

**BLACK YOUTH MATTER: AN ARTS-BASED AND NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE
EXPERIENCES OF BLACK YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CHILD WELFARE
CARE AND THEIR ACCESS TO HOUSING**

By CHELSEA DAVENPORT, B.S.W., M.S.W (c)

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (2020)

TITLE: Black Youth Matter: An Arts-based and Narrative Study of the Experiences of Black Youth Transitioning out of Child Welfare Care and their Access to Housing

AUTHOR: Chelsea Davenport, BSW (Ryerson University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ann Fudge Schormans

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Agya bi wu a, agya bi te ase

-Akan Proverb

The raising of children is a communal activity in Akan societies. With such an arrangement, a child could have many parents, where a parent is someone who takes some responsibility for raising the child. In such a situation, if one's biological parent dies or is absent, there are many others to individually or collectively play their role.

Abstract

Background: There has been minimal research conducted on the unique experiences of Black youth who transition out of the child welfare system, and as well as the factors that contribute to their success or failure to accessing housing.

Purpose: The purpose of study is to explore the needs and experiences of Black youth using Critical Race theory, BlackCrit and Social Capital theory to better understand their experience accessing safe, affordable housing within the Greater Toronto Area after transitioning out of child welfare.

Methods: Five Black youth were recruited using site sampling and snow-ball sampling to participate in an arts-based and narrative study. The data was then analyzed in a constant comparative method.

Findings: The findings from this study suggest the following things: The emotional roller coaster of being in care, the importance of community and sense of family, youth voices in decision-making process, unpreparedness for independent living, the unawareness of housing options, youth definition of good housing, more resources are needed prior to departure of child welfare.

Implications and Recommendations for Change: In light of the findings in this study, a number of recommendations are proposed for improving outcomes for Black youth leaving care and their access to housing. Below is a summary of recommendations:

- A. To focus on building and providing genuine relationships through a caring adult and permanency for Black youth in care
- B. Centralize and value the voices of Black youth in care throughout their post-care planning, policy development and research
- C. To address and respond to the unique experiences that Black youth with disabilities face within the housing market when preparing them for independence outside of the CWS
- D. To apply a Housing first Youth approach

It is my hope that this information will be used to support policy changes and program development in child welfare and the rental housing market that can result in more successful outcomes for Black youth.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Yvette Davenport, who instilled in me the importance of getting good grades, time management, school attendance, and being respectful. It was through these teachings, that I now possess the habits, skills and values that help within the profession of social work, my graduate studies and general life. Most importantly, because of her, I have developed a love and passion for lifelong learning. I know if she were still alive, she would be proud of my dedication, discipline and determination. Thank you mummy, this one's for you!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It has been reported that 65 percent of youth who are in group care and almost half of the children in state care in urban cities across Ontario identify as Black (Wehbie & Parada, 2017; Contenta et al., 2014). However, the Black community in an urban city such as Toronto only makes up approximately 8.5% of the population (Contenta et al. 2014). Evidently, there is a disproportionate representation of Black children and youth who have been placed into the care of the state (Clarke, 2011). Further, racialized children are more likely than white children to come in contact with the child welfare system, and these experiences are exacerbated and more complex for Black children and families. For instance, when contrasted with white children, Black children are more likely to be suspected of being mistreated by their families, reported and investigated by child welfare workers and institutions, placed in foster homes and out-of-home placements, and are less likely to be adopted or reunited with their biological families (Clarke, 2012; Lemon et al., 2005). While in care, Black and racialized children have reported more experiences of maltreatment and abuse than white children (Clarke, 2012).

As youth transition to adulthood, they encounter additional and increasing responsibilities, such as managing employment, relationships, and becoming responsible for their health and wellbeing (Fisher et al, 1986). In the current context, for most Canadian youth, living independently does not typically occur until their mid-20s, as transition to adulthood is often delayed by the choice of remaining in the parental home (Service Canada, n.d.). However, this is not the case for former youth in care. 16.5 percent of 16 and 17-year-old youth in care fall into the placement category of 'living independently' with minimal support (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2017, p.5). And, in Ontario, 800 to 1,000 eighteen-year old youth age-out of care each year (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2018). Although Canadian

research focusing on the transitions stage and outcomes for youth leaving care is limited, the existing literature suggests that youth experience numerous challenges upon aging-out of care, related to, for instance, access to education, employment, and housing (Courtney et al., 2009; Rutman et al., 2007; Tweddle, 2005). However, the collection of disaggregated data that explores the unique experiences of Black youth after leaving care is almost non-existent (Turner, 2017; Teklu, 2012, Tweddle, 2007). Thus, little is known about how Black youth fare in their transition out of care, particularly in their efforts to access housing and employment.

There is literature that suggests that anti-Black racism may influence how Black youth navigate through life once exiting out of care. This literature reveals various issues facing Black youth in general, issues that may emerge for youth transitioning out of child welfare. This includes, but is not limited to; lower rates of educational success, higher rates of poverty and unemployment, increased risk of housing precarity and homelessness, and increased interactions with the criminal justice system (Browell et al., 2010; Hook and Courtney, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012; Tweddle, 2005; Dworsky, 2005; Reilly, 2003). There are significant consequences to the success of youth who are unable to obtain safe, affordable and secure housing upon transitioning from care (Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Stein, 2008). Among the many challenges that youth face while transitioning out of care, the literature highlights homelessness as a particularly prevalent issue experienced by the community (Tweddle, 2007; Rutman et al., 2007).

The purpose of this research project is to identify the experiences faced by a small group of Black youth who have left child welfare pertaining to their access to housing and experiences transiting out of care. While there is some literature that explores this phenomenon, the experiences of Black youth who transition out of care is an area that is often under-researched

and notably one of the most essential aspects of youth's transition into adulthood. This gap in research means that little is known about Black youth transitioning from care, therefore this study may fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Black youth in Toronto from a Critical Race, BlackCrit and Social Capital theoretical positioning.

Research Question

This master's thesis aims to explore the needs and experiences of Black youth who are transitioning out of care and to examine their access to safe, affordable housing within Toronto and surrounding areas. The primary objective of this research is to answer the question: *How does anti-blackness in the child welfare system impact the experiences of Black youth accessing housing while transitioning out of care in Toronto?*

Research Objective

The purpose of the research was to generate vital information from a small group of Black youth who were/are in the care of child welfare through this qualitative study that uses art and narrative based methods to achieve these aims:

- Explore the experiences, barriers, and perceptions of Black youth during their transition and post-transition out of care.
- To allow the youth to identify culturally appropriate informal and formal supports within children's aid societies and the community that help or hinder youths' access to housing.
- And to use the knowledge gained to support policy changes and program development that can result in more successful outcomes for Black youth.

Anti-Black Racism (ABR)

To properly situate this project, I begin with the acknowledgement that anti-Black racism (ABR) exists in Canadian society. It is then important that I offer an understanding of the phenomenon. ABR is a form of structural violence that is rooted in the history of enslavement and colonization (Phillips & Pon, 2018; Pon, Gosine, & Phillips, 2011). It emphasizes the distinct experiences of racism perpetuated against Black people. ABR acknowledges the ways in which institutional structures such as education, housing, employment, and the child welfare system have actively segregated, marginalized and discriminated against the Black community (Pon, Gosine, & Phillips, 2011). A core tenant of ABR is the awareness of community resistance against the oppressions that Black communities face daily. Through the additional theoretical positioning of critical race theory (CRT) and BlackCrit, we can further examine policies and decision-making processes and experiences in a race-conscious way (Williams, 2013). These theoretical standpoints offer the importance of “centralizing community voices, experiences and perspectives of racialized people” in order to develop policies and practices that impact the lives of Black communities (Mullings, Morgan, & Quelleng, 2016, p. 53). Therefore, this project will prioritize the experiences and voices of those who have suffered due to racist policies, programs and processes.

As evidenced by the racial inequities experienced by Black Canadians in multiple systems, including child welfare, criminal justice, and the housing market, this project is rooted in the understanding that whiteness, ABR, and colonization are embedded within these systems (Phillips & Pon 2018). Black children and youth in child welfare care have expressed many sentiments that racism exists in child welfare, that it operates through racial biases, individual racism, and lack of cultural competency, within agencies, staff, policies, and practices (Turner,

2016). As such, this research project will not be centered around proving whether anti-Black racism exists within CWS. Instead, it will focus on the ways anti-Black racism is manifested within these systems that, in turn, impacts the outcomes for Black youth who leave CWS.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Welfare System (CWS): A group of governmental agencies, at times in partnership with private organizations, developed for the protection of children by providing services that supplement or substitute for parental care and supervision (OACAS, 2013).

Permanency: an enduring family relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime; offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership; the child or youth has a sense of belonging and affiliation to a family/extended family with significant community connections; and provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well-being (OACAS, 2020).

Youth in care: youth who are involved in the child welfare system, and specifically in out-of-home or extended care, historically known as Crown wardship.

Youth transition: An age when a youth moved from the care of CWS to independent living (OACAS, 2012).

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Critical social theory is the paradigm that informs this research study. Critical social theory can be best described as offering an understanding of oppression while critiquing domination (Mullaly & West, 2018). This is accomplished through the exploration of social and political practice to address oppression. The goal of critical social theory is liberation by moving away from systems of inequality and oppression and towards an emancipatory system free of domination (Mullaly & West, 2018). This paradigm has been used to begin to understand the social injustice that occurs towards Black youth and children who have encountered the child welfare system (Clarke, 2012; Pon, Gosine, & Phillips, 2011). The paradigm has aided me to consider how I might integrate a number of theoretical frameworks to bring forth transformation

within a child welfare context and address the complexities that Black youth transitioning out of child welfare experience. With all of this in mind, I have chosen three theories to frame this study: Critical Race Theory, BlackCrit, and Social Capital Theory. This section of the thesis will include my conceptualization and operationalization of each of these theories within the study.

From my understanding each of the three theoretical frameworks is typically applied in research in isolation from one another. I am eager to demonstrate how they complement, connect, and correlate within this study. It is my firm belief that these theories not only ground this study given the ontological perspectives from which they begin, but when combined, will provide the necessary framework to better understand the experiences of Black youth who have transitioned out of care and identify mechanisms to offer and strengthen support.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged through the efforts of Black and racialized scholars who sought to use a race-conscious approach to analyze how society maintains white supremacy while oppressing and exploiting racial minority groups (Aylward, 1999). Further, the theory aims to re-examine how concepts of race, racism and power are taken up in dominant discourse, as a means of bringing liberation and transformation to communities most affected (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Delgado (1995), identifies several tenets to CRT. One tenet is that storytelling and counter storytelling are powerful tools for unlearning beliefs that are commonly believed to be true, such as the deconstruction of the “myths, presuppositions and received wisdom about [...] race that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado, 1995, p.xiv). Throughout history; stories have been passed down from generations, these stories have often been told visually through art, on walls, textiles, and paper (Zipes, 2013). For instance, the use of art can be found in many African cultures,

where traditional forms of storytelling were shared on skin and rocks (Nanton, 2016). Therefore we can take the methods of our ancestors and apply it now, through the use of digital storytelling which uses drawings, photos and videos to then convey the Black experience (Nanton, 2016). Within the framework of CRT, we must however recognize that neither art nor narrative storytelling are enough to transform violent discourses, instead they are essential steps towards unlearning. It is through such processes of information gathering [narrative and art], that we can render new stories and legitimize the voices of those with lived experiences. This is the essence of CRT as without the true stories of Black youth being publicly proclaimed, perhaps the world would continue to believe and perceive that all is fine.

CRT allows me as a researcher to build off the objectives of photovoice, which include using imagery to capture lived experiences, promoting community issues through the taking and exhibiting of photographs, and promoting social change by engaging with key stakeholders (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004). As a result of this, my research will move away from the labels, misconstrued ideologies and experiences as told about Black communities by the oppressors. When members of Black communities themselves bring to light the histories and experiences of Black communities, this can act as a weapon for empowerment and change (Razack & Jeffery, 2002).

In sum, by using arts-based methods to create/gather the stories and narratives of Black youth, CRT offers a lens by which to analyze the constructions of race and racism as a common experience for Black youth who are trying to access housing after transitioning out of child welfare.

Black Critical Theory - **BlackCrit**

Black Critical Theory, commonly known as BlackCrit, emerged as a response to CRT, in order to distinctively name and address the racial oppression of Black people (Wynter, 1989; Dumas and Ross, 2016). It is through BlackCrit that we can identify the processes by which marginalization and oppression occurs on Black bodies (Dumas and Ross, 2016). As one of the three theoretical frameworks that will inform this study, BlackCrit provides the foundation for understanding anti-Black racism as endemic for the youth involved in this study (Coles, 2020; Dumas and Ross, 2016).

