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A Photovoice Study on Growing Up Female in Foster Care

Kim Parker-Maneja
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kim Renee Parker-Maneja

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

A Photovoice Study on Growing Up Female in Foster Care

by

Kim Renee Parker-Maneja

MS, Walden University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2021

APA 6

Abstract

Approximately 440,000 children lived in state-supervised foster care across the United States in 2019; of those children, 48% were female. Many studies have examined how foster care impacts youth who age out of care, as many are ill-prepared to navigate the challenges of independence and make responsible adult decisions after transitioning. However, only a handful of studies prioritized the female youth's voice to understand their experiences growing up in the foster care system. This study introduced photovoice, a participatory methodology, to collect data from 11 former female youth 19-25 years old. Manchanda's upstream concept and Rappaport's empowerment theory were used to develop the conceptual framework. Data were gathered through images and words produced by the participants using the photovoice method. The findings generated 5 themes constructed from the data. A thematic analysis was used to explore and evaluate the collected data to identify themes and patterns. Results showed each participant's struggles and underlying behavioral transformations. The findings also provided the knowledge that supportive relationships helped make the transition easier for some participants. The results can inform foster care specialists, policymakers, practitioners, and other relevant officials working with the Child Welfare System to highlight potential policy weaknesses to improve their outcomes. Implications of this study include using the voice of youth and their experiences to promote positive change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all fellow candidates, no matter where you are in the process, who share and understand the highs and crazy of this journey we have chosen to follow. I am proud to stand on the shoulders of those who completed the process before me.

A special thanks to the participants who shared their experiences of growing up female in foster care. It does not end here for me; I will continue to do all I can to partner with and uplift your voice for positive change.

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to the family and friends that stood by my side during the entire process. You know who you are. Giving up was not an option; thank you for helping me to stay focus on the prize. Your prayers and support meant everything to me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Each year in the United States, it is estimated that 20,000 youth transition from the foster care system (Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Many youths exit care without reunifying with biological family members, kinship care, adoption, or acquiring a permanent support system. Youth who emancipated from the foster care system without a safety net are most likely to face multiple challenges and poor outcomes (Bender, Yang, Ferguson, & Thompson, 2015; Nahahodo, Adler, & Woolridge, 2019). Many of these youths lack the proper preparation to manage a sufficient foundation of essential life skills, which leaves them unprepared for life outside of care. As a result, these youth confront various challenges: poverty, homelessness, unemployment, suicide, mental illness, sexual abuse, and undesirable behaviors. Further, growing up female in the foster care system presents an additional set of unique challenges, including a higher risk of domestic violence, stress, little to no access to sex and reproductive health care education, and an increase in risky sexual behaviors.

This qualitative study explored the challenges faced by female participants who grew up in the foster care system to uncover how these factors positively influenced their outcome after transitioning from care. Photovoice, a participatory technique, was used as the method to collect the data. The participants had an opportunity to share their experiences and realities using photographs and narratives as a visual voice. During this entire process, the most critical aspects were the passionate and honest recollections, personal insight, and shared interpretations of their realities. Photographs can be a

powerful and personal retrospective that record specific moments and, at times, stark realities in an individual's existence. For example, the birth of a child or the aftermath of a mass shooting. According to Wang and Burris (1999), who introduced the photo novella in 1994, the photovoice goal is presented as an underpinning for an arts-based participatory approach. The objective of photovoice is to empower, inspire, and uplift marginalized individuals and groups and help them develop knowledge and skills to become positive agents of change in their personal lives and communities.

The remainder of this chapter provides the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, and nature of the study, which will describe the study's intent. The background provides a brief synopsis of pertinent information to help understand the problem being researched (Maxwell, 2013). The remaining segments include the theoretical framework, significance, definitions, assumptions, and the scope and delimitations. This study's social implication is valuable when increased collaboration can be achieved between youth, young adults, and practitioners.

Background

Foster care is defined as a temporary means to house orphaned, destitute, and neglected children when for various reasons, a birth parent is unable to meet their needs (Casey Foundation, 2014; Yee, 2015). The terms “fostering”, and “foster care” have shared characteristics, several intended purposes, and deep roots in history.

Documentation of the earliest mention of children's fostering is found in the Holy Bible and the Talmud. For example, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (Psalm 82:3, The King James Bible) and “One who teaches a child, it is as if

one had created that child” (Sanhedrin 19b, The Talmud). The code of Hammurabi and the Quran also contained early references to foster care that verified the caring of dependent children.

New York City (NYC) documented an upsurge in the number of disadvantaged and impoverished youth found living and sleeping on city streets during the 19th century. In 1853, Charles Loring Brace, a minister, established the Children’s Aid Society in NYC as a strategy to address the vast needs of this growing population by offering food, shelter, and an education. Brace conceived the idea for an “Orphan Train” to further his vision as a transportation mode to gather and relocate impoverished and homeless children throughout the county (New York Historical Society, 2011; Social Welfare History Project, 2018). Children were placed in homes to work as indentured servants; some were fortunate to learn a trade, while others were matched with widows for free labor through the church. There were no laws or regulations to protect these children from multiple forms of abuse and or exploitation in the earlier years.

Brace's idea laid the groundwork for the beginnings of modern-day foster care in the United States. Since the mid-19th century, foster care systems have evolved with the mission to promote the well-being of a child by removing children when warranted from abusive and unsafe homes. The amount of time a child spends in care ranges from a brief stay to several years, or until they age out of the system entirely between 18 and 21. Despite the reason for the child’s entry into the system, the stated primary goal of the system is commonly the reunification of parent and child. However, when this strategy is not in the child’s best interest, kinship care, long-term care, and adoption can be possible

options. For example, kinship care seeks out and provides an opportunity for a close family friend or relative to care for the child. But more than 23,000 age out of foster care every year (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2018). The number of children in state-supervised care across the United States (U.S.) in 2018 was estimated at 437,283. Of this number, 48% were female (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, 2019). In 2018, more than 18,000 foster youth aged out of foster care did so without reuniting with family or securing permanent homes. Additionally, more than 4% or 17,000 emancipated from the foster care system without a supportive network, caretaker, or a place to call home (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Despite the number of youth in foster care, youth voices are often not utilized to contribute to the decision-making process, which affects their welfare and well-being. These marginalized individuals' needs are almost always defined and dictated by other parties such as social workers, practitioners, child welfare administrators, and policymakers (Estrada & Marksamer, 2006; Snow, 2009; Wallis, 2014). Children should be allowed to have some input regarding their circumstances (Friesen, Karoloff, Walker, & Briggs, 2011; Zeldin, 2004). Accurate facts and information are essential when determining practice and policy affecting these kids' lives (Friesen et al., 2011). For example, by engaging the female voice, they can have the opportunity to feel empowered, knowing their ideas and opinions are valued. This act can positively affect their behaviors and possibly help them make better choices after leaving care. The need to make better choices would significantly increase the likelihood of their successful transition to adulthood and beyond.

