

Digital Storytelling with First Nations Emerging Adults in Extensions of Care and Transitioning from Care in Manitoba

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Abstract

Objectives: This study investigated the experiences of emerging First Nations adults in extensions of care and transitioning out of care in Manitoba. Four research questions were explored in this study: 1) What do you remember about your time in care and what was your transitioning experience out of care or upon reaching 18 years of age? 2) What challenges, barriers or opportunities have you experienced since leaving care or turning 18? 3) How have you maintained the connection to family, community and culture since transitioning out of care? 4) Do you think you have reached adulthood? **Methods:** The above noted questions were discussed through two digital storytelling workshops where, over the course of five days, participants developed and embedded individual responses to these questions into their own digital video. Follow up interviews were conducted with the participants to get feedback on their perspectives and evaluation about the digital storytelling workshops. Digital storytelling, through the art of combining oral tradition with digital technology, is a participatory, arts-based, learner-centered approach to generating knowledge. It involves using computer software to create a three- to five-minute video to illustrate a personal history. **Results:** The narrative findings from the produced videos and talking circles suggest that Indigenous emerging adults in extensions of care and transitioning from care in Manitoba continue to experience difficulties on their journeys toward adulthood. However, the findings also suggest that the participants in this study are resilient despite the fact that they are dealing simultaneously with memories of being in care, negative peer pressures, and problems in getting their basic needs met as they navigate life beyond their child welfare experiences. Several implications for policy, practice, and research are also offered. **Conclusion:** This study enhances the understanding of First Nations young peoples' experiences in extensions of care and as they transition out of foster care, and contributes to knowledge that promotes digital storytelling as an effective method for working with Indigenous emerging adult populations.

Keywords: Storytelling; First Nation; Care.

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I am close to aging out. My birthday is coming soon and I will have to leave the group home I am living in. I don't know where I am going next and I am scared. I can't get any definitive answers from anyone. Everyone keeps telling me that time is running out and that overwhelms me even more. Once I am of age, I have nowhere to go and that scares me. I find it sad that once kids in care turn a certain age they are left to fend for themselves. In a family, even once you leave home, you still have a place to return to. You still have support. So why is it that kids like me will no longer have anyone in their life and nowhere to go? It's just wrong. (Anonymous foster youth, as cited in Liebmann & Maddin, 2010, p. 257)

The quote above sadly reflects the reality of many youth who have been in the care of the government through child welfare systems in Canada, the United States, and globally. It highlights some of the unique factors that are faced particularly by young adults moving towards emancipation from government care. While the literature on the lived experiences of Indigenous young people transitioning from government care is scant, the available sources do provide evidence of what these youth might similarly encounter prior to, upon, and after reaching the legal age of majority. This study contributes to the understanding of First Nations¹ young peoples' experiences in extensions of care and transitioning out of foster care. This research arose out of my doctoral studies and is a contribution to the growing body of knowledge that utilizes digital storytelling as a contemporary method conducive to working with Indigenous emerging adult populations.

Literature Review

Background

There is a growing interest in research on the importance of recognizing long-term impacts as well as measuring outcomes for children/youth that have been in long term care of Canadian child welfare systems (Trocmé, Nutter, MacLaurin, & Fallon, 1999). Of particular concern is the research which suggests that outcomes for children and young people with long term involvement in child welfare systems within Canada and in other international jurisdictions has been quite poor (Crichlow, 2002; Maunders, Liddell, Liddell, & Green, 1999; Tweddle, 2005;). Former youth in care are generally characterized

as more likely to be undereducated, unemployed or underemployed, and if employed experience lower earnings, with many living below the poverty line. As well, young people with in-care experiences become parents at a younger age, experience homelessness, live in unstable housing arrangements, become incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system, are dependent on social assistance, have mental health issues, and generally are at a higher risk for substance abuse (Reid, 2007; Tweddle, 2005) and sexual exploitation (Blackstock, 2009; Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt, & Formsma, 2003).

In addition, there is a significant relationship that exists between disadvantaged families and the child protection system, which is frequently maintained across generations (Hurley, Chiodo, Leschied, & Whitehead, 2003). For instance, many former First Nations young people also continue to be involved with child welfare if they become parents at a young age (Brown, Knol, Prevost-Derbecker, & Andrushko, 2007; National Youth in Care Network, 2004; Rutman, Strega, Callahan, & Dominelli, 2001). Research further indicates that youth who have been in long term care and who are now aging out of the child welfare system are ill prepared for independence (Dunne, 2004; McEwan-Morris, 2006; Maunders et al., 1999) and few have the skills necessary to live productively in the world on their own (The Children's Aid Society, 2006). In particular, it has been noted that youth leaving care are already burdened by their childhood experiences of abuse, neglect or abandonment, and few have had the benefit of parental role models to transmit the expertise needed to negotiate the trials of living on one's own (The Children's Aid Society, 2006). Young adults also report limited opportunities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes affecting them as they move toward independence from the child welfare system (Freundlich, Avery, & Padgett, 2006; McEwan-Morris, 2006). The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (2007) states that the long-term costs of not supporting youth as they age out of the child welfare system are far greater than the immediate costs of supporting them to transition out of care successfully. Research indicates that when we allow youth to leave the child welfare system unprepared for independence and without ongoing support, the indirect costs are felt through other government departments such as health care, education, justice, and social services (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2007).

¹ The 1982 Canadian Constitution Act (as amended) defined Aboriginal people as the Indian, Metis, and Inuit peoples of Canada (Voyageur, 2001). I specifically use the term "Indigenous" to designate First Nations peoples whose

traditional and historical territories fall within what is now Canada.

A study by Mann-Feder and White (2000) imparts that the transition from placement to independent living has been made more difficult by the nature and length of the relationships between youth and service providers, other youth in care, and family members. In-depth research is lacking in several critical areas regarding youth preparedness for adulthood: the involvement of youth in case planning and assessment; education, employment and career development for youth in foster care; life skills acquisition; and transitional housing services. In addition, critical questions remain regarding the philosophical approach that is most beneficial for youth – such as whether preparation for adulthood should be focused, as it has traditionally been, on *independence* and self-sufficiency as opposed to *interdependence*, in which youth are supported to make connections with others who can provide lifelong help and support when needed (Freundlich, Avery, & Padgett, 2006).

Policy makers have begun to turn their attention toward providing support and services to ensure improved outcomes for care leavers. These include the provision of stable and supportive placements with a positive attitude towards education, maintenance of links with either family members or community supports, a flexible and functional process for graduating from dependence to interdependence, the active involvement of young people in the planning and decision-making process of leaving care, ensuring the availability of a range of accommodation options, and ongoing support as required (McEwan-Morris, 2006; Mendes, 2005; Stapleton & Tweddle, 2010). Extending child welfare-related services beyond 18 years of age until at least 21 or 24 years has been recommended and/or contemplated in several jurisdictions across Canada and the United States (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2010; Tweddle, 2005). Nova Scotia, for instance, provides supports until age 24; Alberta provides support until 22 years; British Columbia provides support until 24 years; and New Brunswick provides support post age of majority (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2010). Extending foster care beyond 18 years of age has been found to promote post-secondary educational attainment in the United States (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).

