

**Rethinking “Foster Child” and the Culture of Care: A Rhizomatic Inquiry
into the Multiple Becomings of Foster Care Alumni**

by

Rebecca H. Corcoran
B.A., University of Victoria, 2007

This Thesis is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

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This thesis inquires into the lived experience of five foster care alumni as they re-member and explore negotiations of time, space, and being made/becoming as young people formerly in government care. Informed by arts-based living inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) and a collaborative research ethic, I undertook an emergent, rhizomatic exploration of new ways of viewing/thinking about the culture of care and about problematic representations of youth in care as irrevocably “broken,” “damaged,” and “deficient”. This process of inquiry allowed for movement between tangled lines of power, resistance, becoming, and desire informed by concepts central to the works of Foucault (1982), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Tuck (2010), and Skott-Myhre (2008). Five foster care alumni explored their inquiry into “being in care” through arts-based methods that included collage, painting and drawing, and individual and group interviews. Important themes identified by participants included being seen/being heard, “foster child,” time, space, labels, disrupting “normal,” becoming complex, becoming political, and the importance of spirituality, belonging, Indigenous ways of knowing, and community. Such layered, complex representations foreground creativity and dignity while troubling the problematic representations of youth in care that permeate dominant discourses, practices, and policies shaping foster care systems and interventions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: Lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9)

This thesis inquires into the lived experience of foster care alumni as they re-member experiences of foster care. Through an emergent, rhizomatic exploration of the culture of care and of problematic representations of youth in care, new possibilities come forth. Rhizomatic inquiry allows for movement between lines of power, resistance, becoming, and desire informed by concepts central to Foucault (1982), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Tuck (2010), and Skott-Myhre (2008).

I came to this topic of exploring conceptualizations of foster care through my work as a child and youth counsellor working with young people in the care of the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). My former role was often to meet and support young people in their daily lives, connect them to community programs, support their multiple transitions, provide mentorship, attend meetings, and link them to the many professionals and caregivers in their lives. I met weekly with young people for up to three or four hours at a time and worked with some for over two years. I realized quickly that my role was unique; it allowed for intersections between multiple, often rapidly changing worlds: schools, foster homes, job searches, transitions in and out of care, peer relationships, family relationships, and, often, family visits. These roles and the intersections of life afforded me some insight into the different ways that young people come to be conceptualized when “in care” and how young people negotiate these conceptualizations. Conversations in my daily work explored young

people's ability to respond to challenging and often deeply conflicting situations, the complexities of daily living as a "ward of the state," and overlapping systems of care and intervention. Central to my curiosity and commitment regarding this topic are my memories of these conversations about young people's dignity and creativity in negotiating what are often impossible situations, and the many stories and experiences that lie outside of the limiting "in care" label that are too often rendered invisible in foster care research. I continue my work now as an in-office counsellor/therapist for young people experiencing life transitions, including those who are in the care of the government. It is important to note that I myself have not been in government care, so I am deeply indebted to the five collaborators who came forward to engage with this subject and share their stories and memories. Their invaluable contributions highlight the need for research such as this, research that troubles problematic, reductive representations of young people in care.

Context

According to the Residential Review Project (Government of British Columbia, 2011), a report funded by MCFD and the Federation of Community Social Services of BC, approximately 10,171 children and youth are receiving residential services on a daily basis in BC. This includes children and youth in foster care, residential facilities, tertiary care, and kinship care. In BC, Indigenous children constitute roughly 9% of the child population but over half of all children in residential care. In 2009/2010, 49.8% of young people in custody under the Youth Criminal Justice Act were Indigenous (Government of British Columbia, 2011). The context of BC's current culture of foster care links to ongoing colonial practices rooted in hundreds of years of the colonization and management of Indigenous families and communities. These practices have included the imposition of the Indian Act, the regulation of land ownership, land theft, political

and economic marginalization, disease, criminalization, genocide, forced removal of children from their families and communities, and the negation of treaty rights (Richardson & Nelson, 2007, de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011). Richardson and Nelson (2007) describe “the sixties scoop” as the shift from residential schools to the child welfare system during the 1960s, and the continued forced removal of children from their families. The ongoing removal of children to present day has been re-named “the Millennium Scoop” and is reflected in the current disproportionate number of Indigenous families affected by the forced removal of their children. Richardson and Nelson (2007) call attention to the destabilization caused by the separation of children from their communities and how this facilitated the transfer of Aboriginal lands to state control. They explain that the “intense systemic resocialization and cultural deprogramming” of children caused endless grief for Aboriginal communities (p.78). De Finney et al. (2011) stress that the disproportional numbers of Indigenous children and youth involved in the residential system cannot be separated from a history of violence and assimilation rooted in colonialism. Young people’s everyday moments of struggle in the foster care system must be read within this colonial history. Ongoing colonial rule permeates the structures of practice and research through the use of clinical assessment, psychological “expert” knowledge, and categorization, all of which discount both the context of families and communities and Indigenous cultural knowledge and beliefs. Assessment tools used by child welfare professionals seek to assess deficiency, weakness, and dysfunction whilst ignoring social context and power imbalances between professionals and clients (Richardson & Nelson, 2010). As de Finney et al. (2011) highlight, the residential system fails to look at structural inequalities and “instead equips workers with tools to help clients ‘fit’ and ‘rehabilitate’ into normative standards of health, wellness, development and family” (p. 4). These techniques act to construct Indigenous children and families as deficient or

counter to the “norm” of child rearing and child development practices rather than calling into question the practices themselves. Acknowledgement of the ongoing effects of colonialism becomes pivotal when rethinking conceptualizations of young people in care and what new approaches might achieve; in turn, responses to these inequities and reengagement in Indigenous knowledges become important to plans for movement forward.

Skott-Myhre (2006) discusses how children and youth are positioned as “other” and how the effects of poverty lead to the removal of children from families. He argues that instead of acknowledging the consequences of organizing society under global capital, “the ruling elite is producing a proliferating array of ideological propaganda designed to create children and youth as either outside the responsibilities of the dominant power structures or as dangerous or damaged and in need of incarceration and escalating systems of control” (p. 225). This study acknowledges and troubles some of the dominant power structures that shape young people in care by looking at the connections between power, force, and resistance. Unpacking techniques of creating “other” is a central conceptual focus of the study’s inquiry and methodology.

Research questions

Given the paucity of current conceptualizations of young people’s complex negotiations of self, relationships, and power relations in the foster care system, my study explores the following overarching research questions:

1. How do caregivers (the state, Ministry representatives, staff and workers, foster parents, youth counsellors, etc.) construct children and youth in care?
2. How does the subject formation of young people with the state as parent/caregiver shape their understandings of self, family, relationships, power, and belonging?
3. What strategies of negotiation do young people employ in challenging ideas of

subjecthood as problematic? As wards of the state?

4. How do young people in care negotiate their relationship with the state as parent/caregiver? What are some new and alternative possibilities for understanding these complex negotiations outside of dominant one-dimensional “youth at risk” representations?

Drawing on these broad orienting research questions, my analysis will look for alternative explanations and frameworks and consider the following specific questions:

1. Since caregivers and MCFD contractors, staff, and workers are responsible for upholding MCFD policies and discourses, how do these dominant policies show up in everyday relationships between young people, caregivers and Ministry staff?
2. What are some alternative stories of subject formation in care?
3. What new possibilities for practice and research with young people in care emerge from study findings?

The study utilizes a rhizomatic transtheoretical framework to explore the subject formation of young people in care and issues of power and resistance across multiple systems of care. My transtheoretical framework builds links among several critical theories. First, the analysis is drawn from Foucauldian and poststructural conceptualizations of subject formation and resistance within/against state discursive formations and social relations of power. In the spirit of opening space for alternative possibilities beyond the linearity of poststructural concepts, the study also builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of desire, affective engagements/embodied moments, molarities, and assemblages. Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts are further expanded through Eve Tuck’s (2010) Indigenous epistemology of smart desire and collective negotiations of power. This rhizomatic transtheoretical analytical framework,

described in the methodology chapter, allows for a layered, emergent exploration of everyday moments of being made/becoming within and outside the label of “youth in care.” The focus of this thesis is these productive entanglements that can otherwise be difficult to name or describe, gauged through the lived experience and remembered moments of five foster care alumni. The study’s rhizomatic exploration of the culture of care was inspired by living inquiry, the exploration of lived moments (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). In this case, lived experiences and memories were explored through an emergent, collaborative methodology that included arts-based methods such as collage, drawing and painting, and a series of one-on-one unstructured interviews and one group interview. I use the term “collaborators” to refer to study participants to acknowledge the participatory, co-constructed nature of the art and interview process. For the purpose of this study, the terms “youth in care,” “formerly in care,” and “foster care alumni” refer to young people (children/youth) who are or have been placed in the temporary or permanent care of the government, including those in foster homes, kinship placements, residential homes, and residential treatment.

Thesis overview

In chapter 2, I review literature pertinent to young people in the foster care system. I focus on common ways of conducting research with young people in care, the level of youth/alumni participation in research, psychological models of research, and alternative ideas of research. In chapter 3, I explain the theoretical/conceptual underpinnings of the study, including poststructural ways of viewing agency and the subject, Foucault’s ideas of power/resistance, and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of desire, flight, and force. In chapter 4, I describe my emergent methodological approach, including my approach to inquiry and analysis, explorations of living inquiry, and rhizomatic analysis. In chapter 5, “Foster Child,” I present art, sections of

conversations with the collaborators, and my analysis, which continues into chapter 6, “Becoming Resistance,” where I trace connections between lines of power and “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002). In chapter 7, I explore implications for research and practice and offer concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of literature pertaining to foster care, with a focus on Canadian, North American, and British research and contexts. My review of existing studies reveals that there are significant omissions in how foster care is conceptualized and researched. These studies embody central topics of interest to my thesis, primarily the culture of foster care, events such as challenges encountered during placement transitions and interruptions, where responsibility is located, and how power operates to position young people in care, especially when they assert agency and alternative ideas towards developing their own ideas of self. My review emphasizes that constructions of young people in care are overwhelmingly influenced by the dominant Euro-Western psychological lenses of behavioural, attachment, and psychoanalytic theories. As each of the collaborators named at least two major transitions during their time in care, and three of the collaborators described multiple moves as a major theme of their experience, I explore events/transitions as a focus of this literature review and how this connects to other themes namely: attachment, resistance, care systems, behaviour, and conceptions of “child/youth”. Another crucial gap in the literature is research that involves foster care alumni in the research process. Particularly absent within conventional research methods are processes that engage young people directly in sharing their perspectives. Research designs often leave little room for children/youth’s own constructions of experience to emerge or to be factored into the findings (Holland, 2009).

How we research

Holland (2009) reviewed and analyzed 44 journal articles related to foster care in which she found only a few studies focused on youth participants. She finds some “theoretical and methodological diversity in empirical research designs with young people in care” (p. 231).

Diverse theoretical and methodological approaches are needed to provide additional ways of viewing challenges and interruptions in care. Holland discusses the various ways by which researchers conceive their studies, finding two problematic gaps in current research designs: the research designs do not make space for young people's individual constructs of their experience to emerge and they provide minimal discussion of ethical issues. Many of the studies use predefined rating scales that examine the well-being, trends, and social adjustment of children. She suggests that this can be helpful for evaluating interventions, but it does not allow for young people to reflect on what these concepts mean to them. This type of research is constrained by "adult orientated measures" (p. 227). Young people will provide different perspectives than do administrators, caregivers, practitioners, and policy makers. Holland also warns against the professional gaze on "private aspects of everyday life" that categorizes young people and creates them as pathologized others (p. 231).

A few studies do take foster care alumni and/or youth perspectives into consideration. Focusing on education, employment, and health, Unrau, Seita, and Putney (2008) interviewed 22 adults about their memories of the impact of multiple foster placements during childhood. The study findings highlight key themes, including loss, memory of a caregiver, optimism, trust issues, leaving bad placements, starting over, life lessons learned, individual strengths, exposure to different families, and being a better parent in adulthood. The findings speak to dominant thoughts on attachment and loss, and strength and resilience. These findings emphasize both the diversity in the experiences of young people and the need to conduct further research on this subject. Studies that include young people's voices would make visible the impact of dominant policies and practices on young people's subjectivity and sense of belonging.

Liebmann and Madden (2010) explored youth in care and foster care alumni's perspectives on their experiences of care. They stress the importance of incorporating youth in decision-making processes to ensure that policy and practice are complementary. They describe this as part of a "youth participation movement" (p. 255). Through their use of youth and alumni interviews, narratives, and poems, focus is cast onto the failures of policies and practices as measured by the costs to young people of these shortcomings. Youth and alumni quotes shed light on several topics, including transitioning to adulthood, anxiety about the future, confidence, self-sufficiency, and frustration with the system. The participants are given space to speak, share, and present the story of their remembered life experience through poetry and conversation, illuminating what is possible when engaging in thoughtful relational research.

Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, and Trinkle (2010) place a similar focus on youth voices and also draw attention to the lack of studies that include those who are directly served by the foster care system. They interviewed 25 young people in care about turnover in the child welfare/social worker workforce and how it impacts placement transitions. They highlight the correlation of high worker turnover with the incidence of child/youth placement transitions and suggest that related indicators for placement moves include the acting social worker's caseload, a social worker's ability to connect to the children and youth on their caseload, and their work experience/training. The study finds that a high social worker turnover causes a lack of stability in young people's lives and a loss of trust in adults. This alludes to the findings of the Liebmann and Madden (2010) study that found that young people need to be involved in making choices that affect their lives. Strolin-Goltzman et al. also suggest the need for youth involvement/consultation in case planning, facilitation of training, selection and recruitment of

(their own) caseworkers, and expressing their opinions on the causes and solutions to these systemic problems.

Dominant conceptions of placement (dis)ruptures in care and multiple life transitions

Unrau's (2007) meta-analysis of 43 studies researching placement moves looked at whose viewpoints were represented in data collection and findings, how moves are described in studies, and what this communicates about placement moves. She finds that gaps in current literature, including the lack of acknowledgement of children's voices, can lead to incomplete policies. One such gap is the categorization of placements as being either stable or unstable based on the number of placement experiences rather than on the quality of placement. The quality or dynamics of a particular placement is an essential factor in deciding whether or not a placement move may have potential to harm or benefit the foster child. Unrau suggests that multiple standpoints are helpful to understand placement moves, stipulating that dominant groups such as caregivers/representatives of the state have more opportunity to express opinions on placement moves/ruptures than the marginalized groups in question. She asserts that research focused on foster care operates within hierarchies of power in which policy makers and researchers are situated at the top of that hierarchy: "Those in the dominant group have the power to decide how placement moves are studied, evaluated, understood, and acted upon (e.g., best practice guidelines) by others" (p. 125). Unrau highlights that the perspectives of children and youth are often overlooked in "best practice research" and "evidence-based research" and that both are influential in the development of policies and practice. In her exploration of the nature of foster care placement moves, Unrau finds relational approaches that look at the perceived relationship between the child and foster parent more valuable than those that look at the individual characteristics of the child or caregiver. In her study, Unrau does not consider how

policies and researchers are informed by the dominant discourses of capitalism, neoliberalism, and individualism, or how the lenses of Euro-Western psychology and psychoanalysis inform research and practice.

Ward (2009) inquired as to how multiple placements might impact children's later life by presenting findings from qualitative and quantitative studies commissioned by the British government over a four-year period. The findings of multiple studies suggest that children are moved too often in the foster care system and that a high number of moves impacts children's well-being negatively. For example, Ward found that throughout the 3.5 years in which the study was conducted, only 19% of children stayed at the same placement, and that the sample of 241 children had 965 placements between them. Practitioner turnover rates were found to be high, transience for children and other foster siblings were also considerable, and children stated a dislike for these types of repetitive change. Ward also found that the majority of moves were initiated by the state while 11% of moves were initiated by children who "refused to stay in placements where they were unhappy" (p. 1116). The most common reasons included a shortage of appropriate placements, inappropriate planning, reuniting sibling groups, placing children with caregivers of the same culture, and moves to and from temporary placements (when foster parents go away on holiday, for example). This study illuminates some of the reasons for placement shifts and identifies government systems, the disorganization of agencies, and a general lack of resources, rather than young people themselves, as being responsible for multiple moves. It also supplements quantitative data with qualitative data acknowledging children's experiences of moves and the long-term detrimental impacts of multiple relational ruptures.

Perry (2006) used a sample of children and youth in foster care for what she calls a "natural experiment" to examine the implications of disruptions in social networks. She claims

that “[f]oster care placement is the ideal natural experiment for studying network disruption because it represents a case wherein profound changes to established social networks have occurred” (p. 373). Perry’s research describes long-term “behavioural and mental health problems” as being directly influenced by family-of-origin issues and the transition into care. This research does not acknowledge the complexities involved in each individual child and youth’s life, broader sociocultural implications, the social systems at play, dominant cultural values, psychological and individualizing lenses, or the impact of ongoing colonial effects in shaping structural inequities impacting families of origin and young people in care.

In Perry’s study, 167 youth in care were interviewed by telephone in a Midwestern state in the US. The mean number of placements for youth was 4. Foster youth were compared to a group of youth from the general population, who live with their biological family. Tests were used to decipher levels of depression, anxiety, and strengths of relationships in different social networks. Perry contrasted youth in care to the comparison group and found that that they reported feeling lower levels of caring from their caregivers (including foster parents and biological parents). Children in longer, more stable placements reported higher levels of caring from caregivers and less depression and psychological distress. Her findings suggest that long-term supportive relationships and strong support networks result in more favourable long-term mental health outcomes.

Relationship pathology and attachment theory

Events common to the culture of care – such as disruptions to the environment, change in caregivers, placement moves, acts of resistance by young people (i.e. problem behaviours) – are often described directly or surreptitiously through the dominant lenses of psychology and “normative” development. A psychological lens predominant in research with youth in care is

that of attachment theory. Attachment theory has been influential in psychoanalysis toward the goals of coupling a child's early attachments with later developments of psychopathologies (Zepf, 2006). Attachment theory is currently utilized in the field as a predictor of the development of later relationship pathologies. It focuses on the mother/child bond and positions those who do not fit this normative idea of attachment as being in deficit. Burman (2008) critiques this theory's limited focus on the mother/child dyad and how its gaze remains on "changing people rather than environments and/or social conditions" (p. 151). Burman calls attention to attachment theory's reliance on the "interpretive tensions of psychoanalysis" (p. 152). The limited focus of attachment-based assessments underscores the need for further research to expand understandings of relationships in care. A reliance on deficiency presumes that young people who are categorized as "troubled" are somehow broken and need to be fixed (Seita, 2007).

Pierce and Pezzot-Pierce (2001) argue that attachment theory has a lot to offer clinicians in terms of helping with the "seemingly chronic and intractable difficulties in these young clients" (p. 19) as insecure attachment is one of the "risk factors" that they name as contributing to what they call the "genesis of maladaptive behavior in foster children" (p. 20). They also locate deficiency in children's physical health following a study that assessed children upon entry of care: "92% had at least one abnormality in at least one body system" (p. 2). They go on to suggest that:

maltreatment is significantly associated with a number of problems: the development of insecure attachment organizations; poor emotional and behavioral self-regulation; problems in the development of the autonomous self and self-

esteem; more discrete problems like posttraumatic stress disorder; and devastating effects on cognitive and language development. (p.24)

This research is a clear example of research/practice that focuses on deficit and pathology in young people as they respond to a multitude of life experiences, including loss and traumatic life events. For example, Pierce and Pezzot-Pierce state:

Children with difficult temperaments may react differently to abuse or neglect than others with placid, regular temperaments. The former might become distressed, not only by the maltreatment but in response to subsequent changes in family structure or routine, such as placement in foster care. (p. 25)

Yet distress is a logical response to abuse and neglect, and further pathologizing this kind of response by examining temperament (a somewhat static way of viewing people) seems likely to cause further isolation in this problem of abuse/neglect. Pierce and Pezzot-Pierce go on to describe attachment patterns as lasting throughout childhood and into adulthood and suggest that an insecure attachment puts a child at risk of developing “significant psychopathology” (p. 27). Throughout this research paper there will be an ongoing exploration of relationships as being exactly that, relational. Understanding relationships as shaped in context and through relational processes enables a more critical understanding of attachment and of the function of resistance and evasion under difficult circumstances. This includes the critical importance of ongoing negotiations of trust, respect, and dignity, and a framing of these within a history of being let down, of compromised care, lack of caregiver continuity, and lack of safety. The psychologized vantage point seems to miss this important context. Exploring the material events and the why’s and how’s of a relationship that may be rejected by a young person might reveal that the youth is acting out in self-protection. As Wade (1997) states, any act where a person attempts to “expose,

withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose” violence, oppression, or disrespect is an act of resistance (p. 25). I would extend the objects of this statement to include a sense of power imbalance and mistrust in another: If resistance to power, oppression, disrespect, and/or mistrust is considered when examining attachment and relationships, how might the associated signifying behaviours be read differently?

Gauthier, Fortin, and Jéliu (2004) also look through the attachment theory lens and apply it to permanency planning for children in foster care. They review their own program in Montréal that focuses on children’s behaviour difficulties associated with multiple moves and use attachment theory for “understanding responses of foster children” (p. 382). They also describe their clinical application of attachment theory in the assessment of children and their caregivers. The program utilizes a team that advocates for certain decisions regarding the potential re-placing of the child, taking into consideration the child’s history, the opinion of the child protection worker, and observations of caregivers. The article demonstrates the complexity of foster care systems and how often children are moved from biological families to temporary foster homes and often on to a succession of “permanent” foster homes. The study underscores how criteria for placement moves are often based on children’s perceived negative behaviours and the assessment gaze of professionals. An alternative view might be to see how children protect themselves through resisting multiple placement moves and being critical of connections to caregivers who may not be a permanent part of their life.

Behavioural lens in research

Newton, Litrownik, and Landsverk (2000) look at the relationship between problem behaviours and placement change in a sample of 415 youth in foster care. Using a Child

Behaviour Checklist, the authors examine what they label as internal behaviours and external (overt) behaviours and correlate these with the number of placement changes. They find that those with more “volatile placement histories might be particularly at risk for the effects of multiple placements on internalizing and externalizing behavior” (p. 1371).

Although Newton et al. (2000) look at frequency and the incidence of the relationship between children’s behaviour and placement change, they do not inquire into the context of the behaviour and why it is happening. They suggest that behaviour influences placement changes and that placement changes influence behaviour, but again, do not investigate why. Later in the article, the authors suggest that “disordered attachment” may be one reason for placement failure, and they suggest that children be “identified and managed via treatment foster care or other therapeutic settings” (p. 1372). By focusing solely on the child’s behaviour, this study not only places responsibility on the individual but also misses the intricacies of relationships in care, the context of the placement, and children’s ability to protect themselves by engaging in acts of negotiation and resistance. It also minimizes the influence of foster parents, care homes, and other systems of policies and professionals that shape a child’s care. Locating behaviour only within the individual ignores its relational, structural, and socially constructed nature and further legitimizes individualistic responses to relational and systemic issues.

