November 2020

Fostering Success Through Coaching: Perspectives of Help Seeking Within a Coaching Relationship with Post-Secondary Students from Foster Care

Jamie L. Bennett

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Psychology Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Scholar Commons Citation
Bennett, Jamie L., "Fostering Success Through Coaching: Perspectives of Help Seeking Within a Coaching Relationship with Post-Secondary Students from Foster Care" (2020). Graduate Theses and Dissertations. https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/8514

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Fostering Success Through Coaching: Perspectives of Help Seeking Within a Coaching Relationship with Post-Secondary Students from Foster Care

by

Jamie L. Bennett

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Program Development with a concentration in Educational Innovation Department of Teaching and Learning College of Education University of South Florida

Major Professor: Tony Tan, Ed.D.
Sondra J. Fogel, Ph.D.
Sarah Kiefer, Ph.D.
Chloe Lancaster, Ph.D.

October 30, 2020
Date of Approval

Keywords: student success, college, foster youth

Copyright © Jamie L. Bennett, 2020
Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. First and foremost, I thank my husband Warren, who endured sacrifices and missed time, soothed my doubts, and celebrated small successes alongside me during this process. As my daily cheerleader and biggest fan, he offered unwavering love, support, and encouragement through the most difficult periods of this dissertation. In many ways, we earned this accomplishment together.

I owe much gratitude to my dissertation committee. My major professor Dr. Tan was extraordinarily available and prompt with feedback, support, and guidance. Dr. Tan’s guidance was supportive while also challenging me to grow as a scholar. His words to “think deeply” resonated with me throughout the writing of this dissertation and will remain with me as a scholar-practitioner in the future. Dr. Kiefer’s warm and encouraging demeanor and depth of knowledge related to the theories central to this dissertation challenged me to stretch and grow while feeling fully supported. My many conversations about relationally focused theory and practice over coffee with Dr. Lancaster provided me a solid foundation to pursue my research while holding central the people that it will benefit the most in practice. Dr. Fogel’s willingness to work through meticulous details of this study with me were incredibly beneficial. As a fellow social worker, Dr. Fogel helped me to center the values of social work practice in a study that relied on educational theory. I will always be grateful for the way you all challenged me to grow as a scholar while trusting and acknowledging the ideas I brought to this study.
This dissertation would not exist without the study participants who shared their experiences with me. Your courage and willingness to be vulnerable in service of helping others in the future was humbling. Thank you for trusting me with your wisdom and truth.

The numerous family members and friends who checked in on me, encouraged me, and supported me while I was hunkered down with data and writing were essential to my success. Kurt, Joan, Haley, Evan, Christopher, Pepper, Jen, Randi, and countless other family members saw the day-to-day sacrifices of this work and cheered me on to stay focused and finish. To my best friends and sisters Rosa and Amanda, thank you for the check-ins, safe space to be myself, and most of all the laughter that brought me to the surface for air when I was underwater. To the B-Team, who have known me as a grad student longer than not, thank you for your support, laughter, and friendship. To my friend Richecar, who’s incredible perseverance was a constant reminder to keep pushing. Huge thanks to my all of my Ed.D. cohort-mates and especially Veronica, Mark, Otis, Somer, and Janet for the “you get it” conversations.

I have been incredibly lucky to have colleagues who are like family. I owe gratitude to my peer supervision besties Maddy and Korrine who are constant sources of support and encouragement, as well as a safe space to process ideas, insights, and to check myself. To Yvonne, my mentor and friend, who taught me more about being a great social worker, practitioner, and critical thinker than anyone else, and without whom I wouldn’t be where I am today. To my fellow Foster Scholars Kizzy, Angela, Sara, and Molly—I am so grateful to be in community with you fam. To Ronicka and Mallory, the best training team I could ever ask for, thank you for the space and grace to pursue this goal while holding down our collective work for students. To the *Best Liaisons Ever/Youth Engagement Team*, thank you for cheering me on and motivating me to push forward for better results for young people from foster care. To Dee
and the rest of the Cetera team, for support and motivation in this journey to help us all center the best outcomes for youth from foster care.

A participant in this study stated, “Every success story is a relationship story.” My success story wouldn’t have been written without the countless relationships I have encountered in my life. There are too many of you to name, but if we have connected you are a part of my success story. Thank you.
Table of Contents

List of Tables .................................................................................................................................................. iii
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................................... iv
Definitions and Terminology ......................................................................................................................... v
Abstract ............................................................................................................................................................... vi

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Problem of Practice ........................................................................................................................................ 5
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................................... 7
  Study Significance .......................................................................................................................................... 11

Chapter Two: Literature Review ..................................................................................................................... 13
  Former Foster Youth and Help Seeking ........................................................................................................ 14
    Former Foster Youth and Self-Determination ......................................................................................... 15
    Former Foster Youth, Survivalist Self-Reliance, and Help Seeking ....................................................... 18
  Post-Secondary Interventions for Students From Foster Care ................................................................. 23
    System Level Interventions ...................................................................................................................... 23
    Campus-Based Programs .......................................................................................................................... 25
    Interpersonal Helping Interventions ........................................................................................................ 27
  Coaching and Students from Foster Care ................................................................................................. 29
    Coaching as a Helping Approach ............................................................................................................. 30
    Coaching in the Post-Secondary Setting .................................................................................................. 31

Chapter 3: Methods .......................................................................................................................................... 37
  Research Design ........................................................................................................................................... 38
  Positionality ................................................................................................................................................... 39
  Setting and Participants ............................................................................................................................... 42
  Ethical Considerations ................................................................................................................................. 44
  Data Collection and Analysis ...................................................................................................................... 46
    Data Collection ......................................................................................................................................... 48
    Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................................... 50

Chapter 4: Findings .......................................................................................................................................... 56
  Findings from Interviews with Students ..................................................................................................... 56
    Help-Seeking Behaviors Changed Over Time ............................................................................................ 57
    Perceived Vulnerability Impacted Help Seeking ...................................................................................... 59
    Positive Relationship with the Coach Impacted Help-Seeking Behaviors ............................................ 62
List of Tables

Table 1: Sample Demographics........................................................................................................49
Table 2: Deductive Codes ..................................................................................................................52
Table 3: Themes as a Result of Inductive and Deductive Coding...................................................53
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Process of Hybrid Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Display of Findings</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definitions and Terminology

**Aging out of foster care:** Exiting the foster care system without legal permanency (i.e. adoption) upon reaching adulthood (typically between ages 18-21).

**Coaching:** An interpersonal practice approach aimed at increasing motivation, action, and goal attainment through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change.

**Family privilege:** The benefits one receives from membership in a stable family (Seita, 2001).

**Foster Care:** A state-based system of child welfare that provides care for children when biological parents are not fit to do so.

**Former foster youth:** A young person who spent time in the foster care system while under the age of 18.

**Help-seeking behaviors:** The beliefs, attitudes, and decisions that are involved in the act of seeking help.

**Post-secondary education:** Any post K-12 educational institution that provides a high-quality credential. This includes universities, colleges, community colleges, technical schools, and vocational schools.

**Students from foster care (SFC):** A sub-population of former foster youth consisting of post-secondary enrolled students who experienced time spent in the foster care system while under the age of 18 (21 in some states).

**Survivalist self-reliance:** A belief that relying on others for support is risky, therefore one must rely on oneself only to meet needs (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).
Abstract

Coaching, a humanistic approach to growth, has recently been utilized on college campuses as an alternative to standard student service strategies to address the needs of students from foster care. For this dissertation, I have collected interview data from four coaches and five college students who had spent time in the foster care system to explore the perceptions of help-seeking behaviors and coaching within a campus-based university program. The goal was to understand the role of coaching in the students’ help-seeking behaviors. The theories of self-determination and survivalist self-reliance were used to conceptualize my literature review, research design, and data collection on help-seeking beliefs and behaviors among college students from foster care. Using hybrid thematic analysis, I found that coaching provided an opportunity to develop a transformational relationship, which was perceived by students and coaches as positively influencing help-seeking behaviors. The transformative relationship was perceived to provide a sense of relatedness, autonomy, and competency among the students; however, avoidant help-seeking behaviors still remained present. The findings from this study indicate that help-seeking behavior in the coaching relationship was impacted by the presence of relationship-protection behaviors as well as self-protection behaviors.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Within the complex student support systems at post-secondary institutions, an invisible student population is struggling to thrive. These students have a childhood background in the foster care system, an experience that significantly impacts the rates at which they enroll in college and successfully attain a bachelor’s degree. Each year, over 20,000 youth age out of the United States’ foster care system (Children’s Bureau, 2018). Research shows that over 70% of these young adults aspire to attend college, but only a small percentage actually enroll in post-secondary education (Courtney et al., 2011). Of those who enroll, a smaller fraction graduate in six years. In the U.S., only 4-10% of young people with experience in foster care will earn a college degree in six years, compared to nearly 30% of their non-foster care peers (Courtney et al., 2011).

Nearly every facet of life is adversely impacted for youth who age out of foster care upon reaching the age of legal adulthood. The social and economic toll of outcomes among former foster youth are significant, and impact success once in the post-secondary setting. Young people leaving foster care experience high rates of homelessness, unemployment, financial instability, are more likely to become parents at a young age, and have more interactions with the justice system when compared to the general population of young adults (Courtney et al., 2011). A recent study by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2019) indicates that these disparities cost society over $4 billion each year in social services provided to youth who age out of foster care.
Post-secondary education can provide a path to economic and social stability; however, former foster youth who do enroll in college face a multitude of obstacles that diminish the likelihood of their successfully earning a degree. Research conducted by Hernandez and Naccarato (2010) among 12 post-secondary programs designed to support students from foster care indicates the existence of significant challenges related to basic living needs, social support, and academic preparedness among the students. In particular, the study highlights housing, finances, social support, and life skills needed to navigate challenges among the barriers to success for college students from foster care (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Most research focused on this population is not exclusively conducted with the subpopulation of college students who have experienced foster care, but rather the general population of those who have aged out of the foster care system. Therefore, the term “former foster youth” will be used when referring to the general population of young people who aged out of foster care. In instances where research is specific to young people from foster care who are in college, I will use the term “students from foster care” (SFC).

Social connections and supportive relationships are critical for navigating the college system. However, youth from foster care experience repeated experiences of instable caregiver relationships, often resulting in limited social connections upon transition to adulthood (Blakeslee & Best, 2019). Youth in the foster care system rely on child welfare case managers for support in the midst of changing placements. However, case managers often change frequently, and are unable to provide the support that comes from long-term relationship and is needed for a healthy transition to adulthood (Graham et al., 2015). Seita’s (2001) concept of family privilege, defined as the benefits one receives from membership in a stable family, addresses the importance of enduring personal relationships that are typically developed within
the family structure during childhood. Many former foster youth experience diminished or
absence of family privilege, which results in limited social support upon aging out of the system
(Seita, 2014). While former foster youth report supportive relationships with some family as they
transition to adulthood, many of the relationships cited are marked by ongoing conflict and
disruption (Blakeslee & Best, 2019). A particularly salient interpersonal challenge noted in the
literature is avoidant help-seeking behaviors when facing challenges, resulting in former foster
youth attempting to rely only on themselves in the face of problems related to academics and
basic living needs (Kools, 1999; Pryce et al., 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

Limited social connections also result in low social capital among former foster youth. Rather
than engaging in the development of personal and professional networks, SFC often rely
on professional or superficial relationships for help with immediate challenges rather than long-
term intimate relationships that provide ongoing emotional support (Gamez, 2017; Skobba et al.,
2018). The economic and professional opportunities afforded to young people in college is
gained via social networks. The sole reliance on other professionals on an as-needed basis and
reluctance to engage in ongoing relationships is reported as a protective strategy by many former
foster youth (Kools, 1999; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). However, this behavior may impact access
to opportunities and resources often gained through the capital generated within a support
network.

An important nuance of examining relationships among young adults is the difference
between the developmentally common behavior of seeking autonomy from family relationships
and the unavailability or avoidance of relationships, which is common among young adults with
foster care experience. While former foster youth value supportive relationships (Morton, 2017;
Pryce et al., 2017), many express difficulties with vulnerability and openness in developing
enduring relationships as a result of social network disruption while in foster care (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Morton, 2017). Former foster youth view the avoidance of relationships as a sign of independence and strength (Pryce et al., 2017), an armor that shows they are competent and resilient. SFC often carry this sentiment to the post-secondary setting, resulting in difficulty with creating social connections, and subsequently low social capital to leverage in the face of challenges while navigating college.

The tumultuous nature of the foster care system has been shown to impact developmental life skill growth among young people who experience growing up in an instable environment (Goemans et al., 2016). Typically, youth engage in a series of developmental tasks that build on one another, leading to the achievement of more complex tasks over time, contributing to an exploration of goals, sense of self, and plans for the future in the context of opportunities available to youth (Nurmi, 2004). Common adolescent experiences such as learning to drive, participating in extracurricular and social activities with peers, and having an after-school job promote the development of skills such as problem solving, help seeking, and decision making. Unfortunately, these experiences are not typical for young people in foster care; instead, youth often experience restrictive living arrangements such as group homes and lack the resources to participate in the same developmentally appropriate experiences as their non-foster care peers (Simmons-Horton, 2017). Missed experiences result in young people leaving foster care to arrive at college with fewer life skills and essential information compared to their peers. Of particular note are gaps in decision-making skills and help-seeking behaviors (Morton, 2017; Olson et al., 2017; Pryce et al., 2017).

While most research focuses on the disparate outcomes facing youth who age of the foster care system, some research has examined the assets of youth who age out of foster care. In
particular, resilience and motivation to change one’s life trajectory while in college are strengths reported widely among former foster youth, along with a high value placed on earning a college degree. Former foster youth report a strong determination to attend and finish college. They report motivation to break the cycle of poverty, challenge narratives ascribed to them, and prove they can be successful despite a difficult childhood (Lovitt & Emerson, 2008; Tobolowsky et al., 2017; Unrau et al., 2012). This determination is a significant asset for former foster youth. However, it is often manifested in the context of residual survival behavior from adversity during childhood, which results in avoidant help-seeking behaviors (Pryce et al., 2017) that can limit the solicitation of support to navigate challenges.

**Problem of Practice**

Post-secondary student services are largely focused on interventions that aim to instill knowledge of resources, increase academic motivation, and to support self-regulated learners. The most common types of these services are centered on academics (Collins & Sims, 2011). While post-secondary students with experience in foster care arrive at college with academic needs that may be addressed by typical student support services, they also arrive with limited family and social capital, and challenges in life skills such as help-seeking. Qualitative studies cite the avoidance of help-seeking beliefs and behaviors among former foster youth (Morton, 2017; Pryce et al., 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008), and other scholars have found avoidant help-seeking as a factor associated with low degree attainment among former foster youth (Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Former foster youth who report a willingness to seek help do so in ongoing, relational, holistically focused relationships with supportive adults who honor their strengths and autonomy (de Boer & Coady, 2007; Pryce et al., 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2017), and who possess an understanding of the foster care experience (Johnson & Menna,
Students from foster care report that these types of relationships are difficult to find in the post-secondary setting (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Traditional higher education student service approaches – such as first-year experience programs, advising, academic supports, and mental health counseling – do not seem to adequately address all the needs of students from foster care, as evidenced by the low rates of graduation compared to the general population.

Coaching, a specific, interpersonal helping approach, is an innovative, compelling practice strategy to explore for this student population. Coaching is a non-clinical helping approach that is distinctly different than other helping strategies one might encounter in a post-secondary setting such as advising or therapy (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). Coaching focuses on the strengths and goals of a person and the optimal avenues for achieving those goals through ongoing support and an authentic yet professional relationship (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Stober & Grant, 2006). The approach has been indicated as promoting resilience, hope, self-determination, and academic success among post-secondary students (Franklin & Doran, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). Rather than providing advice and guidance on specific areas of need, common approaches to helping in the post-secondary setting (Collins & Sims, 2011), a coach will seek to develop a relationship with the student that is long-term and focused on all aspects of the student’s life. Coaching may serve as an alternative strategy for supporting students from foster care but is not widely available to this student population.

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of help-seeking behaviors and coaching among students and their coaches within a university campus-based program designed to support students from foster care. Specifically, I sought to address the following questions:

1. How did the students who were receiving coaching experience help seeking?
a. What perceived factors influenced their help-seeking decisions?

2. How did coaching influence the students’ help-seeking behaviors?

3. How did the coaches perceive the help-seeking behaviors of the students?

4. How did the coaches perceive the influence of a coaching intervention on help-seeking behaviors of the students?

Theoretical Framework

This study relied on the theory of self-determination to understand help-seeking beliefs and behaviors. Self-determination theory seeks to understand human growth and motivation in the context of the social environment, and is believed to contribute to positive development throughout the life span (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory identifies three basic psychological needs: relatedness, competency, and autonomy, which contribute to positive personality development and behavior regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Each of these needs is cultivated during childhood by supportive relationships, primarily through parental interactions, and stable environments which provide an understanding that help-seeking is an appropriate way to meet one’s needs (Newman, 1998). In addition to the development of help-seeking beliefs and behaviors, self-determination is believed to impact intrinsic motivation, regulation, and shown to contribute positive educational outcomes (Geenen et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The three psychological needs of self-determination theory are often not adequately met among youth who grow up in foster care. Literature documents disruptions to relatedness, described as being in secure relationships throughout the life span, among former foster youth (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Graham et al., 2015), as well as among college students from foster care (Skobba et al., 2018; Unrau et al., 2012). Loss of personal agency and control while in the foster care system impact youth autonomy to engage in decisions about the future and their
options after foster care (Scannapieco et al., 2007; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Loss of autonomy and instability also restricts opportunities for foster youth to engage in opportunities that provide positive feedback, a factor in the development of competency (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Instable caretaking before and during time in foster care results in limited opportunities to meet the needs necessary for the development of self-determination, which may be a contributing factor to avoidant help-seeking among former foster youth.