Emerging Adulthood

There are a number of ways to look at transitioning issues among young people. For example, there is the transition to adulthood that all adolescents eventually move towards as part of their life course. There is also the school to work transition, as well as the transition from living with parents to learning to live on one's own. Leaving care or leaving institutional and/or residential care is another

transition experienced among a select group of young people. The review of the literature generally focuses on emerging adulthood issues and emerging adulthood among those aging out of child welfare systems. The term "emerging adulthood" is a theory of development centered on the late teens through the twenties of young people in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2000).

There is a recently developed theory that proposes a new stage of human development between the adolescent and young adulthood life stages, in which young people who have attained adulthood at the legal age of majority, which in most jurisdictions is 18 years, do not necessarily see themselves as adolescents or adults. This in-between stage is what Jeffrey Arnett (2000) called the "emerging adult" stage of human development. This phase overlaps part of the period of adolescence and extends into what was once called youth or young adulthood. It includes young people in their late teens through to the mid-twenties (typically 18 to 25 years, but increasingly it can also extend into the early thirties) who have "left the dependence of childhood and adolescence, but have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Arnett (2004) indicates that the emerging adulthood stage is a unique developmental period that is particularly prolonged and occurs primarily in Western cultures and other highly industrialized countries where there have been economic changes. He also notes that it no longer makes sense to refer to the age period that starts at puberty (approximately age 10) and ends at adulthood (at age 25) as "youth"; he believes this age span is too long, and too much has changed during this period for it to adequately describe what young people go through today (Arnett, 2000). Instead, he suggests it makes more sense to describe the ages from 10-25 as two periods, with adolescence being between 10-17 years of age and emerging adulthood being roughly between the ages of 18-25 (Arnett, 2006). Arnett (2004) is of the opinion that "'young adulthood' is better applied to those in their thirties, who are still young but are definitely adult in ways those in the late teens through the mid-twenties are not" (p. 19).

Emerging Adulthood among the Indigenous population

The Indigenous population is the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population and is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous population (Preston, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2017). Currently, Indigenous people account for approximately 4.9% of Canada's total population, up from 3.8% in 2006 and 2.8% in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Indigenous youth under the age of 25 represent more than half of the Indigenous population in Canada today (Townsend & Wernick,

2008). It is expected that by 2016, over 1.1 million people will be identified as having Indigenous identity (MacMillan, Wieman, Jamieson, MacMillan, & Walsh, 2009). These numbers, however, are underestimated because of the limitations in the census process, where there has been incomplete enumeration in some communities as well changing patterns of self-identification and legislated changes to the Indian Act (i.e. Bills C-31 and C-3) (Canadian Bar Association, 2010; Wilson & Cardwell, 2012).

While there is very little research that speaks directly to the various transitioning issues among Indigenous youth in Canada. Beaujot and Kerr (2007) note that Indigenous young people consider themselves to have reached adulthood earlier and are not likely to delay their transition toward adulthood, as evidenced by the current trends within the general Canadian population. Emerging adulthood research conducted by Cheah and Nelson (2004) also supports this premise. Cheah and Nelson (2004) explored the acculturation levels of Indigenous young people navigating through and toward the emerging adulthood years while attending university. The Indigenous students perceived themselves to have reached adulthood much earlier than most other Canadian students in the study (Cheah & Nelson, 2004).

Indigenous youth are much more likely to move out of their parents' home at a relatively young age compared to immigrants and other Canadian youth. According to Beaujot and Kerr (2007), one in five Indigenous youth aged 18 had already moved out of their parents' home, compared to one in 14 among immigrants. Relative to earlier decades, the proportion of young Canadian adults continuing to live with parents has continued to climb, and this shift toward older ages has been equally true for both men and women (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). By the age of 29, one in five men still live with their parent(s), while roughly one in ten women are in the same situation (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). Research indicates that early departure from home is linked with lower educational attainment and less successful career patterns (Beaujot & Ravanera, 2008). In terms of education, by age 18 less than half of Indigenous youth report studying full time (49.4%), as compared with 67.5% of Canadians overall and 78.9% of immigrant youth (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). High school completion is noted in the literature as a particular problem among registered First Nations and Inuit youth (Townsend & Wernick, 2008; Clement, 2008). Guimond and Cooke (2008) suggest that up to one half of all youth who are registered Indians in Canada failed to obtain their high school certificate. They note that

...this does not bode well for First Nations youth in the context of a highly competitive labour market as lower and later educational attainment suggests that as these young cohorts age, they will continue to lag behind other Canadians in employment and income, and be at greater risk of low income and dependency. (Guimond & Cooke, 2008, p. 28)

Beaujot and Kerr (2007) note that since Indigenous youth leave home and school earlier than immigrants and other Canadians, they are also more likely to work full time as adolescents. However, as they move into their 20's they become significantly less likely to be employed full time. This is largely because Indigenous youth are considerably more likely to have children much earlier than either the Canadian or immigrant populations. Indigenous women, in particular, have a higher fertility rate but in an age bracket that is considerably younger than that experienced by other Canadian and immigrant populations (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007).

Statistics from the 2006 Census indicate that almost half of the Indigenous population is made up of children and youth aged 24 and under (Townsend, 2008). Indigenous women are more likely to raise children alone, live in poverty, and more often, are unemployed or underemployed (Hull, 2004). Among Indigenous women, early parenting leads to a reduction in educational outcomes, delays in entering the labour market, and subsequently lower earning potential (Hull, 2004; Hango & Le Bourdais, 2009). Beaujot and Ravanera (2008) note that there are many challenges that disadvantage young first-time parents. They note that the wages of women who have children later did not differ from women who had no children, but women who have children earlier than the average for their level of education had lower average wages.

