere. I'm talking about literally in the middle of nowhere. Your only outside touch with the world would be the people that's around you. Nine times out of ten, you're going to run into somebody you knew, because we all from the same place. Came from the same background, some of us. Some of us different

backgrounds, but doing the same things, so we cross paths at different institutions and stuff like that. But we all wind up in this place here, you know, it was just, like I said, it was weird. I've been in a lot of different group homes, institutions and that place there was just, it was different.

Shack recalled his arrival at the OHC placement of focus. He shared, “before going to [OHC], shit, I was in a, I guess you would call it a juvenile psych ward, I guess you call it.” He continued:

“I got picked up from there one day. Well, actually I was showed a brochure and it was just made like it was like paradise. Then there was a place that, this is a day I'll never forget, because I remember it. My social worker... Called me in the office. I had a family group session lined up for that evening or whatever, and we were just touching basis getting ready for that session and while we was in the group, while we was getting ready for our preparation or whatever, she had these little pamphlets on the desk and she was like, "What you think about going to placement?" And I'm like, "Placement?" It was like, man, I just left one, because that's how I got to there. The place was Henry Horner at the time. That's how I got to Henry Horner, because I got kicked out of Mercy Boys Home. I got sent to Henry Horner straight from Mercy Boys Home.”

Shack shared his perceptions about quality of care:

Well, for one, my outtake on any facility that's housing kids that's going through certain things in their life at whatever moment and they are housing kids that may have lost someone close to them, you know, or they're housing kids that they just ain't got nobody else. A lot of these places, man, they don't identify with the kid. When I say identify, I'm not talking about on no text book level, or no therapeutic level, I'm talking about on a human being level. You've got to identify with that. That individual and really get to know that individual. Before you do that, you will never get to really come up with a plan to help somebody succeed in this kind of world.

Like Zika, Shack expressed feelings of being forgotten while in OHC. These expressions are significant revelations about Shack's perception of the quality of care he received. He commented:

They put these kids and they put us in these places, you know ... you're forgotten about. Sometimes some places they start out wanting to help you, but when big things come in to play or they forget that they're supposed to be helping you, you no longer help with you just, I don't know the correct word to use, but a subject or a ... I don't know, you're just forgotten about.

The term “culture shock” was used by four of the six participants as they described the quality of the OHC experience. Paris was one of the four who used that term. She offered, “It was ... it was a big culture shock coming from where I came from to there, and getting there. It was a Christian facility and that was fine, but my background, I'm an open transgendered woman.” At the time of her placement, Paris was an openly gay male who identified as a woman. She had begun the process of gender transformation prior to being placed in OHC. She said:

“When I got there, there was a halt on my life because it was ... I wasn't able to be who I wanted to be. I wasn't able to be who I truly was. I thank them for a lot of things, but I curse them for a lot of other things. You know what I mean?”

Paris was not involved in the decision to place her at a Christian OHC facility. In her experience in out-of-home care, she encountered fierce resistance to her lifestyle. She reported that there was no support, saying:

It was actually, ‘Oh, you're wrong for feeling that way’ or, ‘You shouldn't be this way because this or that,’ that God and all these spiritual battles. I just wanted to be me. I was there for four years, four or five years.” Paris tearfully continued, “When I'm there, it was ... First of all, the place was so ... I don't want to say homophobic. It was homophobic, but it was ... I don't know. The men couldn't talk to the women. The women couldn't talk to the men. It's almost a homosexual setup, but yet it's homophobia. It's this battle back and forth, because I know who I am, so I'm coming in the door, got out, Paris hair (laughs). I don't know. I found myself making a couple friends and we have the same interests, and I don't know. That was a safe haven for me inside a place that was chaotic, because if I was gone away from them, life in Chicago was still going on. My brother was sick. My mom was fighting addiction. My grandmother, she was going through her things. I'm fighting things there and I'm fighting things here at the same time, but again, I have to say they helped me in a lot of ways. There was a lot of the things that I couldn't do that I'm excelling at now.

Paris experienced placement in OHC as a 15-year-old African American who was biologically male, sexually gay, and self-identified as female. Without regard for her hopes, dreams, or desires, she was placed at a Christian facility where she was made to feel as if her very existence was a problem. She said:

I thought none of them liked me. I was the gay kid. I was the kid with the attitude and a mouth because I wasn't going. Teachers didn't like me. I had problems with the security personnel. I had all this on my shoulders. Because of who I was. Because of my sexuality that I wasn't hiding from no one because this is me.

While the importance of relationships emerged as a primary theme in this study and is discussed later in this chapter, it is worth mentioning here that Paris is the only participant in this study who specifically referred to the value of a relationship with a specific staff member who intervened at a very critical time during her OHC placement, positively impacting her experience. She reported:

[I had problems] with staff, with other residents, with teachers. You know what? There was this man named [Staff]. That man was my savior. For real. That man was my savior and I'm going to keep it a buck. I was talking to [Staff]. He had, some issues where he had to walk with two canes. In my mind I felt like we were on the same plane level, so we had a conversation ... The reason I was saying we were on the same plane level is because I felt comfortable enough to talk to him. I didn't feel like he was philandering, I didn't feel like he was dumb, you know what I'm saying? one time and I told him, "Listen here Joe, I can't do this no more. I'd rather kill myself than to be here. Just keeping 100 with you."

During the interview, the researcher searched for clarification, asking her, "You were contemplating suicide?" Paris responded:

Yeah. You don't understand, this place was a really, upsetting place for me, mentally, physically. And it's not that I didn't want to be there, these people was telling me I was wrong for being who I am for five years, Marvin. For five years someone telling me smiling in my face but saying fuck me, at the same time. That's how I honestly felt....

Paris related that developing that relationship with this staff member saved her life. She explained:

I was talking to him, letting him know everything and that's why he started to come and get me every day. That's why he took me underneath his wing, Marvin. That man right there saved my life. The shit I didn't get from my family, he gave it to me, his entire family. He let me know it was okay for me to be who I am. Basically he did, he really took care of me.

The importance of relationships for African American males transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary education is explored in depth later in this chapter.

**Impact of placement in out-of-home care on attitudes about education.** Four of the six participants in this study conveyed the belief that placement in out-of-home care positively impacted their attitudes about education. Two of the six participants in this study felt that their placement in out-of-home care had no impact on their attitudes about education. Zika was one of two participants who felt that their placements in out-of-home care had no impact on their attitudes about education. Zika was the only participant in the study to have earned a master's degree. He said:

I always knew that it was important or what not but, it just wasn't a priority out here. Man, look, I'm from the south side joe, like I said earlier, ain't no dummies out here joe. You go walk that corner. There are OGs that I look up to, been looking up to since I was a shorty. I got the masters of rehab counseling, but I get my wits from them. They always told me to go to school, stay out those streets, even to this day bro. [OHC] helped me by staying focused and making it a priority because I didn't have shit else to do and I needed them grades to play ball so, that's that but, no they [OHC] didn't affect the way I thought about education. I always knew it was important.

Though Zika shared that placement in out-of-home care had no impact on his attitude about education, he acknowledged that the OHC experience helped him “stay focused” and make education a “priority.” Paris made a similar statement regarding the priority of education, saying:

Schooling-wise. When I was in Chicago, I didn't go to school because my mom, she was on drugs, so I was taking care of me, so that means I'm hustling. That means I don't got time for ABCs. I'm trying to eat. Okay? That aspect, as far as schooling, and I was lacking a lot of things. I was lacking a lot of educational basics, and the ranch gave that to me, and I could never fault them for that. They gave me that...

Doug offered that his OHC placement experience changed his perspective of education through exposure to athletics. He recalled:

Every year we used to go to basketball camps. One summer we went to like three basketball camps. And the camps were always on a college campus. So, we got to stay in the dorms and live on campus and play in they gym like we was really college hoopers.



So, from that I really wanted to like make good grades and stuff and like make it play on the college squad.

Doug was one of three participants in this study whose postsecondary educational experiences coincided with the experience of being a student-athletes at division one institutions. Zika played college football, while Doug and Jose played college basketball. Their experiences as student-athletes are explored later in the chapter. Doug and Jose shared a similar perspective relative to their exposure to the world of sports while in OHC. Jose, who attended a historically black college or university (HBCU) on a basketball scholarship, recollected:

The [OHC] exposed me to basketball, man. They had a great basketball program man. I guess you could imagine they had all these hood (explicit) from Chicago with natural fierce aggression and natural athletic ability going up against these lil' white kids from Christian schools, naturally we're going to dominate them. We ran our conference. I got serious about school because one day after practice [Coach] was like, y'all gotta have like a 2.5 or you wasn't going to be able to play. I was playing JV then, so since then I never fell below a 2.5. One semester I was right at it but, I never went below it.

Justice also recalled the basketball program in OHC having an impact on his perspective about education and also his decision to remain in OHC:

I was supposed to leave there like a year before, I actually left but they convinced me to stay down there. My mom was like, 'just stay there, you a year away from graduating' and I knew I was gone like be the first one of my mom's kids to like graduate from high school and shit. Coach was like, 'Say, you finish up, I promise you'll love your senior year.' I don't even think they paid for my last year because I was killing on the court. We went 14-1 my senior year and we won the NACA Championship.

Justice further explained his perceptions on preparation for PSE during his OHC experience in the following excerpts:

Man, like I was able to graduate on time. I was about 18 and a half, whatever. So just thinking about ... because I didn't know a lot of shit. I didn't know a lot of math, like times tables. I didn't know none of that. I'm, fuck, 13 years old. I should've been known that but when you ain't getting it enforced at home that's going to be the results. Man, I got down there started learning and I start liking it.

Although Shack played sports while in OHC, this did not impact his perspective on education. Instead, he reported that legal mandates from the juvenile court were more influential than anything else, saying:

Part of my program was I had to get my high school diploma or my GED by a certain age and if I didn't have it by a certain age then it was a possibility that I probably could've, you know, was facing some criminal charges, which could've lead to a lengthy prison stint.”

The participants in this study revealed that OHC experiences had a positive impact on their perspectives on education. Whether the OHC experience helped them to prioritize the importance of education or whether it incentivized academic pursuits by way of athletic programing; the impact of OHC placement experience was positive. It affected their perceptions of education and contributed to postsecondary education aspirations that were not present before the OHC experience.

**Preparation for postsecondary education.** The literature suggests that students who are the first in their families to attend college and who come from homes in a low socioeconomic status home have the most difficulty accessing college (ACT, 2004; Choy, 2001). According to Bragg, Kim, & Rubin (2005), the majority of underserved populations in postsecondary education are from economically depressed urban areas and remote rural locations. All six of the participants in this study African American males who were first-generation college students from economically depressed urban areas and who attended OHC facilitates in remote rural locations. The uniqueness of the participants’ perspectives was remarkable in many ways and essential to understanding their perceptions of preparation for postsecondary education during their experiences in out-of-home care.