Help-seeking behaviors among former foster youth are also influenced by factors related to the experience of spending time in the foster care system. Of particular importance to this study is the concept of survivalist self-reliance (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). Characterized by beliefs and behaviors that emphasize relying only on oneself for support, survivalist self-reliance is believed to be the result of the meaning making of experiences of not receiving support during time spent in foster care. Self-protective in nature, survivalist self-reliance manifests in beliefs that surviving hardships alone is a primary source of pride, reinforcing avoidant help-seeking behaviors in the face of challenges among former foster youth (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

Also critical to this study is the concept and practice of coaching. Current literature identifies varying theoretical approaches to coaching and various models by which to implement coaching practice. Widely used in business and executive settings, coaching aims to help people identify their long-term goals and discover the inner resources they possess to pursue those goals. While at times coaching may include directives and honest feedback, coaches acknowledge the autonomy and expertise of the coaching recipient to make decisions that best serve their long-term aspirations (Stober & Grant, 2006). Coaches aim to raise awareness of limiting beliefs and actions, build skills, and encourage commitments for action that help the person being coached towards their identified goals. This approach differs from models such as
mentoring or advising in which the helping professional relies on their expertise in a specific area to guide the actions of the person they are helping. Core themes that exist across the various theories that guide coaching practice including the development of a collaborative practice, a focus on solutions and strengths instead of problems, and a belief that the person being coached possesses the capacity to generate solutions and achieve their goals (Stober & Grant, 2006). An in-depth discussion of varying theoretical approaches to coaching is included in chapter two of this dissertation.

The core themes in coaching practice are aligned with the needs for self-determination. Autonomy is present in the theme of personal resourcefulness and inner wisdom to generate solutions with support. Relatedness is present in the collaborative nature of coaching practice, which calls for the development of relationship in order to maximize growth. Competency is cultivated by a focus on strengths within the individual being coached. Literature also supports the benefit of coaching in cultivating self-determination (Curtis & Kelly, 2013; Franklin & Doran, 2009).

The optimal of environments that support the development of adaptive help seeking are pictured in Figure 1. When these conditions are not present, diminished relatedness, autonomy, and competency can result in avoidant help-seeking behaviors. Additional factors including internalized self-protective strategies impact the development of help-seeking behaviors among youth from foster care (Kools, 1999; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). This study examined the influence of a coaching intervention with students from foster care, in particular if the coaching relationship contributes to an environment that cultivates relatedness, autonomy, and competency, and therefore increases the likelihood for adaptive help-seeking behaviors within the relationship.
Figure 1

Theoretical Framework
Study Significance

This dissertation focuses on the perceptions of help-seeking and the ways that coaching provided as a post-secondary support service may influence this behavior. The avoidance of help-seeking among former foster youth can result in the failure to meet basic needs and is likely to contribute to an early departure from college without a degree (Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Designing practice with students from foster care within a coaching approach, which values both authentic relationship development as well as self-determined growth and action, may provide an opportunity to acknowledge and shape the beliefs and behaviors of SFC in ways that can shift avoidant help-seeking behaviors to adaptive help-seeking behaviors. However, research to date related to coaching with students from foster care is extremely limited. The findings outlined in this dissertation broaden the current literature related to this topic by examining how coaches and students perceive the influence of a coaching relationship on help-seeking behaviors in a post-secondary setting by providing insight to the perceived help-seeking behaviors that take place within a coaching relationship from the view of both students and coaches.

Conclusion

The experience of growing up and aging out of the foster care system results in disparities across many areas of a young person’s life. Youth who leave the foster care system struggle with social connections and life skills, which impacts their post-secondary educational trajectories. Among the most salient struggles is that of avoidant help seeking, which is indicated as a factor for leaving post-secondary education without a degree (Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Student services within post-secondary settings are designed to support the academic and motivational challenges of the general student population, but do not
provide the type of support that students from foster care need to be successful. Coaching, a
specific practice approach that prioritizes ongoing relationship and leveraging inner strengths,
could be an optimal strategy for impacting avoidant help-seeking behaviors, but is significantly
under-researched and largely unavailable to this particular student population.

Chapter two of this dissertation will provide a review of the literature in three sections.
Section one reviews the literature related to help-seeking, and the particular help-seeking
challenges that result from growing up in foster care. The second section provides a review of
current interventions for students from foster care in the post-secondary setting. Finally, the third
section explores the exiting literature related to coaching as an approach to support the self-
determination needs of SFC. Chapter three describes the methods of the qualitative study
described in this dissertation. Qualitative findings from a series of interviews with four coaches
and five students from foster care are presented in chapter four. Lastly, a discussion of findings
and future implications in the context of self-determination and coaching are presented in chapter
five.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Post-secondary students from foster care face a multitude of challenges that interfere with their opportunities to graduate at the same rates as their non-foster care peers. The experience of time spent in foster care is often marked by periods of trauma, relationship disruption (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Unrau et al., 2008), and restrictive environments that result in missed experiences typical among teens and young adults (Simmons-Horton, 2017). These experiences often result in self-protective behaviors that can hinder success once in college such as difficulty in seeking help, resulting in a reliance on only oneself for support during times of challenge (Morton, 2017; Olson et al., 2017; Pryce et al., 2017). SFC indicate that they understand the value of relationships, but resist seeking help due to a belief that it indicates weakness and experiences of stigmatization by campus staff who are unaware and uninformed of their needs and experiences (Johnson & Menna, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2017).

Studies indicate that students from foster care do not perceive the types of supports offered in post-secondary settings as fully meeting their needs (Gamez, 2017; Lovitt & Emerson, 2008; Morton, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Further, the disparate rates of success among this population is another indicator that existing strategies are not engaging this student population in a way that supports completion of a degree. A fundamental gap exists among the student support services provided by post-secondary institutions and the types of services SFC are most likely to need. Although recent development of specific post-secondary supports for SFC have gained momentum in the past decade (Geiger et al., 2018), the literature has yet to comprehensively
articulate specific helping approaches that address the needs of SFC within the post-secondary setting. Coaching, a non-clinical helping approach that is distinctly different from other helping roles one might encounter in a post-secondary setting (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018), is an innovative and compelling practice strategy to explore for this particular student population.

This chapter explores the literature related to coaching with students from foster care in three sections. First, I will explore the research related to help seeking in the context of self-determination theory, including the specific help-seeking behaviors among former foster youth. Second, I will describe the current interventions available to students from foster care in post-secondary settings with a focus on the fit between services offered and the needs of the students. Third, I will review the foundational philosophies of coaching practice and the potential opportunities for using coaching with students from foster care in the post-secondary setting.

**Former Foster Youth and Help Seeking**

Early literature on the science of help seeking indicated that children who sought help were exhibiting dependent behavior, implying an inherently negative connotation to the act of asking for help. The work of Nelson-LeGall (1981) activated a shift in the accepted narrative from a view of help seeking as a dependent behavior to one of help seeking as a sign of showing initiative in learning. According to Nelson-LeGall (1981), self-regulated learners will follow a predictable process of cognitive and behavioral actions that include being aware of the need for help, deciding to seek help, identifying a helper, engaging the helper, and finally, assessing the effectiveness of the help-seeking process. This process is seen as located in the social context in which children are seeking help; in other words, asking for help is not meant to be viewed as an isolated behavior, but instead an interaction of knowledge, perceived competence, behaviors, and social influences within the environment (Nelson-LeGall, 1981).
Newman (2000) advanced the understanding of the social impacts of help seeking by examining the role of social interactions on help seeking through a lens of the theory of self-determination. Adaptive help seeking—which includes recognition that the help is necessary, the request is well planned (i.e. who and what is needed for help) and executed efficiently (i.e. help is requested appropriately and received as needed)—is argued to be a critical factor in development and learning for children. The role of the parent is particularly important in promoting the development of adaptive help-seeking behaviors and beliefs. Parents who tend to children’s needs in a consistent and safe manner promote healthy attachment and consistent and productive discourse about challenges and how to manage them, all of which promotes the development of adaptive help-seeking skills (Newman, 2000).

Adaptive help-seeking behaviors are understood as necessary for young people to regulate their learning, get their needs met in school, and navigate challenges (Newman, 1998). Help seeking is often viewed in the context of motivational constructs, including self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When children’s psychological needs for self-determination, including perceived relatedness, competency, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), are met within relationships, the skills and beliefs related to adaptive help seeking are more likely to develop.

**Former Foster Youth and Self-Determination**

Research indicates that help seeking may be underdeveloped or maladaptive among former foster youth (Kools, 1999; Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Pryce et al., 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). Unmet self-determination needs related to loss of secure relationships and control among former foster youth (Powers et al., 2018) may be a contributing factor.
Securing a sense of connection with others is a primary need for well-being. During childhood, parents and other supportive adults provide a foundation of belonging and security that promotes the development of a sense of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory of self-determination posits that perceived relatedness is a key factor for behavioral self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and well-being. Children who are subject to unsupportive or disrupted parenting may experience a diminished sense of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Young people who grow up in the foster care system often face unstable or unsupportive parenting before entering foster care, which then continues during time spent in the system.

Relatedness qualities are a clear indicator of beneficial helping approaches in literature surrounding work with at-risk youth and former foster youth. A qualitative study focusing on transformational relationships among at-risk youth highlighted several key factors that were reported as beneficial to youth’s sense of safety in relationships with others (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2017). Themes that emerged from youth and supportive adults included listening without judgment, authenticity, challenging the youth in healthy ways, reliability during times of stress, and genuine caring present in the relationship. Through these strategies, themes related to mattering (knowing that you are important to another person), a sense of agency and control over long-term outcomes, as well as an increased ability to regulate emotions were observed (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2017). For youth in foster care, caseworkers are the liaisons between the child, their current living arrangements, and the child welfare system. De Boer and Coady (2007) examined the qualities that contribute to positive caseworker–youth interactions. Qualities such as being strengths-based, non-judgmental, and empathic were cited as important. Further, caseworkers who were relational and humanistic in their approach were reported as being most effective by youth (de Boer & Coady, 2007).
Perceived competency, defined as a perception that one’s choices have an impact on the outcomes of their life, contributes to healthy development throughout one’s lifespan (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Youth aging out of foster care often manifest a stance of survivalist self-reliance, which results in presenting as highly competent while actually missing the skills necessary to effectively manage stress and problems in everyday life (Kools, 1999; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). One consequence of this false portrayal of competence is a lack of a future orientation, sometimes referred to as survival mode, most likely due to self-protection from loss and disappointment from learned experiences (Gomez et al., 2015; Kools, 1999). A lack of future orientation can result in youth having no plans for housing, employment or academics, even when they are facing transition, such as aging out of the system or graduating high school. Relationships that support the development of skills in a safe way and are not stigmatizing are a critical component in addressing the competency needs of youth utilizing survivalist behaviors.

A sense of agency and control over one’s life contributes to opportunities to practice autonomy in the context of the environment. The foster care system greatly reduces the ability for a young adult to make developmentally appropriate decisions for themselves, and conversely, often excludes youth from decisions that impact their long-term outcomes (Scannapieco et al., 2007). The most beneficial relationship qualities that contribute to self-determination cited in the literature include intentional actions to promote autonomy and provide opportunities for experiences that build competency. In practice, this is expressed by a balance of power between the worker and youth (de Boer & Coady, 2007; Pryce et al., 2017) and the acknowledgement that former foster youth can make beneficial decisions for themselves (Powers et al., 2018).

Increased self-determination among former foster youth was the intended outcome of the My Life Model, a coaching and mentoring intervention for youth aging out of the foster care
system (Powers et al., 2018). Qualitative findings among 10 youth who participated in the study indicate feeling empowered and prepared for challenges as they transitioned to adulthood. Themes that emerged from the study were related to self-determination, including a sense of trust with their mentors and coaches, a sense of control over their lives, and the development of skills through experiential learning (Powers et al., 2018). The My Life Model is one of the only interventions in the literature focused on coaching and self-determination among former foster youth and shows promise for coaching as a strategy for increasing self-determination. However, while this study alludes to increased capacity to engage in help-seeking behaviors, it does not specifically address these behaviors. Existing literature remains extremely limited in exploring self-determination, help seeking, and coaching among former foster youth.

It is likely that the unmet psychological needs of self-determination may be a contributor to avoidant help seeking among former foster youth. Existing literature explores the underlying drivers of avoidant help seeking among former foster youth, but few explore the potential interventions that could increase adaptive help-seeking behaviors.

**Former Foster Youth, Survivalist Self-Reliance, and Help Seeking**

In addition to the perceived relatedness, autonomy, and competence that may drive help-seeking behaviors among former foster youth, specific experiences while in care are thought to contribute to avoidant help-seeking behaviors.

Kools’ (1999) qualitative study of 17 foster care youth, aged 15–19, indicated that the unpredictability of life spent in the system, including constant changes in relationships and housing and a limited view of future options, contributed to the development of self-protection strategies such as keeping relationships superficial and not disclosing their status of being in foster care. As a result of these self-protective behaviors, youth often developed a “veneer of
self-reliance” (Kools, 1999, p. 150) that protects a stigmatized sense of self and hinders development towards healthy interdependence in young adulthood.

Kools (1999) characterizes the behaviors that result from the veneer of self-reliance as pseudoindependence. Pseudoindependence describes the self-protection behaviors of former foster youth and includes the portrayal of competence without the capabilities to practice problem solving or future-planning skills. Pseudoindependence is one consequence of the veneer of self-reliance developed by former foster youth (Kools, 1999), and is marked by youth presenting themselves as independent, competent, and capable, but missing the knowledge or skills necessary to navigate the challenges during their transition to adulthood.

Scholars have aimed to expand understanding of pseudoindependence among former foster youth. Samuels and Pryce (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 44 youth in foster care or who had aged out of the foster care system in the United States. The average age of study participants was 20 (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). The semi-structured interviews used to gather data in this study focused on the foster youths' perceptions of their life stage development relative to what is considered typical among all young people (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). Their findings indicate that youth who age out of the foster care system develop a sense of survivalist self-reliance (Samuels & Pryce, 2008, p. 1199). Premature adult status, growing up without the support of consistent parents, and pride of surviving the system were found to be significant contributing factors to the development of a survivalist self-reliance stance. Samuels and Pryce (2018) posit that survivalist self-reliance stems from the process of meaning making among foster youth who grow up in a system that both removes autonomy to participate in normative developmental tasks while also not providing adequate support to meet all needs. Youth from this study described repeated experiences where they were “going it alone” to meet needs,
having to grow up too soon as a result of absent parents, and channeling the pain of loss into a source of strength and resilience. Consequently, youth often reject the notion of relying on others for support as they navigate the transition to adulthood, sometimes even viewing it as a threat to their strength (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

Since the publications by Kools (1999) and Samuels and Pryce (2008), researchers have relied on the constructs of pseudoindependence and survivalist self-reliance to expand the field’s knowledge of the behaviors and outcomes of former foster youth. In particular, researchers with a focus on this population have used concepts related to pseudoindependence and survivalist self-reliance to better understand the help-seeking behaviors among former foster youth (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Pryce et al., 2017; Seita et al., 2016).

In a study that expanded on the concept of survivalist self-reliance and its role in help seeking, Pryce, Napolitano and Samuels (2017) interviewed 28 young people (mean age of 22) who had aged out of foster care. This qualitative study used in-depth interviews to examine the relational challenges of youth from foster care in an effort to make policy recommendations for improved outcomes (Pryce et al., 2017). Three levels of environment influence were found to impact help seeking (Pryce et al., 2017). At the intrapersonal level, former foster youth hold beliefs that help seeking is developmentally inappropriate for adults and signals a dependence on the child welfare system they are seeking to avoid. At the interpersonal level, youth report understanding that help seeking is important for success but it is difficult in the face of little to no social support after leaving foster care (Pryce et al., 2017). Lastly, systemic issues result in limited resources available to youth in combination with few opportunities to exercise personal agency while in the foster care system; these systemic factors reinforce the notion that help seeking is not useful among former foster youth (Pryce et al., 2017). Recommendations for
relationally focused services that prioritize the cultivation of natural support networks highlight the need to shift the types of relationships young people from foster care can access.

A grounded theory study conducted with seven young people in the foster care system (ages 16–20) by Johnson and Menna (2017) sought to understand the help seeking characteristics of youth in foster care. Their findings suggest that youth from foster care employ a unique strategy when engaging in help seeking. In particular, once the need for help is recognized, youth from foster care carefully assess the availability of a helper who has an understanding of the experience of being in foster care. This factor was salient enough in the experiences of the youth in this study, it was named as a stand-alone stage in the help-seeking process of youth from foster care, and not just a determinant of decision making (Johnson & Menna, 2017) as outlined in models of help seeking among the general population of young people (Karabenick & Newman, 2006; Nelson-LeGall, 1981). The authors also found unique factors that prevented help seeking among former foster youth compared to the general population, including the risk of stigma from disclosing foster care status to potential helpers and distrust of systems designed to help.

