

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Can Youth Really Tell Us What They Want? Youth's Voices in Dependency Cases

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6qx2939q>

Author

Mukhopadhyay, Shreya

Publication Date

2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Can Youth Really Tell Us What They Want? Youth's Voices in Dependency Cases

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Social Ecology

by

Shreya Mukhopadhyay

Thesis Committee:
Professor Jodi A Quas, Chair
Assistant Professor Jessica Z Klemfuss
Assistant Professor Amy L Dent

2020

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents and my brother. My family's endless support and love gives me the strength to work towards all of my dreams. This Thesis is one of my first steps towards fulfilling our collective dream of my career as a scientist and my efforts to serve the society through science.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: Methods	18
NSCAW Data	18
Participants	19
Measures, Procedures and Coding	21
Analyses Plan	22
CHAPTER 2: Results	26
Preliminary Analyses	26
Main Analyses	26
Subsequent Analyses	29
CHAPTER 3: Discussion	33
CHAPTER 4: Practice and Policy Implications	41
CHAPTER 5: Limitations and Future Directions	43
CONCLUSION	45
REFERENCES	46
APPENDIX: Tables	56

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1	Response categories to “If you could live with anyone, who would it be?”	56
Table 2	Descriptive Statistics.	57
Table 3	Variable Skewness and Kurtosis.	58
Table 4	Preliminary Analyses.	58
Table 5	Response Rates of Youth Placed in the Two Placement Types, Grouped by Placement With/Without Siblings.	59
Table 6	Binary Logistic Regressions predicting responses to “Do you want this to be your permanent home?”	60
Table 7	Multinomial Logistic Regression predicting responses to “If you could live with anyone, who would it be?”	61
Table 8	Binary Logistic Regression predicting Discrepant Responses (all youth included).	62
Table 9	Binary Logistic Regression predicting Discrepant Responses (only youth who said “yes” to the question “Do you want this to be your permanent home?”)	63
Table 10	Binary Logistic Regressions predicting responses to “Do you want this to be your permanent home?” Using Youth’s First Responses Only.	64
Table 11	Multinomial Logistic Regression predicting responses to "If you could live with anyone, who would it be?" Using Youth’s First Responses Only.	65

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express a deep sense of gratitude to my advisor Dr Jodi A. Quas. Her excellent mentorship and constant guidance, support and faith in me has made this project possible. Her love for science and dedication to translate science for improving lives of children inspires me every day to be a better human and scientist.

This project wouldn't be complete without the guidance of my committee members Dr Jessica Z. Klemfuss and Dr Amy L. Dent. Their valuable input was instrumental in my writing process. Additionally, Dr Dent's role in laying a strong statistical foundation and Dr Klemfuss' guidance in helping me frame my arguments were vital in the completion of this project.

I am also grateful to Dr Thomas Lyon from University of Southern California and Kelli Dickerson from my lab. Jodi, Tom and Kelli have been an incredible team of mentors since the start of this project. Their insights on how to best approach the research questions have been invaluable.

I would like to thank my wonderful friends and family who are my pillars of strength. With their constant emotional support, I am always able to work towards all of my goals.

Finally, I am thankful to the archive, NDACAN, for making the dataset National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NCSAW) publicly accessible.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Can Youth Really Tell Us What They Want? Youth's voices in Dependency Cases

by

Shreya Mukhopadhyay

Master of Arts in Social Ecology

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Jodi A. Quas, Chair

The practice of giving youth a voice in their dependency cases and the precise age at which this should be done, is heavily debated upon. However, very little empirical research exists to support the different notions about youth's rights, responsibilities and burdens that come with giving them such a voice. The present study investigated how youth's placement within family networks – an important predictor of youth's well-being in out-of-home care – shape their placement preferences. Specifically, we investigated if youth prefer placements with kin and/or siblings when in out-of-home care. We also investigated if placement preferences vary as a function of youth being younger versus older than the age cut-off for legal competency or age at which youth are asked about their preferences in some states (i.e. 12 years). Data from a national survey (NSCAW) were used in which foster youth were asked a close-ended and an open-ended question (ages 6 to 18 years, N= 1565) about their placement preferences . Binary and Multinomial Logistic Regressions revealed that placement type had robust associations with placement preferences, youth consistently preferred kin over non-kin foster families. Sibling presence had a weaker association with youth's placement preferences. Finally, the associations

of placement type and sibling presence with placement preferences were mostly similar across youth younger than 12 years and those 12 and older (the age cut-off for legal competency). Contributions to the debate surrounding asking youth about their placement preferences in dependency cases and relevant policy implications for child welfare have been discussed.

Keywords: foster care, out-of-home care, placement preferences, kin placements, sibling placements

INTRODUCTION

The most recent Child Maltreatment Report revealed that in the year 2018 alone, nearly 3.5 million children and adolescents in the US were in contact with Child Protective Services (CPS) due to allegations of suspected maltreatment at home. Of these, 146,706 children and adolescents were removed from their parents' custody and placed into foster or congregate care settings owing to concerns about imminent danger (U.S.D.H.H.S., 2020). Once removed, Child Protective Services (CPS), in collaboration with the Juvenile Court, is responsible for making crucial decisions about the services to be provided for youth's well-being, placement, and short- and longer-term care. Multiple factors directly related to the youth and those related to their families and broader environment are taken into account as these decisions are made. These factors include but are not limited to caregiver and housing availability, stability of the home environment, individual youth's needs, and home and community safety. Legal mandates further require that when possible, youth should be placed with kin rather than with unrelated adults or in congregate care (Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193)), under the assumption that kin placements help maintain family connections and confer positive outcomes for youth of all ages.

Further, some states, such as Michigan and Massachusetts among a few others, require or strongly recommend that youth be asked about their placement preferences as well when deciding where they should live. These states specify that this should occur only when the youth are 12 years and older and are believed to be of sufficient maturity, so they are able to express a reasonable preference (U.S.D.H.H.S., 2020). However, the extent to which CPS or the courts actually ask youth for input regarding placement is unclear. In fact, the need and benefits of

considering youth's placement preferences remain controversial. Debate centers on whether or not and at what age youth can actually express a reasonable preference regarding their placement, what factors influence their preferences, and how does involvement in placement decisions affect youth's experiences and functioning. The current study was designed to inform this debate. Specifically, in the study, predictors of youth's placement preferences were examined. The research questions were threefold: (1) How does the type of out-of-home placement, specifically kin-care versus non-kin foster care, shape youth's placement preferences?, (2) How does placement with siblings shape youth's placement preferences?, and (3) Do placement preferences among youth vary as a function of demographic characteristics? Specifically, we were interested in placement preferences in association with two demographic factors. First, placement preferences were explored as a function of age to determine if youth's placement preferences varied as a function of whether they are versus are not older than the legally determined age cut-off of 12 years when their preferences are considered. Second, racial matching was explored to determine if youth's placement preferences are predicted by whether or not their race/ethnicity is the same as that of their caregivers'. Before describing the study, the theoretical and practical value of considering youth's preferences is discussed, followed by research concerning the roles of type of placement, sibling presence, age and race/ethnicity on children's placement experiences and perceptions. Finally, the study's hypotheses are presented.

Costs and Benefits of Considering Children's Preferences

There is considerable controversy regarding whether youth can provide valuable and honest insight into their placement preferences (Warshak 2003; Jenkins, 2008). Strong arguments favor youth's participation in their dependency cases. These arguments have come from sources like the American Bar Association, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child and also practitioners and scholars in the field of law and social work (Krinsky & Rodriguez, 2005; Pitchal, 2008). These arguments center around three broad advantages of involving youth in the decision-making process.

First, soliciting youth's input when they are involved with CPS and also in their dependency cases can give them a sense of control and increase their feelings of empowerment (Merritt, 2008; Pitchal, 2008). Theoretically, failing to acknowledge children's views about important decisions affecting them, including placement, sends a message that their perceptions and feelings are not valued or relevant (Merritt, 2008; Pitchal, 2008). Evidence somewhat consistent with this possibility has emerged from retrospective studies of former foster youth. Festinger (1983) found that youth who aged out of the foster care system reported that they wanted more participation in the various decisions that were made about their lives (see Jenkins, 1984). In another study with foster youth, Curran & Pecorra (1999) found that youth who felt that they had some control over their placement-related decisions were more satisfied with their placement.

Second, youth are valuable sources of information about their needs. Experts across fields argue that giving youth the option to participate in decisions made in different settings like academic, medical, custodial placements in divorce situations, and even juvenile courts, gives unique and useful perspectives about their opinions, experiences, and needs (Barnes, 2007; Coyne, Amory Kiernan and Gibson, 2014; Smith, 2007; Spinetta et al., 2003; Zimmerman, 1982). Such information about their needs, desires and experiences are often overlooked or underemphasized by adults but are nonetheless important to youth (Kelly, 1994). Similar benefits could emerge in the dependency system as well, if children and adolescents are asked about what placements might be best for them.

Third, giving youth a voice across a range of settings (e.g., medical, legal, educational) through involving them in 1) shared decision making regarding their cancer treatment (Coyne et al., 2014; Spinetta et al., 2003); 2) in decisions related to custodial rights after parental separation (Smith, Taylor & Tapp, 2003); and 3) in designing school curricula in educational settings (Smith, 2007) has also been linked to positive outcomes like developing a sense of agency, responsibility and self-efficacy in the youth.

Despite these benefits, concerns have been raised about the adverse effects of asking youth about their preferences in contested custody cases (Warshak, 2003). Though this literature mostly focuses on parental custody upon separation, the arguments are relevant to dependency cases as well. The concerns largely center on three issues, namely 1) the validity of the information children provide, 2) the emotional weight or trauma of such decision-making, and 3) the precise age at which children's reports can be trusted. Regarding validity, although empirical research is limited, Warshak (2003) noted that those who advocate for children's voices in such situations assume that children's expressed thoughts and feelings are equivalent to their best interests. However, Warshak suggested that this is not necessarily the case. Children's preferences might be shaped more by personal motivations, such as preferring a parent who has more lenient rules, discounting a parent out of frustrations, or wanting to remain with a parent, even if that parent is abusive, instead of broader perceptions of what is best for them, either immediately or over time. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) similarly note that children's preferences and thoughts are likely to be transient or fluctuate during family turmoil, making it difficult to base longer term decisions on single time point preferences expressed by children.

Turning to the second issue – the emotional burden of expressing an opinion – again empirical research has yet to test this systematically. However, Emery (2002) commented that

children who are asked to express their preferences in custody cases may experience intense feelings of emotional labor and burden that can weigh heavily on them and cause distress. Whether similar concerns would appear in cases of maltreatment that require placement in out-of-home care, is unclear. Jenkins (2008), on the other hand argues that after the trauma of maltreatment, denial of participation instead of participation in court hearings is more traumatic for children and adolescents.