The framings of BlackCrit put forth by Dumas and Ross (2016) that will guide the extension of CRT in the present study include:

- (a) anti-Blackness as endemic to all dimensions of human life;
 - (b) Blackness existing in tension with the “neoliberal-multicultural imagination”;
 - (c) creating space for Black liberatory fantasy; and
 - (d) resisting revisionist history that erases Whites from a history of racial dominance
- (p.429–431)

Although CRT is one of the theories used to guide my research, it cannot operate in isolation as it does not fully capture the experiences of the participants and the social issues that impact their lives, it is limited in its ability to address the nuances of the Black experience within institutions such as child welfare (Dumas and Ross, 2016). Further, it does not equip me, as a researcher, with the appropriate language to engage, analyze and share how anti-Black racism impacts the youth within the law, policies, services and their everyday life because the focus is too broad (Dumas and Ross, 2016). In the early development of this research study, when I was

engaging with the literature through the lens of BlackCrit, what became clear was the significant need to recruit participants solely from the Black community. This is not to undermine the experiences of racism and oppression of other racialized and Indigenous children and youth within the child welfare system. Instead, it was to centralize the voice of Black youth to work towards the dismantling of anti-Blackness within child welfare. While all racialized communities face their own struggles and none overshadows another, I believe it to be important to single out the unique Black experiences within CWS. This is because not all racialized people suffer equally from the effects of institutional racism, as discussed earlier in this thesis -Anti-Black Racism (Weheliye, 2014). It is through BlackCrit that I am understanding the distinct layers of injustice that Black people face and the distinct layers within those identities, such as Black women and Black disabled women. Further, it allows me to position the data gathered in the study within the inherent understanding that ABR is prevalent within the child welfare system. With the intent to include the voices of the Black community to ensure no-one is left behind in the process of rethinking and improving the CWS and, ultimately adding to the emerging work that seeks to overcome the distinct layers of injustice this community faces.

By engaging with both CRT and BlackCrit, I was provided with a relevant lens to examine the significant and perpetual violence experienced by Black youth that is embedded within ideological discourses and as part of institutional practices.

Social Capital Theory

The final theory that was used to understand the experiences of Black youth participating in this study, is the social capital theory (SCT), which emerged from four main contributors, Bourdieu (1997), Coleman (1990), Putnam (2000), and more recently Lin (2001). This theory is commonly used within studies that involve the experiences of youth in both research and policy

and is therefore fitting for my study. Although SCT has been used by researchers for decades, clear definitions are scarce (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Bourdieu provides a definition of SCT that resonated with me the most. For Bourdieu (1986), SCT refers to “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). In simpler terms, social capital refers to the product of social relationships that we have within groups and the role that this plays in our lives (Bassani, 2007). What is essential from Bourdieu's work to the application of this study is the emphasis on the complexities entailed in the social reproduction of class inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Lin (2001) emphasizes the value of using social capital as “it’s refined and explicit articulation of resources, social structure, and hierarchy, as resources—embedded in a social structure—that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1083). It is through Lin’s work that I will incorporate systems of hierarchy and its direct influence on Black youth accessing housing into analysis of data gathered in this study.

Bassani (2007, p.18) works to provide an amalgamated and more linear understanding of SCT for researchers and students. Within her work, Lin suggests that there are five main dimensions of social capital theory, these include:

- (1) there are various forms of capital that influence well-being, of which social capital plays a pivotal role;
- (2) a positive relation between social capital and well-being exists;
- (3) social resources are transformed into social capital;
- (4) social capital is created in a complex process; and
- (5) social capital formed in any two groups (such as the family and school)

interacts to influence the effect that social capital has on youths.

The concept of SCT, as elaborated above, permits me to look at how youth gain access to vital resources such as housing and an overall successful or unsuccessful transition out of care through relationships that are developed within the institutions that they have encountered. Due to the complexities of the lives and circumstances of the participants in this study, sources of social capital are often located outside of the familial context of the theory. Therefore, the contextualization of social capital theory in this study will have to address the lived realities of Black youth aging-out of care. As sources of social capital may stem from social workers, foster parents, peers-support relationships, mentors, and law enforcement personnel. This is due to the complexity of the lives and circumstances of youth transitioning out of care as there is variability of services and support they encounter. Within the context of this study, a more fluid definition of SCT suggests that multiple factors will play a role and influence the transition for youth leaving care.

For the purpose of this study, all of the dimensions identified by Bassanni (2007) loosely informed the process of research design and data analysis, however, some specific dimensions were more instrumental. For instance, Bassanni's third dimension (social resources are transformed into social capital) and the fourth dimension (social capital is created in a complex process), and Lin's idea that social capital is hierarchically related relative to the control of and access to resources, proved important to this study. These components of SCT are also compatible with CRT and BlackCrit, which will be further explored below.

For this study, it was important to recognize that access to social capital directly impacts the well-being of an individual due to what Lin (2001) identifies as its mobilizing role. Although well-being was not the primary focus of this study, I am bringing a holistic perspective to this

analysis and discussion and consider well-being (as might result from being housed) to be a product of social capital. Through this acknowledgement, we can see the significance of attending to social capital in efforts towards creating better outcomes for youth who transition out of care. Further, when conceptualizing access to housing and, in particular, how someone defines ‘good’ housing it is contingent upon the social and structural resources present for the youth. This refers to the relationships and environments that the youth have found themselves in throughout their lifetime.

Bassani (2007) suggests that when youth are able to engage in healthy relationships, it produces social capital, whereas unhealthy relationships result in limited social capital. When interpreting the data, I avoid oversimplifying the experiences as ‘healthy’ versus ‘unhealthy’. Instead, I chose to extract the components of the stories that represent both unhealthy and healthy relationships, networks, and resources throughout the youth’s journey towards housing, irrespective of the outcome. In this way, I avoid creating assumptions about what an ideal housing situation is based on my experiences and relationships.

When interpreting the data through SCT, I must factor in the unique experiences of each participant but ultimately look to reveal the commonalities between the different trajectories from the Black youth participating in the study, as a means by which to inform future policy and program directives. Further, I hope that by integrating SCT within my research, other policy developers, child welfare, and researchers taking up this work can consider including SCT within their work with youth. With that being said, some research has discovered that merely measuring social capital is not enough, as it does not always impact the youths’ well-being (Bassani, 2007). Moreover, Bassani (2007) questions the integration of unique experiences of youth when other factors such as racism, age, and ability come into play. With this in mind, I see

the integration of SCT with CRT and BlackCrit, as a means by which to begin to mitigate this limitation. It is through the use of this combination of theories, that as a researcher, I can look for the complexities of exogenous factors such as historical implications, family history, race, age, gender and how they impact the development of social capital for the youth who are transitioning out of care.

SCT starts with the premise that people are influenced and impacted by their ecological and communal support systems (Barn, 2010; Reynolds, 2009). Therefore, SCT is important to this study as it functions to address and acknowledge the nuances of the journey Black youth experience when transitioning out of care.

In summary, when considering these ideas, it was evident that the combination of CRT, BlackCrit, and SCT was best suited to provide the theoretical frameworks I needed for my study. CRT and BlackCrit provide the critical lens to address systems of oppression, racism, and anti-blackness within the study. Blackcrit and SCT allow us to consider how social structures, whether consciously or unconsciously, oppress some youth while privileging other youth as they attempt to access housing. CRT, BlackCrit, and SCT, together, create a holistic framework where issues are not attended to in isolation. Black children and youth who are in child welfare care are at increased vulnerability and risk of homelessness by virtue of their pre-existing circumstances such as their involvement with CWS and their race (Coman & Devanney, 2011), and through this combination of three theories, I have a lens by which to begin to discuss the how, why and next steps. It is with this reflective understanding that this study allowed the participants to express their experiences using art and narrative methods, so that we can make more informed meaning of their experiences transitioning out of care and accessing housing.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to identify the experiences faced by Black youth who have left child welfare. Amongst the many challenges and negative outcomes that youth experience, this literature review will focus on issues of homelessness, underemployment, and poverty (Leslie & Hare, 2000; Mendes, 2003; OACAS, 2006; McCreary Centre Society, 2007; Tweddle, 2005). While there is some literature that explores this phenomenon, the experiences of Black youth who transition out of care is an area that is often under-researched. This literature review will begin by highlighting the racial disproportionality and disparities of Black children in care. Next, I will provide an analysis of literature that addresses the transitioning period for Black youth exiting the system and their access to housing or experience with homelessness as potential outcomes.

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive review of all the literature, but a summary of major themes found in relevant literature pertaining to the experiences of Black youth who are transitioning or leaving the CWS. The research literature that I reviewed reveals that this is a group of youth who are facing a very complex process, complicated by multiple factors that contribute to an unsuccessful transition out of care. The literature revealed a number of significant themes and issues that emerge for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system. This includes, but is not limited to, decreased educational successes, higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and increased interactions with the criminal justice system (Browell et al., 2010; Hook and Courtney, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012; Tweddle, 2005). Although, not all of these factors will be explored within this literature review, I recognize the complexity and prevalence of these issues for Black youth who have transitioned out of care.

Search Engines

Keywords and phrases used in searches were as follows: child welfare and ethnic minority youth transition; adolescent youth leaving care, Post care options, ethnic minority youth transitioning from care; ethnic youth transition and homelessness, employment; youth transition and marginalization; Black youth leaving the CWS; and African Canadian youth aging out of care and child welfare; Anti-Black Racism in Child Welfare.

Anti-Blackness in Care

In 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services provided funding to address the need for better service and outcomes for African Canadian children, youth, and families who come in contact with child welfare agencies (Turner, 2016). Throughout the process, the voices of Black youth and families involved in the Ontario CWS were elevated, reminding us of the prevalence of human suffering caused by systemic racism in the child welfare system (Turner, 2016). In relation to narratives shared by Black families involved with this sector, scholars have concluded that colonialism, anti-Black racism, and white supremacy are embodied by Ontario's child welfare system (Pon & Phillips, 2018). Thus, this project will acknowledge that anti-Black racism exists in Canadian society and in the child welfare system as demonstrated through the narratives, art and experiences of the Black communities and families who have interacted with this system. This portion of the literature review will look at academic and grey literature to further address how anti-Black racism is manifested and the impact that such anti-Black racism has on Black youth who are transitioning out of care.

The Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable (2009) found that in urban cities across Ontario, such as Toronto, London, and Ottawa, 65 percent of youth who are in group care

identify as Black (Wehbi & Parada, 2017). Racialized children are more likely to be removed from their families, but these experiences are exacerbated and more complex for Black children and families. For example, Clarke (2012) and Lemon et al. (2005) point out that Black children are more likely to be suspected of being mistreated by their families, reported and investigated by child welfare workers and institutions, placed in foster homes and out-of-home placements, and are less likely to be adopted or reunited with their biological families. Fallon et al. (2013) found that the rate of investigations involving White children was 54 per 1,000 children, but 75 per 1,000 for Black children, reflecting the overrepresentation of Black children being reported and put into care. Pon, Gosine and Phillips (2011), argue that the over-representation of Black children in care and Black families involved with the child welfare system can be explained by systemic and structural oppression of colonialism and racism existing with the child welfare system. Despite data that demonstrates this overrepresentation and understanding of the sociohistorical factors contributing to it, much of the existing literature does not address the experiences of Black families in and outside of CWS (Clarke, 2002, 2011; Hutchinson et al., 1992; Rambally, 1995). The literature that does exist reveals that there is as well an overrepresentation of Black youth in care who experience an enormous amount of trauma, abuse, and neglect, including the sometimes neglectful parenting of the government care system (Raychaba, 1988; Courtney et. al, 1998). As a result of these experiences, Black children and youth may be left with unresolved conflicts that follow them as they transition out of care. The research literature also demonstrates that it is not solely the child welfare system that is embedded with racism, but also the related systems of criminal justice, health care and education - all of which are actively involved in the lives of children and youth in child welfare care, and

each of which creates additional barriers for youth who are transitioning out of child welfare (Pon & Phillips, 2018).

Youth Transitioning out of the Child welfare System (CWS)

1. Homelessness

The literature demonstrates that all youth exiting CWS's care are at a great disadvantage when contrasted with their community peers, specifically related to the risk of homelessness. Our Voice Our Turn (2012), reported that approximately 43 percent of homeless youth have been involved with the child protection sector within Ontario. In the Toronto youth shelter Covenant House, it was reported 48% of "street youth" seeking post-transition were former children in care (Leslie and Hare, 2000). Transience is common for many youths leaving care as they struggle to find a safe, affordable, and accessible place to live (Rutman et.al, 2005). Within the first six months of transitioning out of care, this risk is even greater for youth (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). A Canadian study from the University of Victoria reported that 30 percent of their sample of 37 youth who would be aging-out in 2003 or 2004 had moved four or more times within eighteen months of leaving care (Rutman et al., 2007, p. 7). Youth participating in another study who had not received the proper preparation for their transition, reported being homeless or spending at least one night on the street (Courtney & Dworsky, 2009). Among the homeless youth was an over-representation of Black youth (Kulik et al., 2011, Teklu 2012); this finding supports the need for further research and resources allocated to this population.