Insights into the help-seeking behaviors among the subpopulation of students from foster care in the post-secondary setting has been informed by the work of Kools (1999) and Samuels and Pryce (2008), and is thought to contribute to the low rates of post-secondary degree attainment (Morton, 2018; Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). In the college setting, survivalist self-reliance is related to residual habits from dependence on oneself during childhood, limited support networks, a fear of stigmatization from campus support professionals, and a lack of understanding of the needs students from foster care bring to college among student support professionals (Tobolowsky et al., 2017).
In a phenomenological qualitative study conducted with 21 university students from foster care in Washington State, Morton (2017) found that SFC reported themes of survivalist self-reliance, namely avoiding asking for help, which impacted their success in college. An overwhelming sense of independence, even in the face of academic, housing, or financial crisis prevented students from seeking help on campus, resulting in faculty and student service staff being largely unaware of their needs (Morton, 2017). Students in this study also expressed a need to blend in with their peers to avoid being different, which further hindered asking for help when facing issues.

In their descriptive statistical analysis, Okpych and Courtney (2018) use a theoretical framework centered on attachment styles to measure the likelihood of help seeking among post-secondary students from foster care. This study used secondary data analysis from the longitudinal Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (Courtney et al., 2011) to examine the relationships between attachment-avoidant students and help-seeking behaviors. The researchers found that SFC who were reluctant to develop close relationships and who possessed a tendency of self-reliance were statistically less likely to earn a degree in comparison to other students from foster care who were not relationship avoidant. These findings align with the notion that parent–child attachment styles promote the earliest adaptive help-seeking beliefs and behaviors (Newman, 2000).

There is clear evidence that former foster youth struggle to engage in adaptive help-seeking behaviors. Current evidence points to unmet psychological self-determination needs, as well as cognitive, behavioral, and environmental challenges related specifically to experience in foster care. SFC experience fears of stigma, a lack of supports with whom they have a sense of comfort and trust, and a fierce determination to prove their competence, sometimes at significant
cost, through relying only on themselves for support (Johnson & Menna, 2017; Morton, 2017; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Pryce et al., 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Interventions that aim to increase the adaptive help-seeking beliefs and behaviors of SFC must not only be informed by the unique challenges of help seeking among this population, but also the broader psychological and motivational constructs of adaptative help seeking.

Post-Secondary Interventions for Students From Foster Care

As awareness of the disparate post-secondary outcomes of former foster youth increases, interventions designed to address the needs of foster youth that relate to educational success have increased in number. Interventions at the systems level (federal and state policy), the institutional level (campus-based programming) and individual level (interpersonal practice models) have emerged in an effort to level the educational playing field for young people leaving foster care. Review of these interventions aims to inform the potential for future interventions that build on current progress.

System Level Interventions

In 2008, the United States Congress passed the Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act (Fostering Connections), a policy that provides funding to states to support foster youth between the ages of 18–21, extending services past age 18, the norm under prior legislation. Since that time, nearly all 50 U.S. states have extended foster care services past age 18, including providing case management services, housing, education and employment support (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015). Promising results are emerging as researchers examine the outcomes of extending foster care. An eight year, ongoing longitudinal study conducted by Courtney et al. (2018) on 727 16–18 year old youth in California’s foster care
system, indicates that youth participating in extended foster care programs there were more likely to have graduated high school and enrolled in a post-secondary education institution. Youth in this study were also more likely to be receiving other types of financial support, such as scholarships, than young adults who aged out but were not participating in extended foster care at age 19. However, the same analysis indicated young people participating in extended foster care programs were still lagging in educational outcomes compared to their non-foster care peers of the same age (Courtney et al., 2018).

State legislated tuition exemptions are another policy intervention that aims to level the playing field for young adults leaving the foster care system. Tuition waivers are an intervention that is conceptualized from research related to Tinto’s (1975) student integration theory and retention in higher education. Tinto (1975) posits that motivation to succeed in college is contingent upon successful integration into all aspects of the institution, including with faculty, peers, and administration. Using student integration theory as a framework, Caison (2005) found that college retention was related to a student’s ability to embed themselves within the culture and develop long-term goals within their higher education setting. To this end, the likelihood of student integration is diminished when students are employed outside of the educational setting during their transition to college. Increasing the financial resources through state legislated tuition waivers for youth from foster care, therefore reducing their need to focus on employment to meet education expenses, was hypothesized to be a worthy intervention. The nation’s first tuition waiver for foster youth appeared in Florida in 1997 (Florida’s Children First, 2014); today, 22 states have some form of tuition waiver legislation (Hernandez et al., 2017).

While tuition waivers provide significant financial benefits to youth leaving foster care, an analysis of their effectiveness by Hernandez et al. (2017) showed that few states were tracking
outcomes and usage of the waivers. Further, several systemic issues related to the tuition waiver implementation were discovered. First, many states include a time limitation on using the waiver, either by age or time passed from first use, not taking into account research that indicates foster youth take much longer to complete college than their non-foster care peers (Courtney et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017; Pecora et al., 2005). Second, the tuition exemption is typically not funded within state budgets, but instead expected to be absorbed by colleges, possibly reducing institutions’ incentive to recruit and enroll former foster youth. Lastly, institutional policies may further hinder youth from using the waiver. For example, an analysis of waiver usage in Florida discovered a post-secondary institution who restricted class registration until one week prior to classes beginning for students using the waiver, reducing incentive for students to utilize the benefit. The same analysis found that only 15% of eligible youth from foster care in Florida were using the waiver to attend college (Florida’s Children First, 2014).

**Campus-Based Programs**

Campus-based programs are another approach to address the needs of college-going foster youth and can supplement the financial support offered by tuition waivers and other scholarships. An increasingly popular initiative, campus-based programs typically leverage existing campus services, and, if possible, create new services to support the students from foster care enrolled at a particular college (Geiger et al., 2018). While recruitment may occur, typically students must be accepted to and enrolled in a post-secondary institution before becoming eligible for this type of support. An analysis of campus-based support programs in California and Washington found that campus-support programs are diverse in their services and scope of eligibility among students (Dworsky & Pérez, 2010). For example, some programs may include students who have spent any amount of time in foster care as children, while others restrict
eligibility to those who aged out of foster care. Regarding programming, a descriptive study of 81 campus-based support programs indicates a lack of a standardized approaches, but found common components among programs, including support in finances, academics, housing, mental health, and community building (Geiger et al., 2018).

As campus-based interventions increase in number, researchers and practitioners alike are seeking evidence to narrow the scope of services that are most effective for youth leaving foster care. In a student-perceptions focused survey evaluation, conducted with 95 students currently enrolled in the Seita Scholars Program—a decade-old campus-based scholarship program for students from foster care at Western Michigan University—financial and housing supports were indicated as most useful, and 77% of the students indicated they would be unable to graduate college without the program (Unrau et al., 2017). While students in the program graduate at a rate of 30%, triple the rate of the national average for SFC, the graduation rates within the program fell below the average for the general student population at the same university, indicating areas for continued attention (Unrau et al., 2017).

The Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success (FACES) program at Texas State University identifies a strengths-based approach that includes advocates who work with students to increase a sense of a positive identity, autonomy, and an asset-based view of student abilities. The school was able to increase its retention rates for SFC to 84% compared to 76% of the general student population (Watt et al., 2013). An analysis of the mentoring services offered by the FACES program indicates that a strengths-based approach over a control-based authoritarian one supported practice such as promoting student autonomy and resilience. Students from the study who were also provided campus-based programming support remained in school and graduated at significantly higher rates compared to the national foster care population (Watt et
al., 2013). Most campus-support programs have emerged in only the past decade (Geiger et al., 2018); therefore, research on long-term effectiveness is still limited.

The Bridging Success Early Start program at Arizona State University is a summer bridge program designed specifically for incoming freshman and transfer students from foster care. In a mixed methods study, Geiger et al. (2017) examined participants’ experiences and beliefs as a result of participating in the program. The program—which consisted of workshops related to college preparedness and social time with peers and college staff—was found to increase perceived readiness for college, resilience, and sense of connectedness. Participants also indicated they felt confident in asking for help after participating in the program (Geiger et al., 2017).

**Interpersonal Helping Interventions**

From a self-determination lens, adaptive help seeking is cultivated through supportive social interactions that shape beliefs and behaviors throughout childhood and beyond (Newman, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students from foster care arrive at college with avoidant help-seeking behaviors that are thought to be attributed to disruptions in the development of self-determination as well as from specific foster care experiences. The arc of literature to date has evolved from understanding the holistic needs of students from foster care to studying the programs that have been developed to serve them in the last decade (Courtney et al., 2011; Day et al., 2011; Dworsky & Pérez, 2010; Geiger et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017). While the literature indicates specialized programming is indeed beneficial for SFC, research has yet to thoroughly explore the interpersonal practice methods utilized by student support staff that best support SFC. In other words, evidence suggests that SFC benefit from supportive people during the transition and duration of their post-secondary journeys; however, there is limited knowledge
about what helping philosophies, practice techniques, and relationship qualities are best suited to support the development of adaptive help-seeking behaviors.

Existing models of post-secondary support for the general student population are available to support SFC. While embodying relational approaches, student–staff support ratios often reach hundreds of students to one support staff and may result in contact only a few times per semester. Common approaches to student support, including advising and tutoring (Collins & Sims, 2011), rely on the transfer of expertise from a professional, which is inherently a position of authority, to the student and may not address unmet needs of autonomy and competency. Further, it is likely that these types of services do not provide an adequate amount of time to engage in consistent, authentic relationships, which are known to be the most supportive and most likely to build trust among SFC. While meeting with support staff once per semester is common in the field of academic advising (Alexitch, 2011), SFC are likely to require much higher frequency of contact in order to build trust. In fact, one successful campus-support program designed for SFC encourages a student–staff ratio of 25:1 for optimal support of their needs, allowing for regular contact between the coach and SFC to develop relationship and support the multitude of needs SFC face (Unrau et al., 2017). Time-limited programs, academic advising, and retention triage programs are not designed to meet this level of student support intensity. Counseling programs, also time limited on many campuses, may provide an authentic, meaningful relationship to the student, but are typically focused solely on mental health functioning instead of a holistic approach to SFC needs.

Efforts of proactive outreach from unknown administrative staff to students who are deemed as “at-risk” may go unanswered by SFC who view help seeking as a weakness and fear stigmatization when required to disclose their foster care status to professionals who do not have
an understanding of the system (Johnson & Menna, 2017). Further compounding help-seeking avoidance is the likelihood that a student support staff may not be able to address complex issues common to SFC such as housing instability, managing residual trauma, and relationship turmoil with biological family (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Researchers have found that the general population of post-secondary students who find seeking assistance difficult on their campus will turn to informal supports for help with personal and motivational issues. Commonly, these supports include peers, family members, and people with whom students feel a shared sense of identity or experience (Alexitch, 2011; Collins & Sims, 2011). However, students from foster care who have diminished social networks due to their experience in the system (Blakeslee & Best, 2019), and who might feel as if disclosing their status as a foster youth will result in stigmatization (Johnson & Menna, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2017), are less likely to have access to these informal support networks. Therefore, they may be more likely to forgo seeking assistance, continuing to rely on themselves for problem solving and persisting through challenges.

A specific and targeted practice approach is needed to address the unique needs of SFC and to utilize resources effectively within existing student support structures. Coaching—a practice that relies on authentic relationships, a strengths-based focus, and an emphasis on cultivating inner resources—could be the innovative model that is applicable in the college setting and addresses the needs of SFC.

**Coaching and Students from Foster Care**

Coaching is a helping approach that is non-clinical in nature and rooted in philosophies of humanistic psychology (Stober, 2006). Above all else, coaching is about change. Only recently has coaching benefitted from research that increases its credibility and fidelity (Franklin &
Evidence-based coaching, a description coined by Grant (2003), refers to a coaching practice that is informed by the “best available knowledge…and practitioner expertise” (Stober & Grant, 2006, p. 6) and that can be informed and customized by each individual client. Therefore, evidence-based coaching calls for integrating existing helping frameworks within a set of guiding principles in order to enhance growth (Stober & Grant, 2006).

**Coaching as a Helping Approach**

The field of humanistic psychology has influenced the field of coaching most significantly. While coaching models vary, the philosophies of coaching present within models typically include characteristics to those found in humanistic psychology, including a holistic view of the person, an emphasis on relationship as a way to prompt growth, and a belief of inherent resource and autonomy within each person (Stober, 2006). In action, these philosophies create a supportive environment for self-directed growth in the context of a collaborative relationship that aims to join with a client to support the discovery of personal strengths and desired goals. These philosophies inform four guiding principles of an evidence-based coaching approach and align with the psychological needs of self-determination.

First, a humanistic coaching philosophy views the nature of the coaching relationship as essential. This requires practice that emphasizes a trusting, collaborative relationship between the coach and the person being coached. Within this relationship the coach aims to authentically connect, actively practice acceptance and non-judgement, and be authentic in providing feedback in the moment (Stober, 2006). The relational stance of coaching is seen as a cornerstone and provides a foundation for relatedness within a safe relationship to maximize change. Second, coaching views the client as both the source and director of change. Coaches prompt exploration of needs and goals from the perspective of the person being coached instead of giving advice.
Principle three emphasizes the need for the coach to view each client as a whole person, and not just as the problems or situations that they are bringing forward. Finally, the fourth principle calls for the coach to be the facilitator for growth rather than an expert of growth, drawing on existing strengths to address opportunities for growth (Stober, 2006). These principles guide a practice that values the autonomy to make decisions for oneself and opportunities to cultivate competency through personally designed goals and actions.

According to Stober and Grant (2006), varying models and foci of coaching can be implemented in an evidence-based manner as long as they are informed by the best current knowledge from theory. Examples of coaching variations include behavioral coaching (Peterson, 2006), cognitive coaching (Auerbach, 2006) and integrated goal coaching which draws on self-determination theory (Grant, 2006).

It is critical and necessary to highlight the limitations of the coaching approach. Coaching is a relatively new approach to helping and lacks extensive literature that uses experimentally rigorous methods to determine evidence of outcomes. This is both a limitation and a reason for further research. Second, coaching is non-clinical in nature, meaning it is not designed to meet mental health needs of clients. This is particularly important for the population of focus in this study, who are known to experience higher than average rates of mental health diagnoses (Courtney et al., 2011). Put plainly, coaching is not an answer to all of the challenges facing former foster youth but may provide a complementary structure to existing types of support, such as counseling and advising, to create a more robust support system.

**Coaching in the Post-Secondary Setting**

Although literature about coaching in college is heavily oriented to athletic coaching, some evidence supports the effectiveness of coaching as a student support strategy in post-
secondary education settings. Using a mixed-methods study, Lefdahl-Davis et al. (2018) studied the impact of coaching on decision making, goal setting, and confidence in areas of academics, life purpose, and sense of self. It evaluated pre- and post-study surveys among 94 students who participated in a minimum of three coaching sessions with a certified coach over the course of a three-year period (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). They found that coaching was significantly associated with increased resilience, awareness of strengths, and success in goal setting and attainment. Of particular relevance to this dissertation, the study indicated that these impacts were more significant among students who were minorities or experienced marginalization on campus (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018).

An emphasis on an individual’s strengths and coaching were also the foci of Govindji’s and Linley’s (2007) study of 214 college students. Correlation, multivariate, and multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the responses of surveys completed by participants. Findings indicate that knowing, valuing, and using one’s strengths was associated with well-being (Govindji & Linley, 2007). The authors posit that coaching, which is inherently focused on strengths, can be associated with well-being (Govindji & Linley, 2007).

In one of the largest quantitative studies to date related to coaching in the college setting, Bettinger and Baker (2014) used randomly assigned control groups to study a college coaching program across 17 cohorts with over 13,000 college students. The program included services in which trained coaches provided consistent communication, helped students establish daily activities to reach named goals, and to build specific skills such as time management and problem solving. Results showed coached students were more likely to continue their studies the following academic year than those who did not receive coaching (Bettinger & Baker, 2014).
In a multi-case study of eight people in the general population who identified being ready for a life change were provided coaching focused on the self-determination tenets of relatedness, competency, and autonomy (Curtis & Kelly, 2013). The study found that a coaching intervention supported participants’ use of hope, personal strengths, and temperance to combat negative beliefs and work towards goals. The study also indicated an increased sense of self-determination among the participants (Curtis & Kelly, 2013). Although encouraging, the findings are based on a small number of people over a relatively short period of time (eight weeks). Studies that examine outcomes over a longer period of time can inform of the sustainability of perceived self-determination after receiving coaching.

Coaching with SFC is a compelling strategy for many reasons. During time in foster care, youth often experience loss of autonomy and opportunities to engage in experiences that contribute to knowledge and skills acquisition (Scannapieco et al., 2007; Tobolowsky et al., 2017; Unrau et al., 2017). As a practice, coaching helps people self-identify goals and builds on existing strengths to identify paths towards those goals. Inherent to a coaching practice is the promotion of setting future-oriented goals autonomously in the context of authentic relationship, bolstered the notion that the person being coached knows what they need and want and has the means to achieve their goals with the support of the coach (Stober & Grant, 2006). Therefore, coaching is an approach that acknowledges the need for SFC to rely on their independence as a strength, inherent in the survivalist self-reliance stance (Kools, 1999; Samuels & Pryce, 2008), while addressing the missing life skills needed to engage in effective behaviors on campus.

Coaching aims to promote autonomy by shifting power in the relationship to the person being coached. In practice, this means that coaches do not engage in telling people what they “should” do (advice giving), do not make decisions for people, nor assume that they know what
is best. Research on the child-welfare sector indicates that working relationships in which former foster youth experience power balance, non-judgement, and opportunities for agency are most beneficial (de Boer & Coady, 2007). This type of relationship may not be readily available to SFC on college campuses given that services are hierarchically organized so that students self-report to staff who often provide advice or guidance on what to do. Coaching also may be viewed by students as less stigmatizing than counseling or case managers, roles often present to assist high risk students in higher education, and that mirror roles experienced while in the foster care system.