During analysis of this sub theme, two underlying strands emerged from the data: (a) preparations that aided in the postsecondary educational experience, and (b) perceptions about

the lack of skills necessary for success in postsecondary education. All of the participants in the study mentioned certain classes and teachers that helped them prepare academically for postsecondary education. Two of the six participants felt that they were well-prepared for postsecondary education as compared to their peers who had not experienced OHC. Four participants felt that their preparation was lacking. Zika and Doug, both of whom were high school and college athletes, felt they were well-prepared. Zika explained:

Going to (OHC) made me better prepared for college because it was a boarding school. For all intents and purposes, you are already at college so, its not like being away from your folks is all new. Plus, I figured out what my mistakes were and when I got to (college) I knew I was on my own out here and it was about decision making. That's something that I got from my experience, not everybody on the team when I got to (college) couldn't hang. I was used to the change.

Doug explained his level of preparation as well, saying:

I was more prepared for college because I was told more and I learned more on the way. Back in school in Chicago no one gives you pointers about go into college I felt like I got extra help to let me know what was on the way.

Jose was the only participant in the study who attended postsecondary education on an athletic scholarship. He explained that experience:

It was weird because I had watched a few of my classmates, you know, give prep where they took them shopping for trash cans and, you know, a little small refrigerator. You know, toiletries and stuff like that. But for me, I didn't receive any of that so I was like I was lost. Like when I got there I was thinking that they were going to give me everything and it wasn't like that. I ended up getting \$200 in my pocket and dropped off all my clothes and said here you go and this is what you're here to do. And I had to do everything myself. I never had to enroll in any classes. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what a guidance counselor was or, you know, the person who helps you pick out what you're going to do. I didn't know.

Jose's perception of preparation for the postsecondary experience is directly related to the essence of his postsecondary experience. Jose felt that he received minimal physical preparation (e.g. no help purchasing items for dorm room) but, "never had to enroll in any classes" indicating that this was done for him. "They crippled me, I was on scholarship. I never filled out an

application.” Because of his basketball talent, Jose felt he was “catered to”, the impact of this idea on his postsecondary educational experience is shared later in this chapter.

Paris was not an athlete. She believed that the adversity she faced prior to the experience of OHC, as well as the OHC experience itself, prepared her well for college life. She said:

I was an openly gay male in at a Christian Academy in [state], fuck being prepared, I was ready to go. I was on my own before I got to the [OHC] so besides my academics, and I was very behind before I got there, they didn’t prepare me for shit. I still wasn’t on par with the other students but, I held my own.

Paris was ready to move on with her life. She felt that the adversity that she experienced in life had prepared her for postsecondary education. Although her academic improved, she did not feel that her OHC experience adequately prepared her for postsecondary education, saying, “No, I don’t think they prepared me, just because it was so ... restricted. They didn’t prepare me for real life. They prepared me for chapel.”

Like Paris, Justice shared the experience of being several grades behind prior to placement in OHC. He explained his perspective on how his OHC experience prepared him for postsecondary education, saying:

Being down there (OHC facility) with school, being able to be exposed and go to different places. You know, like that's something I still haven't done since I've been a grown up of just going to different little spots because responsibilities or money might not be too tight. I mean money might be too tight. Or I can't do this because I made bad decisions and can't move around like this. So being grateful to going to different states and different ... like going to Mexico and going off in Texas. You know, going to the state capital and all that in Florida and getting to know people that playing in the NFL and all that.

He also reflected back, saying:

And also reflecting back like, "Man growing up from Chicago I wouldn't have gotten that exposure" you know what I'm saying? I wouldn't have got that. I would have been ... you know probably wouldn't have made it that far. But just been in a box. Unless I got exposed to other things that helped me get out away from that box. What I always talk to my mom ... you know, everybody experiences ... like I don't want to overshadow nobody

else experience what they have may have had in being down there at one of them type of facilities.

Shack was the only participant in the study to explicitly express his reservation about attending postsecondary education due to feelings of not being adequately prepared, he shared:

Well, to be honest. I really didn't want to go to college ... I ain't really want to go, because I didn't feel I was ready for no college, man. I hadn't even been in society and then you try to put me in college. The (OHC) was, it was isolated. It was an isolated place. Before I went there I was a very sociable person, but like, at college, I just felt out of whack.

Statements made by four of the six participants in this study revealed that they not only felt inadequately prepared for postsecondary education, they also felt inadequately prepared for life. All related having to retrain themselves to interact with the public during their transition from OHC to postsecondary education. Four of them made specific statements on that topic.

**Paris:** It didn't prepare me for real life or real events for real face-to-face interaction with other people, you know what I mean? As far as like, it just didn't teach you the normalcy of interaction with other people, you know what I mean? Because there it was more like do what I say when I tell you to do it. No. When I got to (PSE) I had to reprogram myself for everyday interactions.

**Jose:** You're not allowed to, you know, self-discover. Which, as adolescents, from your 16 or 14 to 18, you're supposed to do it. You weren't allowed to self-discover so you pretty much had to go from 14 or 13 to you've got to be 18 years old and that's it. Even though you're 14 years old. So, there wasn't really no development, you know, as far as the human psyche or the mind or the heart. So it was tough, you know, that part. And that's, I think, what made me not really want to go around and go back to school. Because I was lost. I didn't have anybody to turn to or guide me, so I had lost interest. I had to put my own self in therapy after I left there because I just got tired of dealing with a lot of anger and pain.

**Shack:** It was just different. When I left that place, I had to teach myself how to talk to people again. Like when I'd be around a, especially a mixed crowd of people, and not be so like look into the floor, scared to look at somebody because past experiences, you weren't allowed to do that. It was just- And it was harder because you're doing it yourself. You spend years with somebody in your ear trying to fix or correct a problem that you're telling them what made you get to the place that you're at, at that time, and then to go from that to now you're back in the world, but you're not in the world, you in

the college setting. It's still a controlled environment, but you just got more freedom... you just pretty much had to retrain yourself to get back into society, you know what I'm saying.

**Zika:** Yeah the whole thing with the girls was jacked up. I didn't really learn how to communicate with females in the right way. I was always nasty. That's why I have four kids now. But for real not knowing how to communicate and how to protect yourself joe. I know some dudes out here right now that went to (OHC) and they got eight and nine kids joe. They wasn't teaching us safe sexual practices down there, we couldn't even talk to the girls, so what you think the first thing a (explicit) gone do when he get out, its just like being in jail only you never really had the socialization. You end up having to teach yourself and having to find out the hard way.

The experience of placement in out-of-home care emerged as a primary theme in this study. Perceptions of the quality of the out-of-home care experience, the impact of OHC experience on participants' attitudes about education, and participants' perceptions regarding their preparation for postsecondary education were all essential for understanding the essence of the lived experiences of African American males who have transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education.

### **Theme 3: Postsecondary Educational Experience**

The postsecondary educational experience is central to this study of lived experience of African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. Similar to the precursors to their out-of-home care experiences and to the placement experiences themselves, the participants' postsecondary educational experiences were both similar and different from one another different and similar for participants in a number of ways including: (a) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (b) feelings of isolation, awkwardness, fear, (c) experiencing stereotypes, prejudice and bias, and (d) connections with others.

**Motivations to attend postsecondary education.** Each participant in this study shared their motivations for enrolling in postsecondary education. As discussed previously in this chapter, three participants in this study were motivated to attend postsecondary educational

institutions in order to compete in sports at the collegiate level. The other three participants proclaimed other motivations (or non-motivations). Though a college athlete, Justice also shared a different motivation, in addition to the opportunity to play basketball. He said:

I would say college was kind of forced upon me because I really wanted to go back home as soon as I graduated high school. I was ready to return back to Chicago and they knew that. So when graduation ... I will say 11th grade that's when I started taking it serious. Like, "Okay, I'm almost there. My grades are doing. I'm working hard. I'm doing my homework. Thinking about all the things I didn't do before I was there." You know, and finally doing it man. I knew I wasn't ready to go back to Chicago though. Man, I really wasn't ready to go back to Chicago. With graduating and them putting me in [college] ... Yeah, I wasn't doing nothing with myself. I wasn't motivated. I'm 18 19 and I'm like 'man, it's just a blessing to even be part of' you know.

Justice's described being "put in" a postsecondary educational institution. He did not feel that he was ready or adequately prepared. He felt as if he was just going with the flow. Doug said that he had similar feelings. He said:

College was the next step, I mean you finish high school and you know what I'm saying go to college. You really can't do nothing out here without a college degree or some type of trade so I knew I had to do something. I'm cool now, I make over \$100,000 a year and I didn't finish but to tell you the truth that's why I went I wanted to make money so, I guess it aint all bad.

Doug's motivation for attending postsecondary education was to secure financial stability. While he did not finish a traditional undergraduate program at the institution in which he initially enrolled, he did complete an advanced trucker certification and now owns and operates his own logistics company. Shack did not feel that his OHC experience adequately prepared him for the social demands of living and learning on a college campus, but he was mechanically inclined. He recollected:

I was a very mechanical person. If you do your research you can go back, you can pull my records, when I was at the [OHC], I was the reason they started the auto mechanic program. They didn't have no such thing, you know, and this place had been in existence for years before I even got there. I had a skill. I liked the cars. Like old cars. I could take an old car apart and put it back together. You could show me something, I could do it. They had the Air Force come, I remember this. They had the Air Force come to the ranch

and they gave us an ASVAB test and me, and this other kid, I ain't going to say his name, but me and this other kid, we scored like, we blew the test up, they couldn't believe it. So they started preparing me for that. My grandfather, he was real excited about that. I told him I was going to go to the Air Force, and I wanted to work on airplanes. Which he was excited about that, but like I said, I was the kind of person like, man I'll make a decision, somebody in my ear, if that's what they want to hear at the moment, then yeah okay, that's what you going to get. That was just, I don't know-

Shack's phrase "somebody in my ear" is a descriptor of his perception that the decision to go to college was not truly his own. Though he described wanting to go to the Air Force and work on airplanes, he was persuaded not to go that direction, saying that the decision was against his own desires and due to his limited decision-making skills at the time. He did not want to enter the postsecondary institution that he attended.

Zika played football but said that was not his motivator for attending college. He proclaimed, "I knew what it meant to be a student-athlete. That's how I got in and got out. Football was the tool to pay for school. I wasn't trying to go to the NFL." Zika, the only participant in this study with a master's degree, was motivated to make a difference in the lives of others. He said:

Man, I was so blessed. Like for real. I wasn't supposed to be here. They tried to blow me away when I was 14, shorty (exposed a healed gunshot wound in torso). So, to be able to do all that I have been able to do and to now sit here with you and reflect back is all a blessing. I went into counseling because I wanted to help people overcome their lil situations. I always wanted to do that. I got my BA in criminology and my masters in rehab counseling. I'm a NCC and LPC.

Paris shared similar motivations for attending postsecondary education. He explained:

I wanted more in life and I wanted to help people. I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted the higher education so I graduated, and I moved on to [college]. You have to understand, I just came from a boarding school for four and a half years, almost five. And there was no outside, worldly things. Okay so I leave the [OHC] and I'm at [college] and I can do whatever I want at that moment. I did everything I indulged, that first night I indulged in life. What honey? I had the time of life in school. I did study. I worked hard.