From my review of the literature, it would seem that the reasons that housing instability and homelessness occur for youth transitioning from CWS are often not studied, and when they are reported, it would appear that circumstances vary. One factor that is understood to contribute to the increased housing precarity of youth transitioning out of care is that youth leaving care

often do not return to their communities to live with a parent or other family member but instead are faced with the reality of having to find a place to live on their own (Rutman et al., 2007, Stein, 2008). Additionally, Rutman et al., (2007) reported homelessness in the teenage years occurred for youth in care due to conflicts with a parent or caregiver or when a parent was no longer physically able to support them (p. 41). In a study by Kulik et al., (2011), youth also reported family situations such as a history of sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse and parental substance abuse as contributing factors to their homelessness and housing instability. In this and another study, youth participants indicated that involvement with drugs or alcohol led to homelessness, while for others homelessness resulted from breakdowns in personal relationships with a boyfriend (Rutman et., 2007 p.18, Kulik et al., 2011). In sum, there is a relationship between youth who experience homelessness and youth with previous involvement in the CWS (Rutman et., al 2007; Kulik et.al, 2011). This is significant because it demonstrates the impact that a loss of services, support and relationships may have on the transition of youth in care (Serge et al., 2002).

2. Housing

For Black youth transitioning from child welfare care, additional barriers exist with access to safe affordable housing as they face structural inequalities and differential treatment as compared to non-Black youth. Specifically, for Black youth, there are structural barriers to accessing housing, as discriminatory practices from housing providers often deem Black youth as undesirable tenants (CERA, 2018; OHRC, 2007) - this occurs despite the Ontario Human Rights Code (“the Code”) which guarantee that all tenants have the right to equality in housing. Illegal discriminatory practices are still common, as some landlords refuse to rent to people on the basis of their age and/or other intersecting factors, such as their race, gender identity or

expression, or source of income (CERA, 2018). Discrimination can take many forms, this includes the denial of housing, charging higher prices or rents for housing, and applying more stringent or inappropriate screening criteria to certain people due to their social location (University of Toronto, 2002; Canadian Human Rights Act Review Panel, 2000; Hucker 1997). For instance, in a study conducted in Toronto looking at the housing experiences of African immigrants in the city's rental market, they found that most respondents experienced discrimination by landlords in their housing search (Teixeira, 2008). An additional complicating factor is the confusion that exists in youth communities about the law and their rights, due to the inaccessible resources that exist (CERA, 2018). This can then result in landlords and housing providers exploiting their age-related vulnerability to deny them safe, affordable and accessible housing (CERA, 2018). Consequently, youth reportedly are less likely than other groups to seek support for accessing justice, even when their rights have clearly been violated (CERA, 2018). For Black youth and former crown wards, this could be especially true as a negative history with the criminal justice system may deter them from using these services.

When critically analyzing access to housing for Black youth who have transitioned out of care, we must include the impacts of current policies and programs on pre-transition planning and post-care supports. Within the child welfare system, the Continued Care and Support for Youth program provides eligible individuals who have reached the age of 18yrs and for whom care has been terminated with extra financial support (MCSSb, 2019). The financial support is in the form of monthly payments of \$850 paid directly to the youth member to ease the transition into independence and adulthood. The monthly payments are available up to the age of 21yrs. Typically, this fund is intended for housing, groceries and other essential needs, depending on the level and types of support the youth has access to. If we examine this policy through a focus

on some of the most vulnerable youth within an urban setting, it is evident many will fall through the cracks, and this may be especially so for Black youth. According to CMHC (2015), an ‘affordable’ accommodation is considered a rental that costs the individual 30% or less of their average household income. In 2018, it was reported by CMHC that the average one-bedroom rental in the Greater Toronto Area was \$1260 a month. Therefore, a former youth in care would have to earn a monthly income of approximately \$4,000 a month for the average unit to be considered affordable. Even with the combination of Ontario Works - which is \$656/month - and the \$850 from MCSS a month, the independent youth would still not have the means to access affordable housing. The literature also indicates that discrimination based on income is becoming a concern, this is usually practiced through the use of credit reports, rent-to-income ratios, and request for guarantors (University of Toronto, 2002) and unfairly discriminates against those with lower incomes. These factors combine to suggest that the Continued Care and Support for Youth program does not mitigate the specific challenges faced by Black youth who have transitioned out of care in the urban city.

Black youth who have left child welfare face intersecting discriminatory barriers in the rental housing system. When you combine age, income status, race, gender and lived experience, Black youth appear to be more likely to be subject to discrimination in housing. Through both the literature and analysis of current provincial policy directives, it has become evident that the needs of the Black youth living in an urban setting are not being met.

3. Employment and Poverty

Studies indicate that youth who age out of care experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment (Hook and Courtney, 2011; Tweddle, 2005). A Canadian study discovered that only 32 percent of their sample of 210 former youth in care received full-time

employment upon leaving care (Tweddle, 2005). In comparison to the general population, employment wage rates are significantly lower for former youth in care (Hook and Courtney, 2011). In a longitudinal study located in the American Midwest, researchers followed a sample of 732 young people who had aged out of care and discovered that by age 23 and 24 years, 56% would be classified as poor (excluding the nine percent who were disabled or incarcerated) (Hook and Courtney, 2011). Further, it was revealed that youth who aged out of care with a high school diploma were twice as likely to be employed; whereas, youth having aged out of care who completed some university were four times more likely to be employed (Hook and Courtney, 2011). This is significant as education is closely linked to employment outcomes and further impacts housing options for youth. Hook and Courtney (2011) compared their study results with a National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health which further demonstrated the disparity of low-income and unemployment from former foster youth than their peers.

Despite variation in policy and programming, similar findings were found in Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). A study in Australia reported that 68.1% of youth leaving child welfare care were receiving welfare support related to education and 48.9% to unemployment (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007). Further, only five young people were earning a full-time wage (6% of females, 16% of males) (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007). While the authors of the study did not offer an explanation for the gender disparity, the gap between males and females could be due to the prevalence of early pregnancy affecting women leaving care (Hook & Courtney, 2011). It might however be a function of other factors - more research is required. In a British longitudinal study, it was found that youths aging out from residential care often have to depend on social assistance (Stein, 1994). Studies in both the UK and Australia indicate that former

youth in care are more likely to be dependent on social assistance and more likely to be unemployed or underemployed (Cashmore & Paxon, 2007; Stein, 1994).

More recent Canadian studies have indicated that youth find the loss of supportive relationships, as well as financial hardship, to be the most challenging component of leaving care (Rutman et al., 2005). Within the context of housing, this alludes to the challenges in finding, securing and maintaining safe and affordable housing for youth. Toronto has one of the highest housing markets in Canada (Teixeira, 2008). For youth living in urban cities and facing financial difficulties this makes obtaining safe, affordable housing within the urban city very difficult.

When examining trends of employment and wage outcomes for foster youth who age out of care, I noticed substantial racial disparities and variation in youths' experiences after leaving care (Dworsky, 2005; George et al., 2002; Hook & Courtney, 2011). For instance, African American youth were half as likely to be employed compared to white youth (Hook & Courtney, 2011). African American youth also earned significantly less than their white counterparts (Goerge et al., 2002). Dworsky (2005) reported that African American youth experienced less favorable labor markets than whites. Thus, unemployment and underemployment and financial precarity seems to be a typical experience for Black youth leaving care (Hook and Courtney, 2011; Tweddle, 2005). Studies from four countries have demonstrated that youth leaving care are not earning enough money to successfully achieve self-sufficiency, let alone adequate housing. Further, some researchers also concluded the need for more race-related data when understanding the experiences of youth unemployment and poverty when transitioning out of care.

To conclude, when conducting this literature review, what became evident was the lack of research, policies, and programs that take up a critical race lens when addressing the

experiences of youth in care. Although it might be possible for some to attribute poor transitions solely to the traumatic backgrounds and personal characteristics of Black youth, the findings from this literature review suggest that additional structural and systemic factors within the housing market and the child protection system may also contribute significantly to poor outcomes for youth aging-out of care. In some of the studies included in this literature review, youth have shared their frustrations with being suddenly cut off from child welfare system services and programs before they feel ready, expressing that they do not possess the financial resources to fend for themselves (see for example, Tweddle, 2005). Despite differences in policy, research from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada all report on poor employment outcomes for former youth in care.

The literature has demonstrated that there is a need for additional resources to be allocated to better understanding the experiences of Black youth transitioning out of care and the development of tools and interventions that will result in more successful outcomes. The existing limited literature points to the ways that Anti-Black racism is embedded within current social, economic, and political systems in Canada, resulting in a lack of opportunities, lower-socioeconomic status, higher unemployment, and significant poverty rates for former youth in care. For Black youth exiting care, it has become known that Black youth leaving care are disproportionately at risk when compared to their White counterparts (Avery, 2011; Stein, 2008). However, nuanced understanding of the disproportionalities is just beginning to become present within the literature and there is a strong need for further research that responds to this issue of Black youth transitioning out of care and access to housing that meets their needs.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodology

My approach to methodology was guided by my choice of theoretical frameworks, specifically BlackCrit. BlackCrit significantly informed my research design, choice of methods, recruitment and also data collection process. The purpose of my research is to learn about, share, and honour the experiences of Black youth who have transitioned out care and their access to housing post care. In recognition of the value of the lived experiences that the Black youth bring, I wanted to ensure power was shared wherever possible within the data collection process. BlackCrit emphasizes the valuation of lived experience by placing the ownership of knowledge back into the control of Black communities who experienced it in order to identify the processes by which marginalization and oppression occurs on Black bodies (Dumas and Ross, 2016). An arts-based and narrative approach to inquiry fit best within the epistemological stances of BlackCrit, that emphasize Black youth speaking for themselves. All of these elements are what led to BlackCrit informing the methodological approach in this study.

Recruitment

To recruit the participants, I engaged in both site sampling and casual snowballing. Management of a specific private group home, located within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), had agreed to support recruitment of youth for this project. This private group home was chosen due to their emphasis on providing care to Black and racialized children and youth. The staff were provided an information poster (APPENDIX A) that they shared with youth electronically. An email script (APPENDIX B) was also provided to staff with additional information about the project that they shared with current and past residents. When a youth expressed interest in participating, or learning more about the project, they were advised to contact me directly and given the necessary information.

All participants and staff were also asked to inform others about the study to create greater awareness about the opportunity for youth to participate in the research. However the youth were not asked to use a formal script for snowball sampling because it is not the most relevant, efficient or accessible means for them to pass along their information, instead they were instructed to share project information and my contact information by capturing a photo of the poster and sharing that with their networks. All recruitment protocols were approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Participants Eligibility Criteria

Participants of this project consisted of:

- Black youth between the ages of 17 and 24 years (one exception to this age range was made and is explained in later in this discussion)
- Having transitioned out or left CWS care
- Who were seeking housing or living accommodations upon departure from care
- Have personally identified experience seeking housing or living accommodations upon departure or post care
- Have access to the internet, Facebook, telephone and/or email

Sample Size

A purposeful sample of five participants was recruited to engage in a three-part arts-based activity. Because this research project used both photovoice and narrative methods, it was recommended that I keep the sample size small. The limited number of participants allowed me to provide the necessary support to participants and ensure that they were able to fully participate (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The sample size was a feasible number for a Master level study, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in terms of cost and resources needed as participants received a \$50.00 e-transfer honorarium for participating in the entirety of the project. A detailed description with the demographics of the participants will be provided in Chapter 5.

Methods

Using an Arts-Based Methodology, that is guided by BlackCrit and CRT, this research hoped to provide an accessible, comfortable and safe(r) way to engage in the research objectives. An arts-based methodology was used to understand social issues in a non-conventional format using Photovoice (Bagnoli, 2009). The three main objectives of photovoice explained by Magill & McDonagh (2004) are the use of imagery to capture lived experiences, promote community issues through photographs, and promote social change by engaging with key stakeholders. Photovoice is a visual qualitative research methodology that typically uses cameras to help participants to document, reflect upon, and address areas of concern, while stimulating social change (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang et al. 2000). Art was used in this project to allow participants to share their experiences, barriers, and perceptions during their transition and post-transition out of care in an alternative mode of expression (Chambon, 2008).