Limited studies are present on the impact of coaching practice with former foster youth, and none of these studies focus on survivalist self-reliance behaviors. Most notable are the My Life Model (MLM) and the Fostering Success Coaching (FSC) model. The MLM is an intervention that is delivered to the general population of former foster youth over a 9–12-month period. A strong focus on coaching is present in the MLM intervention. Coaching is described as youth-focused support in areas of relationship development, cognitive skills, and self-regulation as well as experiential support in the context of goals. Youth who receive the MLM intervention report that coaching increased motivation and action towards goals (Powers et al., 2018). Also notable in the findings was a high value placed on the authentic relationship between the coach and youth. Relationship qualities cited include trust, respect, non-judgement, and consistency. Also noted was reciprocity and power balance, indicated by youth having full control over their decisions (Powers et al., 2018).

The FSC model (Bennett et al., 2020; Unrau et al., 2017) is a coaching model that is designed specifically for SFC and is the only coaching specific model for the subpopulation of college students from foster care found in literature to date. The FSC model is implemented in a
four-year university setting, within a campus-based support program specifically for SFC. Students in the program receive coaching for the duration of their undergraduate studies (Unrau et al., 2017). In practice, the FSC model focuses on developing interdependent relationships with students and working towards goals that promote skill development in academic, professional, and personal areas. Student perceptions of the FSC model are positive; study findings show students who received coaching indicated their coach as one of the most important elements of the programming they receive and cited the campus coach as the most significant person supporting goal attainment. Notably, SFC receiving coaching via the FSC model earn bachelor’s degrees at triple the rate of the national population of former foster youth (Unrau et al., 2017).

The MLM and FSC models show promise for coaching as an alternate intervention for SFC. Limitations do exist and provide implications for further research. The MLM study acknowledges the need to further investigate the relationship qualities that promote self-determination among former foster youth. Similarly, the authors of the study on the FSC model cite a need to examine whether it is the coach as a person or the coaching approach that produces favorable results among SFC (Unrau et al., 2017). Lastly, neither study focuses on interpersonal mechanisms that lead to degree attainment, including help-seeking behaviors. Empirical research related to using a specific coaching approach with college students from foster care is very limited, and therefore a worthy topic for continued research.

Conclusion

College students from foster care face multiple interpersonal and systemic barriers in their pursuit of a college degree. Residual impacts from time spent in foster care contribute to challenges related to help seeking and development of life skills due to missed experiences while in the system. Research on helping strategies in the context of post-secondary student services is
limited to programming or relationship approaches such as mentoring rather than specific practice models that utilize evidence-based approaches such as building authentic relationships and providing experiences to develop skills and competency. Coaching, an innovative practice from the business sector that promotes self-determination, is used in a limited capacity within the college setting, and even less in relation to SFC. Research that integrates the best practices of relationship building from the child welfare sector, coaching practices from the business sector, and post-secondary student success initiatives offers a promising approach to advance knowledge and best practices in supporting SFC. Such research may inform practitioners and help to change the mostly negative trends and narrative related to post-secondary degree attainment among former foster youth.
Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the help-seeking behaviors as perceived by students from foster care and coaches within a university campus-based program. The methods described in this chapter guided the study of a specific phenomenon (help-seeking behaviors) in a specific context (receiving coaching in the post-secondary setting), among coaches and students engaged in a coaching relationship.

Qualitative methods are commonly used to understand the lived experiences within everyday life among people, groups, and organizations through intensive contact. In this study, I applied the qualitative method of phenomenology, to explore the essential meanings people place on their lived experiences through thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2014). I sought to explore the themes of help seeking via a thematic examination of lived experiences within the relationship between students and their coach. To better understand the perceived impact of the coaching relationship on help seeking, I focused on the meanings that each participant created related to help seeking, and sought to identify themes related to their perceptions (Miles et al., 2014). Interview data was gathered with post-secondary students and coaches who had a student-coach relationship within a campus-based support program designed for students from foster care. In this chapter I will describe the research design, researcher positionality, setting, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures of the study.
Research Design

Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the complexity of human behaviors and to provide insights to the meanings people ascribe to their experiences, providing rich descriptions of perspective that allow for refining and creating theory (Miles et al., 2014). Individual voices and perspectives are the foundation of qualitative research, allowing for the emergence of patterns and themes related to issues experienced by subjects of study. College students with foster care experience are an invisible and underserved population on campuses; therefore, amplifying their voices in qualitative research is critical to understanding the perspectives they hold related to their experiences while pursuing a post-secondary degree. Likewise, the coaches who support them have accumulated personal and professional perspectives that can also inform best practices.

Qualitative research relies on human interpretation. Therefore, it requires the researcher to be aware of their own positionality in the context of data, as well as the assumptions embedded within the philosophical approaches and research methods used during inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In their description of the five phases of the qualitative research process, Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the need for clarity in the philosophical assumptions of the researcher, which inherently guide the research in the form of applied paradigms, approaches, and analysis of data. I am philosophically situated in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism focuses on the people’s meaning making in the context of their social environments. Ontologically, interpretivists assert that there is not one single truth, but rather that truth is constructed through our individual lens in the context of our environments; this lens is not subjective, but intersubjective, inextricably connected to the environment in which the person is situated (Schwandt et al., 2007). Given the notion of multiple truths, the epistemological
assumption is that the researcher and participant both play a role in interpreting the reality of events (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology requires the researcher to become personally engaged with the phenomenon, not simply viewing it from a distance or as an abstract. This intimate engagement allows the researcher to view the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants. To fully understand the essence of the phenomenon, the researcher engages in the participants’ lived experiences to uncover the meanings made within these experiences (Rao & Churchill, 2004). Through the process of engaging with study participants’ lived experiences, the researcher will inevitably engage with their own perceptions and beliefs about the phenomenon of focus. It is not expected that the researcher erase these perceptions; however, it is expected that they recognize and set them aside so that they do not diminish the credibility of the essences of meaning reported in the study (Rao & Churchill, 2004). Reflexivity, the process of ongoing self-reflection related to the researcher’s position in relation to the research topic, is critical to the credibility of the study. The practice of observing one’s own position in relation to the topic of study while engaged in qualitative research also includes the acknowledgement of how the researcher’s biases may impact the research design and findings (Berger, 2015).

**Positionality**

I grew up in a Midwest blue-collar city. My extended family is middle class, relying on life-long careers in local factories and service industries that are the cornerstone of the economy in my hometown. While most of my family sat solidly in middle-class suburbia of my town, my parents struggled with addiction and economic instability from my earliest memories. I grew up in poverty. At the age of 13, I entered into the foster care system, where I experienced two kinship foster care placements with extended family before aging out of the system at age 18.
While college was discussed with me as a teenager, I was the first person in my mother’s family to earn a bachelor’s degree and remain the only person in my entire extended family to hold an advanced degree. I stand with the 94%-96% of former foster youth in the U.S. who did not earn a bachelor’s degree by the age of 26. I earned my degree at the age of 29 and went on to earn my master’s degree at age 30. I am aware that my experiences as a child and young adult impact my perspective and contribute to my identity. Therefore, it is essential that I understand how they contribute to the lens in which I view and analyze my data.

As a former foster youth and former college student from foster care, I am keenly aware of the tendency to “go it alone.” I see my younger self, and sometimes even my current self, in the words of the scholarly articles I read and in the words of my study participants describing self-protective actions and avoidant help-seeking behaviors. My lived experiences have fueled my passion for improving outcomes for young adults who spent time in foster care. I have channeled this passion into my professional career as an education-focused social worker, my personal life as a mentor to young adults with similar experiences to mine, and my educational pursuits as a scholar focusing my research in the area of foster youth and higher education. My relationship to my research topic is intimate; I lived it, I work it, and I think about it every day. I am aware that this relationship carries an extra burden of responsibility. As a social worker I must remain self-reflective and intentional in my work with students and my colleagues. As a researcher, this is also important.

My positionality in this study is multi-faceted. As a former student from foster care, I shared an aspect of my identity with several of my interview participants. As a clinical social worker, I have worked professionally with dozens of students from foster care within the campus-based support program in which this study took place. With this professional experience,
the experiences shared by the coaches who participated in this study reminded me of my own practice experiences. A critical position I hold in the context of this research is that I participated in the development of the campus-based program and coaching model that will be investigated in this study.

I have a deep awareness that my personal and professional lived experiences contribute to the lens through which I see the world. It also influences how I collect, view, and analyze data. The positionality of a researcher influences the research in various ways, including building rapport with research subjects and interpreting results (Berger, 2015). Researchers who share lived experiences can leverage their experience by disclosing personal stories, which may result in deeper exploration and trust during interviews. However, care must be taken not to impose the researcher’s story on the research participants, or let the researcher’s needs take over the interview (Berger, 2015). In my role as the primary investigator (PI) of this study, I shared my foster care background with the students who I interviewed and invited questions about that identity in the initial meeting with each participant. I believe this disclosure increased rapport with the students who participated, especially in the absence of an established relationship.

Similarly, as a trainer and colleague of the coaches who participated in this study, I had a dual role. This created a risk that could have impacted the willingness of participants to be vulnerable in describing their coaching work. To mitigate these risks, I practiced transparency in my role as a researcher by clearly and regularly stating the role I was holding during interviews, and clarifying things I was not listening for, such as performance markers of their job duties. I also practiced asking for clarification often related to foster care or coaching specific language in order to prevent simplification or assumptions of terms familiar to myself and the participant. For example, if a student or coach mentioned a coaching tool that I am familiar with, I asked
them to describe their perspective on the tool and how it is used, rather than assuming their understanding was the same as mine.

Addressing how my dual roles can influence my perception of the study findings was a critical reflexive activity for me as the researcher (Ahren, 1999). Reflexive journaling took place throughout the process of this study. Before each interview and throughout the analysis and writing process, I reflected on my own beliefs, lived experiences, and biases about coaching practices, students from foster care, and help-seeking behaviors. In addition to ongoing journaling, I engaged the seminal literature relevant to the theoretical framework that guided this study early and often throughout data collection, analysis, and writing of findings. Re-reading the literature that informed the design of this study provided a helpful method for checking any assumptions or biases related to experiences and themes emerging from study participants.

**Setting and Participants**

This study took place within a post-secondary setting in which students from foster care are participating in coaching during their undergraduate studies. Participants were recruited from a campus-based support program at a mid-size, Midwest university, all of whom were participating in a coaching relationship as part of the program’s requirements. The program serves about 150 students from foster care through various programmatic interventions, including scholarships, housing and academic services, and emergency funding that covers expenses that might typically be provided by family. In addition to these services, and of relevance to this study, a dedicated coach is assigned to each student during their time as an undergraduate. Coaches are trained in the Fostering Success Coaching Model, a coaching model designed for use with post-secondary students from foster care (see Appendix A for a description of the Fostering Success Coaching Model) (Bennett et al., 2020). Meetings between coach and
student are expected to occur multiple times per week via various modes of communication (i.e., in-person, phone, text) and are ideally high frequency and low duration in nature to allow multiple opportunities for connection and support (Unrau et al., 2017). Students and coaches determine the frequency and duration of meetings based on the students’ needs. However, the program encourages in-person contact every month for each student.

This setting was selected for this study for several reasons. First, the campus-based program in which the coaching takes place is well established and considered an exemplary national model in terms of providing support to students from foster care (Geiger et al., 2018). Students in this program graduate at a rate of 30%, a rate that is three times higher than the national average for former foster youth. While the students receive various benefits while enrolled in the program, they rate the provided coaching services as among the most important factors of their success (Unrau et al., 2017). Next, as an established program with a large number of students and a team of several coaches, it provided a better opportunity to use purposeful sampling to recruit participants who were in long-term student–coach relationships and therefore able to reflect on their experiences.

As is typical for qualitative research, purposeful homogenous sampling was used to select participants for this study. Homogenous sampling allows the researcher to recruit participants based on a certain characteristics (Miles et al., 2014). Desired characteristics for the study included students who had worked with a coach for a minimum of one calendar year and coaches who have been employed by the program for at least one calendar year. This time frame was selected as it allowed for the recruitment of students and coaches who had had multiple instances of interactions and could therefore reflect on their experiences and perspectives related to the coaching relationship over time. Students were invited to participate if they were an active
student in the selected program, had junior or senior status, were in good academic standing as defined by the university, and had participated in coaching for at least one calendar year. This inclusion criteria allowed for a sampling of students who were making progress towards graduation and who had varied academic and coaching experiences. Many studies related to students from foster care and help seeking focus on the reasons this population does not ask for help and the subsequent challenges they may face as a result (Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). The inclusion criteria for this study provided an opportunity to explore help-seeking behaviors among a student population that is experiencing academic success, an element that is not currently prominent in the literature. A total of five students participated in this study.

Coaches were invited to participate if they met the inclusion criteria of being a current full-time coach in the identified campus-based support program for a minimum of one year. Program staff who did not work primarily with students, or former staff employed as coaches, were excluded. At the time of recruitment and data collection, the program employed four full-time coaches, all of whom meet inclusion criteria. All four coaches participated in the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Student participants involved in this study may be considered vulnerable because of their lived experiences in the foster care system and potential trauma histories. During this study, participants were asked to reflect on and share their experiences and perceptions of participating in coaching as a student or a coach involved in a campus-based program. Student participants were asked to reflect on the experience of receiving coaching services, their relationships with their coach, and their own help-seeking behaviors in the context of their time spent in foster care. The coach participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of the students’ help-seeking
behaviors and the coaching strategies they perceived as being useful or not useful in navigating these behaviors. Because the interview questions did not request student or coach participants to disclose past trauma, foster care history, or confidential information about themselves or others, it was assumed that the risk of harm was minimal. However, it is possible that the recounting of past experiences or relationship challenges may cause uncomfortable emotions or surface painful memories. To mitigate this, I was prepared to provide written resources for accessible counseling or therapy to the participants. The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of South Florida reviewed the design and procedures of this study before any study actions were implemented. The IRB approved the study as involving minimal risk and dictated procedures to protect the safety and confidentiality of all participants.

Hard copies of data collected from subjects, such as handwritten notes/memos and printed interview transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet at my private home office throughout the duration of data collection and analysis. Electronic data, such as interview recordings and electronic transcript records were immediately downloaded to a secure cloud-based server provided by the university, and not kept on public sites (i.e. Zoom) or on my personal computer. Data records gathered during this study will be destroyed no later than five years after collection as dictated by the IRB. Due to the nature of the relationship between participants, all identifiers were removed from all publicly available findings or writings. The use of aliases, gender neutral pronouns, and limited descriptions of demographic identifiers were carefully monitored and used to prevent the identification of participants in the findings.

All participants were provided with an informed consent letter (see Appendix B) outlining the study commitments, research procedures, risks, and confidentiality measures. Participants were also verbally briefed on the study commitments, research procedures, risks,
and confidentiality measures, and provided verbal consent to participate in alignment with the IRB approved procedure. Participants were made aware that they could opt out of the research process at any time without consequences or penalty. Finally, student participants were provided an incentive of an Amazon gift card in the amount of $20 after the completion of the final interview. Coaches who participated were not compensated.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

This study focused on students and coaches who were in a professional helping relationship within a campus-based program designed for students from foster care. Collecting data from students and coaches provided multiple viewpoints of the perceptions related to help seeking in the context of receiving coaching. A thematic, hybrid data analysis was used to interpret the data collected in a rigorous, iterative process of reduction to identify themes in the meanings made by study participants during their coaching experiences.

Four interview protocols were developed for data collection. The first and second interview protocols were informed by research questions that focused on students’ perceptions of help seeking:

1. How did students who were receiving coaching experience help seeking?
   a. What perceived factors influenced their help-seeking decisions?
2. How did coaching influence the students’ help-seeking behaviors?

The first interview protocol was designed to explore students’ beliefs related to help-seeking behaviors. Questions were informed by existing knowledge of help-seeking behaviors among former foster youth and invited students to both share their perspectives and memories related to help seeking with their coaches and with other helpers on campus. The second interview protocol included fewer questions and used a narrative approach, inviting the students to tell a story about
a time when they sought help and a time when they did not seek help. This protocol invited the
students to describe their behaviors, thoughts, and decisions related to help seeking in particular
situations.

The third and fourth interview protocols were informed by research questions that focused on
coaches’ perspectives of students’ help seeking:

3. How did the coaches perceive the help-seeking behaviors of the students?

4. How did the coaches perceive the influence of a coaching intervention on help-seeking
behaviors of the students?

The third protocol included several questions that aimed to explore the coaches’ perspectives of
students’ help-seeking behavior and how they respond to it within their role as a coach. The
questions prompted the coaches to recall memories of students coming to them for help or,
conversely, not coming to them for help. Questions that were informed by literature on best
practices in coaching with youth from foster care were included to prompt sharing of techniques
used with students in various help-seeking situations. The fourth protocol used a narrative
approach, prompting the coaches to share stories of times when students did and did not seek
help. These questions intended to invite the coaches to reflect on their perceptions of students
and their practice in the context of particular situations. The interview protocols used in this
study can be found in Appendix C.