The lived experiences will be examined using photovoice for data collection to understand challenges youth, specifically females, face growing up in care. Some of the challenges include poor health, risky behaviors, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, poverty, and possibly death are just some of the most significant high-risk factors experienced by this population (Jones & Gragg, 2012; Pryce, Napolitano & Samuels, 2017; Nakahodo, Adler, and Woolridge, 2019). In aligning with the upstreaming tenants, the research rationale is to identify the potential threats to current policy and use the findings to evaluate what weakness and failure in strategies can be reframed to meet their needs better.

Statement of the Problem

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) indicated that roughly 437,283 children resided in state-supervised foster care at the end of the fiscal year in 2017. When accessing the national and international statistics reports on children in foster care, a fuller understanding of the numbers of youth in need of care emerges (Children's Bureau, 2018, 2019; Child Welfare Outcomes, 2017; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). But more often than not, entering foster care is not always in the best interest of the child. Youth and young adults in care, especially those who are female, are often subjected to trauma because of multiple placements and maltreatment, which lead to a decrease in emotional, developmental, and intellectual growth (Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2014; Havelicek, 2014; Stott, 2014). Neglected and traumatized children are predisposed to exhibit an increase in emotional, mental, and behavioral struggles. Forty-eight percent of the foster care system youth have emotional

or behavioral problems, and 63% are victims of neglect (Casey Family Programs, 2018).

The child welfare system's goal is predicated on safeguarding, reunifying, and promoting keeping families together (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). When that goal becomes impossible, the next is to place these kids with kin or foster/adoptive families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). The child welfare system was never meant to be a long-term solution; instead, it was designed to work as a temporary option to protect vulnerable children from abuse and neglect (Children's Aid Society, 2011; New York Historical Society, 2011). The longer the child remains in foster care custody, the less likely they have to reunite with their biological family or otherkin, get adopted, or achieve other permanency options (Lockwood, Friedman, & Christian, 2015; Ringeisen et al., 2013). However, this is their fate until they aged out of care between 18 - 21 years old. But many of these youth, especially females, leave ill-equipped and unprepared for independence after transitioning from care (Burdick, 2016).

After transitioning from the foster care system, which provided a support level, many falter and struggle during the changeover (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Once emancipated, the possibility of succeeding is lessened if the youth does not have a reliable, supportive network of adults for guidance, coping skills, confidence in decision-making, and help in the necessary independent living skills to navigate adulthood. Unlike their general population counterparts, who may have access to emotional and financial support from family and close friends when facing hardships, these youth most likely do not (Greeson & Thomson, 2014; Cusick & Courtney, 2007). As they adjust to independence, if not corrected, many of these youth will be deficient in

the types of behaviors, educational, and employment proficiencies to obtain a well-paying job to succeed (Children's Rights, 2016; Williams-Mbengue & McCann, 2015; Lockwood, Friedman & Christian, 2015). Though there are success stories and many federally enacted programs to improve youth outcomes like The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 115-123, also known as the Chafee Program), youth continue to face hardships after aging out of care as established through child welfare statistics (Burdick, 2016; Child Welfare Policy Primer, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to explore the challenges female youth confront growing up in the foster care system. By drawing on the participants' perspectives and lived experiences, the focus was giving them a voice to understand their needs and how to improve the many outcomes for youth after leaving care. The realities of events that affected their behavior and choice through the findings will help to understand their truths and the effect on decision-making and other factions of their everyday lives (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). Identifying the needs and potential gaps in services and applying strategic planning to determine the type of resources required is the first step in the policy process (Youth Villages, 2020). The system is overwhelmed, underfunded, and needs an overhaul due to the nationwide increase of children entering the foster care system (Casey Foundation (2018). The potential findings can be beneficial for policymakers, child welfare administrators, advocates, and other concerned actors in reframing current policies or developing additional sustainable strategies to improve long-term outcomes for youth.

Research Question

The research question in a study is a guide for understanding a phenomenon or issue to be investigated (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). This study's central question was “What learned realities of female youth revealed through Photovoice could be implemented in the present and future programs designed to improve their outcomes after transitioning from care?”

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This research structured on the photovoice approach integrated empowerment theory (Ackerson & Harrison, 2000; Rappaport, 1990; Zimmerman & Perkins, 1995) and Manchanda's (2013) upstream concept to investigate and understand a female's emotional and psychological outlook growing up in the foster care system. Empowerment theory and the upstream concept support opportunities to facilitate others in personal development, increased knowledge, and a sense of confidence in an individual's ability to advocate for him or herself. The focus was on examining the frameworks and their findings to assess their impact on using photovoice methodology to understand the participants' lived experiences. Photovoice is also founded on feminist theory, empowerment education, and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1994), which will be expanded in Chapter 2.

Empowerment theory is a means to establish effective strategies to eradicate obstacles and address power imbalances (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Rappaport, 1981). For those with constrained or limited power, to empower is the ability to define, measure, and take back one's right for increased responsibility and control in tackling

issues that affect their well-being. Empowerment can be used for positive personal growth and autonomous community affairs. It can be achieved on a minuscule or grand scale. It is a course of action that seeks to educate, encourage and pass on a sense of self-efficacy to individuals and communities marginalized by their social hierarchy, economics, political representation, and human conditions (Rappaport, 1990; Zimmerman, 2000). The semantics of empowerment can also indicate an elevation in awareness (Rappaport, 1986). Nonetheless, there is an increase in understanding the meaning behind empowerment and its effect on positive change.

According to Manchanda (2013), the upstream concept encourages building a more focused, driven strategic approach to focus on issues or breaks in policy and address them at their origin. An upstream intervention follows the belief that it is not enough to mend pieces of the chain each time a gap appears. It is better to move upstream to examine the chain's entire length for any imperfections and fortify them before they become a problem. The goal is to design and invest in long-term planning initiatives to identify, intervene, and confront potential failures early on. The frameworks will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2 literature review.

Nature of the Study

The phenomenon being investigated in this study was the challenges that female youth face growing up in foster care. The transition from care to independence is already stressful; however, this group is also forced to grow up faster (Havlicek, 2011; Lee & Berrick, 2014; Mitchell, Jones, & Renema, 2014). This means dealing with adult situations and making decisions they may not be mentally ready to handle.