Paris wanted to improve the quality of her life through service to others, and this motivated her choice of major once on campus. However, the decision to enroll in the particular institution in which she enrolled seemed motivated by the perception of freedom – specifically, freedom from her OHC experience. She did not complete the nursing program at this institution, sharing, “I didn’t finish up. Some things happened in Chicago and I had to leave school to take care of my brother.” She later completed a certified nursing assistant program and cosmetology training program.

**Feelings of isolation, awkwardness, and fear.** Four of the six participants in this study contributed statements that reflected feelings of isolation and of not fitting in. These feelings of isolation, awkwardness, and fear were identified as major contributors to the participants’ inabilities to establish connections and to develop a sense of comfort in this new environment. Justice attributed his feelings to the lack of African American representation among the students on the campus of his postsecondary institution. Regarding his initial reactions during his first days as a college student, he said, “I was the only black dude there. It was another black dude on the basketball team but, most of the black people, they were from Africa, like Somalia or someplace like that ... I just couldn’t relate.” This lack of representation had Shack questioning his own ability to fit in as well. He noted:

At college, I just felt out of whack. I couldn't, I had this one class, oral communications, I couldn't even really excel because I mean, I ain't been around this amount of people. You feel what I'm saying, and then let alone it's white people, and then let alone it's a mixed crowd, it was separated.

Shack further discussed how his OHC experiences, discussed previously in this chapter, also impacted feelings of social awkwardness during his postsecondary education experience. He said:

I ain't go to school with girls. If I did go to school with girls, they was in they own classroom where you might pass them in the hall or something like that, but you really couldn't even look at them. So, going to college and then you're around all these men, you seeing all these beautiful women, and in your mind you're saying everything you want to say, but when it's the time, it's like you ain't got no social skills and I didn't feel in place.

Shack's OHC experience was marked by his description of the practice of gender segregation while in care. He felt that he did not have the skills necessary to effectively communicate with peers, especially females. He reported a lack of normal, age-appropriate interaction between male and females while in OHC, relating it to his feelings of isolation, awkwardness and fear during his postsecondary experience. He explained:

Not being able to identify with nobody you around. When you think of college, freshman in college at a university, okay you got a group of people coming in. Like man, Joe, I went to such and such, my prom this year was such and such, or my last year of high school we did such and such, it was like this. Man, I can't believe I'm here now and starting a new journey. And then you sit there and it's your turn and shit, where you from? You don't even know what to say. Well shit, I'm from Chicago, or you don't even know to say, well shit I'm from the [OHC], or I'm from [town OHC is located in].

Shack felt that his college experience “sucked,” as did his OHC experience. He reflected collectively on the two periods of his life, saying:

It's like, damn you talking about a prom and then you sit there and you be like, what the hell is a prom? Like I said, as I get older, you realize more and more stuff, it's like dang man, you missed out on this, that, and that. And then sometimes it just makes you think, like would an individual been better off left where they was at, or would an individual been better off going to pay they debt to society whatever way they had to go pay it, versus going someplace and being stripped of pretty much who you are and trying to turn you into who they want you to be. My college experience, it sucked. That's why I left and I went back home, because it wasn't like the stuff I was seeing around me.

Doug also spoke of a sense of isolation but found comfort in his teammates. Reflecting on his experiences, Doug stated:

I went to a black school so, I didn't necessarily feel like racial tension. It was more about the haves and the have-nots. And coming from where, I came from I was a have-nots, you know what I'm saying. But, I know one thing I wasn't around that bitch getting a financial aid check (laughs)... I remember being in orientation and everyone acted like they knew each other already, like they came to school together from high school and

already had a connection. I aint have none of that. Tell you the truth. I aint gone lie. I was scared as hell for the first week or so but, I found connection with a few dudes on the basketball team and of course the ladies.

Though Doug did feel a sense of initial isolation due to his perceptions of his socio-economic status, it did not seem to impact his overall experience. He said: "I wouldn't change nothing I did or didn't do. It was fun while it lasted, everything comes with some consequence. That's what happen when you go to college. At least I could say I went and I got that experience. A lot of folks don't have that." Like Shack, Doug also experienced gender segregation while in OHC, but he did not see this experience as being adverse to his social interactions with his female counterparts. His connection with other student-athletes helped provide some level of comfort.

Jose, who attended an HBCU, described his initial experience on campus as "an exciting time." He felt connected, and as a student-athlete on a basketball scholarship, he felt well received. He described:

So, while I was on scholarship I really didn't have to do anything. Everything was catered except for like my toiletries and everything else. I had my schedule made out for me. Got up early in the morning, like six o'clock in the morning, go to basketball practice. Come back, shower. You know, go to breakfast. Then from there I would go to my first couple of classes. Come back, go back to practice. So, the first month was like that. You know, practice and then school. Practice, school, and then the rest of the day was mine, like after five or six o'clock.

These feelings of comfort changed to feelings of awkwardness the day he lost his scholarship, he recollected:

I was at a basketball practice one day and the coach ran us like dogs. I remember we woke up at 5.30 in the morning, we ran till like seven and practice was over. And he came back to practice like at 12 o'clock. And prior to this, this was like November, I went home because my little brother had got shot. So, coming back to school, you know, we had the first couple of games and went through that. And then I had the altercation with my prior basketball coach and living father, as I would say. The person I lived with for most of my life. And that day, after practice, around 12.30 practice, before practice came he asked me to urinate in a cup. So, me being me, I didn't know no better. I just went and

urinated in the cup, which was a drug test. So that day during practice he ran us like dogs. I can remember he was like, oh, what was- you know, what's our motto? And, you know, it was one team, one sound. You know, one movement. We move as a family. And he said so what's the word if one of the guys get caught smoking? And I was the first one to speak up. I was like, man, you kicked off the team. You lose your scholarship, there's everything's gone. There's no second chances. So, he said, and he asked it again. And I was the first one to answer it. And so he pointed me out in front of everybody and he said so why did you come back dirty for marijuana? And I said what? And he said yeah. And me being me, I said, man, you know, I've been smoking all my life. I've never had a problem with smoking weed, you know? And- So I lost my scholarship. They took everything away. They didn't pay the tuition for that semester. So, I had, man, that's when reality really, really set in for me. I didn't know how to take care of financials and that's actually when I got my job. Because I had to pay to be there. You know, I had to pay for my books which came out to like almost a thousand dollars at the time. 'Cause I was taking seven classes so, you know, each book is like \$200. And I had to check out again, teach to them and all, which was, you know, I even called because I was lost. I even called back to (Staff) and I asked him, I said what am I ... You know, he's like just sign the papers. And, yeah, I signed the papers away which was one of my worst mistakes because I ended up, after the Christmas break, I left. I didn't come back to school.

The loss of his athletic scholarship due to substance abuse significantly impacted his postsecondary education experience and contributed to his feelings of awkwardness. Those feelings, in turn, led to isolation as his status changed from scholarship recipient to custodian at the same school. Not only did his status change at school, it also negatively impacted his relationships with his family and with the staff who supported him at his OHC facility. Jose did not return to school after his first semester. He said:

Yeah, and the school didn't even ... The classes weren't even that much money so that was ... But I also paid for my living, my dorm. It was kind of crazy. And then I had to start work and I became a custodial maintenance worker, which is a janitor in the school. And I stayed for like a month. And it was a struggle, like I started to miss classes because I couldn't keep up with the schedule which meant I had to work. And come back and still work and, you know, I had to find ways. And like I had a tutor, I lost a tutor, because it was given to me because I was playing basketball. So, I had to start learning how to research and was hard.

**Experiencing stereotypes, prejudice and bias.** Zika, who was a student-athlete at a predominantly white state university, did not recall feelings of isolation, awkwardness or fear.

He shared about having to deal with what he believed to be racial stereotyping that had an effect on his decision not to pick-up a minor.

I figured out real quick how they had us all pegged. The whole team took Africana because it was an easy A but, must of the black dudes either majored or minored in Africana Studies, whether they wanted to or not. When they did the schedules, it was just one of those classes that everybody automatically took. So, I brought it up and everybody- even the blacks- was like “here he go” cus, I’ve always been interested in my heritage and history but, that right there made me not want to minor in it. I had already made up my mind about majoring in Criminology but, from that point there, I knew for damn show I wasn’t going to minor in it.

Zika felt that black athletes were influenced to minor or major in Africana studies. His experience is consistent with experiences confirmed and documented of other student-athletes at other colleges and universities in the United States. The ability to recognize this pattern while an undergraduate student athlete, is an indication of Zika’s individual system of social capital, a concept that is discussed in Chapter 5. Zika also shared that in addition to racial stereotyping, he endured the “dumb jock” reputation, even though there was no basis for that assessment. He shared:

I wasn’t a straight A student by any means. I was the student who solidly bordered on a B and C. Which was slightly above average. I don’t know why they tried to play me like that but, I took it. I mean I earned my degree but, I took all the unnecessary White guilt they threw my way like bet.

When asked to clarify his meaning by the phrase “unnecessary white guilt,” Zika clarified: “You know all of the tutoring programs, the booster club donations, this black student initiative and that one. You know white people trying to right their wrongs.”

Paris also reported not necessarily feeling alone or afraid during her postsecondary education experience. She reporting frequent difficulties in her interpersonal and academic interactions with peers and faculty while attending a predominately white state institution. She shared her approach to managing relationships with both white faculty and students:

Once I got to [postsecondary education], I avoided all negative comments and connotations like the plague. I refused. Even though I was gay and out, I was still black, and I was very mindful of that in the space I was in. I didn't want to be perceived as being just the average flamboyant gay guy on campus. You don't want to carry on that way, so I'd steer away from using slang like during my work study, I didn't do that do-rag, pants sagging shit. I'd look presentable at all times, dressed to the tee. When I say presentable, I'm talking in terms of what the white folks would call presentable.

Justice felt overwhelmed by experiences of racism while pursuing postsecondary education. These experiences, coupled with the fact that he spent most of his time playing basketball, sleeping and not attending class, impacted his decision to leave the Christian college he attended. He said, "Man, I got tired of waking up at those guys' time. You know what I'm saying? I'm catching up on sleep." He described being on campus and the occurrence of a specific incident:

I was chilling. I don't even lie. And just laughing and kicking it with the basketball players and some of the girls. But it still ... there was an overwhelming number of Caucasian people there. You know, so when I was there I had some friends there. I had a couple girls I remember being at William's Baptist. It was cool, the couple girls that went there. They was like, "Man I work at Subway. Come down there." This is one of the experience that I had that I will never forget being in Arkansas. But I remember her telling me, "Yo, you should come down there." One of them worked at the movie theater in Jonesboro. So I'm driving around.

I'm kicking it like I'm ... I ain't at [OHC] even though I wanted to drive back to Chicago. Just really don't know the way right now you know what I'm saying? It's like forget about it. I'm in my little world. I kind of got used to being around the people out there because I knew you aren't going to see many of me. So, one of my friends at school, I remember her telling me "Come out to Subway and get some food. Like we college students. We ain't got money." You know, we eating cafeteria food. So, I remember her like ... I had this one kid that was with me that was at [OHC] too. His name was Rivet. I think Rivet was going to [postsecondary education] with me too. Thinking about it, he was. Because he was like 19 and I was 18.