To practice my methods of data collection and analysis, I completed a pilot study that
served as the research setting. It was conducted with a student who had recently graduated from
the program and a coach who had left their position in the program within the same calendar year
as the study took place. Pilot studies help researchers test run their interview protocols and
analysis methods to address any issues related to bias and to refine questions for clarity and
effectiveness. They also provide an opportunity for the researcher to gain a glimpse of how the study will proceed and inform necessary adjustments (Chenail, 2011). To complete the pilot study, I interviewed both of the participants and evaluated the interview data using a hybrid data analysis. The process of the pilot study resulted in the refinement of my interview questions and supported the finalization of the a priori codebook that was used during data analysis. No data from the pilot study are included in the findings of this study.

**Data Collection**

Participants were recruited via the program director of the selected setting for the study. The IRB approved materials provided to the program director included an overview of the study details in a formal email and a flier that was shared with potential subjects. Information about the study was also included in the student newsletter that was emailed to all students in the campus-support program. Participants were invited to contact me directly if they met the study criteria and wished to participate. A total of 11 participants contacted me with interest in participating. One person did not meet inclusion criteria, and one opted out of the study before completing the first interview. The resulting participant pool consisted of four coaches and five students. The demographic characteristics of the participants are displayed in Table 1.

I engaged in up to four video-recorded contacts with each participant. When a potential subject made contact by email, they were invited to join me on a brief call to learn more about the study’s details and procedures via the online video-conferencing platform—Zoom. During this video call, I provided a thorough introduction, which included disclosure of my dual roles and background as a former foster youth. Also, participants were read the informed consent document and given the opportunity to ask questions. At that time, they verbally provided consent to participate, and were sent an email with the informed consent document attached.
The initial contact also included the scheduling of the next two contacts, which would be video interviews. The second video contact consisted of an individual, semi-structured interview recorded via Zoom. Verbal consent was verified and the opportunity to ask any clarification questions was offered before the interview begun. Subjects were also made aware that the interview was being recorded. The first interviews with the subjects ranged from 45–75 minutes and consisted of several open-ended questions designed to explore the help-seeking perceptions of the individual. The interview protocol for this contact is located in Appendix C. The next contact was a semi-structured interview in which the participants were invited to tell a story of a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Coach Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African</td>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years working with a coach</td>
<td>Years working as a coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more</td>
<td>Eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Sample Demographics
help-seeking example and a non-help seeking example they remember from their own experience. Student participants were asked to share their experiences of help-seeking decisions related to the example. Coaches were asked to recall their experience in providing coaching to a student who sought help. A final contact occurred via email. Coaches were sent a summary of the aggregate findings from the coaches’ interviews, and students were sent the aggregate findings from the student interviews. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback, edits, and corrections to the findings from their own perspective in writing or via a final Zoom video call. Four subjects opted to send an email verifying the findings as accurate. This final contact served as a credibility measure to corroborate findings before any conclusions were written.

**Data Analysis**

A hybrid approach to thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was used to guide a reflexive and iterative process of data analysis. Thematic analysis is an approach used widely in qualitative research, providing a method for grouping and linking codes and eventually identifying overarching themes through an iterative process to identify the meanings made by the participants who are being studied (Grbich, 2013). This process allows the researcher to search for patterns within the data that are relevant to the phenomenon of focus (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A hybrid thematic approach to analysis blends a deductive process for analysis related to the theoretical framework and an inductive process that is driven by the data collected during the study (Swain, 2018). In conducting my data-analysis, I followed a six-step iterative process of hybrid thematic analysis as outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the stages.
In hybrid data analysis, a deductive codebook is first created based on the existing literature and theoretical framework. Second, the codebook is tested for reliability and applicability to the data. Third, the raw data is summarized and grouped into initial themes via an inductive process of reading and pulling key ideas out from transcripts or documents. Fourth, the a priori codebook is applied to the inductive themes from step three. Inductive codes can also be assigned in step four as new themes arise. Fifth, all data sources were connected to identify themes across the data sets. Sixth, the themes identified are carefully corroborated through an iterative process of reviewing codes, themes, raw data, and literature connected to the theoretical framework of the study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
To employ this process of data analysis, I first created a deductive code manual based on the research questions and existing literature that explores help seeking among former foster youth, the helping practice of coaching, and the theoretical framework that guided the study. Second, the deductive codebook was validated and adjusted following the pilot study, resulting in nine theory driven codes, displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Deductive Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory Driven Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Relationship</td>
<td>Actions or beliefs related to the creation of a relationship in the context of coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Action</td>
<td>Coaching actions, tools, or other strategies that are intentionally used to promote goal achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Seeking</td>
<td>Adaptive: Beliefs or actions that include engaging a supportive person for help in a way that indicates a recognition of need, planning, and executing of the ask.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidant: Beliefs or actions that include active avoidance of engaging a supportive person for assistance in the face of a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival Behaviors</td>
<td>Actively seeking to distance oneself from others as a way to protect a survivor identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Protection Behaviors</td>
<td>Beliefs and actions that seek to protect a stigmatized sense of self—presenting as competent and independent, which is in conflict with the sense of the self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>The perception that one is in control of their life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>The perception that one is connected to other people who care about their well-being and success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>The perception that one is effective and can impact their life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcription and coding began immediately after the first interview. Each transcript was crafted while reviewing the interview’s recording and then imported into MAXQDA software for coding. The first round of coding followed step three of the hybrid data analysis, which consists of summarizing and identifying initial themes via an inductive coding process. With each new transcript that was coded, new inductive themes emerged; therefore, an iterative method of
coding was used across all transcripts to ensure fidelity and thoroughness of coding. At this stage of analysis, I also summarized main themes that were emerging using a memo function in MAXQDA. As coding took place, a block-and-file approach was used to keep quotations intact so to preserve the essence and meaning of the participants’ voices. The block-and-file approach keeps the data intact and within the context it has been collected, making it useful for identifying themes and maintaining the voices of participants (Grbich, 2013).

Table 3

Themes as a Result of Iterative Inductive and Deductive Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching is Informed by Students’ Foster Care Experiences</td>
<td>Coaching takes place in the context of both the past and current environments of both the students and the coaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Transformational Relationship</td>
<td>Coaches intentionally create a relationship that serves as a platform for teaching students help-seeking behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful Teaching for Long-Term Success</td>
<td>Specific actions for building students’ skills and strengths by actively promoting partnership and power sharing with students in everyday moments and tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help-Seeking Beliefs and Behaviors Changed Over Time</td>
<td>Help-seeking behaviors positively changed for students from their freshman year to present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationship with the Coach Impacted Help-Seeking Behaviors</td>
<td>A positive relationship and experience working with their coaches contributes to a willingness to seek help within the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Vulnerability Impacted Help Seeking</td>
<td>Not asking for help aligns with the need to maintain independence, which is a source of resilience and mechanism for self-protection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the iteratively inductive coding was complete, I reviewed the inductive codes to merge similar codes into categories. Next, I applied my deductive code manual to the initial inductive codes and emerging themes to guide broader theme generation. The hybrid approach includes the process of inductively coding throughout (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), which took place as themes emerged. The final inductive codebook included a total of six parent codes and seven subcodes (see Appendix D). MAXQDA analysis features were used to compare themes across interviews and across subjects. Iterative reading of the data in the context of the final inductive and deductive codes produced large themes for each group. As themes emerged, they were applied across all subjects to verify and refine. A set of themes were then finalized among the group of students and the group of coaches. The final themes from each group are displayed in Table 3. Finally, findings were sent to each group of participants for the verification of findings.

Credibility, a measure of trustworthiness, in reported study findings is a critical element for qualitative researchers. In qualitative research, in which the research instrument is a human, credibility can be achieved through several means, including thick description, multivocality, and member checking (Tracy, 2010). Thick description requires in-depth reporting of both data and the context in which they are embedded. This type of description aims to “show readers” the findings, rather than “tell readers” them (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). The block-and-file approach of analysis allows data to remain intact, preserving the context (Grbich, 2013). Multivocality is characterized by the presence of multiple points of view and voices in the research findings, including that of the researcher, while member checking invites research participants to validate the researcher’s findings throughout the analysis process (Tracy, 2010). Gathering data from both students and coaches provided various viewpoints of the relationship that is at the center of
this study. Additionally, my vocality as the researcher includes my perception of the data in relationship to the theoretical framework that is guiding this study.

As an additional measure of credibility, I engaged participants in member checking at the end the analysis process in order to provide opportunities for participants to provide input on the final write-up of findings. To do this, participants were contacted via email and provided with a summary of findings. The participants were given seven days to review the themes and conclusions of the findings and to submit comments via writing or via a scheduled, recorded Zoom meeting. For this step of analysis, it is crucial to display the findings in a way that participants can interpret and react to them with clarity (Miles et al., 2014). I displayed the findings of this study in a table format that identified main themes and subthemes, with definitions and excerpts from the write-up of findings included directly within the table. Participants were also sent the entire write-up of findings and encouraged to choose the document that best suited their preferences for providing feedback.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of help seeking among students from foster care and the coaches with whom they were working within a campus support program at a four-year university. A phenomenological approach guided the research design and selection of subjects, and a hybrid thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and inform findings. Measures to recognize my positionality as a researcher, credibility and validity, and the protection of subjects were incorporated into the study.
Chapter 4

Findings

In this qualitative study, I aimed to understand the perceived help-seeking behaviors among students with foster care experience and who are engaged in a coaching relationship within a campus-based support program at a four-year university. I examined the perceptions of help-seeking behaviors and the perceived influence of a coaching intervention from the perspective of coaches and students. A total of four coaches and five students participated in this study. The coaches were all employed by the campus-based support program and had been in their full-time positions from anywhere between three to eight years. All of the student participants had either junior or senior status, were in good academic standing, and had been working with a coach for at least one year.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the findings of an iterative process of hybrid thematic analysis. In order to explore the perspectives of help seeking and coaching, data from coaches and students were analyzed as two distinct sets of data. Findings were displayed in the form of summaries and included direct quotations from coaches and students.

Findings from Interviews with Students

Three themes related to research questions 1 and 2 emerged from the hybrid analysis of the students’ interview data. The first theme indicates an awareness that help-seeking beliefs and behaviors changed during time spent in college and specifically within the context of the coaching relationship. The second theme indicates a perspective that self-protection strategies had remained present, hindering help seeking at times within the coaching relationship. The third
theme indicates that students believed the relationship they had with their coaches had a positive impact on their help-seeking behaviors.

**Help-Seeking Behaviors Changed Over Time**

One focus for this study included exploring the ways in which student participants perceived their help-seeking behaviors during their time in college, and was guided by the following research question:

1. How did the Students Receiving Coaching Experience Help Seeking?

As students reflected, a theme emerged that indicates a shift in help-seeking attitudes and actions from freshman year to the present. The students indicated a belief at the time of entering college that they were only able to rely on themselves and therefore did not feel comfortable seeking help from their coaches in many instances. The students consistently reported feeling the need to “go it alone” early on in their college careers. As is commonly reported by former foster youth, the dedication to self-reliance was seen as a way to cope with experiences of not being supported during childhood. One participant, Jaden, described a viewpoint that “asking for help” was superficial and different than “seeking support,” which involved more of a relationship. Jaden stated further:

> I would say individually for me, I'm more likely to ask for help and not really seek support, just because this might be sort of characteristic of many students who have had like an adverse background, but like that sense of like independence that you're raised with that, like, you know, you know how to solve your own problems and like you know how to support yourself.

Luka shares a similar perspective:
A lot of the times, like coming home from school, it would be me making my own food or, you know, like getting myself to bed and doing my homework and everything like that. And so, I kind of got used to doing things by myself.

The students shared how their experiences of being let down by adults during time spent in foster care impacted their perspectives on help seeking. Sam shared their experience seeking help from case managers: “I think that when I was in the system, like I just kind of knew that, like if I went to go ask for help, it was hopeless.” Feeling let down by people who were assigned to helping was also shared by Luka: “I also know that I would rather do something myself, rather than ask for help and be turned down or rejected or have somebody that says that they're going to follow through with something and then they don't.”

The students reflected that in the beginning of their college experience, they viewed the coach’s role as similar to that of other professional roles that may have been present in their lives. Therefore, the student participants may have been reluctant to engage them as supports. Landry shared, “I didn't really know them pretty well, so just walking all the way across campus to meet with these people who just want to pick my brain and all that. Yeah, I just wasn't really fond of it.” Sam shared an experience of physically showing up to meetings with their coach during their freshman year, but not actively engaging in help seeking:

And at that point, help seeking was really difficult for me. I do feel like my campus coaches were always supportive and like always checking on me, and I was just kind of like, “Yeah, everything’s great.” Like, “doing just fine.” And in reality, I was like failing everything.

Over time, the students indicated that this perspective began to shift towards seeing the coach as a trustworthy person who could offer help and support. Several students commented on the
intentional decision to seek help as they progressed in their college career. Dominique shared their decision to ask for help more often:

I used to be really afraid to ask for help. I wouldn't ask for help at all, ever, and I knew that I had to change. I really just knew that, like, in order to get somewhere and actually progress further in my future…I'd have to start seeking resources, asking for help.

Sam shares their perspective about returning to college after taking time off: “I came back to do it right, and help seeking from that point on has been a complete turnaround.”

The students who participated in this study described awareness of their help-seeking beliefs and behaviors as being rooted in their past experiences of time spent in the foster care system and expressed a perspective that they had changed since their time in college. These changes over time seemed to have been predicated by a decision to make a change in order to reach their goals and often were described in the context of developing a more trusting relationship with their coaches. This was described by one student:

I reached out to my coach a couple of times and in different ways. I started asking for like unconventional supports and ways that I was like, I've never been supported like this…maybe I can ask you this and see how this goes. And then over time, like I would say my conditions and safety expanded and I got a little bit more comfortable asking for a little bit more space to like be heard in a different way.

*Perceived Vulnerability Impacted Help Seeking*

Although the students in this study indicated that coaching positively impacted their help-seeking behaviors, they also reported feeling discomfort asking their coaches for help when facing a challenge. Many of the reported reasons for not asking for help aligned with the need to maintain independence that had been a source of resilience and mechanism for self-protection.
during time spent in the foster care system as reported at the beginning of this section. As the
students in this study reflected on their beliefs about asking for help, they often communicated
“feeling bad” asking for help. When prompted to share what “feeling bad” meant, the students
shared feeling embarrassed to ask their coach for help and feeling as if their individual needs
were not as valid as other students’ needs. However, the most salient and often cited reason for
avoiding asking their coaches for help was to prevent being perceived as a burden or
inconvenience. Findings also indicated that the students often felt more comfort with help
seeking in certain situations than in others.

Protecting themselves from embarrassment and letting their coach down were reported as
reasons the students were avoiding asking for help at the time of the interviews. At the same
time, the students acknowledged that their coach was not likely to be disappointed in them, but
still felt as if they could not reach out for help. Dominique shared:

I couldn't get my books for a while and I didn't have the money to go and buy those. And
so I was really embarrassed about it. So I was like, I don't want to ask my coach, because
I'm embarrassed, which is really dumb, but I was, and that's what happened.

Another example was described by Luka: “That wasn't how I wanted my coach to perceive me
even though I understand like they don’t care. They want to be there for me...but in the moment I
was like, no, my coach doesn't need to see this.” Luka also shared they did not want their coach
to “look down” on them during a situation in which they could have benefitted from help.

Another reason the students indicated they “felt bad” asking for help was related to a
perception that their needs were not as valid as others or that other people could use the help
more than they could. When discussing being unable to buy their textbooks, Dominique shared
not asking the coach for help because “someone else could probably need this money more than I
do.” Luka indicated feeling as if their class status as a senior meant they should not need as much help. “My campus coaches should spend more time and energy with their first year students that are a little bit more, you know, in need of different services and things like that.” One student even acknowledged a sense of discomfort with the idea of their needs being important: “understanding that my needs are just as valid as anybody else's, that still sounds weird to say out loud.”

Protecting themselves from feeling like a burden to others was frequently reported by the students as a reason to not reach out for help. Jaden shared, “I don't want to require someone to give me help that I would certainly feel is burdensome to them.” Luka shared, “I just, I never want to be a burden to anybody else. Or like inconvenience anyone.” Landry shared, “That’s the most important part, just not bothering anyone. I don't like the feeling of inconveniencing people like taking their own time to help me.” Feeling as if they could be perceived as a burden to their coaches was applied broadly by the students and described in areas of needing help with money, moving to new housing on campus, navigating peer relationships, and addressing mental health challenges. Feeling as if they were a burden was often related to the need to be independent and rely only on oneself, as indicated in Dominique’s reflection: “I want to do good things for myself and not rely on people to do stuff for me.”

The students also described instances in which the feelings of being a burden when asking for help were alleviated. One student shared feeling more comfortable accepting help when they knew the help was going to many students, and not just them. Similarly, Landry shared feeling “more comfortable” accepting support during the COVID pandemic because all of the students were receiving help, not just them. Jaden described an instance of receiving help from their coach during an emergency situation and feeling as if the coach was in it together with
them because they physically showed up to work on the challenge. “It is a burden we're going to share together and in that moment, like me and my coach we're going through the same problem, even if it was just my problem, like we were solving it together.”

It is important to note that the students largely reported being willing to seek help from their coach in many areas that they needed support at the time of the interview. This varied from student to student. Some students shared they felt particularly “bad” seeking help for problems related to money but found it easy to go their coach for academics or relationship support. Other reported areas that students felt like they were a burden in seeking help included mental health, residential moves, and certain academic subjects, namely math. Therefore, it was reported to be the case that the students were not simply willing or unwilling to seek help but were instead able to identify their needs and actively seek help or avoid seeking help based on perceived vulnerability of the reason help was needed.