The third issue focuses not on the general utility or consequences of providing input but instead on the age at which youth's stated preferences can be trusted. In custody and divorce cases, and in dependency jurisdictions, there is a presumption that children below a particular age (typically 12-14 years) are incapable of adequately weighing placement options and distinguishing between what placement is best for them and what placement they desire. The age of 12 years as the cut-off roughly corresponds to profound developmental changes in cognitive competence, complex reasoning abilities, perspective taking, and judgment that accompany the transition to adolescence (Piaget, 1964; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996). Although these changes certainly shape how well children can evaluate their own situation and interests, evaluations that are necessary to express a preference about placement, the changes are not categorical (or dichotomous). Moreover, the age of 12 is not a singular time point after which complex and abstract reasoning is possible. Nonetheless, prior to that age, there has been the assumption that children are incapable of providing valuable input.

Despite theoretical arguments for and against youth's preferences being sought and considered, empirical evidence is limited. Interviews with adults who were formerly in the foster care system suggest that they wanted to have a voice in their placement decisions, and some benefits have emerged in other contexts as a result of giving children a voice (Curran & Pecorra,

1999; see Jenkins, 1984). As discussed next, some studies of foster youth in the dependency system have begun to address these important issues by focusing on what children desire, and how that relates to their placement experiences. The results lay the foundation for the present study in highlighting the need to examine the direct and interactive roles that placement type, siblings, and age play in shaping youth's preferences.

Placement Within Family Networks

Perhaps the most well-researched facet of foster youth's placement experiences focuses on placement setting, specifically how the type of placement (i.e., with kin or non-kin foster family or in congregate care) affects youth's functioning and the placement's success which is measured by better mental health outcomes, placement stability, higher levels of support from and contact with biological family while not in their custody (Holtan, Rønning, Handegård, & Sourander, 2005; Winokur, Holtan & Batchelder, 2014, 2018). A smaller, but related body of work has considered how placement with siblings – another potentially important element of familial connection – is associated with lower placement disruptions and higher stability and also better mental health outcomes (Akin, 2011; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011; Leathers, 2005). Within these two lines of research, however, only few studies have examined children's perceptions of and preferences for their placement, including whether their perceptions and preferences vary as a function of their familial connections (kin and/or sibling presence) in their placements.

Scholarly and policy attention regarding placement type is perhaps unsurprising in light of legal mandates to place children in the most family-like settings, particularly those with close family connections whenever possible (State Child Welfare Services, Section 16501.1). These mandates emerged in part based on research demonstrating multiple benefits of placement in

family-based settings as opposed to other settings. Benefits of being placed with kin specifically include increased likelihood of contact with biological parents and siblings, better mental health outcomes, increases in youth's sense of stability, and increased altruism and positive behavior while in placement (Dubowitz & Sawyer, 1994; Johnson-Graner & Meyers, 2003; Koh & Testa, 2008; Rubin et al., 2008; Scannapieco & Hegar, 1988; Shlonsky & Berrick, 2001; Webster, Barth & Needell, 2000; Winokur et al., 2018; Xu & Bright, 2018). Children and adolescents placed with kin are possibly more familiar with the family culture and may already have an established relationship with the caregiver, which should enhance their comfort or at least reduce their anxiety during the transition period (Hegar, 1988, 2005) and may even help the adults adapt more quickly to individual youth's personality and needs.

Research on sibling placement, like research on placement type, has largely focused on the broader question of whether and how beneficial it is for siblings to remain together. Like research on kin caregivers, research on sibling placement also suggests several benefits, although findings hint that the nature of relationship between siblings might also matter (Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Leathers, 2005). In general, compared to youth placed separately from siblings, those placed together experience fewer placement breakdowns, have reduced stress levels, and evidence better adjustment and functioning (Akin 2011; Bank & Kahn, 1975; Groza, Mashchmeier, Jamison & Piccola, 2003; Hegar, 1988, 2005; Holland, Faulkner & Perez-del-Aguila, 2005). Of importance to note is that since very few children in congregate care are placed with siblings, analyses need to separate placement type from sibling presence in careful ways. When this is done by only considering family-like settings, being placed with a sibling seems to help (Leathers, 2005). This is consistent with retrospective reports from adults formerly in the foster care system, who explain that maintaining sibling ties in out-of-home placement

helped them cope with removal (Cicirelli, 1980). Being placed together is one way that these ties can be maintained. One potential caveat to the benefits of siblings stems from situations in which the relationship between siblings is non-supportive, conflict-laden, or even abusive. In some situations, for instance, siblings reported high-conflict relationships that can interfere with placement stability or further inhibit positive functioning in maltreated youth (Linares, 2005). Accordingly, although siblings often confer benefits, some limitations to this may emerge when siblings' relationships to each other are problematic – a point worth considering when evaluating youth's own perceptions of their placement.

Youth's Placement Perceptions and Preferences

Placement with kin and siblings

Separate from perhaps more objective (and often retrospective) indicators of the benefits of family connections – either via kin caregivers or siblings being placed together – is whether youth similarly prefer to be in placements with family connections. In fact, only a handful of studies have examined youth's general perceptions of their placement and even fewer have directly assessed youth's preferences regarding placement (Chapman, Wall, Barth & the NSCAW Research Team, 2004; Dickerson, Lyon & Quas, 2019; Dunn, Culhane & Taussig, 2010; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011; Wilson & Conroy, 1999). However, among previous studies, comparisons of youth's placement perceptions and preferences have focused on youth living in kin versus non-kin settings, with the latter combining placements with foster families and in-group homes (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). A smaller number of studies have investigated youth's placement perceptions and preferences comparing youth placed with or without a sibling and combining that with placement type (Dickerson et al., 2019; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). In combination, this work suggests that youth are capable of providing

useful information about their feelings and desires regarding placement, although important questions still remain.

Youth's placement perceptions when in kin or non-kin settings largely parallel what one would expect based on which setting confers benefits and this holds true across a wide age range. Youth report a stronger sense of contentment, safety and stability when placed with kin (Chapman et al., 2004; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008). Youth also report that they feel like a part of the family more often when placed with rather than without kin, that is, in foster or group home settings (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). In one important study, Dunn, Culhane and Taussig (2010) separated the two types of non-kin settings into foster and group homes, comparing 9- to 11-year-olds' perceptions of these two placement settings to each other and to kin care settings. Youth's perceptions were largely similar between kin and foster family settings, with both diverging from the perceptions of youth in group homes. Specifically, youth in kin and foster care settings were less likely than those in group homes to say that their lives would have been better if they had remained with their family of origin. These findings raise some questions about studies comparing simply kin to non-kin settings. Instead, it appears that children may be inclined to prefer any family type of setting rather than non-family setting. Whether similar trends would emerge in older youth, for instance, who might distinguish more between kin and foster, is unknown. These studies also leave open the question of what youth, across age, would say if directly asked about their placement preferences. That is, youth may have similar feelings about both (e.g., that they like their placement, that their lives are better having been removed), but still prefer, if asked, to be with family.

Among studies comparing placement perceptions between youth living with or without a sibling, Hegar and Rosenthal (2009, 2011) found that youth (age 6 to 18 years) often report more

positive feelings about the family (e.g., they feel close to the family) when living with compared to without siblings (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). An alternative interpretation, or at least caveat, however, is that the non-kin group in this study included youth living with foster families as well as in group homes, the latter of which include extremely few sibling pairs. Given broader differences in experiences and perceptions between youth living in family versus group home settings (Dunn et al., 2010) collapsing these two groups could lead to differences based on placement type rather than sibling presence that is driving some of the evident trends. A cleaner comparison would involve teasing apart these family settings from congregate care facilities – that may or may not keep siblings together. Further, contrary to their expectations, Hegar and Rosenthal did not find any sibling and placement type interactions.

Additionally, they also found that the positive perceptions towards siblings decreased over time. Specifically, in the data set used by the researchers (the same as that in the present study), there were two samples. One was a long-term foster care (LTFC) sample that had, as a selection criterion for inclusion, youth who had been living in out-of-home care for at least eight months. The other sample, the child protective services (CPS) sample, did not have such a restriction, and length of time of removal was not considered. The differences in placement perceptions as a function of sibling presence were only found in the CPS sample not in the LTFC sample. Hegar and Rosenthal interpreted these trends as suggesting siblings are more important shortly after removal and less so once youth have settled into their placement.

Dickerson et al. (2019) followed up on Hegar and Rosenthal's research by examining youth's preferences for placement based on both whether they were living in kin or non-kin foster care and whether they were or were not placed with siblings. The study focused on children younger than the age of 12, only above which some states allow for children's

preferences to be considered. They investigated placement preferences shaped by both type of placement and sibling presence, but their inferences were limited due to a smaller sample size (N=100) that precluded any investigations of potential interactions between placement type and sibling presence. When asked about their placement preferences, most children wanted to return to their biological parents in the long run, although a smaller number of children placed with kin wanted to do so than children placed with non-kin foster caregivers. Likewise, a smaller number wanted to return to their biological parents when placed with rather than without a sibling. Whether it is sufficient to have any type of family member in the same household (e.g., kin caregiver or sibling) or whether there is an additive benefit of kin caregivers and siblings, is not clear but an important issue in need of direct inquiry.

Together, findings hint at youth's ability to provide input about their perceptions of their placement, including an ability to explicitly express a preference regarding where they would like to live (Dickerson et al., 2019; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). However, because some studies combined foster and group home settings into a non-kin group (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011) or did not test for type of care and sibling interactions (Chapman et al., 2004; Dickerson et al., 2019), concrete conclusions about youth's preferences cannot yet be drawn. Moreover, virtually no studies directly compared youth's placement preferences between youth younger versus older than 12 years. If no differences emerge between these two age groups, such would lend further support to the notion that children across age can reliably report on their preferences and add value to the placement decisions being made. The present study did just this.

Methodological Caveats – Question Types and Racial Matching

Before describing the present study, two additional important methodological issues need to be mentioned, as they were also addressed. One concerns the way in which youth's preferences are evaluated, that is, how youth are asked about where they would like to live. Prior studies of youth's perceptions of their placement, including the few on their actual preferences regarding placement, have relied on yes/no questions to solicit information from youth. Thus, for example, youth have been asked whether they like where they live, if they feel like a part of the family, if they feel close to their caregivers, or whether they want to live where they are currently until they are grown up (Chapman et al., 2004; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). On the one hand, even fairly young children can answer yes/no questions, affording the opportunity to include wide age ranges of youth. On the other hand, yes/no questions, especially in isolation, limit children's response options, or inhibit complex explanations. Such is especially true of younger children, who may not elaborate unless explicitly asked to do so and may not know that response options other than yes/no are possible (e.g., "I don't know") (Saywitz, Goodman & Lyon, 2017). Finally, yes/no questions, as discussed above, can lead to response biases (e.g., "yeah saying"), again more so among younger children than older youth (Saywitz et al., 2017), leading to incorrect inferences about what children prefer.