The Indigenous Experience Transitioning out of First Nations Care

What is known about the long-term outcomes and post-care experiences of young people who are transitioning out of government care, particularly Indigenous youth who have since aged out of First Nations child welfare? The Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Maltreatment provides evidence that First Nations children in the child welfare system are overrepresented in government care in almost every province within Canada (Sinha et al., 2011; Trocmé, Knoke, Shangreux, Fallon, & Maclaurin, 2005). In contrast to the lived experience of other middle-class Canadian children and

youth, First Nations children are more likely to be born into poverty, to suffer health problems, maltreatment, and incarceration, and to be placed in the child welfare system (Sinha et al., 2011). Although provincial data collection systems vary, it is estimated that there are currently over 25,000 Indigenous children in the child welfare system – three times the highest enrollment figures of residential schools in the 1940s (Blackstock, 2009b). In terms of First Nations children on reserve, the numbers of children entering into care are tragically rising. Data from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs confirms that between the years of 1995 and 2001 the number of Status Indian children who entered into substitute care rose an astonishing 71.5% nationally (McKenzie, 2002). In particular, research has also established that First Nations children in Canada remain in care longer than most other children who have contact with child protection systems (Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004; Trocmé et al., 2006), and that a substantial number of First Nations young people stay in care right up until they reach the legal age of majority (McEwan-Morris, 2006). So, it is no wonder that many First Nations young people in care will experience the transition to adulthood from government care rather than from a natural family centered situation.

Despite the overrepresentation of First Nations children in child welfare systems, little research to date has focused on the transition that this specific group of young people will have to eventually make when leaving care. In particular, the focus of the research to date has not been on the distinct transitioning experiences of First Nations young people who have been in the care of a First Nations child welfare agency, despite the fact that these agencies have been in operation for well over thirty years (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). These voices need to be heard and we need to learn from them. This research highlights some of the transitioning experiences of First Nations emerging adults leaving the care of First Nations child welfare agencies within the Manitoba context.

Methods

Methodologies

The research approach for this study was qualitative, participatory, arts-based, and incorporated narrative inquiry through digital storytelling techniques. Narrative Inquiry is about studying experience and is at the heart of storytelling. It provides the theoretical framework behind digital storytelling, which is an adaptation of storytelling where a personal story is merged with still-frame imagery, music, and voice to create a multi-media story (Lambert, 2009). It allows ordinary people to tell their stories, and is both empowering and emancipatory because it encourages people to give voice, image, and sound to their

life experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). New information and communication technologies provide the opportunity to explore storytelling through multimedia, including video/filmmaking, in what has been described as digital ethnography. Stories and storytelling are part of a post-positivist paradigm of inquiry influenced by phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative analysis, along with the evolution of visual methods in social research (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Digital ethnography uses digital tools to help people create personal narratives that are powerful, compelling, and emotionally engaging, at the same time generating knowledge in ways that exceed standard research methods (Murthy, 2008; Varis, 2016). Digitized elements, like photos, videos, illustrations, music, or narratives may come from the storyteller's own archives or could be taken from the Internet if publicly available. Blending the storyline with these other elements represents the craft and art of digital storytelling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). They have been called "short, multimedia tales told from the heart" (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010, p. 37).

This research is also participatory because it emphasized participation and action by the participants themselves. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a methodological approach that is most conducive to doing research with Indigenous peoples (Bennett, 2004). PAR emphasizes collective inquiry and experimentation grounded in experience and social history, addressing questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Typically, a pure PAR approach would have seen the participants assist in creating the questions and participating in the design of the research itself (Schinke, McGannon, Watson, & Busanich, 2013). However, in this case the PAR process was partially used. I initially created the research questions that the participants responded to in their digital stories instead of letting them have free reign to tell any story they wished. While their stories had to fit into the scope of my research, they still had the freedom to express how they wished to respond to the questions I posed. They were also free to add to their stories. Participants learned how to use the software program and became responsible for editing their own personal videos rather than having someone do it for them.

Narrative Inquiry through digital storytelling is also an artistic process. Arts-based research brings scholarly inquiry into the creative realm (Knowles & Cole, 2008). It allows for personal, emotional, experiential realities and embodies expressions of knowledge and authenticity. Arts-based qualitative inquiry is an innovative approach that extends qualitative research through the use of arts-based or informed methods such as visual arts,

photography, stories, poetry, video biographies, drama, movies, theatre, music, and sculpture, or through other creative processes such as digital storytelling (Butler-Kisber, 2010; de Mello, 2007). This methodology values alternative ways of knowing, incorporates Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and allows for the participatory creation of knowledge, making this methodology a conducive way of working with Indigenous youth as it preserves and promotes the oral wisdom of Indigenous peoples (Wilcox, Harper, & Edge, 2012). Arts-based approaches like digital storytelling hold significant transformative power because digital technologies are themselves reshaping the social institutions and practices surrounding storytelling, including the power relations that govern who can speak, what they can say, and how they can say it. Digital storytelling is a new mode of communicating authenticity, and involves truths and methods that rely on image-based testimony (Adelson & Olding, 2013).

Research Questions

Two digital storytelling workshops along with post-workshop interviews were held over the summer of 2015. Each workshop incorporated talking circles. Four questions were posed during the talking circles, and the responses to the research questions identified below were then incorporated into the participants' videos:

1. What do you remember and understand about why you were in care? What was your experience transitioning out of care?
2. Where are you now on your life path? What challenges, barriers and opportunities have you experienced since leaving care?
3. How have you maintained connection to family, community, and/or culture since turning 18 and transitioning out of care?
4. Have you reached adulthood? How and when do you know you have reached adulthood?

Participants

A total of 12 participants were involved in this study. Three women and nine men participated in the workshops and all identified as First Nations citizens with current and former experiences of having been in the care of child and family services prior to aging out. Although over the age of 18, four of the participants were in extensions of care and had not yet transitioned out of care at the time of participating in this study. Six of the participants indicated that they had completed grade twelve. Two of the participants were still attending high school, and the four participants in extensions of care also stated that they were still in the process of completing high school. Four participants have had children since leaving care. One

participant had entered university while another participant noted that she had taken some university courses but had not finished. Only two of the participants were employed at the time they participated in this study; the majority of the participants were unemployed. One participant identified as being homeless and indicated that she couch-surfed between friends and family. The participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 32 years of age. All participants had lived experiences with the child welfare system in Manitoba, anywhere from 6 to 18+ years of being in care.

Workshop Team

The workshop team consisted of three individuals. The facilitator of the workshop is the author of this paper. A research assistant was enlisted to help with the delivery of the workshops and all logistics from beginning to end. The research assistant took care of picking up and preparing meals, as well as transporting the Elder to the workshops and home. He also assisted in welcoming the participants and answering any technical questions when the facilitator was busy helping other participants. The third member of the team was a female Elder. Although the Elder did not attend the workshop in person every day, she agreed to keep her schedule open and to make herself available to all participants when and if needed. The Elder attended in person on days one and five, and opened and closed both workshops with a prayer and smudge. The Elder explained to participants how the talking circles worked and what was expected of the participants when participating in the talking circles. She contributed her own stories about growing up and becoming an adult, and was available to speak with the participants for one-on-one cultural counselling sessions if there was need expressed by any of the participants.