Sigrid’s (2004) study investigates reasons for placement changes among children in long-term care. The study outlines the following reasons for moving: the child’s behaviour, a mismatch of characteristics between child and foster family, unrealistic expectations from foster family, and unforeseen events. Similar to Newton et al. (2000), Sigrid also utilizes the Child Behaviour Checklist as a measure of behaviour in relation to placement moves. He finds that the majority of behaviourally inspired moves occur soon after children enter care and therefore

would suggest intervention at this time. This trend could be read as indicative that the transition into care is more problematic than the number of moves and that the children actually adapt to foster care as they move on to different homes. Sigrid's findings suggest that kinship care homes are usually disrupted less than foster parent care and that 70% of placement changes for children are due to "system or policy mandates" (p. 619). Although 70% of moves are due to system and policy gaps, the focus in this area of research remains on child behaviour.

Chamberlain, Price, Reid, Landsverk, Fisher and Stoolmiller (2006) used a parent daily report (PDR) checklist and questioned foster parents over the phone in a 5-10 minute conversation to measure the occurrence of "child behavioural problems" in the previous 24-hour period. They argue that the purpose of this checklist is to minimize biases that are associated with retrospective reports on behaviour, although it must be clarified that the PDR is a measuring device for children's behaviour reported by parents. This study took place in San Diego over a 12-month period, and the PDR and the child's demographics were used to predict placement disruptions. The participants were 246 children aged 5 to 12 years in long-term (over 3 months), non-kinship foster care. The study found that children and youth who displayed over a certain number of behaviours each day were more likely to experience a placement disruption. Again, this study positions a child's behaviour as the primary problem, but overlooks the intricacies of the context and how or why the behaviour occurs as indicators of placement disruption. It does not, for example, examine the placement or the impact of imposed moves.

Chamberlain et al. describe the purpose of their study as looking at predictors of placement disruption. They found that placements where children exhibited over seven "problem behaviours" per day were at risk for disruption and that this risk increased for each behaviour that occurred. The more foster children there were in the home, the more the PDR increased this

“risk.” They suggest that this finding indicates foster parents’ threshold to tolerate certain incidents and/or types of behaviour. Here again, this study looks only at the child’s behaviour and rudimentary demographics as indicators, thus missing any relational factors and context that may inform or shape a behaviour. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation and also note the foster parents’ potential bias on reporting behaviours. This study’s limitations further illuminate the difference between looking at behaviours in isolation and looking at responses in the context of the child’s circumstances and influencing factors. These gaps highlight a pronounced chasm in research that looks at placement disruption for children in care and their foster parents.

Chamberlain et al. also suggest that implications for practice may include focusing on interventions that reduce “behaviour problems” and increase parenting skills. They suggest limiting the numbers of children placed in foster homes and working to “recruit, train and support” (p. 420) kinship placements. They then acknowledge that even though studies point to the need for policy change that this will likely not be implemented due to funding restrictions.

Chapman, Wall, and Barth (2004) interviewed children in kinship care, foster care, and group homes to document their impressions and experiences of relationships in care. They interviewed 316 children who were older than six and had been in foster care for over a year. Findings revealed that children in kinship care report feeling that their caregiver cared for them more than those in the care of a foster parent. These findings echo those of Sigrid (2004), who found that kinship care often has less behaviour related disruption in placement and suggests that this might be due to caregivers’ dedication to the child or different perceptions of events/behaviour by the case worker. Though Chapman et al.’s findings point to generally positive perceptions of care in current placements, the exception was children in group homes. They suggest that perhaps children in group homes have less access to their families of origin

and are treated less positively by caregivers, and thus report more negative experiences of care. A critique that the authors provided of their own study was the concern that the interviews were not as private as they could have been, and that children may have felt influenced to report positively about their current caregivers. They also commented on the absence of long-term follow up to see if any changes manifested or if children's views shifted over time.

The subject in care

This section explores how youth identity/subject formation is constructed in foster care research. It is possible to see shifts in conceptualizations of identity/subjecthood over time, space, history, and modes of inquiry. That being said, the field of developmental psychology is still very influential in how young people in foster care are conceptualized in research. In the dominant socionormative milieu, a common focus is on self-regulation, subjectification, and the limited scope of specific subject positions, including those of "foster child" and "youth in care."

Salahu-Din and Bollman (1994) take a developmental approach to studying identity formation. They suggest that young people must attain certain developmental goals of adolescence so as to reach a state of "adulthood." Regimented within the constraints of Euro-Western, linear developmental structures, this research suggests that adolescents' failure to meet these developmental goals could mean additional failure in their adult lives. How is it that individuals are held responsible when they inevitably face barriers to measuring up to standards of normalcy? Salahu-Din and Bollman's research links challenges in identity development back to the failed responsibility of a child's family of origin without acknowledging poverty, racism, the lack of successful preventative programming, and biased Eurocentric cultural views of what we consider to be a healthy family. This analysis exemplifies how dominant perceptions operate

through the humanistic language of self-esteem, attachment, and identity formation in adolescence.

Mulkerns and Owen (2008) take a similar developmental position in their research with foster care alumni, although they also emphasize sociocultural factors that influence young people through the lenses of self-differentiation theory and relational-cultural theory. These approaches include the exploration of youth self-sufficiency, conceptualizations of racial identity, development as seen through cultural lenses, lack of community, and scarcity of cultural support as barriers to reaching these developmental tasks. Mulkerns and Owen look into the influence of emancipation on identity by interviewing 12 young adults within 10 years of leaving foster care. They look for and discuss self-efficacy, self-reliance, and independence as being relevant to how young people think about accessing support from others. They suggest that the study's participants identified stigma and stereotypes as barriers to feeling connected to others and also to seeking support. The types of stereotyping and discrimination described by the participants included racism, sexism, and negative attitudes regarding the social position of being a youth in foster care. The authors term this theme of not seeking support as "help-avoidance" and explore how this is connected to and perhaps encouraged by policy, with an abrupt severance from connections and community at the time of emancipation. Seita and Brown (2010) speak about emancipation and its effects:

Already traumatized by the problems that required removal from their family, and then further distressed by a system insensitive to their emotional needs, these confused young people had to magically adopt the ways of the mature adult and integrate into society successfully. (p. 57)

Here Seita and Brown point to the challenges that young people face when expected to become productive adults without supports, and without acknowledging trauma, loss, and flaws in the system of care. Perhaps concepts of becoming an “adult,” measured against the rigidity of normative development, can be viewed as problematic as such narrow and privileged understandings of normalcy leave a very thin line of opportunity to be able to create the “appropriate” response to very challenging circumstances.

Davies (2000) describes her concerns with how developmental/categorizing psychology becomes a way to overview and classify something that is not understood in an attempt to control it:

Positioning children as objects of a developmental/categorizing psychological enquiry can lead to a failure to theorize the contexts that they inhabit – and it can lead to individualistic interpretations of socially structured phenomenon. This leads inexorably to ‘victim blaming’ and the behavior becomes that which is responsible for many of the social problems in the world. (p. 155)

A victim-blaming lens views behaviour as innate to a “problem child” rather than as a complex and mediated response to a number of factors, including broader political, social, and economic factors.

Reconceptualizing terms

Belonging and dignity

Carriere and Richardson (2010) explore the implications of using attachment theory with Indigenous families and in the context of a Euro-Western child welfare system. They also explore what happens when our perceptions of attachment shift and we start to think and talk about bonding, connectedness, and culture instead. They suggest that dignity, bonding, and

culture should be important components of welcoming a child into a new family and/or home and that the term “connection” may be more appropriate than attachment when discussing relationships for the child. Carriere and Richardson also stress the importance of including community and extended family in the connection process to support children in maintaining relationships with their family of origin when possible. They emphasize the need for a child to receive many levels and layers of support to ensure a web of connections. Carriere and Richardson’s conceptualization of connection is not limited by the discourse of attachment and the mother/child bond. It moves beyond individualized models and looks at how children can be supported, loved, and feel a sense of belonging to families and communities outside of the rigidity of the primary caregiver model. Carriere and Richardson stress how culture and spirituality can be nurtured for children living in care or in adoptive homes, thus providing suggestions for effective care that go well beyond behavioural models:

Treatment such as neglect, dismissal, humiliation, or abuse constitutes a social wounding, while care, attention, love, and respect (positive social responses) assist people of all ages in filling their being with a sense of self worth. (2010, p. 13)

The authors go on to explain that the preservation of dignity is vital, and that by “supporting connectedness and cultural identity for Indigenous children and families, service providers may help turn longing into belonging” (p.63). This conceptualization of dignity has been central to my framing of this study and will be further explored throughout the following chapters.

Psychological ways of viewing young people still often dominate conversations in practice and policy and continue to inform research questions and methodologies. The persistence of language such as “problem youth” and “at risk youth” emphasizes the need to

question normative theoretical models. Coates and Wade (2007) contend that such a questioning would involve a critical analysis of the language and systems that reproduce dominant cultural values and regimes of truth: “The ability of any group to advance its interests hinges in part on the group’s ability to publicize its perspectives as more truthful or reasonable than others” (p. 511). In order to provide a more contextualized, critical exploration of these ideas, my proposed study explores alternative understandings of relationship, subjectivity, and power in care.

Richardson and Nelson (2007) suggest that:

Too often, families are judged from outside their cultural frame and are deemed to be deficient. Psychological tools, developed through the period of the empire, are used continuously against Aboriginal and other marginalized people. (p. 7)

Richardson and Nelson argue that these tools are used to measure deficiency and amplify dysfunction and weakness while ignoring people’s ability to respond, their cultural knowledges and strengths, as well as power imbalances and a colonial social context. They go on to suggest that work can begin once dignity has been established, once power imbalances have been equalized, and that we can then support families and communities rather than just working at the individual level. From this point, collaborations may be informed by Indigenous and European relations free of “racism, euro-centrism and economic marginalization” (p. 7). Community-focused interventions that are central to Richardson and Nelson’s dignity-based framework include supporting parents with their children, parent mentoring, multifamily cooperation and supportive educational supervision for caregivers, the support of grandparents, and legislating cultural plans and connective agreements between caregivers and Aboriginal communities. A more comprehensive, culturally grounded approach such as this one may help to address some of the problems that are connected to the removal of children, including the blaming of mothers for

not protecting their children when they themselves are facing violence from the same perpetrator (Richardson & Nelson, 2007).

Richardson and Nelson emphasize the need to disrupt Euro-Western normative discourses of healthy development. The dominant discourse focuses on the “notion that young people should seek to become coherent, singular identities with a unitary psychological core self rooted in Western psychological notions of individuation, esteem, purpose, boundary, and assertion” (Skott-Myhre, 2008 p. 12). This discourse trickles down into practice, where the goal of a youth worker is to support young people to achieve a “healthy” development model by subscribing to the notions of independence and functionality and becoming a productive adult. This goal is thrust unquestioningly onto young people without an acknowledgement of the obvious barriers and systemic oppression that limit access to certain subject positions. Skott-Myhre (2008) discusses how youth in general are often discounted and thought of as being incapable of producing a rational core, and therefore have a lack of decision-making ability about their own lives. For youth in care who are already seen through a lens of “lack,” a lens that compares them to a dominant, exclusive idea of normal, with the state deeming them incapable of making their own decisions, a potent question must be asked: How does this impact young people’s lives?

Cradock (2007) is concerned with the normative values that are attached to ideas of child, family, and the state in the context of foster care and examines the ideas of the “self” that are perpetuated through capitalism and neoliberalism. Through the evaluation of two Canadian juridical cases that went before the Supreme Court, Cradock finds the trend of the state shifting responsibility to the individual, to the child, and to the foster parent through an expectation that children will act as “(self) responsible” citizens. The cases Cradock reviews reveal that the state

engages the foster family as the “moralizing intermediary” and that children’s views are not considered enough to make choices about their placements: “Children have no right to determine where they will live except negatively: to act out – to fail to work out their problems – in hope they will be removed” (p. 168). This self-determined “acting out,” Cradock explains, comes with the cost of bringing responsibility to the self. When children who are left out of decision-making processes act and take control of their lives, they are further isolated, blamed, and made responsible. Foster families, on the other hand, can make a claim to the state, have more choice in placements, and can return children to their legal guardian when they are unable to cope, a position that is enabled because foster children “have no overriding claim on foster families” (Cradock, p. 168).

The concepts I have outlined thus far illuminate the need to explore different conceptual frameworks by which to undertake research in foster care and with young people in care. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) reject the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective that unconscious thought informs conscious thought, and instead suggest the opposite. They conceptualize the unconscious “like a head of unruly thoughts that have been made to look into the mirror by a domineering conscious only to be told they are something other than they see” (p. 27). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that we have more possibilities accessible to us than psychoanalysis would have us believe. Deleuze and Parnet’s (2002) critique of psychoanalysis questions its limitations: “Psychoanalysis was to invent a statute law of mental illness or psychic difficulty which consistently renewed itself and spread out into a systemic network. A new ambition was being offered to us: psychoanalysis is a lifelong affair” (p. 85). Psychoanalysis becomes a study of lack, a negative view of the unconscious, and it “breaks up all productions of desire” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 77). This can be seen in attachment theory and in behavioural models that focus on lack

in comparison to ideas of normative development, and from these stem pathologies, constraining labels, and a closing down of creative possibilities. Skott-Myhre and Skott-Myhre (2007) suggest that “a child who feels they lack something central to their life is a needy child, and a needy child is more open to manipulation and exploitation than a child who feels secure and fulfilled” (p. 49). They suggest that taking up a position of lack may put us in danger of being appropriated by the current systems of power, namely capitalism. They go on to suggest that “life does not lack” but that rather it “fills all spaces with its productions, connections and relations (p. 50). Tuck (2009) explains how a desire-based framework can move research away from deficit-focused forms of research:

It is our work as educational researchers and practitioners, and especially as community members, to envision alternative theories of change, especially those that rely on desire and complexity rather than damage. (p. 422)

This thesis aims to open thinking to engage multiple ideas of resistance and productive force rather than narrowing and reducing. The next chapter explores how the theoretical underpinnings of this research harmonize to explore resistance, desire and complexity through a collaborative rhizomatic inquiry.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

This chapter seeks to connect multiple theoretical concepts that underlie this thesis and that inform the study's methodology and analysis. My hope is that by using a transtheoretical framework, I can invite alternative accounts of young people in care and thicken descriptions of context, history, and systems of care. Instead of focusing on the individualized, rational neoliberal subject so prevalent in dominant psychological models, I draw on poststructural definitions of agency (Davies, 2000) and Foucault's (1982, 1987) discussions of "subject formation," "modes of objectification," and "power and resistance." This framework enables me to disrupt the predominant humanist construction of the rational, responsible individual that shapes current foster care research, practice, and policy. This conceptual map also presents ideas of becoming, desire, creative force, and lines of flight as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Deleuze (1997). In this section I both explore some of the theoretical underpinnings utilized and define the terms and ideas that are pivotal to this research study.

Dickerson (2010) describes three broad categories of theoretical perspectives that shape both therapeutic and research-based conceptualizations of identity and subjectivity: individualizing, systemic, and poststructural. Behavioural approaches fit into the dominant psychological, individualizing, and psychoanalytic approaches that show up in current research, as described in the literature review. These positions view identity as fixed and innate; problems are understood to surface as pathology, deficit, inability – and as being situated within the person. In practice and research, this positions expert knowledge at the top. In contrast, poststructural theories (see, for example, Davies, 2000) see identity as socially and historically constituted, as multiple, and as always in progress. Under this lens, individual problems are not

seen as residing within the individual but rather as mediated by social forces, including societal expectations of what is normal and acceptable.

This study takes into consideration a variety of discourses that influence constructions of youth in care. This conceptual outline considers topics such as individualism, capitalism, power, psychiatry, psychology, governmental systems, and sociocultural implications and examines both how these show up in research and influence how we position youth in care. Knowledge produced by dominant normative psychological perspectives upholds dominant notions of truth and perpetuates the power systems that advance these ideas. It individualizes through pathology and through exclusive claims to truth, and thus undermines difference and other productions of knowledge. How the individual, individuality, ideas of self, and subjectivity are thought of greatly influences how professionals work with and relate to others. Possibilities for conceptualizing illness, the body, difference, and power are all influenced by historical, sociocultural standards of “normal” and right and wrong. For example, Skott-Myhre (2008) suggests that the force of young people becomes subject to the classifications of adolescence through the lens of psychological development and emotional health, which often focuses on “deviance and pathology, risk and resilience.” (p. 13) Young people in care often receive these types of classification, altering how their lives are viewed, documented and experienced.

Reconceptualizing agency and the subject

Common humanist understandings of the subject and agency influenced by individualism, neoliberalism, and dominant, normative discourses of rationality describe the subject as rational, accepting of responsibility for their actions, and capable of making coherent choices based on free will. People who do not fit this description of personhood are seen as faulty or lacking (Davies, 2000). Neoliberal values position the subject as being congruent and

self-determined, with access to equality, choice, and freedom. Cradock (2007) asks, “What new kinds of children are being created by orders of rule premised upon the extension to children of rights and responsibilities within the neoliberal order and advanced capitalism” (p. 154)? To this question I would add: how do socionormative delegations of rights and responsibilities change based on a category of child, youth, or adulthood, and how does this change influence who has a right to speak and be heard?

Poststructural theories move away from traditional humanist forms of agency embedded in a dominant Euro-Western culture that conceptualizes agency as based entirely on rational choices and free will. This form of agency or free choice privileges those who have access to certain subject positions that “others,” by contrast, do not. Davies (2000) frames agency as how one is constituted and conceives self within available discourses and with access to a subject position in which there is a “right to speak and be heard” (p. 66):

This individualised subject is understood as an active agent and the construction of it as such within Western cultures is so pervasive that it is difficult to think against the grain of it, or to imagine that agency might indeed be blocked by this constitution of subjects as individualised subjects-of-will. (Davies, 2000, p. 57)

Within such a discourse of rationality and privilege, only those with presence rather than lack are considered agentic. Under a humanistic aperture, agency is only accessible to few, as the discourse of being “normal” enables and is enabled by access to this privilege of free choice and rationality. I am interested here in subverting this limited and limiting notion of agency, and to propose instead poststructural conceptualizations of the subject as fluid, politicized, and situated. Davies (2000) argues that we are always positioned within discourse; through the combination of previously unrelated discourses, agency can show up as one’s ability to move beyond any given

discourse and position self as something new, or, as Davies (2000) states, to “resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves” (p. 67). Through the development of new language and the fluidity of movement, this theory of agency, while it demands that we acknowledge our positions within the discourses available to us, opens up to new ideas and possibilities of conceptualizing self. Davies (2010) extends this definition of agency: “Agency has generally been thought of as being in the province of the individualised subject-of-will. Here I am suggesting that agency is linked to the opening up of new ways of being” (p. 56). Davies’ definition of subject of thought opens up the possibility of agency, not as a rational action, but as productive, complicated, and responsive to possibility. I use the notion of agency to refer to the multiple strategies of resistance, negotiation, and care of self that young people in care take up in the face of adversity and erasure, and also as a means of building connection, hope and community.

To rupture normative notions of youth in care as abnormal, broken, defective, unattached, I propose a lens of multiplicity that enables concepts to converge, clash, contradict, and differentiate. This lens is intentionally placed to rupture any sneaky attempts at truth-finding, and it serves the theme of becoming and embracing the emergence of collaboration, of theory, of data, and even of this piece of writing. I explore the relationship between Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari tentatively. Both suggest that theory is practice rather than serving to describe practice, and both write and complement the other’s theories, even as they challenge them (Deleuze, 1999). Deleuze and Guattari’s and Foucault’s ideas of the subject and of power/resistance seem to connect at points but diverge into different, sometimes even contradictory, bodies of knowledge. Therefore I begin to chart these theories and the spaces between them.

Power and subject

Knowledge, power, and self, Foucault (1982) states, “are irreducible but constantly imply one another” (p. 94). This is one of the theoretical approaches that I consider when looking at how young people are made into subjects or wards of the state through their construction of being seen as “kids in care.” Foucault (1982) describes two meanings of the term subject, as dependent on someone else’s control and as one’s own identity and self-knowledge. He outlines three modes of objectification/subjectification that transform humans into subjects. The first is the modes of inquiry that create hierarchies of knowledge which privilege scientific knowledge as an objective, universal truth that defines humanity. The second mode, dividing practices, separates us into categories of binary oppositional items, for example “normal” and “abnormal,” or “able” and “disabled.” The final mode Foucault describes is a study of how the human develops into a subject through a process of self-surveillance. In Foucault’s (1986) later work, he discusses “care of self,” a concept that denotes different aspects of self, including relationship to self, care of the body, care of needs, and the subtle agentic negotiations that are often missed in a focus on individualizing and dividing practices. Deleuze (1999) comments on Foucault’s process of subjectivation: “He does not write a history of subjects but of processes of subjectivation, governed by the foldings operating in the ontological as much as the social field” (p. 95). In examining processes of power rather than people and their histories, this study aims to look at the culture/process/movement of something rather than further objectifying a group of people. The risk in any piece of research is replicating power without the realization of doing so. Here Colebrook (2002b) describes a process of how we construct subjects/objects in research: “The practices to ‘know’ man – the human sciences – actually produce man as an object to be viewed” (p. 111). The measured value of this study is to tease out processes of power, resistances, and

force in order to expand and explore difference as possibility rather than to study (and thus produce) “youth in care” as “knowable” subjects.

Deleuze (1999) describes Foucault’s definition of power as “a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a ‘power relation’” (p. 59). He does not describe power as a form or a relation between two forms but rather describes force as “a set of actions upon other actions” and states that “force has no object other than that of other forces, and no being other than that of relation” (p. 59). The purpose of such force is “to incite, to induce, to seduce, to make easy or difficult, to enlarge or limit, to make more or less probable, and so on” (p. 59). In Deleuze’s (1999) exploration of Foucault’s theory of power, he expands into concepts of power as rhizome, as multiple, and of speaking and seeing as modes of becoming:

No doubt power, if we consider it in the abstract, neither sees nor speaks. It is a mole that only knows its way round its networks of tunnels, its multiple hole: ‘it acts on the basis of innumerable points’: it ‘comes from below.’ But precisely because it does not itself speak and see, it makes us see and speak. (p. 68)

Everyone becomes productions of power, inseparable from force and flight. In this research, discussions of power invite questions about molar assemblages, including the operations of governing systems, sociocultural norms, psychology, psychiatry, individualism, and capitalism that cycle through each other and into processes of subject-formation and subjectification, the express point being to examine how power circulates and how dominant and less dominant subjectivities of “youth” might show up in the data. Foucault (1982) discusses the subject as being integral to an analysis of power relations. A very specific type of power that Foucault suggests does not live in a specific organization or group but is a process or “technique” that makes individuals subjects. Foucault did not subscribe to the notion of power coming only

from above but rather suggested that power circulates through everything, including the subject. It does not come negatively from the outside to the subject, although this may be recognized as an effect of power on the subject in the form of negation or oppression (Madigan, 2011).