**Positive Relationship with the Coach Impacted Help-Seeking Behaviors**

A second focus of this study was guided by the following research question:

2. How Did Coaching Influence the Students’ Help-Seeking Behaviors?

All of the student participants in this study reported a positive relationship and experience working with their coaches that contributed to a willingness to seek help within the relationship. Within this theme, several subthemes were present, including feeling holistically supported in all areas of their lives; receiving support that was unexpected or above and beyond other support received in the past; and feeling as if they were the experts in their lives. The students described feeling valued, validated, accepted, and cared for in their relationships with their coaches and indicated these qualities helped them seek help from their coaches more often than they have in past relationships with helping professionals.
A common perspective among the students was that the coaches were consistently available to help them in any area in which help was needed. The experience of always receiving help when going to the coach was a factor in going to the coach in the future when help was needed. Dominique shares, “Everything that I've ever gone to them for they’ve never turned me down, turned me away. They’re always trying to help me.” Sam shares a similar perspective: “The support that we get from them it is like never failing. If we go to our campus coaches, we will get help with it. They don’t leave us kind of in the dust or say like, we just don’t know how to help you with that.” The students consistently reported knowing that they could rely on their coaches, that they were available, and that they could be trusted to help them resolve issues “ASAP.” Students also shared that if their coach was unable to quickly answer their questions, they always connected them to someone who could. As one student shared, “I felt like every time I went to them with a problem, it didn't go unresolved.”

The perspective that the coaches genuinely cared about the students and exemplified that by providing support that was above and beyond the expected was commonly cited by the students. Jaden described an instance in which they were stuck on the side of the road after experiencing a car breakdown. They decided to call their coach, expecting some advice on what to do. Instead the coach came to pick Jaden up and was prepared with emergency funding to get the car towed to a mechanic. Jaden shares their reaction to the support in that instance: “That was amazing because first of all, I didn't, I didn't have any way to get back home.” Several examples of coaches helping more than expected were shared by all participants, including the support received when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted campus employment, impacting their finances. All of the students reported being proactively contacted by their coaches when the pandemic started for a check-in on basic living needs, such as food and rent, and, in some cases,
receiving funding to cover rent for the summer to alleviate financial stress. Other examples included connecting students with mental health services, helping them to figure out health insurance benefits, editing academic papers, providing housing supplies, and assisting them in navigating a roommate conflict. The consistent and reliable support was cited not only as being useful to students, but also as contributing to a sense of feeling valued and cared for by their coaches. Sam shares:

I feel like it just gave me like a lot of value for myself and it just made me feel like I do deserve nice things. I do deserve like, not just the bare minimum, like I deserve more than just to have my head above water. I think their commitment to like just always helping us out and making sure that like we're not just surviving but like we're actually doing well. It just went a long way for me.

Being perceived as an expert of one’s own experience and the promotion of autonomy to make decisions was another reported benefit of coaching. The students reported feeling as if their coaches viewed them as the experts in their lives. For example, Luka shared, “They understand that I'm the expert of my own experience, and they're never going to know more about my life and my experience than I do.” Dominique shared how being viewed as the expert of their own experiences helped them feel validated and confident in themselves and their decisions:

I brought some pretty like serious issues to like my campus coach and they never like invalidated me, believed me through everything, and helped me. It felt like a change in my life because before I came to college, nobody ever believed what I had to say.

Being perceived as the expert of their own lives and experiences was present in the ways the coaches provided help to the students. Landry shared that their coach has helped them understand that they are “smarter than I think,” sharing further that their coach is “always just
straightforward with me and is like ‘you already know what you want.’” Students also reported feeling empowered to make their own decisions based on what they felt was best. For example, Sam shared:

They've always made it about like, …not just what they think is best or, you know, what they think I should do. They've always just wanted me to choose for myself what is best for me at the time.

Dominique shared that their coach was “clear that this is my story and I'm the one who gets to tell it and I'm the one who gets to make the decisions.” The student participants also shared that while they felt in control of their own decisions with their coaches, they also felt supported in figuring out ways to move forward. Sam shared:

It's [coaching] always made me feel that like I'm better at making choices because I realized how many choices I have after talking to them. Just because we can do everything on our own, it doesn't mean that we have to.

Students also described discussing their help-seeking behaviors with their coaches and related these conversations to better help-seeking behaviors. Sam described having a conversation with their coach after returning to college after having taken time off. In the discussion, they discussed Sam’s previous help-seeking behaviors and how they could be shifted moving forward. Luka also described a conversation with their coach that impacted their perspective about accepting help:

I remember having this conversation with my coach, and she was like “don't take that joy away from your friend.” She said if that's how he wants to support you, let him do that. I never thought about it from the other perspective. Because I would want to do things like that for the people that I love. And so I've definitely gotten a little bit better.
The students consistently shared that the relationship they had with their coach was beneficial and had positively impacted their help seeking over time. Consistency, a sense of feeling valued and validated, and a knowledge that the help provided by coaches was reliable and respectful of the students’ autonomy to make their own decisions were all reported as positively impacting the willingness to seek help in the coaching relationship.

**Findings from Interviews with Coaches**

Three main themes, related to research questions 3 and 4, emerged from the hybrid analysis of the coaches’ data. The first indicates a perspective that coaching’s influence on help seeking takes place within the context of both the students’ past foster care experiences and the program’s current team structure. The second theme emphasizes the importance of creating a purposeful relationship that will serve as a mechanism for academic success as well as teach the students how to engage interpersonally with others in meaningful ways. The third theme indicates the need to purposefully teach skills that can be translated into various areas of the students’ lives in order to help them be successful.

**Coaching is Informed by Students’ Foster Care Experiences**

The findings in this section provide insight into the coaches’ perceptions of help-seeking behaviors among the SFC that they serve, and was guided by the following research question:

3. How did the coaches perceive the help-seeking behaviors of the students?

The theme of coaching in the context of the students’ past foster care experiences emerged as the coaches reflected on their views of the help-seeking behaviors among the students with whom they worked. This contextual framing of the students’ behavior informed their understanding of the students’ motivations for seeking and not seeking help as well as their subsequent coaching decisions with students.
Habits formed as a result of experiences of being in foster care were central to the understanding of coaches’ perspectives related to help-seeking behaviors among their students. Habits were described as learned behaviors that were necessary to navigate the challenges of the foster care system, including help not being available or an accepted way to meet the needs a youth might have while in care. Cameron states hearing students describe the ways they have experienced the unavailability of help:

“[Student’s share] ‘I've got to do it on my own, because I did not have the support. I didn't have a trusted individual, parent, guardian, family member, friend, the support system wasn't there.’ So, I think that's part of it. It is a learned behavior based on the environment and some of the experiences students have had.”

Bob reports a perspective that students have not had the opportunity to learn about help seeking in a positive setting.

They always feel as if asking for help is not normal, like…it's not a common thing. It's not something that was practiced, wherever, whether it was residential or even a foster home. That it was something that wasn’t utilized in a positive perspective.

A central perspective held by the coaches posits that past relationships within the foster care system hindered the development of adaptive help seeking through discipline, expectations of independence, and failures to respond to or provide help that was requested.

Avoiding help seeking as a self-protection behavior was also cited by every coach that participated in the study. They described a perspective that help seeking is a very vulnerable act for students who may fear being viewed as incompetent or view themselves as a disappointment or burden to their coach. Cameron states:
A student might say, “this is a stupid question.” Then it's really clear that they're judging or being hard on themselves. Or “I know you're really busy, so I didn’t want to bother you with it.” So a sense of “I'm a burden for you.”

Zeke shared a similar view that students “think that they're putting on someone else from asking for help. That's from someone making them feel like that or their internal self telling them that.”

Bob shared a similar perspective: “So they immediately feel shameful that they're in that position, you know, as if they've done something wrong.” Marquise shared an interaction with a student in which the student resisted reaching out for help because they “didn’t want to let me down.” The shared perspective of the coaches indicated a view that the students’ desires to protect themselves from the judgement of themselves or others were driving avoidant help-seeking behaviors. Coaches shared a perspective that this fear of judgement was critical to the students’ identities as survivors and their need to avoid further labeling like that which occurred during time spent in foster care.

The perspective of coaching in the context of learned behaviors from time spent in foster care was reported as an important factor regarding the ways that coaches responded to students with a strengths-based focus when they did show up for help. Cameron reported experiencing an intentional stance of empathy and a desire to understand the reasons why a student they were working with did not feel safe asking for help from them when they that student had been expelled by the university. “I know where the student was at that moment and kind of what that meant. I just felt, you know, this empathy for what is the fact that he was just, you know, feeling scared and feeling overwhelmed.” Marquise also shared an experience of learning a student did not reach out for help as a result of fears of letting them down and responding with acceptance.
“And that was hard to hear. That was heartbreaking to me, and you know I responded to her, ‘you cannot let me down. I’m happy and privileged to be able to work with you.’”

In addition to coaching in the context of the students’ foster care experiences, the coaches also shared the importance of coaching within the context of their program on campus and as part of a team. Being one coach on a team of many was cited as an important tool for reinforcing adaptive help-seeking behaviors among students who may be reluctant to do so. Marquise described a recent situation in which the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a financial crisis for a student. The coach reported working with the student to remedy a late rent payment, but not being able to convince the student to accept financial support for groceries. During the coaching session another coach happened to step into the room and offer support for groceries to the student. Upon this second offer, the student accepted. Marquise described his understanding of this interaction:

I knew I couldn't push it too hard and I was really thankful that that other coach stepped in and said something like that too without knowing the context. Just knowing what our common needs were basically with students at that time.

Marquise described this experience as normalizing the help being provided, which created an environment in which the student felt able to accept help. Zeke also identified the need to coach within the context of a team. “We all have very different, diverse backgrounds and identity. So utilizing the strengths on your team is huge.”

Another cited benefit of coaching in the context of a team was the culture of relationally centered work with students that was cultivated amongst team members and with program leadership. Cameron says, “despite how busy or how full of a schedule that the program has, it’s never felt that anything takes precedence over connecting with that individual, over the
relationship.” The relationally centered work was also viewed by coaches as a defining beneficial experience for students who may not receive the same type of attention from other campus services or within the child welfare system.

**Creating a Transformational Relationship**

Coaches were asked to reflect on their perspectives related to coaching and help-seeking, as guided by the following research question:

4. How Did the Coaches Perceive the Influence of a Coaching Intervention on Help-Seeking Behaviors of the Students?

As the coaches discussed their work with students, the notion of a transformational relationship emerged consistently and perhaps most saliently. In fact, most of the work and viewpoints expressed by the coaches were made in the context of the relationship that was purposefully created, cultivated, and discussed between coaches and students. Dimensions of this theme include holding a perspective of the student as a whole person with varied experiences, nurturing partnership, maintaining trust and transparency within the relationship, normalizing adaptive help-seeking behaviors and outcomes, viewing students with an unconditionally positive regard, and remaining aware of the biases and needs that are present for the coach.

While the coaches reported consistently utilize a coaching lens that is informed by an understanding of the foster care experience, they likewise maintained a perspective that the student is a whole and unique person. This perspective includes recognition that students are more than their foster care experience and are whole humans that have individual needs and experiences. Being authentic and genuine when working with students was cited by all of the coaches as necessary to building trusting relationships that honor the student as a whole person. The coaches shared techniques for creating a genuine and trusting relationship, including relating
to students in ways based on characteristics or experiences such as shared birthdays, similar childhoods, or comparable family dynamics. Coaches also shared aspects of their own lives including stories about pets and children as a way of relating on a human level. Zeke states, “genuine and authentic engagement is huge for students, and especially in foster care, they sniff out bullshit, let's be real.” Cameron shares a similar view:

I mean, before any other role, I mean it’s just two human beings who are just getting to know each other so it's as simple as just having a conversation. “What's bringing you to college? What are you excited about? What do you like to do?” You know and intentionally and appropriately sharing, kind of that reciprocal sharing, you know, I'm a real person as well.

Taking a curious stance and using assessment skills such as open-ended questions and active listening were cited as needed skills to genuinely and authentically build relationship with students.

Cultivating partnership, characterized by allowing the students to be in control of the coaching relationship, that honors the student as they are in the moment was cited by all coaches as critical to engaging in a purposeful relationship with students. Marquise shared, “you allow them to be not only expert of their own experience, but the controller of their own experience.”

The sentiment from this statement was expressed consistently by coaches in various contexts and examples, indicating the presence of partnership in the relationship as a core philosophy to the team’s coaching work. Marquise described their partnership approach as “yielding” to the student, which requires being carefully attuned to the motions of engagement that the student presents. They share further,
If you tell me you're not comfortable with it, I'm gonna go back. So it's almost like a relationship where I'm going to stay close to you wherever you are. I'm not gonna try to get too far off.

Bob shared a similar perspective of working to meet the student “where they are at” to engage in the relationship, “really putting some thought into how best to pull out the best parts of that student, to help them kind of see that there's other avenues that they can engage in, because avoidance has only caused difficulties.”

Each of the coaches described a consistent practice of being transparent of the role of the coach and the role of authority within the student–coach relationship. Transparency was conveyed via frequent conversations about the relationship that included clarifying the role of the coach, expectations the coach and student had for each other, and boundaries within the relationship. Marquise describes how they set this norm from the beginning of the coaching relationship:

When I have new students, we're going to talk about this process because my job isn't just to help you develop a discrete set of skills and then push you out here. We're going to figure out stuff along the way. So if something I'm doing isn't working for you, we got to communicate about that.

Openness in acknowledging the relationship as an ongoing, dynamic process that impacts the students’ ability to trust the coach enough to come to them for help was a consistent theme across the coaches’ responses.

The discussions about the relationship are also ongoing as the relationship develops. As Cameron shares,
I'm trying to always communicate to students is that…we're in this partnership and you're in a position now as a young adult and you're having opportunities to make decisions in ways maybe that you didn't even have the opportunity to do before.

The coaching relationship is also a space in which the coaches can talk about and reinforce help-seeking behaviors in a positive way as they are presenting in the moment. Zeke shares,

When you're trying to build a relationship with a student who was hesitant to reach out for reasons you might not know, making a generous assumption. And so, if I went and did the critical approach it, you know, made them more resistant to ask for help in the future. So praising them for reaching out and then once the coaching relationship is built, and they do more, follow through praising them for doing that.

Discussing boundaries with students was also cited as a way to leverage the relationship to teach and reinforce help-seeking behaviors. One coach shared their perspective of needing to set boundaries so that the student was clear from the beginning what the coach can and cannot provide. They further stated that boundaries should never be a reason for not reconnecting with a student when they reach out for help so as to be consistent and trustworthy in communication with students.

Coaches consistently reported relying on a practice of normalizing in the context of help-seeking behaviors. This can include normalizing the situation as a typical situation that many students face or normalizing not having an answer (i.e. the coach doesn’t know either and says so). Normalizing situations that students find challenging or overwhelming was viewed as a coaching method that can help students feel more accepted when seeking help and that can provide a valuable learning moment within the relationship. The coaches shared normalizing phrases such as, “it is normal to approach something with a feeling of a lack of confidence or
lack of knowledge, lack of skills;” “you know, we're not supposed to know everything;” “I don't know either cause this is confusing stuff.” Bob shared utilizing normalizing to help students when they might be judging themselves or expecting judgement from their coach about a mistake, such as oversleeping and missing class. They said, “students oversleep you know. Maybe they hung out with friends too long, whatever the case is. But it's certainly nothing that they've done wrong.” All coaches also cited using normalizing when they didn’t have an easy solution to a problem, queuing an opportunity to engage in coaching actions that allow the coach and student to find answers together.

The approaches described by the coaches in this study were consistently rooted in a perspective of students that is unconditionally strengths-based and accepting. Even when coaches faced challenges with students, such as expulsion from college or prolonged avoidance, they consistently shared a perspective of highlighting strengths the students arrive at the coaching space with and a willingness to move forward within the relationship. Zeke describes this perspective as “having that empathetic compassionate view of them and what might be behind the not wanting to ask for help.” The perspectives that students’ help-seeking behaviors are contextualized within their foster care experiences, are not ill intentioned, and therefore should be handled with care were present across all of the coaches’ responses. Cameron states,

I'm always going to receive you. So I think I often say that like you bring whatever you like into this room. And then we can figure out what we're going to do with it or if it's something we need to pull in other people for, but like there's never something that you can't bring into the space.

Lastly, coaches indicate self-reflection as an essential component for engaging in transformational relationships with students. Awareness of the interpersonal nature of the
relationships was present among the coaches as was the need to remain in a professional role. Coaches named instances of feeling stressed about students’ decisions, wanting to give advice based on their own beliefs or solutions, and at times identifying with students’ situations in a way that could bring bias to their coaching practice. Zeke shared an awareness of how their approach to providing help impacts the students learning: “I'm like, all right, I'm just gonna figure this out for them. Because I wanted to help. But what was I actually doing? Was I helping?” Themes within the need for self-awareness included awareness of the coaches’ own help-seeking tendencies, how those will intersect with beliefs about students, and the avoidance of “cookie-cutter solutions” with students who are individuals.

Creating a transformational relationship was cited as a critical part of influencing the help-seeking needs of students. Coaches conveyed a consistent and unconditional positive regard for their students, regardless of how they arrive at the coaching relationship. The relationship is described as being cultivated over time and as a partnership that can act as a mechanism for discussing and reinforcing help-seeking behaviors between the coach and student. The coaches discussed the coaching relationship as very dynamic in that the coaches must be self-reflective while also attuned to the needs of the students in the moment. Therefore, the coaches were not only creating a relationship with the students, they were creating a transformational relationship that served as an environment that supported the growth and achievement of the student over time. As one coach stated, “every success story is a relationship story.”