Photovoice was the principal means of data collection. Photovoice is a technique that uses a visual structure to communicate community concerns, social justice, and public injustices by allowing participants to talk candidly and be heard about issues affecting their lives (Nolan-Abrahamian, 2009; Sutton-Brown, 2015). The participants, disadvantaged in power and voice, are encouraged to produce poignant adaptations for their intended audience, usually policymakers, practitioners, and other related officials, to bring their realities to the forefront to promote positive change. An image serves as a highly effective visual communication instrument to articulate an awareness and greater understanding of an event, as seen through the photographer's lens (i.e., the birth of a child, death of a loved one, graduations, family vacations, and holiday celebrations; Favero, 2013; Rose, 2016). Images can also be the voice when words fail as a global form of understanding, awareness, and a means for positive and collaborative social change (Plush, 2015; Walton et al., 2012). The photovoice process offers a stage for marginalized and underserved groups to uplift their voices to be heard.

Operational Definitions

Child welfare system: A system comprised of many federal laws and regulations focused on the protection, support, and well-being of children (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, 1980).

Child protective services: A federal social service program, subject to state laws, commissioned to investigate and provide monetary support related to all potential reports of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment (childwelfare.gov).

Emancipation: Depending on the policy and rules of their respective states, the

emancipation of youth, ages 18 – 21, refers to individuals who age out of foster care (Stoner, 2009).

Emerging adulthood: Considered a transformational stage for youth between the ages of 18 – 26, who are in a sense testing the waters on the path to adulthood as they navigate through uncertainties, exploration, and adult decision making (Arnett, 2000; Singer & Berzin, 2014).

Empowerment: Can be described as the ability to focus on the power within to achieve one's goals or to instill confidence in others to act to spur change (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007; Labonte, 1989; Wallerstein, 1992).

Image-based research: A qualitative research method that uses a range of visual tools (i.e., photographs, video, and film) to collect data.

Observer-participant: A technique related to ethnography methodology that grants the researcher an opportunity to become part of the participant's environment in his or her research study (Kawulich, 2005). As an observer-participant, the researcher studies the events and actions while recording the behaviors of the participants.

Photo-elicitation: Uses visual methods to collect information, memories, and views gathered from research participants to gain a better understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Meo, 2010).

Visual methodologies: A method used to create a permanent visual testimony (i.e., film, video, and photography) by researchers to analyze findings and provide insight into a participant's perspective (Rose, 2014).

Wards of the state: Refers to a child who becomes the permanent or temporary

financial responsibility of the state, through the *parens patriae* doctrine, in which they reside. This doctrine allows the government to intervene in protecting a child whose welfare might be at risk (Georgetown Law, 2017; Whitelaw, Moore & McFadden, 2009).

Youth: Describes an individual between the ages of 15 - 24 years old (un.org)

Young adults: Though the age varies, young adults are described as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 (un.org).

Assumptions

An assumption is a significant statement made that has not been confirmed but is presumed to be the truth (Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Simon, 2011). The following assumptions were made to conceptualize the management of this study. The first assumption was using photovoice as the best qualitative method to capture the realities of the study's participants (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997). Second, I assumed that applying the upstream concept and empowerment theory would facilitate a clearer picture of the participant's challenges.

Scope and Delimitations

A study's scope is defined by location and time the research was conducted and who constitutes the study population (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008; Stringer, 2007). This study's scope was the lived experiences of female youth, 18-25, who grew up in the NYC foster care system. Offering a voice to this marginalized group gives them a sense of control to learn about the experiences and challenges faced after leaving care without a safety net to guide them along the way (Blakeslee, 2014; Jones & Gragg, 2012). Additionally, this study alludes to female youth's significance in being exposed to more

positive experiences to increase their chances of successful outcomes after leaving care (Jones & LaLiberte, 2012). Some findings support this fact and agree that it can improve personal development and potentially provide the best chances for a successful transition (Storer et al., 2015)

Safeguards were required to maintain and protect the vulnerable population being recruited for this study. Therefore, no contact or interviews focused on youth in care under 18 years old because the scope of the study is targeted at female youth that has already exited foster care and facing adulthood (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; National Academies, 2009; Stringer, 2007). The study also did not engage youth who did not have a personal link or involvement with the foster care system. Young children in care and their peers who did not grow up in foster care will be occasionally referenced; however, the study was centered on the participants' data. The same studies also refer to the need for female youth and young adults to be exposed to more positive experiences and education specific to their physical and mental state to increase their chances for successful outcomes (Jones & LaLiberte, 2012). Some findings support that it can improve personal development and potentially provide the best opportunities for significant transitions (Storer et al., 2015). Consequently, this study intended not to make general statements about this specific population or others with similar characteristics.

Limitations

In qualitative studies, limitations are elements of the research design and the amount of data collected that might affect and impact a study (Creswell, 2009; Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005). First, the study was limited to the participation of 15-20 female youth, 19-25 years old, who grew up in the New York foster care system. The size of the samples may or may not be representative of the targeted population. In qualitative research, no rules or criteria determine the appropriate sample size (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013).

Second, bias is another potential limitation that can affect the study. Therefore, recognizing that bias is possible during any phase of the research process, the researcher needs to identify and understand how bias can lead to questions about the validity of the results (Creswell, 2009; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Finally, a participant's possibility to drop out of the study can delay and affect the time frame as a new search begins for a replacement. Thus, it is imperative to be prepared and have a contingency plan for potential replacements.

Significance of the Study

This research's findings may add to the existing body of literature that highlight the challenges faced by female youth in foster care. This research is also significant because it will focus explicitly on females growing in care, with photovoice as a platform to empower marginalized youth to share their realities and become sources of advocacy (Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2014; Stott, 2012; Sutherland & Cheng, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Photovoice allows the participant to become co-researchers in the study by enabling them to elevate and uplift their voices for social change. As representatives of their communities, they were allowed to visually share how their lived experiences impacted them in all aspects of their lives. This may lead to positive personal

development that increases self-esteem, self-expression, self-awareness, and self-empowerment by sharing their expertise and lived experience with policymakers and other concerned parties for awareness and transformation by these critical stakeholders. Having an increased knowledge of the possible challenges provides a better awareness and understanding of how they were affected economically, socially, and most importantly, how their experience influenced changes in their behaviors.