A few studies have asked hypothetical questions about youth perceptions rather than direct questions about youth's desires, such as "If you had stayed with [your family of origin], would your life be better than it is now, worse than it is now, or the same as it is now?" (Dunn et al., 2010). Young children may have difficulty drawing inferences between hypothetical scenarios and their own desires potentially limiting the value of interpreting at least younger children's answers as being reflective of their own preferences. Additionally, reported positive

perceptions towards the placement setting (e.g. “liking”, “feeling like a part of the family”, etc.) might be tapping into something different from youth’s preferences for placement per se.

Related to question type is the potential for inconsistent responses when several questions are asked. For instance, children may say that they like their current family but if asked whether they want to stay with that family until they are grown, they may say no. While not completely discrepant, such variations can undermine the perceived credibility of children and lead to the interpretation that children are not reliable sources of information. Fox et al. (2008) analyzed such variations in response and found that 69% of youth, ages 6 to 13 years living in out-of-home care answered yes when asked, “Do you think you will live with [current caregiver] next year?”. However, when asked a short time later with whom they thought they would live as a teenager, only 42% of the youth said their current caregiver. Likewise, when asked "Do you want this to be your permanent home, the home where you will live until you're grown?" 77% said "yes," but when asked with whom they would live if they could live with anyone, only 37% identified their current caregiver. These answers, though not completely contradictory, certainly give the appearance of inconsistency in youth’s preferences and have been interpreted as suggesting children cannot reasonably express a preference about their placement before adolescence (Warshak, 2003). Open-ended questions about youth’s preferences for placement may not fully eliminate potential inconsistencies, but they could give youth a broader range of potential response options and fewer constraints. They are also less leading, thereby raising fewer questions about potential biases (Waterman, Blades, & Spencer, 2001, 2004). Thus, including at least some open-ended questions about placement preferences would provide a complimentary approach to yes/no questions to gain reliable insight into youth’s preferences.

A second potential methodological consideration, or at the very least an additional factor worth exploring in relation to youth placement preferences, concerns that of race/ethnicity. Specifically, it's worth exploring if youth's placement preferences are shaped by whether or not their caregivers' race/ethnicity matches the youth's race/ethnicity. Transracial placements in adoption and placements in traditional foster homes have been fiercely debated in several countries, including the U.S. (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Grow & Shapiro, 1974). Enormous discrepancies between the race/ethnicity of children placed in care (who tend to be racial minorities) and the race/ethnicity of non-kin foster caregivers (who tend to be White Non-Hispanic) has led both to high numbers of cross racial/ethnic placements and to a stronger push for non-White foster caregivers (Bank & Kirton, 2012). Findings concerning the effects of racial matching, though, are not entirely clear. On one hand, when youth functioning or placement-related outcomes (e.g., stability) have been examined, no differences have emerged based on whether youth are placed with a foster parent who is the same versus a different race/ethnicity (Feigelman, 2000; Feigelman and Silverman, 1983; Silverman, 1993). Additionally, both proponents and adversaries of transracial adoption agree that it is better to place youth in family than in congregate care settings, even when the race/ethnicity does not match between the youth and caregiver. On the other hand, associations like the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) contend that placement of racial minorities in non-minority families, could lead to "cultural genocide," insofar as youth do not learn about their own culture and identity. Such a position has long been supported in relation to American Native youth, who are protected from transracial placements (ICWA, 25 U.S. Code § 1902, 1980) to the extent possible in order to minimize cultural alienation.

These debates notwithstanding, virtually nothing is known about whether youth's explicit preferences for placement vary as a function of whether they are the same versus a different race/ethnicity than their adult caregivers. Such is primarily a concern with non-White minority youth in non-kin foster care settings, who are often placed with White parents. In kin placements, variation is minimized due to biological relationships. Yet in non-kin foster placements, caregivers may not look similar to children or have similar cultural and daily practices. Whether children's preferences vary as a function of racial/ethnic match could provide further insight to these ongoing debates.

Present Study

The goals of the present study were 1) to examine the direct and interactive links among placement type, sibling presence, and age on youth's placement preferences and 2) to explore whether racial matching was related to youth's placement preferences above and beyond family networks and the other relevant demographic factors. To pursue these goals, data collected as a part of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) were analyzed. NSCAW is a multi-informant, longitudinal investigation of children and adolescents across the U.S., who were in contact with Child Protective Services and some of whom were removed from their parents' custody. Data collected as a part of NSCAW, which included two samples of children, were made publicly available. One sample, termed the Child Protective Service (CPS) sample, comprised of youth who had some contact with social services due to allegations of maltreatment and who may or may not have been removed. They were followed for between 5-8 years. The second sample, termed the Long-Term Foster Care (LTFC) sample, comprised of youth formally removed from home due to maltreatment substantiated by social services. The youth must have been living in out-of-home care for at least 8 months at the start of the study to

be eligible (time in out-of-home care at the start ranged from 8 to 20 months). These youth were followed for up to 3 years.

In both samples, extensive background information was collected from caregivers, social workers, and the youth themselves (when possible) about their maltreatment history, contact with social services, functioning, and placement and caregiving experiences. In addition, youth age 6 years and older living in out-of-home care were asked about their perceptions of their placement, including their feelings towards their current placement and preferences regarding where they would like to live. These latter questions were of relevance in the present investigation.

Several hypotheses were tested. First, youth in kin care were expected to be more likely to prefer to remain in their current placement and want their current placement to be permanent compared to youth in non-kin foster care (Chapman et al., 2004; Dickerson et al., 2019). Second, youth living with siblings were expected to be more likely to prefer to remain in their current placement and want their current placement to be permanent compared to youth separated from siblings (Dickerson et al., 2019; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). Third, these main effects were hypothesized to be qualified by a placement type by sibling presence interaction: youth were expected to be the most likely to want to remain in their current placement when placed with kin and siblings and the least likely to want to remain in their current placement when placed with neither kin nor siblings. Fourth, as has been uncovered in prior investigations relying on the NSCAW data, youth living in out-of-home care for longer durations were expected to be more likely to want their current placement to be permanent relative to youth who have been living in out-of-home care for shorter durations (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). Fifth, regarding age cut off for legal competency, an exploratory approach was taken to examine if age interacted with placement type and/or sibling presence to suggest that placement type and sibling presence

shaped youth's placement preferences differentially across age. Previous studies did not report any age differences – by itself or in conjunction with other relevant variables (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011), or had a narrow age range (Dickerson et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2010) to test such age differences. Sixth, and a more tentative hypothesis was that, among youth in foster care, those placed with a caregiver whose race/ethnicity matched youth's own race/ethnicity would be more likely to prefer their current placement compared to youth placed with a caregiver whose race/ethnicity did not match youth's own race/ethnicity. Youth in kin care were not considered here because of the low likelihood that their race/ethnicity does not match that of their caregivers.

CHAPTER 1

METHODS

NSCAW Data

Data collection for the National Survey for Child and Adolescent Well-Being I (NSCAW I) spanned from 1999 to 2004. IRB approval for NSCAW was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Research Triangle Institute (RTI) with support from the institutions involved in data collection and the consortium that designed the project. All data were de-identified and made publicly accessible in the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN).

NSCAW included two samples. The recruitment and participant selection approach were similar in both and were designed to capture children and adolescents across diverse geographic and demographic regions of the U.S. (see Dowd et al., 2004 for details). The CPS sample included infants, children and adolescents, that is “youth” ages 0 to 14 years when recruitment began. Their families had come in contact with CPS during a 15-month period between October 1999 and December 2000 due to suspicions of maltreatment. Some youth were living in out-of-home care at the time of recruitment, but such a living arrangement was not a criterion for inclusion. Other youth were receiving CPS services in-home. The LTFC sample included similar aged youth (0 to 14 years). However, all had been removed from home due to substantiated maltreatment and were living in out-of-home care for at least 8 months at the start of their participation.

For the CPS sample, there were five total waves of data collection. The delays between the waves of data collection occurred as follows: Wave 1 took place 2-6 months after the close of the initial investigation/assessment (i.e., when a determination of substantiation was made);

Wave 2 took place 12 months after the close of the initial investigation/assessment; Wave 3 took place 18 months after the close of the initial investigation/assessment; Wave 4 took place 36 months after the close of the initial investigation/assessment; and finally Wave 5, 59-97 months after the close of the initial investigation/assessment. The varied timeframe for Wave 5 emerged as a result of delays being linked to data collection according to youth's age cohort instead of when the initial investigation was closed like the earlier waves. Youth age 6 years and older were interviewed in waves 1, 3, 4 and 5.

In the LTFC sample, there were four waves of data collection. The delays between the waves of data collection occurred as follows: Wave 1 took place 12 months after the youth were placed in out-of-home care (although recruitment occurred 8 months post-removal, the actual interviews were slightly later); Wave 2 took place 24 months after the youth were placed in out-of-home care; Wave 3 took place 30 months after the youth were placed in out-of-home care; and Wave 4 took place 48 months after the youth were placed in out-of-home care. Details on the order of age cohorts interviewed are reported by Dowd et al. (2004). Youth age 6 years and older were interviewed in waves 1, 3 and 4.

Participants

The current study included a subset of youth from both NSCAW samples. Specifically, youth between the ages of 6 to 18 years at the time of the interview, who were living in out-of-home care at the time of questioning and who had had at least one sibling (full, half, or step) below the age of 19 years at the time of interview were eligible. Beyond these initial criteria were four additional requirements that further screened the final sample. These were:

1. For all youth, the roster of individuals living in the household could not contain any biological parents as living with the youth (this was done to preclude situations in which youth were coded as being in out-of-home care, but a parent was a member of the household).
2. For youth living in non-kin foster care, the roster of individuals living in the house could not contain any adult relatives (including adult-age siblings). This ensured that clear and reliable comparisons could be made between non-kin (hence referred to as non-kin foster) and kin care.
3. Youth could not be listed as living in a group or congregate care facility.
4. Youth's IQ must have been 70 or higher to increase the likelihood that they were capable of understanding and answering the interview questions.

With these restrictions, the final sample contained 1033 children and adolescents, aged 6 to 17 years ($M = 10.25$ years, $SD = 3.07$ years) across the two samples (743 from the CPS sample and 290 from the LTFC sample). All youth in the sample were asked about their perceptions of out-of-home placement in at least one wave. Many of these youth were asked such questions on more than one occasion (perception questions were asked during waves 1, 3, 4 and 5 for the CPS sample and waves 1, 3 and 4 for the LTFC sample). Since the youth's placement setting (e.g., sibling presence and type of placement setting) and preferences could both vary across the waves, analyses were conducted at the level of interview or response rather than level of participant. Stated another way, each response given by youth in a separate wave was considered a separate observation and outcome measure in the main analyses. This resulted in a final sample of 1565 responses from the 1033 youth. However, because some youth answered the questions more than once, a supplemental set of analyses was conducted at the level of youth,

with youth's responses to the questions only in their first interview included. Results were largely identical across the two approaches. Differences that did emerge are described in the "Subsequent Analyses Section".