These concepts of resistance and desire are not easily separable. Attention must be drawn to how these theories of resistance and a preceding life force work together and apart, how they converge and diverge. Deleuze (1999) states that “when power in this way takes life as its aim or object, then resistance to power already puts itself on the side of life, and turns life against power” (p. 76). Evans (2010) speaks to Deleuze’s take on resistance, suggesting that when power captures life as an object, life becomes resistance:

With life therefore said to be already richer in possibilities, the life which exceeds expectations *becomes a life of resistance*. Inevitably, since life resistance combats the forms of confinement (capture) and technical strategies (overcoding) so essential to forms of species manipulation, it equally refuses to accept the dangerously unfulfilled categorisation which power necessarily imposes in order to control and transform existence. (Evans, 2010, p. 5)

Desire and creative force become integral to this idea of power and becoming resistance, and it becomes important to what is attended to in the methodology and analysis.

The following section explores how resistance expands into becoming resistance, strategic desire, and movement between lines of power, force, and creativity.

Power/resistance ... and desire

Skott-Myhre (2008) discusses Foucault’s stance on resistance as an “insurrection of subjugated knowledge” (p. 17) which encompasses alternative stances that counter the dominant “regimes of power” and colonial language: “When the subjectum of youth is called into the

subjectus position of adolescence there is, according to Foucault, an immediate resistance to such calling” (p. 17). Skott-Myhre suggests that when there is an attempt to shape a young person with constructs of power, the young person will resist. He goes on to describe Deleuze and Guattari’s take on resistance: “Such performances do not operate in reaction but through the surplus of life force that exceeds the territorialized identity called into being by the dominant ideological social structure” (2008, p. 18). For Deleuze (1997), agencements of desire “are objective lines that cut across a society” that create a “recoding” (p. 189). He explains, “I therefore have no need for the status of phenomena of resistance; if the first given of a society is that everything takes flight” (p. 189). However, in speaking to Foucault’s take on resistance, Deleuze (1999) states: “There is no telling what a man might achieve ‘as a living being’, as the set of forces that resist” (p. 77). Deleuze speaks of resistance as becoming “the power of life” (p. 77), and in this sense bypasses discussions of subjectivity, instead viewing desire as a process rather than a structure/subject: “As opposed to subjectivity [desire] is an event as opposed to a thing or a person” (Deleuze, 1997, p.189). It is “an agencement of heterogeneous elements that function” (p.189), the coming together of multiple different pieces to form a function. Tuck (2009) explains that because desire “is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant,” it “necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance” (p. 420). Desire is multiple “connections which enhance life” (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 91). This idea of desire is productive and positive, not a traditionally ascribed derivative of lack. These connections create social wholes that become communities, which in turn produce interests and “organized forms of desire” (p.91). “Power is, therefore, not the repression of desire but the expansion of desire” (p. 91). Through these concepts comes the question of becoming other, not limiting oneself by the images of “child,” “youth,” “problem

child,” but rather becoming something else (Colebrook, 2002a). Tuck (2010) explains how she views Deleuze’s take on desire:

The literal figurative quality of Deleuze’s work would require that desiring-machines *are* in the body, but also at molecular and platonic scales. Desiring-machines are in the smallest imaginable components of life, and also exist as ideas or ideals, hanging out there in the sociological imagination. (Tuck, 2010, p. 640)

Colebrook (2002a) explains that desire, rather than being located outside of power and being affected by power, is power itself, “a power to become and produce images” (p. 94); it “does not oppress us; it produces us” (p. 94). When looking at power and how it operates, we therefore look at productions of power that we ourselves enact:

Desire also has the power to produce images that enslave it: images of a moral ‘man’ obeying his social duty. But the task is not to get away from images so much as to reveal and intensify their production: why limit ourselves to the image of man and woman as social citizens, why not become other? (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 94)

Through the lens of desire as productive of other becomings, I am able to look at the movements and productions of power and how we become both this power and limitations, and how, by cutting across these limitations, we might be able to examine the movement of becoming other.

Thickening the story: The rhizome

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the rhizome as a way of conceptualizing desire’s connections. They contrast rhizomes to arborescent (tree-like) structures that are rooted and that

produce a distinct direction. Rhizomes have no beginning or end, are always in the middle, and focus on the between rather than the beginning and end of something (Colebrook, 2002b). A rhizomatic analysis becomes useful to investigate connections between concepts/events/histories. As Skott-Myhre (2008) suggests, “we escape the inevitable striations of mapping through the map itself” (p. 82). He goes on to say that rhizomatic spaces are fluid and always changing, they spill over perceived limits and boundaries into new spaces. This conceptualization can be applied to experiences in care because the idea of providing each young person in government care a regimented, cohesive, structured life under the umbrella of assigned caregivers is perhaps a story never realized. It seems futile then to apply the same inflexible guidelines to multiple emergences of the event. When conceptualizing young people who are placed into this space, it may be beneficial to experiment with the rhizomatic map, which is constantly being drawn and redrawn, disrupted, and recreated (Skott-Myhre, 2008). In terms of my analysis and methodology, the rhizome “is an event or an encounter with multiplicities that dislodges fixed ways of perceiving the world and offers us emergent ideas and perceptions that re/creates multiplicities” (Irwin, Beer & Springgay, 2006, p. 24). These ideas move away from trying to recreate a fixed static space from rigid boundaries and direct copies, and stray from dualistic ways of viewing concepts, events, and people.

The tangle of lines

Deleuze and Parnet (2002) outline three kinds of line that are revealed by the rhizomatic map: molar lines, molecular lines, and lines of flight. May (2005) describes molecular lines as lines of segmentarity with fluxes and thresholds, molar lines as lines of rigid segmentarity, and lines of flight as lines that are “not themselves constituted – or imprisoned – in specific identities” (p. 137). Deleuze and Parnet (2002) frame molar lines as including “binary

machines,” “devices of power,” and “planes of organization” (p 128). They are lines of power through the striated categorization and organization of life force.

Micropolitics are “how persons and interests are produced from the chaotic flows of desire” and how categories are “coded” from affects, our embodied reactions (Colebrook, 2002a p. 92). We see this in the emancipation process when youth age out of care. There is a sudden transition from “youth” to “adult,” when a young person’s age shifts from 18 to 19, the label instantly changes the assemblage, and the coming together of all the bits that make up “youth,” “youth in care,” and “ward of the state” are no more. Colebrook argues that “desire is not repressed by politics so much as it is coded” (p. 93), and it speaks to the micropolitics of the category “adult” recoding the young person.

Skott-Myhre (2008) describes “lines of flight” as “escape routes from the structuring effects of dominant social forms” (p.11). It may be valuable to think about how these “escape routes” may influence subjectivity and abilities to move around certain constraints of the produced subject. Lines of flight operate like shoots of creative force cutting across striated lines of power, working in and around them and opening up new possibilities for modes of subjectivity like a “complex array of tunnels under and through society” (p. 11). Performative subjectivities are made up of a tangle of molar and molecular lines and lines of flight that cut across these structures and events (Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2007, p. 22). Opening up new possibilities for how we co-constitute the self/ourselves and others are “nomadic lines of creativity, lines that are always in the middle, lines of flux not synthesis that disrupt dualisms with complementarity” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 19). The lines are not a departure from life; they produce life and are new becomings:

The great and only error lines (sic) in thinking that a line of flight consists in fleeing from life; the flight into the imaginary, or into art. On the contrary, to flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon. (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 49)

Deleuze's (1997) focus on desire and flight rather than resistance is fascinating, opening to new possibilities for creativity in how we first view and then talk about young people experiencing the foster system. That being said, I find much use in keeping a focus on resistance as defined by Foucault because it functions as a grounding force that vitalizes concepts of subjectivity, and that adds an element of memorization, determination, and deliberateness that, as Tuck (2010) argues, is missing from Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptualizations of desire. The writings most pertinent to my field of inquiry are those which attempt to reconcile and move between these concepts. Deleuze (1997, 1999) himself explores how these concepts converge and diverge, and what linguistics separate them, and Tuck (2010) explores her own desire to be "smart," "wise," "agentic," and "insight/ful" even as she takes up Deleuzian ideas of desire (p. 3). Her ideas expand beyond Deleuze's; Desire as agentic becomes useful to this study, becoming the glue that holds these concepts together as they collide, and splinter.

St. Pierre (1997) explores her own pull to her research site, which sends questions through my mind as to the pull for the geographies I chose to explore. She writes: "I am propelled into the middle of things and am forced to look for smooth spaces that might erode the topologies of its thick, dense codes" (p. 379). I feel a similar pull to my topic, a gnawing, embodied sensation, a clear discomfort when my options settle on a reductive methodology, and a deep longing for ethical expansion, collaboration, and movement in this area of study.

Chapter summary

This chapter explored connections between theories of subjectivity/self, power/resistance, desire, becoming resistance, and rhizomatic analysis. As I discussed, Foucault's concepts of subjectivity, power, and resistance are different from Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of desire and becoming, and yet there is a productive tension and engagement between the two that I do not want to abandon. I include them both in my methodology and analysis because the space between them becomes an interesting part of the rhizomatic approach. So, in the spirit of becoming, I have embraced a sense of "and" that comes from working transtheoretically rather than a reductive theoretical "either/or":

The tree is a filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be" but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction "and ... and ... and ..." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 25)

The next chapter explores how these concepts have been woven throughout my methodology and analysis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This study is intended to act as a vehicle for opening up conversations about practice, belonging, responsibility, agency, and support for young people in relationship with the foster care system. The aim is to move away from dividing and individualizing practices toward a richer description of identity, subjectivity, complexity, resistance and life force. I want to challenge the molar concepts of “troubled youth” that permeate characterizations of youth in care by exploring how the youth themselves make meaning of – and potentially resist – such characterizations. This analysis navigates how young people protect themselves and negotiate difficult circumstances in creative ways with the tools and skills that are available to them, in the context of the limitations of dominant discourses and the policies and practices that construct their lives in care. The intent of the series of arts-based interviews is to invite dialogue about power relations, subject formation, and responses to events/transitions, as well as multiple strategies of resistance/flight into creative spaces, embodied exploration, and new possibilities in order to contribute alternative stories or accounts of being in care.

In this chapter, I describe my research design: the use of narrative in individual and group conversations and arts-based methods; research questions; participants; and the research products coming out of a collaborative, emergent research approach. The collective, emergent methodology I developed is rooted in the transtheoretical orientation described in the previous chapter, and seeks to trouble overly determined, problematic representations of youth in care. I explicate how my research design – deliberately left open ended, fluid, and creative – enabled the engagement of participants as collaborators, two terms that I use interchangeably throughout this paper. Participants actively engaged in the co-construction of research themes and explored topics they identified as important. This allowed flexibility and opportunity for creativity, for

remembering, for exploring values and voice. Participant collaborators voiced their own critical analyses of the system and shared their perspectives on how to create effective change. In this chapter I also evaluate the ethical implications and strengths and limitations of this approach.

I am not truth seeking or looking to uncover the “real experience” of young people. Nor do I aim to represent all young people in care, or even the foster care alumni who came forth for this study. I am interested in troubling existing constructions of truth that are embedded in systems of out-of-home care and I am compelled by new possibilities for positioning and supporting children and youth in care.

Methodological approach to inquiry

My methodological approach is emergent, shifting as it unfolds. This approach holds collaborators at the center of the research and allows for attention to openings, messiness, and rupture. During both individual interviews and one group interview, multiple sites of data and analysis emerged from the inclusion of art-based methods and flexible narrative-style conversations. Data were collected and analyzed using multiple forms of documentation: art, field notes, transcripts, and audio recordings of interviews. Inviting multiple ways to engage with data supports the exploration of the spaces in-between art and text and fits with this attempt at a rhizomatic inquiry and analysis. This form of analysis acts as a map that is always shifting and changing, with a focus on movement rather than boundary:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions: it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, re-worked by an individual, group or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political

action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it has multiple entryways. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12)

The cumulative, emergent inquiry looks not to narrow themes but rather to open them to new complexities and possibilities and to identify connections between discourse and how young people are constructed in care. Therefore, maps and rhizomatic data analysis have become central to this study as a method of exploring complexity and multiplicity.

In exploring ideas for inquiry and a rhizomatic analysis, I looked to the art/writings of Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2008), who pose the question, “How are we experiencing lived experience” (2008, p. 88)? The use of art plays on this tension between exploring complexities and representing them in singular research products, as expressed by Colebrook (2002a):

We may never encounter a pure work of art or philosophy, but we can strive to distinguish and maximise artistic, philosophical and scientific tendencies within any text. We can distinguish these tendencies not by looking at what a work is but at what it achieves or does. (p. 12)

The methodology and methods attempt to open and engage with this concept of what art/philosophy achieves through an invitation to messiness that contrasts with traditionally reductive research. Attending to loss, humour, and rupture creates openings, displaces meaning, and allows for slippages that “become tactile, felt, and seen” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 898). This fits for reconceptualizing subjecthood and resistance in ways that honour complexity, opening up new possibilities outside of the dominant hegemonic stories of being-child/youth and being-in-care.

Below I outline three concepts that informed my choice of methods, shaped the questions asked in the interviews and my approach to art, and influenced the analysis chapters: engaging with complexity, embodied knowing, and re-membering.

Engaging with complexity



Figure 1. Painting by RC

I painted this picture during the interviews while the collaborators worked on their own art pieces, as a way to explore my multiple roles as researcher, practitioner and as a student. I experimented with different shapes merging and pushing apart from each other, multiplying, with edges blurred. A certain freedom came to my expression, a realization of new form and possibility transpired with this exploration of novel concepts and remembered stories, of new meanings and depths. Layers of pen, pencil, watercolour, acrylic, and cardboard form the lines, masses, and smears that collectively came together in this exploratory piece. As both an

experiment and a response to my own engagement with the subject matter, the colours and shapes connected to my embodied lived experience of the conversations – lines signifying power and flight. This art piece acts as an example of how expression becomes complex and is constructed relationally, an assemblage of material and space, the inside/outside, and relationships to others and to events. Complexity was investigated throughout this study, not only through the use of art but through multiple approaches to living inquiry, including embodied knowing, and remembering. The multiple approaches create ethical space for movement between memory, current events, and exploration of possibilities.

Embodied knowing

I exposit the concept of an embodied knowing through the use of arts-based methods, conversations with participants, and analysis. This is a knowing that extends beyond discourse and into the “unknowing” of a body’s ability or possibility. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) describe affect as being felt before it is thought and before it is given meaning. Embodiment is different from emotion, which comes later as a stratifying of affect. Because it is difficult to conceptualize and describe these moments verbally, art can be an interesting way of exploring embodied experience/memory. I mentioned this concept to participants when it resonated with the conversations we were already having. Surprisingly, it came up several times throughout conversations connected to memories, art work, and colours. Below is an example of a conversation that I had with KD about how this kind of knowing materializes:

KD: One of my friends is a yoga instructor. So she’s all into colours and numbers and things. She says red is a very powerful colour. So when I see a vibrant red like this it just like ... whoa!!

R: Do you find it to be powerful too?

KD: Yeah

R: So you know that feeling ... or know that word like an ‘embodied experience’? So when you see that red for example you get like a ... feeling like ... that’s powerful?

KD: Jolt, that physical sensation?

R: Yeah (nods).

KD: No. Tell me about it.

R: Well, it's exactly that idea, having an experience of it. Instead of being tapped in to what you think about it, you're tapped in to what you sense about it or feel about it. Not in the sense of 'I feel bad about it' but in the sense of like ... 'whoa.'

KD: Like energy?

R: Yeah. Energy exactly. I wonder if that shows up in what you're constructing here? That spiritual energy or positive energy that we talked about?

KD: Certainly, certainly. Like, I saw this paper and I was drawn to it because it's earthy. You're like "actually, it's made of elephant poop." I was like ... "Wow!!... Excellent!" (laughs).

R: Yeah, yeah (laughs).

KD: And I saw this red felt earlier in the interview and I got kind of excited.

Looking back at this conversation now makes me smile because I find this concept of embodied experience so difficult to describe and explore. Though I feel and see that the collaborator was getting it and actively doing it, putting language to this concept was nearly impossible. This is the objective of the exploration of embodied experience through art: It can go where spoken word cannot. This concept of embodied knowing returns later in this chapter, in the descriptions of both the interview/art process and in the data analysis.

Memory

Deleuze and Parnet (2002) explore the idea of "becoming as an antimemory" (p.78) and suggest that a memory is always a "reterritorialization," a reflection back not to the children we once were, but to a child who is carried with us. We produce "blocs of childhood which are always in the present" (p. 78). The aim of the interviews was to elicit these ideas of becoming and to use art materials as a means of opening the concepts at hand to seek new possibilities.

This concept of remembering fit with the interview style, which invited questions of a different kind: a critical look, a complex remembering that attends to multiple views of events and invites new possibilities in relation to that event/culture of care. The conversations at times reflected Foucault's ideas of resistance to power and Wade's (1997) concepts of attending to

responses rather than effects. For example, questions such as “How did you know what to do?” open memory of action/agency rather than alluding to passivity and further victimization. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas of life force preceding power were explored in the questions/art as collaborators opened conversations about spirituality, knowing, creativity, connection, and so on that cut across lines of power and boundary. This style of exposition fits with Skott-Myhre’s (2008) description of Deleuze and Guattari’s lines of flight; he describes the possibilities of cutting “across structures and events” even when unable to escape the influence of the borders of social structures that they may cross (p. 19).

In the interviews and analysis I therefore attempted to acknowledge the collaborators’ current reflective knowledge of their remembered experience. It is this repetition of the past that transforms the past, and “each performance or memory of the past opens the past anew” (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 64). Memories do not represent the truth of past situations but rather become complex in interaction with the current time/space/event in which they are invoked, becoming a living inquiry and a fresh movement forward. They become something else entirely.

Research process

I met with the five participants a total of ten times. I held nine one-to-one interviews/conversations and one group interview. During both types of interviews the themes/topics of conversation were introduced as being open and questions developed accordingly. One-on-one interviews were conducted first because the response to recruitment was staggered. The group interview was intended to pull the group together and look at collective experience; collective analysis supports the importance of deindividualizing constructions of youth in care, an important backdrop to this study. All five collaborators

engaged in arts-based methods, volunteered for one-on-one interviews, and attended the group interview.

Art

The art component of this study focuses on fostering creativity, becoming, and possibility. Art can interrupt the linearity of verbal narratives and can be useful as a method to chart in-between spaces (Davies & Gannon, 2009). Colebrook (2002a) explores movement and space and the tensions created between art and philosophy:

The interaction of philosophy and art should create difference and divergence, rather than agreement and a common sense. Philosophy has to do with creating concepts, while art has to do with creating new experiences. But the two can transform each other. (p. 7)

In these spaces between art and events/concepts, we see that tensions, ruptures, and flight can become, in turn, possibility. The in-between spaces in this context also act as connections between art, text, conversation, and embodied knowing. They are the intersections between what was described above – complexity/messiness, embodied experience, and memory – and they are the different relations forged between researcher, collaborator, and reader. Therefore art becomes a process of opening in connection to conversation, events and experience, allowing for attention to becoming and possibility. Irwin and de Cosson (2004) describe the process of art making as one that is ambiguous and that is not easily defined, suggesting that creating a method or series of steps would be impossible:

If boundaries are recognised as uncertain sites that shift and change, forming new lines or demarcation, then boundary becomes not something that is definitive and declarative, but rather an undefined space that is constantly in the process of becoming. (p.65)

There was no sequence of steps or prescribed way of approaching art in this project. I did make a few optional suggestions for warm-up activities, but even when the suggestions were used to begin a piece, the art almost always shifted, becoming something else. For example, during the one-on-one interviews, I offered mask making and/or collage as some of the options for art, and during the group interview I suggested a warm-up art activity of introducing oneself through a drawing (an activity inspired by Tobin, 2007). Creative art materials (paints, pastels, pens, paper, canvas, cardboard, buttons, glue, magazines, sketchbooks, ribbons, etc.) were made available to participants who had a choice in how they wanted to express their ideas, knowledge, and embodied experience/memory work (poetry, pamphlet making, letter writing, painting, etc). Each participant picked a different theme and art activity based on their preference/interest. Art pieces that were created included masks, paintings, collage, and drawings with pastels. Most of the pieces involved some form of collage, illuminating the combination of different materials, layers of meaning, and insight added through its messiness (Springgay et al., 2005). All of the pieces had multilayered meaning and reflected the accompanying conversations. All of the collaborators had the option of discussing, writing about, or titling their art piece if they so chose.

Physical space also became important to the artistic process. The interviews were held in a fairly comfortable board room with giant tables pushed together to create art space. The room was originally chosen for its big windows, with access to fresh air and serene surroundings, but it somehow felt too formal. However, as soon as the art materials were spread on the surface of the table and the first paintbrush hit paper, the room became creative space.

Interviews

The interview style started as semistructured thematic questioning, but it evolved into a narrative-style conversation and an invitation to simultaneously engage in a creative arts process. These characteristics fit with my epistemological location of wanting an emergent, messy process rather than something linear and reductive. To guide the conversation, I created an initial list of questions reflecting my own responses to having read current literature and theory/philosophy and my own subject position as youth worker and child and family therapist. The original themes used for the questions reflected this combination; the majority of them came from my previous experience as a youth counsellor where daily collaborative conversations would revolve around these ideas, sparking my curiosity for further inquiry.

The one-to-one interview questions were open ended. The participant collaborators were shown a list of suggested themes and then given the option to discuss what they thought stood out as being important and as fitting with their experiences of being in care. The initial interview questions were shaped around the theme of circulations of power and how they affect dominant stories of the subjectivities of youth in care. The question plan was loosely followed and the participant/collaborators seemed eager to discuss and share ideas and memories. The conversations had a natural flow; as interviewer I asked questions seeking more detail or description rather than sticking to the question plan. I followed the lead of the interviewees and their choice of topic rather than referring back to specific questions. I rarely looked at my notes. It was more important to me to stay present in the conversation than to ask for specific questions to be answered.