Research Design and Digital Storytelling Workshops

The weeklong digital storytelling workshops for this study took place in two different locations over the course of two months (June 2015 and August 2015). Each workshop was five days in length and participants attended for approximately 5 hours each day. The first workshop was held in a child welfare agency setting during daytime working hours from 9-3pm. The second workshop took place during the beginning of August in the evening hours from 4-9pm within the researcher's home.

The emerging adults involved in this study participated in daily smudging and talking circles prior to receiving information and instruction about the digital storytelling process. Participants were gifted with sweetgrass, ceremonial tobacco, and a painted rock at the time of obtaining their consent to participate in the study and

workshop. The researcher screened her own digital story, “My Mother’s Love was in a Bowl of Porridge” (Bennett, 2014), after giving brief information about digital stories as a form of healing. I also screened a number of other digital stories from the Nindibaajimomin Digital Storytelling Project for Children of Residential School Survivors website to give participants a range of ideas and examples of how digital stories had been developed by others in a different context. I provided the participants with the website’s toolkit, which they utilized as a resource to help them understand the digital storytelling techniques and process they would learn over the course of the week. Participants also received training on the ethical practices of taking pictures and videos. Other workshop activities included debriefing, regular breaks, movement, and healthy meals, snacks, water and refreshments. Additionally, and importantly, the Elder was available to provide emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual, and cultural support for any participant who needed this additional support. Workshop materials about understanding and coping with trauma were provided to all participants.

The emerging First Nations adults who participated in the two workshops were guided through computer tutorials that enabled them, with support, to construct their own stories and videos, which ultimately formed a part of their healing and reconciliation journeys. Eight individuals attended the first workshop, while four individuals participated in the second workshop. Each participant’s video responded in unique ways to the research questions identified above, and ranged from 2 minutes to 13 minutes in length. On the last day of the workshop, where permitted, participants’ videos were screened. Participants were allowed to invite significant people to watch the screening of their videos. Most of the participants completed their videos, however some felt that they still need more time to edit their videos to make them better. A traditional feast then followed the end result of each workshop, where a certificate of appreciation, including an honorarium, was presented to each participant in appreciation for their efforts.

Equipment and Software

The workshop facilitator provided participants with the URL link to the online trial version of the video editing application (Adobe Premier Pro CC 2015) used for the workshop. Participants were encouraged to bring their own laptops, however laptops had been graciously lent by a child welfare agency for participants to use during both workshop sessions. Audio recording devices, a scanner for scanning participants’ photos, and a printer were also available to workshop participants. Most participants had a smart phone, which they used for taking photographs,

videos, and audio recordings for the stories and narratives used in their videos. The research assistant ensured that a camera, including audio and video recording equipment, was available for the participants’ use at each workshop location.

Post-workshop Interviews

Follow-up interviews were held with nine of the 12 participants. Participants were asked to share personal reflections and provide feedback on the digital storytelling process and any in-depth learning that emerged from the videos produced by themselves and the other participants involved in this research.

Results

This section focuses on the narrative findings from eight talking circles, twelve individual videos, and individual interviews held with some of the participants after the workshops ended. The primary purpose of this study was to promote an understanding of the narratives of survival and resilience that come from the experiential stories contributed by First Nations former youth in care. These selective narrative responses are organized around participants’ memories of being in care, transitioning experiences, pathways to adulthood, and resiliency and hope. It concludes with an overview of the participants’ perspectives about being involved in digital storytelling.

Memories of Time in Care

A slight majority of the participants in this study had the common experience of being placed in care at a young age. One participant indicated that he had come into care shortly after birth, while approximately half of the participants indicated that they had come into care around three to five years of age. The remaining participants said their exposure to the child welfare system and foster and group home care started later in the teenage years. All of the participants had aged out of the system at 18 years of age, with the exception of four individuals who were still in extensions of care at the time they participated in this research. One person noted that while his exposure to child welfare did not happen until his teenage years, he had memories of having been involved with the system when he was younger, starting possibly around five years of age. Other participants shared stories of being involved with child welfare throughout their childhood until they had become permanent wards in their youth. For 11 of the 12 participants, the drug and alcohol addictions of their parents were identified as being the main reason behind what brought them into care. As one participant noted, “I was taken away from my mom because she was always drinking.”

The participants also reflected extensively on their memories of being in care. Participants spoke of the strangeness of being in care, about being split from siblings when they went into care or witnessing the abuse and bullying of siblings in care, and about the things that stood out in their minds about their first placements. Group homes, foster homes, and hotel placements were identified as some of the places that the participants remembered living in when they first came into care. Most of the participants shared a common perspective about these homes, which was epitomized in a comment made by one participant who said, “Basically I was in some good foster homes and some bad foster homes, and it kind of made me who I am today.” The digital storytelling participants often cited siblings as being significant to them. Being separated from sisters and brothers and being concerned for siblings was mentioned by many of the participants as one of their earliest memories about being in care. Another participant stated, “I was separated from my brother and my sisters. That was really hard just not knowing where they were and how they were doing or what kind of people they were with.” One participant added her thoughts on being separated from her siblings:

I remember waking up to a tall man in a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and my sisters crying. I remember being pulled hard by this man and him saying, ‘everything is going to be ok.’ But nothing was. I was separated from my brother and my two little sisters.

This participant stated that she used to have nightmares about her time in care. She explained this in more detail:

Now it’s pretty good but I still have my nightmares. I just have a lot of bad history about that time. I will always have the memories of being in the child welfare system. There were good times but also there were a lot of bad times.

Participants spoke of the unfamiliar feeling of being placed in the care of strangers. As another participant noted, “in the beginning it was pretty strange. We were going into homes ... it’s weird seeing and living with new people.” Another noted that as a result of being in care, she had to learn to become familiar with all the new restrictions associated with being placed with strangers. As she further explained, “all these new people in her life were telling her what she could and couldn’t do, where she could and couldn’t go, and whom she could or couldn’t see or live with.” Some participants carried memories of guilt and had expressed feeling culpable and

responsible for having been apprehended and for changing the trajectory of their family’s life. One participant shared that he had felt it was his fault that he and his siblings had been taken from his mother and placed in care. All of the participants shared similar experiences of being moved frequently and experiencing multiple placements throughout their time in care.

Discussing and remembering these experiences inevitably lead to reflections on how the participants felt about these early experiences. Many pointed to feelings of abandonment, feeling unwanted and unloved. One participant stated that her experience of growing up in foster care “really destroyed her” because it left her feeling “lost and unwanted.” One of the participants still in an extension of care noted that the connection with social workers appeared to diminish as he got older. He expressed the sense of abandonment that he felt in the following narrative:

When you’re young, it’s more easier and people they actually give you more attention, because for the past four years, when I was 14 my CFS workers didn’t even care. Like they would just drop me off in a group home and they’d tell me stuff, “Oh we’ll get you into school, and we’ll give you purchase orders and we’ll give you all this stuff.” Once I got into a group home, that was the last time I saw my worker is when they left me in the group home. They didn’t help me, they didn’t help me at all, they just left me on my own and that was harsh thing to me, to have no one there to help you, to guide you or anything cause you to have to do things on your own.