When racial matching was explored, only youth living in non-kin foster care were included. Among youth placed with kin, their race/ethnicity matched that of their caregiver 88% of the time. Variability, therefore, was too little to include these youth. Among youth in non-kin foster care, 68% youth and their caregivers matched in race/ethnicity, whereas 19% of them did not (21% were missing information about either the youth's or caregiver's race/ethnicity). Therefore, the total sample size for these analyses was 926.

Measures, Procedures, and Coding

Dowd et al. (2004) provides details regarding recruitment and consent/assent procedures for all youth and other reporters (caregivers, caseworkers and teachers) and details on all measures, procedures, and coding of NSCAW. Only those relevant to the present study are described here.

All youth interviews took place at their current placement. Placement-relevant questions asked about a range of topics, including youth's relationship with their current caregiver, experiences in their placement, contact with biological parents and siblings, and so on. Embedded in these were two key questions about youth's placement preferences: 1) "Do you want this to be your permanent home?", and 2) "If you could live with anyone, who would it be?"

Responses to the yes/no question about whether youth wanted their current placement to be permanent were coded as "no = 0" and "yes = 1." Responses to the open-ended question

about with whom youth want to live were originally documented as one of 25 categories or as “other” with a description by the interviewer (see Table 1) in the survey. For the present study, responses were recoded into one of three mutually exclusive response types: Biological parents = 1, Current placement = 2, or Somewhere else (i.e., not biological parents or current placement, such as with grandparents, aunt/uncle, teacher, etc.) = 3. An additional 104 (7%) responses could not be recoded because of missing data, ambiguous or don’t know responses, or refusals.

Analyses Plan

Analyses were divided into three sections: preliminary analyses, hypotheses testing (main analyses), and supplemental analyses. The preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics on the predictors and outcomes. These checked for distribution (Table 1), kurtosis, and skewness (Table 2). Chi square analyses tested for potential confounds, including gender and race/ethnicity distribution variations across age (differentiated based on the age cut-off for legal competency, below versus at or above 12 years), sample type (CPS vs LTFC sample), sibling presence (with versus without sibling) and placement type (kin versus foster care).

The main analyses consisted of four logistic regression models in two parts to examine youth’s placement preferences. First, a hierarchical binary logistic regression and a hierarchical multinomial logistic regression were conducted to examine placement in family networks and age as predictors of youth’s placement preferences. Predictors were identical in both regression models. Age, gender and sample type were entered in Step 1; sibling presence and placement type were entered in Step 2; and relevant two-way interactions (i.e., placement type x sibling presence, placement type x age, placement type x sample type, sibling presence x age, sibling presence x sample type, and sample type x age) were entered in Step 3. The outcome measure for the binary logistic regression was youth’s yes/no response to the question about whether they

wanted their current placement to be permanent. The reference group of the outcome measure was “no” response. Thus, the analysis compared the odds of youth’s response of “yes” over youth’s response of “no” (where the null value = 1). The outcome measure for the multinomial logistic regression was youth’s response to the open-ended question about who would they want to live, if anyone. The reference group in this analysis consisted of youth who reported they wanted to stay in their current placement (i.e., with their current caregivers). Thus, the analysis compared 1) the odds of youth reporting that they want to return to their biological parents over youth reporting that they want to remain in their current placement and 2) the odds of youth reporting that they want to live somewhere else over youth reporting that they want to remain in their current placement (where the null value = 1).

Second, the tentative hypotheses about whether youth’s placement preferences were predicted by youth’s and caregiver’s race/ethnicity over and above family networks (specifically siblings only) were tested. Both binary and multinomial logistic regression models were re-conducted with only youth in non-kin foster care. These models included age, gender and sample type entered in Step 1; sibling presence entered in Step 2; racial match entered in Step 3 and relevant two-way interactions (sibling presence x age, sibling presence x sample type, sample type x age, racial mismatch x age, racial mismatch x sample type and racial mismatch x sibling presence) entered in Step 4.

In addition, two supplemental analyses were also conducted. First, discrepant responses to the close-ended and open-ended questions were explored. Varying responses have often been interpreted as suggesting that youth cannot answer placement-related questions accurately (Fox et al., 2008; Warshak, 2003). Hence, it is important to assess whether there are patterns or predictors of these discrepancies that may account for their occurrence.

This was done using two definitions of a “discrepant response”. A broader definition simply included what seemed like contradictory responses. For instance, when asked if youth wished to make their current placement permanent, some of them answered “yes”, but immediately afterwards, when asked who would they want to live with, they mentioned another caregiver (i.e., either their biological parent or someone else). These youth, therefore, gave discrepant answers according to this broader definition. Likewise, some youth gave discrepant responses because they answered “no” when asked if they wanted to make their current placement permanent but said “current caregiver” to the open-ended question. On the other hand, some youth gave consistent responses to both the questions (“yes” when asked whether they wanted to make their current placement permanent and then mentioned their current caregivers in response to the open-ended question or “no” when asked whether they wanted to make their current placement permanent and then mentioned either their biological parents or some other place in response to the open-ended question). These latter youth therefore gave non-discrepant responses.

Upon closer look at the two questions, however, a narrower definition of “discrepant responses” was also used to explore possible predictors of discrepant responses. Given the framing of the two questions (if they want their current placement to be permanent and who would they want to live with, if anyone) it could have been the case that the youth wanted to live in their current placement temporarily (right now) but did not want it to be permanent. So, if the youth say “no” to the close ended question about wanting their current placement to be permanent, it’s open to two interpretations. One interpretation would be that they do not want to be in their current placement at all and the other interpretation would be that they want it to be temporary, not permanent. On the other hand, if youth say “yes” to the close ended question

about wanting their current placement to be permanent, it's only open to one interpretation. Accordingly, a discrepancy in their response to the two questions after saying "yes" to the closed question would be a more definitive contradiction of responses.

Since this was an exploration of patterns of discrepancies, discrepant responses based on both definitions were subjected to binary logistic regressions as outcome measures ("non discrepant responses" = 0, "discrepant responses" = 1). The reference group of the outcome measure was "non-discrepant" responses. Predictors in these models included age, gender and sample type entered in Step 1; sibling presence and placement type entered in Step 2; and relevant two-way interactions entered in Step 3 (placement type x sibling presence, placement type x age, placement type x sample type, sibling presence x age, sibling presence x sample type and sample type x age).

Second, regarding robustness of the relations, the same regression models as in the main analyses were evaluated to see if the relations between the predictors of interest and placement preference observed in the response-level main analyses remained the same when youth (i.e. only the first interview) rather than responses (i.e. all interviews across waves) were considered. The binary and multinomial logistic regression models were identical to those included in the main analyses. Of interest was whether the results from the main analyses replicated when only youth's first responses were analyzed.

CHAPTER 2

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses examined gender and race/ethnicity differences across the groups of each of the predictors – age, sample type, sibling presence and placement type. Gender distributions differed between age, sample type and placement type ($\chi^2s > 4.54$, $ps < .05$) and race/ethnicity only differed between the two placement types ($\chi^2 = 11.86$, $p = .018$). More girls than boys were younger than 12 years, in the CPS sample and placed with kin. Regarding race/ethnicity, the proportions of American Indian, Pacific/Hawaiian/Asian, Hispanic youth and “other” race were similar across both placement types, while more African American youth were placed with kin and more Caucasian youth were placed with non-kin foster families. All the χ^2 results are given in Table 4. Table 5 shows the overall response rates to the two placement preference questions grouped by placement type and sibling presence. Given some of these patterns, gender was included as a covariate in the models.

Main Analyses

Four logistic regression models were tested in two sets of analyses to examine youth’s placement preferences.

First, a hierarchical binary logistic regression was conducted predicting youth’s responses to the close-ended question about whether youth wanted their current placement to be permanent. The model was significant at all three steps ($\chi^2 = 33.44$, $p < .001$ at Step 3, see Table 6 for results). Sample type, placement type and the placement type by sample type interaction were all

significant predictors. Contrary to expectations, sibling presence and placement type did not interact.

Overall, youth in the Long-Term Foster Care (LTFC) sample were significantly more likely than youth in the CPS sample to want their current placement to be permanent (OR = .67, $p=.001$). Specifically, the odds of saying “yes” over “no” among youth in the LTFC sample was 1.47 (1/.67) times that of youth in the CPS sample. Next, youth placed in kin care were significantly more likely than youth in non-kin foster care to want their current placement to be permanent (OR=1.48, $p=.001$). Specifically, the odds of saying “yes” over “no” among youth placed with kin was 1.48 times that of youth placed with non-kin foster families.

Probing the sample type x placement type interaction (OR=1.69, $p = .037$) revealed that placement type was not a significant predictor of youth’s placement preferences among those in the LTFC sample (OR = 1.05, $p>.05$). However, placement type was a significant predictor of youth’s placement preferences among those in the CPS sample. Specifically, among youth in the CPS sample, the odds of saying “yes” over “no” among youth placed with kin was 1.77 times that of youth placed with non-kin foster families (OR=1.77, $p = .008$).

Second, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted predicting youth’s responses to the open-ended question about who would they want to live with, if anyone. More nuanced preferences were captured in these analyses. The model was significant at all three steps ($\chi^2 = 120.07$, $p<.001$ at Step 3, see Table 7 for results). The main effects of youth’s age, sample type, sibling presence and placement type were significant, as was the age x sibling presence interaction.

Overall, youth in the LTFC sample compared to youth in the CPS sample were significantly less likely to prefer returning to their biological parents over preferring to live in their current placement ($RRR=1.55, p=.001$). Specifically, the odds of preferring biological parents over their current placement among youth in the LTFC sample was .64 times ($1/1.55$) that of youth in the CPS sample. Youth age 12 and older (i.e., the age considered legally competent for youth to provide input about their placement preferences in some states) compared to youth younger than 12 years were significantly less likely to prefer returning to their biological parents over preferring to live in their current placement ($RRR=0.74, p=.028$) and significantly more likely to prefer going somewhere else over preferring to live in their current placement ($RRR=2.09, p<.001$). Specifically, the odds of preferring biological parents over their current placement among older youth was .74 times that of younger youth and the odds of preferring to go somewhere else over their current placement among older youth was 2.09 times that of younger youth. Next, youth in kin care compared to youth in non-kin foster care were significantly less likely to prefer returning to their biological parents ($RRR=.57, p<.001$) and also to prefer going somewhere else ($RRR=.76, p=.064$) over preferring to live in their current placement, although the latter was only marginally significant. Specifically, the odds of preferring biological parents over their current placement among youth in kin care was .57 times that of youth in non-kin foster care. Finally, youth placed with siblings compared to youth placed without siblings were significantly less likely to prefer going somewhere else over preferring to live in their current placement ($RRR=0.72, p=.026$). Specifically, the odds of preferring to go somewhere else over their current placement among youth placed with siblings was .72 times that of youth placed without siblings.