After the first round of interviews, I completed a very brief and fluid initial thematic analysis so that I could better inform the questions of subsequent interviews and promote an

opportunity to follow up on topics as they presented themselves. This process is discussed further in the data analysis section of this chapter. Participants were also invited to comment on certain aspects of the analysis and reflection, and were invited to give feedback to me throughout the study. This process was similar to how participant involvement might transpire in grounded theory, and I checked in with participants to confirm that meanings were understood and documented as intended (Kirby, Grieves, & Reid, 2006). Sometimes I received direct suggestions of themes. For example, AB pointed out a theme that she felt was important: “Stability was a big thing that is probably something that should be on here [gestures towards original themes document]” (AB, I1, p. 2).

The group interview was the last interview in the series and it built on connections from previous themes but also opened up a discussion of creative responses and new possibilities. To facilitate this, I recapitulated themes that had already occurred in conversation, occasionally asking a question. Much of the group discussion was directed by the collaborators and previously discussed ideas dropped away, giving rise to new concepts or topics for discussion. Here is an example of what I said in this interview to invite conversation:

The themes that have come up... (include) talking about new possibilities, what people think would be useful, and negotiating the system. We talked a bit about community responses, supports, (support people as) sounding boards and people who help you to figure out what's gonna be useful to you. (RC, GI, p. 17).

By simply reviewing topics that had emerged in one-on-one interviews, a conversation was sparked that was mostly led by the participants. This group meeting also acted as an opportunity for the collaborators to meet each other, view the initial analysis map completed to that point (displayed in analysis section of chapter), and provide any additional analysis; it also served to

give closure to the conversations. The meeting was a celebration and an opportunity to reflect back on the process.

Approach to analysis

My methods for data analysis drew on poststructural analysis as informed by Foucault's (1982) definitions of subject formation and power and resistance and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) ideas of multiplicity, desire, and lines of power/flight as incorporated into a desire-based rhizomatic framework. These points of analysis work with the ideas of mapping presented in and inspired by a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005) and fulfill my desire to make complex ideas of the subject and construct a web of possibilities rather than finding an answer or identifying a static or definitive representation of subject formation in care. This type of analysis looks at layers of the assemblage, asks questions, looks for multiple positions, and utilizes reflection and the spaces in-between (Irwin et al., 2006). The inclusion of a desire-based framework opens doors to a "depathologizing analysis" (Tuck, 2009, p. 418). This framework allows me to explore new possibilities, intensities, space, and connections. While still acknowledging power, struggle, and loss, it is not a deficit-based framework; it does not focus on absence or lack.

Analysis of art

Art making is an opening for lines of flight which allows for a becoming of something other than what is known, something different: "Art interrupts linear verbal narratives" (Davies & Gannon, 2009, p. 54). Therefore I leave space for this flight but do not attempt to represent or analyze the art itself. Art as a method and interpretive process stretches into what cannot be said or heard and "produces sensations, affects and intensities as its mode of addressing problems" (Grosz, p. 13 cited in Davies & Gannon, 2009, p. 55). Although I do not directly analyze art, I

indirectly attribute some meaning to the pieces just by where I choose to place them in the analysis and by which quotes I choose to place around them. This process is guided by conversations with the participants and their descriptions of their art pieces, which were recorded and transcribed. Some of the collaborators chose to add words or titles to their art pieces, and/or chose to talk about their intended meaning during the art-making process. Participants also explored themes through their art pieces. The group discussion provided another layer of collective analysis: Not only were the themes/points of discussion identified in each individual interview and art piece brought back to the group for feedback and reflection, but the group process generated new lines of reflection and conversation that further complexified and deepened the individual interviews and art pieces. Readers will experience their own responses and sensations, becoming another layer of analysis. As Irwin et al. (2006) describe:

Rather than simply interpreting art, audience members become analyzers or interlocutors. In many instances audiences are actually called to a specific time and place where they become active participants in the artwork. (p. 19)

New questions may form, new ideas may arise, but readers engage in their own meaning-making process.

Process of analysis

My process for data analysis was cumulative, cohering through several cycles of analysis. During initial individual interviews, I asked participants to reflect on the themes I had identified based on my practice experience and literature review, and to suggest additional themes or lines of exploration, which I used to shape subsequent interviews. To illustrate how I collected and represented emergent themes, I present a rhizomatic map (Figure 2) that looks at concepts of youth in care. Some of the themes remained central throughout the process and others shifted and

changed, often absorbing into other themes and concepts. This analysis looks at: how children in care are positioned; resistance; the embodied experience of this position; and Foucault's (1982) concepts of objectification and subject formation.

During the first one-to-one conversation with AB, some of my initial ideas for analysis and how to conceptualize themes were confirmed. As we were closing our first conversation, AB mentioned that she was "bouncing around" a lot during the interview. I joked that I do the same and mentioned that "bouncing around" was actually a good fit for the study. She explained how she saw the themes:

AB: The whole being in care and the behaviour and the belonging ... Everything just ties into each other.

R: I wonder if it (list of themes) makes more sense if I structure it as a web? (gesture towards list of themes)

AB: Yeah, it would ... just put being in care in the middle and branch it out and everything can intertwine.

The first map emerged from that conversation with AB, who points out the connections between concepts and the usefulness of being able to visualize this. These themes were originally provided to the participants as a linear list. I reformatted the themes as a map because it seemed to fit more closely with my intention to proceed in a fluid, organic manner rather than through a predetermined process and question guide. The map illustrates many of the themes that continued to run through the conversations, some taking up more space in conversations than others based on the collaborators' preferences and experiences. Many more themes and maps emerged and will be illustrated later.

Irwin et al. (2006) discuss the value of Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of a rhizomatic map as different from maps that seek to define rigid borders and definitions of inclusions/exclusions. They suggest that rhizomatic maps have only middles and no beginnings or ends; rhizomes operate in the spaces in-between, spaces of opening and possibility. This conceptualization is congruent with the concept of disrupting linearity, of being in a constant state of becoming; maps and tracings can also work together to make new connections and new creations. The rhizomatic map works as a move towards destabilizing concepts, objects, and identities and situating subject formation within political cultural, economic, and social processes (Irwin et al., 2006). A rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). This concept complements both my methodology's use of maps to show multiple relationships among the stories and the findings that appear in relation to the lived experience of the alumni collaborators. Irwin et al. (2006) describe the rhizome as "an event or an encounter with multiplicities that dislodges fixed ways of perceiving the world and offers us emergent ideas and perceptions that re/creates multiplicities" (p. 24). Any point of a rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, "can be connected to anything other, and must be" (p. 7). A rhizome grows in all directions, disrupts linearity, creates interconnected networks, has multiple entry ways, and maps the spaces in-between thinking and materiality (Irwin et al., 2006).

Movement (molar and molecular)

Springgay et al.'s (2005) definition of contiguity is described as the coming together of and movement in-between image, text, and the different subject spaces of the researcher; this idea also fits with that of the rhizome. Resisting formal naming allows for frays and discomfort,

allows the researcher to look for dualisms that become clear momentarily before blurring, dissolving into each other, becoming complex (Springgay et al., 2005). My methodological approach enables a living inquiry, a process of art making, engaging presently, and remembering actively through creation and exploration of lived experience. Springgay et al. describe living inquiry as an “embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual understandings and experiences rather than mere visual and textual representations” (p. 902). Irwin et al. (2006) suggest embodied living inquiry as a form of theorizing through inquiry; they contend that active questioning allows the process to become an act of invention rather than representation.

The attempt to step away from representation brings with it the unique challenge of portraying meaning in research. This analysis did not look for answers or truth in the data but more into the multiple, shifting ways of viewing knowledge. Skott-Myhre (2008) suggests that multiple meanings given to any event allow the accuracy of representation to be less important: “More important perhaps, is the political and creative potential of the description provided” (p. 32). When approaching research in this way, there is an invitation to conversation, a fluidity and opportunity for this creative/political potential of which Skott-Myhre speaks.

Springgay et al. (2005) describe the movement of meaning making through metaphor and metonymy as:

the movement within displacement that provides metonymy with its pulse of difference, recognizing the extent to which signifiers dislodge Others with partial, opaque representations and not only revealing meanings, events and objects but also obscuring them in this very act. Thus meaning is anticipated, it is alluded to, provocative and suggestive. (p. 904)

Drawing on Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005), I refer here to a method of analysis aiming to link subjective stories to a broader analysis of social discourses and structures. I have also engaged in a process of interpretation, but this form of inquiry is not meant to lock into singular interpretations but rather to allow for ambiguity as meanings shift in space and time. An interpretive process embraces complexities and may not always follow a cohesive storyline. The analysis will not be about representing another's life and work, but about mapping possible connections and exploring what is possible rather than what is already known (Davies & Gannon, 2009).

Through the process of making art and engaging in open-ended discussion, our research team engaged in a much more embodied process of meaning generation. We moved away from the act of metaphor as representation and towards metaphor as becoming, shifting image and text into how we discuss and think about events. It is therefore not about recreating an experience but becoming a new lived experience, with the memory present and active in relation to the current. It may differ from the traditions of metaphor and move into an exploration of becoming. As explored earlier, becoming strays from representation of a known thing or concept and draws into a new assemblage that is a shifting collection of concepts in relation to materiality; only from this assemblage comes new meaning. This concept of becoming is attended to in the analysis.

Power

The analysis examines the content of the interview conversations through the matrices of Foucault's (1982) ideas of power, subject, objectification, and being made. It explores Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) and Deleuze's (2002) concepts of desire, and of molar, rigid lines of segmentarity and molecular, hidden lines of segmentarity. Desire does not come from lack but

rather is productive and positive. Power is the expansion of desire rather than the oppression of desire (Colebrook, 2002a). A rhizomatic analysis serves to make visible lines of power and divisions of space/category. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe connections between power and creative force:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. (p. 9)

Skott-Myhre (2008) describes lines of flight as violating and exceeding molar and molecular constraints: “nomadic lines of creativity” and “lines of flux” (p. 19). These lines “cut across structures and events” (p. 19) and are produced by creative force. As explored in the conceptual framework chapter, molar representations of being in care may be rigid structures, such as government as parent, school, the foster care system, psychological assessment, and so on, whereas the molecular lines may be more subtle, for example, the categories of youth, and adult that young people in care contend with in the descriptions of “appropriate” behaviour and daily life activity. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe lines of flight as entangled and inseparable:

The three lines are immanent, caught up in one another. We have as many tangled lines as a hand. What we call by different names – schizoanalysis, micro-politics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has no other object than the study of these lines, in groups or as individuals. (p. 125)

Using maps, I attend to lines of power and resistance in the first analysis chapter and to lines of flight and creative force in the second analysis chapter. Some differences between these concepts are explored throughout the two chapters.

Participant collaborators

I use the term collaborators to describe the study participants in honour of their level of collaboration and the dedication and expertise they gave to the study. There is no ideal term to use for the purpose of their role, but collaborator comes closest. The collaborators did not participate in the research design or the thesis analysis directly, but as mentioned earlier, the study was designed to allow for a certain degree of collaborator contribution/direction and critique/analysis within the data collection process. The option to give feedback was also made available throughout the process.

I recruited collaborators for this study through local community agencies in Victoria, BC, using e-mail invitations, recruitment posters, and word-of-mouth/connections. Five young women aged 22 to 29 came forward to collaborate in the study. All of the collaborators had experienced being in government care for at least five years, and all of the participants were eager to share and engage in the study. JP (22) was in and out of temporary care for extended periods throughout her childhood and lived with her mother and grandmother when not in care. AB (27) was in temporary foster care for a period of time and eventually asked for a continuing care order (CCO) so that she could be placed in permanent care. She lived in two different foster homes during her time in care. MA (27) was in permanent care and lived in multiple different foster homes growing up. ER (29) was in permanent care and also lived in multiple foster homes while growing up. KD (24) lived within her family of origin, a group home, and a foster home over the span of her childhood. All of the collaborators are now working in various fields; many

of them have completed or are in the midst of completing further education and all of them are political, active, and eager to share. All of the collaborators described to me at some point throughout the study that they approached their participation with intention, wanted to contribute to this field, and wanted their remembered experiences and ideas to support positive change for young people in care. This is explored further in the analysis chapters.

Ethics

Due to the emergent, narrative nature of this study and my desire to work more collaboratively with the participants, I opted to explicitly state several important ethical considerations related to time commitment, ownership of materials produced, group accountability, power relations, and so on. To make the demands of the research visible to participants, consent forms clearly outlined the limitations of confidentiality, time commitment, level of involvement in participation of the study, and the study's purpose.

In preparation for the study and throughout the interviews, a main ethical question attended to was how power relations are dictated by the positioning of the researcher in relation to the participants. I am positioned as the sole researcher, and while collaboration has been central to this methodology, I am the one interpreting and writing the findings. Therefore, ethical considerations included the following: How are the people who participate in the study affected by the process and content? How are the stories they share honoured? How do I write myself into this study? How I am positioned and how do I position myself? How will my location be shaped by my access to different subject positions, including English born, Euro-Canadian, (first-time) researcher, student, family/youth counsellor, woman, white, and raised in my family of origin? Some tensions remained throughout the process because these questions of subject positioning are not easily resolvable. Different conversations required different attention to how I approach

my position. For example, in the initial interviews with participants, I made sure to clearly state my position as coming to this research from the role of student/practitioner and I clarified that I myself am not a foster care alumnus. The tension that resulted from this position was uncomfortable for me at times, and my own embodied response of ongoing ache in my stomach reminded me to consider power relations in researcher/participant relationships. In this piece of research I am not sharing my own life stories but documenting those of other people. The risk is that I somehow contribute to the problem of constructing youth in care as “other.” I have been consulting with the collaborators throughout the process, but I am still the sole researcher and writer in the crystallization and dissemination of results. I am not entirely comfortable with this tension. Reynolds (2010) speaks to this embodied sense of ethics:

I trust that community workers hold embodied knowings of their own relationships with ethics. Acting in ways that transgress ethics is often experienced as discomfoting. I welcome this discomfort as a resource to the practitioner, a communication from the body which requires not a solution but an attending-to. (p. 100)

This discomfort is something that I will hold to scrutiny if I ever engage in the act of research again.

Structuring safety: An ongoing conversation

Collaborators were asked to share very personal stories, artwork, and remembered experiences with the child welfare system. There were limitations to confidentiality because one of the sessions involved participating in a group setting. Therefore, particular attention to confidentiality, respect, and power needed to be paid. I engaged with this idea of ethical research through the writings of Vikki Reynolds (2010), who stresses the importance of “Structuring

Safety” as a process of co-creating/negotiating safety in community work. This process includes providing structure in one-on-one interviews and in group spaces and clarifying limitations to safety and confidentiality while at the same time being accountable to upholding that safety. During the group conversation, I was hoping to spend more time at the beginning of the process tending to this co-creation, but I think a common understanding of respect toward the conversation was established quickly by all the group members. I invited ideas for structuring safety after explaining the limitations and importance of group confidentiality and of honouring each other’s stories. KD suggested that everyone listen to each other speak, and also be cautious not to interrupt each other. Everyone agreed with these suggestions. Trust, respect, and collaboration underlined every conversation. I aimed to be present, engaged, and courteous to the collaborators rather than being limited by the imposed structure of predetermined questions and process. Two participants commented on the absence of structure during interviews. At the end of a one-on-one interview, AB commented on her preference for unstructured interviews: “Things aren’t structured, which is what I am used to is having structured interviews, which really bothers me” (AB, T1, p. 25). KD commented on her own experience of being an interviewer and what she thinks is important: being “present”; being “mentally on”; and “letting the youth connect however they’d like to.

Like even the way you are with me. It’s great. I mean, you have a pencil in your hand, you know? You’re gonna be listening to me more. Plus it’s recorded so you’re not focusing on that ... because I notice when you write stuff down. (KD, T1, p. 7)

These conversations were considered throughout all of my other interviews. From that point on, I was aware every time I paused to write something down, and instead of referring to

my notes I focused on maintaining conversational style and staying present, thus curbing the risk of falling into the rigidity of more hierarchical interviewer/interviewee, knower/known interactions.

Methodological limitations

Although I recruited widely, including in many community centers/programs, through community leaders, and in several programs at the University of Victoria and Camosun College, I only interviewed participants who contacted me directly. In addition to that potentially limiting factor to recruitment, all of the interviews were conducted at the University of Victoria. I did not search for harder-to-reach participants or hold interviews in the downtown core, therefore recruitment could not reach anyone who might be more isolated, like the underrepresented population of street-engaged young people in Victoria. This was a limitation imposed by my original ethics application in which I specified my interview site as the University of Victoria. As I began the interviews, I realized that this specification might be too limiting and then applied for a revision of ethics so as to be able to conduct research in other areas of Victoria. However, by the time my revised ethics application was approved, I had almost finished the interviews and I had five keen, dedicated participants. Though the scale and demographic of this study may be viewed as a limitation, it also became a strength in that the participants who came forward were enthusiastic and educated, and they spoke to the intersections of categories of youth, adult, alumni and leader all blurring, contrasting, and becoming complementary to the site of rich critical discussions and collaborative inquiry. The participants all came voluntarily and made the first contact; they were motivated to engage in an arts-based, emergent, collaborative process as well as to meet, not only individually with me, but with other care alumni.

Chapter summary

This methodology chapter explained the path that was taken in the study and the frame used to invite complicated conversations, engage with embodied meaning generation, and facilitate a collective interpretive process. The next chapter introduces the medley of stories and art work, exploring how we talk about, think about, construct, position, and work with children and youth in care. These stories also convey deeper meanings: what it is to be seen, to be loved; the importance of dignity, of connection to others.

Chapter 5: “Foster Child”

In this chapter, I present a first round of data analysis focused on unpacking representations of the “foster child.” In engaging in rhizomatic analysis, I do not claim a stable or representative philosophical position but rather am attending to the movement between differing ideas, how they emerge in relation to art and text, and the spaces in-between concepts. The interactions between art and text invite complexity, and through this movement research becomes a “lived endeavour” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). This lived endeavour of art and story thread together and knit into the narratives of participants, of being made “foster child,” “ghost,” “zombie,” becoming resistance, becoming connected, becoming complex; they create openings for multiple knowledges. As outlined in the previous chapter, and divergent from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of becoming, Foucault’s (1982, 1987) ideas of the subject, power, and resistance are explored. I read these Foucauldian concepts in relation to the Deleuzo-Guattarian understandings of becoming, which reject humanist notions of being and suggest that “all ‘beings’ are just relatively stable moments in a flow of becoming life” and that there is nothing other than these flows of becoming (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 125). The layout of this chapter embodies my rhizomatic analytical process, in that it shows the relationship of the quotes to the art, and these to the presentation of possible interpretations and theoretical framings on my part. The chapter becomes a rhizome, a map of analysis, looking at lines of power, lines of flight, and how they connect to both constrain and create other possibilities. The map illuminates the myriad beginnings of analysis, highlighting the themes that arose across multiple conversations with participants. Any of these themes can be positioned in relationship with each other and a new question or thought may arise. The rhizomatic nature of these maps allows for complexity and a journey that is manifold, encouraging the exploration of lines of power,

I didn't actually know that people had those constructs. It didn't make any sense to me! I didn't even realize I didn't want to be called a 'foster child' because I didn't want to be labelled period. I didn't know about these ideas of foster children until not that long ago. I didn't know that that was like a blanket thing for a lot of people to think that way!" (ER, T1, p. 1)

Here, ER struggles with the realization that she is being *made into* a label that "didn't make any sense" to her. She talks about this label carrying meanings and assumptions and that this may be how others perceive her when they hear that she has been a foster child. She connects this label of foster child to how she sees blanket statements operating on a larger scale, stating that "it wasn't until recently that I've been discovering the idea of blanket statements in general, and that that's quite prevalent in our society"(ER, T2, p. 1).

Foucault's concept of "dividing practice" fits with what ER terms "blanket statements." In the categorization that describes and separates a particular group of people, "the subject is either divided inside himself or from others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 327). This example exemplifies the concept of dividing practice, and is supported by the multiple expressions of it found woven throughout the collaborators text and art. Also here and throughout the stories are examples of resistance: "I didn't want to be labelled period"! As attempts to categorize occur, so do counter-stories of resistance to labelling. KD recounts something similar: "Identifying myself as a youth in care was never something that stood out for me" (KD, T1, p. 2). This story re-enacts the participants' refusal to partake in the dividing practice of category-making.

"Just a kid"

When attempting to share her beliefs and concerns with the professionals in her life, and about her wants and needs of daily living, ER described multiple experiences of being positioned

as not credible. Credibility in this case is lost in the categorization of “child” and made inseparable from the subject position of “foster child.” She states, “They do not care what I am telling them, they do not realize that what I am telling them is true.” ER points to how she felt she was seen by saying, “they thought I was just a kid” (ER, T1, p. 3). The category of “just a kid” undermines the credibility of the subject. This is typified when ER speaks of social workers’ responses to her complaint about her foster placement and her request to go into independent living:

Without even having spoken to this woman, or coming into the home, or speaking to me face to face at any point in time, their assertion was that I was lying, that I was being bratty, that I was being completely belligerent, and that I had no idea about what I was talking about! So that was their response to me, and so that was really frustrating. (ER, T1, p. 4)

As ER describes how her credibility is questioned based on assertions that she was “lying,” “bratty,” “belligerent,” and “had no idea what she was talking about.” She is positioned as an untrustworthy, non-knowing subject who complains needlessly, and her attempts to advocate for herself are ignored. ER also identifies “not being listened to” as one of the “biggest problems” (T1 p. 3) for her in foster care, again fitting with previous concepts of “foster child,” as “just a kid” whose voice is chronically minimized or ignored. MA connects “not being listened to,” to a realization of her rights:

I have a very big sense of right and wrong and when I was like, “wait a minute! Something like this did happen here! This isn’t right, this isn’t how you’re supposed to treat people!” and when you take it to your social worker. It’s like, you’re not listened to at all, ever! (MA, T2, p. 1)

This engagement with rights reappears throughout the analysis, emphasizing an important theme that emerged as each of the participants described situations where they were mistreated, where violence occurred, and where they advocated for themselves. ER had a similar experience to MA when trying to assert rights with social workers. She states: “they wouldn’t listen to me!” and “my voice did not make any difference.” She stresses that, “whenever I had some kind of issue, being abused or something was happening in one of the houses it didn’t matter.” These examples illuminate the difficulty of building a sense of community and relationships in a context of pervasive silencing/erasure/denial. JP also speaks to certain categorizations, such as “foster parent,” that shift child/adult relations into institutionalized relations of power and place “professionals” into positions of seemingly absolute authority with the right to “run the lives” of foster children. She said, “These people call the shots. They run our lives and they’re suddenly our parents, right?” (JP, I1, p. 2). These examples underscore again the power of dividing practices that reaffirm the unquestioned value of “expert” knowledge, while infantilizing young people as void of knowledge and authority over their own lives.