*Purposeful Teaching for Long-Term Success*

The third and final theme that emerged from the coaches’ data, also guided by research question 4, was the action of purposeful teaching within the coaching relationship. Coaches described specific actions of building students’ skills and strengths through actively promoting
partnership and power sharing with students in everyday moments and tasks. Coaches regularly emphasized learning moments when working with students. When a learning moment occurred, they used techniques that intentionally sought to provide autonomy to the student. The coaches highlighted the students’ autonomy to make decisions for themselves as central to the partner role they take on with students.

Opportunities to teach and reinforce skills and strengths were perceived by the coaches’ as always available, whether during the mundane tasks of filling out paperwork or the more difficult challenges of supporting students as they navigated crises. Several coaches described a financial aid process in which they helped new students during the summer before their freshman year of college. While the objective of the paperwork was to get money to pay for education related expenses, the coaches described it as an opportunity to build trust, create connection, and learn about the skills the students possessed. Marquise said, “It seems like okay, you're filling out forms, but that's not it. I mean, there are questions on there. What are your educational goals? Well, number of things right there we can talk about. I can challenge you.” A student struggling to secure housing reached out to Cameron who described partnering to work together on the issue:

We partnered, you know, used technology and sharing screens and all that kind of stuff to be able to see what can we look at together. The partnership allows us, I think, to do together and also for me to recognize skills that they already had and be able to name those and use those so very much from the beginning saying, “yeah, makes sense why you're stuck at this point.” And as we're doing these things together in partnership you know you've done a lot, so I will even be able to name like your skill of communication and checking in. Checking email every single day, you gathered all this other information
already. I think a coaching approach that is intentionally partnering and always looking for skill.

Coaching includes discussing skills and strengths being built outside of the coaching environment as well. Bob shared an example of highlighting skills a student was learning while working at a part-time job on campus:

I use the simple thing of, if you have a job on campus. There's a perfect example of what it's like to have to show up, clock in, now you're on somebody else's time and how is it going to benefit you long term, like right now you see it as a part time job, there's really not a whole lot of money attached to it. But what are the skills that you're building along the way that are going to make you a true contributor when you graduate.

A core theme of purposeful teaching with attention to autonomy and power sharing was conveyed by all of the coaches who participated in this study. Coaches used various words and phrases to describe this approach including partnering, doing “with” not “for,” and not “fixing.” Teaching, in this way, was described as a purposeful way to reinforce the development of life skills such as problem solving, decision making, and asking for help. The coaches also viewed this approach as a distinctive trait that distinguishes their role with students as different than other roles, such as those held by case managers or parents, which might exercise more authority in the relationship with the students. As Cameron describes,

But when a student does ask for help, like kind of avoid the trap of just doing ‘for.’ I want to make sure they know how helpful I am and I want to make this as painless as possible. And then so, so much so that that you know, potentially, I'm reinforcing that you’re going to say help and I'll figure out the rest. And then there's not enough development of skill.
According to the coaches, taking a partnered approach that values autonomy allows for individual solutions to arise from the students themselves or to be co-created by the coach and student. Zeke shared an experience of working with a student who was experiencing challenges in several areas, including housing and education. Zeke shared their approach to coaching the student:

Prioritizing the sense of like having her share different stuff that's going on. But she was kind of just wanted to talk. So I was like, all right, well, I'll share all the different needs and resources that you might need. And then we can take a step back look where to start.

Bob’s perspective similarly indicated the practice of avoiding problem solving for students: “Before trying to jump into problem solver, trying to jump in with ideas, like you really have to let the student give you that information.” The importance of acknowledging and promoting autonomy in partnership with the student was viewed as necessary for the students’ well-being given their foster care history. One coach shared,

Students are used to being acted on or acted for and…that is understandable when they’re youth and not able to make their own decisions. But a lot of the people who have acted on them have acted with malice or with the neglect. And so that feeling of being acted on and being out of control means the potential risk for a lot of harm.

Pacing and timing also emerged as critical to the learning moments with students. When the coaches identify a learning moment that can present an opportunity for skill building, they consistently described the need to slow down the coaching interaction. Attention to the pacing and timing of the coaching interaction was named as “practicing the pause,” “having patience,” “slowing down,” “sitting with,” and “holding space.” The importance of this “slowing down” was perceived as a way to engage students in the process of problem solving when they did seek
help, to gather information in order to provide customized solutions, and to provide empathy and
connect during times of distress. Marquise described their perspective of how slowing down the
coaching session teaches healthy help-seeking skills:

    So, not, not just literally fixing something but getting a fix. It's almost addictive if you if
    you learn to reach out to people in crisis and they always solve your needs. That is
    addictive response and it's, so I mean, it's maladaptive. It doesn't mean that it's morally
    less than anything. It just means it's not something that you would want to live through
    life because at some point, you won't be able to get that that fix you know that creates
    problems.

Another coach stated, “I think it's one of most important times to slow it down because otherwise
you're going to be doing things that are reactive and not as intentional.” Providing space for
partnership, autonomy, and exploration of individual solutions that are driven by the students
was noted as unusual for students from foster care to experience and as a unique feature of
coaches on campus. One coach who had previously served in social work positions within child
welfare agencies indicated how their role as a coach was different: “[as a coach] I support you to
advocate for yourself versus I’ve gotta be in full advocating mode myself or I gotta gather
information on my own.” The coaches acknowledged that the type of work they did to partner
with and provide autonomy to students was cultivated by a program and team culture that
prioritized this type of work.

    Salient themes that emerged from the coaches who participated in this study were aligned
with an unwavering positive regard for students and their help-seeking behaviors, even when it
was recognized that they were avoidant with the coach. Developing a transformational
relationship was cited as critical for discussing help-seeking behaviors and normalizing the need
for help while navigating the college experience. Finally, the coaches expressed an intentional process of using everyday moments with the students to teach them skills that would result in adaptive help-seeking habits.

**Conclusion**

The findings reported in this chapter indicate similar viewpoints from both students and the coaches with whom they worked in relation to students’ help-seeking behaviors. The coaches actively employed a compassionate response that was informed by the knowledge of typical experiences faced during time in foster care and the resulting impact on students’ help-seeking behaviors. With this knowledge, the coaches aimed to create transformational relationships and meaningful learning moments to reinforce the notion that they are a safe space in which students could seek help for most issues they were facing in college. Likewise, the students reported feeling very supported by their coaches and shared a perspective that the coaching relationship had changed their help-seeking behaviors for the better. Self-protection strategies remained present for the students in areas that felt particularly vulnerable or sensitive. Students reported avoiding help seeking in vulnerable areas to limit the risk of placing too much burden or inconvenience on the coach.
Chapter 5

Discussion

In this study, I aimed to expand the knowledge of how help-seeking behaviors are perceived within a college setting among students from foster care. Additionally, perceptions of how a specific helping approach, humanistic coaching, influenced help-seeking behaviors were explored. Literature related to child and adolescent development indicates that adaptive help-seeking behaviors are a critical component to becoming a self-regulated learner (Nelson-LeGall, 1981). They also highlight that help-seeking behaviors develop within the context of social interactions with parents, teachers, and peers (Newman, 2000), and are driven by an individual’s perception that core psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met and cultivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additional research indicates that former foster youth experience challenges with seeking help in adaptive ways. Qualitative studies have shown that former foster youth disavow asking for help as a sign of strength and pride from surviving the foster care system (Samuels & Pryce, 2008) and present with a false façade of competency that is rooted in self-protection but is not supported by tangible life skills necessary for independence (Kools, 1999). Recent quantitative research has linked avoidant help-seeking behaviors among students from foster care to difficulties with attachment to supportive adults, which results in lower-degree attainment (Okpych & Courtney, 2018). What is known about the help-seeking behaviors of former foster youth and the impact of avoidant help seeking on degree attainment, which is significantly lower among former foster youth in comparison to non-foster youth, provided the purpose for this study.
Former foster youth experience disparate rates of post-secondary degree attainment compared to the national population (Courtney et al., 2011). This study not only aimed to understand help-seeking behaviors among this population, but also to understand what interventions could be useful in supporting adaptive help-seeking behaviors in order to impact academic success. The influence of coaching—a humanistic practice approach that aims to increase goal achievement among individuals—on help seeking was examined to better understand its influence on the help-seeking behaviors of students from foster care. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did students who were receiving coaching experience help seeking?
   a. What perceived factors influenced their help-seeking decisions?
2. How did coaching influence the students’ help-seeking behaviors?
3. How did the coaches perceive the help-seeking behaviors of the students?
4. How did the coaches perceive the influence of a coaching intervention on help-seeking behaviors of the students?

This phenomenological qualitative study used a hybrid data analysis strategy to identify themes that explore the meaning-making processes of both students and coaches in relation to help-seeking within the coaching relationship. A total of nine participants completed two interviews each, which were transcribed and analyzed using a six-step, hybrid data analysis process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A set of themes emerged from each group of participants and were then combined through a process of iterative inductive and deductive coding. Findings were subjected to member checking to increase credibility.

Findings from research questions 1 and 3 indicated that both students and coaches who participated in this study perceive similar self-protective behaviors among the students who were
engaged in coaching. Coaches described students’ avoidant help-seeking behaviors as rooted in past experiences with individuals who were not trustworthy or the absence of supportive adults to seek help from all together. Likewise, students reflected on their past experiences of having limited safe avenues for help seeking and expressed an awareness that those absences had impacted their current help-seeking behaviors. Both students and coaches indicated a strengths-based view of the help-seeking behaviors that were present in the coaching relationship, identifying learned avoidance behaviors as developed to protect the student from further relational harm during time spent in foster care rather than a purposeful willfulness to not seek help.

Findings related to research questions 1 and 3 also indicated that the reasons students in this study were reluctant to seek help from their coaches changed over time. Students indicated that they initially (i.e. as freshman/incoming students) felt weary of seeking help from their coaches because of their uncertainty of the coaches’ reliability and as a way to protect their independence. Both students and coaches reported that current behaviors of avoidant help-seeking were still linked to self-protection but manifested in a way to protect the relationship from disruption so that the coach would not be disappointed or let down by the student needing help. The perception of being a burden to the coach was also reported as more salient for students based on past experiences in certain topics, such as money and mental health.

Findings related to research questions 2 and 4 indicated that a core component to the perception of help-seeking behaviors among students and coaches was the quality of help provided within the ongoing coaching relationship. Coaches reported genuine care and support for students regardless of the reasons they needed help. The students’ perceptions were similar, reporting feeling holistically supported by their coaches in all areas of their lives and as always
receiving reliable and quality help when they reached out. All participants also cited the importance of the stance of the “student as the expert” of their own experiences and choices. This quality of the relationship was reported as an intentional action on behalf of the coaches to support autonomy and build help-seeking skills; the students indicated this helped them feel validated and accepted. Finally, all participants also reported the importance of normalizing within the relationship. Coaches reported normalizing students’ beliefs about their challenges and help-seeking behaviors as a way to connect and build trust so that students were willing to seek help again in the future. Students reported that normalizing was important to help them re-frame their perception of their challenges from unusual to common among all college students, which increased their comfort with help seeking.

**Perceptions of Help Seeking and the Influence of Coaching**

The findings of this study indicate that upon entering the post-secondary setting, the students in this study perceived themselves as help-seeking avoidant, signified by only engaging in a transactional manner with their coach or not asking for help when facing challenges. As the relationship progressed over time, participants reported the development of a transformational relationship that shifted help-seeking behaviors, increasing the likelihood that students would go to their coach for help. Survivalist self-reliance identities were still present, but instead of manifesting in the avoidance of developing mutually beneficial relationships, they instead manifested in behaviors that seem to attempt to protect the relationship from disruption. Relationship-protective behaviors, rooted in preserving relatedness with the coach, ultimately result in avoidant help-seeking, especially in situations where the student feels particularly vulnerable to being perceived as incompetent (Figure 3).
Impact of a Transformational Relationship on Student Help Seeking

The drivers of help seeking reported by study participants align with the existing literature that indicates avoiding help-seeking may serve as a source of pride for youth who have repeated experiences of disrupted and instable help-providing relationships. The concept of survivalist self-reliance asserts that youth with foster care experience make meaning of their trauma by creating a survivor identity that is rooted in self-reliance as a strength and resource for resilience (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). This was especially salient in the students’ descriptions of their help-seeking behaviors as incoming or freshman students. Reports of meeting requirements

Figure 3

Display of Findings
to see the coach but not disclosing challenges or seeking help to simply meet needs without engaging in an ongoing relationship was perceived as a source of strength and personal responsibility as students entered their college careers. These findings are consistent with literature that suggests youth from foster care will engage in transactional help seeking to meet their needs while avoiding establishing mutually supportive relationships (Kools, 1999; Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Tobolowsky et al., 2017). However, findings suggest that the act of cultivating a transformational relationship with coaches did impact the help-seeking behaviors over time among the participants in this study.

The presence of a transformational relationship seemed to be a catalyst for ultimately reshaping the help-seeking behaviors present among the participating students. Previous literature has established that a transformational relationship is one that includes listening without judgement, authenticity, healthy challenging in ways that promotes growth, reliability during times of stress, and genuine caring in the relationship (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2017; de Boer & Coady, 2007). The findings in this study indicated a transformational relationship was present between the coaches and students and is attributed to shifting the students’ help-seeking behaviors from their early years in college to the time of the reported findings.

Coaches and students reported the ways the transformational relationship worked to shift help-seeking behaviors over time. The coaches’ reliability and willingness to help in all areas of the students’ lives was reported to build trust and opened avenues for students to be vulnerable during times of stress and challenge. Consistency was also critical. Consistency was described as no only as daily consistency by way of checking in with students “just because” and following up with promises, but also as low-turn over among the coaching team, which cultivated a sense
of safety and belonging, and reportedly made help seeking easier with the coach because of familiarity. This finding is congruent with previous literature which indicates students from foster care avoid seeking help when they believe that they will have to share details of their past experiences repeatedly with strangers who are assigned to help them across various campus departments (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Lastly, students reported an increased sense of worthiness and deservedness from the coaches consistently going above and beyond the expectations of the students, which also cultivated a sense of being genuinely cared for by their coaches.

Participants of the study reported feeling a sense of autonomy that was a result of the coach prioritizing the student as the expert of their own experiences and future actions. All participants identified this component of coaching as contributing to a relationship that was supportive in ways that was unique not only for the students with foster care experience, but also unique in the campus community. This type of relationship is cited as critical in coaching practice to promote the self-directed learning and growth of the person being coached (Stober 2016). The promotion of autonomy present in the relationship was attributed to feeling respected and competent when with the coach, which contributed to students feeling as if they could go to the coach for help while also feeling respected and in control of their own decisions. Findings from this study indicate that a transformational relationship was being created between the coaches and students, and that this relationship was a catalyst for increasing the instances in which students felt as if they could go to their coach for help.

From Self-Protection to Relationship-Protection

Although the findings of this study indicate an increase of adaptive help-seeking behaviors, evidence of ongoing survival self-reliance was present, and related to a form of
interpersonal protection. Kools (1999) posits that self-protection strategies employed by former foster youth are caused by a stigmatized sense of self that results from experiences in foster care that resulted from negative labels placed on the child or feelings of being perceived as “bad” or “different.” The result of this stigmatized view of the self is lowered perceptions of competence and increased self-doubt, but outward presentation of confidence and independence. In turn, this results in youth keeping relationships superficial so that they can avoid the exposure of the stigmatized self-identity and remain safe from further harm from unreliable adults (Kools, 1999). The three themes of self-protection among former foster youth are “I can and must take care of myself,” “Others can hurt you,” and “I don’t need anyone” (Kools, 1999, p. 148). The concept of survivalist self-reliance builds on this concept, and indicates that youth from foster care will avoid relying on others for support (Pryce et al., 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). Findings from this study indicated a similar pattern. Students and coaches reported themes of relying only on oneself as driving avoidant help-seeking behavior early in the coaching relationship, which resulted in students not disclosing challenges. However, as the coaching relationship developed, themes of self-protection appeared to shift. Rather than being rooted in independence and keeping relational distance from others, the perceived self-protection strategies were seemingly rooted in protecting the transformational relationship that had been developed with the coach. In particular, themes of not wanting to be a burden or let the coach down as driving mechanisms for not seeking help were reported from both coach and student participants.

The participants in the current study reported a shift in the manifestation of the stigmatized sense of self when a safe relationship was created with the coach. Instead of manifesting in an avoidance of relationships, it seemed as if it was used as a protection to avoid over reliance on the coach in order to preserve the relationship. In other words, within a
relationship that had proven to be trusting over time, the self-protection strategies shifted to relationship-protection strategies to avoid overburdening or inconveniencing the relationship with the coach. However, relationship-protection strategies seemed to yield the same stance of self-reliance in that they resulted in the avoidance of engaging with the coach for help in situations that were deemed too risky or vulnerable.

The findings from this study indicate that internalized beliefs connected to self-reliance and relatedness may shift from self-protection to relationship-protection as a means of preserving perceived relatedness that is present in the relationship, as was with the coaches. Fears of being a burden, “bugging,” or being an inconvenience to the coach were reported by students and perceived by coaches as a reason the students avoided seeking help, even after a trusting relationship had been reported as present between the coach and the student. The students in this study reported these feelings as reasons they avoid seeking help, even when they were cognitively aware that the coach would not perceive them in this way. One explanation for this shift may be connected to a drive to preserve the relationship that had been created between the coach and the student. Rather than self-protection themes such “‘I can and must take care of myself,” “others can hurt you,” and “I don’t need anyone” (Kools, 1999, p. 148), the themes are instead relationship-protective and characterized in ways such as “I’m embarrassed for needing help,” “other people need it more than me,” and “I’m going to let my coach down.”