However, the age and sibling presence main effects were qualified by a significant interaction ($RRR = 1.86, p=.039$). Among younger youth, sibling presence was a significant predictor of youth's placement preferences. Sibling presence predicted younger youth's preference for going somewhere else over remaining in the current placement ($RRR = .48, p=.020$). Younger youth placed with a sibling were less likely to prefer going somewhere else over remaining in their current placement compared to younger youth placed without a sibling. Specifically, the odds of preferring to go somewhere else over their current placement among younger youth placed with siblings was .48 times that of younger youth placed without a sibling. Among older youth, on the other hand, sibling presence was not a significant predictor of youth's placement preferences ($RRR = .88, p>.05$).

Finally, racial/ethnicity match between youth and their caregiver was examined in relation to youth's placement preferences. Two hierarchical logistic regression models – one binary and one multinomial – were conducted. As previously mentioned, this analysis only included youth placed in non-kin foster families and both the binary and multinomial logistic regression models were similar to the ones above except for excluding placement type from Step 2 and including racial/ethnic match in Step 3 of the predictors (all relevant two-way interactions were now in Step 4). Racial/ethnic match did not emerge as a significant predictor of youth's placement preferences in either of the two models (directly or in interactions, Wald's $z<1.35$ for the binary logistic regression model and Wald's $z<1.49$, all $ps>.05$ for the multinomial logistic regression model).

Subsequent Analyses

Next, observed discrepant responses between the close-ended and open-ended questions were explored as was the sensitivity of results when total number of youth ($N=1033$) was

substituted for total responses (N=1565) in the analyses. As a reminder, in the youth-level analyses, only responses given in the youth's first interview were included.

A binary logistic regression was conducted using the broader definition of “discrepant responses” with predictors identical to those in the main analyses. The model was significant at all three steps ($\chi^2= 22.10, p=.02$ at Step 3, see Table 8 for results) and only placement type emerged as a significant predictor of discrepancies (OR = 1.47, $p = .002$). Youth placed with kin were significantly more likely than youth placed with non-kin foster families to give discrepant responses. Specifically, the odds of giving a discrepant response over a non-discrepant response among youth in kin care was 1.47 times that of youth placed in non-kin foster families. None of the relevant interactions were significant (Wald's $z < 1.41, ps > .05$).

Another binary logistic regression was conducted using the narrower definition of “discrepant responses” with predictors identical to those in the main analyses. The model was not significant at any of the three steps ($\chi^2= 12.26, p > .05$ at Step 3, see Table 9 for results). None of the main effects emerged as significant and only the sibling x placement type interaction emerged as significant (OR = 1.87, $p = .049$). However, follow-up analyses failed to reveal significant simple main effects (ORs $< 1.18, ps > .05$).

In the final set of analyses, data at the level of youth were analyzed. The results of the hierarchical binary logistic regression model ($\chi^2= 40.73, p < .01$, see Table 10 for results) and hierarchical multinomial regression models ($\chi^2= 100.26, p < .001$, see Table 11 for results) were replicated. Most results remained similar in direction to those already reported though sometimes the magnitude of the Odds Ratio (for the Binary Logistic Regression) or Relative Risk Ratio (for the Multinomial Logistic Regression) were different. In the binary logistic regression model, all the patterns of relations (direction and significance of predictors) in the model were identical,

though the magnitude of the Odds Ratio were different. Four notable differences emerged when the hierarchical multinomial logistic regression was conducted.

First, the significant main effect of age reduced to marginal significance (RRR= 0.73, $p=.06$) for youth who preferred returning to their biological parents over preferring to live in their current placement. Second, the main effect of sample type became significant (RRR=1.56, $p=.023$) for youth who preferred going somewhere else over preferring to live in their current placement (it was only significant in predicting youth's preference for biological parents over their current placement). Youth in the LTFC sample compared to youth in the CPS sample were significantly less likely to prefer going somewhere else over their current placement. Specifically, the odds of preferring to go somewhere else over their current placement among youth in the LTFC sample was .64 times ($1/1.56$) that of youth in the CPS sample. Third, the placement type x sample type interaction was now significant (RRR = .44, $p=.026$) for youth who preferred going to their biological parents over preferring to live in their current placement. Among youth in the LTFC sample, placement type was not a significant predictor of youth's preference for biological parents over their current placement (RRR=.84, $p>.05$). However, among youth in the CPS sample, placement type was a significant predictor of youth's preference for biological parents over their current placement (RRR = .37, $p=.001$). Among youth in the CPS sample, those placed with kin compared to non-kin foster families were significantly less likely to prefer their biological parents over their current placement. Specifically, the odds of preferring their biological parents over their current placement for youth in the CPS sample placed with kin was .37 times that of youth in the CPS sample placed with non-kin foster families. Finally, the age x sibling presence interaction reduced to non-

significance (RRR= 1.63, $p > .05$) for youth who preferred to go somewhere else over remaining in their current placement.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to provide insight relevant to ongoing debates about youth's capability to provide useful information about their placement preferences in their dependency cases. Of particular interest was whether youth's preferences mapped on to patterns revealed in empirical research that show improved functioning among youth placed within family networks, including both kin caregivers and siblings, compared to youth placed in a home without any family member. Prior investigations have largely focused on how only one of either placement type or sibling presence shape youth's placement perceptions. The current study extended this by investigating both placement type and sibling presence as familial connections. Additionally, the importance of having an age cut-off for legal competency and the role of racial matching as a potential predictor of youth's placement preferences have virtually never been investigated before. The current study sheds light on whether youth's preferences for familial connections differ across age groups. We also investigated whether youth's placement preferences were shaped by whether or not their race/ethnicity matched their foster caregivers' race/ethnicity. Finally, the importance of asking youth about their preferences would require effective questioning strategies. The current study explored discrepancies in youth's responses when asked about placement preferences in different ways (i.e. close and open-ended questions). The patterns in the discrepancies are expected to shed light on the need for further investigations on how to better ask youth questions about their placement preferences.

Results suggested that youth were generally competent in expressing placement preferences. Overall, youth showed a strong preference for placement within family networks.

This preference for placement within family networks was most notable among youth placed with kin caregivers rather than with non-kin foster caregivers, but it was also evident at times among youth placed with versus without siblings. In the latter case however, age also mattered. Sibling presence was more important in driving placement preferences among younger compared to older youth. In combination, these results support the notion that youth across a broad age range are capable of providing input about their placement preferences. This input is potentially unique in offering a perspective otherwise unavailable to social services. If this input could be added to other information about the youth's needs and options, social services would be in a better position to make better informed decisions about with whom youth should live following removal. Even if decisions are not ultimately consistent with youth's preferences, by giving them a voice, youth may feel empowered and respected, and hence better adjust to some of the significant disruptions they face (Merritt, 2004).

Turning to the findings more specifically, placement type was a strong predictor of youth's preferences. Regardless of how youth were asked, they exhibited a fairly consistent desire to be with kin rather than non-kin foster caregivers and were less likely to want to be reunified with their parents or even go to other places when living with kin. Similar patterns have been reported in other studies of foster youth's perceptions of caregivers (Chapman et al., 2004; Dickerson et al., 2019; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). For example, youth liked their caregivers more and felt like a part of the family more when placed with kin rather than non-kin caregivers (Chapman et al., 2004). Whether this trend is simply due to familiarity with kin or due to greater comfort because of a closer relationship, is not clear. It would be worth exploring these underlying mechanisms explaining youth's expressed preferences since these may help guide

efforts to increase youth's positive feelings about other types of out-of-home settings when removal is necessary.

Yet family networks do not only include kin caregivers. Siblings also represent an important source of comfort, familiarity and support during times of transition, including among youth removed from home due to maltreatment (Hegar, 1988, 2005). Given this importance of sibling relationships, it was hypothesized that youth would prefer placements with siblings compared to placements without siblings. Some support for this hypothesis emerged, although primarily in response to the open-ended question asking whom youth wanted to live with. Younger but not older youth were more likely to want to live in their current placement when placed with a sibling. When no sibling was in the home though, younger youth almost equivalently reported preference for their current placement and other placements.

Several explanations may account for the age differences in how sibling presence seems to be shaping youth preferences. First, younger youth may feel particularly strongly about the need for physical proximity of family members as opposed, for example, to psychological closeness or other ways of maintaining connections. Adolescents in contrast, may be able to rely more on their perceptions and knowledge of familial relationships to maintain closeness, rather than requiring their sibling's actual presence. Second, older youth (especially adolescents) strive for independence and autonomy (Erikson, 1993), reducing their need for close sibling ties, or at least reducing that need relative to the needs of younger youth. At the same time however, older youth did not fully express this independence as they still showed a preference for kin caregivers. Overall, further investigations with detailed information about sibling dynamics are important to unpack these important differences between younger and older youth. Within these investigations, documentation about birth order and age differences among siblings, would also

be helpful to understand the role of sibling relationships in shaping placement perceptions and preferences in a more nuanced manner.

In addition to placement within family networks, findings from the current investigation also supported that the two sample types (CPS and LTFC) in the original survey, consistently predicted youth's placement preferences, specifically for kin care over non-kin foster families. Stronger preferences for kin were evident among youth in the CPS compared to the LTFC sample. Youth in the LTFC sample showed no explicit preference for kin in response to the yes/no questions about making their current placement permanent. This parallels findings obtained in prior studies using the NSCAW data (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). As a reminder, the CPS sample comprised of youth who had any contact with social services and the LTFC sample comprised of youth who had been in out-of-home care settings for longer durations. Within these two sample, youth who were 6 years or older and were living in out-of-home care at the time of the interview (across waves) were asked about their placement perceptions and preferences. The exact length of time these youth had spent out of home prior to answering the questions was not known. However, by design youth in the CPS sample spent shorter durations in out-of-home care than did the youth in the LTFC sample. Additionally, in the response level analyses some of the youth in the CPS sample may also have been living in out-of-home care for long durations in the later waves of data collection

Perhaps youth in the LTFC sample simply wanted a "family" type of setting or stability since they were living in out-of-home care for longer durations. Thus, they would say "no" less often when asked about making their current placement permanent. These youth may have already adjusted to their placement, leading them to want to make that placement permanent regardless of whether their caregiver was or was not a kin. For youth in the CPS sample

however, the familiarity or comfort of their biological parents or at least kin may have been more important than stability. Two findings support this interpretation. First, sample type and placement type interacted such that preference for kin care over non-kin foster care did not emerge among youth in the LTFC sample but did among youth in the CPS sample. Second, the effect sizes of preference for kin were bigger in the youth level analyses (OR = 1.74) than in the response level analyses (OR = 1.47), showing that youth were less likely to want their current placement to be permanent in their first out-of-home interview but this dissipated over time. Note that in neither samples was there data available to test the influences of time spent in the current placement, more definitively. Thus, placement in out-of-home care does not necessarily mean that youth were only in one location. Placement changes in both the CPS and the LTFC samples complicate these possible interpretations and highlight the need for more nuanced investigations of precisely how youth preferences are related to stability and change in out-of-home placement settings.