Absence of information

For the collaborators, important information was often absent or left out. There was missing information about why they were being removed from their family, why they were moving foster homes, about background, cultural ancestry and community roots, how to access biological family, and about their foster parents.

JP still does not have clear information of why she and her siblings were put into care and why they were moved so often. “But we still don’t ... like, us kids still don’t know what the driving factors were. Why did this change keep happening, right? Why is it?” (JP, I1, p. 7). ER describes a similar experience to JP, not knowing why she was put into foster care throughout

her time there: “Like I didn’t know for many, many years that my mother was a drug addict, and that’s why I was put into foster care” (ER, T2, p. 11).

ER describes information about her cultural background that she was not given as a child:

I didn’t even know I was Native until I was 18. No one even notified me! (laughs)

You know? I always had a draw towards it and I always had visions and dreams

and all the social workers, unless they’re on their own spiritual path, have no clue

what that means! (ER, T1, p. 6)

In ER’s example, the lack of information provided about Indigenous ancestry is endemic of overt assimilation practices of the Canadian child welfare system. Over decades, Indigenous children have been denied access to information and rights in efforts to disconnect them from ancestral rights and belonging as seen through the colonial use of residential schools (Richardson & Nelson, 2007). The hegemonic control of the state over access to basic cultural information is representative of a very deliberate and intimately damaging policy of colonial assimilation and forced marginalization that continues to impact thousands of Indigenous families. Yet, despite living through these policies of erasure, ER shares an embodied spiritual knowing of her Native background, through the counter-story of “always [having] a draw towards it” and of “always [having] visions and dreams.” At the same time, this experience of spiritual knowing was often overshadowed by a lack of information and access. For ER as for many of the collaborators, the dividing categorization of “foster child” serves to legitimize limits to familial and cultural/historical information and becomes a limitation to having influence on the decisions made about one’s own life. Again we see how these categorical shifts differ for adults who have access to information, highlighting how policy, institutions and professionals construct their expert roles with children in care.

Becoming Ghost



Figure 5. Ghost by MA

“I have always felt like a ghost. That’s why I have to talk about it all the time. So other people don’t.” (MA, GI, p.48)

When discussing this idea of becoming a foster child, powerful imagery of becoming invisible and not being seen or heard – of becoming a ghost – arose in both the art work and the ensuing conversations. It was brought together in our group conversation during our final meeting. MA’s art piece evokes an assemblage of becoming ghost, not being heard, feeling loved, and the label “foster child”. During a one-to-one interview and then again later in our group interview, MA spoke at length about feeling like a ghost when in foster homes:

You’re a ghost. You are put into these homes but you never belong there. And holidays come, and their family has come in, and you’re just there. You are not heard, not seen ... you’re just there. You know when people want you to disappear you are really easily made to disappear and when you’re growing up and trying to become a productive person in society, you are a ghost! (MA T1 p. 7)

That theme of becoming a ghost found resonance in multiple stories throughout the interviews. Different/similar terms like being made “invisible,” becoming “zombie,” or the “wall,” were also used to describe this sense of being/becoming. All carried the weight of not “being seen or heard; being treated like a person” (MA, T1, p. 10) and of becoming foster child; becoming other, a thing. ER describes the challenge of feeling real when you are not seen or heard by those around you:

You don’t really want to be alive anymore ... you’re not even living, you’re like a ZOMBIE! You’re HALF ALIVE, walking around in this skin ... but you don’t know why you are in it. Why you’re even here on the planet. (ER, T1, p. 17)

These quotes emphasize the pervasive sense of invisibility experienced by many of the participants. Ghost and zombie describe a sensation of not being fully alive, not mattering, of being a shadow, not a full person, of passing through rooms and lives without full impact. Many

of the collaborators talk about feeling invisible and nonexistent across various sites in their lives, particularly in their negotiations with service providers and caregivers. “You feel like you don’t exist. You’re not even a real anything, you could just be a wall (laughs)” (ER, G1, p. 19).

JP describes her negotiations with multiple caregivers: “It felt like they saw us as like a stray, like a stray pet that they were helping for a while” (JP, I1, p. 1). Later in the same interview, JP discussed being treated like a “victim” by social workers and caregivers. Her resistance to this was evident throughout the conversations. The counter story of “tough kid” is always present:

All of them treated us like we were victims. I had that feeling ... like we should be feeling sorry for ourselves. For me, I was a pretty tough kid. And most of us as kids wanted to be tough. We had to be resilient to get through all this. We’re fine right? We had that front like ... “yeah everything’s fine.” (JP, I1, p. 7)

Some participants discussed how difficult it was to be seen as complex and present when their presence was so often ignored. As ER describes, when you are systematically ignored, you “become a wall,” “shut down,” feel not “important”: “You’re just there! And it was really weird. So I just shut down. I totally shut down and didn’t interact or really think of things. I just kind of realized that I wasn’t you know... important.” (ER, G1, p. 47).

Expectations

The pathologization and victim-blaming that is imposed on young people who “shut down” as a result of chronic erasure/abuse/silencing leads into another recurring theme: others’ expectations. The collaborators discuss this theme several times throughout the group interview, examining the impact of minimal expectations from caregivers which in turn limit which subject positions participants can access. This theme of expectation also extends to the importance of

creating space and opportunity to succeed by way of expectation. JP speaks to this theme by describing others' treatment of her as being broken or not capable:

Like I was saying earlier, when people expect so little from you and they and they treat you like you're not capable or like you're broken, it's really easy to fall into that and be like, okay, meet those expectations. It's not that difficult right? (JP, GI, p. 13)

JP goes on to describe the importance of respect in relationships, and how this influences others' expectations. She shares that at some point, "you wanna do good. But that's a more complicated issue. Like, because if the person asking you is someone you don't respect in the first place, it's not gonna matter" (JP, GI, p. 13). ER describes the impact of how she was positioned in her foster home, seen as "cross" or "cruel," and in that process, learning to "self regulate":

But I actually started to believe ... maybe there is something wrong with me so I started to be really quiet. And not knowing how to interact and was feeling incredibly insecure although I was already feeling insecure. (ER, T1, p. 11)

Foucault's (1982) third mode of being made object, Subjectification, describes how humans turn themselves into subjects. In ER's last quote, she states: "I actually started to believe that something was wrong with me." She describes a sense of feeling different, "insecure" and that she changed the way she acted as a result of this surveillance by becoming "quiet." For most participants, "becoming ghost, becoming invisible" was shaped by almost daily experiences of "not belonging," just "being there," "made to disappear" not "being treated like a person," being a "blank slate" and "not seen" –this impacted every aspect of their lives, including education, peer relations, sense of belonging, sense of self, their abilities to advocate for themselves, access

to information about their lives, placements and lack of control over basic decisions. This process of being made “other” powerfully limits access to multiple complex subject positions; it forecloses other possibilities, making it that much more difficult to find alternatives. And, as discussed in the following section, those who do find alternative subject positions are labelled as “deviant” and “abnormal.”

Surveillance: From invisible to ultra visible

AB notes: “When you’re in care and stuff you get scrutinized a little bit more” (AB, I2, p. 1). MA describes this scrutiny, having her personal information hijacked and how that influenced her sense of trust: “How can you trust someone who’s talking bad about other foster children or you? I’m not trusting that!” (MA, T2, p. 3).

There has been a lot of times where you’re out in public and the foster parent will be like, “these are my foster kids. And that’s that one’s story and that’s that one’s story.” and you’re like, “Hey! Hi, that’s my business and not everyone else’s.” Or they are talking to their friends and you hear it. Or talking to their family members. That hurts ... Like, I didn’t need everyone in my church to know that I was molested. It was like dinner table conversation. I’d be sitting right there.

That’s my business. I didn’t want them to know. That’s not fair. (MA, T2, p. 3)

ER tells a story of her foster parent who was also a psychologist, who worked with foster children and held the status of “expert.” ER discusses the power that gave this foster parent, and how this power in turn produced a very intense description of voicelessness: “This was someone who had credibility: she had university degrees on her wall” (ER, T1, p. 4):

There’s only one point she got outwardly aggressive with me. At another point I found her in my room going through my things. There were a lot of boundaries

being crossed and things and because she had all these credentials, her voice was more powerful than mine. That was really frustrating for me. (ER, GI, p. 21)

ER went on to describe her knowing that “something wasn’t right” but not knowing how to say, “Well this person has credentials and you are favouring her in a biased way compared to me who is a youth and who doesn’t have anything” (ER, GI, p. 21). Credentials are how we come to separate the illegitimate/voiceless non-knowers, from expert knowers who have the authority to make decisions. The theme of knowing will be discussed again in later sections of this chapter.

Becoming bits of paper: The pay cheque, the psych assessment, the file...

Money and the theme of becoming pay cheque came up in most of the interviews. JP describes knowing that a pay cheque was relevant: “I don’t know how the idea got into our heads that foster parents use us for money” (JP, GI, p. 8). Similarly AB talked about a shift that occurred with her foster parent when her Continuing Care Order was granted:

Her mood honestly changed. From her being like, “oh, we can work on this together.” And then boom, as soon as I became a CCO it was like “cha ...ching! You are just my pay cheque!” (AB, GI, p. 11)

MA describes how she remembers finances being allocated across her memory of several foster homes:

I know that foster parents are given a certain amount of money and that money is meant to go to a lot of different things. The majority of the foster parents don’t do that. That’s their pay cheque, that’s how they view it. You know it’s hard to see their kids get new clothes and new stuff at the beginning of the year. They say

“well ... you’re not going to school why should you get it?” I said “No, I’m not going to school. What am I meant to do, enrol myself?” (MA, T1, p. 10)

This quote draws a connection between finances and relationship to caregivers and how the complexity of “becoming paycheque” may occur. Here “the paycheque” illuminates an interesting paradox, of being made into something that you cannot yourself access. MA has described the process of power circulating through socioculturally-defined indicators of achievement and the obvious limitations of accessibility to this achievement. Here the “choice” of not going to school is positioned as a fault of the child’s rather than a hindrance by the event/situation, a socioeconomic disadvantage of not having someone to register you as a direct result of how children are positioned in foster care.

Becoming label: “Liar” and the “bad kid”

Throughout the transcripts are multiple examples of “becoming label” through divisions of time, space and classification that serve to minimize, pathologize and discredit young people in care. As AB aptly reflects, “I’m actually all too familiar with the labels, because I’ve been labelled a few times” (AB, T1, p. 6). This next quote by AB also introduces the stereotype of the “angry little kid:”

I was your stereotypical angry little kid that shut down on everybody and pretty much flipped my middle finger to the world and was like, screw you all! That was a big label that I had: “problem child.” (AB, T2, p. 5)



Figure 6. Mask by AB

AB completed this mask while she discussed the theme of labels in care. The label “problem child” is a theme that shows up throughout the interviews, and it will resurface later in relation to my analysis of medicalized terms such as depression and deficit focused terms such as “angry child.” These terms are used to medicalize and psychologize young people in care, and they become recoded through the diagnosis of mental health disorders such as oppositional defiance disorder. Power operates through dividing practice, the process of individualizing young people and putting constraints on people and bodies through categorization and medication. In response to the common statement that as a child, “it’s not your fault,” MA said:

I think you're told that the first few times when you're a little kid. But then when you grow up, different things that social workers say and foster parents say ... make you feel like it is your fault. Like the judgements that they put on you ... "well I guess I am bad then" you're not told those things like you're a pre-teen or a teenager. You are bad. You're just bad and that's why you're here. (MA, T2, p. 6)

This quote typifies sociocultural concepts of developmental progression, which signify the transition from "innocent child" to "manipulative teen." A child is seen as in need of protection, a product of a unit, not at fault, whereas a youth should be self-sufficient, self-determined, a citizen-in-becoming. Here, the "under-performing youth in care" is contrasted against the norm of the liberal humanist subject, a middle class, able, straight, white youth who is "rational" and can "succeed." If a young person cannot measure up to this standard they are damaged, broken, mendacious.

When discussing labels, AB immediately suggests "failure" in relation to her experience with classmates at school. "FAILURE, that's a big one or that like, your parents are failures and stuff like this" (AB, T1, p. 5). Not only is AB given this label of "failure" but this is also extended to her family, becoming an intergenerational legacy. Most participants spoke to this intergenerational "vicious cycle" throughout the interviews; they described growing up under the threat of becoming like their family, who had been classified as unable, incapable, etc. MA spoke to this: "You're told you're stupid and that you're going to end up like your parents" (MA, T1, p. 12). When I inquired into where this message came from, MA describes hearing it from a few different foster parents and social workers. In a few conversations, collaborators mention

that the label often came before the associated behaviour/pattern. Here MA describes her experience of shifting labels:

As soon as people, like police officers or schools, heard that you were a kid in care, automatically you were a bad child and there was something was wrong with you. You were looked at completely different. (MA, T1, p. 3)

MA continues, interpreting interactions with her friends' parents to mean that "they didn't want you to be associating with their children. It's obviously something you did to be in foster care," even though, she exclaimed, "it's not true, it's not true at all" (MA, T1, p. 3). MA pointed out that this label of "bad child" operates in comparison to ideas of "good child." She describes her own realization of this binary when compared to a friend not in care who automatically had a "good girl" label: "But she was the bad one! I was always like, "maybe we shouldn't do this ... She was way wilder than I was!" (MA, T1, p. 3). When positioned in a binary category, it is possible to look from not only the category in which one is positioned but from the position of its binary opposite (Davies, 2010). Here it is possible to see the divisions of space and status based on the label of "foster child" and "bad child" and the association between them. This quote is a good example of how individualism circulates through these labels, placing responsibility onto the child and limiting access to alternative subject positions. Even though MA describes a sense of knowing the label was not true, she could not always shift it, particularly with certain people who sat in positions of authority.

Building on the same idea, KD discusses her thoughts on becoming a part of a group of "kids using drugs" where she describes falling "into quite a delinquent group" and building what she describes as "a niche to suit that label":

When I lived in East Van I was more high-functioning. When I moved to the island that's when I got into drugs and delinquent behaviour. There was comfort in that. There I was able to connect with other people, who were able to share some of the same kind of dysfunction that I was feeling, so the label, it wasn't so much that but, kids using drugs that was that label. (KD, T1, p. 2)

KD mentions the terms “high functioning,” “delinquent behaviour,” “dysfunction,” and “kids using drugs.” All of these terms are indicative of some kind of comparison to common sociocultural conceptions of “normal” that are heavily psychologized. But here KD also points to a connection and a sense of belonging that surpasses this prescriptive identity within a group of “outsiders.” This is explored in the next chapter under the sub-title of *Becoming Community*.

Normal, utopia

The process of labelling occurs in relation to an idea of “normal,” connected to ideas of a white, straight, able, rational, autonomous individual, and the dream of a middle class nuclear family. Skott-Myhre (2008) describes the concept of utopia as unreal places that do not exist, suggesting that “they are ideal forms that hold a relation to society either as a perfection of certain existing forms or as an alternative to the current configuration of the social normal” (p. 87). Utopias, he says,

are certainly a kind of map. But it is an odd mapping of a world that doesn't exist.

That is not to say however that utopic maps don't have political or actual force.

Indeed, one might even say that they have force well beyond what might be

expected given their mythical nature. (p. 87)

In this next quote, JP talks about negotiating utopia with her social workers and a set of implied norms that to her did not make sense:

I didn't feel that I was bad off ... 'cause I didn't know any different. It was kind of like they were talking about this UTOPIA. Talking about this idea of what things should be like. And I don't even understand that. It's like, they're seeing this and I'm like "what are you looking at?" Right? I had no idea what they were talking about so ... (JP, I1, p. 8)

JP describes how she experienced her social workers' ideas of "normal" and "the way things 'should' be." There is a "mom and dad and everyone is happy and you have your pet dog who's happy and healthy!" (JP, T1, p. 8). As ER stresses, dualistic thinking can serve to divide "normal" from not:

I lived in a sort of fantasy world for a long time, because I couldn't identify my emotions or feelings, all I know is I felt bad. And I didn't realize that I just wanted to be normal. And my focus was about fitting in. I wasn't even conscious of why that was my focus for a long time. I realized that it became my focus because if I don't fit in then I'm not going to be accepted and then I'm gonna have to move again and feel rejected. So you realize that you're like a puppy at the pound... you kind of look cute and do cute things and I couldn't quite express myself to people clearly. (ER, T1, p. 14)

Here ER describes a process of comparing herself to an idealized definition of "normal" and begins to self-regulate to meet this standard. At the same time this becoming "cute," like a "puppy at the pound," serves to defend her position and potentially protect her from rejection or even the risk that comes with moving to an unknown foster home. Though the concepts of "normal" and "utopia" are virtual by nature of their machinery, they are forces that influence and

affect young people with multiple professional caregivers through the mechanics of “measuring up.”

Classification and medication

In the conversations about labels and being made foster child, being sad, being angry, and unruly behaviour, the participants also frequently mentioned medication. Conversations about medication and diagnoses were scattered throughout the interviews and, occasionally, strong opinions of medication’s effects/affects were made. As Skott-Myhre (2008) points out:

Youth as developmentally defined bodies are subject to chemical intervention at an increasing rate of frequency for behaviours the dominant society finds troubling, such as not paying attention in school, being sad and withdrawn, or being defiant.” (p. 63)

In a one-on-one interview, I asked MA, “What are your thoughts on medicating?”

I am 100% against it! After my mom died when I was 14 they made me see a kid shrink and within 5 minutes of meeting me they said I was depressed and they put me on antidepressants. This was before they found out that kids shouldn’t be on them. And they had me on the highest adult dosage. I wasn’t depressed, I was sad. But did any of them take the time to talk to me about why I was sad? No! They decided to medicate me. I was like a walking zombie when I took my pills ... some days I would fake it. But there were group homes that were very vigilant about me taking it and would stand over me taking it. (MA, T1, p. 10)

When I inquired further, she stated:

I couldn’t feel anything at all. And I don’t think that’s the right way to deal with sadness to not feel it because then you’re not being human. You have to feel it to

get through it. That's how we deal with things. You can deal with the sadness, you can cry about it. You can be angry about it. But feel it! Not put a band-aid on it. Because once those anti-depressants come out of your system you're gonna feel it anyways. (MA, T1, p. 11)

MA's thoughts on medication illuminate the use of drugs to quiet "inconvenient" emotions, another form of institutional control and discipline of unruly bodies. For MA, medication was not the answer and she knew this and resisted. She describes knowing that she was "sad," wanting to "feel it," "cry about it," "be angry about it," to get through it, knowing that the sadness was something that she would eventually feel anyway, and that antidepressants were just a "band-aid."

MA spoke passionately about supporting someone close to her through withdrawal from an "alcohol problem." This person had been to see a doctor who had prescribed antidepressants. Her response to this was "good job, give him something to overdose on? Thank you SO much!" (MA, T1, p. 10). The medicalization of her family member's substance use provides insight into how a standardized treatment such as bio-chemical intervention can be hazardous when the context of the situation is missed by the professional. Though, as Skott-Myhre (2008) points out, to move away from individualistic bio-medical mapping of the body and situate the body within the environment is to "struggle against the status quo" (p. 80).

Similar to MA's example, JP spoke of observing care providers' approach to "problems" that her siblings were facing, and the role of medication in mediating these problems. She described that some professionals put her siblings "on Ritalin and the next one would take them off it. It was all over the place." She described these professionals as focusing "on their issues" (JP, T1, p. 9). In a different interview, ER shared her views of how Ritalin is used:

I really believe that the reason that Ritalin was made was to shut people up! To shut youth up! To shut them up and not have their evolution and their openness be a distraction for others! I really don't believe in it as being suitable in any way or helpful in anyway for anybody to be shutting children up! And I really think that a lot of people are living by this model ... be quiet, don't say anything. This is so destructive ... so harmful! (ER, T1, p. 9)

The interactions between classification and medicating serve to further individualize, separate and divide from "normal." As ER declares, medication can become a part of institutional control. ER's description fits with Foucault's (1977) analysis of multiple and often subtle methods of disciplining unruly bodies and rendering bodies as docile, which in turn serves to uphold the authority of institutions and experts to decide what is right, and what is wrong.

Space

The examples of control and resistance of young people's bodies cannot be understood outside of an analysis of the spaces that these bodies occupy. Spaces -particularly institutional spaces- feature prominently in many of the examples of being made into specific kinds of problematic subjects. Invisibility and these shifts in relation to others and subsequent shifts in categorization can all be seen as spatial. ER portrays an absence of proximity to other people, of people occupying shared space, or spending time together: "They didn't even want to be around me ... they didn't want to hang out with me or do anything"(ER, G1, p. 47). Space is not necessarily a neutral plane; it is complex, often used to the benefit of dominant regimes. This may occur with certain classifications of people often designated as belonging to certain geographies or landscapes (Skott-Myhre, 2008). Certainly, the examples provided by some

participants of being removed from connection to their Indigenous lands and communities reflects the importance of these spaces as critical to survival and thriving outside the norm.

Divisions of physical space

In a one-to-one interview MA retells a recent conversation that she had with a foster parent while helping that parent to prepare her home for a foster child to move in. She told the woman not to buy a specific type of bed because she saw it as “a foster kid bed, I don’t call them captains beds. They are foster kids beds” (MA, T2, p. 11):

Every single foster bed, every single one, exactly the fucking same! Drawers underneath so it’s easy, you don’t have to have a dresser in the room! If you just put drawers underneath. Kids can put their clothes in and take them out as soon as they leave ...You never had to unpack, there’s no attachment, nothing that the kid would like. Standard everything! It’s just standard everything! (MA, T2, p. 10)

Through MA’s description of the standardization of children’s bedrooms it is possible to see how power operates through space and signifies (un)belonging or (un)permanency in a home: “You never have to unpack,” “there’s no attachment.”