A few participants shared the experience of having been abused in foster care. One male participant stated in his video, “I’ve been in some dark places growing up”; he also described being locked up in his room for “days at a time” and remembered missing meals. As a result, he felt that many of his later anger issues stemmed from those experiences. Another participant remembered he and his siblings had been abused for many years in a foster home before they were finally believed. In his video, Jared explained how he and his siblings came to be removed from that abusive foster home:

I was taken away from my mom when I was about three or four years old with my brothers and sisters. We were put into foster homes where we got abused by the

foster parents. We were in that home for about six or seven years before we were moved out by our social worker. They finally believed us after we told them after all those years.

Some of the participants shared similar stories of getting into trouble while in care, and turning to alcohol and drugs as a way of coping. A majority of the participants, both male and female, spoke of being involved in gang-related activity and doing “basically stupid things,” such that they began to experience what it was like to be “going in and out of the youth correctional system.” One female participant shared in her video that she “started smoking weed” when she was 10 years old, and at 12 she started “consuming alcohol and drank all the time.” Another noted that when she turned 14, she dropped out of school and started ‘repping a gang’², and started using prescription drugs to get high. Another participant further shared that she had been “introduced to ecstasy and cocaine,” and that her “drinking and drug use got worse” because she “just didn’t care anymore.” For one participant, the loss of his grandparents culminated with him becoming “an alcoholic and drug user at age 12.” Other participants also spoke of hanging out with older people that got them involved with drugs, drinking, and gang activities. One of the older participants in the study (32 at the time) stated that he battled depression and suicide for almost 10 years after leaving care, and throughout that time he shared, “I felt like I was going nowhere and lived in a bottle.” Another male participant ended his video by giving a tribute to former friends who had been gang members, but who have since passed on. He reflected in his video on his gang involvement, that he thought he would never make it to adulthood as he often surmised he would likely die before he reached the age of 15 years.

Transitioning Experiences

The participants identified barriers and challenges to becoming an adult during their transitioning experiences. Participants identified barriers as obstacles that were difficult to get past or over. For instance, finding a place to live and finding employment were often cited as examples of the barriers they have faced. Challenges were viewed as factors that were difficult to obtain, but not necessarily insurmountable. Participants identified some of their challenges as:

- Having difficulty obtaining ID and a driver’s license

- Learning to be independent (paying bills and budgeting)
- Loss of supports and resources that they had when they were in care

The oldest of the participants stated that for him, one of the challenges he identified upon emerging from care was that he did not know how to love. He connected this realization to the many experiences of rejection he had experienced over his time in foster care. He further shared:

Like any child, all I wanted was to be loved or feel I was worthy of love. I feel that need was not met in my youth. I sought after it in all the wrong ways as an adult. As a result, I had a skewed view of what being in a relationship was and what love is. Reflecting back on past relationships, I now see how I hurt and used my girlfriends to fill an internal void. To this day I still struggle with what love is, and wonder at times if I am capable of a selfless love or do I just take?

Participants cited education as one of the major opportunities they have experienced since leaving care. As one participant shared:

I feel now that ever since I graduated and got accepted into the University of Manitoba, I feel that most of these barriers and challenges are little in comparison to the opportunities that I’m faced with now. Like even just sitting here you know, this is an opportunity to present a story, to present all of our stories that will one day touch kids that are going through the same thing that we were going through because Manitoba has the highest rate of kids being in CFS.

Being in extensions of care, becoming a parent, and learning to rebuild and re-establish relationships after care were also cited as some of the things that participants saw as being a challenge and an opportunity at the same time:

Another challenge and barrier I guess was trying to build a relationship with my parents. At the time my mom was

² “Repping a Gang” is a colloquial expression meaning that one is “affiliated with a gang.”

homeless on the street, which is why she couldn't take care of me. So it was very hard to come to terms with her situation and to have a relationship with her when she was living that life. And my dad he was never really involved with my life. Right now we are trying to build a relationship. We just found out he has cancer so I'm trying to build a relationship before he goes. Both of my parents have a great relationship with my children so that makes me very happy even though they couldn't be there for me as a child, they are there for my children, so I'm very grateful for that.

Even the idea of drugs was put out there as being both a challenge as well as an opportunity, as one participant bravely shared:

The other thing that I have experienced too, was drugs. That was an opportunity. I'm going to put that in the opportunity part because it is obvious that I made that choice to go out there and do drugs, that's the first mistake I made. It's easy to access in the city. I'm not going to lie.

Participants noted that they had a range of family ties. Some indicated that, despite their child welfare placements, they remained connected to their birth families, while others have had to re-learn to connect with their birth families. Other participants indicated that they have maintained relationships with their foster families. Two participants shared that they had no family to return to because of the death of important family members. Many of the participants have moved on to created their own families by connecting with a partner, giving birth to their own children, or by finding a surrogate family to stand in place of their families of origin.

Participants indicated that they felt disconnected from their culture, but many expressed a strong desire to learn more. Some of the participants reflected on this disconnection and now, as parents themselves, rely on cultural activities and participate in cultural events with their children, as the following narrative considers:

And for culture, yeah, I've always kind of been disconnected from my culture. My dad went to residential school so he's a survivor and all my grandparents went. My mom is a Christian so she always taught me that my culture was wrong,

which I guess was passed down to her from her parents being in residential school. So, I didn't get to learn my language and well, since having children I obviously have a deep interest in learning the culture. I take my kids to pow wow clubs and things like that. We smudge at home and we listen to a lot of pow wow music. When my kids are fighting that's kind of how I calm them down. I just throw on some traditional drumming and they shut up.

The findings revealed that the participants' connections to community were weakened by their involvement with child welfare and their placements in care. The majority indicated that since leaving care they haven't visited or returned to their communities, while others have never been to their communities despite being serviced by an Indigenous child welfare agency.

Pathways to Adulthood

The things that are identified by non-Indigenous populations as markers for having reached adulthood (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007) are very similar for the First Nations participants involved in this study. Participants were of the opinion that graduating from high school, obtaining employment, finding and keeping an apartment, reducing their reliance on parents and foster parents, as well as becoming parents themselves were the markers that they identified as having reached adulthood. Of significance was the fact that a majority of the participants (8 out of 12) did not see themselves as having yet reached adulthood, even though they have reached the legal age of majority. Participants believed that racism played a role, as the following narrative contemplates:

Generally, almost every place that I've gone to get a job, they've actually turned me away and hired people that were lined up behind me. So yeah, it's racist. I've got a lot of job training experience. It's just that no one wants to hire a big Native guy that looks all beaten up and scruffy.