The study's results can also impact practice, policy, and social change. In practice, through increased knowledge, medical and therapeutic practitioners can use the findings to potentially implement additional effective strategies using a participatory-based approach to address mild emotional, mental, and behavioral challenges to focus more on each child's individual needs. For example, experiencing multiple placements does not allow the child to make long-lasting connections; theoretically, they will fear attachments and chose to keep everyone at a distance. If the child experiences constant change and a lack of communication, it will be harder for them to trust someone is listening and keeping their best interest in the forefront. For youth, being part of an activity that encourages their voice and a sense of autonomy can potentially reduce the child's stress and anxiety while in care.

The research also helped identify the barriers that impact some females' successful transitions from care. For example, the adolescent stage can be demanding and vexing for all youth as they seek to comprehend their bodies' mental, emotional, and physical changes (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). It is significantly more demanding and challenging for young adolescent females aged out of care without

family or a supportive adult mentor to guide them through adulthood (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). Additionally, they are still trying to find their place in society and discover their status amongst their peers (Dumas, Ellis, & Wolfe, 2012; Weinberger, Elvevåg, & Giedd, 2005). Trying to come to terms with their past and adapt to the stigma of being a foster or throw-away kid can stir up negative connotations (Rogers, 2016).

Summary

Chapter 1 provided the introduction, background, and purpose of the study. The research question, significance, theoretical framework, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations were also addressed. Through the lens of the female participants who transitioned from care, the intention was to examine how their lived experience contributes to the policymaking process. The data were intended to present a fuller awareness of how the needs of these youth and the foster care system are entwined in many current social issues. The findings can be a valuable influence on child welfare policies and reinforce the best strategies to serve their needs.

Chapter 2 will review the literature research strategy, the upstream concept, and empowerment theory as the theoretical framework steering the study. Furthermore, it will offer an assessment of the theoretical basis for using photovoice as a research tool. Finally, the literature review will provide empirical data that presents an assortment of perspectives that explore the challenges experienced by former female youth after aging out of care.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 begins with a summary of the literature research strategy. The chapter will also present the upstream concept and empowerment theory as the theoretical framework steering the study. Furthermore, it will offer an assessment of the theoretical basis for using photovoice as a research tool. Finally, the literature review will provide empirical data that presents an assortment of perspectives that explores the challenges experienced by former female youth after aging out of care.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search for scholarly resource materials was performed from January 2012 through January 2019. Searches were conducted in the following databases: Academic Search Complete; Annie E. Casey Foundation; Child Trends Databank; Children's Defense Fund EBSCOhost; Dissertations & Theses; National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, ProQuest Central; PsychInfo; Sage Premier; SocIndex; Taylor and Francis Online; and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. During the literature research process, the current literature was sourced using the following keywords and phrases: *aging-out, barriers to success, empowerment, power, visual methodologies, economic burden, political disadvantage, impact on female youth growing up in foster care, emancipation, photovoice, public policy, image-based research, upstream concept, empowerment theory, and transitioning youth and young adults.*

Additional references and citations were identified within the cited materials gathered from preliminary searches with Boolean phrases including the following: *foster*

care AND aging-out; foster care AND female youth; upstream AND public health; photovoice AND impact on marginalized groups. The bulk of the keywords and Boolean phrases provided relevant sources to the problem being researched for this study.

In searching for scholarly articles and peer-reviewed sources associated with the upstream concept, it was challenging to locate many credible resources. For example, the search began with guide words like *upstream, public health, and upstream concepts and theories* as keywords but I continued to find adequate and quality resources. I reached out to the Walden library for assistance, then followed the suggestion to use the term 'upstream*'. After entering the new keyword, there was access to many additional resources that were not available only using the term upstream.

Literature on foster care, child abuse and neglect, youth transitioning from care, and foster care reform is plentiful and can easily be found during the research process. However, there is a lack of information related to the outcome of female youth who grew up in care. Additionally, finding studies or databases that track youth and young adults after they age out of care also proved challenging.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

To address the challenges individuals face when transitioning from foster care, the frameworks guiding this study were the empowerment theory and the upstream concept. These frameworks were chosen to answer the question “What learned realities of female youth revealed through photovoice could be implemented in the present and future programs designed to improve their outcomes after transitioning from care?” Empowerment theory aligns with the principles and tenets of organizational behavior,

public policy, and the importance of collective social action (Nolan-Abrahamian, 2009).

The concept of upstreaming places emphasizes adopting preventative measures to address and confront an issue at its origin before it becomes a hindrance.

Empowerment Theory

Power can be defined in terms of those who hold power over others through societal, economic, and political involvement, and social justice (Moscovitch & Drover, 1981; Pfeffer, 1981; Wallerstein, 1992). Power is seen as a dynamic force, and with force comes to change. (Pfeffer, 1981). However, there appears to be indecisiveness when it comes to narrowing it down to its specific meaning (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Zimmerman & Perkins, 1995). Many youths, especially female youth, are stripped of their power once they enter the foster care system. The only way to gain a sense of control is through education and training. Empowerment is a multi-layered process with connections to power (Moscovitch and Drover, 1981) and individual control (Rappaport, 1987). Rappaport (1987) hypothesized that empowerment is viewed as a process where individuals and groups can obtain control over concerns and issues that affect them through increased skills and knowledge.

The term empowerment has gained momentum and has been embraced over an extensive spectrum of fields, including photovoice, management, public policy, psychology, social work, and other research specialties in the last few decades (Ackerson & Harrison, 2000; Zimmerman & Perkins, 1995). According to Zimmerman and Perkins (1995), the fascination with the theory of empowerment began in 1974. The interest during that period was viewed as slow-moving, but over time, it developed into a

mainstream process to influence positive change and a sense of control (Labonte, 1989; Rappaport, 1987).

For this study, empowerment theory contributed to the foundation for the photovoice methodology developed by Wang and Burris (1994) to provide a platform for social change and interactive partnerships between marginalized communities and policymakers. The focus is facilitating and educating individuals through photography and dialogue to use their voices to communicate their community's concerns and needs (Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). Empowerment theory also supports components of the upstream concept where the emphasis is targeted on building a volume of strategic initiatives, supplying the necessary resources, reframe policy to improve the conditions faced by the participants, and effective collaborative relationships to address problems at its origin (Hughes et al., 2011; Manchanda, 2013; Pigg, 2002). Continued positive interventions such as empowerment can reinforce the power marginalized communities can wield economically and politically (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2008).