In the group interview KD discusses her thoughts about separation of space in her foster home, her voice rising above the murmur of the group. She begins by saying, “I’ve got something to say about privacy and boundaries and household space for people.” She describes having “a really great experience in foster care” but still experiencing a separation of space: “The top floor was kind of their space” (KD, GI, p. 13). She goes on to describe how some spaces in the home were not available to her, marking a clear distinction between “family” and “fostered,” while other communal spaces enabled a process of relationship building and quality time together:

I wouldn't really use the top floor. Although we might have a cuddle fest on the couch or play scrabble and drink tea as a family and stuff, there was still like an unwritten boundary and stuff that I wouldn't cross because it's still not quite family." (KD,GI, p. 13)

AB relays her experience of a foster parent giving her space, and describes the context of why she needed it after a previous experience with a challenging foster home and a transition from an in-patient mental health program: "(I) was still shutting down and would get frustrated and was always in my room not wanting to be around anybody." AB describes this space as "given," subtly implying the boundary between "adult" and "child" and highlighting who has the power to give or take away space: "She gave me that space" (AB, T1, p. 13)

Space and community

JP describes being removed from "home" and how this impacted her sense of having support at school. This action accompanied the removal from her mother, but she is also removed from her self-described home: her school. In this conversation, JP described the shift of space into a new territory, out of a space that she had considered sacred: "There was a time when they came to our elementary school and they took us out of class and were trying to take us out of school. They apparently were removing us from our home." JP describes the shift in relationship with her principal: "The principal is supposed to be this good person. Like he physically picked me up and put me over his shoulder and carried me out while I was kicking and screaming." JP went on to describe the surveillance of the event of being carried out of school and how it changed her sense of her school space:

Through the hallways! Classrooms could see this you know! This was a devastating experience for me because I was like, "hey! I'm a good student!" I

found schools to be like my HOME. I was always looking forward to school more than home. I hated going home and I was always excited to go to school right?

And this happened and it was like ... Wow, I am really on my own! (JP, T1, p. 6)

This example shows a drastic rupture in JP's sense of belonging across multiple spaces of school/home, peer group, and teachers, made even more difficult by its extreme public nature. School -a site of safety, for being a "good student," formerly "home"- is irrevocably changed by this event.

MA raises concerns about the proximity of youth social work offices to probation officers when she was in care. She describes this arrangement as "a complete set up, you go from one office to the next." She explores how this works to categorize young people. She describes the "child" and "teenager social workers" offices as being "completely separate" but the "teenager one was in the same office as the probation officers" (MA, T2, p. 7). Here, multiple apparatus of state intervention and surveillance of youth bodies overlap under one space.

In a similar vein, support facilities such as Mental Health in-patient facilities and professionals' offices were discussed by each of the participants. For some, these facilities were used as a threat of forced intervention, such as in ER's explanation: "They always threatened to send me to the mental ward" (ER, G1, p. 11). Others described the space itself as signifying disembodiment, like "some office somewhere with white walls" (KD, T2, p. 4). MA remembered visiting an in-patient child and youth mental health facility as a child, describing it as "not a place for children":

Me and my kids drove by there the other day and they asked me what it was. I am very open with them and talk to them about everything. And I said, "well, that's where they put kids who are sick." And my son's like, "well, what is it like?" and

I'm like, "well your uncle has been in there and it's just like jail cells. It's like jail cells for children. It's sad. It's a sad place. And I think it's not good. And I think that those kids just need to be hugged (laughs, cries) they just need a hug." (T1, MA, p. 6)

MA equates the facility to jail cells, speaking to the restrictions placed on children through the orientation of space and the separation from connection and life. This is also contrasted by her compassion, her wanting kids to have hugs, an idea that ruptures the clinical sterile space of many in-patient mental health facilities. Interestingly, AB described a similar inpatient mental health setting as somewhere that she felt that she could "rebuild." The notion of rebuilding/remaking as a form of resistance is explored further in the next chapter.

Time and space

Time became an important theme and was raised in both individual and group interviews. In the group interview, MA described her orientation in the present, as never planning too far ahead: "You just think about the now and how to get through today or what I'm gonna do next week. You never think too far in advance" (MA, G1, p. 44). This comment sparked a flurry of responses. Everyone began to talk at once, heads nodding, enthralled by this concept. MA contrasted a present-orientation to the experience of kids who are not in care:

They're not worrying about where they are going to live next week or tomorrow, they're not worrying about if they're getting food or if some family member is going to die or if someone is going to come and hurt them. They're not worried about those things. (MA, G1, p. 44)

ER's response to this idea propelled this discussion of future: "I didn't think I was real, I don't know if there's anything in the future! There's just right now, and right now isn't so great!" (ER, GI, p. 44)

Young people in foster care stop receiving support at age 19 and experience a categorical shift from youth to adult overnight. This was MA's memory of turning 19: "My social worker drove me to the welfare office, dropped me off and left me there." She describes being "pregnant," "scared" and having to sit through "meetings with guys who had just gotten out of jail." She proclaims, "I don't think that foster kids should have to deal with that. Like, when other kids leave home they're not driven to the welfare office and dropped off!" (MA, T2, p. 22). Here is further evidence of how drastic ruptures are laid over young people in care, with the expectation that they will not only adapt, but become self-sufficient "citizens."

Food space

Some of the participants emphasized the impact of limited accessibility to food as being important to a sense of (un)belonging. MA describes encountering the common rule that "if you're not home at meal time, you don't eat" (MA, T2, p. 12). MA also described cupboards being separate for family and foster children and how complex this became. ER talked about her experience of this in a home that she lived in for six years: "He would separate everything and lock food away. So me and my sister couldn't eat. I lived on toast and Kraft Dinner" (ER, GI, p. 45). Separation of the quality of food showed up in several other conversations. In the group interview, ER, MA, and AB discussed their memory of the quality of the food that they had access to. ER stated, "we ate shitty food, like McDonalds and stuff." ER describes the food source as being "pathetic" and suggests that her foster parents were "skimping." For MA it was "Mr. Noodles." She laughed as she shared, "I didn't know what an avocado was until I was 27. I

was like, ‘what’s that?’” (MA, GI, p. 47). AB described a very different experience of food, casting her foster mom as being “all about the healthy” (AB, GI, p. 47). These examples illuminate how food connects to relationships with caregivers, to the pay cheque, to the value of health, and to the value of young people’s well-being, which in turn impacts growing bodies and a sense of being alive, worthwhile, and important.

Safe space: Becoming chessboard, a number, a file

Many of our conversations focused on definitions and experiences of protection, safety, and risk. In the group interview, MA described her experience of protection in the foster care system and the challenges of finding safety:

And then you’re taken out of homes because it’s unsafe. A lot of kids are taken out their home because it is unsafe and put into homes that are unsafe. They might as well be nowhere (laughs). (MA, GI, p. 22)

ER responded to MA’s story by describing how she saw many young people respond to risk in care:

Many of my friends lived on the street because they would refuse to live in foster homes. They lived in a pack because at least they knew they weren’t going to sexually abuse each other, likely they wouldn’t kill each other. There was more protection. (ER, GI, p. 23)

ER went on to describe her own experience of living with a family who was going to adopt her: “There was no protection, there was no potential for me voicing my needs and saying: ‘I think I could be in a better home’.” In a one-to-one interview, JP expressed similar concerns: “We felt like we didn’t really have a say with who we wanted to live with. What our lives were going to be like. We felt helpless!” (JP, T1, p. 22)

Three of the participants describe being moved to multiple homes during their stay in foster care. MA describes this process of being moved as being “kind of like a chess board. I’m gonna put this one here and that one there, but you’re not really seen” (MA T1, p. 9). JP describes what happened when complaints were made about foster homes/caregivers: “Every time one of us ended up talking to one of them (case workers) we’d move homes.” To JP this was a “band-aid solution” and cultivated a mutual disrespect: “we didn’t really respect them either” (JP, T1, p. 22). In separate interviews, both MA and ER describe similar experiences of becoming a number. MA states: “A number, that’s what I always felt like ... another number. Another little tab in their file” (MA, GI, p. 41). In a one-to-one interview, ER describes something similar: “I was just a number!” (ER, T1, p. 11). MA described how “becoming a tab in a file” was reproduced in her face-to-face interactions with social workers:

You go into their office and you’re annoying them. And it’s like, really you know as soon as they see your face sitting there, they’re like, “fuck, I don’t really want to listen to you right now.” (MA, T2, p. 15)

Contrasted to this experience of being just a number, AB describes the power of feeling heard by her social worker and having space made for her in court to share her concerns:

Moving out! That was the biggest decision I ever had to make, becoming a permanent ward. I said, “Its Christmas time, I just want to move forward.” My worker got up and said, “She wants to say something.” So I said, “I don’t want to be playing this game anymore where I come here every month and you tell me that I have to wait it out for three more months! It has to end!” (AB, T2, p. 8)

In AB’s memory of becoming a permanent ward of the government, she was given the opportunity to speak in front of a judge after several extensions of temporary care. The quote

above amplifies her want to have some control and shape her own process through her desire for stability, but within the limitations of the process of becoming foster child.

Becoming “other”

Throughout the quotes are multiple examples of being divided off, classified, measured against “normative values,” positioned/labelled as “other.” Foucault’s (1982) three modes of objectification -dividing practice, modes of inquiry with the status of science (psychology, the human sciences), and subjectification- have helped illustrate how processes of classification operate. Multiple examples of dividing practice were shared by collaborators, including: the removal from family/home/culture/ancestry/community, multiple moves, separate food cupboards, the foster kid bed, white walls, separate areas of the house, surveillance, lack of access to information and to decision-making, and being rendered invisible/inconsequential. Dividing practices also included the separation/absence of local knowledge, Indigenous or family knowledge, having no way to refuse this separation, and not being consulted/listened to in regard to life-changing decisions. Divisions also show up time/space orientations, such as in collaborators’ descriptions of the spatial management of youth in care and the overlap of different systems of control and surveillance. The collaborators’ efforts to create other time/space orientations included maintaining a sense of being alive, a sense of worth, and a sense of future.

The second of Foucault’s divisionary tactics, classification, was addressed through examples such as: labels of “other,” the threat of the “psych ward,” psychological lenses utilized to view the “foster child,” labels/classifications of developmental (dis)ability and mental illness; reductive conceptualizations such as “just a kid,” “damaged,” “failure,” “bad,” divisions between

child/adult, medical labels such as depressed, forced medicalization (Ritalin and anti-depressants), and divisions of power such as professional, psychologist, and social worker.

Foucault's third mode of being made is subjectification. Examples of subjectification included organizing self in relation to dominant knowledge, through a sense of not measuring up, and being compared and comparing self to "normal." Strategies for fitting in, avoiding subjectification and seeking belonging included becoming quiet, "looking cute," and "shutting down." Throughout the chapter were also multiple examples of various forms of resistance, such as resistance to being positioned as a "victim," resistance to being "medicated," examples of running away, kicking and screaming, values of non-conformance and self protection, and demands for voice, respect, dignity and belonging. In a way, all of the stories and artwork shared and in fact, the entire methodology, may be read as embedded in an ethic of resistance through the act of remembering, retelling and collective analysis. In the following chapter, I pick up these threads and move to a Deleuzo-Guattarian analysis that explores creative force and other alternative becomings.

Chapter 6: Becoming Force

This chapter continues from the last, building on the threads of “becoming resistance” explored in the previous chapter, but the analysis now shifts to include Deleuze’s (1997) and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts of desire, creative force, and an exploration of both creativity and complexity. As explained in the conceptual map chapter, these concepts of force diverge from those of resistance, as “for Deleuze, power follows desire in that desire is what drives the world into being through creative force” (Skott-Myhre, 2008 p. 146). Tuck (2009) describes Deleuze and Guattari’s desire as crafted from experience over a lifetime, as reaching for contrasting realities, for complexity. This differs substantially from what she describes as Foucault’s definition of desire, as “a hole, a gap, or that which is missing” (p. 418). Tuck (2009) explains that her view of desire is:

Exponentially generative, engaged, engorged, desire is not mere wanting but our informed seeking. Desire is both the part of us that hankers for the desired and at the same time the part that learns to desire. It is closely tied to, or may even be, our wisdom. (p. 418)

These descriptions of desire guide my exposition of creative force, of new possibility, of unique and rich descriptions of young people’s engagements with the culture of care and their entanglements with desire, change, and power. Like Tuck’s exegeses of desire, which connect to and expand upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas of desire, this chapter also explores concepts of becoming and lines of flight. The themes of this chapter include: becoming multiple/complex; becoming resistance; becoming loud/dignified and critical/political; Indigenous ways of knowing and spirituality, and; becoming community/belonging. In this chapter’s analysis, multiple becomings and creative force are seen through additional artwork

and conversations by research contributors outside and beyond the predominant representations of children/youth in care as broken and deficient. The first theme discussed below is that of “becoming complex, becoming multiple.”

Becoming multiple, becoming complex

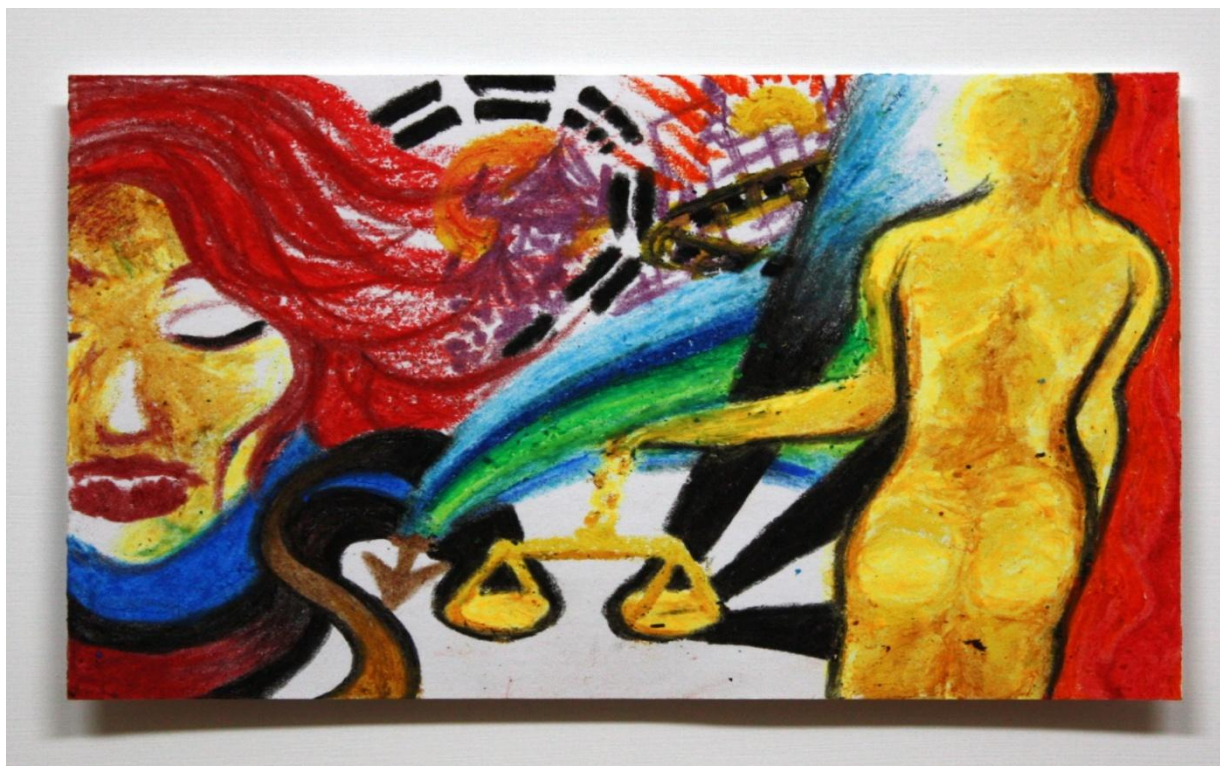


Figure 7. Pastel by JP

Balance is really important to me and something that I always consider in everything that I do in my life. The world- I have done a lot of travelling, and the world was revealed to me through my travels. It did influence and shine a light on who I was and make me feel good about who I was. I have an uncertain future right? And I'm trying to figure out the home for myself. It's not done yet, it's in construction. With everything I do, I consider. The red hair reminds me of my mother, we are so different. But I see her in me all the time. Who I am in a way is because of her. I may be very much the opposite. But I am the opposite of

everything she was. And then here is the balancing act, the straight ones versus these freestyle ones because that's again the balance that I have. I can be down to earth and I have this side in my life that is in order. It feels like some days I am two people, multiple people. There's the person that I am in private and then in public and it's very hard to balance it out. It's really the group of people. I honestly don't believe that they know me, they only see one side of me, so my identity to other people is really unknown. I chose to have my back towards, and my face is not finished because you're talking about masks right? I don't know if I'd say I wear many masks. I would say it's the exact opposite where I don't have anything at all. Everyone I meet is based on first impressions; I am constantly misunderstood or underestimated. I'm the living proof ... don't judge a book by its cover." (JP, GI, p. 18)

The above art/story by JP resonates with the notion of becoming complex and multiple in relation to the world or to others. JP describes feeling "like some days I am two people, I am multiple people," and describes her identity to others as "unknown." This open-ended, multi-faceted understanding that is produced in relation fits with concepts of multiplicity and becoming as an emergent process:

We do not begin as subjects who then have to know a world; there is experience and from this experience we form an image of ourselves as distinct subjects. Before 'the' subject of mind, then, there are what Deleuze refers to as 'larval subjects': a multiplicity of perceptions and contemplations not yet organised into a self. (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 74)

Colebrook's idea of our experience informing an "image of ourselves" (p. 74) seemingly fits with how JP explains her experience of the world: "The world was revealed to me through my travels. It did influence and shine a light on who I was and make me feel good about who I was." JP's powerful descriptions of "balance," and her clear message that "I am constantly misunderstood or underestimated. I'm the living proof ... don't judge a book by its cover" contrast with the messages of lack (i.e. "victim" and "broken") that she reported receiving from professionals in her life growing up in the culture of foster care. In contrast to these diminutive, objectifying representations, JP's story is rich in descriptions of strength, being alive, exploring new possibilities, and heading into an "unknown future." Skott-Myhre's (2007) concept of self captures this movement between tensions of power and creativity:

The self is structured between the tensions produced by the desires of life to express itself radically and uniquely in each body in every moment and the mechanics of domination that would turn those productions to other purposes.

(Skott-Myhre, 2007, p. 22)

Similarly to JP's story of becoming complex self, ER speaks to the desire for creative expression as a form of exploring her own "characteristics and identity." This is exemplified when ER mentions how she approaches a sense of self quite differently from common indicators of understanding the individualized self:

For me building confidence came from ...yes, when someone believes in me that help and support really helps and acceptance really, really helps. But for me to become confident in believing in myself, I needed outside sources. That was always like, theatre or something that allowed me to explore more deeply my own characteristics and identity and build some kind of courage and intuitive sense about what that meant. (ER, T1, p. 13)



Figure 8. Pastel by ER

It's about being a multidimensional being, and that evolution needs to be nurtured, and the burgeoning growth that it brings, and the gift that that brings (ER, T1, p. 9).

ER depicts people as shifting, changing, evolving. The concept of being “multidimensional” and the “burgeoning growth” extends far beyond the simplified meanings that psychological views of young people promulgate, fitting with Skott-Myhre's (2008) idea of “a subject always in motion through its creative productions” (p. 21). ER's nomadic images retreat from static and conclusive ways of viewing subjectivity and advance into creative becomings through the expressive and/or exploratory means of theatre, travel, and growth.

Diverging from reductive, linear views of child and youth as passive vessels, and as recipients of care, here ER's and JP's examples speak to active and complex subjectivity, and in the process create new spaces for possibility. In Deleuze's (1997) description of force preceding power, strategy becomes "secondary in relation to lines of flight" (p. 188). ER's descriptions of strength and ability precede attempts to control or subvert a sense of self, rejecting labels that limit the sensation of this strength. In the previous chapter, I detailed how as a research group, we explored the concept of being "just a child" and asked questions of how we position and conceptualize children. The collaborators shared multiple examples of movement beyond the "normative" sociocultural notions of a passive child. AB spoke to this: "My mom would disappear for 3 or 4 days and it would just be me having to raise myself" (AB, T1, p. 7). ER shared a similar story: "For me, at five years old I was able to find the peanut butter and bread and feed myself and feed my brother and try to keep my mother from destabilizing. So, there is some level of instinct that kicks in at some point" (ER, T1, p. 16). ER's remembered experience of being 5 years old challenges common assertions of small children as being dependent and unable to be active agents in their own caring, as exemplified by her description of "instinct" and keeping her mother from "destabilizing."

The spiral up



Figure 9. Spiral by KD

“There is my powerful spiral ... yeah, neat man!” (KD, T1, p. 15)

Once I had let go of the drugs and grabbed onto the family, it was just maybe even replacing some of that emotional fulfillment that I was getting from the drugs because I was numbing it right? Yeah, constantly distracted. Constantly high. Luckily I graduated from high school on time. But just filling my mind and then letting that go. I actually went into rugby. Stopped the drugs, had a different set of friends, graduated from high school. Right away [my foster mom] was like,

“okay, what are you going to do for college?” I said ... “I never thought of that” she said “apply! Apply!” and I did and I got in everywhere that I applied to. So then it went on and on. And you know how it can spiral down? It’s just spiralled up! It’s related to the networking and the relationships. That really was the foundation.” (KD, T1, p. 15)

KD’s story of spiralling up contrasts with previous stories of the intergenerational legacy of the spiral down that is a part of our normative sociocultural view of foster child following in the steps of a “failed” family. Here it is possible to see how themes of time/space as expounded upon in the previous chapter converge with multiple events, connections to others, and ideas of self for this new becoming, “spiralling up.” In this story of becoming the spiral up, lines of flight intertwine with striated lines of power, contesting boundaries and moving around the limitations that follow the powerful discourse of the “broken” child/family. An orientation towards a future - towards a focus on movement/ability, on becoming- can shift concepts of “self” dramatically. Rather than the focus on “lack” induced by challenging experiences and by being positioned as “damaged,” “broken” and “failure,” a theme reoccurred across the stories of being able to “see (things) differently,” to “understand things” that others cannot see. JP speaks to this in relation to her peers at school:

I always felt that I saw more of life than they did. And they didn’t really understand things the way I did. Um and some of their concerns were so ... the word I would use now is juvenile right? I didn’t feel like I fit in with anybody. Because I saw things differently. Yeah, yeah. And uh ... and things that concerned them and stressed them out. Didn’t phase me. (laughs)” (T1, p. 9)

Both MA and ER speak to how this sense of seeing things differently happens for them in their post-care lives. MA explains: “I think now that I see. I think that this has happened to me so I can fight for other things. I can fight for kids who are in the same situation” (MA, T2, p. 6). ER describes how “For some reason I was given all of these experiences to see differently” (ER, T1, p. 11). These quotes exemplify the convergence of events, a multiplicity of memory, history, knowing, and creativity, all connecting through the interview process. These experiences, seen as rich and meaningful, move away from descriptions of lack: accumulated knowledge and experience become important for creating new movement. MA makes meaning of the events in her life, both “negatives and positives” and connects this to her current sense of purpose:

I believe in taking all of my negatives and positives from my past. If I can take the negative and flip it into a positive by helping someone else then I’m going to do it. There’s a purpose for it. If I can help someone else then there’s a reason that it happened. (MA, T1, p. 1)

Here loss is reframed, reimagined as creative and productive. MA describes the move away from a frame of lack and towards possibility and openings, as does Tuck (2009): “Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities” (p. 417). Here, loss, “negatives,” “positives” assemble into the desire of helping others, full of purpose, meaning and wisdom.