For this study's participants, adulthood was associated with being employed, yet many of them were not employed during the time they were involved in this study. Racism was implicated as the reason that hindered their attempts in finding employment. Participants felt that the lack of opportunities in finding gainful employment prevented them from feeling that they had reached adulthood. This kept them from being able to be

seen and treated as adults, which hindered their attempts to become successful adults.

Resilience and Hope

Participants' narratives suggest that mentors, family, community, and culture are important elements in supporting resilience and hope in those who have had child welfare histories and as they learn to navigate life after care. Mentors were described by the participants as important in having connected them to beneficial resources and supports within the Indigenous community. One participant explained that her mentor "connected her to other support people from the community" and helped her become "connected to Elders, cultural advisors, and invited her to cultural events and activities that slowly changed her life." Another participant believed that his mentor "saved his life because he had been lost, lonely and suicidal for a long time." Their narratives about their interactions with mentors reflect that they had access to someone that helped them weather the difficulties associated with transitioning to independence. The findings from the narratives shared by some participants suggest they maintained connectivity with their families both while in care and after having left care. This is consistent with the literature, where it has been acknowledged that youth in care will eventually gravitate to family once they age out of care (Barth, 1990).

Participants in this study also understand and are connected to Indigenous culture. For example, participants mentioned and were familiar with the sacred medicines (tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass, and sage), the Medicine Wheel, the seven sacred teachings (love, trust, honest, courage, wisdom, courage, and humility), sweat lodges, and participating in sharing circles with Elders. In fact, culture played a role in every aspect of the workshop as we smudged, recited prayers, and held a circle daily to discuss the questions associated with this research. Some participants indicated that they had been exposed to Indigenous teachings since the time they were young, whereas for other participants culture did not have not much of a role in their lives until they got older. There was, however, enthusiasm and a desire to learn more about culture after having been exposed to Indigenous teachings and ceremonies. For Indigenous youth, building a healthy identity and sense of self can be greatly enhanced by connecting with traditional knowledge and practices. Research has linked exposure to strong cultural beliefs and values with resiliency among youth and with positive health outcomes, including improved educational achievement and self-esteem (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

Post-Workshop Reflections

The feedback responses received from 9 out of 12 participants during the post-workshop interviews were very positive. One person described the experience of being involved in the digital storytelling process in the following way:

I found the process to be very interesting. It was a great subject to explore. A lot of the questions asked are very relevant to the lives of the participants; the information gathered can maybe change the way the child welfare system works, and even though the participants were over the age of 18, I think that there can be plans/strategies that can be put in place and/or used to improve the lives of those who have aged out of care. I found the workshop to be very valuable.

One of the key ingredients to relationship-building noted by most of the participants was the food, the opportunity to have fun, getting to know new people, and learning a valuable skill.

Overall, the feedback from participants supports the idea that using digital storytelling as a methodology, such as in this study, was a transformative, healing, and an empowering approach for conducting research with First Nations emerging adults who have previous child welfare histories. The following narrative from one participant sums up the experience of participants on sharing child welfare history through the digital storytelling process:

I think recording your story then trying to find images that reflect your words is a powerful medium. It forces you to slow down and think about your past. For me ... this workshop helped me reflect on my past and take the time to analyze some experiences I put out of my mind.

Discussion

In reflecting upon what I learned in conducting this research, I came to realize that it required a journey from my head to my heart. In the process I was also asking my participants to take a similar journey with me. As an Anishinaabe woman, I have come to know that Indigenous ways of knowing are subjective and relational, unlike non-Indigenous ways of knowing which are supposed to be objective and where knowledge is found outside of the person. Indigenous knowledge comes from within rather than from outside of one's self. Indigenous ways of knowing are ultimately grounded in one's personal introspections, as it is only through them that

people gain authentic insights and can stand in their truth. With this understanding in mind, I realized that I had to listen to not only my head, but also my heart in order to look at the findings from my research with fresh eyes. In the Anishinaabe language, “Debwewin” translates to “a personal and wholistic truth that is rooted in one’s heart” (Gehl, 2012). This truth is also inclusive of both “mind knowledge” and “heart knowledge”. In the Anishinaabe tradition, one’s spirit speaks through the heart and Elders say “the process of completing mind knowledge and connecting it to the heart knowledge is best referred to as a personal journey. Each person’s Debwewin Journey will be different” (Gehl, 2012).



Figure 1. Debwewin Journey for Indigenous Youth Transitioning from Care (Bennett, 2016, p. 277)

Figure 1 depicts the Debwewin Journey that each participant took during the process of reflecting back on their experiences in care and transitioning along the pathway to adulthood that contributed to each of their own unique ways of resilience and hope. This diagram is very similar to the Medicine Wheel. The memories of time in care reflect the beginning of their journey. The next part of their journey in care was a reflection on all of the experiences and outcomes that come from making the transition from being in care to leaving care. The following aspect of the circle reflects on another journey that Indigenous young people must past through, which is all the uncertainty that comes with becoming an adult. These experiences ultimately lead them to a place where they can feel hope, exhibit resilience, and feel that much stronger because of those experiences. The experience of being in care is a part of the participants’ wholistic realities. The circle depicts the Debwewin Journey for youth who have been in care and represents an almost unique rite of passage that they each must navigate as part of the initiation upon leaving care. In the process of

moving through each element of the circle, those in care transitioning toward adulthood eventually come to make the long journey from being in their head to being in their heart (at the center of the circle) and emerging an adult.

As this research was rooted in an approach that privileged the narrative through storytelling, the following is what I believe is significant and unique about the Debwewin Journey that I have been on with these participants:

First, this study revealed that digital storytelling gives agency to First Nations emerging adults because they had to use their own words, pictures, narratives, and choices of music to tell their own unique stories. They are all truly the authors of their stories.

Second, the stories that were created, as part of this study, were original creations, presented in a way that emphasized the voice and agency of each individual participant.

Third, the stories created for this project produced counter-narratives about the attributes of these First Nations emerging adults with prior child welfare and transitioning experiences. Counter-narratives refer to the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized. The idea of “counter” - itself implies a space of resistance against traditional domination. A counter-narrative goes beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. Instead, these must come from the margins, from the perspectives and voices of those individuals. A counter-narrative thus goes beyond the telling of stories that take place in the margins. The effect of a counter-narrative is to empower and give agency to individuals to tell their own stories in their own way. By choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view, helping to create complex narratives truly presenting their realities (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). The themes in their videos offer counter-narratives that reinforced themes of pride, achievement, love, respect, connection, understanding, and reflections that are rooted in personal and collective self-esteem and resilience among this particular group of participants. These stories were counter-narrative in that they were rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are specific to those who can speak about the experience of being Indigenous and having previous child welfare experience, and what this experience means for and to them specifically. Counter-narratives are personal stories that alter the understanding of dominant culture (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, & T’Lakwadz, 2009).