I remember Rivet being from Chicago kind of cock strong but was the complete opposite of what he looked. He had no hardness about himself. I remember us going up to Subway one night ... She like, "Oh, hey Justice." And like, "What you want?" And I'm like, "Okay, I want to try this. I want to try that." Subway wasn't open when I left Chicago. So it was like, "Okay while I'm here. Cool. I tasted it while I was at the ranch. And I liked it." Come up there and it's free too. So come up there and get the food. I remember like there was these two guys in a pickup truck. These army recruiting guys. I remember them

pushing the window open and was like, "You going to fucking serve that nigger?" They was already in the drive through. But when I walked in she immediately was like, "What you want?" Or whatever. She was like, "Y'all can hold on" or whatever, like, "Hold on guys" and they was like, "You going to serve that fucking nigger before you serve us?" I remember looking like, "What?" Like, "What did you just say?" So I'm like looking at Rivet like, "I know this motherfucker." She was like, "Sir, you can go to another restaurant if you're going to be disrespectful like that." He was like, "No. Fuck that. Fuck you serving niggers." So she served me. She made my food. Me and my guy food. We go tot eh car. They still in the drive through. By the time I get to my car I see her walking over to the window to help them. They jump out the truck they like, "Fuck you nigger." I remember talking to them like inside the restaurant when they was like, "Fuck you." I'm like, "Fuck you bitch." Like, "Who you talking to?" I don't even care. Like I will fight both you motherfuckers and whatever. Rivet standing there scared as fuck.

I'm just like, "If these motherfuckers walk up on me when I put my food up I'm fixing to fight both of them." Like I don't even give a fuck. I'm like, "You better roll." So I'm walking up to my car. They jump out the truck and run towards me. One of them had like a beer can in his hand. A full beer and I remember like he slung it so hard it moving so fast it skinned my ear. Like cut my ear. That's how like, if I wouldn't have moved that would have got me good. Probably knocked me, you know what I'm saying?

So when the beer missed both of them walk up like towards me. Now I start walking up towards them and I hit one of them in the nose. The other one tried to swing. Hit the other one in the nose. Both of them fall. Fall back, nose bloody. They jump up. I'm knowing like, being in Arkansas man they got gun racks. You know what I'm saying? Let's skedaddle real quick. Like, let's roll. Me and Rivet get in the car. This whole time I'm looking at Rivet. And I'm just like in my head like, "I can't wait till I get out this car I'm fixing to slap the shit out of his ass for real." That's what I'm saying my head. I'm like, "Dog you didn't flinch did you?" He was like, "Man, I don't ... dudes like that." I'm just like, "Man, you got to have some sort of pride man. Be a fucking man. I'm fighting this is some race shit right here dog. This ain't no these some regular motherfuckers just coming up talking shit. This is got more to do with our skin color dog. And I understand. I get where we at but if you approach me, I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight you till we can't fight no more." So we get back to the school. I remember getting out, getting my food. And he got out. I walked right around to the side when he got out I'm like, "Dude" smacked the shit out of him. He was just like, "Man, I'm black man." I'm just like, "Man, don't." I'm like, "Dog, I just lost all respect for you. You run around here looking like you could lift a house but you let small fuckers like this come up dog. We supposed to have been stomping them motherfuckers out. I hit both of them. They didn't get a hit on me. I got to put them both backwards and then get up out of there because I'm worried about us getting shot." You know what I'm saying?

When asked about the frequency of these events during his time at PSE, he responded by saying:

Shit like that happened a lot in [name of the town in which postsecondary institution is located], not necessarily on campus but, definitely in the town. Oh yeah. You definitely felt the racism. You saw it. You know what I'm saying. Fortunately, I was cool with some of the white families out there. I was messing with a bunch of the white girls out there once I graduated. So having to deal with that. Them experiences man, it ... that fight taught me to understand that you going to have to conduct yourself in a different element where you outnumbered. You understand?

**Connection with others.** All six participants in this study commented on their connections with others. Justice noted an experience of being involved in a racially motivated fight and the impact the incident had on his decision to leave school. Jose felt that he had strong connections when he initially arrived and discussed how losing his scholarship impacted his relationships with peers, with staff members in OHC, and with his family back home. Shack reported, as did others, that he did not feel he was adequately prepared to socially interact in the postsecondary education setting.

On the other hand, Paris reported feeling a sense of relief, and shared her strategies for ignoring negativity related to her sexuality and racial identity. Zika and Doug were more pragmatic about their experiences, seeming to take the good with the bad and making the most out of the experiences. The impact of these connections with others during the transition from OHC to postsecondary education emerged through analysis of the qualitative data.

As discussed in the representation of this theme and the related sub-themes, it was revealed through the research that postsecondary education experience was important to understanding the lived experience of these African American male students as they transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. The participants described motivations for attending postsecondary education, and connections with others during their experience at their institution of choice.



#### **Theme 4: Importance of Relationships**

All six participants shared comments regarding the importance of relationships and the impact that relationships had on their decisions to enroll, persist, or end postsecondary education. They shared strengths and weaknesses and provided statements of significance on two distinct levels: (a) relationships with family, and (b) social relationships.

**Relationships with family.** Five of the six participants made references to the important roles that their families played in their decisions to enroll in postsecondary education. For Jose, whose tenure of eight years at a single OHC facility was the longest stay among the six participants, staff at the facility took the place of his family. He commented on a verbal confrontation that he had with a staff member who he identified as his “father:”

So, I didn't know what it was to get drug tested. So, they knew that. So, I ended up having (Staff), which was my head basketball coach also, and he was also the director of the placement that I was in. So, he came up to visit me and he had words and he didn't like how I was living, and he didn't think the way I was living was the right way. And I was more to the fact of, well, I mean, I have to make it on my own. There's nobody here to show me anything.

This man had multiple roles in Jose’s life. He was his pastor, basketball coach and placement director. After Jose lost his scholarship, he also lost this relationship. He commented on rebuilding the relationship with his family after being away for more than a decade in OHC and postsecondary education, saying, “It was hard, man. I missed out on a lot. Birthdays, holidays all of that.”

Shack and Doug indicated that their families had no impact on their decisions to enroll in postsecondary education. Shack said:

I felt like I didn’t really have no family. I mean when I left [postsecondary education] I went back to Chicago and I stayed with like my step-grandmother for a while but that didn’t work out because I kept getting into it with her kids. Met a few women that helped me out. Shit. But once I left [postsecondary education], I never really like connected with no family. I started my own family.

Doug said:

I still got a brother in Chicago that I talk to from time to time but, he wasn't really involved in my life like that, not enough to influence like my path or nothing like that. I'm going back to finish my bachelor's degree because that's something I want to do but, Ima do it when I get ready. I might be a 50-year-old man in that joint but one day.

Zika felt that his relationship with his family suffered minimally as a result of his time in OHC and in secondary education and indicated that his relationship with his family provided him with the support and confidence he needed to persist. He said:

I mean the whole purpose of going to the [OHC] was for it to be an intervention, how do you suppose that you could do some intervention with a child, who for the most part, not a Christian and don't believe in half the shit yall promoting because yall don't live by it and without they goddam family? How do you do it, Marvin? Family therapy? You in a Christian boarding school on a hill 500 miles away with an old rugged cross singing hymns in chapel three days a week. I wasn't real life homie. My relationship with my folks got stronger though, especially when I was in school. They was all proud of me and would come down and watch me play. My mama, grandma, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews all remember that. They still real proud.

Paris felt that her family supported throughout OHC and through her postsecondary education time. She reflected:

My family supported me or whatever but, I had to have a real good sit down with my mom because I felt like she didn't have to send me off like that. But, at the same time I understood where she was coming from and I love her for that to this day. When I was in school didn't nobody like come down there to check on me but, I was good honey. You hear me. Then my brother got sick, that's when I decided to come on back up here to be closer because my grandma was already sick and you know it was just best for me - well for all of us, for me to come back to Chicago.

**Social relationships.** Throughout the chapter, significant statements from all six participants revealed that social relationships were important factors in their decisions to enroll and persist in postsecondary education. Two participants, Shack and Justice, did not feel that their OHC experience adequately prepared them for postsecondary education. Paris made a similar statement, saying: "I had to reprogram myself for everyday interactions." She also

reported feeling liberated and accepted as herself, saying that she felt supported by friends that she made while in postsecondary education. She said that while she did not persist at her initial postsecondary institution, she developed lasting social relationships that remain important to her today. She explained:

Like I said earlier my friend was going back and forth and I knew I wanted better. I knew they had a connection at [postsecondary education]. I didn't know what, I didn't know how, I didn't know what, but I knew the [OHC] had connections. I used those connections to benefit myself at that moment. I entered Arkansas State as a freshman. I wanted to do everything. My best friend was an AKA. I had a lot of good moments. I had a lot of really good moments. I don't know. What do you want to know about Arkansas State? I had a group of people around me that were supportive, that wanted my light to shine bright, sexually, mentally, physically. It was ... be you, be your authentic self. Be you. I had lots of friends around. I still to this day keep in touch with some of them.

Jose revealed feelings of shame that impacted his social relationships. Once he lost his scholarship, the embarrassment caused him to withdraw. He stated:

Man, I went from playing ball, hooping with the team, practice, busy all the time to trying not to be seen. From athlete to custodian cleaning the buildings. And, it didn't take long. I really didn't have time to like meet anybody.

Doug specifically described social relationships that he developed with teammates prior to arriving at postsecondary education. He said:

I like already knew the entire basketball team. That's one thing the [OHC] did do well, they had a great athletics program and they kept us up there at camps. All kinds of camps: basketball, football, soccer. Most of the dudes from [OHC] used to stay together, get on the same teams, try to dominate the camp and stuff like that. I always got on a team where I was the only one from the [OHC], you know and you meet people like that. Even though I did not go to the same college where all the camps were, I still recognized a lot of the same people who just ended up going to the same school as me.

Exercising his individualized system of social capital, Doug realized the benefit of building his network prior to his postsecondary experience. Commenting on continued social relationships from his OHC and postsecondary experiences, Doug laughed and said: "I'm not good at keeping up with people but, there's a few that I just can't seem to get rid of."

Zika also commented on lasting social relationships from his postsecondary experience, saying “I’m still friends with a lot of people from [postsecondary education]. My first baby mama is from down there so, I go down there a lot, I’m proud alumni, brother!” Zika proudly showed his alumni sticker, an artifact that attested to his continued relationship with his alma mater.

### **Theme Five: Impact on Academic Performance**

The final theme that emerged from descriptions provided by study participants were the participants’ perceptions of the impact their out-of-home care made on their academic performance during postsecondary education. Only one of the six participants persisted through the postsecondary experience to obtain a bachelor’s degree. This same participant also earned a master’s degree. Zika discussed his perceptions of the impact OHC had on his academic performance during his postsecondary experience:

Academically, I wasn’t the brightest but, I was far from dull from a long shot. It was like that before I even got to the (OHC). Like I said, they helped me slow my lil ass down to focus. But, college was all me homie. I can’t give that to no one. I graduated with a 2.7 and I was satisfied. It was a little harder to get in grad school but, I got in and completed that too with a 3.7. I ain’t done yet either.