Dignity as force

Dignity and the protection of self are also key themes woven throughout almost every conversation. In a one-to-one interview, MA described an interaction that she had with one of her social workers regarding her foster parent/placement. She described her desires to her social

worker: “I want to move out, I hate her, she’s nasty, she was so mean to us!” (MA, T2, p. 12)

MA explained her memory of how she “got out” of that foster home:

My social worker thought that this foster parent was so great. That she wouldn’t move me. So, I OD’d to get out. One of my foster siblings broke into the medicine cabinet and I took every pill in there. Then they were like, “Oh, she really doesn’t want to be there ’cause she’s ODing” and I’m like, “I told you I didn’t want to be there!” (MA, T2, p. 12)

In this example MA moves beyond the limitations placed upon her to seek out alternative means to reach a desired outcome. She also explains that the overdose was a very risky manoeuvre, and connects it to another occasion where she almost lost her life: “That’s not what I was trying to do. I didn’t want to die. I just wanted to stop hurting” (T1, p. 6). Through an individualizing lens such as a behavioural or deficit-based perspective, these events may have been looked at as “acting out,” as an action that needs to be controlled and monitored. Psychiatry might see only symptoms of a mental health disorder, and as explored in the previous chapter, a humanistic lens might suggest that such a child is broken and hopeless, an addict, or might look at the individual’s capacity. MA describes a variety of responses to this occasion including professionals who wanted to put her in what she described as a “mental place.” Differently, these actions may be read as resistance or response to unfavourable conditions/mistreatment or it could be read as force and flight, allowing MA to move through the striations of power held in the authoritative position that the professional caregivers held. As MA explained, “I was sad.”

AB’s tells her story of responding to “abuse” in a foster home and experiencing not being heard, a phenomenon similar to MA. She described having what she named a “breakdown,” seeking out a school counsellor and, later, a mental health intake worker at a hospital:

I had nothing on me but my hoodie and my headphones. Yeah, I went and checked myself into Emerg at [name of hospital]. I was oddly calm though and they weren't believing me until the counsellor comes in from school. They were trying to medicate me at the hospital but I was like, "no, let me run my course."

(AB, T2, p. 10)

This rupture, "breakdown," propelled from her desire to leave, provided AB with the opportunity to move forward in new directions away from the confines of what she described to be an "abusive" situation. Even though AB's credibility was questioned at the hospital, "they weren't believing me," AB insisted on her own path to healing and refused bio-medical intervention; "let me run my course." As she spoke in the interview, I noticed her sense of assuredness: She described "knowing" what to do and being adamant about what her path would be. She described her time in an inpatient facility: "It was a mental rebuilding of my life which was needed" (AB, T1, p. 19). This view was divergent from the other participants who described the threat of being sent to a similar facility. She recounted her response to being told that she needed to return to her foster home. Upon her discharge from the hospital, "They were going to put me back into that home environment. But I was refusing with everything in me" (AB, T1, p. 12). This interaction between AB and her social workers could be seen to cut across lines of power, a line of flight propelled by AB's refusal to comply to return. She explained that eventually her social workers listened to her and moved her to a new foster home. In these examples of dignity and strategy, I see refrains of what Tuck (2010) noted as smart and intentional desire. Beyond Deleuzian definitions, this type of desire allows for strategy, more opportunity for movement. Evident throughout their quotes thus far, the collaborators

acknowledge their own unique ways of seeing things. Further, the collaborators are witnessed in the following sections as they describe: becoming loud, and becoming political.

Becoming loud!

The participants spoke to “becoming resistance” in their relation to inequality and power’s attempts to control by being loud, speaking up, running away, and acting out. Examples of this desire to become loud and to speak up, despite “silencing” by authority figures, are threaded intricately throughout the documented conversations. The following examples show several such flights from the striations of power. Lines of flight exemplify the “escape routes from the structuring effects of dominant social forms” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 11). ER speaks to this flight, and how being “loud,” “bitchy” and “direct” became useful as a response to silencing and abuse: “I was loud, and I was bitchy, and I was direct. And I became that way because of being abused when I was a kid and I was being silenced all the time” (ER, T1, p. 13).

Connecting back to the previous chapter of analysis, we see how “becoming loud” away diverges from being made “ghost” or “zombie.” The response to silencing sparks a shift towards becoming “loud,” “direct,” “bitchy.” These events of being made ghost and becoming loud may connect and overlap; they are not mutually exclusive. MA spoke to how having a “loud voice” in the group interview highlighted the differences among multiple responses based on individually-assessed measures of safety: “I think that ... I have a big voice (laughs). I’ve always had like a really loud voice. It was helpful for when I found out my rights. I was very vocal about it” (MA, GI, P49). JP spoke of the process of realizing how she could sidestep unfavourable, authoritative relationships. She describes becoming “physically stronger” and how that impacted her sense of ability and control: “So it came to a point where it was like, “hey I can make my own decisions here. I can survive on my own. I don’t need this” (JP, I1, p. 12). AB speaks to a similar shift: “I

changed from being the quiet one who didn't say much to being the one who if there was something wrong, I would say it (AB, G1, p. 28). The collaborators spoke to this becoming loud and active as connecting to making meaning of the events in their lives.

Becoming critical/political

Throughout the conversations, JP repeated a point, mimicking the system of care: "We hear that there is a problem" but describes never getting a solution or any tools to make it better:

Give us things that we can do to make it better, make us feel like you actually understand, like you care right? It's just more like crisis mode. Whenever the situation hit crisis mode, like we were being physically abused or like shit is going down that shouldn't be happening. Then they're like: "oh we're gonna come in and make things better." It just seems like a band aid solution. They don't actually go down to the bottom of things like, the kids need to be fed. How are you going to ensure that the kids are going to be fed? You're giving welfare cheques to an alcoholic. That's not getting to us in food form you know? (JP, T1, p. 20)

JP's quote illuminates how poverty and addiction interact with each other and how these in turn interact with child welfare systems. She delineates just how reactive and crisis-orientated support services are and that, as a result, they are not able to shift course and accommodate immediate needs such as "the kids need to be fed." When inspecting systems of care, poverty is a core problem. Children may be removed from parents because of issues associated with poverty, including lack of housing or under-housing, the instability caused by frequent moves, lack of employment, etc. In the system itself, underfunding for preventative, supportive, community programming is evident and it would seem that funding cuts are made often. By looking at the

connections between events in her life, JP's voice echoes in the gaping cracks within the governing systems. ER also speaks to what she sees as being "holes in the system":

Now that I can reflect and see some of the holes in the system, you know, there's a lot of things I don't understand in the way that the system works in regard to foster care. What I do understand is that social programs are underfunded sickeningly so, and that I think that to be able to manage the amount of people in need at this time is almost impossible given the current circumstances, economically as well. Politically and socially in general people don't understand that there's such a divide, that there's such as divide between the classes at this time. (ER, T1, p. 2)

Poverty and the vast differences in incomes that ER names as a "divide between the classes" centers on the constraints placed on child and family services in a capitalist society. Here ER connects how she thinks this system may influence the quality of the support and roles of service providers: "It is such a high burn out field. I think a lot of these social workers are burnt out and they have to do it because they have to feed their own kids and pay their own mortgages." ER goes on to relate this to what she names: "the problem with the monetary system in general" and trusting for-profit sources and services: "you don't know if a dentist is telling you that you have five cavities because he want so to pay off his mortgage, he wants to put his kids through university or if you really have five cavities" (ER, T1, p. 3).

ER connects her critique of the monetary system to a term commonly known to the field as worker "burn out." Richardson and Reynolds (2012) speak to the individualization of burnout and how it places responsibility and burden of sociocultural injustices on individual workers. Here they explain the importance of collective accountability as a response to being "blown up":

Through belonging we invite spirited and generous invitations to collective accountability. We are looking for cover, to be blanketed by one another. This belonging is our antidote to being “blown up” by “burnout” and by individualism. (p. 12)

In this example ER speaks to what she sees as being a risk for what can happen when the responsibility for protecting a child relies on individual service providers:

So if that means there’s abuse going on in the home ... That’s why you see so many kids, especially Native children are being completely disregarded. Being murdered in foster care and no one’s doing anything about it, not taking any accountability, social workers especially don’t want to take any accountability, not when it’s happening, not when they are being notified and they don’t want to take any accountability after it’s happened. (ER, T1, p. 3)

Connected to the previous point of burnout, ER speaks to how individualism operates to deposit responsibility onto a single person when the system acting as caregiver fails. ER suggests that perhaps a social worker may be “afraid” to challenge boundaries or act differently: “not only that it’s a lot of work but that they have to, be accountable for their actions as well in the process.” These lines of power intertwine inseparably. We cannot discuss a problematic system of care without discussing relations of power that are deeply classed, gendered, and racialized – poverty, the “for-profit monetary system,” the “divide between the classes,” individualism, sexism and racism as they operate to sustain the status quo, intersect to shape an economy of abnegated accountability. Molar colonial events such as Canada’s residential school system, 60s and millennium “scoops” and other ongoing colonial practices are completely obscured by the dominant sociocultural milieu. In these molecular lines of power, there is little systemic

accountability, justice-doing, and truth-telling. While in this case some responsibility is located in the social workers with access to even less power, nonetheless they are able to maintain a mask of morality and generosity as representatives of a benevolent “welfare state.” The ultimate responsibility falls onto the child and the family, constructed as irrevocably deficient by racialized striations of power.

The rights of a child

In many interviews, the collaborators spoke to the ongoing theme of rights and access to information. ER spoke about the lack of information provided to young people as they near aging out:

One of the things that I would have found useful in care is if someone would have informed me of my rights and informed me of like, um ... what was available to me, financially and things like that. Like, I just found out this year that I was no longer eligible for financial assistance (laughs) you know for schooling for example. That would have been really helpful to me. (ER, G1, p. 1)

This comment sparked a big response amongst the other group members. JP and KD were unaware that there were any financial supports available for education. JP’s response was, “you get financial assistance for school?” She later added, “I had no idea, like what the hell is this?” KD chimed in, “no one told me that and I’m 24 and I just graduated!” The conversation continued and JP highlighted her interest in academic learning and shared her frustrations with the lack of support for and information about educational opportunities:

I’ve always been a very academic person and I’ve always been praised for being good at school. During high school and as a young adult, no one ever came to me

and said, “by the way there’s this if you’re interested. We think you’ll excel, you’re obviously going to go to college! (JP, GI, p. 3)

ER’s response to JP was “No one’s paying attention to the fact that you’ll be able to progress!” (ER, G1, p. 3). This frustration was shared amongst the collaborators. Stemming from the desire to be supported to move forward and to be able to access education, this conversation emphasizes the participants’ frustration with models of care that focus on lack and that miss their ability to “excel” and “progress.” Building on these observations of favouring lack of support to what “could be,” the group also spoke about the need for more advocacy. The onus here is on young people to find out what they are eligible for and how best to obtain it. Basic rights that are publicized as available to young people, such as access to formal education, are routinely held back or undisclosed, often seemingly due to lack of program funds and general disorganization.

KD speaks to the need of advocacy in response to ER telling a story about one of her foster parents stealing a large quantity of money from her. When I asked how much was stolen, ER said “a few thousand dollars.” KD responded by saying, “Wow, we need legal counsel. We should have had the opportunity to speak to a lawyer. There should be an advocate on hand” (GI, p. 7). ER describes the absence of this type of support: “That advocacy was never offered to me. (pause) When I asked for it, it was almost as if people were too lazy or didn’t want to do the extra paper work or be an advocate. Or maybe they didn’t know how, or where to direct me” (GI, p. 7). This discussion led to further questioning of rights and access to support. In the group interview, KD suggested how certain knowledge would be beneficial: “I wonder if we understood the finances and the budgeting was, if we had training in budgeting and in finances we would have had a better working knowledge of how we were being cared for?” AB described this knowledge as linked to “independence,” sparking a conversation about why that

independence may not be advantageous from a different perspective. In tracing lines of power, it is possible to see how their access to certain information was limited. ER and KD discuss this limitation:

ER: But if you had been given that knowledge then you're gonna start asking questions right?

KD: But there shouldn't be anything wrong with that right!?

ER: Yeah, that's the point! That's the thing! They should have some way to respond instead of just saying. "Oh well, don't worry about it we are taking care of it." Instead of that answer which isn't really an answer.

The absence of knowledge and systematic efforts to curtail self-advocacy are powerful themes that circulated throughout the conversations. Later ER honed in on this absence of information as related to what she views as fear of the "out of control child" she went on to describe: "and to them being out of control was just speaking my mind or expressing myself in some way." She also spoke to becoming her "own protector" from this event, which suggests movement beyond these striations in that she did not stop "expressing" herself although the pressures to stay in "control" were pervasive.

Indigenous ways of knowing

Many of the participants explained their connection to their own ancestries and cultures as emergent and as powerful, an alternative to the dominant story of dispirited, acultural "kids in care." ER spoke passionately about her relationship to her family history, including the history of residential schools, discrimination and addiction. She described dealing with a pervasive sense of mis-education and racism: "I found that incredibly frustrating not only dealing with bigoted people but people who didn't understand the Native culture. Period" (ER.T1, p. 6). She related

her frustration with the lack of knowledge and understanding of how issues of racism and inter-generational trauma connect: “This is what I am saying is difficult. Especially for Native children. Because I am part Native and my whole family – biological family – is dealing with issues ranging from the residential school system to drug addiction and alcohol addiction (ER, T1, p. 6). ER’s description of rippling effects across her extended family speaks to the persistence of colonial policies such as residential schools across generations. Richardson and Nelson (2007) describe the residential school system as responsible for the forced removal of approximately 100,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities, resulting in cultural assimilation and dislocation, community break-down, abuse/neglect, disease, and often death. Richardson and Nelson highlight how this history connects to the current practice of foster care, continuing the separation of children from their Indigenous cultures, from their families and communities. This also raises questions of how the dominant Euro-Canadian values and concepts of childhood are imposed as standard and unquestionably “normal,” thus alienating diverging methods of raising and caring for children and other perceptions of health, wellness, family, and community.

Tuck (2009) describes her shift in understanding desire as being inclusive of her Indigenous values of “collectivity and the interdependence of the collective”:

In my application of this concept as part of a framework of desire, complex personhood draws on Indigenous understandings of collectivity and the interdependence of the collective and the person rather than on the Western focus on the individual. (p. 420)

Fitting with Tuck’s association of desire to collectivity and interdependence, KD explored her connections with ideas of cultural resilience, respect for community belonging, and

traditional knowledge. She spoke to her own relationship to her family and her education and described her beliefs of Indigenous learning and teachings:

The whole value of respecting your elders is pivotal. The storytelling factor and recognizing one's history and the history of friends and family and recognizing the effects. Appreciating change and recognizing that life is fluid and always changing and not just plastic in one way. Really believing that spiritual level of being. Respecting life, and trees, that's animals, that's people, that's yourself and recognizing and appreciating difference. That includes minorities as well of course right? It's kind of inherent into the teachings of this Indigenous stuff. Because we are a minority right. If you're gonna practice this stuff. You are supporting a minority level of being. So I think there's good lessons that come with that. (KD, T2, p. 6)

KD's quote speaks to this concept of desire and interconnectivity among all relations, beyond human connectivity and into notions of life and spirit affirmation. Deleuzian philosophy relates a similar sense of "being" to ethics, and being within and connected to "not just human life, but all life, organic and inorganic" (Davies, 2010, p. 55). KD went on to speak of "insider knowledge" and the importance of the local knowledge of the people that professionals work with in education and child welfare systems. She later clarified the difference that she saw in adult/child relations:

One difference was about respecting authority rather than respecting elders for the sake of their knowledge and incredibly valuable information that they could pass to you it wasn't about that, it was about respecting authority and reaping the consequences. (KD, T1, p. 7)

Not only are young people isolated from the wisdom, values and guidance of their elders, but current individualistic Euro-Western conceptualizations of “authority” and “consequence” further separate young people from generational interconnectedness and community responsibility and accountability. This kind of adult/youth interaction contributes to a further hierarchical division of youth and adult (Skott-Myhre, 2008).

Interestingly, ER spoke of the desire for a spiritual connection to her roots, before she learnt of her lineage. In these examples both ER and KD describe a deep spiritual, embodied “knowing” of connections, experienced through “dreams,” “visions,” through school and reconnections to family, and knowledge of ancestry. They emphasize that this embodied knowing contributed to becoming re-spirited and powerful, each of them describing this as being important in their lives and visions for the future.

Spirituality

Our discussions of Indigenous knowledge and belonging connected in many ways to layered and complicated experiences of spirituality. It is quite difficult to put parameters on any definition of spirituality and perhaps it is contradictory and even unnecessary to do so, and yet spirituality and spiritual knowing shaped not only the experiences of collaborators, but also our process of inquiry and the methodology. The act of creating art can be a spiritual process. Irwin and de Cosson (2004) describe this as “a deeply spiritual act giving voice to the inner longings of the spirit with an attitude of receptivity and openness” (p. 57). KD connected her art piece (on the following page) to the notion of being connected to all beings, all life, all relations, and to spirit, senses, nature. Her piece conveys a larger, more nuanced definition and a sense of community that goes far beyond human, let alone the “state as parent.”



Figure 10. Tree by KD

Ever since I was really little, I've always felt a sense of connection. I used to hug the trees when I was really young. I always felt there was a common energy ... like I breathe out the air and the trees breathe in the air and vice versa. And the water cycle. When I came to UVic my first year was in geography. I wanted to find out more about the world and connect to it. I always believed it. I couldn't really explain it until I started dabbling with my Indigenous roots. Understanding and learning more about how to connect and why, and what it can mean, and other ways I can feel. Yeah, I always felt that there was an inherent

interconnection, with the outdoors, nature, and people and just that life force that energy force. It's always been there for me. (KD, T2, p. 14)

KD explores the idea of intuitive energy, embodied knowing, connection to other beings and life outside of human interaction, and a deep sense of spirituality: "I think there's some spirituality there, and energy there that I can tap into and feed my spirit with when I need to or when I want to." She describes, "Painting trees and being around trees and nature. It's sort of like plugging myself into a wall, it's energizing." (KD, T2, p. 14) KD describes spirituality as supportive: "it just opens more doors. It's forgiving and it's supportive and it can always be a foundation to fall back on and offer opportunity." Similarly ER states, "I knew I was on my own so I developed a connection to my spirituality." She describes getting "signs along the way, 'do this, do this, and do this.' I had to be incredibly intuitive to know what to do next." She identifies this as becoming a "big strength" (ER, GI, p. 25). It is evident that for these collaborators, intuition and connection to alternative knowledge opened up possibilities for new becomings:

I grew up not having a mother, not having a father. I had to have something that was real, that was alive and supported me and to me it's like, okay I'm walking on the planet, that supports me! That is a living, breathing, being that supports me!
(ER, T1, p. 9)

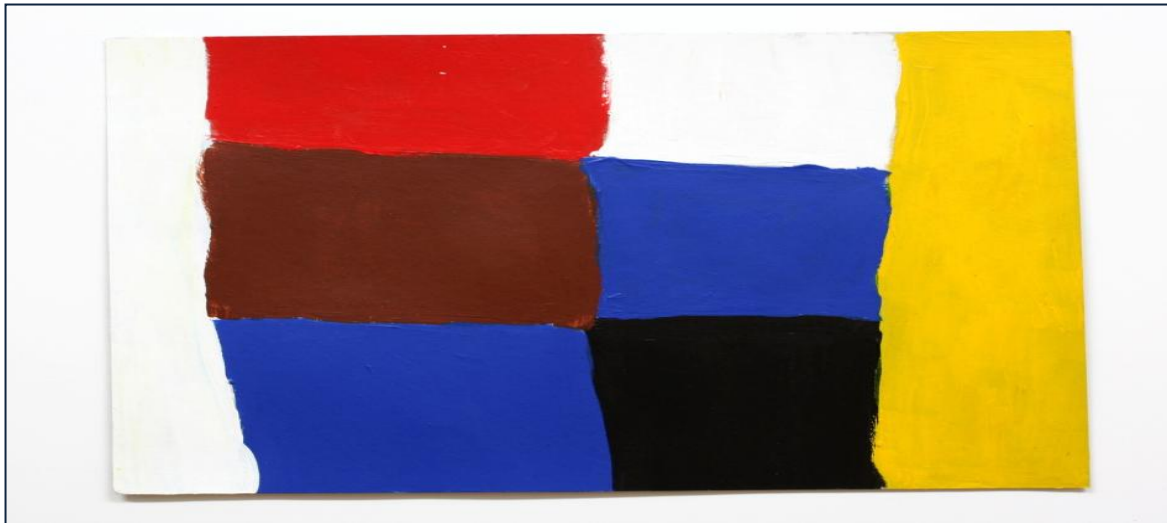
KD also describes spirituality as "supportive," "forgiving," and as a foundation to fall back on and offer opportunity (KD, T2, p. 18). She decries the risk of "linear thinking," naming the ministry as a "Western organization." She sees spirituality as an opportunity to approach "different ways of thinking, rather than getting shut up in this limited perspective" (KD, T2, p. 18). These rich descriptions of spirituality and intuition expand beyond any "Western psychological notions of individuation, esteem, purpose, boundary and assertion" and cuts across

these dominant notions of singular identity with a “unitary Psychological core” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 12).