Prior to COVID-19 a unique research design approach was created that would combine Photovoice and journey mapping as the arts-based methodologies to identify and reflect on common themes in the stories and experiences shared by the participants. While the first phase of the research remained the same (and is described later on), in the second workshop phase, participants would have been asked to share the photographs and notes that they collected in phase one. Participants would then be asked to display their photographs in a somewhat chronological order on a map or artistic display of their choice. Participants were going to be asked to share their photos in this way to follow the journey mapping process. A journey map is a visualization of the process that a person goes through in order to accomplish a goal. In its most basic form, journey mapping starts by compiling a series of user actions into a timeline (Crosier & Handord, 2012). Next, the timeline is fleshed out with user thoughts and emotions in

order to create a narrative/story (Crosier & Handord, 2012). Participants would be encouraged to think of different stages in their process of obtaining housing after leaving care. The Photovoice process with the combination of journey mapping would create a visual component of the research that will aid the community learn and access the findings. Next, the participants would be encouraged to share their photos and journey maps. After all participants have shared the plan was to work together as a group to identify themes and common issues that emerged from the participants stories, imagery and experiences.

However, the use of these arts-based methods has proven to be a challenging approach to research with youth during COVID-19, as all in-person data collection has been disallowed by McMaster University's Research Ethics Board. To accommodate the safety of both the participants and the researcher, I was required to significantly shift my approach. Photovoice was still an option for participants but in a more limited form in comparison to traditional photovoice methodology approach (for example, Wang 1999). As this study no longer contained group-based discussion, all discussions with participants were one-on-one. Each participant used freely licensed photos from the internet phone to capture images instead of taking their own images, and no personal photography devices or formal photography training were provided. The other significant difference was that the photovoice approach used in this study was less structured in terms of the discussion of photographs selected (see the Activity 3 subsection). Due to the restrictions of the use of solely an arts-based methodology, I made the decision to also include narrative methodology. Narrative method involves the use of storytelling relying on both written and/or spoken words (Riessman, 1993). Given the restrictions due to COVID-19 this method offered an accessible and manageable way to engage in the research question with the participants. The one-to-one semi structured interviews made it possible for me to closely attend

to what the participants were sharing and gave agency to the participants to have control over what was shared within the discussion. A narrative approach was an appropriate addition as it too aligns with CRT and BlackCrit as it fits with an epistemological stance in a way that impacts a person's life by critically engaging in power and structure and provides a compelling strategy for racialized groups to share their experiences to a greater audience (Bell, 2017). Through a narrative approach, I was able to gather the lived experiences of Black youth using virtual platforms such as Zoom and telephone. Using both the narrative approach of inquiry and photovoice also gave participants the opportunity to make sense of the forms of oppression that may have experienced using an approach familiar to many of them. The primary methods for gathering data in this research project were photovoice and narrative through semi-structured telephone interviews. Both of these methods gave agency to the participants to create and share their experiences. The imagery and stories told were used to present their ideas, conflicts, experiences, and system gaps to a broader audience.

Data Collection

Prior to the restrictions that the global COVID-19 pandemic placed on doing qualitative research, there was, in my proposed study, a focus on creating a research space that reflected the needs and preferences of Black people. This would have entailed inclusion of music, games that allowed connection outside the parameters of research, art, and food. However, with the new restrictions, many of these elements were hard to achieve on a virtual platform. Participants were encouraged to eat, draw, grab a blanket or set up their space however they felt most comfortable in their work with photovoice. While still drawing from BlackCrit, I strove to create an environment that was accessible and familiar to the participants. As a Black researcher, I wanted to ensure that my data collection process was less invasive than traditional interview settings and

that it replicated comfortable or familiar situations for the youth. To achieve this, I used virtual platforms that many of the youth have already come into contact with and use on a daily basis, such as Facebook, text message and telephone. (Although Zoom was a suggested platform none of the participants opted for the use of video call through Zoom.) Additionally, these platforms allowed the youth to express themselves using a variety of images including; memes, photographs, texts, quotes or drawings.

Because BlackCrit emphasizes attention to the ways that marginalization and oppression occurs on Black bodies, it was important to take this up within the data collection and analysis. Participants were given the freedom to map their journeys with questions provided by me to guide and probe the conversation. However, within the overarching research question (which was shared with the participants prior to and during their one-to-one interviews), they were also encouraged to reflect upon experiences of racial discrimination within the context of child welfare and the housing market.

In the project, participants were asked to engage in three separate but interconnected activities.

Activity 1

To adjust to the restrictions of COVID-19 participants were asked to review a slide show (created by me) that provided an overview of key components of the research project, including information on photovoice methods, as well as information on privacy and confidentiality. The purpose of these slide shows was to prepare them for the second activity where they would be selecting freely licensed photos from online or taking different photos that represent their experiences accessing housing after leaving child welfare. This activity allowed participants to learn more about the method and myself as not only a researcher but as a person. All participants

completed this activity to help them make an informed decision of what method they choose to engage in.

Activity 2

In the first step of the second activity, all five of the participants were given six questions (APPENDIX D) to help guide the selection or taking of photos, or the one-to-one interview discussions. Two participants chose to participate in photovoice through the selection of photographs using freely licenced images online. It is important to highlight that since these two participants' interviews were focused on specific photographs they had gathered, the analysis also focused only on the dialogue associated with the photographs provided. In some cases, the photographs selected did not represent the main issue of access to housing, instead they reflected external issues that were of importance to the participants such as education.

The other three participants chose to use narrative during the phone interview process as the methods to share their story. Although this was not the original intended methodology, I provided participants with a choice of method due to the barriers that exist for participants to engage in photovoice.

The second step of Activity 2 took place on a closed Facebook group with myself and the two participants who chose to select photos from online. The participants were given one week (7 days) to collect or create their images and to post them to the closed Facebook group. As they gathered their photos, they were encouraged to write down any reflections or rationale for the chosen images to support the discussion that would take place during activity three. Participants were able to take or gather photographs of anything that has been meaningful, helped, or prohibited them from a successful transition out of care. The two participants expressed difficulty collecting these images with the probes that were given to them. These probes were:

think of different stages in their process of obtaining housing after leaving care, think of how you felt, and think about the future. Because the probes were proving difficult, I sent them the interview questions that would be asked in my telephone interviews with the other three participants to help guide their selection of images. This was proven to be very effective and resulted in the participants submitting many images that they would discuss with me during activity three.

Activity 3

This activity took place using a telephone interview method. However, participants were given the opportunity to also discuss their images or answer the semi-structured interview questions over email or Zoom. All of the participants chose to engage using the phone method. One participant shared that a phone call would be better as she did not think her wifi was reliable. This was an opportunity for youth who participated in the photovoice process to discuss what their images meant to them, and to share their experiences of transitioning out of care. For those who opted out of the photovoice process, they were invited to share their experiences of transitioning out of care and accessing housing through the question prompts in Appendix D. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes long.

Data Analysis

All of the data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed by myself, the researcher. The accuracy of the transcription plays a crucial role in credibility and analysis, therefore as each interview was completed, I would begin transcribing the audio-recorded interviews so that the transcripts would quickly be ready to code. In addition, Lapadat & Lindsay (1999), state that through the act of transcribing interviews, the transcriber is able to develop

deeper understandings and analysis of data. For those reasons, I made the decision to transcribe all interviews myself. For the purpose of this thesis, the use of participants' words that have been included in the Findings chapter may include minor edits for grammar, clarity, and, in some incidents, identifying details have been removed to ensure the participants' privacy.

Once the interviews were transcribed, a critical lens relying on the underpinnings of Critical Race Theory, BlackCrit, and Social Capital Theory, to understand, analyze and interpret the data was used. In addition, a constant comparative method of data analysis was used. Mason (2002) describes this inductive reasoning approach as “develop[ing] theoretical propositions or explanations out of the data, in a process which is commonly seen as moving from the particular to the general” (p. 180). Through reading each transcript, I examined the individual sentences within the larger context of what was shared. This process allowed me to reveal and identify areas of significance from each of the interviews. Following this initial analysis, using constant comparison procedure, I was able to compare and contrast the similarities and differences found within the data from each of the interviews (Spiggle, 1994). As I familiarized myself with the data, various thematic categories began to reveal themselves, leading to the initial thematic groupings which incorporated a multitude of themes within them. To organize the plethora of themes, I grouped related themes and started to recognize a pattern within this grouping. This process is what led to the identification of four stages of the participant's journeys found in the Findings section. It was through this grouping and the methods (art and narrative inquiry) that I realized the themes that followed these four identified stages are the ones to be prioritized within the data analysis. Not only did I think this was the best way to present the data, but this process was influenced by BlackCrit and CRT, which place extensive value on the authenticity of the Black voice and the knowledge and power that comes through it. Therefore, the data was

presented and analyzed in the most similar manner that was shared by the participants which allow pages of the thesis to hold space Black liberatory fantasy (Dumas and Ross, 2016). The themes that did not get included in the Findings section, although important, were strategically taken out as they were farther removed from the core stages that impacted the youth transition out of care and access to housing.

Researcher Positionality

Heuristic inquiry brings to the forefront both the personal experience and the insights of the researcher (Patton, 2014). It is through this that one does not separate the individual from the experience but rather the relationship or interaction between both and how it impacts and influences the study. As a young, Afro-Caribbean Women and former crown ward, I engaged with members of my community in order to complete this study. Thus, I recognize the importance of acknowledging how my positionality and experiences shaped the way that I interacted with the research process, the participants and the data collected, and the conclusions made. The participants that were recruited for this study possess many demographic similarities to me as the researcher, such as age, race, and gender, as well as the shared experience of having been in care. This I felt greatly impacted the rapport that I was able to build with the participants and facilitated access to their lived experiences through the phone calls.

Power differences will always exist within research however we must actively examine the processes in which it operates and interrogate how power and its process relates to both ourselves as researchers and the overall research study (Langhout, 2006). With that being said, I recognize that I hold a great deal of privilege within the research space, as an educated researcher, who was adopted at a very young age and also works within the homelessness sector for the municipality that the participants reside in. These multiple and intersecting identities and

experiences may pose risk for the participants and the overall data collection in this study. For instance, the fear or re-traumatization that could come with my presence while engaging with former crown wards. In addition, both my educational background and professional experience within Social Work and the homelessness sector could evoke an array of emotions such as distrust with the participant.

To mitigate this, I engaged in critical reflexivity and mindfulness about the historical and current underpinnings of whiteness in CWS in Canada. Specifically, by understanding the historical contributions that social workers and government workers have made to perpetuating anti-black racism in the CWS, in order to avoid reproducing violence within the research setting. I believe critical reflexivity is crucial for the process of acknowledging our own privilege and working towards strategies to mitigate harm for the participants as a result of our privilege.

All of these components of my life are manifested in one way or another within the research process. Therefore, I felt it was of important to share who I am with the participants. To be fully transparent in the body that I possess as a light skin Black woman with various complex lived experiences. This was relayed to the participants within the first few moments of participant eligibility screening and oral consent process, and reiterated in an approach that allowed the researchers to ask any question they may have about my career path, profession, or relevant identity. However, I also reminded the participants that my role in this research process was not to be their Social Worker or Housing Worker. By opening up as a researcher, sharing both where power, privilege, and oppression operate within my life, I believed I created a more reciprocal research dynamic in which power could be shared as participants could lead the conversation.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this section, I will first describe the group's composition, and the important individual processes that occurred in relation to data collection. Then I will share the findings from my analysis of the semi-structured qualitative interviews and images gathered through the photovoice method. However, due to the constraints of this Master level thesis, I am unable to go into detail of all the stages, challenges and experiences that were identified within the data. Instead, I have chosen to address the ones most predominate to the intersections of being a Black youth and access to housing. This is not to say that other factors are less important or should not be further analyzed in future research projects. The following is presented in a way that allows you to walk through the journey of five women highlighting their experience in care, transitioning out of care, accessing their current accommodations and opportunities for change within the child welfare transitioning process for youth. These four stages are presented in a semi-chronological order using both text and images. Within the four stages of their journeys, I have identified the major themes that were represented in the data to help better understand their experiences.

Demographics

There were five youth who participated in this study. Each of the youth completed a short demographic survey (APPENDIX C) prior to the study. This survey asked for information about race, gender, age, education, and general information around time in care. The survey revealed that all five participants identified as Black women. Two members chose to specifically identify with a country or region, Nigerian and the Caribbean. The participants' ages ranged from 18-25 years, with the exception of one participant, Selena, who is 30 years of age. Although the original eligibility criteria for this study was ages 17-25 years, an exception was made to include

this participant through a ‘For Information Only’ (FIO) form request which was approved by the university’s research ethics board. All five participants identified as having some sort of disability. Two participants indicated that they have mild intellectual disabilities, the other three identified as having a learning disability. The two participants who live with a mild intellectual disability transitioned from CWS to adult developmental services and the three remaining participants are living independently or in a mentorship home.

It is important to note that all the participants in this study chose pseudonyms to be used when I was sharing information they provided in the thesis.

Stage 1: Experience in Care

Young people’s experience in CW care impacts their post care life and the issues that arise in the transition to adulthood. Therefore, extensive space was given to participants to contextualize their experience of transitioning out of care from the beginning of their journey. Whether the beginning meant the transition from their biological care to emergency placements, or their time in the last care arrangement, participants were invited to share their thoughts, feelings and journey through the child welfare system. Within the fabric of their stories and images, two interconnected themes emerged: The emotional rollercoaster of being in care and the significance of having community and caring adults.