Zika’s experience of academic success gave him a sense of confidence that was not shared by other participants in the study. He is currently considering pursuit of a second master’s degree in educational psychology.

Paris did not persist at the initial postsecondary institution in which she enrolled, but continued her experience at other institutions. Reflecting on the experience, she stated:

The university did everything they were supposed to do. That's that. Yeah, they did, they played their role. They were there to educate me and to open my mind to the world and they did that. They did that. Now everything else, that was on me and life. It was on me and life. I came home, took care of my family and got a CNA license.

Paris did not acknowledge the role that her OHC experience played in her academic performance, but she praised the university and took ownership for the decision to end her initial experience.

Jose and Justice spent less than a full academic year in their respective programs. Both of these participants revealed traumas that impacted their decisions not to persist – in Jose’s case, a lost scholarship, and in Justice’s case, a racially motivated fight. They were unable to articulate details of their academic performance.

Shack described his academic performance as poor. He recalled his rocky start, which for him, defined his experience. He said:

Man. Okay. On campus, first semester, well first off, I had went to my first day of class, didn't have a book, didn't have nothing. Like I said, I went to the acceptance committee, after the acceptance committee I was taken to a dorm room, I was showed a dorm. I guess that would be my living quarters. And then I remember getting a folder and then the folder had a bunch of different papers in it and stuff like that, you know, and I remember sitting down and looking through the stuff. I remember I was having these little, at the time I thought they was like coupons, you feel what I'm saying, I thought they was like a coupon, but it wasn't explained to me that I get a syllabus.

I ain't even know what a syllabus was, you know, I learned what a syllabus was my first day of class when I showed up with no books. Because each professor would give whatever lesson they teaching would have a syllabus, and that syllabus is everything you going to cover in that semester. So, you can choose to either fall behind on the syllabus or you can choose to stay ahead on the syllabus, but that's what the purpose of them giving you this is. Now, I didn't know that, so like I said, I go to my first day of class. It was an embarrassment pretty much. I was embarrassed, because I was a financial aid student and that was brought up in front of the class, like I can't remember the teacher, it was a female, she was actually one of the ladies who was at the acceptance committee. She was an English, she did English, and she also had some intermediate classes that she did also, but I know she was an English professor. That was her main title. And she kind of like put me on blast. You know, I'm a financial aid student, why you ain't got books? That's all provided for you, this, that, and the third, blasé, blasé, so I wind up leaving that class that day early. I had got a visit later on that day by one of the, I guess he was a social worker that used to work at the ranch. He came up to the school and he saw me or whatever.

He laid up here and went over my little paper work and stuff and that's when he found my little, when I told you I thought they was coupons, they were actually coupons, but what

they were used for, the purpose of them was I go to the campus book store and that's what I use to get all my book supplies, my pens, all, they was vouchers pretty much. And like I said, it wasn't explained to me, so I didn't know. Then finally I get that part figured out. Man, that first semester was just, like I said man, it was just like learning how to walk all over again.

Doug believed that the OHC experience prepared him academically, since he never considered going to college before attending OHC. He said, "All I remember is that I was passing and I making them credits!" adding, "I was so far behind when I got to the (OHC) and from there to college. They fucked me up in some ways but, they taught me how to read and multiply. I'm not totally fucked up from placement."

Doug did not persist at the postsecondary institution he attended initially, but continued his postsecondary training to become a truck-driver. He described what it means to be an owner-operator and how all of his experiences are used in life performance.

This fifth theme revealed that the out-of-home care experience had a significant impact on the academic performance of these African American men who transitioned from OHC to postsecondary education. Participants in this study acknowledged that their perceptions of academic performance described the essence of their lived experience.

### **Summary of Themes**

Field research revealed that significant life circumstances experienced by African American males from inner-city neighborhoods are precursors to placement in out-of-home care. These life events impacted the participants' early views and attitudes about education, which, in turn, had an effect on their early academic performance. The participants' perceptions of their OHC experiences included perceptions of the quality of the care they received, the impact of the OHC intervention on their attitudes about education, and the degree to which they believed that OHC prepared them for postsecondary education.

The postsecondary educational experience itself was central in this study. Participants shared their motivations for attending and persisting in postsecondary education and also their motivations for not persisting through to completion of their degrees. For some of the participants in this study, the postsecondary experience was marked by feelings of isolation, awkwardness, and fear, and involved stereotypes, prejudice and bias.

The connection with others during the postsecondary experience was identified as significant for understanding the experiences from the perspectives of the participants. The importance of relationships also emerged as a primary theme at two distinct levels: (a) relationships with family, and (b) social relationships. Collectively, the themes and sub themes that emerged described the essence of the lived experiences of transitioning from OHC to postsecondary education for the African American men in this study.

### **Findings**

The findings of this study are based on themes revealed through research and include an interpretation of each finding. Three findings have been identified and will be discussed as they relate to relevant literature and the research questions which guided this study. The findings were: 1) experience of placement in OHC impacts the experience of transition to PSE, 2) individualized systems of capital are used during the transition from OHC to PSE and 3) Positive engagement is essential to positive outcomes for African American males who transition from OHC to PSE. The findings recorded here will set the framework for the recommendations discussed in chapter five. Figure 4.3 provides a visual representation of the findings that have emerged through research.

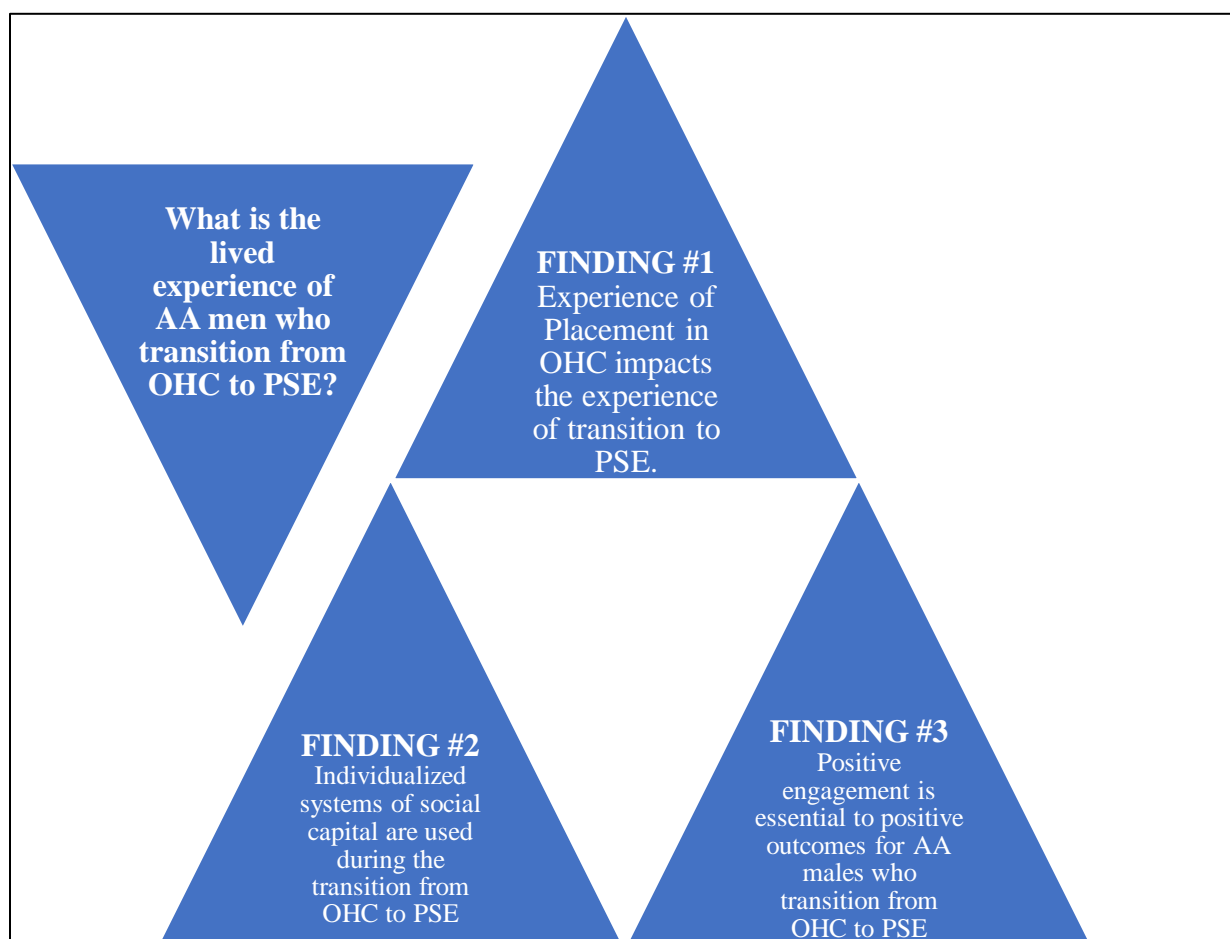


Figure 2. Visual representation of the research findings

### **Finding 1: The Experience of Placement in OHC Impacts the Postsecondary Experience**

The participants in this study noted that their out-of-home placement experiences were influential in their transitions to postsecondary education. During the interviews, most participants shared that placement in OHC affected their views on education, helped to improve academic performance, and motivated them to enroll in postsecondary education. Five of the six participants in the study did not persist to completion of their undergraduate degree. These participants also discussed reasons for not persisting through to graduation.



## **Finding 2: Individualized Systems of Social Capital are Accessed During Transition**

Though the phenomenon of transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary education was an experience common to six participants, each participant's individualized system of social capital was revealed in their descriptions of their particular experience. All participants in this study expressed feelings of social exclusion, with several of them expressing feelings of social exclusion upon being placed in OHC. Some characterized their OHC placement experience as being "taken away" from society. Raffo and Reeves (2010) proposed a theoretical perspective of individualized systems of social capital to explain the relationship between the agency exercised by young people who are socially excluded and the contributions made by social structures in shaping their school-to-work transitions. As discussed in Chapter 2, this perspective provided a theoretical lens for this present study. Using this perspective, the researcher recognized that such systems of social relations both supported and constrained individual actions and outcomes. In other words, while the OHC experience impacted the experience of transition from OHC to postsecondary education, the African American male participants in this study had some control over their own development and over their own change processes. For each participant, the extent of individual development and change was dependent on the way the individualized system of social capital evolved. The evolution of the individualized systems of social capital for the participants in this study was conditioned by the material and symbolic resources available to their individual networks.

Using the theoretical perspective of individualized systems of social capital in this study, data analysis revealed that each of the participants exercised some level of agency in his or her own development and growth during the OHC experience and throughout the transition to postsecondary education. Different typologies of weak, strong, changing and fluid individualized

systems of social capital were identified (see and are explored here in relation to the empirical data and a range of theoretical perspectives used by Raffo and Reeves (2010).