Fourth, participants in this study also demonstrated that Indigenous storytelling can serve as a social function that connected them to their audience and to each other. Each video produced was made for a specific audience in mind: for themselves (so that they could remember and unburden themselves from these troublesome memories), for their families (as a way of connecting them to an experience about what they went through when they were away from their families or for future generations), for the researcher (so that I could complete my doctoral studies), for their mentors (to share their gifts and talents), for social workers (who had supported and befriended them while they were in care), and for the child welfare system (so that the system could understand their experiences as Indigenous wards of state care). Through their videos they want others to learn from their experiences. These stories and videos are incredible gifts and should be seen in that light.

Fifth, an outgrowth of this connection through storytelling was the bonding that occurred among the participants during each of the two workshops. For five solid days they all congregated at the same place, ate together, laughed together and joked with each other, reminisced together, and participated in all the discussion circles, where they helped each other figure out the software program as they worked through the process of developing their videos. In the post-workshop interviews, they spoke about the camaraderie and feedback that was critical for their storytelling experience. Their experience working together reinforced cultural solidarity and group cohesion, which is a prerequisite for social interactions that will happen in other contexts across their lifespans (Hackett, Furgal, Angnatok, Sheldon, Karpik, Baikie, Pamak, & Bell, 2016).

Sixth, in this study, the participants' storytelling became a collective memory, resulting in personal transformations. Their stories were collective because they were based on common experiences and actual stories of being in care, which wove together details from a variety of sources and were combined in the unique style of each participant. At the same time, their experiences and stories also drew upon the collective experience of a cultural group. Each one of the participants was engaged in a form of knowledge transfer with one another. As Gehl (2012) notes, knowledge transfer is "the process of

passing on heart knowledge as an intergenerational transfer of knowledge" (p. 57).

Seventh, Indigenous emerging adult storytelling is considered creative resistance because it is both creative and a source of resistance. It is creative because the stories that were crafted for this study were molded by the storytellers in ways that were unique to each individual, and it is a form of resistance because the stories were based on the participants' own "truth-telling" memories about their time in care and what happened to them as they moved toward adulthood. The stories embedded in the participants' videos, like the stories about residential schools, are part of the collective truth-telling that is necessary for reconciliation (Corntassel et al., 2009), especially in child welfare.

Lastly, the videos that were created conform to the principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession)³ in that all of the participants own their stories, pictures, narratives, and the videos they created as part of this project. By having ownership of their videos, the participants also have the power to protect and control how their information is used. In the case of this research, they have all given me permission to use their videos at any educational forums and conferences, and most have given me permission to post their videos online. As such, I have become the steward of these videos, but ownership of these videos will always belong to and be controlled by each of the participants. I am incredibly honoured to be a steward of these incredible stories.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Further Research
Results from this study have several implications for policy, practice, and research. In responding to each of these areas briefly, I move from general to specific suggestions.

Policy. First, Indigenous agencies were important in the delivery of services to First Nations families and communities. These agencies were created primarily to stop the removal of First Nations children and youth from communities, given earlier non-Indigenous child welfare practices. It is clear that many First Nation youth are leaving the system without deeper connections to their families, communities, and cultures. The findings suggest that Indigenous agencies need to reconsider how they prepare youth for adulthood and how they will focus on

³ The First Nations principles of OCAP® are a set of standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used, or shared. They are the *de facto* standard for how to conduct research with First Nations. Standing for ownership, control, access and possession,

OCAP® asserts that First Nations have control over data collection processes in their communities, and that they own and control how this information can be used. OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) (www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP).

the needs of First Nations emerging adults. First Nations child welfare agencies need to focus on connecting youth to rites of passage that are culturally relevant in addition to ensuring that their basic needs are being met, as well as maintaining their connections to family, community, and culture as they pass through the emerging adulthood stages. In addition, exposure to a variety of cultural initiatives and activities are key to strengthening the self-esteem and resilience those transitioning out of care.

Second, First Nation Child and Family Service (FNCFS) agencies need to consider the implications of the theory of development around emerging adulthood for the populations they serve. Given that true adulthood is not likely reached until the age of 25 for most young people today who are not raised in care, all agencies need to reconsider the extension of services to those who have been in long-term care. Agencies will also need to reconsider the costs around transitioning services should this theory of development be embraced as a strategy in the future. Consideration must include how to reconnect emerging adults with their family, community and culture since connection to culture, community, and especially family is primarily why First Nations Child and Family Service agencies were initially developed. Like residential schools, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare systems have long played a part in separating Indigenous children and youth from their familial generations. The system needs to build in reunification efforts to help former youth in care reconnect with their families. This would be an important element necessary to bring about reconciliation for all families, but specifically for Indigenous families who engage with child welfare.

Third, it is also clear from the findings that healing is necessary for those who are passing through the emerging adulthood stage. As the young people in this study shared, the alcohol and substance abuse of their parents were noted as the primary reason why many of them were placed in care. There is a possibility that some of the participants may have been affected by their parents' substance addictions prior to their birth but have never been diagnosed with disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs), which may leave them more vulnerable in the emerging adulthood stage as they may not have the types of support needed to help them navigate adulthood that other young people with

disabilities are able to acquire. More supports need to be in place to help them cope with these realizations and to help them prepare for a future that brings wellness and stability. Memories of feeling unloved, unworthy, and thoughts of suicide were mentioned as possible mental health issues that were unresolved, and may still not have been resolved at the time the results of this study were prepared. Agencies may need to consider the need for more healing approaches for those who are transitioning toward adulthood and passing through the emerging adulthood stage. Healing approaches should incorporate cultural rites of passage into the array of services that are available to young people under the age of 18. The importance of prevention and working with the adult family members of the too many Indigenous children who are coming into care is necessary, however these efforts may demand more from the system at large and not just from Indigenous agencies alone.