In summary, findings suggest that youth removed from home due to maltreatment implicitly recognize the value of family networks and regularly express a preference to keep connected to those networks by being placed within them. This is especially true when considering placement with kin caregivers, but for younger children, it is also true when considering placement with siblings. While both types of family relationships were important, their combination did not further enhance youth preferences. Hints that stronger preferences would emerge when youth were living with both kin and siblings appeared in an earlier small study (e.g. Dickerson et al., 2019), but not in other analyses using the NSCAW data (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011). Our data thus suggest that youth prefer to be with a family member, most

notably an adult kin caregiver who possibly not only knows something about the youth's needs but can also address those needs.

It should be noted that the current findings diverged some from those reported in prior studies that analyzed placement perceptions and preferences using the same dataset (NSCAW). These differences include a stronger sibling effect on youth's favorable perceptions of the caregivers ("feeling like a part of the family", "liking the family") and a sibling by sample type interaction with no sample type by placement type interactions (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009). Chapman et al. (2004) also did not find a kin effect on youth's placement preference (asking youth if they want their current placement to be permanent), they only found one in favorable perceptions of caregivers and the setting.

The varied findings could be due to differences between the current and former studies in the ways that the groups were created and the final samples that were included in the analyses. In the present study, comparisons were made between youth placed with kin and youth placed with non-kin foster caregivers. Youth in congregate care were excluded. In some other studies, youth in non-kin foster and congregate care settings were combined in a "non-kin" category (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, 2011). Given that differences in experiences in and consequences of placement in the two types of non-kin settings could affect youth preferences, they were kept separate in the current study. In addition, although single NSCAW variables within waves classified the type of placement, discrepancies were sometimes uncovered upon more detailed file reviews (e.g., files contained variables listing all other individuals in the home; at times, biological parents were included, even when a youth was classified as living in out-of-home care). Thus, multiple checks were made on the final dataset in this secondary analysis to confirm that no biological parents were living in the home of any of the youth in the sample. Additionally, no adult relatives were

living in the same setting as of the youth who were categorized as placed in non-kin foster care. Such “cross-checks” altered the final sample sizes slightly and may have further contributed to some subtle differences.

Two final trends in the results are important to discuss. One concerns the exploratory analyses examining youth preferences as a function of the match between their race/ethnicity and that of their caregivers’ race/ethnicity. Despite concerns raised about youth’s development in domains of self-identity and adjustment when placed with caregivers belonging to a different race/ethnicity (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Grow & Shapiro, 1974), at least in terms of youth’s expressed preferences, race/ethnicity did not appear to have an influence. However, the sample size for this analysis was small and there was little variation in the different groups of specific youth and caregiver race/ethnicity. This leads to limited inferences of our results and the potential influence of racial matching on youth’s placement preferences is worthy of more in-depth study.

Second, discrepancies in the close and open-ended responses were explored to see which youth were more likely to express discrepant responses across the two question types. The results revealed youth in kin care were more likely to give discrepant responses. These differences might have been driven by social pressures that are more likely to influence attitudes and behaviors and also an expected strong sense of loyalty towards family than strangers in disclosing information (Salter, 1995). The interviews in NSCAW were conducted in the youth’s current placement possibly with the caregiver nearby. Hence, youth may have been more likely to endorse their current placement in response to the close-ended question especially when placed with kin though in response to the open-ended question they did not do the same. Extensive work on effective questioning strategies in forensic interviews show that open ended

questions elicit more accurate information than option-posing questions (Lamb et al., 2006).

Hence, it could be that the open-ended question captured youth's preferences (e.g. a desire to go to their biological parents, grandparents or other relatives) more accurately than the close-ended question.

CHAPTER 4

PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In addition to theoretical significance from emphasizing the value of connections to family networks, the results are also important practically. Overall results suggest that when youth are removed from home due to maltreatment, they can express reasonable placement preferences. Additionally, their answers are consistent with what one would expect in terms of how placement experiences largely relate to youth functioning. Accordingly, two relevant policy implications are discussed in this section.

First, one of the most important aspects of ongoing debates about asking youth for their placement preference concerns their age and whether the age cut-off of 12 years operational in some states is a useful way of determining who can express a preference (U.S.D.H.H.S., 2020). Very few age effects emerged. Placement type did not interact with age in any of the two models at any level of analyses. Both younger and older youth seem to recognize the importance of kin and preferred to be with kin once removed. Sibling presence showed hints of age differences, only when all responses were considered. Nonetheless, the results did not reveal differences in the two age groups in a direction that would support youth only be asked about their preferences if they are age 12 or older. Future work needs to examine, more carefully, how sibling age, order, and relationship quality all relate to placement preferences and experiences as the nature and dynamics of the sibling relationships might influence youth's preference about whether or not they want to remain with their siblings.

Second, how youth are asked about their placement preferences is important in shaping their responses, and potentially the perceived credibility. Discrepancies in youth's responses

have often been interpreted as indicative of youth's incapability to provide useful information (Fox et al., 2008; Warshak, 2003). However, it is unclear if the discrepancies found in the current study are due to youth's incapability itself or due to the use of different question types (see Lamb & Fauchier, 2001). Almost 30% to 50% of the youth who responded to the questions gave discrepant responses. Previous work on effective questioning strategies has shown that open-ended questions are more effective in eliciting accurate information from children compared to option imposing questions probably because the former force youth to recall information from memory instead of recognizing one of the options suggested by the interviewer (see Lamb et al., 2007). Hence, use of more open-ended questions and invitations might be more useful in practice when asking youth about their placement preferences. In addition, future investigations examining effective question types that also reduce potential discrepancies across questions could further shed light on good questioning practices in dependency cases.

CHAPTER 5

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the current study contributes novel understanding of youth's placement preferences, two important limitations should be noted. First, the study only investigated placement in family networks when in out-of-home care though there are a myriad of factors that can shape youth placement experiences and preferences. While family networks are certainly important and able to be easily identified and screened by social services, they fail to capture complexities of youth placement. For example, data were not available regarding how long youth had been living with the specific caregivers prior to answering the placement questions or the number of moves youth had experienced in the interim. Both length of stay in a particular setting and number of movements while in the system, are related to foster youth's health, functioning and adjustment (James, 2004; Koh, 2009) and may also affect youth's preferences. Placement stability is also related to placement with kin caregivers (Perry, Daly & Kotler, 2011). Stability therefore could be contributing to some of the evident links between kin placement and youth desires to remain in their current placement. Due to the lack of this information, the important role of stability factors in association with placement preference was not directly investigated.

Second, the current study was not a longitudinal investigation of youth's placement preferences as a function of family networks and age. Placement preferences across time could not be investigated in this study due to the lack of detailed information about out-of-home settings. Though information about youth's placement type (e.g. kin placement versus non-kin foster placement) was broadly available, specific details about the people in the household were lacking. As a consequence, it was unclear if the out-of-home placement setting itself was the

same across two or more waves when the out-of-home placement type was the same. For example, youth could have been placed with a “foster mother” or an “aunt” across multiple waves but it was unclear if they were with the same “foster mother” or “aunt” across these waves. When placed with the same caregiver or setting for a longer time period, the youth’s increased sense of familiarity and comfort might confound youth’s preferences. The lack of this information limited the possibility of such a detailed longitudinal investigation.

Finally, the NSCAW data collection procedures could also have shaped responses among youth, especially when they were answering questions about caregivers. Participating youth were interviewed in their current placement, where caregivers may or may not have been present. It is not clear whether the caregivers were in close vicinity of the youth during the interview or whether youth were able to answer freely. As a result, youth may tend to endorse their current placement in the survey more often than they really wanted. In fact, the responses to open and close ended questions were largely discrepant and the distribution of “yes” and “no” responses to various close ended questions in the dataset were heavily skewed. Together this indicates a potential level of discomfort felt by the participants in expressing opinions/feelings about their current placements, especially negative ones.

CONCLUSION

The current study provides much needed support for the notion that youth are capable of reporting on their preferences for placement and youth's preferences often reflect a desire to remain connected to family. Preferences for kin caregivers was consistent across both age groups – those younger than 12 years (age cut-off for legal competency) and those older. Thus, these results have challenged two important assumptions, namely 1) the general incapability of youth to provide meaningful preferences and 2) the need for an age cut-off for legal competency to ask about placement preferences. These results have important policy implications since the two assumptions heavily influence policies and practices regarding asking youth about their preferences in dependency cases. However, the discrepant responses found in the current study indicate the need for further investigations examining what factors lead to such discrepancies and also what questioning strategies would be the most effective in asking youth about their placement preferences in dependency cases. This could include a greater number of questions or greater use of open-ended questions, “tell me more” prompts as well as proper instructions and explanations about what specifically is being asked of the youth. Most importantly, it should be noted that youth's preferences should be one of many guiding factors and not a final decision in their dependency cases.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, L. S. (2006). From corrections to community: Youth offenders' perceptions of the challenges of transition. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 44(2-3), 31-53.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v44n02_02
- Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980.
- Akin, B. A. (2011). Predictors of foster care exits to permanency: A competing risks analysis of reunification, guardianship, and adoption. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(6), 999-1011. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.01.008>
- Alexander Jr, R., & Curtis, C. M. (1996). A review of empirical research involving the transracial adoption of African American children. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(2), 223-235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984960222007>
- Bank, S., & Kahn, M. D. (1975). Sisterhood-brotherhood is powerful: Sibling sub-systems and family therapy. *Family process*, 14(3), 311-337. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1975.00311.x>
- Barn, R., & Kirton, D. (2012). Transracial adoption in Britain: politics, ideology and reality. *Adoption & Fostering*, 36(3-4), 25-37.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/030857591203600304>
- Barnes, V. (2007). Young people's views of children's rights and advocacy services: a case for 'caring' advocacy? *Child Abuse Review: Journal of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16(3), 140-152.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/car.977>

- Chapman, M. V., Wall, A., Barth, R. P., & National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Group. (2004). Children's voices: The perceptions of children in foster care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 74(3), 293-304. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.74.3.293>
- Cicirelli, V. G. (1980). Sibling relationships in adulthood: A life span perspective. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10050-033>
- Coyne, I., Amory, A., Kiernan, G., & Gibson, F. (2014). Children's participation in shared decision-making: Children, adolescents, parents and healthcare professionals' perspectives and experiences. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 18(3), 273-280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejon.2014.01.006>
- Curran, M. C., & Pecora, P. J. (1999). Incorporating the perspectives of youth placed in family foster care: Selected research findings and methodological challenges. *The foster care crisis*, 99-125.
- Dickerson, K. L., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2019). The Role of Kinship and Siblings in Young Children's Placement Preferences. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260519854560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519854560>
- Dowd, K., Kinsey, S., Wheelless, S., Thissen, R., Richardson, J., Suresh, R., ... & Dolan, M. (2004). National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), combined waves 1–4, data file user's manual, restricted release version. Research Triangle Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Caliber Associates. *University of California at Berkeley*.