Figure 11. Paintings by AB

Belonging, Family, Trust, Acceptance and Independence



Belonging: Becoming family, interconnected

Intimately connected to the issue of spirituality, intuitive knowing and becoming connected, was the theme of belonging and family. Belonging can be approached in multiple ways, framed as the inclusion of an individual in a preestablished group, or as something else entirely. Here, in AB's artwork/words (on previous page) and in the quotes to follow, belonging becomes much more. It is an ongoing conversation, it is reciprocal, it is lines of power tested through values of mutual "respect," "trust," and "love." It is a becoming through multiple lines of power, flight, and negotiation. Earlier this notion is also discussed as interconnectedness, as it relates to trust, knowing, and spirit. Mixed in the art pieces on the previous page are words by AB: "family," "independence," "acceptance," "trust" and "respect," all of which are expounded upon within this section and traced back to other themes. Here AB describes her thoughts on belonging and how it connects to young people's behaviour:

If you don't feel like you belong in the home, you are not going to act like you belong there. You're gonna act out. If you feel bad in the environment then that's how you're gonna act out, in a bad way. If you feel like you belong you're gonna act like you belong. (AB, T1, p. 15)

Moving beyond the limitations of "paid" caregivers, KD speaks to how relationships between "social worker," "foster parent" and "foster child" can become authentic and meaningful: "because initially I was thinking well you're paid to take care of me you don't love me. But you just see it. I've been out of care for 6 years now and we still love each other so much." KD continues to describe the shift of power through vulnerability and connection with caregivers, when caregiving becomes "no longer a job":

I guess having these government workers, government guardians act all vulnerable. It's not just a job anymore you know? There's a pay check but that's their heart. (KD, T1, p. 5)

With tears in her eyes, MA describes how her mom became her mom. She describes her mom as someone who played a meaningful role in her life as a young person, not her biological mother but the mother she was meant to have: "I was meant to be hers." She emphasises that they "adopted each other":

And oh, and I was horrible to her. Absolutely horrible. I swore at her, I would run away from her and did some horrible things and she never left. The other ones would be like, "to hell with this kid. She's too much" and she would be like, "no matter what, I'm here. You can get mad, you can storm off, but I'm here and I still love you." (MA, M2, p. 2)

These descriptions of family diverge from the nuclear family that is held up as the normative model of family and attachment. One might question why this model of the nuclear family is upheld, who benefits from this model, and how much influence the colonial heterosexual matrix that thrives under neoliberalism has on our notions of "normal" families? As AB points out: "families aren't perfect! Everybody needs to realize there is a little bit of dysfunctional in every family and that dysfunction, (for) most of the families I've been around ... it actually brings us closer" (AB, T2, p. 9). The examples above disrupt this notion of "normal," "healthy" families that sustain sensations of "distrust," "lack" and "illness" in exchange for powerful alternatives such as ongoing negotiations of trust, respect and love. As KD described in the group interview, a "symbiotic relationship" develops (GI, p. 8).

In the group interview KD speaks about trust: “I feel like I’m picking up on a pattern with this. Where there’s a lack of trust and a lack of understanding, there’s a lack of good relationship, right?” (KD, T1, p. 9). This idea of trust resonates with AB and she talks about trust several times throughout our conversations. Here are her ideas on “a successful life” and how that relates to others: “If you want to succeed you have to have trust, and if you don’t have that trust or people who can build it with you then there’s no point in it” (AB, T1, p. 22). In a one-on-one conversation with MA about trust, I ask how, when she was in care, did she know whether or not she could trust someone. MA’s responded that “it’s written all over their faces, ” and explained:

I think with me, I was very protective of myself, even when the people who I knew were there for the right reasons and were trying to help me. Those people, I tended to push away. Because I was like yeah, you’re probably going to end up being like the rest of them and I tried to push them away and they didn’t go away.
(MA, T2, p. 1)

When taking into consideration trust and the history of caregivers not living up to that trust that MA describes, it is possible to see how pushing away people is productive and protective. Yet, in the dominant culture of foster care, pushing others away gets taken up as “behavioural,” as “disorder,” as attachment “problems.” Wade (1997) calls to light how the theory and practice of psychotherapy ignores resistance and in his own work focuses on response and resistance. Wade’s understanding of the productive force of intuitive response and resistance has important implications for a different way to practice in the foster care system. This is explored further in the next chapter.

Community

We are finding more and more that the more separate that we become the less able we are to function healthily, mentally, physically, and emotionally in this culture, in this society. There are many studies that support that community building is very helpful. Not just community building but that holistic integration of evolution, like the understanding that we are evolving beings! (ER, T1, p. 7)

ER's quote further illuminates some of the limitations of individuality, and how becoming "separate" acts as a barrier to functioning "healthily" through connection. ER's mention of "community building" and acknowledgement that we are "changing as people" and "evolving beings" cut across some of these striations of power. In countering capitalist, profit-focused methods of utilizing community, what other definitions might we draw on? Which communities can we access and how do we sidestep culturally dominant characterizations of community in order to construct a different set of belonging that support complex negotiations of trust and belonging, becoming family, and respect? MA exemplifies the impact of trust on her relationship with a youth worker that she felt believed in her:

He made me feel like I wasn't just ugly and I wasn't just nothing, I was okay and I was valued. That made a huge, huge difference in my life. (MA, T1, p. 12)

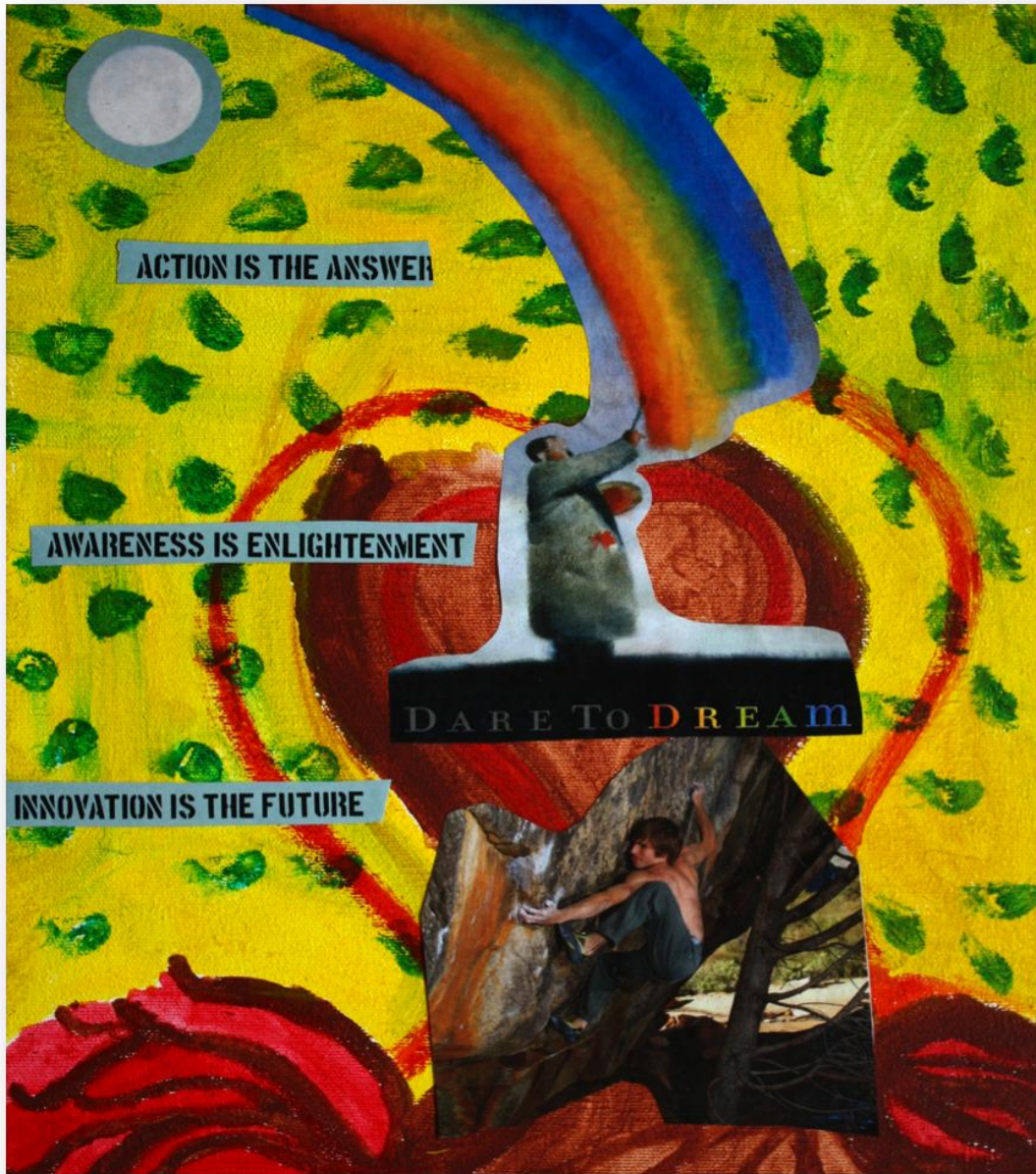


Figure 12. Collage by ER

It's about roots, creating strong roots, a community network. There is a kid climbing a tree, trying to get up to his dreams so he can get to the rainbow and see what's on the other side. It's a heart tree. These are supposed to be leaves. And action is the answer, awareness is enlightenment, innovation is the future and dare to dream. (ER, GI, p. 48)

In the following example, JP emphasizes that her peer-community became important to her sense of belonging and connectivity:

I look back and instantly we trusted each other. We knew we were in the same situation, we had that connection. So we would hang out together no problem. I didn't worry about them betraying me or telling on me for doing something bad. We knew that we would always be there. (JP, T1, p. 22)

JP describes these communities of peers as pivotal to a sense of belonging. In the previous chapter, ER spoke to the streets as becoming a safe place to be for some young people as “there was more protection.” The importance of peer community as a place of safety and unquestioned belonging disrupts dominant conceptualizations of the streets as unsafe, dirty, disconnected.

The idea of community belonging also links to ideas of productive engagement and being active in community. Again, this disrupts dominant representations of “children/youth in care” as disconnected and passive. In the group interview, I asked about community responses and engagement, a theme that had been brought up several times in the one-on-one interviews. KD's response to this question highlighted what she thinks is important about engaging in community:

Dialogue, action, collaborating, more than one person right? Working on something together. Makes me think back to the volunteering days when I was in care. It was a good distraction. (GI, p. 1)

The sentiment of valuing collaboration, action and community seemed to extend to the other collaborators. Skott-Myhre and Skott-Myhre (2007) suggest that the draw to common conceptualizations of community may not hold much force as there is a sense of lack of such community in our current global culture. They suggest that a form of love, the love between

“friends, equals, or in another term loyalty to family, political community, job, or discipline” (p. 54) might actually be the force that propels us forward in community and in youth work. Such love is driven “by what we hold in common, which is the ability to produce ourselves as radically different” (p. 55).

Chapter summary

This chapter incorporated Tuck’s (2010) notion of desire as becoming “intentional,” “agentic” and “smart” (p. 645) in order to relate how foster care alumni produce new possibilities in the midst of damaging situations. Salient themes woven throughout the art pieces and conversations shared by the collaborators included those of connection, spirituality, force, negotiations of “knowing,” “seeing,” “speaking up,” “kicking and screaming,” being a “bitch,” negotiations of “trust,” becoming “family” and becoming “community”. The descriptions shared by the collaborators speak to becoming resistance, cutting across lines of power, negotiating complex systems and relationships, and connecting to values of spirituality, community, love, and reciprocity.

These themes highlight the futility of bio-medical treatments in isolation from the histories and events in young people’s lives, as well as the productive force of desire for shaping something outside of the reductive, damaging “broken child” image. Skott-Myhre (2008) speaks to how the creative force of youth “becomes subject to the definitions of psychological development and emotional health within the taxonomic descriptions of adolescence, with its focus on deviance and pathology” (p. 13). By acknowledging lines of power and exploring flight and desire through multiple points of entry and through connections and messiness, new stories emerge. These stories may in themselves become new opportunities for rupture, difference, and most importantly, an ethic of love, respect and community.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

A process cannot be understood by stopping it. Understanding must move with the flow of the process, must join it and flow with it. -Paul Atreides, Dune (Herbert, 1965)

In this concluding chapter, I revisit connections between my methodology, my analysis of the artwork and stories shared, and implications for research/practice. I want to stress that, although the two chapters *Being Made Foster Child* and *Becoming Force* are presented as separate for the purpose of organizing this thesis, they were by no account separate in the conversations among our research team. Therefore, in this final chapter I hope to revisit threads that connect within and across the different themes of the study in order to explore new possibilities in foster care practice, policy, and research. My goal is not to provide definitive answers but to raise questions that might support a more collaborative and critical exploration of what else is made possible when we pay attention differently.

My involvement in this research has deeply affected my own approach to practice and leaves me with questions about how to attend to complex and often abstract themes that so intimately shape the lived experiences of young people in care. For instance, topics that were raised, such as space/time, spirituality, art, and Indigenous ways of knowing, are not typically part of case planning conversations. Findings also prompt questions concerning how ideas of difference are evoked as multiple parallel storylines and carried throughout the conversations while remaining conceptually connective. For example, spirituality was viewed both as a visceral, unexplainable life force/drive and as a creative response to not being seen/heard. It was also connected to Indigenous values and ancestral ways of knowing that supersede individual experiences through connections among many generations and relations. How can we honour

these vital connections through practice and policy when our current system of care does not even acknowledge they exist? Richardson and Reynolds (2012), discuss the importance of Justice doing and suggest a “healthy and hopeful skepticism about whether or not we are engaging our ethic of justice-doing” in our work with people (p.6). They also re-name “burnout” as “spiritual pain”, and explore how responses to this spiritual pain can include relationships of solidarity, that in turn can act to re-connect practitioners to their/our collective ethics. Richardson and Reynolds’ (2012) ideas connect to the theme of community as described by the collaborators, who discussed responses to oppression/events through connections to community and their own sense of dignity or measuring trust in those connections.

At the same time as the collaborators discussed problematic relationships in care, they also described relationships that became very important and support networks that emerged from diverse assemblages of caregivers. Boundaries and categories blurred as collaborators shared descriptions of case workers and youth workers becoming a friend or an ally, of foster moms becoming family, of friends becoming brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, all through complex relational negotiations of trust, dignity, and respect. What might happen when we honour young people for their wisdom, beyond the limiting striations of formal education and textbook learning? Or engage in conversations and actions that acknowledge and create space for their lived experience and their sense of knowing rather than solely accepting normative ideas of success, family, and development? In this thesis, I have considered how to trouble the lines of power that maintain the constraints of an individualized way of viewing young people, and have explored what is opened up by a rhizomatic approach to inquiry. Colebrook stresses that, through the prism of desire, lived experience becomes multiple and complex; it becomes rhizomatic:

Life is a flow of time or becoming, a whole of interactions or ‘perceptions’. Each event of perception opens up to its own world. Above and beyond all these actualised worlds there is a virtual whole composed of a multiplicity of durations. (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 54)

Life as a flow or a becoming provides opportunity for difference, for messiness, for loss, and for new connections. Drawing on this approach might enable us as practitioners to better understand the complexity of the culture of foster care and the unique histories and trajectories of each young person that we encounter. In turn this may better equip us to practice in ways that acknowledge complexities and power, and the experiences of young people such as being racialized, gendered, discriminated against and help us to connect this to historical, political and economic issues. As AB points out, “life is disorganized; you just have to find that right balance and make it work.” (AB, GI, p.49) As seen in the collaborators’ stories and art work, there are common threads but also unique histories and trajectories, complex struggles and responses, and different ways of knowing and connecting. The right balance is not a predetermined right way of working with people or a universal truth, but rather can be attained perhaps through collaboration, acknowledging messiness, context, moments of resistance, and creative responses.

Implications for research

My hope for this research is that it becomes a part of the broader assemblage of studies that contributes to how the culture of foster care is considered. Study findings provide a valuable counterpoint to dominant psychological research. My hope is that by exposing lines of power, this complexity is rendered visible and can offer an urgently needed counterpoint to the hegemonic use of reductive, deficit-focused research models that further pathologize and individualize young people in care, their families, and their communities.

Creating space

Unless foster care alumni are involved in leading, decision making, and advising, critical knowledge is being ignored: “Youth are the best experts on themselves” (Seita & Brown, 2010). Like Carriere and Richardson (2010), Seita takes a stance on the importance of dignity and the language we use in talking about youth in care.

Ethics in research and practice

Vikki Reynolds (2008) states that “the person is held responsible for their actions, but not for the social context. Responsibility must be in balance with access to power” (p. 5). Young people who are in the care of the state do not have access to the same level of power that their caregivers do, and their caregivers do not have access to the power that policy makers and researchers can access. Yet it is young people who are held accountable for their “behaviour” by diagnosis and segregation from “normal” through the authoritative lenses of normative development. If we consider context and access to power, then systems should be held accountable and policy should attend to that level of accountability, for example, addressing poverty and increasing community-based support programs and housing for low-income families rather than focusing on family deficit and removing children.

Dominant cultural values, the lens of psychology, and dominant ideas of mental health, success and ability influence the way that we as professionals view and talk about young people in foster care. This occurs through labelling and practices of individualization, diagnoses and a systemically dedicated focus on attachment, behaviour, and ability. These practices isolate problems from context and locate them in the individual. This in turn prescribes responsibility on the individual rather than upon systems, and separates “problem children and youth” from connections to others by constituting them as other. Thus othering is achieved through a process

of contrasting “foster youth” to an idea of normal that stems from the dominant hegemonic discourse of normative development. Skott-Myhre (2008) states that “dominant systems of language seek to appear as if they have always been true and that any adjustments must be justified within the logic of the prevailing system” (p. 31) thus creating binary codes of legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowing and being. In exploring alternative ways of practicing that honour alternative modes of knowing, there are new possibilities for expansion. For example, following the theme of interconnection between people, spirituality, other beings and/or the earth through engagement in community programming would contrast the isolation of individual clinical treatment. The inclusion of young people and foster care alumni in research and policy would be pivotal to reshaping the field. This suggestion connects to the need for accessible and attainable grants for formal education and also connects to the need to acknowledge and honour multiple ways of knowing, including Indigenous knowledges and lived experience.

Response-Based and Narrative Conversations

When discussing counselling, MA described the difficulty of accessing adequate supports when there is so much silencing and denial surrounding issues facing young people in care. Under an individualizing, pathologizing lens, service providers may not even understand what they are missing. MA stresses that, “even if [young people in care] do see a counsellor, are they (the counsellor) asking the right questions?” (MA, T2, p. 2). Wade (1997) and Carriere and Richardson (2009) describe dignity as being central to how people respond to oppressive events. Dignity became a pivot point for conversations in this study, but in dominant ways of working therapeutically the idea of dignity is often lost, as are possibilities to attend to dignity when talking about young people’s ability to protect themselves and their families during times of

conflict and turmoil. Wade (1997) argues that “any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of one’s self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression, represents a de facto form of resistance” (p. 25). In this study, participants shared multiple examples of resisting negative social responses, protecting oneself, strategically (re)negotiating caregiver relationships, trusting, caring for self, protecting dignity, and seeking other possibilities. All of these actions often occur in the presence of the looming threat of being moved somewhere unknown, of being rejected, or living with a pervasive sense of not belonging. Coates and Wade (2007) provide ways of working therapeutically with people through inquiry into their responses to violence. By focusing on the material event, the context and the details of the ways in which people protect themselves, these conversations skirt the deficit-based conversations that victim-blame, pathologize, and further individualize young people.

Another form of therapy that fits with non-pathologizing ways of working with young people is Narrative therapy, originally developed by Michael White and David Epston. This therapeutic approach is informed by Foucault’s concepts of objectification (dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification) as discussed throughout this thesis and also connects to Foucault’s ideas on the inseparability of power/knowledge (Madigan, 2011).

Relationships and “stability”

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, relationships became a central theme of conversations with the collaborators, and of course are critical to caring for young people and to how young people care for themselves and others. Permanency planning appears to be a well discussed topic in foster care research and in long-term planning for children in care, and is very relevant to the current culture of care. In the Ministry’s most recent residential review

(Government of British Columbia, 2011), there is a core focus on how to sustain permanency for children, in their family of origin and in foster care. This includes encouraging permanent relationships with caregivers for young people in care. The collaborators in this study had many thoughts about permanency, which was often described as “stability” in our conversations. There are several connections between the Ministry’s review, of their consultations with young people, and the conversations in this study. The Ministry report’s findings overlap with this research’s findings in several respects, including the importance of supporting families, long-term planning about young people’s futures, sharing information (about placements), youth inclusion in planning, taking complaints seriously/youth’s right to be heard, not being judged, the importance of stable relationships, access to more supports and services, access to (consistent) funding for education, and more supports for aging out of care, including thoughts on housing beyond care. The collaborators also stressed the importance of building community through caregivers and of having more than one contact person in the Ministry to build a sense of continuity and connection.

In addition to these critical facets that support permanency and stability, the collaborators emphasized the more difficult to quantify importance of trust, dignity, and connecting with family, community and cultural background. Each of the participants described at least one important connection to people in their lives, whether they were teachers, youth workers, social workers, or foster parents who believed in them at some point during their time in care and who were able to see beyond any limitations derived from clinical ways of viewing young people. Most of the participants also reported active roles where they become those support people for others, and/or are pursuing education to do so in the future. They shared that they are involved in diverse projects and initiatives that support relationships and ethical community building. These

included supporting other foster kids living in their (former) home; volunteering to teach young people about the environment and living green; supporting family members; caring for siblings (also formerly in care); pursuing education; studying education, social work, or child and youth care to give back to applied fields; taking leadership roles at work; and training young people in a profession.

Limitations of this study

This research does seek to deconstruct individualistic ways of practice that limit other options of being/living, but is not a critique of any one system or role. Its intention is quite the opposite. The connections between the multiple roles of caregivers, social workers, and professionals are crucial to creating communities of support for young people in care.

There are several important conceptual, methodological, and applied limitations that have shaped the process and outcomes of this study. Due to its fluid and emergent nature, this is not an exhaustive study with the explicit aim of generating definitive solutions, particularly in terms of policy and practice analysis. Further studies need to be undertaken to expand this area of research that address complexity, and resistance/desire. Specifically, there is a need for an expanded focus on the nuances within and among the individual stories and perspectives of diverse young people in care. In a brief MA-level study such as this one, it is inevitable that the individual specificities of each individual story and context may get obscured. This was most obvious to me in the push and pull of the analysis process, which I experienced as both reductive and expansive. In many respects, I experienced a palpable sense of loss while completing the data analysis: I could have written an entire thesis on each of the 10 interviews. Some topics were rushed or missed completely in favour of the presentation and dissemination of key findings. I had to choose the pieces that the participants seemed to emphasize and prioritize, and

that contextualized their artistic exploration of the concepts/conversations. But there are a thousand ways to read the data, and so multiple sites of inquiry emerge from this study such as a more complex, layered understanding of desire, resistance, Indigenous knowledges and spiritual ways of knowing, and how these connect to policy and practice and a more complex political analysis.

Concluding thoughts

As Skott-Myhre (2007) suggests, striving towards revolutionary youth work can generate “new ways of imagining the world outside the existing regimes of power and domination [that] produce new possibilities for who we might become.” (p.18) This idea of becoming aligns with the productive, creative force of young people that ruptures the limiting dominant sociocultural conceptions of “youth in care.” In this study, my goal was to see what possibilities might emerge when exploring collaboration and complexity, when looking to depart from harmful practice and reductive forms of research. This thesis does not find an answer, with no promise to ever do so, but I hope it generates ideas for how to rethink foster care practice, research and policy to move towards an ethic of action, collaboration and justice. KD suggests that life “is always moving, it is always fluid. It doesn’t mean that you have to put up a wall, or stop that movement but just be aware and conscious of it” (KD, T2, p. 16).

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