Upstream Concept

Manchanda (2013) described the upstream concept as a process that strives to amend and enhance health care at its origin. Upstreamists walk a social justice path to transform social, ecological, public, and other health systems through traditional measures. For example, instead of providing a quick fix for every flaw in the plan, they would move upstream to assess the threats, identify vulnerable areas, and focus on improving the weak links at its source before a total breakdown occurs. It is important to

consider the full picture and choose when and where to help. For this study, an upstream intervention strategy helped to assess the shortcomings in child welfare policies and design effective procedures to reframe and enhance policy breaches to theoretically increase positive outcomes for youth aging out of care.

Theoretical Basis of Photovoice

Photovoice was established as a photo novella in 1994 by Wang and Burris to improve community conditions and implement change through policies. Photovoice is a health research strategy that fosters community building and participation. It is a process used for both personal and community transformation. It is a crucial instrument in community-based participatory research recognized by researchers to be accurate (Courtney & Hook, 2017). Photovoice was developed based on three intersecting theories: Paulo Freire's empowerment education, the feminist theory, and documentary photography.

Freire strived to advance oppressed adults' intellect through his critical educational approach. Freire (1970) suggested that arming oppressed individuals with information and political tools could improve their condition by understanding their power. Through political intervention and economic betterment, he believed they could constructively transform their sense of worth as they advocate for social change to improve the social and economic conditions that plague their communities (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010; Myles & Freire, 1990). Freire championed the importance of learning and building a shared communal concept to motivate and encourage uneducated individuals to educate themselves and rethink their role in their current status.

Comparably, the feminist theory is used to examine and target the understanding of social roles and gender inequality by seeking to identify and revise the malicious thought process of the opposite sex and other doubters on women's role in society. It encourages women, who for many are viewed as the oppressed gender, to recognize and embrace the diverse collective influence that they possess for progressive transformation, equal justice, political rights, and social change (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Squires, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005). History includes many unforgettable, determined, and courageous women who fought for a voice and equal rights in a male-dominated culture such as Susan B. Anthony (Gordon, 2013) and Sojourner Truth (Yellin, 1990).

Finally, documentary photography or photovoice as a research tool in qualitative studies is not a new methodology. This methodology has played a central role in providing vulnerable marginalized and underrepresented populations a distinctive stage for sharing their lived experiences and perspectives of the world around them. This methodology has also gained acceptance in the field of research. It is used in some diverse disciplines, including public health, anthropology, and education, to record historical moments in history (Pink, 2007; Sitter, 2017). Some examples are the ravages of war in Syria (Corneliussen, 2014), September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States (Contact Press Images, 2002), Vietnam war (Lam, 2015; Naythons, 1993), Civil rights movement (Harris-Perry, 2013), the women's march in Washington (Robinson, 2017), and most recently the March for our Lives Global Rally (2018).

The common factor shared by the three theories is bringing about constructive community transformation through social action. Change is paramount on an individual

level, where perceptions are then transformed. The individual's experiences can potentially bring change to the community.

Review of Literature

Challenges Facing Transitioning Female Youths

Various barriers hinder female youths in foster care during their transition into adulthood. The obstacles include homelessness, unemployment, poverty, lack of supportive relationships, and educational challenges.

Homelessness. Youths in foster care lack some of the most vital resources; they are unemployed and have limited or no education and no family housing support to count on (Benson & Bougakova, 2017). Stable housing is critical in establishing other essential life areas, including employment, education, health care access, and social services (Singer & Berzin, 2015). But a review of the literature published between 1990 to 2011 showed that between 11% and 36% of the 25000+ youth who aged out of the foster care became homeless (Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney, 2013). Thirty-six percent of the 624 participants in a Midwest study had at least one episode of homelessness by the time they were 26 year compared to the national sample of youth aged between the age of 18 and 26, of which only 4% ever became homeless (Udry, 2013). A study in California also reported that one-quarter of emancipated youth are homeless (Fowler, Marcall, Zhang, Day, & Landsverk, 2017). There is a relationship between regular employment and stable housing, and some cities have limited housing support for those who age out of foster care (Blazavier, 2014; Dworsky et al., 2013).

Females compared to male youths from foster care are more likely to become

homeless (Fowler et al., 2017). Out of the 44% who have experienced homelessness, 24% are female, with female youth 9% more likely to experience homelessness than 8.6% for male youth. Most female youth are not aggressive; hence, they do not endeavor to join social welfare groups for enlightenment on life after foster care. Homelessness for female youths is worsened by the high costs of residential rental houses, so it is difficult for young women to afford (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016). There are also low vacancy rates, and it is not easy to find a home located in safe and decent locations (Thompson et al., 2016).

The highest probability was seen in those who have never joined any welfare (Fowler et al., 2017). Other identified risk factors for homelessness included youths who had previously run away while in care, those who were placed in a group-based case setting at the baseline, children who had been previously abused after getting admission into foster care, and youths engaged in delinquent behaviors as well as those who did not feel that they had a close relationship with the guardian (Thompson et al., 2016). Further both males and females with mental health disorders, tend to have higher homelessness (Fowler et al., 2017). The predictive probability for homelessness was 0.4 for females, 1.1 Black individuals, 1.3 for the presence of an abusive parent, and 0.15 for new foster placement (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016).

Once they are homeless, the former foster care youths experience some problems different from others who do not have homes. The effects of homeless to foster care youth can be divided into health and personal effects. Homelessness is characterized by an increased risk of physical and sexual assault (Dworsky et al., 2013). The alcohol and

drug service study investigated drug abuse among homeless alumni of foster care. It was determined that drug dependence was similar to the general population of homeless youth. The study determined that drug dependency is also a fundamental problem for homeless foster care youths (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012). Other health effects include tuberculosis, sleep deprivation, mental illness, cold injury, and respiratory diseases. Personal products that have been reported include increased risk of abuse and violence, incarceration, behavioral problems, and loss of self-esteem (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012).

Unemployment and poverty. The lack of employment opportunities has been established as one of the most significant challenges to youth transition into foster care. It is reported that 47% of youth who grow up in foster care remain unemployed, and 80% of those who leave foster care do not earn enough to support themselves 4 years after emancipation (Thompson, 2016). Nearly 25% of the cost of raising a child is used on youth who are above 17 years old, roughly 67% of youth in their early 20s still receive parental assistance, and up to 40% of those are in their late third decade of life (Benson, & Bougakova, 2017). In 2014, non-foster youth between 18 and 34 received an average of 58,000 dollars from their parent. Studies have also shown that 40% of children in their late teenage years and early 20s always go back to the parental home when they leave due to unemployment. But the situation is different for youths emancipated from foster care. Foster care youth lack these resources that will enable them to gain and maintain employment. The lack of financial support during youth transition from foster care into adulthood results into adverse long-term outcomes include school drop-out, delinquency, incarceration, healthcare problems, and parenthood (Greeson, Garcia, Kim & Courtney,

2015; Greeson & Thompson, 2014; Thompson et al., 2016).