Table 4.  
Individualized Systems of Social Capital

Individualized Systems of Social Capital for African American Males Who Transition From Out-of-Home Care to Postsecondary Education		
Category	Description	Participant
<b>Weak</b> system of social capital	A network of social relations that is relatively small, provides little practical informal knowledge through the interactions of that network, is often not practice driven, and has little access to material and symbolic resources, resulting in a relatively passive/ static articulation of individual change and development.	Shack Doug
<b>Strong</b> system of social capital	Social capital derived from a concentration of opportunities for developing informal and practical knowledge and understanding. Although external constraints impact heavily on their lives, there is an indication that they have developed survival strategies and approaches to help them combat the potential of slipping into an underclass of dependency and hopelessness	Zika
<b>Changing</b> system of social capital	Repetitive pattern of social reproduction created within particular, individualized social network, and similarities between earlier school transition and present predicament. Absence of other significant external influences results in narrow horizons and provides evidence of the constraining and structuring effects of individualized networks.	Jose Justice
<b>Fluid</b> system of social capital	Exhibits a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and the changing biography of the young person. Social capital is the result of a diversity of individuals, reflective of a wide range of relationships developed in a number of different contexts, and providing a broad base of constantly updated reflexive knowledge	Paris
<i>Note.</i> Individualized systems of social capital for African American males who transition from OHC to postsecondary education. From “Youth Transitions and Social Exclusion: Developments in Social Capital Theory,” by C. Raffo, and M. Reeves, 2000, <i>Journal of Youth Studies</i> , 3(2), 147-166.		

**Weak systems of social capital.** Analysis of descriptions provided by two of the six participants in this study revealed the presence of a weak system of social capital during the time of the transition from OHC to PSE. Weak systems of social capital are characterized by Raffo and Reeves (2000) as “a network of social relations that is relatively small, provides little practical informal knowledge through the interactions of that network, is often not practice driven, and has little access to material and symbolic resources, resulting in a relatively passive/static articulation of individual change and development” (p. 156)

Both Shack and Doug entered OHC after the deaths of their primary caregivers and when they did not find other eligible family members to provide primary care. Their network of social relations was small at the time of their admission into OHC. During their transition from OHC to postsecondary education, they reported minimal access to material resources. Symbolic resources were also unavailable. This resulted in their inability to persist in their initial postsecondary educational setting.

**Strong systems of social capital.** One participant in this study provided statements that depicted a strong system of social capital. According to Raffo and Reeves (2000), strong systems of social capital are “derived from a concentration of opportunities for developing informal and practical knowledge and understanding. Although external constraints impact heavily on their lives, there is an indication that they have developed survival strategies and approaches to help them combat the potential of slipping into an underclass of dependency and hopelessness” (p. 158).

Zika was the only participant in this study to persist through the transition from OHC to postsecondary education, ultimately graduating with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. Zika took advantage of a concentration of opportunities for developing his practical knowledge base, which

impacted his decision to enroll and persist in postsecondary education. This included his involvement with college athletics and the development and maintenance of social relationships. Although Zika described thoughts and feelings regarding his OHC experience and the transition to postsecondary education that were similar to those of other participants in this study, his successful completion of his degree program indicated that Zika, despite precursors to OHC placement and despite the OHC experience itself, had developed survival strategies and approaches that enabled him to persist in postsecondary education.

**Changing systems of social capital.** Qualitative data analysis revealed a changing system of social capital for two of the six participants in this study. These participants individually expressed ideas that reflected Raffo and Reeves' (2000) description of this state as characterized by a "repetitive pattern of social reproduction created within particular, individualized social network, and similarities between earlier school transition and present predicament. Absence of other significant external influences results in narrow horizons and provides evidence of the constraining and structuring effects of individualized networks" (p 161).

Jose depicted a pattern of social reproduction during his transition from OHC to postsecondary education. Arriving at college on a basketball scholarship provided a sense of confidence that was short lived when he lost the scholarship due to substance abuse. In an attempt to remain enrolled, despite the loss of his scholarship and identity as a student athlete, he took on the position as custodian at the same institution in which he had once played basketball on scholarship. He described feeling as if he had also lost his relationship with a key staff person at the OHC facility. The absence of significant external influences to persist resulted in his return to Chicago and to the same quality of life that he had before he was placed in OHC.

The constraining and structuring effects of a changing system of social capital was also depicted in Justice's contributions to this research. His experience of an event that could be described as a race fight significantly impacted his decision to persist at his initial place of enrollment. The absence of other significant external influences, such as those that could have been found through association with other African American males on campus, resulted in his decision not to persist, narrowing his horizon.

**Fluid systems of social capital.** One of the six participants in this study described a fluid system of social capital. According to Raffo and Reeves (2010), a young person with a fluid system of social capital “exhibits a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and the changing biography of the young person. Social capital is the result of a diversity of individuals, reflective of a wide range of relationships developed in a number of different contexts and providing a broad base of constantly updated reflexive knowledge” (p. 162)

Paris was the only participant in this study who was male at the time of OHC placement, but identified as a transgender woman later. Paris described being openly gay and exhibited a significant degree of adaptation throughout the OHC experience and the transition to postsecondary education. Analysis of significant statements provided by Paris revealed that her system of social capital was the result of a reflective and wide-ranging system of relationships. These relationships were developed in the context of OHC, beginning with a relationship she formed with a particular staff member who intervened during a point in life when Paris was considering committing suicide, and continuing in the new relationships she developed while enrolled in college.

The phenomenon of transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary education is impacted by the agency of the individual participants in this study. All participants in this study experienced OHC, and all experienced a transition from OHC to postsecondary education. However, the transition to postsecondary education was experienced differently by each participant and was moderated by each participant's individualized system of social capital.

### **Finding 3: Positive Engagement is Essential to Positive Outcomes for African American Males**

Throughout the interviews, participants identified processes and practices that they felt assisted in the development of their academic attitudes and motivations to attend postsecondary education. Participants also provided significant statements about the importance of their connections with others and the value they placed on relationships during all stages of the process – prior to their placement in OHC, during placement, and after provision of the intervention.

Nearly all the participants in this study shared about the precursors to out-of-home care, about their out-of-home care experiences, and about how these experiences impacted their motivations for attending postsecondary education. The positive educational experiences during placement in OHC were essential to the participants' ability to: (a) benefit from academic remediation, (b) complete high school, and (c) enroll in postsecondary education. The ability to persist in postsecondary education toward the completion of an undergraduate degree was limited for five of the six participants in this study. Analysis of the descriptions provided by the participants in this study revealed that these positive interactions did not continue as they moved into postsecondary education. As a result, one in six of the African American males in this study went on to graduate from postsecondary education institutions. Positive academic and social

engagement of African American males throughout their educational lives is essential to their subsequent positive outcomes both in care and out of care.

### **Summary**

Five primary themes and their related sub themes emerged from the researcher's triangulation of interviews, observations and field notes. The themes were: (a) precursors to placement in out-of-home care, (b) the experience of placement in out-of-home care, (c) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (d) importance of relationships, and (e) impact on academic performance. From these themes, three findings were identified and discussed in relation to previous research: (a) experience of placement in OHC impacts the experience of transition to postsecondary education, (b) individualized systems of capital are used during the transition from OHC to postsecondary education, and (c) positive engagement is essential to positive outcomes for African American males who transition from OHC to postsecondary education. The findings and interpretations presented here inform the conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Although extensive research exists on African American males, out-of-home care, and postsecondary education, little is known about the essence of the lived experiences of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary educational institutions. The purpose of the present study was to explore variables related to the successful transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education for African American males. Few studies have qualitatively explored the internal and external factors that promote their successful transition into adult roles. In this study, the researcher sought to (a) understand the lived experiences of African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to institutions of higher education, and (b) uncover the central meanings and the essence of their transitions, as well as those factors, both internal and external, that contributed to their experiences.

Through a review of existing literature and through analysis of the data, the researcher sought to gain an understanding of the essence of the lived experience of the African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. The data secured through interviews were further clarified with a review of significant statements provided by the participants, as well as reflections and observations recorded in the researcher's field journal. A thorough qualitative analysis of the data resulted in the discovery of trends and patterns presented as primary themes and sub themes substantiated by the voices of the participants. The primary themes that emerged included: (a) precursors to placement in out-of-home care, (b) the experience of placement in out-of-home care, (c) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (d) the importance of relationships, and (e) impact on academic performance.



In light of recent existing research, the themes were considered. Three findings emerged that supported and countered existing research. The three findings were that: (a) experience of placement in OHC impacts the experience of transition to postsecondary education, (b) individualized systems of capital are used during the transition from OHC to postsecondary education, and (c) positive engagement is essential to positive outcomes for African American males who transition from OHC to postsecondary education. The consideration of the themes, findings and interpretations inform the conclusions and recommendations offered in this final chapter.

This chapter offers conclusions to the two research questions that formed the foundation of this study.

1. What is it like to transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education?
2. What are the central meanings – in other words, the essence – of the transition, and what are the factors, both internal and external, that contributed to the experience?

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the conclusions and recommendations specific to practice and future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study and with the researcher's personal reflection.

## **Conclusions**

The so-called achievement gap between African American students and their non-African American counterparts is so disproportionate that it has prompted researchers to study the issue. Previous researchers have contributed to a body of work highlighting the disadvantages of this population and have recommended that specific actions be taken in the form of services, supports and programming for African American males who enroll in postsecondary education. This study sought to invite to the discourse the voices of a specific sub-population of this group that

experienced out-of-home care prior to their enrollment in postsecondary education. Using the counter-storytelling tenet of critical race theory, the researcher sought to understand the essence of the lived experiences of the African American male participants in this study.

**RQ 1: What is it like to transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education?**

**Experience of placement in out-of-home care impacts the experience of transition to post- secondary education.** Presented as the first finding in this study, the African American males who participated in this study described their experiences transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. Some of the participants had multiple OHC and PSE experiences. This study focused on the OHC experience that specifically preceded PSE enrollment. Participants conveyed that the experience of placement in out-of-home care positively impacted their attitudes, beliefs and values about education.

Though participants described developing improved attitudes about education and experienced improved academic performance through their placement in OHC, many believed that they were not adequately prepared for the social demands of postsecondary education. A few participants stated that their motivations to attend school were impacted by external factors such as wanting to please family members or being heavily influenced by OHC provider who in some cases did not involve these young people in planning for their futures. They felt socially excluded in PSE.

During the transition to postsecondary education, the agency exercised by the participants shaped their transition experiences. The postsecondary experience was dependent upon the way individualized systems of social capital evolved for each individual participant, and the way that individualized systems of social capital evolved impacted their decisions to persist in postsecondary education.

**Individualized systems of capital are used during the transition from OHC to postsecondary education.** This study found consistency with the theoretical perspective of individualized systems of social capital proposed by Raffo and Reeves (2010). African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education in this study acknowledges the contribution made by OHC in shaping their motivation to attend and persist in postsecondary education. These individualized systems of social capital were different for each participant.

An individualized system of social capital, according to Raffo and Reeves (2010), “identifies the potential of some control over their development and change but also accepts that the extent to individual development and change is heavily dependent on the way the individualized system of social capital evolves for each individual young person, and that this in turn is conditioned by the material and symbolic resources available to these networks” (p. 147).