- a) The emotional roller coaster of being in care

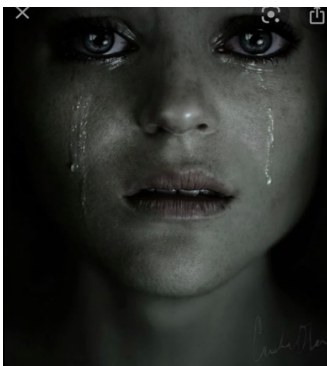


Figure 1 submitted by Kira

All five participants described feelings of both happiness and sadness throughout their time in care. Many of the experiences of sadness, depression and isolation were expressed when they were brought into new environments such as placements and schools.

“I chose this photo [figure 1] because being in care was very depressing and hard for me being away from my family, I was in a dark place” Okay, for example, when I was at school everybody would find out I wasn’t with my real family, because so many people would come to one meeting, people would be different colours, so that didn’t really help my situation, then people would make comments like “at least I have family”. - Kira

“My experience living in care was good and bad. When I first got into foster care, I did not know what to do with myself. Sometimes I wanted to run away, because I missed my family and the place made me depressed”. - Cierra

Contrarily, participants shared many stories of the positive impacts of being in care and moments that brought them joy and happiness. For many of the participants these experiences were shared on the latter part of their journey. Once they became more acquainted with staff and other residents and had resided in their respective placements for an extended period of time, they reported significantly more positive experiences and emotions.

“My experience living in a foster care was scary at first but I grew up to love it because they became my second family, they taught me to be strong” - Kimesha

“However, as I got older, I began to enjoy it more because I met some really amazing staff members that treated me like family”. -Cierra

“It was kind of good in a way, I like when we go shopping. I liked the group home that I was in for the most part”- Titi

b) The importance of community and sense of family

Agency staff, foster parents, social workers and child welfare workers can be some of the only caring adults in the lives of youth in care. Therefore, the relationship between youth and service providers also have the potential to be some of the most important relationships that they build which in turn can greatly impact their transition.

Many of the participants expressed a strong and positive relationship with the formal support person in their lives. As you venture further along the journey you will see how both Cierra and Titi, who expressed a strong attachment to the agency workers or foster parents, reported much more positive transitioning periods and outcomes. Below are the sentiments made by Cierra and Titi who had extremely positive relationships with their formal support systems. Specifically, through the presence of a caring adult.

“I began to enjoy it more because I met some really amazing staff members that treated me like family. [The Director] treated me like her own daughter. - Cierra

“[The House Mentor] who is my favorite staff has always looked out for me and encouraged me when I am feeling down or wanted to give up. [She] has also taken me to her family’s house on special occasions. On our March break we have gone to Great Wolf Lodge or sometimes Clifton Hill. We get passes to Wonderland and Wet 'n' Wild which is a lot of fun”- Cierra

“[The House Mentor] is technically like a mother to me that I didn't have. Right now, I have known her for 3 years and she really helped me, she gets me everything I need, she knows all my challenges” .-Titi

In contrast, a disconnect between the worker and youth was often expressed by the participants. For these youth, the disconnection often stemmed from the inability to connect with their workers due to difference in culture and potentially approach to relationship building. There was a strong emphasis on whether the worker was or was not Black placed by two participants who

shared that they did not relate or connect with their non-Black workers and would actively avoid them.

*“I didn't like the [the non-Black] worker, she was weird, because she didn't understand me” .
- Kira*

“[The worker] is white, she's rude, she thinks me and the other Black girl look the same, both of us were like no we don't, we were so offended” - Kira

“She [my old social worker, who was not Black] was kinda pushy and I don't connect with her at all” . -Titi

“I was the only Black youth and child in the house. Everytime, it was only me, there was only me. Never once another Black [staff or child] [...] I felt isolated and would just stay in my bedroom and do my own thing” . - Selena

Stage 2: Transitioning out of care

This research study aims to explore the needs and experiences of Black youth who are transitioning out of care to better understand how the transition process impacted their post care living accommodations. The post-transitioning planning and youths' experiences of such are pivotal to this understanding. The images and stories shared by the participants revealed significant themes: youth voices in the decision-making process and the unpreparedness for independent living.

a) Youth voices in decision-making processes

When discussing the preparation that took place prior to their transition, many of the youth expressed their confusion and lack of awareness with the process. Their responses revealed that they did not have a substantial responsibility or power over their transition, and in fact were pushed out of the decision-making process altogether. Their lack of awareness of opportunities and choices, and the final transition decisions suggest that their personal goals were not

acknowledged within this process. Below are sentiments shared by two of the participants in regards to the confusion and lack of participation in the decisions that were made:

“Uhm, I don't even know how the process of transitioning was, I'm not really gone yet, I don't think, I am just with a different agency type of thing, but I really don't know what happened ” - Kira

“I don't even know, I wasn't really a part of the processes and I didn't have a choice in what happens next” - Kira

b) Unpreparedness for Independent living

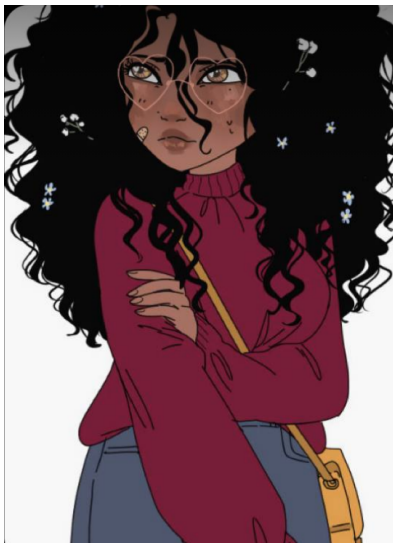


Figure 2 - Shared by Kira, who said it represents her confusion with her schooling.

Youth participating in this study expressed great concern about leaving care at the age of 18 years. Many shared stories of confusion, fears, and challenges that they experienced as they approached the transition period. The following statements express these emotions and address the insufficient preparation they received from the CWS for their transition to independence and their next living accommodation:

“I was afraid to leave because I didn't think I would find the resources I needed by leaving... up till now I wish I had the support still to find a place” . - Kimesha

“I was really terrified, I didn't know where I was going to go, how I was going to support myself, what I was going to do” - Kimesha

“To be honest, I did not know what to do. At age 17 I was thinking about where I was going to live, how much an apartment was going to cost, and if I was independent enough to move out on my own. Those things were running through my head almost every day” . - Cierra

Additionally, it was made clear that support is needed around the broader issues that impact their transition out of care, such as employment, financial literacy, and education.

“I don't have a job right now, but I am going to look for one. I don't know about any other ways to pay my rent. My worker doesn't talk to me about other resources to help me with getting a house, but that's what I wanna talk about” .- Titi

“My biggest challenge is, well, school, [...] I think I am doing grade 11 or 12 classes next year. I don't even know” [as depicted in figure 2]-Kira.

“A challenge I faced was the process of applying to schools and figuring out what my next steps would look like was also difficult” . - Cierra

“Now I know how to budget [at age 21], but before I did not” . - Cierra

From these excerpts, it was clear that the youth were suggesting that 18 years old was too young to transition into independent living and that they did not feel that their past placements prepared them for this next stage of life. This will be further explored in the final stage of the findings section, which is where the youth share their opportunities for change. The following excerpts from youths' transcripts demonstrate the concerns that youth feel about having to leave care at the age of 18 years. This finding has a strong correlation with the literature which indicates that 18-year-olds are not yet adequately prepared to navigate the challenges that accompany independent living (Courtney et al., 2009).

“Okay well the challenges that I faced, is definitely the transition to foster child to adult. It feels like they just throw you out. An 18 year old person should not be on their own. Luckily, I have a different head on my shoulder, and I was able to finish highschool and college” . But it's hard, at that age to do all that.” - Selena

“Then to say at 18 to do everything on your own..... isn't that fucking crazy?” - Selena

“But I think that is crazy, that is not an adult, we are not ready. Especially when they have been getting support from so many people, foster homes, social workers, and they don't have the ability for themselves to take care of themselves independently, 18 is not an adult.” - Selena

Stage 3: Securing Housing after care

My research aimed to explore the needs and experiences of Black youth who are transitioning out of care by taking a deep dive into their journey of obtaining safe, affordable accommodations. Therefore, participants were asked to reflect and share their experiences specifically pertaining to the access of housing. The following three sub-themes emerged from these discussions: the unawareness of housing options, discrimination in the housing market, and the need for additional housing support.

a) The unawareness of housing options

As was reported in the earlier phases the youth expressed a range of emotions in relation to leaving care. Their sentiments included confusion and a lack of knowledge on the process of obtaining housing.

“There was no options of where I can go next, the only other one was a group home with disabilities, and I'm not doing that” - Kira

“I don't even know what my ideal placement would look like after care” -Kira

“I never had a conversation with [the group home staff] about where I can go or the next steps for after I leave care” - Kimesha

“I know now that there are things that I didn't utilize. I don't even know what the housing worker is, all that stuff I didn't even know about. But whatever” . - Selena

b) Discrimination in the rental housing market

Two participants had engaged in the process of finding a rental unit, either on their own or with a housing worker. Both of these participants, Kimesha and Selena, were searching for housing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Of the two participants, both reported feeling they

had been discriminated against on the basis of the colour of their skin during the rental application process. It is important to note that both of these responses emerged organically and were not probed by the researcher, thus strengthening the reality of the specific challenges that young Black women face when accessing housing in the GTA.

“I think I faced housing discrimination, nobody would rent to me ‘cause I am Black. also the credit check really bothers me...not everyone has good credit but they should still be able to help me, and they just make all sorts of assumptions” - Kimesha

“In Brampton they want someone who is their same race. So if you meet or stuff they don't want you in your basement apartment, they are looking for their own sort of people. They want people with their dietary lifestyle, [some] didn't want to have you in their apartment if you were cooking meat. They are looking for their own people. They are telling you things you can never fulfill, the little things, that prevent us from being able to access the places” . - Selena

Stage 4: Next steps and opportunities for change

The value of narratives lies in giving the audience an opportunity to understand the experience of the storyteller (Bell, 2017). The final stage of participants’ journeys emerged in response to the final prompts in the semi-structured interview where participants were encouraged to share: what formal support did you find helpful in your transition out of care? Or unhelpful? (Formal support can refer to youth workers, social workers, housing workers ect...) and what does safe, affordable housing mean and look like for you? (Question 4 and 6 in APPENDIX D). This final stage aligns with the objectives and theoretical frameworks embedded within this research study - to allow the youth to identify culturally appropriate informal and formal supports within children's aid societies and the community that help or hinder youths’ access to housing. And to use the knowledge gained to support policy changes and program development that can result in more successful outcomes for Black youth.

a) Youth's definition of good housing



Figure 3 submitted by Cierra



Figure 4 submitted by Cierra

After the youth shared their journeys through care, they were asked to describe what ‘good’ housing meant to them. For many, it appeared to be the first time they were asked this type of question and therefore required some probing from me as the researcher. I then asked more specifically, how they understand safe and affordable housing. The answers varied from participant to participant, depending on their current situation. However, the majority of participants highlighted the following criteria:

- Ideal locations
 - Safe neighbourhood
 - Sense of community

- Within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)
- Within their personal budget
- Easy to maintain
- Specific guidance with obtaining a house and the over transition to independence (as depicted by figure 4)

One participant, who receives adult development services, expressed a need for continued access to support once she lives in an independent setting. Another participant, who is also a mother, emphasized the need for safe living conditions for her child and preference for quality housing. Figure 3 was shared by Cierra, who explained to me that the houses she chose reminded her of a place in Hamilton or Oakville, which she described as safe, affordable, having a low crime rate, and the ideal overall ideal location for her.

b) Resources needed

To conclude the interview youth were invited to share their thoughts on what needs to be done to create better transitioning outcomes for themselves and other Black youth transitioning from care. The five youth shared the following recommendations:

- More affordable housing options
- More financial support after leaving care
- Learn skills for independent living before the age of 16
- Age out of care at the age of 21years
- Free mental health support after transitioning from care
- Consistent support with academics and education goals during care
- Individual support navigating potential challenges that could arise when transitioning out CWS

- Continuous housing support even after they have left care

“I would say housing was the main challenge, at the beginning, I was at a shelter, I was there for quite a while, on and off. The shelter was really scary, but also good, because they had resources that I wanted - for instance, job searching, programs to take care of housing, payment, how to keep [your housing], how to speak to your landlord, those little but important things”. -Kimesha

“I would have loved more support in housing and getting it faster especially because now I have a daughter, I wish I had the supports I had then now” - Kimesha

“I don't know about any other ways to pay my rent. My worker doesn't talk to me about other resources to help me with getting a house, but that is what I wanna talk about” - Titi

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

In this discussion, I revisit some of the phases and themes described in the findings section while connecting each of them back to literature and to the three theories that frame this study. Based on the semi-structured interviews and art shared by the participants, the findings mirror existing North American literature on youth transitioning from care, while amplifying the unique set of barriers to accessing housing for Black youth. This discussion is organized into six major sections that discuss the relevant and interconnecting themes that emerged from this study. While this study addresses the broader experiences of all children and youth in care, it also speaks more specifically to the experiences of Black children and youth in care. And, as I move through these themes, the focus increasingly becomes that of the experiences of disabled Black children and youth, and then even more specifically, disabled Black women in care as this is directly connected to participants in this study. The purpose of this discussion is to provide further analysis of the youths' experience and provide a base for future research, practice and policy development regarding the experiences of Black youth transitioning out of care and their access to housing.