Foster care youth have more employment barriers than the non-foster child. The economic and emotional support that a foster youth lack makes it difficult to maintain employment. Initially, foster care youths come from communities characterized by high unemployment rates and low education rates, homelessness, teenage parenthood, and incarceration. The foster care children have been shown to have up to 6 times more developmental delay than their general population counterparts. It has been reported that up to 66% of young women foster care alumni become pregnant with five years after foster emancipation. All these factors accumulate to become barriers to employment among foster care youths (Scott, McMillen & Snowden, 2015). Youth between 20 to 24 years have high unemployment rates, but the situation is worse for foster care alumni. During the 2008 recession, the national unemployment was at 5% but 15.2% for the foster care youth. A study conducted during a similar period showed that up to 90% earned less than 10,000 annually (Scott et al, 2015).

The effects of unemployment among former foster care youths are significant. Studies have demonstrated that new unemployment is directly related to lower future earnings coupled with recurrent spells of joblessness (Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017). It has also been shown that extended unemployment leads to depression, especially among the youth. The foster care children lack adequate social support and are, therefore, more predisposed to depression and other mental disorders when they are unemployed (Jolliffe, Farrington, Piquero, Loeber, & Hill, 2017).

Educational challenges. An integrated assessment study of the educational

experiences of children entering foster demonstrated academic challenges. It has been established that foster care will tend to worsen educational experiences that already existed before a child joined the foster care system (Hernandez & Henson, 2017). A study in Washington on educational attainment in foster youths demonstrated that children placed under foster care changed schools more frequently than their counterparts in ordinary families (Courtney & Hook, 2017). Consequently, a study on student mobility and academic achievement linked frequent school transitions to low education and high school drop rates (Hernandez & Henson, 2017; Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

On assessing the grownup function of previous foster care youths, research showed that 0.3% had the aspiration to attain 9-11th grade, 11.6% aspired to complete high school education, and 12.7% aspired to go to college. 49.0% aspired to complete a college education and 22.3% to go beyond college (Phillips et al., 2015). However, there were inconsistencies in their aspirations and expectations due to the various challenges they faced. 0.4% expected to reach 9-11th grade, 13.5% to complete high school, 14.3% to join college, 45.4% to complete a college education, and 14.8% to go beyond college. It was also reported that almost half (47.3%) of the participants had been placed in special education. The study's type of school enrollment was 80.3% high school, 6.3% college, 1.9% vocational school, and 6.4% others. The highest level of school grade completed wanted compared to the foster children's aspirations and expectations. Most 52.5% had attained 11th grade, 1.6% 8th grade, 5.9% 9th grade, 27.2% 10th grade, and 10.5% 12th grade. 0.5% had reached the first and second year of college, and 0.1% a fourth year of college (Phillips et al., 2015).

This research was comparable to a similar study relating to educational experiences between foster and non-foster care teenagers. The study also reported that teenagers in foster care were unlikely to complete high school education (Phillips et al., 2015; Batsche et al., 2014). The study on the adult function of former foster care also reported that grade retention in foster care children was more frequent in Hispanic and African American children, especially those living in poverty and single-parent homes. Grade retention occurred more frequently during the first, sixth, and ninth grades at 6.4%, 4.3%, and 4.9%. The study also showed an association between frequent school changes and a history of behavioral problems to grade retention. It was also pointed out that grade retention increased the probability of poor education and poor employment outcomes. The academic classes' grades were also investigated; the study found a failure range between 10 to 17 percent for the foster youth (Courtney & Hook, 2017).

In comparison, a national survey on adolescent youth's academic performance showed that the instance of grade A was twice more prevalent than in foster care. The study also aimed to determine the interpersonal difficulty in school interaction. The findings were moderate compared to a similar national average. However, this was attributable to self-report bias. 54.1% compared to the national average of 39.4% reported never getting into trouble with their teachers. 23.6% compared to the national average. They were reported having difficulty getting along with their teachers a few times (Batsche et al., 2014). As regards paying attention, 39.8% compared to 24.4% reported never having trouble paying attention. Using the word recognition of the Wide Range Achievement Test, the study determined foster care reading ability. The study

participants had a mean score of 39.5, corresponding to the seventh-grade level of reading. The study also noted that 44% of the foster youths were reading at the high school level (Batsche et al., 2014). It is evident that the educational challenges faced by foster care is significantly higher than non-foster care for teenagers.

Impact of Growing Up Female in Foster Care

The female child in foster care constitutes what is called double vulnerability. Risk-taking behaviors usually characterize the adolescent period, whether in foster care or not. The period requires much guidance to the adolescent, particularly in making decisions. In foster care, the adolescent more often lacks direction through this critical period. The teenager in foster care faces additional challenges in decision making around sexual behavior. A female child living in foster care generally live in provisional settings, usually lacking stable guardianship.

The teenagers are usually in institutional foster homes. Literature reports that 34% of teenagers (13-18-year-olds) in the adoptive care system live in the institutions, compared to only 4% under 12 (Zárate Alva, Arnau-Sabatés & Sala-Roca, 2017). In addition to the assortment of joint problems affecting children in care, the female youth face added challenges, including reproductive health care access, multiple placements, and a high risk of sexual and physical violence.

Negative stigma and characterizations. Females in foster care become used to the negative stigmas that have harmful effects on their adult life. There is no significant research to elicit the role played by stigma in foster experience and after emancipation. In a study exploring stigma experiences in foster care, the study correlated the relationship

between foster care stigma experience and the individual ability to transition into adulthood (Mariscal, Akin, Lieberman, & Washington, 2015).

Although every participant in the study identified stigma, it was noted that it was more in females than male participants. The participants were aware that stigma had affected their adult life. The participants reported that stigma affected their ability to have meaningful connections with peers and foster families. They have also noted that the negative effect went on even after leaving the care system. The participants in this study referenced specific instances of stigma while in their school environments. Also, there was a report on stigma and how it impacted interpersonal and romantic relationships as they matured. As noted, the literature on the negative stigma on female foster care remains limited. There is a need to determine and compare the level and long-term effects of stigma on foster care females across different states.