The fourth policy suggestion is directed at the child welfare governing bodies of the province, the Southern and Northern First Nations and Métis CFS authorities. Each governing body should fund digital storytelling research initiatives with Indigenous emerging adults that capture the voices of those who have child welfare experiences, so that we can begin to build a repository of knowledge and learn from the prior experiences of those who have aged out of care in this province. These voices have been missing from the record for many years now. Digital storytelling videos could be made that focus on the various paths of success, or detail the challenges that other foster care alumni have experienced since leaving care. Digital stories could also identify the various ways child welfare alumni have remained connected to their communities, their cultures, and their families, and how these connections can be enhanced and strengthened in the process so that the future generations can be informed on how to proceed beyond the seven generations.⁴

Practice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) made a number of recommendations after hearing from over 6,000 residential school survivors. Many of the recommendations in their executive summary center on child welfare. One of these is the need to ensure that social workers are properly trained about the history and impacts of the residential school system. I would argue that governments also need to implement a policy to ensure that it captures the history and impact of

⁴ The concept of “seven generations” is based on an ancient Iroquois philosophy that decision made today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future (Richardson, 2008). This concept can also be applied to relationships - every decision should result in

sustainable relationships seven generations in the future. No person should make any major decisions affecting their life, their family, their community or their interaction with outsiders without consideration of how such decision will affect their descendants down to the seventh generation (Stigelbauer, 1992).

child welfare on the subsequent generations of families, as it has been noted by many researchers that child welfare took over where residential schools left off (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985). Agencies need to start developing healing programs as well as independent living and skills-based programs that could perhaps incorporate digital storytelling as a technique for Indigenous adults who have been a part of the child welfare system. Many Indigenous adults who were once in care can become today's mentors to those who are currently in care. Digital storytelling could be a method for helping Indigenous foster care alumni create stories of healing that could be shared as part of the training for youth preparing to leave care. Digital storytelling can be used for sharing aspirations about where youth envision themselves in the future. It can become a planning tool that shows the path forward.

Second, I would suggest implementing the recommendation made by Commissioner Hughes in the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry to support the extension of youth transitioning out of care. As was suggested by Commissioner Hughes (2013), the *Child and Family Services Act* within Manitoba needs to be amended to allow for the extension of services up to and including the age of 25 to any child who, at the age of majority, was receiving services under the Act. As the findings suggest, emerging Indigenous adults as well as other Indigenous youth exiting child welfare are still vulnerable and struggling long after they have left care. Extending the option to stay in care longer would help ameliorate the struggles that many emerging adults face. These extended services are vitally important to Indigenous populations, who are currently overrepresented in the child welfare system.

Third, the provincial and federal governments must recognize "emerging adulthood" as a new stage of human development that needs to be reflected in our social, justice, health, and education service sectors. Such recognition would see the development of a separate department within Family Services, with separate legislation and funding earmarked for addressing the needs of all emerging adults, including Indigenous emerging adults, who eventually must leave and transition out the child welfare system. Criteria and standards will need to be developed to identify the eligibility for extensions to all youth who had been receiving services at the time of reaching the age of majority. Such a move requires adequate funding from both the provincial and federal governments. This is not a new suggestion; support for this change is reflected in community consultations, which AMR (All My Relations) Planning & Consulting (2015) conducted in the process of mapping options for action to guide the Department of Family

Services in response to the recommendations in the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry. This has also been reflected in research conducted in Ontario (Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth [Ontario], 2012).

Research. First, more research needs to be considered by the child welfare system within the province as a whole, to get a clearer understanding of the challenges that former youth in care are experiencing during the emerging adulthood years between 18 and 25. A more thorough research effort to look at the human stages of development regarding emerging adulthood is needed. In particular, FNCFS Agencies need to understand the ways that the theory of development regarding emerging adulthood is similar or different for First Nations young people. Follow up research with other populations of emerging adults in Manitoba may confirm that some of the experiences among this study's sample are generalizable across different groups of young people, and that much more needs to be done to support families to prevent children from coming into care, as well as supporting emerging adults who are in care well beyond the age of 18 so they are able to receive more assistance in achieving independence, whether this occurs at age 18, 21, 25 or even later. The government and its systems should not be shutting the door on these vulnerable young people at some inconsequential age mark.

Second, further research might start with an expansion of the current study to strengthen and verify the findings. As I originally sought to incorporate a northern perspective into my understanding of transitioning issues among First Nations emerging adults with prior child welfare histories, an expansion of this research could provide an opportunity to collect northern and rural perspectives as well. Expansion of this kind of research might also be necessary for those individuals who identify as Two-Spirited or LGBTQ. Identifying a space and time that is safe for members of this community where they can come together and produce videos about what it was like to transition out of care would provide another level of understanding on what it means for members of this community to transition out of care. Independent digital storytelling workshops equally geared to each gender could also significantly increase our understanding of transitioning issues among the Indigenous populations, specifically within the Manitoba, and would bring a great deal of healing to various generations who have not had a chance to share their stories. Individuals who have been incarcerated have also expressed interest in participating in digital storytelling workshops. An expansion of this research could conceivably be extended to men, women, and youth who are currently detained in detention centres within this province. Similar research, specifically

filming, has already been done with Indigenous street gangs in Winnipeg (Buddle-Crowe, 2007), but further digital storytelling workshops could also be done with young men and women who are currently in care and affiliated with gangs. A multi-pronged approach to digital storytelling would contribute significantly to our understanding of transitioning issues among the various Indigenous populations who have child welfare histories in Manitoba and elsewhere. Furthermore, digital storytelling workshops could be conducted collaboratively and in partnership with various FNCFS agencies and the Provincial Department of Family Services to provide a better understanding of transitioning issues across the province. Such an opportunity would help agencies and the province understand and begin to track the long-term outcomes experienced by former youth that were once a part of their systems. Understanding these outcomes can help agencies begin to tailor services to emerging adults who are now currently in extensions of care, which can radically address how FNCFS agencies prepare young people for adulthood after emancipation from child welfare. In addition, engaging former youth in care as mentors to assist other youth transitioning out of care can be a transformative experience. Specifically, engaging former youth in care in helping young people develop their own digital stories as part of the process of leaving care can boost not only the young person's self-esteem but will also build the emerging adult's resilience and their sense of independence.

Conclusion

Through storytelling, I provided a venue for the participants to share their stories and narratives as a way of helping them work toward decolonizing their experiences. The methodology itself can be viewed as an anti-colonial approach. Decolonization starts with the mind (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012), and anti-colonial approaches seek to help those who have been oppressed to confront the oppression that they have experienced (Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, & Hetherington, 2013). Undoing the effects of colonialism requires each of the participants to consciously consider to what degree they have been affected by not only the physical aspects of colonization (i.e. via their child welfare experiences), but also the psychological, mental, physical and spiritual aspects as well. Creative, consistent, decolonized thinking shapes and empowers the brain, which in turn provides a prime reason for positive change and contributes to individual healing and strength (Gray et al., 2013). I would suggest that digital storytelling is a tool and activity that works against colonization and the post-colonial legacies which have maintained the social injustices that First Nations peoples have continued to experience

through conventional child welfare systems. Understanding how to make the journey from the head to the heart can assist First Nation emerging adults on what to expect as they make their own Debwewin Journeys toward adulthood. Creatively using storytelling and technology can lead to healing and transformation, which is necessary to become healthy functioning adults post-care.

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