The Importance of Relationships as Social Capital

Two themes unveiled in stage one of the findings section - Experience in Care - were the emotional rollercoaster of being in care and the significance of having both community and caring adults in the lives of the youth. Although the two themes from stage one were presented in isolation in the findings, I believe the rollercoaster of being in care, the significance of community, and the presence of a caring adult go hand in hand. This is due to the close connection participants made between relationships and experiences in care. Therefore, both of these themes will be discussed simultaneously within this portion of the thesis. Further, Bassani (2007) shares that when youth are able to engage in healthy relationships, it produces social capital, whereas unhealthy relationships result in limited social capital. To support this discussion, I make the connection between the importance of relationships in relation to social capital for the youth.

A child's journey through life is heavily influenced by the people, places and environment they are surrounded by. Children come into child welfare care for reasons of abuse and neglect, many with experiences of trauma, and too often children in care experience further abuse, neglect and trauma. For all children and youth in care, their lives are often reflective of a roller coaster in which they are constantly exposed to new experiences and environments that may impact their life either positively or negatively. For instance, frequent changes in staff, placements, schools, programming, and services. A child's experience prior to coming to care inevitably encompasses ups and downs due to the nature of change they are experiencing at a young age. However, Black youth in care are more likely to face an enormous amount of trauma, abuse, and neglect, including the sometimes neglectful parenting of the government care system while being in care (Raychaba, 1988; Courtney et. al, 1998). Further, they experience additional

challenges as they encounter marginalization, racial discrimination, isolation, and identity issues while in care and within their transition out of CWS (Avery, 2011, Clarke, 2011). The presence of a caring adult can provide Black children and youth with a support network or someone who they can trust to help them navigate these challenges while in care and during their transition to independence. A ‘caring adult’ refers to a person that guides, takes care of, and/or advises through the provision of positive and productive support throughout a child’s or youth’s development (American Promise Alliance, n.d). Therefore, they are pivotal to a child’s development, especially for youth who do not have stable relationships with their biological family.

Relationships and Housing

Due to the small sample size, it is impossible to draw concrete conclusions from my study about the connection between the presence of a caring adult and access to safe, affordable housing. However, other research has consistently shown that all youth have better outcomes when they have strong social support and feel connected to their family, school, and community (Courtney et al., 2001; Leslie & Hare, 2000; Tweddle, 2005). The data gathered in this study supports the notion that relationships have a significant impact on social capital (Bassani, 2007). It also suggests that youth who built a strong connection with at least one formal or informal support person (caring adult) had more social capital available to them. For instance, the impact of a caring adult for two participants in this study led to relatively positive post-care outcomes and housing. The common factor in both experiences was the access and connection to both a caring adult and the completion of a high school diploma as a highly valued source of capital. For Selena, her foster parents extended their support after the age of 18 years, which provided her the time to apply and attend post-secondary school while always having a place to call home.

Likewise, for Cierra, the transition out of care to a house with the support of a staff mentor was almost seamless. Cierra's positive relationship with the staff mentor in her last placement appeared to stem from their genuine interest and care for her and her future. The staff member supported her with her educational and personal development skills, and also attended to the cultural and spiritual aspects of her life. This support is one of the contributing factors that led to Cierra completing a high school diploma. Cierra was also able to build deep relationships and connections with her Social worker, where the relationship was described as more of a family bond than a professional bond. As a result, she was able to access a unique post-care accommodation that allowed her to live with a former staff member and the person she trusted.

In contrast, for some youth participants, there was an absence of the presence of a caring adult and dependable relationships within CW. For these participants, 'social capital' was obtained amongst themselves – through the relationships they established within their personal networks outside of the child welfare system. Thus, these three Black youth are turning towards support and relationships outside of what I would describe as eurocentric, racist institutions, and developing social capital amongst themselves. During activity three youth shared how their non-Black worker did not understand or support them which led to their personal choice to avoid them altogether. The concern with this is, for some youth, it may result in the involvement of risky behaviors, such as criminal activity, for survival (Duke et al., 2017). Therefore, access to this form of social capital may not enable the same outcomes of other relationships such as a 'caring adult'. This finding mirrors what is already known about the Black community in Ontario, as they disproportionately experience negative outcomes, including unemployment, violence, homelessness and a lack of opportunity, and when combined with gender, age and former crown wardship, these issues become more prevalent (Clarke, 2011; Teklu, 2012;

Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Duke et al., 2017)). Therefore, a targeted approach to transition from care that addresses the need for community and relationships is necessary to address the needs of this community to reduce the consequences of anti-Black racism for these youth. The art and narratives shared by the participants of this study address the importance of relationships for Black youth in and from care, and also support the idea that relationships providing social capital, as supportive relationships, can act as a buffer against many of the negative outcomes Black youth may experience during and after their transition from the CWS (Coleman, 1988).

Permanency

'Relational permanence' - or supportive long-term relationships - is argued to be especially important for all youth 'aging out' of care (Samuels, 2009). However, I argue that the importance of seeking relational permanence for Black youth who transition out of care needs to be emphasized. This is because relationships are especially important to the Black community and essential to the process of gaining social capital. Additionally, in comparison to non-Black children and youth, Black youth are less likely to experience reunification with their birth parents or adoption from care (Courtney and Wong, 1996, Harris and Courtney, 2003, Wulczyn, 2003). The harm of this is that Black youth who are unable to achieve legal permanency through adoption or long-term placements experience deprivation of relational permanence as children that may impact their entire lives. As a result, youth have little to no social support to assist in their navigation through life - the kinds of supports that people sometimes receive from their parents and family members over the course of their lifetime (Doucet, 2018). When examining social capital in the context of Black youth in care, the lack of stability in care relationships for Black youth can result in an overall deficit in social capital for youth - both in care and upon

transition out of care (Wildeman & Waldfogel, 2014). Relational permanency, through strong and supportive relationships with someone from the Black community, offers many benefits to the overall outcome of Black youth as these relationships make possible the continuity of connections to family, culture, ethnicity, religion and language (Greenblatt et al., 2005).

Education Matters

For many young people, education - which is understood as a form of social capital - is a significant factor in determining success with their transition out of care (Courtney et al., 2009). Although education was not the focus of this study, almost every participant addressed their experience of some level of schooling. This theme of Education Matters is an extension of three interconnected themes presented in the findings - emotional rollercoaster of being in care, the importance of relationships and community, and resources needed. As revealed early on in this study, access to education and achieving at least a high school diploma was understood to be a predominant factor in the overall success of Black youth transitioning out of care and directly impacted their experiences accessing housing. The majority of the participants had negative experiences within their educational journey and have not received a high school diploma. Similar to other research, many of the participants in this study expressed interest and aspiration to attend higher education, however this proved more difficult to achieve for the participants. The research demonstrates that Black students are underrepresented in post-secondary school (Courtney, 2009; Dworsky, 2008; Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Kirk & Day, 2011). Likewise, in this study, only 2% of the participants obtained a high school diploma. Despite scholarship programs being available to these youth, they are disproportionately impacted by other barriers which deter them away from higher education and lead to higher dropout rates (Levine-Rasky, 2014). The Toronto District School Board (2010) summarizes these findings from a 2006

Student Census which highlights the prevalent anti-Black racism within the education system. The results of this census indicated that Aboriginal and Black students in Toronto are “least likely to enjoy school, least likely to find school a welcoming place, least likely to feel that school rules are fair to them” (The Toronto District School Board, 2010, p.13).

Education and Disability

All five participants identified as having a disability -mild intellectual disability or learning disability. Factors such as race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, gender, and class can result in barriers to learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). For disabled Black youth transitioning out of care this could include discriminatory barriers to learning. American studies revealed that former foster youth with disabilities experience poor levels of educational attainment; in comparison to their peers (Courtney, 2009). The barriers that exist for disabled Black youth can vary, however research specific to this group reinforces other study findings that when disabled students have a strong connection to both teachers and their peers, they tend to have more positive educational outcomes such as more success academically (Goleman, 2006). This finding was supported by some of the participants in my study as well.

For disabled Black youth in care, who are often made into a transient population, building these connections can be challenging as they typically experience frequent placement changes, geographical changes, and are constantly moved to different school programs (Kulik, et al., 2007). One participant in the study by Kulick and colleagues (2007) described school as one of her greatest challenges in transitioning into adulthood, due to her inability to complete the requirements for each grade because of a lack of placement stability. She explained how over her high school career she attended a variety of different school options such as alternative schools,

homeschooling, and curriculum specifically for students with disabilities. However, at the age of 18 years, she was not able to reach her goal of getting a high school diploma. Similar experiences were echoed within my study, as one participant -Kira- shared her frustrations with being bounced around to different educational programs to the point where she cannot identify what grade she has last completed. Both of these experiences shed light on how these multiple educational placement changes can compound the challenges and impact the success of disabled Black youth in care from achieving their educational goals.

Although minimal disaggregated data exists that is looking at this specific population of youth, and their access to education, we do know that Black high school students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), have a 40% dropout rate (Levine-Rasky, 2014). These catastrophic dropout rates are also reflected within youth with learning disabilities, where over 25 percent of Canadians aged 22 to 29 with learning disabilities report less than a high school certificate as their highest academic achievement (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2018).

The findings from these studies are to a more limited extent reflected in the data in this study, where three of the five participants have yet to obtain their high school diploma. The factors contributing to this were expressed by the participants as being related to the transient nature of being a child in care, the lack of consistent supportive relationships to help them with school, and challenges with the curriculum. Further barriers that may exist for this population include the apparent lack of focus on the educational attainment of Black youth within the school board and CWS. Although numerous programs exist in Ontario that are intended to support access to education for youth in transition, based on findings from this study, it appears Black

disabled youth are in need of consistent relational support and encouragement to guide them throughout their educational journey.

This is consistent with studies that support the notion that the presence of caring and supportive adults, can positively impact the academic success of youth considered to be at risk (Lever et al., 2004; Sinclair et al., 2005, Smith,1997). Both Selena and Cierra described having the presence of a caring adult that directly impacted their attainment of education, access to gainful employment, and accommodations that meet their learning needs. It was the support of a caring adult that led them to complete their educational goals and opened the door for them to be able to access housing for longer periods. For instance, with Selena, her foster parents supported her venture to college and provided additional resources outside of CSW for the duration she was in school. Based on the interview with Selena, one can infer that the same level of support through housing accommodation would not have been possible without her enrollment in college. This is significant as we see once again the connection between relational support and permanency as well as the social capital stemming from educational attainment. For instance, educational success is important because youth with positive educational experiences have access to more employment opportunities and other successful outcomes such as housing (Day et al., 2011).

Nothing About Us, Without Us

Within all three stages of the participants' journeys, it was evident that the voices of youth are often overlooked and left out of the decision-making process for post-care planning. Many participants were not aware of the details of their post-care plan or housing arrangements. This suggests that those facilitating this process either do not communicate these details with the youth or do not communicate in a way that is accessible to the youth. Many of the participants

reported that they were given one or two options and had very little control over their situations. This is also mirrored within research surrounding children and youth with disabilities, where they are often excluded from participating in decisions that directly impact their lives (Sinclair, 2004). The findings can be seen to represent a potential abuse of power by the CWS. To better contextualize this theme, I will be drawing on the theories that frame this study (CRT and BlackCrit) and additional post-modernist theories and constructs such as governmentality, bio-power, and power-sharing. Jan Fook (2002) explains that power is a highly controlled resource, contextual, and fluid. For Gilbert and Powell (2010) this is evident in the different regimes of power that operate within institutions such as CWS, for instance, when post-care planning is used to subjugate people as a means to exert control over their lives.

To further this discussion, governmentality and bio-power are two concepts that can be drawn from to deconstruct the experiences of Black youth. Foucault refers to bio-power as the process that manages and regulates specific bodies to "optimize its capabilities, efficiency, usefulness, and docility" (Phillips, & Pon, 2018). In tandem, governmentality is described as the everyday strategies that exert control over citizens' actions through legislative, social, economic, political, and cultural practices (Phillips, & Pon, 2018). The youth indicated a lack of knowledge around housing options and resources that are available to them aftercare. This unfortunate discovery demonstrates the lack of agency over their lives. It sheds light on the 'power over' approach that is often experienced by Black youth in the CWS and minimizes their overall freedom and access to social capital.