The individualized system of social capital for each participant in this study could be located within one of the four typologies identified as weak, strong, changing and fluid. As identified in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, a young person with a weak system of social capital is characterized by “a network of social relations that is relatively small, provides little practical informal knowledge through the interactions of that network, is often not practice driven, and has little access to material and symbolic resources, resulting in a relatively passive/ static articulation of individual change and development” (Raffo and Reeves, 2010, p. 156) The system of social capital depicted by two of the six participants could be characterized as weak.

Two other participants aligned with Raffo and Reeves’ (2010) description of a changing individualized system of social capital – “repetitive patterns of social reproduction created within particular, individualized social network, and similarities between earlier school transition and

present predicament. Absence of other significant external influences results in narrow horizons and provides evidence of the constraining and structuring effects of individualized networks” (p. 161).

One of the six participants in the study exhibited “a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptation in response to changing circumstances and the changing biography of the young person. Social capital [was] the result of a diversity of individuals, reflective of a wide range of relationships developed in a number of different contexts and providing a broad base of constantly updated reflexive knowledge” (Raffo and Reeves, 2010, p. 162). This description fits the characteristics of a fluid individualized system of social capital.

Another one of the six participants showed a strong individualized system of social capital, as described by Raffo and Reeves (2010). This participant’s social capital “derived from a concentration of opportunities for developing informal and practical knowledge and understanding. Although external constraints impact heavily on [his life], there is an indication that (he) developed survival strategies and approaches to help (him) combat the potential of slipping into an underclass of dependency and hopelessness” (Raffo and Reeves, 2010, p. 158).

**Positive engagement is essential to positive outcomes for African American males who transition from OHC to postsecondary education.** Positive engagement was reported to have an impact on participants’ lived experience transitioning from OHC to PSE. Participants in this study related positive academic experiences in OHC to the positive outcome of high school graduation. However, the competencies and confidences they developed did not translate through the experience of transition into postsecondary education. Most participants described themselves as feeling “out of place” and isolated.

It is remarkable that the only participant in this study to persist through the transition to earn an undergraduate degree was also engaged in athletics. Of the six participants in the study, more than half participated were college athletes. These participants reported a more positive experience connecting with others during the transition into postsecondary education. Connection with others was important to all participants in this study, including connections with positive peer and with adults.

**RQ 2: What are the central meanings, the essence, of the transition, and what are those factors, both internal and external, that contributed to the experience?**

The essence of the lived experience of transitioning from OHC to PSE for African American male participants in this study emerged from analysis of descriptions of the experience provided by each participant. The central meanings emerged from the primary themes in this study: (a) precursors to placement in out-of-home care, (b) experiences of placement in out-of-home care, (c) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (d) the importance of relationships, and (e) impact on academic performance.

Precursors to placement in out of home care emerged from descriptions provided by the African American male participants of their life experiences prior to being placed in out-of-home care. The participants described how significant life circumstances had an impact on their attitudes towards education. Two sub themes emerged in their descriptions: (a) multiple paths to out-of-home care, and (b) attitudes about education prior to out-of-home care. The actual placement experience itself also emerged through significant statements provided by the participants.

Each participant identified details that depicted their unique OHC placement experiences. Three sub themes emerged from descriptions provided by the participants: (a) perceptions of

quality of care, (b) impact of placement in out-of-home care on attitudes about education, and (c) preparation for postsecondary education.

The postsecondary educational experience is central to this study of lived experience of African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. The participants had varying postsecondary educational experiences, just as they experienced varying precursors to out-of-home care and varying placement experiences. Similarities and differences experienced among participants were divided into categories that included: (a) motivation to attend/end postsecondary education, (b) feelings of isolation, awkwardness, and fear, (c) experiencing stereotypes, prejudice and bias, and (d) connections with others. The final theme that emerged from descriptions provided by study participants were the participants' perceptions of the impact out-of-home care on academic performance during postsecondary education.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations provided in this section are based on the themes, findings and conclusions of this study. Recommendations are aimed at those who provide out-of-home care at the student affairs administrators who make decisions about enrollment and campus life initiatives. These recommendations are intended to better support African American male students who transition from OHC to postsecondary education. Additional recommendations are also noted for future research.

#### **Recommendations for Providers.**

The study findings highlighted xxx ways that OHC providers of out-of-home care could improve their efforts to address the needs of African American males who transition from OHC to PSE.

**Invest in continued quality improvement.** While participants in this study conveyed the belief that OHC had a positive impact on their attitudes about education, they also shared feelings that they were not adequately prepared for the transition to PSE. Providers of out-of-home care should always seek to improve the quality of service. Continuous quality improvement is defined by Casey Family Programs and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (2005) as “the complete process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions. It relies on an organizational and/or system culture that is proactive and supports continuous learning. Continuous quality improvement is firmly grounded in the overall mission, vision, and values of the agency/system. Perhaps most importantly, it is dependent upon the active inclusion and participation of staff at all levels of the agency/system, children, youth, families, and stakeholders throughout the process” (p. 1). Casey Family Programs and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (2005) provide an online toolkit for providers.

**Implement a system of care principles and values.** A central component of implementing system of care principles and values is the engagement of families as partners in care, which includes facilitating family reunification (Stroul & Friedman, 1986). Participants in this study were placed in out-of-state facilities. They identified the need for continued connection with family while in OHC and, more specifically, noted the services that they were supposed to receive, such as family therapy.

**Engage youth in planning for their own futures.** Implementation of a system of care principles and values also calls for family and youth engagement at all levels in the process of making decisions about their futures and about their treatments while in OHC. In addition to the

individual level, a system of care principles and values calls for family and youth engagement at the program level in the process of making decisions about programming in OHC placements. Family and youth should also be engaged at the systems level in advocating for their needs and for the needs of other young people in similar situations. Also, realize that college is NOT for everyone. Assist young people in the development of their understanding of the diverse range of opportunities available for postsecondary education.

**Implement and use measures to provide planned support throughout the transition from OHC to postsecondary education.** Alexander (2015) identified that 63 percent of OHC facilities surveyed measured experience of care post-discharge. Participants in this study did not receive planned follow-up services but were dependent on the individual connections that they had developed with individual staff members who stayed in contact with the participants once they transitioned to PSE. The practice of implementing measures to capture youth perceptions of OHC experience is important to understanding what works for young people and what could be improved and lead to more positive outcomes. This practice should be coupled with transition planning that is informed by the unique needs of families and guided by the desires of the young person.

### **Recommendations for Higher Education.**

Study findings revealed three strategies that student affairs administrators and practitioners should consider the following when addressing the needs of African American males who transition from OHC to postsecondary education.

**Increase cultural awareness and sensitivity of faculty and staff.** The presence of African American males in the halls of postsecondary institutions provides opportunities to increase the cultural awareness and sensitivity of faculty, staff and administrators in those



institutions. These opportunities to create a culturally diverse, aware and sensitive staff increase the institutions' abilities to assist underrepresented groups with a stronger sense of belonging. Campuses that are already offering these learning opportunities for faculty and staff may see an increase in feelings of comfort, and those feelings may lead to greater levels of persistence through the transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. This could also lead to positive impact on matriculation and graduation rates.

**Consider students arriving from OHC facilities.** Recruiting and enrollment efforts should consider and respond to the unique needs of students who are arriving from OHC facilities. This could be done through the establishment of systems for identifying unique student sub-populations, identifying them for additional support. For participants in this study, assistance above and beyond traditional programming for first-generation college students may be required. Consideration of students arriving from out-of-home care should include: identification of such students, individualized orientation traditions for them, assessment of their social and academic needs, and placement with peer and faculty mentors. It should also include reaching out to non-traditional high schools in recruiting efforts and providing information and resources to increase feelings of connection and identity as an undergraduate prior to arrival on campus.

**Provide opportunities for students to connect and engage.** Social connections are important for African American males who are transitioning from OHC to postsecondary education. Most postsecondary institutions have student life offices that are concerned with the socio-emotional development of students. Please understand that the transition may be considerably more difficult for these students, depending on their individualized systems of social capital. Assist students in identifying their individualized systems of social capital and help them fill in critical elements that may be absent from their network.

## **Recommendations for Future Research.**

It should be expected that African American males will continue to enter PSE with hopes of positive outcomes by way of degree attainment, financial security and promoted status. The data from this study captured the essence of the lived experience of African American men who transitioned from OHC to PSE. The researcher identified four specific opportunities for future research.

1. Future researchers could replicate the current study with African American females who transition from OHC to PSE. This would provide insight on the lived experiences and engage the voices of these individuals in the discourse regarding the need for improving transitions from OHC to PSE.
2. Future studies could make comparative analyses of African American men and non-African American men who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. Such research would identify disparities between these populations.
3. Future researchers could examine the experiences of African American men who transitioned from OHC to postsecondary education and graduated from the postsecondary programs in which they enrolled. This would provide insight into how these men matriculated and how they persisted through transition to graduation.
4. This researcher recommends future research on the difference between members of this subpopulation who attend predominately white institutions v. historically black institutions.

## **Closing Reflections**

As discussed in the introduction to this study, postsecondary education remains increasingly important for young adults. Over the past 20 years, enrollment at postsecondary

educational institutions has increased. The percentage of African American college students in the United States also continue to rise each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Although there has been significant achievement in college enrollment rates among African American students, the college matriculation rate for these students remains below their white counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). African Americans who enroll in postsecondary educational programs were only half as likely to earn a degree as their White counterparts (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

This study aimed to contribute to the literature by bringing forth the voices of these men to uncover the essence of their lived experiences, particularly as they interface with systems not originally designed to serve them. While recent literature has focused on the exit of youths from foster care and on their subsequent educational outcomes, the review of relevant literature revealed no study of the lived experiences of African American males who have transitioned to postsecondary educational institutions from residential care. This current study fills the need for scholarship that focuses on the strengths of individuals from marginalized communities and that integrates their voices and experiences into the epistemology in higher education and social science. From the lived experiences of these young men, we are provided with a deeper understanding of the transition from residential care to postsecondary educational institutions for African American men.

The aims of this study were two-fold. First, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of African American males who transitioned from out-of-home care to postsecondary education. Secondly, the researcher sought to uncover the central meanings – the essence – of their transitions and to identify the factors, both internal and external, that contributed to their experiences. The findings of this research contributed to a better

understanding of resilience and suggested methods for incorporating resilience into programming and practice in order to improve outcomes for African American male students who transition from OHC to postsecondary educational settings.

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## APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692

F: 225.578.5983 [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu)

[lsu.edu/research](http://lsu.edu/research)

### ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

**TO:** Roland Mitchell  
ELRC

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** September 21, 2017

**IRB#** 3918

**RE:** A study of the lived experience of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education

**TITLE:** New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

**Review type:** Full \_\_\_\_\_ Expedited X **Review date:** 9/18/2017

**Risk Factor:** Minimal \_\_\_\_\_ X Uncertain \_\_\_\_\_ Greater Than Minimal \_\_\_\_\_

**Approved** \_\_\_\_\_ X **Disapproved** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval Date:** 9/21/2017 **Approval Expiration Date:** 9/20/2018

**Re-review frequency:** (annual unless otherwise stated)

**Number of subjects approved:** 7

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable)

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

## APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT FORM

### PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT FORM

Participant's Name:

Pseudo:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

---

#### Phase I Interview

Phase I Interview Checklist			
	Introduced to Purpose of Study		Informed of risk and benefits to participants
	Informed of Data collection methods		Informed of limits of confidentiality
	Discussed Criteria for Enrollment		Discussed Rights of Participants
	Discussed Informed Consent		

Verification of Enrollment Criteria	
	Sex: Are you male? Or Where you male at the time of OHC experience?
	Age: Are you over the age of 18 years?
	Race: Are you African American?
	Focus: Have you experienced out-of-home care (OHC)?
	Focus: Did you pursue postsecondary education during or after your OHC experience?