Although the students and coaches who participated in this study cited self-protective and relationship-protective themes that prevented help-seeking in some cases, it was also clear that time spent with the coach was perceived as beneficial in relation to help seeking. Students reported feeling comfortable and being motivated to seek help from their coaches in many ways, and self-rated as more likely to seek help from their coaches at the time of the interview as
compared to when they arrived at college. Self-protection and relationship-protective strategies were typically discussed in the context of highly vulnerable topics. These topics varied among the students and were often described in the context of past memories that were painful or relationships that were unsupportive. One explanation for protective strategies being topic specific and varying among the students may be connected to the stigmatized sense of self that resulted from individual experiences the students faced as children (Kools, 1999) and continued to be perceived as too vulnerable to bring to the coach for fear of closeness in the relationship (resulting is self-protective strategies) (Samuels & Pryce, 2008) or too much of a burden for the coach to navigate with the student, resulting in a loss of closeness in the relationship (resulting in relationship-protective strategies).

Another explanation for relationship-protective strategies may be related to the experiences of disrupted instances of relatedness during time spent in foster care (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Morton, 2017). Relatedness—being connected to people who are caring and promote well-being and success—is a key psychological need for optimal development (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and critical for supporting adaptive help-seeking behaviors throughout childhood and adolescence (Newman, 2000). However, caring connections with supportive adults are often compromised when children experience foster care, resulting in diminished family privilege (Seita, 2001). In the absence of family privilege, youth may experience a diminished sense of relatedness and fewer opportunities to learn how to navigate challenges in relationships.

Students in this study reported a myriad of rotating case managers in their lives during time spent in foster care. Relationship-protective strategies may be linked to experiences of disrupted or lost relationships, such as being moved from a foster home or receiving messages of frustration from case managers related to developmentally normal mistakes made during time spent in the system.
Although the students in this study could communicate a cognitive awareness that their coach would not receive them with criticism or end the relationship, dissonance was present in the behavior of help seeking in vulnerable areas, indicating an internalized sense of being responsible for protecting the safety of the relationship with the coach. Future research that explores the underlying mechanisms for relationship-protective themes is needed to better understand the explanations for this manifestation of help-seeking behaviors.

**Practice Implications**

The participants of this study indicated awareness of the self-protective and relationship-protective strategies that resulted in avoidant help-seeking behaviors and described times when help-seeking behaviors might be more likely to take place. The following implications for practitioners are informed by both the findings from this study, with emphasis on the solutions offered by the students and coaches who participated:

1. Cultivate transformational relationships. Transformational relationships have the opportunity to provide support to students from foster care and can serve as a catalyst for supporting help-seeking behaviors. In particular, it seems as if a transformational relationship can increase the instances in which students from foster care will seek help from supportive service providers. Actions that can create transformational relationships include viewing and interacting with students with unconditional positive regard and willingness to provide holistic “whole person” help. From this stance, practitioners are tolerant of all behavior youth bring to the relationship, including those that might feel personally uncomfortable to the practitioner or have serious consequences for students. Holding a stance of unconditional positive regard communicates acceptance and non-judgement and may increase trust.
2. Listen for what is not being said. Attentive and attuned listening is a coaching best practice (Stober & Grant, 2006). In coaching students from foster care, attentively listening to what is not being said can indicate areas in which a student may feel embarrassed or fearful of burdening the coach. Approaching these areas with curiosity and compassion may support avenues for help-seeking dialogue with students.

3. Discuss help seeking with students. Leverage the relationship created with students to directly discuss help-seeking behaviors and how they are impacting the student’s relationship with the coach and with others. Share information about help-seeking behaviors after spending time in foster care and acknowledge self-protective or relationship-protective strategies as normal given past experiences. Discussions can also include actions towards adaptive help-seeking and how it will support the student in relation to their goals, needs, and wants.

4. Normalize. Naming and validating the normalcy of struggling with challenges in post-secondary settings can reduce feelings of isolation and fears that lead to self-protective and relationship-protective strategies. Normalizing can challenge inner narratives related to a stigmatized sense of self and includes sharing personal experiences of not knowing or struggling while in college. It may also include generally sharing the ways that other students are seeking and receiving support in an ethical manner that protects individual privacy. Normalizing requires empathy and time. It was reported as most useful when it was offered to students in a way that was not about fixing or providing solutions as a “forward action,” but rather as a slowing down and holding space for processing and acknowledging before applying actions. This action validates the student’s experiences and feelings and conveys understanding.
5. Promote autonomy. Practice with a perspective that acknowledges the students as experts of their own experiences and as experts of the solutions that will best work for their lives. In practice, this includes believing the student when they share experiences, validating and empathizing with their feelings, and prompting them to share ideas for solutions instead of asserting solutions for the student. Autonomy to make decisions within a caring and compassionate relationship promotes a sense of relatedness with the coach and increased competency by acknowledging the student as someone who holds solutions and is an effective agent for change in their current circumstances.

6. Refer and connect. Coaching is not intended to substitute for mental health counseling. While coaches can explore psychological barriers to help-seeking towards future actions, it is not ethical to engage students in techniques that delve into past traumas for treatment (International Coach Federation, 2019; Stober, 2006). Supporting students to connect with other service providers such as therapists who can support psychological well-being is recommended as needed.

In my practice as a scholarly-practitioner working within the field and population that was the focus for this study, I will prioritize the dissemination of the findings from this study. First, I plan to produce one or more scholarly articles for publication. Second, I will integrate the implications of the findings to strengthen professional development training that I currently lead with professionals serving older youth and students from foster care. Lastly, I will pursue future research that explores and expands the effectiveness of coaching as an intervention for this population.
Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study should be considered within the context of the limitations and directions for future research. First, this study was conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This appeared to hinder recruitment, limiting the number of students who volunteered to participate in the study. Further, the participants of the study all reported a higher level of stress and intensity in their roles as coaches and students because of the pandemic, which may have impacted their perceptions related to help seeking. A larger sample of students and coaches as well as a less heightened environment may result in additional or more nuanced findings of how help-seeking changes or develops within a coaching relationship.

Alternative help-seeking frameworks were considered for this study, including Ryan et al.'s (2005) differential profiles of help seeking, which seeks to explain varying types of help-seeking attitudes and their subsequent actions. Alternate frameworks shed light on developmental help-seeking behaviors, but do not take into account the unique situations of trauma, loss, and family disruption that is experienced by students from foster care. Likewise, most literature related to former foster youth’s help-seeking behaviors does not provide in-depth discussions of developmental help-seeking literature. Future research that continues to explore developmental help-seeking behaviors in the context of the foster care system experience is needed to expand understanding of the optimal environments for graduation and successful career transition that promotes life-long success for students from foster care.

Conclusion

Students from foster care arrive at the post-secondary setting with strengths that have supported their resilience and survival during traumatic conditions growing up. Student support professionals should not only be aware of the needs of students from foster care, but also
understand their habits of help seeking. Help-seeking habits, which develop throughout childhood and in the context of socio-cultural environments, may present as avoidant among former foster youth and hinder academic success among students from foster care. While the development of transformational relationships may support a shift to adaptive help-seeking behaviors, avoidant help-seeking behaviors may still exist to protect the self in particularly vulnerable topics or to preserve the perceived relatedness between the coach and student. Leveraging the transformational coaching relationship can serve as a mechanism for examining the psychological barriers to adaptive help-seeking.
References


https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.11.049


97


http://10.0.3.248/j.childyouth.2011.08.004


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.09.004


http://10.0.3.248/j.childyouth.2017.03.002


http://10.0.95.64/000560


http://10.0.4.183/s15430421tip4102_10


essential ingredients for promoting self-determination and successful transition to adult life:
https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.007


Skobba, K., Meyers, D., & Tiller, L. (2018). Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and


Appendix A

The Fostering Success Coach Model

The Fostering Success Coach (FSC) model was developed within a campus-based support program designed to serve students from foster care at a mid-size four-year public university located in the Midwest. The campus-based support program that houses the coaching model of focus in this proposal offers a multitude of supports, including a scholarship, targeted academic and life skill services, and on-campus housing. To receive these services, students are required to meet with a coach regularly. While technically a requirement to receive other benefits, students in the program report the coach as being a significant factor in their success as a student (Unrau et al., 2017).

The FSC model was designed in response to a lack of existing practice models intended to serve youth exiting foster care in educational settings that were viable for use by staff working in the program. The model emerged through an iterative process over the course of seven years that incorporated feedback from students being served and the staff working with students as well as an ongoing review of practice and research literature. The resulting coaching model includes a set of core principles and practice methods for student service professionals who are working with college students with a background in foster care (Unrau & Bennett, 2016).

The core principles of the model provide a foundation for building relationships and supporting goal attainment with students. The FSC prioritizes authentic professional relationships between coaches and students as a necessary foundation for the students’ success in seeking a degree (Unrau & Bennett, 2016). Coaches intentionally seek to share power with
students, increase students’ senses of agency and efficacy, and act as partners and advocates in various life areas that may present challenges or barriers as students navigate the degree process. Coaches implementing the FSC model encourage experiential learning in the context of the students’ goals while in college, including practicing new skills in real-time via role plays or with other campus support staff (Unrau et al., 2017).

A typical coaching interaction can last from a few minutes to an hour, depending on the topics of focus. The FSC model calls for coaches to engage in a three-stage practice for each coaching interaction. First, a holistic assessment aims to learn the student’s status quo across the Seven Life Domains, a tool used in the coaching model and adapted from Casey Family Programs’ (Casey Family Programs, 2001) guidance on working with transition-age foster youth. Students are encouraged to bring forward topics and issues for which they wish to receive coaching, rather than the coach deciding the area of focus. Second, the student and coach prioritize together where they will focus their time for the session. Lastly, the coach uses an intervention process that includes implementing coaching strategies and measuring student progress in the moment to increase student motivation, positive habits, and skills that contribute to academic and personal success (Unrau & Bennett, 2016). The three steps of an FSC session are used in each coaching interaction and aim to provide a predictable flow for students within the ongoing student–coach relationship.

At the time of this writing, most interventions aimed at supporting students from foster care are program or policy oriented (Geiger et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017), which results in challenges of replicating in various settings, especially those with limited resources. As a practice model that can be integrated into various types of campus and community programming,
the FSC model is a worthy intervention of focus for research related to better supporting college students with foster care experience.
Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Title: Fostering Success Through Coaching: Perspectives of Help Seeking Within a Coaching Relationship with Post-Secondary Students from Foster Care

Study # 000643

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Jamie Bennett who is a doctoral student in the USF College of Education Educational Program Development with an emphasis in Educational Innovation program. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Tony Tan. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at Western Michigan University. The purpose of the study is to explore the ways college students from foster care view their beliefs and behaviors related to asking for help from coaches who are assigned to help them earn their degrees. Your participation in the study will include a pre-meeting to review the study details. Within two weeks of the pre-meeting, you will participate in an up to 90-minute interview. Within 4 weeks of the first interview you will participate in an up to 60 minute second interview. Finally, you will be invited to another 30 minute meeting within 6 months of the first interview to view and verify accuracy of findings. All contacts will take place via Zoom video conference. The video and audio will be recorded.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part because you are either a student with foster care experience or a coach who is working with students with foster care experience. Participants of this study should be 18 years of age or older.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities. Your decision to participate or
not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. If you are a student, you will be compensated $20 in the form of an Amazon gift card via email for your participation. Employees will not receive compensation for participating in this study. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are. Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Jamie Bennett at (269) 271-1608. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research

Would you like to participate in this study?
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. First and Last Name__________________________________________

2. In all public materials included in this study you will be referred to by a pseudonym, which is an alternate name that you may choose. If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be selected for you by the researcher. Pseudonym: ____________________________________________

3. What are your pronouns? ________________________________

4. What is your gender? ________________________________

5. What is your race? ________________________________

6. What is your current class status: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior I do not know

7. How long have you worked with your current Campus Coach/have you been a coach? ________________________________

8. (Students) Were you assigned to any other Campus Coaches previously? Yes No

8a. If yes, how long did you work with your previous coach(es)? ________________________________

9. (Students) What was your student status when you entered WMU? Beginner Transfer I do not know
Individual Student Interview #1

1. What is it like to be a student at [name of university]?

2. What is it like being a student in the campus-based program?

3. When you think of asking for help, what words or phrases first come to mind?

4. What do you think impacts your willingness to ask for help when facing a challenge?

5. What is it like to ask for help as a student on your campus?

6. What is it like working with a coach?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your coach?

8. When you think about the time you spend with your coach, what seems most important about that time? Why?

9. Can you tell me about a time recently when you came to your coach with help for a problem?
   a. What was the experience with your coach after you asked for help?

10. Can you tell me about a time recently when you came to another person who isn’t your coach for with help for a problem?
    a. What was the experience with this person after you asked for help?

11. In what ways do you think coaching impacts your help-seeking decisions?

12. Do you think that working with your coach has changed your help-seeking behaviors?
    Why or why not?

13. Is there anything else you feel is important to share with me?
Individual Student Interview #2

1. Can you tell me the story of a recent time you asked for help?
   
   a. *Follow up questions to identify the decision points: do you recall what you were feeling? Thinking? Doing?*

2. Can you tell me the story of a recent time when you did not ask for help?
   
   b. *Follow up questions to identify the decision points: do you recall what you were feeling? Thinking? Doing?*

Coach Interview #1

1. From your perspective as a coach, what words come to mind related to students when I say the phrase “asking for help”?

2. From your experiences working with students from foster care, what do you think it takes for students to ask you for help?

3. From your experiences working with students from foster care, what do you think gets in the way of students asking you for help?

   I’d like you to think about the students you have worked with who, from your perspective, are willing to seek help from you when they are facing a challenge.
   
   a. What do you think contributes to this willingness to ask you for help?

   b. What behaviors are common among students that are willing to ask for help?

   c. Can you describe how your relationship is impacted when students are willing to ask for help?

   d. What coaching strategies are most important to rely on with students who are willing to ask for help?
4. I’d like you to think about the students you have worked with that, from your perspective, avoid seeking help from you when they are facing a challenge.

   e. What do you think contributes to the avoidance of asking you for help?

   f. What behaviors are common among students who avoid asking for help?

   g. Can you describe how your relationship is impacted when students avoid asking for help?

   h. What coaching strategies are most important to rely on when students avoid asking for help?

   i. Why those strategies.

5. From your perspective as a coach how does coaching students impact help-seeking?

6. From your point of view, how willing are students to engage in help seeking with others besides yourself on campus/in the community?

   i. What factors do you think contributes to this help seeking with others?

   j. What do you think gets in the way of students seeking help from people other than yourself?

7. From your perspective, what elements of your coaching practice are most influential in regard to help seeking behaviors?

8. Is there anything else you feel is important to share with me?

**Coach Interview #2**

1. Can you tell me the story of a recent time you coached a student who came to you for help with a challenge?

   a. *Follow up questions to identify the coaching strategies within the coaching interaction.*
i. From your perspective, what coaching skills did you rely on specifically to provide the student with help?

ii. What non-coaching skills did you rely on?

iii. From your perspective, in what ways was the coaching approach useful in this instance? Not useful?

2. Can you tell me about a time when you learned that a student did not seek help from you for a challenge?
### Appendix D

**Inductive codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in Help-Seeking Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Factors of Help Seeking</td>
<td>Program Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling “Bad” When Asking for Help</td>
<td>Not emulating people from the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that one’s problems aren’t important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking help away from people who need it more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of being an inconvenience/Burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Seeking Easier When Reciprocal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Specific Help Seeking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Coaching Relationship to Teach Help-Seeking Skills</td>
<td>Coaching includes talking about help seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History of relationship is necessary to observe help-seeking cues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Permissions

Article

Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development

Jennifer Fereday
Youth & Women’s Health Service
North Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Eimear Muir-Cochrane
University of South Australia
Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

© 2006 Fereday et al. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract

In this article, the authors describe how they used a hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to interpret raw data in a doctoral study on the role of performance feedback in the self-assessment of nursing practice. The methodological approach integrated data-driven codes with theory-driven ones based on the tenets of social phenomenology. The authors present a detailed exemplar of the staged process of data coding and identification of themes. This process demonstrates how analysis of the raw data from interview transcripts and organizational documents progressed toward the identification of overarching themes that captured the phenomenon of performance feedback as described by participants in the study.

Keywords: rigor, credibility, thematic analysis, qualitative research, social phenomenology

Introduction

In the interpretive study reported in this article, we explored the phenomenon of performance feedback within nursing. The impetus for the research was the introduction of a signed declaration of self-competence required for continuing registration as a nurse within South Australia. The use of performance feedback was recommended by the Nurses Board of South Australia to inform a nurse’s self-assessment of competence (NBSA, 2000). Performance feedback in this context is defined as information provided to employees about how well they are performing in their work role. This can involve formal and/or informal feedback processes, including written appraisals and verbal comments as part of everyday work. However, a review of the literature highlighted limited research to support the utility of feedback in this context. The study reported here addressed the identified deficit by exploring:
Appendix F

IRB Certification

Certificate of Completion

Jamie Bennett

Completed the Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel Basic Course

on Tuesday, April 2, 2019

USF

CITI Certificate ID#: 5217