- Dubowitz, H., & Sawyer, R. J. (1994). School behavior of children in kinship care. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 18(11), 899-911. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134\(05\)80001-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(05)80001-8)
- Dunn, D. M., Culhane, S. E., & Taussig, H. N. (2010). Children's appraisals of their experiences in out-of-home care. *Children and youth services review*, 32(10), 1324-1330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2010.05.001>
- Emery, R. E. (2002). Easing the Pain of Divorce for Children: Children's Voices, Causes of Conflict, and Mediation-Comments on Kelly's Resolving Child Custody Disputes. *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law*, 10, 164.
- Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society*. WW Norton & Company.
- Feigelman, W. (2000). Adjustments of transracially and inracially adopted young adults. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 17(3), 165–183. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007531829378>
- Feigelman, W. and Silverman, A. (1983) *Chosen Children: New Patterns of Adoptive Relationships*. New York: Praeger.
- Fox, A., Berrick, J. D., & Frasch, K. (2008). Safety, family, permanency, and child well-being: What we can learn from children. *Child Welfare*, 87(1), 63-90. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/32q702ts>
- Grow, L. J., & Shapiro, D. (1974). *Black Children-White Parents: A Study of Transracial Adoption*. New York: Child Welfare League of America.

- Groza, V., Maschmeier, C., Jamison, C., & Piccola, T. (2003). Siblings and out-of-home placement: Best practices. *Families in Society*, 84(4), 480-490.
<https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.136>
- Hegar, R. L. (1988). Sibling relationships and separations: Implications for child placement. *Social service review*, 62(3), 446-467. <https://doi.org/10.1086/644560>
- Hegar, R. L. (2005). Sibling placement in foster care and adoption: An overview of international research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(7), 717-739.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.12.018>
- Hegar, R. L., & Rosenthal, J. A. (2009). Kinship care and sibling placement: Child behavior, family relationships, and school outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(6), 670-679. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.01.002>
- Hegar, R. L., & Rosenthal, J. A. (2011). Foster children placed with or separated from siblings: Outcomes based on a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(7), 1245-1253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.02.020>
- Hegar, R. L., & Scannapieco, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Kinship foster care: Policy, practice, and research*. Child Welfare: A Series in Child Welfare Practice, Policy, and Research.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195109405.001.0001>
- Herrick, M. A., & Piccus, W. (2005). Sibling connections: The importance of nurturing sibling bonds in the foster care system. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(7), 845-861.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.12.013>

- Holland, S., Faulkner, A., & Perez-del-Aguila, R. (2005). Promoting stability and continuity of care for looked after children: a survey and critical review. *Child & Family Social Work, 10*(1), 29-41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2004.00339.x>
- Holtan, A., Rønning, J. A., Handegård, B. H., & Sourander, A. (2005). A comparison of mental health problems in kinship and non-kinship foster care. *European child & adolescent psychiatry, 14*(4), 200-207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-005-0445-z>
- Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. §1901 (1978).
- Jenkins, S. (1984). Review of No one ever asked us: A postscript to foster care [Review of the book No one ever asked us: A postscript to foster care, by T. Festinger]. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 54*(4), 659–660. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0098838>
- Jenkins, J. J. (2008). Listen to me! Empowering youth and courts through increased youth participation in dependency hearings. *Family Court Review, 46*(1), 163-179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2007.00190.x>
- Johnson-Garner, M. Y., & Meyers, S. A. (2003). What factors contribute to the resilience of African-American children within kinship care? In *Child and Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 32, No. 5, pp. 255-269). Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025883726991>
- Kelly, J. B. (1994). The determination of child custody. *The Future of Children, 121-142*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1602481>

- Koh, E., & Testa, M. F. (2008). Propensity score matching of children in kinship and non-kinship foster care: Do permanency outcomes differ? *Social Work Research, 32*(2), 105-116. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/32.2.105>
- Krinsky, M. A., & Rodriguez, J. (2006). Giving a voice to the voiceless: Enhancing youth participation in court proceedings. *Nevada Law Journal, 6*(3), 34. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:4KWK-BDW0-0198-G01X-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Lamb, M. E., & Fauchier, A. (2001). The effects of question type on self-contradictions by children in the course of forensic interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology: The Official Journal of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 15*(5), 483-491. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.726>
- Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Esplin, P. W., & Horowitz, D. (2007). A structured forensic interview protocol improves the quality and informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. *Child abuse & neglect, 31*(11-12), 1201-1231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.021>
- Leathers, S. J. (2005). Separation from siblings: Associations with placement adaptation and outcomes among adolescents in long-term foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 27*(7), 793-819. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.12.015>
- Linares, L. O. (2006). An understudied form of intra-family violence: Sibling-to-sibling aggression among foster children. *Aggression and violent behavior, 11*(1), 95-109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2005.07.001>

- Merritt, D. H. (2008). Placement preferences among children living in foster or kinship care: A cluster analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review, 30*(11), 1336-1344.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.04.002>
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.
- Piaget, J. (1964). Cognitive development in children. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 2*(2), 176-186.
- Pitchal, E. S. (2008). Where are all the children-increasing youth participation in dependency proceedings. *UC Davis Journal of Juvenile Law & Policy 12 U.C. Davis J. J, 12*, 233.
<https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:4SHF-KBV0-00SW-40CG-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Rubin, D. M., Downes, K. J., O'Reilly, A. L., Mekonnen, R., Luan, X., & Localio, R. (2008). Impact of kinship care on behavioral well-being for children in out-of-home care. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 162*(6), 550-556.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.162.6.550>
- Salter, A. (1995). *Transforming trauma: A guide to understanding and treating adult survivors of child sexual abuse*. Sage Publications.
- Saywitz, K. J., Lyon, T. D., & Goodman, G. S. (2017). 19 When Interviewing Children: A Review and Update. *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment*, 310.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2893157
- Shlonsky, A. R., & Berrick, J. D. (2001). Assessing and promoting quality in kin and non-kin foster care. *Social Service Review, 75*(1), 60-83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/591882>

Silverman, A. R. (1993). Outcomes of transracial adoption. *The Future of Children*, 104-118.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1602405>

Smith, A. (2007). Children and young people's participation rights in education. *The*

International Journal of Children's Rights, 15(1), 147-164.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/092755607X181739>

Smith, A. B., Taylor, N. J., & Tapp, P. (2003). Rethinking children's involvement in decision-making after parental separation. *Childhood*, 10(2), 201-216.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568203010002006>

Spinetta, J. J., Masera, G., Jankovic, M., Oppenheim, D., Martins, A. G., Ben Arush, M. W.,

Dongen-Melman, J. van, Epelman C., Medin G., Pekkanen K., & Eden, T. (2003). Valid informed consent and participative decision-making in children with cancer and their parents: A report of the SIOP working committee on psychosocial issues in pediatric oncology. *Medical and Pediatric Oncology: The Official Journal of SIOP—International Society of Pediatric Oncology (Société Internationale d'Oncologie Pédiatrique)*, 40(4),

244-246. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpo.10262>

Steinberg, L., & Cauffman, E. (1996). Maturity of judgment in adolescence: Psychosocial factors in adolescent decision making. *Law and Human Behavior*, 20(3), 249-272.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01499023>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,

Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2020). Child

Maltreatment 2018. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>.

- Wallerstein, J. S., & Kelly, J. B. (1980). Effects of divorce on the visiting father–child relationship. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, *137*(12), 1534–1539. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.137.12.1534>
- Warshak, R. A. (2003). Payoffs and pitfalls of listening to children. *Family relations*, *52*(4), 373-384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00373.x>
- Waterman, A. H., Blades, M., & Spencer, C. (2001). Interviewing children and adults: The effect of question format on the tendency to speculate. *Applied Cognitive Psychology: The Official Journal of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, *15*(5), 521-531. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.741>
- Waterman, A. H., Blades, M., & Spencer, C. (2004). Indicating when you do not know the answer: The effect of question format and interviewer knowledge on children's ‘don't know’ responses. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *22*(3), 335-348. <https://doi.org/10.1348/0261510041552710>
- Webster, D., Barth, R. P., & Needell, B. (2000). Placement stability for children in out-of-home care: A longitudinal analysis. *CHILD WELFARE-NEW YORK-*, *79*(5), 614-632.
- Wilson, L., & Conroy, J. (1999). Satisfaction of children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, *78*(1), 53–69.
- Winokur, M., Holtan, A., & Batchelder, K. E. (2014). Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, *10*(1), 1-292. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2014.2>

Winokur, M. A., Holtan, A., & Batchelder, K. E. (2018). Systematic review of kinship care effects on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. *Research on Social Work Practice, 28*(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515620843>

Xu, Y., & Bright, C. L. (2018). Children's mental health and its predictors in kinship and non-kinship foster care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 89*, 243-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.001>

Zimmerman, R. B. (1982). *Foster care in retrospect* (Vol. 14). School of Social Work, Tulane University.

APPENDIX: TABLES

Table 1: Response categories to “If you could live with anyone, who would it be?”

Categories	Coded in the original study
Biological mother	1
Biological father	2
Step mother	3
Step father	4
Grandmother	5
Great grandmother	6
Grandfather	7
Great grandfather	8
Aunt/uncle	9
Great aunt/uncle	10
Biological sibling(s)	11
Foster sibling(s)	12
Other relative	13
Neighbor	14
Friend	15
Girlfriend/boyfriend	16
Current foster parent	17
Former foster parent	18
New (or unspecified) foster home	19
Current group or residential setting	20
Former group or residential setting	21
New group or residential treatment setting	22
Incarceration/juvenile justice	23
Teacher/child care/other known provider	24
By myself/alone	25
Other	26

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	CPS Sample		LTFC Sample		Overall	
	By youth (N=743)	By data points (N=1095)	By youth (N=290)	By data points (N=470)	By youth (N=1033)	By data points (N=1565)
Age (% below 12)	62.6	55.3	63.1	56	62.7	55.5
Sex (% female)	55.6	55.4	49.3	49.6	53.8	53.7
Hispanic origin						
Non-Hispanic origin	45.0	30.5	64.1	39.7	50.4	33.2
Hispanic origin	6.7	4.6	9.0	5.5	7.4	4.9
Race						
African American	35.8	36.4	43.4	41.5	37.9	38
Caucasian White	40.9	39.2	39.3	36.8	40.5	38.5
American Native	5.2	4.9	5.5	5.7	5.3	5.2
Asian/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	1.9	1.6	1.7	1.1	1.8	1.4
Others	2.0	1.4	1.4	0.9	1.8	1.2
Placement type (% placed with kin)	45.5	43.1	36.6	35.5	43	40.8
Sibling presence (% placed with siblings)	51.3	50.8	45.2	42.8	49.6	48.4

Note: Because of missing data, some percentage totals (race/ethnicity) do not round up to a perfect 100%.