Enrollment Agreement: Would you like to participate in this study?	
	Yes, Verbal agreement to participate obtained
	No, verbal participation to participate was not obtained

Phase II Scheduling			
	Date	Time	Location
Initial Plan			
Alternate			

## **APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

#### **Introductory Statement**

The purpose of this research is to study the phenomenon of transitioning to higher education through the lived experiences and perceptions of African American men who arrived in postsecondary educational institutions from out-of-home care. The data collected will come exclusively from recorded interview sessions with the participants. This interview is expected to last no longer than 90 minutes. The name of the participant will be replaced with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. All data collect will be securely maintained by the researcher. As a requirement of this research project your informed consent to participate must be documented with a signature. Let's review the informed consent form.

#### **Review Elements of Informed Consent Form**, specifically highlighting

- Associated Risks
- Points of access to Mental Health Services, if needed
- Rights to Refuse
- Privacy
- Signature

I will now turn on the recording device and begin recording.

#### **Interview Questions**

1. What was it like to transition to college after being in out-of-home care?
2. Describe the motivating factors that lead you to pursue postsecondary education.
3. As you reflect on your years at OHC, how did this experience impact your college decisions?
  - a. Decision to attend
  - b. Decisions in attendance
4. What impact did your OHC experience have on your transition to college?
5. What specific services/resources did the PSE institution provide that assisted you either academically or socially during your time as an undergraduate?
6. Based on your experiences, what are recommendations you have for providers of out of home care?
7. Recommendations for student affairs and higher education professionals.
8. If you were describing this experience to current African American males transitioning from OHC to PSE what would you tell them about the experience?
9. What are some things you would have changed/ not changed about your experience?
10. Please share anything additional that you believe is important for me to know concerning your experience?

## **APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION LETTER**

### **Letter to Participants**

Dear (Participant's Name),

I am in my final year of doctoral study at Louisiana State University. The final year is the research stage of my program and I would be honored if you would consider participating in this very important study. As you may know, studies that uplift the voices and perspectives of African American males are currently limited. There is a need to increase the voice of lived experience into academic spaces. This is an opportunity to explore your thoughts, feelings and perspectives related to your experience transitioning from out-of-home care to postsecondary education (college). I am personally drawn to this given my own personal experience and professional experiences as clinical social worker and professional in higher education.

Participation consist of a 15-minute phone conference where I will collect basic demographic information and we will schedule a time for a face-to-face interview. The interview would last no more than 90 minutes and will be audiotaped. A short follow-up interview will be held to clarify information from the initial interview. While the information you provide will be included in the study, you will be identified by a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated. Please let me know whether or not you would be willing to participate. I am available to answer any questions and address any concerns you may have. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Marvin Cain Alexander  
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership/ Research  
Louisiana State University  
870.822.1906  
Malex26@lsu.edu

## **APPENDIX E. INFORMED CONSENT**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY**

1. **Study Title:** **A study of the lived experience of African American males who transition from out of home care\* to postsecondary education**
2. **Performance Site:** This study will be conducted in the United States at research conducive locations mutually agreed upon by the study participant and researcher.
3. **Principal Investigator:** Dr. Roland Mitchell is available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30p.m. Dr. Mitchell can be reached at 225- 578-2156
4. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to lift the voice of African American males who transition from out-of-home care to postsecondary education into the literature, shedding light on this experience from their perspective to uncover meaning and implications for providers of out-of-home care and postsecondary educational institutions.
5. **Subject Inclusion:** Individuals over the age of 18 who are African American and have experience transition from out-of-home placement to a postsecondary educational institution. To participate in this study, you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
6. **Number of subjects:** 5 - 7
7. **Study Procedures:** The study will be conducted in multiple phases. In the first phase, subjects will spend approximately 90 minutes engaged in an in-depth semi-structured audio-recorded interview where the phenomenon of transition from out of home placement to postsecondary educational institutions are explored. Next, the data collected will be transcribed, analyzed, and synthesized by the researcher and finally presented to the subject to check for accuracy and validity of information derived from the interview.
8. **Benefits:** Subjects participating in this study will receive the benefit of a paid meal (value not to exceed \$30) at a restaurant of their choice. Additionally, the study may yield valuable information about the lived experience of transitioning from out of home placement to postsecondary educational institutions.
9. **Risks:** Subjects will be asked to rediscover thoughts and feelings related to the transition from out of home placement to postsecondary educational institutions which may expose to some level of psychological risk, depending on the individual. A list of support services is provided here:
  1. Marvin Alexander, LCSW, co-principal investigator, is a licensed mental health professional, and will be available to process and debrief any thoughts and feelings related to the study from the time of enrollment through the time

of the subject's exit from the study. He may be reached by email at malex262lsu.edu or 870.822.1906.

2. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides a HelpLine where staff are prepared to help subjects in the study deal with any psychological or emotional issues that may arise through participation in this study. NAMI is available Monday- Friday, 10pm – 6pm at 1-800-950- NAMI (6264)
  3. Anxiety and Depression Association of America provides information on prevention, treatment and symptoms of anxiety and depression and related conditions. Phone 240-485-1001
  4. Sidran Institute helps people understand, manage and treat trauma and dissociation and maintains a helpline for information and referrals. Phone: 410-825-8888
  5. The Suicide Prevention Lifeline connects callers to trained crisis counselors 24/7. Phone: 1-800-273-8255. They also provide a chat function on their website. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>.
10. The identity of the subjects in this study is directly linked to the data collected. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.
11. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
12. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
13. Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb.

I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

---

Subject's Signature

---

Date

\*Out-of-home care refers to the placement of a child or adolescent in a restricted living environment (e.g. residential treatment center, group home, orphanage, etc.) away from their biological/ family of birth.



## APPENDIX F. INFORMED CONSENT

### AGREEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPE AND/OR VIDEOTAPE FOR RESEARCH PROPOSES

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be enrolled in:

**A study of the lived experience of African American males who transition from out of home care to postsecondary educational settings.**

My signature below certifies my agreement to participate in this study and my permission to be audiotaped and/or videotaped for the purposes of this research study. I further understand the following:

1. I can request that the tape recorder or video recorder be turned off at any time and may request that the tape or any portion thereof be erased. I may terminate this permission to tape at any time.
2. The purpose of taping is for use in dissertation research. This will allow the above referenced researcher to consult with his appointed committee members, who may listen to the tape alone or in the presence of others involved in direct supervision of the research project.
3. The contents of these taped sessions are confidential, and the information will not be shared outside the context of this research project.
4. The tapes will be stored in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose without my explicit written permission.
5. The tapes will be properly discarded after they have served their purpose.

Agreed:

\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marvin Alexander, Researcher

## APPENDIX G. INFORMED CONSENT

### DATA SHARING AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be enrolled in:

**A study of the lived experience of African American males who transition from out of home care to postsecondary educational settings.**

My signature below certifies my agreement to participate in this study and that I have been informed of my rights to confidentiality and limits to confidentiality in this study. I further understand the following:

1. Participation in this study is voluntary and I may terminate participation at any time.
2. The data collected in this study is for use in dissertation research and may be shared with other parties during analysis.
3. The content the interviews sessions are confidential, and the information will not be shared outside the context of this research project.
4. While all attempts will be made to conceal my identity, the content the interviews sessions are not anonymous. There is a risk that my identity can be revealed by certain, unique attributes of my lived experience.
5. Data will be stored in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose without my explicit written permission.

Agreed:

\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marvin Alexander, Researcher

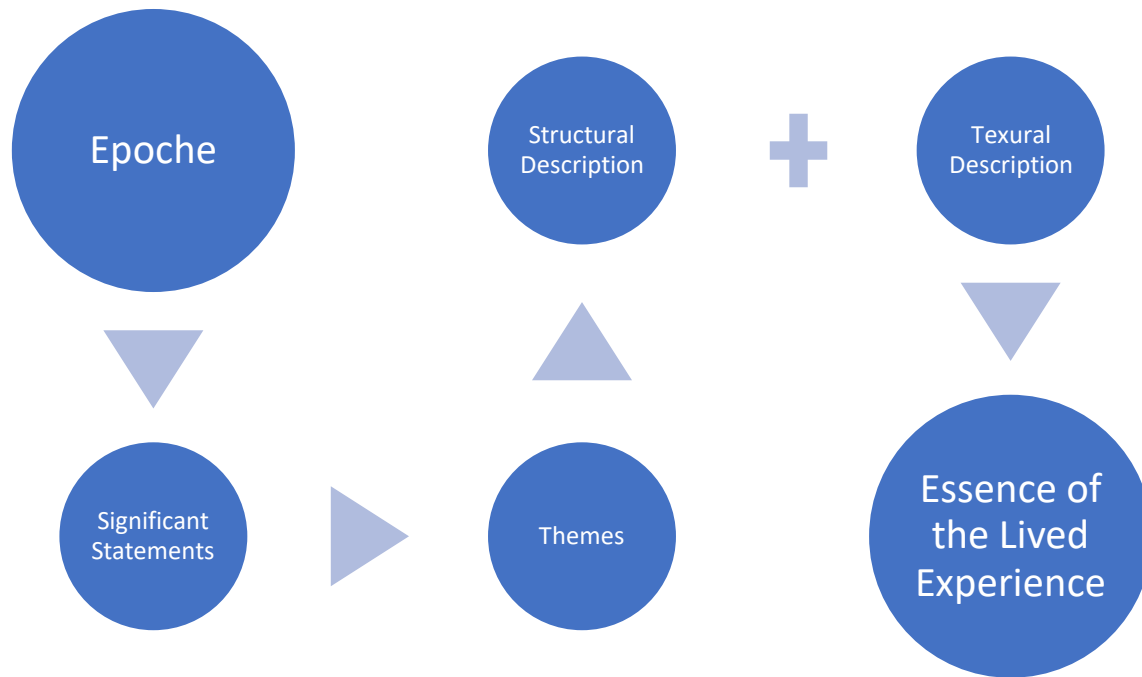
## APPENDIX H. FIELD JOURNAL DOCUMENT

### Researcher's Field Notes

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
General Observations	

## APPENDIX I. PHENOMENOLOGICAL DATA CODING PROCESS



## **VITA**

Marvin is a professional educator, clinical social worker and human services leader in the United States of America. His work includes provision of behavioral health services for children, youth and families who are multi-systemically involved; youth rights advocacy and transformational system leadership at the local, state and federal levels. He is the recipient of multiple awards and is recognized across the country for his ability to integrate lived experience into academic research, clinical practice, leadership and advocacy.