Service providers may be well-intentioned with their approach to presenting post-care options, as exemplified by Kelsy-Ann's worker who automatically transitioned her into a group home setting after care in order to prevent her from transitioning to the streets. However, the

exclusion from the decision-making process serves as a disadvantage to the youth, as they are not allowed to set goals for themselves or given the opportunity to understand and choose from the different options available to them. This was also revealed elsewhere in the data, as many of the youth expressed the desire to live independently but were not presented with this option. Rather than staff acting as the expert, youth need to have both power and responsibility in decision-making in order to ensure success before, during and after their transition (Wessells, 2015).

This theme echoes findings in the literature that demonstrate the need for youth in care to have a greater voice in the decision-making process (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006; Jones & Kruk, 2005; Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012; Representative for Children and Youth in British Columbia, 2013). Decision-making processes should not be limited to their post-care planning but also include participating in agency and broader societal policy making and service development. Research indicates that young people in and from care suffer from systemic marginalization and social exclusion (Stein, 2006) and, as a result, their voices are often left out of social change conversations. It is also essential to ask who holds the final decision-making power, even when that power is shared with community members - such as youth in care. The exclusion of children and youth from participation in decision-making has negative repercussions, whereas including them has a number of identified benefits. Sinclair and Franklin (2007) indicate benefits for the inclusion of disabled youth, that seem to be equally important for Black children and youth in care such as, to uphold children's rights, to improve services, to improve decision-making, to enhance democratic processes, to promote children's protection, to enhance children's skills, to empower and enhance self-esteem (p.108). Therefore, it would seem likely that when youth in care are able to participate in the decisions that shape their lives,

it provides them with a greater sense of control and ultimately prepares them for the transition to adulthood (Leeson, 2007).

In this study, youth also had the opportunity to share their perspectives, recommendations, and ideas to create a better transitioning period for children leaving the CWS and what types of accommodations need to be readily available to them. The participants' stories demonstrate that it is through the inclusion of the voices of Black youth in care that they are given agency over their lives and that we are all able to begin to reimagine CWS. The next section of this discussion highlights the unique issues presented by the participants and is accompanied by recommendations consolidated from the youth on how to achieve better post-care outcomes for Black youth in care.

We are not ready!

In Ontario, youth in care 'age out' at 18 years of age but can also voluntarily withdraw from care once they are 16 years old. However, young people who leave care at age 18 face many challenges during their transition, due to underdeveloped living skills, and lack of support and resources (Gaetz, 2014). This was a major theme that emerged from the data, as youth described feeling unequipped and unprepared for their transition at the age of 18. Despite the different reasons given, all of the participants noted some feelings of anxiety, fear and confusion when the time came for them to leave CWS. Specifically, youth expressed feelings of contention with the thought of transitioning out of CWS at such a young age. These feelings were rooted in the lack of preparation for leaving care given that they received from their last placements in the CWS. The youths' responses echoed many of the recommendations put forth by the Provincial Child Advocate Office that child protection legislation and policy should raise

the age to at least age 21 or, if in school, until age 25 years for youth to be permitted to remain in care and access support (Gaetz, 2014).

Identity Matters

Youth in care are not a homogeneous group and while shared experiences of oppression and marginalization stemming from the experience of care are important to know, the unique experiences and needs of the sub-groups of youth in care that exist, must be captured as well such as young Black women with disabilities. It is through research such as this, that we are able to begin to learn about the specific needs, wants and desires of this group of youth to work towards policy and programming that is effective. Further, the specific data collection methods I used to gather the Black youths' experiences, through a BlackCrit and CRT theoretical lens, allows us to begin to understand the inherent impacts of anti-Black racism that youth experience when navigating different systems, including CWS and the housing market. During the semi-structured interviews, the youth - all of whom identified as disabled Black women - expressed an array of specific needs that, from their perspective, have often been overlooked by the CWS. Such as, the need for safe housing arrangements for both the woman and their children. Safe accommodations were defined as feeling a sense of community, family-friendly, and easy to maintain. Recent policy responses to 'ageing' out of care have included the provision of monetary support for living expenses, healthcare benefits and education, such as the Continued Care and Support for Youth program which provides eligible individuals who have reached the age of 18 years and for whom care has been terminated with extra financial support (MCSSb, 2019). The financial support encompasses monthly payments of \$850 directly to the youth member to ease the transition into independence and adulthood. The monthly payments are available up to the age of 21 years. However, based on the responses from participants in this

study, many were not aware of this financial support that is available to them post-care. Although I did not directly ask the participants about this program or similar ones, 80% of the participants explicitly stated the lack of awareness surrounding external funding support that they may be eligible for. Further, there has yet to be a holistic response that addresses the need for safety through relationships and community. Policy responses also fail to address the nuances of housing accommodations, where youth expressed the need for assistance with gathering household items and maintaining their place. I share this to highlight the gap between the specific needs of the target population of this study and the policy responses to the issues youth transitioning out of the CWS face.

Another significant finding was the experiences of discrimination faced by the Black women participating in this study when accessing housing. These discriminatory housing application processes often prevented the Black women from easily obtaining housing, as was expressed by two participants, Kimesha and Selena. These participants described the rigorous and invasive housing application requiring applicants to provide a source of income to the landlord. Further, challenges can arise when the youth have to provide proof of employment or income that reveals their status as a former crown ward or persons with disability. There is also an element of gendered bias, that was evident through the narrative shared by Kimesha, who is a mother and faces additional discrimination based on her status as a young Black mother. The stigma that exists for Black youth who are in care, who also have disabilities among other layered identities (such as motherhood) can often be detrimental to the success in finding housing as they are labeled as “unfit” or “risky tenants”.

One participant stressed the appreciation she had in her last placement with having access to haircare products and money to do her hair. Further research has also concluded the need for

more funding and awareness on the significance of hair and the caring of their hair for Black youth. Many Black community members and scholars have stressed the need for the allocation of appropriate funding for hair care products and styling for Black children in care (Turner, 2016; Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2019). For instance, the HairStory, an initiative led by youth amplifiers at the Provincial Advocate Office, began as a way to address the lack of resources to support the grooming and styling of Black hair for youth in care, and then led to further conversations about injustices and transformative action needed within the child welfare system (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2019). Black hair care should be acknowledged within the CWS transitioning. I am suggesting that with the appropriate tools and resources for Black youth, they will feel confident within their styles and maintain healthy hair care options they love and desire post-care. If there is known to be a positive relation between social capital and well-being, then the care of Black hair can act as one means by which to support the development of well-being for Black youth. Unfortunately, due to the parameters of this Master's thesis, this impact was not explored in further detail.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Challenges faced

For multiple reasons related to being Black, disabled, and a youth in care, the participants are a transient population, often moving multiple times for employment, education, affordable housing, relationships, and so forth. Therefore, engaging youth in this project over multiple occurrences was difficult. This research project involved three separate activities where youth were required to complete tasks independently. For this transient population, finding time to complete all the activities posed many challenges. Youth expressed to me that they were completing the tasks during their breaks at work or very late in the night. This is not ideal for

data collection: youth may feel rushed, and they did not always have a comfortable and safe place to reflect, talk during the one-on-one semi structured interviews or to complete the independent photovoice activity. Although, I did recommend a series of places that would assist with maintaining confidentiality, and provided estimated durations for each activity, the reality was that youth had to squeeze in the activities within their busy schedules.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project was altered to ensure the safety of both the participants and researcher. What was once a series of in-person workshops had become a completely virtual research experience using both online and telecommunications. Thus, the eligibility for this project was not inclusive of youth who do not possess the technological tools such as a phone, laptop, and wireless internet. Although I attempted to provide as many alternatives and accommodations as possible, meeting in person was impossible. This not only excluded potential members of this population from participating, but also created accessibility issues for those youth who did consent to participate in the study. Such as the reliance on text, which did not allow for the type of exchanges that face-to-face supports offer.

Limitations to this study

Descriptors of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability create a different degree of difficulty for youth transitioning out of the CWS and their access to housing. Recognizing this, this study initially aimed to explore the intersections of being Black, a youth, with experience of being in the care of CWS on transitions from care and access to housing as this is a gap within current literature. A limitation with this approach, is that I did not initially consider other intersections, such as disability. It was only after all of the data was collected that I discovered that each participant was living with a disability. This was significant to the data analysis and to understanding the youths' experiences pertaining to access to housing. While I

was drawing on critical theories for my analysis, a critical disability lens was not included in the study; this was overlooked in the research design process. I suggest that future research in this area address the intersections of different descriptors and lived experiences that are predominant within this population, specifically race and disability.

One participant, Selena was 29 years of age and her involvement with the CWS ended in 2013. This was prior to many significant post-care policy and program implementations in Ontario. These include the Aftercare Benefits Initiative in 2014 and the Renewed Youth Supports Program in 2017. Therefore, many of her experiences and input on aspects of the transitioning period that can be improved have since been addressed for OACAS and the MCCSS.

The participants from this study were recruited using site sampling and casual snowballing from a specific private group home. This group home provides services to the majority young woman, resulting in all participants from this study identifying as women. Therefore, the Black male experience and Black youth identifying as LGBTQ2SA+ was missing from this research study. Another limitation of this study is due to site sampling - the geographical location of participants consisted of only the cities of Toronto and Brampton, both in the province of Ontario. This excludes the experiences of many other Black youth living in the province, notably those in rural and Northern locations.

Implications and Recommendations for Change

One goal of this study was to use the knowledge gained to support policy changes and program development that can result in more successful outcomes for Black youth. The following section will provide a series of implications for social change and policy and practice

recommendations. These recommendations all stem from the voices of the youth in this study and represent a continuation of the discussion shared in Chapter Six. Faulkner & Faulkner (2016) state, “while the findings [of a qualitative study] cannot be generalized, they can be used to identify issues confronting the individual during the discovery process, and that knowledge might be beneficial to other individuals going through the same thing or to professionals working with these individuals” (pp. 93). It is my hope that this research contributes increased knowledge in the field of social work and child welfare regarding the experiences of Black youth transitioning out of CW care and emphasizes how necessary it is to consider post-care housing options.

Relationships

Black disabled youth need and deserve an opportunity to achieve relational permanency and can benefit from policies and programs that support them to obtain the kinds of social capital that stem from relational permanency beyond that provided by legal permanency. This is necessary, because this population is often excluded from these efforts to achieve relational permanency and the social capital that it provides (Greenblatt et al., 2005). Thus, the opportunity to participate more actively in policy and program development must include a thorough CRT, blackcrit and critical disability informed analysis to develop targeted responses to eliminate the disparities that exist for Black youth and disabled Black women in care. Further, this study demonstrated that relational permanency does not need to be limited to the current options that are acknowledged by CAS, which include kinship service, kinship care, customary care, legal custody, adoption, and transition to adulthood (OACAS, 2020). These currently accepted options do not capture the ways in which relational permanence was obtained by the Black youth in this study - through friendships, mentors, community members and former staff members. Therefore,

further research needs to be conducted to capture a more nuanced and critical understanding of relational permanency for the Black community and the ways that CAS can facilitate this process long before their transition from care. This study demonstrated that commitment from the staff at the private group home worked to ensure their youth obtained long-lasting relationships must be mirrored within the CWS efforts.

Furthermore, there is a need for more effective tactics to be employed by CWS through rethinking and re-understanding how they deliver their services and connect with youth. Based on the journeys of the participants of this study, it may be through supporting more intentional connections and meaningful collaborations between service providers and service users that lead to better transition outcomes. Alongside this, is the need for both formal and informal support that takes into account the cultural, linguistic, disability and gender diversity within Black communities. These aspects of attending to the need for youth to have a caring adult and supportive relationships should be taken up by both Black and non-Black service providers when providing care to Black youth. In conclusion, the dislike of and disengagement youth experience with their non-Black workers and formal CWS support systems may contribute to a negative and unsuccessful transition and to the inability of youth to access housing that meets their needs. Whereas more positive relationships with workers - including non-Black workers - and their formal support network may encourage and provide a positive experience with their transition and post-care opportunities.

Education

The findings from this study suggest that successful transitions for youth are impacted by whether they are successful in obtaining their educational goals. The study revealed the importance of education in the lives of the participants – all Black disabled women – with

involvement in the CWS. Therefore, it is recommended that future research address this by exploring the specific education needs of this population and their access to education in and post care. This research needs to include a Black feminist lens, combined with a critical disabilities studies lens that addresses racism, sexism, and ableism in the education system; alongside the marginalization of children and youth in the CW system.