Cost of multiple placements. Family stability is critical for the development of a child. Therefore, a child should not be deprived of a stable and lasting family life unless emergent and compelling. In 1909, family stability was espoused in the White House conference on dependent children. Removal of children from their parents is avoided as much as possible and only done when necessary. The main goal of foster care is to offer a safe and permanent home. Despite the steps taken to ensure that this is achieved, it is not always the case.

Thousands of children in foster care experienced multiple placements from one home to another. The prevalence of numerous arrangements is significant. In Illinois, a study conducted on the placement stability determined that youths experienced up to two

placement moves in the initial year. The research established that in more than 75% of movement cases, the foster parent decided against providing care (Pears, Kim, & Fisher, 2016). The effects of multiple placements include turbulence in the foster family environment. Multiple placements have also been associated with increased sexual risks among females living in adoptive care.

A study on emancipated youth in California indicated the worst outcomes for children who had more than five placements. Compared to girls who had just one placement, those with more than five were twice as likely to become expectant. In the study, 40% of the emancipated participants were in foster care for more than five years, 60% of whom were female (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016). It is worth noting that the prevalence of multiple placements has only been studied in a limited number of states, and therefore the findings may not be representative.

Lack of supportive relationships. The availability of social support from a caring, responsible adult is required for healthy adolescent development. Healthy supportive relationships protect against risky situations and challenges (Rost, Nutting, Smith, Werner & Duan, 2001; Fraser, Kirby & Smokowski, 2004). This protective effect is also real for children in the foster care system (Courtney & Lyons, 2009; Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan, & Lozano, 2008). Various literature has supported the conclusion failure to develop long-term and supportive relationships with adults put the transitioning adult at risk (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013; Goodkind, Schelbe & Shook, 2011; Havlicek, Garcia & Smith, 2013; Jones & Gragg, 2012; Kirk & Day, 2011; Rosenwald, McGhee, & Nofall, 2013; Singer & Berzin, 2015; Storer, Barkan, Sherman,

Haggerty & Mattos, 2012; Berzin, Singer & Hokanson, 2014; Smith, 2011). The quality rather than the quantity of the adult relationship is most critical.

When a permanent connection is established with a dedicated adult who provides unconditional devotion and commitment, safe and secure relationships, and lifelong support, there is a successful transition into adulthood (Barth, Greeson, Zlotnik & Chintapalli, 2011). It has been observed that natural mentoring is one of the possible avenues through which good relationships can be cultivated. It is a promising approach with possible, desirable results. (Ahrens, DuBois, Garrison, Spencer, Richardson & Lozano, 2011). The best mentor is an adult who resides within the youth's social network. It can be a teacher, a football coach, a pastor, extended family members, or even neighbors. Since the relationship formed through natural mentoring is gradually formed and not pressured, it is likely more sustainable. An enduring bond is likely to be created because the youth slowly develops trust (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike & Larose, 2006).

By maintaining the same social interactions, there is the least likelihood of the mentor to leave. The relationship is more likely to be long-lasting, increasing chances for a positive outcome. The impact of natural mentoring has been studied. A study conducted on adolescent mentored former foster care adults found out that mentored participants had better health outcomes. They were less likely to have sexually transmitted diseases, suicidal ideations, and to be involved in violence. (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016; Greeson, Garcia, Kim & Courtney, 2015; Greeson & Thompson, 2014). Another longitudinal study in Missouri showed that mentored youth were less likely to be arrested

at 19. There were less depression and anxiety symptoms, and most felt satisfied with life (Munson & McMillen, 2009).

Substance Abuse. Female adolescents are at risk of substance abuse and risky sexual behavior. Unfavorable outcomes can affect their mental and physical health (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). There is a gap in the literature on the long-term effects of drug and alcohol abuse on the youth aging out of foster care but based on risk factors (lack of social support systems) shared in this group. It can be hypothesized that the use of drugs places them on a negative outcome trajectory. The youths in foster care tend to use drugs at a higher rate than their peers. A study conducted on adolescent youth in foster care enrolled in a life skills program reported that 36% of marijuana use in six months (Stott, 2013). The rate is high compared to 25-32% of marijuana use in one year reported by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health on seniors and sophomores (Azofeifa, 2016).

Substance abuse is also higher in foster care adolescents than their peers. In a Missouri sample, 35% of youths transitioning from care had reported having had a diagnosed substance abuse disorder at any particular point in their life (Stott, 2013). A study in Wisconsin recounted that alcohol use among foster care youths started earlier (54% versus 36%) by 13 years. Drug use among foster care alumni was 43% compared to 19% of the general population (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012). Although evidence on substance use and abuse does not differentiate between males and females, it can be assumed that females in foster care are at higher risk than their general population peers. However, there is still a literature gap that can be explored.

Risky behavior and potential negative outcomes. Some of the risky behaviors faced by females in foster care include irresponsible sexual encounters, violence, bullying, and having multiple partners. Some potential adverse outcomes include unwanted pregnancy and costly treatment of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Regarding reproductive health care, there is limited data nationally reporting on the incidence of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among females living in foster care (Dworsky, Smithgall & Courtney, 2014). However, available regional and outcome studies report significantly higher pregnancy, childbearing, and STDs in females living in adoptive care. The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth longitudinal study involved 700 participants from Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. The study reported that 33% of women had become expectant by the age of 17; this was exponentially (two-and-a-half) greater than the 14% incidence of the teenage female of the same period in the same population (Dworsky et al., 2014). The study also reported a frequent incidence of repeat pregnancies. 46% of those previously pregnant had experienced more than one pregnancy by the age of 19, with the general population prevalence being 34% (Dworsky et al., 2014).

The reasons and risk factors explaining the higher rates of foster teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections that have been explored are, however, limited. The available evidence is mixed on sexual risk behavior. Some evidence has shown that the average female teenager in adoptive care usually engages in sexual activities at a younger age instead of other females with permanent guardianship. The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being examined the sexual behaviors of

900 youths. The study involved both foster care and non-foster care children. It reported that up to 20% of foster care youth had had consensual sex by 13 years compared to the general population of only 8% of 9th-12th graders (Needs, 2014; Wall & Kohl, 2015).

Another focus group study involving 120 youths from foster care was conducted by UCAN (Dworsky et al., 2014). The study identified that foster kids usually start families by having children fill the emotional void of lacking a family. The study also identified higher contraception use rates and delayed sexual activity among teenagers who had supportive and caring parents (Dworsky et al., 2014). These factors lack in adolescents in foster care.