Table 3: Variable Skewness and Kurtosis

Variables	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Sample Type	-0.87	0.06	-1.24	0.12
Age	0.22	0.06	-1.95	0.12
Gender	-0.14	0.06	-1.98	0.12
Placement Type	0.37	0.06	-1.86	0.12
Sibling presence	0.06	0.06	-1.99	0.12
Close-ended question about placement ¹	-0.15	0.06	-1.98	0.13
Open-ended question about placement ²	0.25	0.06	-1.47	0.12

1. Do you want your current placement to be permanent? 2. If you could live with anyone, who would it be?

Table 4: Preliminary Analyses

	Sample type		Placement type		Sibling Presence		Age	
	CPS	LTFC	Non-kin foster	Kin	Absent	Present	Younger than 12	Older than 12
Gender (% males)	44.0	50.0	49.0	42.0	48.0	44.0	48.73	43.33
Race/Ethnicity (in %)								
American Native	5.0	5.7	6.1	3.7	6.1	4.1	5.6	6.72
Asian/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	1.5	1.0	1.6	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.18	2.19
African American	36.4	41.5	35.3	42.0	37.7	38.0	45.72	44.37
Caucasian	39.1	36.8	40.5	35.5	40.96	35.8	46.31	45.0
Other	1.3	0.8	1.1	1.4	0.8	1.6	1.18	1.72

Note: The chi-squares of sample type, age and placement type were significant with gender and of placement type with race/ethnicity.

Table 5: Response Rates of Youth Placed in the Two Placement Types, Grouped by Placement With/Without Siblings

	Kin (n= 573)		Non-kin foster (n= 852)	
	Without siblings (n= 226)	With siblings (n= 347)	Without siblings (n= 528)	With siblings (n= 324)
Do you want this to be your permanent home?				
Yes	57%	62%	49%	51%
	Kin (588)		Non-kin foster (873)	
	Without siblings (n= 232)	With siblings (n= 356)	Without siblings (n= 542)	With siblings (n= 331)
If you could live with anyone, who would it be?				
Biological parents	34%	38%	43%	47.5%
Current Placement	37%	37%	24%	31%
Somewhere else	29%	25%	33%	21.5%

Table 6: Binary Logistic Regressions predicting responses to “Do you want this to be your permanent home?” $\chi^2(11) = 33.44, p < .001^a$

	OR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1				
Age	1.11	0.12	0.99	(.89, 1.38)
Sex	1.15	0.12	1.31	(.93, 1.42)
Sample type	0.68**	0.08	-3.25	(.54, .86)
Step 2				
Placement type	1.48**	0.17	3.47	(1.18, 1.85)
Sibling presence	1.19	0.14	1.55	(0.95, 1.49)
Step 3				
Placement type x age	0.85	0.20	-0.68	(.54, 1.34)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.05	0.24	0.21	(.67, 1.65)
Age x sibling presence	1.22	0.28	0.86	(.77, 1.92)
Sample type x age	1.01	0.25	0.04	(.63, 1.63)
Sample type x placement type	1.69*	0.43	2.09	(1.03, 2.78)
Sample type x sibling presence	0.94	0.24	-0.24	(.57, 1.54)

OR=Odds Ratio, SE = Standard Error, CI=Confidence Intervals

^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 7: Multinomial Logistic Regression predicting responses to “If you could live with anyone, who would it be?” $\chi^2(22) = 120.07, p < .001^a$

	Biological Parents vs. Current Placement				Somewhere Else vs. Current Placement			
	RRR	SE	z	95% CI	RRR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1								
Age	0.74*	0.10	-2.20	(.57, .97)	2.09**	0.30	5.10	(1.57, 2.78)
Sex	0.90	0.11	-0.83	(.70, 1.15)	1.02	0.14	0.14	(.77, 1.34)
Sample type	1.54**	0.21	3.17	(1.18, 2.02)	1.28	0.19	1.64	(.95, 1.72)
Step 2								
Placement type	0.57**	0.07	-4.26	(.44, .74)	0.76	0.11	-1.85	(.57, 1.02)
Sibling presence	0.87	0.11	-1.05	(.67, 1.13)	0.72*	0.11	-2.23	(.54, .96)
Step 3								
Placement type x age	0.98	0.28	-0.06	(.57, 1.71)	0.87	0.26	-0.45	(.48, 1.58)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.49	0.41	1.48	(.88, 2.54)	1.60	0.48	1.56	(.89, 2.87)
Age x sibling presence	1.42	0.40	1.25	(.82, 2.44)	1.86*	0.56	2.06	(1.03, 3.35)
Sample type x age	0.94	0.27	-0.21	(.53, 1.66)	1.67	0.52	1.65	(.91, 3.07)
Sample type x placement type	0.60	0.17	-1.79	(.34, 1.05)	1.03	0.33	0.10	(.55, 1.93)
Sample type x sibling presence	1.20	0.35	0.64	(.68, 2.12)	0.88	0.28	-0.41	(.47, 1.64)

RRR=Relative Risk Ratio, SE = Standard Error, CI=Confidence Intervals. Note. ^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 8: Binary Logistic Regression predicting Discrepant Responses (all youth included) $\chi^2 (11) = 22.10, p = .02^a$

	OR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1				
Age	1.15	0.14	1.13	(.90, 1.46)
Sex	1.23	0.15	1.78	(.98, 1.56)
Sample type	0.94	0.12	-0.51	(.73, 1.21)
Step 2				
Placement type	1.47	0.18	3.16	(1.16, 1.87)
Sibling presence	1.08	0.13	0.61	(.84, 1.38)
Step 3				
Placement type x age	0.92	0.24	-0.32	(.56, 1.52)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.34	0.34	1.16	(.82, 2.20)
Age x sibling presence	1.31	0.33	1.06	(.79, 2.15)
Sample type x age	0.79	0.21	-0.87	(.47, 1.34)
Sample type x placement type	1.48	0.41	1.41	(.86, 2.54)
Sample type x sibling presence	0.69	0.19	-1.31	(.40, 1.20)

^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 9: Binary Logistic Regression predicting Discrepant Responses (only youth who said “yes” to the question “Do you want this to be your permanent home?”)
 $\chi^2(11) = 12.26, p = .34^a$

	OR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1				
Age	1.27	0.20	1.55	(.94, 1.72)
Sex	1.14	0.17	0.85	(.85, 1.52)
Sample type	1.26	0.20	1.44	(.92, 1.73)
Step 2				
Placement type	0.94	0.15	-0.43	(.69, 1.27)
Sibling presence	0.97	0.15	-0.20	(.71, 1.32)
Step 3				
Placement type x age	1.00	0.32	0.02	(.54, 1.89)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.87*	0.60	1.97	(1.0, 3.50)
Age x sibling presence	1.55	0.49	1.38	(.83, 2.90)
Sample type x age	0.82	0.28	-0.57	(.43, 1.59)
Sample type x placement type	1.03	0.35	0.07	(.52, 2.01)
Sample type x sibling presence	0.70	0.24	-1.03	(.35, 1.38)

^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 10: Binary Logistic Regressions predicting responses to “Do you want this to be your permanent home?” Using Youth’s First Responses Only

$\chi^2(11) = 40.73, p < .001^a$

	OR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1				
Age	0.95	0.13	-0.34	(.72, 1.26)
Sex	1.21	0.16	1.39	(.93, 1.57)
Sample type	0.60**	0.09	-3.48	(.44, .80)
Step 2				
Placement type	1.74**	0.24	4.01	(1.33, 2.29)
Sibling presence	1.18	0.17	1.24	(.90, 1.56)
Step 3				
Placement type x age	1.11	0.33	.35	(.62, 1.99)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.10	0.31	0.35	(.63, 1.93)
Age x sibling presence	1.16	0.35	0.50	(.65, 2.08)
Sample type x age	0.97	0.29	-0.1	(.54, 1.75)
Sample type x placement type	2.33**	0.75	2.62	(1.24, 4.39)
Sample type x sibling presence	0.70	0.23	-1.10	(.37, 1.32)

^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 11: Multinomial Logistic Regression predicting responses to "If you could live with anyone, who would it be?" Using Youth's First Responses Only. $\chi^2(100) = 100.26, p < .001^a$

	Biological Parents vs. Current Placement				Somewhere Else vs. Current Placement			
	RRR	SE	z	95% CI	RRR	SE	z	95% CI
Step 1								
Age	0.73	0.12	-1.86	(.52, 1.02)	1.96**	0.36	3.63	(1.36, 2.81)
Sex	0.89	0.14	-0.70	(.66, 1.22)	1.08	0.20	0.45	(.76, 1.55)
Sample type	1.88**	0.32	3.68	(1.34, 2.63)	1.56*	0.31	2.27	(1.06, 2.29)
Step 2								
Placement type	0.49**	0.08	-4.38	(.36, .68)	0.73	0.13	-1.73	(.50, 1.04)
Sibling presence	0.85	0.14	-1.01	(.62, 1.17)	0.65*	0.12	-2.27	(.45, .94)
Step 3								
Placement type x age	0.63	0.23	-1.28	(.31, 1.28)	0.82	0.32	-0.50	(.38, 1.77)
Placement type x sibling presence	1.37	0.46	0.95	(.71, 2.65)	1.67	0.65	1.33	(.78, 3.56)
Age x sibling presence	1.43	0.51	0.99	(.71, 2.89)	1.63	0.63	1.25	(.76, 3.49)
Sample type x age	1.22	0.46	0.54	(.59, 2.55)	2.16	0.87	1.91	(.98, 4.78)
Sample type x placement type	0.44*	0.16	-2.22	(.22, .91)	0.57	0.24	-1.33	(.25, 1.30)
Sample type x sibling presence	1.72	0.62	1.49	(.84, 3.5)	0.82	0.34	-0.47	(.36, 1.86)

Note: The RRRs that are different from those in the main analyses, in their statistical significance, are in bold font and those that are now significant (not in the main) are also italicized.

^a χ^2 at Step 3 reported, it was significant at all the three steps in the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$