Youth in this study expressed being ‘bounced’ around from different schools and education streams without being informed about the various options available, which impeded their success in school. Below is a list of various educational streams in the GTA that are available for Black, Disabled youth or ‘at-risk’ youth, such as:

- The Africentric School
- Supervised Alternative Learning
- Foundations Program
- Fresh Start Suspension and Expulsion Programs
- Teen Education and Motherhood Program (TEAM)

These possibilities and others need to be presented to youth so they can make informed decisions about their learning environments. There is a current website that is hosted by YouthCAN (a program facilitated by OACAS) that provides information on topics for youth in care such as supports for youth in education. However, the information currently available does not outline programs and streams available for youth currently in high school. Instead, it emphasizes post-secondary school and related financial support. A shift to also focus on providing specific information for high school students in care, specifically Black and disabled Black youth in care, so that Black youth have information on their options, will help to ensure their educational needs/goals are best met.

Black Youth Voice

“Nothing about us without us” is a slogan guiding many disability rights advocacy groups that communicates the message that people living with disabilities should not only be included but at the forefront of the decisions or policies that affect their lives (Scotch, 2009). This mantra can be extended for disabled Black youth in care, as their voices are often excluded from these processes. Black youth are the experts in their own lives and should have the agency to fully engage in decision making processes that impact them. Based on the sentiments of participants of this study and on the research literature I drew on for this study, I recommend that more collaborative processes be introduced to ensure youth in care are able to take ownership of their post-care planning. Additionally, I recommend that accountability measures be put in place in order to ensure that efforts towards meaningful inclusion are being made to share the decision-making power with this specific and large population of child welfare youth. For instance, through the collection of disaggregated data that provides information on who is (and is not) attending and actively participating in the annual YouthCan conference, to hold the organizers accountable for inclusion of the most vulnerable members of the CW community. Such forums are a step in the right direction, but without the inclusion of Black disabled youth in these forums, and without a focus on youth in transition, I am afraid the specific needs of this community will continue to go unnoticed.

Improving the rental housing system

When youth were asked what safe affordable housing looks like to them it provoked many conversations that led to potential solutions. The following recommendations are based on recommendations shared from youth, the literature, and my interpretation of some of the ways to address the challenges faced by the participants of this study.

Based on the findings of this study and others, it is clear that Black disabled youth and former crown wards face intersecting discriminatory barriers in the rental housing system, barriers that prevent them from accessing housing. Therefore, there needs to be specific rights-based housing education available to this population of youth prior to their departure from the CWS. An approach that could support this recommendation is ‘arts-based legal education’, which is an approach that has been utilized by the Centre of Equality Rights and Accommodations (CERA) to educate marginalized communities and has proven to be an effective method. It involves using art to facilitate safe(r) spaces to allow participants to learn about the rental housing system while reflecting on their own lived experiences (CERA, 2018). I believe this approach would be beneficial to youth as it could provide a creative and potentially more accessible way to deliver important and essential information about their access to housing post care. I would also stress the importance of education about housing rights being readily available and delivered to all landlords to ensure they are not upholding discriminatory practices within their own rental process. An equal, if not greater, emphasis needs to be placed on housing providers (such as landlords) to understand their responsibilities.

Housing First

Within the narratives shared by youth, access to safe and affordable housing is a focal point of concern when transitioning out of care. This study and others have demonstrated that youth transitioning out of care face increased risk of homelessness (Turner, 2019; Raychaba, 1989; Echenberg & Jensen, 2009). Based on the experiences and ideas for change in CWS shared by the participants, I believe a Housing First approach needs to be put on the forefront of transition planning and that this, in turn, will provide better outcomes for Black youth. Housing First is a principle in which housing is described as a human right and basic right. Housing First

approaches emphasize the needs for immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable and appropriate, followed by other supportive services to avoid future homelessness (Gaetz, 2017). Gaetz (2017), provides insights around a Housing First approach specific for youth, which employs strategies that not only address housing stability but the need for specific support that aids in the facilitation of healthy transitions into adulthood. Further, the approach centralizes the understanding that housing, as a social determinant of health, needs to be addressed first and foremost to better move forward in other areas of their lives. For instance, in this study youth indicated the need to learn skills for independent living at a young age and to receive continued mental health support. Therefore, the implementation of life skill training while in care, during transition and after that is culturally and age appropriate can reduce the long lasting and negative outcomes for youth.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the needs and experiences of Black youth who are transitioning out of care and examined their access to safe, affordable housing within Toronto and surrounding areas. The process of understanding and recording this information required a mixed methods approach. To begin, I embodied three theoretical frameworks – Critical Race Theory, BlackCrit, and Social Capital Theory – within the entire process of the qualitative, arts-based research project. This was crucial to the development of my research project, as I constantly would refer back to my theoretical framework and ensure my methods, recruitment, engagement with participants, data collection and data analysis reflected my own ontological positioning. In the study, participants engaged virtually in a 3-part activity series where I gathered their experiences using text and images. Afterwards, I used both the text and images

collected from and created by the participants, in conjunction with their individual interviews and the literature to analyze the data and share the findings. Through this process, it was discovered that the journey through and from care for Black youth is often windy, bumpy and long. Their individual stories poignantly make plain the impacts of the CWS on the lives of our most vulnerable youth as they transition into adulthood. The data from this study confirmed findings from the scarce research literature that exists, that Black youth experience significant and particular challenges during the CWS transition with regards to access to employment, education and housing. The principal reasons for these challenges, as discovered in this thesis, were the experience of racial discrimination, the absence of a caring adult in their lives, and insufficient preparation for transition from the CWS. Black youth deserve better.

The major findings concluded from this research offer several solutions for CWS practice and for future and current policy directives that impact the lives of youth transitioning out of care. In light of the findings in this study, a number of recommendations are proposed for improving outcomes for Black youth leaving care and their access to housing. Below is a summary of recommendations:

- E. To focus on building and providing genuine relationships through a caring adult and relational permanency for Black youth in care
- F. To centralize and value the voices of Black youth in care throughout their time in care and post-care planning, policy development and research
- G. To address and respond to the unique experiences that Black youth with disabilities face within the housing market when preparing them for independence outside of the CWS
- H. To apply a Housing first Youth approach

I offer these solutions with the hope that MCCSS and OACAS will no longer ignore the structural inequalities that exist within the policies, programming and services provision for Black youth leaving care in Toronto. Further, society must continue this work through future analysis, deconstruction and transformation to support better outcomes for Black youth transition out of care in Toronto.

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APPENDIX A - POSTER

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR ONLINE RESEARCH PROJECT THAT
EXPLORES THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF
CHILD WELFARE CARE AND THEIR ACCESS TO HOUSING**

Participation requirements include that participants be:

- a Black youth between the ages of 17 and 24 years old
- who has transitioned out of child welfare care
- who were seeking housing or living accommodations upon departure from child welfare care
- Have access to the internet, Facebook, and email

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in 3 different art based activities virtually

- Activity 1: Review a slide show about the project (maximum 30-40 mins)
- Activity 2: Online arts-based activity using photography, images, and/or drawing (over 1 week span)
- Activity 3: Online group discussion and debrief (approximately 45 min discussion)

*Note: there is an option to meet with the researcher on a one-to-one basis online or over the phone if you are not comfortable to participate in a group discussion or forum.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$30.00 honorarium via e-transfer, for completing all 3 activities.

For more information about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact

Chelsea Davenport

Email: davenpoc@mcmaster.ca

This research project is not in association with TLK Homes. Participation in this project is voluntary, confidential and will not affect the participant's status in TLK Homes

*This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research
Ethics Board*



Chelsea Davenport
MSW(c)
davenpoc@mcmaster.ca

Sample E-mail Subject line: McMaster Masters of Social Work Student research project:
Learning about the Housing Experiences of Black Youth Transitioning out of the Child Welfare System

Hi (youth name),

Chelsea Davenport, a Black, former crown ward, who is now a McMaster graduate student, has contacted TLK Homes asking us to tell our residents about an online arts-based study she is doing that looks at the experiences Black youth have accessing housing and accommodations as they transition from child welfare care. This research is part of a graduate thesis project at McMaster University.

The following is a brief description of her study.

Chelsea Davenport is inviting you to take part in an online arts-based photography project. You will be asked to engage in a series of online activities, with Chelsea and approximately 3 to 8 other Black youth who have transitioned out of child welfare. To participate in this project you will need access to the internet, Facebook, and email. This online arts-based project will use Photovoice methods to learn more about the experiences of Black youth who have been involved in the child welfare system and are no longer in the care of a Children's Aid Society. In particular, she wants to learn about their experiences in trying to access housing.

Photovoice is a research method that asks participants to express their points of view or represent their communities by photographing scenes, or gathering images that highlight research themes. Through art, it brings new insights and perspectives which raise awareness of hidden or overlooked issues and aspects of the community.

Journey Mapping means that we will use our conversations and the images to demonstrate your journey of trying to access housing after leaving Children's Aid Society care.

Activity 1

You will be asked to review a slide show that provides an overview of key components of the research project, including: information on photovoice methods, as well as information on privacy and confidentiality. The purpose of this slide shows it to prepare you for the second activity where you will be selecting or taking different photos that represent your experiences accessing housing. At this time, you will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire, so that Chelsea can get to know a bit more about you.

Activity 2

The activity will take place on a closed Facebook group with Chelsea and other participants. Chelsea will first share with you a few questions and suggestions to guide you in taking photographs about your journey to accessing housing. You could also choose freely licensed photos from the internet or draw your own images (and take a photograph of these) to represent your experiences accessing housing. She will provide you with one week (7 days) to collect or create your images and to post them to the closed Facebook group. As you gather your photos you will be encouraged to write down any reflections or rationale for your chosen images. You will be able to take or gather photographs of anything that has been meaningful, helped you, or prohibited you from a successful transition out of care. Once all the images have been posted, you will be invited to create digital collages using apps and websites.

Activity 3

This activity will take place using email, a video conference using Zoom or a phone conference. This will be an opportunity for youth who participate to discuss what their photographs mean to them, and to share their experiences of transitioning out of care. After hearing from everyone who is comfortable sharing, Chelsea will lead a discussion of some of the main themes by looking for common stories, imagery and experiences. Should you prefer a 1-1 discussion with Chelsea over participation in a group discussion, this can be arranged using email or phone.

If you are interested in participating or getting more information about taking part in Chelsea's study please contact Chelsea directly by **using her email: davenpoc@mcmaster.ca**. Chelsea will not tell me or anyone at TLK Homes whether you participated or not. Taking part or not taking part in this study is your choice and will not affect your status or any services you receive here at TLK Homes.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Staff.

APPENDIX C - Demographic Info Sheet

**An arts-based Study that Explores the Experiences of Black Youth Transitioning out of
Care and their Access to Housing
Demographic Info Sheet**

Instructions: Please fill in. This will provide me with some basic background information about you. You do not have to complete this form in its entirety, only what you are comfortable with.

**Please DO NOT put
your name on the
sheet.**

Demographics:

How do you describe your race and/or ethnic background? (*example: Black African (e.g., Nigerian, Ghanaian) Black Caribbean (eg, Haitian, Jamaican) or Black Canadian*)

Gender

Age

Education (Less than HS diploma, High school, Some college, Bachelors degree, Graduate degree)

Experience in care:

How long were you in care?

What type of care arrangements were you in? (*e.g, group home, foster*)

How long has it been since you were last in care? _____

APPENDIX D - QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSION

General

Question 1: What was your experience of living in care?

Question 2: What were your thoughts or feelings about leaving care at your age?

Question 3: What would you say are some of the challenges you faced while leaving your last placement? Or challenges you still face?

Housing

Question 4: What formal support did you find helpful in your transition out of care? Or unhelpful? (Formal support can refer to youth workers, social workers, housing workers ect...)

Question 5: How was your experience accessing the housing you need and desire after leaving care?

Question 6: What does safe, affordable housing mean and look like for you?

Option 2 (available to for participants who did photovoice):

Q1. Can you share a story about your experiences accessing housing after leaving care?

Sub question: What are some of the challenges?

Q2. In taking these photographs, what are some feelings, thoughts and emotions you experienced?

Q3. After hearing from other youth, are their experiences similar or different from yours?

Sub-question What was different, what was similar?

Alternative

Participants may frame stories about, and take a critical stance on, their photographs in terms of questions spelling the acronym **SHOWeD** (Wang & Burris, 1997):

Q1. What do you **S**ee here?

Q2. What is really **H**appening here?

Q3. How does this relate to **O**ur lives?

Q4. **W**hy does this situation, concern, or strength exist?

Q5. What can we **Do** about it?

Q1. When you look at the themes and photographs that tell the story of each theme, what thoughts, emotions and questions do you have?

Q2. Are there any other themes, not represented by photographs, that you believe exist in your experiences?

Q3. What are the most important things that you feel other people need to know about your experiences?

Q4. Who are the people who you think need to learn about your experiences?

Q5. What do you think are the most important messages that they need to hear?