

Hypothesis

- How does the media portray the foster care system compared to the realities in the eyes of foster parents?

Lit Review

- Foster care is 50 separate systems that are each unique to its respected state. Each system is separate from each other; they still run under the same fundamental principles and is overseen by the Federal Government.
- There are six different evaluation criteria that the American foster care system must abide by.
- “recurrence of maltreatment, incidence of child abuse or ignorance, foster care reentry, length of time to be reunified with the biological family, time of duration to obtain child adoption and stability of foster care placement.” (Man Xiao-ou).
- As of 2018, there were over 400,000 children in foster care in the United States. This large number of children can put a strain on the system, making it difficult for agencies to properly screen and train foster parents, and to provide adequate support and supervision for the children in their care.

Methods

- Watching 18 episodes of *The Fosters*.
- The series follows the lives of Stef Foster and her life partner Lena Adams and their multiethnic, blended family. Stef and Lena are the parents of Brandon, Stef’s biological son from her previous marriage, and twins Jesus and Mariana, who were adopted as children. The couple take in two foster children, Callie and Jude, while trying to navigate this change and it everything it brings.
- Writing down every time someone in the show mentioned either some aspect of the foster care system, or anytime the characters mentioned their past run-ins with their foster homes, which included any type of abuse or neglect.
- Sitting down with two different foster family parents to examine their oral history on their experience trying too and successfully fostering children.
- These two couples talked about the struggles with fostering and ways they want to see the foster care system to change for the better.
- Examples of questions asked:
 - Is it draining being a foster parent? Whether that be mental emotional, physical, or spiritual?
 - Is it hard to become a foster parent? What do you have to go through to be able to foster?
 - In your opinion, what changes do you think should be made regarding the foster care system?

“Fact or Fiction: How T.V. Shows Portray The Foster Care System”

By Sasha McMonigle

Results

- Comparing the television show *The Fosters* to real-life examples, there were a lot more similarities than differences, within the foster care system.
- In respect to the types of abuse, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and neglect, the ways that the show presented these issues, it does happen more frequently in reality than realized, but not to the extent the show portrayed.
- Another similarity is the fact that foster families deal with a range of challenges, including difficult birth parents, difficult social workers, and the challenges of parenting children who have experienced trauma. These challenges are common in the foster care system, and many foster families struggle to navigate them, which is evident both in the show and during the oral histories.
- Similarities between the show and the real-life foster care system is the diversity of the children in care. In the show, the Foster family takes in children of different ages, races, and backgrounds, which is reflective of the real-life foster care system. In the United States, there are over 400,000 children in foster care, and they come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences.
- One of the most notable differences is the portrayal of foster parents on the show. In *The Fosters*, Stef and Lena are loving, supportive, and dedicated parents who are deeply committed to their foster children. In real life, foster parents come in all shapes and sizes, and they may not always be as perfect as the Foster family on the show. Some foster parents may have their own challenges and struggles, and they may not always be able to provide the level of support and care that their foster children need.
- Another difference between *The Fosters* and the real-life foster care system, is the way that the show portrays the bureaucracy of the foster care system. In the show, the Foster family often has to deal with difficult social workers and other government officials who are unhelpful or even hostile. In real life, the foster care system can be complex and bureaucratic, but it is not always portrayed in such a negative light on the show. In fact, many foster families work closely with social workers and other professionals to provide the best possible care for their foster children.
- “*The Fosters* doesn’t try to romanticize adoption and fostering and make it all look like a walk in the park. It is honest about the lack of trust and childhood trauma that many kids in the foster system experience and it does not avoid difficult topics, including sexual and physical abuse, bullying, racism and homophobia.” (TACT).



Theory

- Critical Theory created by Max Horkheimer
- Critical Theory sought to understand the underlying structures and forces that shape society, and to examine how these structures and forces impact individuals and groups.
- Ideology is defined as a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide our understanding of the world and our place in it. These beliefs, values, and assumptions are often shared by a particular group or society, and they shape our perceptions, thoughts, and actions.
- According to Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, ideology is not neutral or objective. Instead, it is inherently tied to the interests and perspectives of those who hold it. As a result, ideology can be used to justify and reinforce existing power dynamics and inequalities within society.
- Overall, the goal of Critical Theory is to enable individuals and groups to develop a more critical and self-reflective understanding of the world, and to work towards creating a more just and equitable society. By challenging the assumptions and power dynamics that underpin our social and political systems, Critical Theory seeks to empower individuals and groups to create positive change.

Abstract

To sum-up all the information given on this poster, there are more truths in the show *The Fosters* when looking for how foster care and the foster care system, is being portrayed. It tackles tough topics like physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse, the feeling of being unwanted or “on your own”, and PTSD from previous traumas. There are also some difference such as the extremeness of all the scenes that depict foster care. Critical Theory plays a role in the way society understands and interacts with the foster care system. This theory also encourages changes throughout, not only society, but specific elements in society like the foster care system.

Sources

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