A research synthesis examining family relationships and adolescent pregnancy risk determined that the family structure is protective and strongly influences teen pregnancy (Mariscal, Akin, Lieberman, & Washington, 2015). The findings demonstrated that connectedness, guardian or parental supervision, and regulation of children's activities significantly reduced the risk of teenage pregnancies. There was also a correlation identified between parental values and adolescent pregnancy. However, the study demonstrated inconsistencies between parental or teenage sexual communication and pregnancy risk.

The challenges faced in foster care include residence in disorganized homes and dangerous neighborhoods, low socioeconomic status families, single parenthood, the presence of older sexually active siblings, and sexual abuses. The research is also associated with an exponentially increased risk of pregnancy (Mariscal, Akin, Lieberman, & Washington, 2015; Pears, Kim, & Fisher, 2016). Regarding single parenthood, national

data has shown that between 50% and 80% of youths in adoptive care come from households of unmarried couples or single mothers (Eastman & Putnam-Hornstein, 2018). A further study conducted in urban areas has shown the percentages to be higher in these areas. It has also been established that children in adoptive care were more likely to reside in single-parent-headed households. They are also expected to live with cohabiting couples than other children (Pears, Kim, & Fisher, 2016).

The protective and risk factors study demonstrated the protective effects of school engagement and educational performance against early teen pregnancy. The finding was further supported by a study analyzing the risk factors for teenage fatherhood. The study findings also revealed that higher education expectations, high performance, and ethical behavior in school are linked to delayed sexual debut and adolescent pregnancy and birth (Salazar, Roe, Ullrich, & Haggerty, 2016). School drop-out rates have been revealed to be a more considerable influence on teenage pregnancies. This lack of protective mechanism increases the likelihood of adolescent pregnancies in females in foster care. The female teenager is thus predisposed to experience adolescent pregnancy.

Turbulence in the family environment has also been associated with increased sexual risks among females living in adoptive care. Turbulence is inherent in the care system. It is the family turbulence that pushes a girl-child into foster care. Once in the care system, the teenager faces further upheaval when they are separated from their siblings. The teenager is also faced with frequent home relocations. To exacerbate the situation further, placement in group homes or institutions deprives the child of meaningful adult relationships. In Illinois, a study conducted on the placement stability

determined that youths experienced up to two placement moves in the initial year. The research established that in more than 75% of movement cases, the foster parent decided against providing care (Zinn, DeCoursey, Goerge, & Courtney, 2006).

A study on emancipated youth in California results indicated the worst outcomes for youth who had more than five placements. Compared to girls who had just one placement, those with more than five were twice as likely to become expectant. In the study, 40% of the emancipated participants were in foster care for more than five years, 60% of whom were female (Needell, Cuccaro-Alamin, Brookhart, Jackman, & Shlonsky, 2002).

Socioeconomic aspects also influence the rate of foster care pregnancy. Data on youths in adoptive care have revealed that most foster care children before recruitment are more likely to be from low socioeconomic households and receiving public assistance. Growing up in such families predisposes a girl in foster care to become pregnant compared to others with healthy parenthood. A study on a risk matrix and protective aspects in Washington demonstrated early exposure to abuse and neglect with an initial encounter of sexual activity (Kirby, Lepore, & Ryan, 2005).

The study also demonstrated an association with a lack of contraception use and multiple sexual partners. As shown by the study, the cumulative risk of these factors is the increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy and birth. The study demonstrated that the female foster child is twice likely to be exposed to abuse and neglect than the general population (Kirby, Lepore, & Ryan, 2005). The Casey National Alumni study on the effects of foster demonstrated that adoptive care children usually had been abused in one

way or another due to neglect (Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Downs, O'Brien, Hiripi, & Morello, 2003). Similar results were demonstrated by the report on a maternity group home program (Hulsey, Wood, & Rangarajan, 2005).

Sexual and physical abuse. Sexual and physical abuses are more common among female youths in foster care than the general population. They are exposed to verbal, sexual, and physical abuse, as reported by the study on risk and defensive aspects (Currie & Spatz Widom, 2010). These youth have an increased risk of sexual abuse; it is at least ten times higher than that of non-foster females who live with their biological parents (Sedlak, Mettenburg, Basena, Peta, McPherson, & Greene, 2013). The consequence of the risk equates to a lack of adequate oversight and negligence of these children. A study on a risk matrix and protective aspects in Washington demonstrated the association of early exposure to abuse and neglect with an initial encounter of sexual activity (Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015). The study demonstrated that the female foster child is twice likely to be exposed to abuse and neglect than the child in the general population. As shown by the study, the cumulative risk of these factors is an increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy and birth.

The Casey National Alumni study on the effects of foster demonstrated that adoptive care children usually had been abused in one way or another due to neglect. Similar results were shown by the report on a maternity group home program (Jones, 2014). There is a resultant association with the early sexual debut and numerous sexual associates. The youth sense of safety and trust around sexuality issues is affected. Multiple studies reported that a female with a past sexual abuse has an amplified risk of

teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual behavioral outcomes (Stock, Bell, Boyer, & Connell, 1997; Upchurch & Kusunoki, 2004).

Challenges of Being a Teenage Mother in Foster Care. Teenage mothers in foster care have increased vulnerabilities compared to counterparts not in foster care. A study was conducted to determine the challenges that adolescent mothers face (Datta, Macdonald, Barlow, Barnes, & Elbourne, 2017). Teenage isolation was the most common challenge; they reported a lack of emotional and social support with their babies. The mother lacks breastfeeding support. They have to leave school to take care of their babies, which further results in a decline in education performance.

Non-foster care teenage mothers may have the luxury of being assisted with baby care by family members. In foster care, institution-based without a foster family end up being emancipated earlier than intended. Studies have reported failure in educational advancement and thus difficulty in gaining and maintaining employment. The other challenge was access to health care due to financial instability. Data on youths in adoptive care have revealed that most foster care children before recruitment, are more likely to be from low socioeconomic households and receive public assistance (Datta et al., 2017).

Growing up in such households predisposes a girl in foster care to become pregnant compared to others with healthy parent relationships. Teenage pregnancy and parenthood have harmful effects on educational achievement. A study conducted to determine teen mothers' diploma attainment showed that they had lower diploma attainment than those who did not have a teen birth. In the survey, 89% of young women

who had not experienced a teenage pregnancy or given birth attained high school diplomas by 22 years compared to only 51% of the young women who had a teen birth. However, 15% of teen mothers earned a general equivalency diploma (GED) compared to 5% of young women who did not experience teen birth (Batsche et al., 2014). Cumulatively, 34% of young women who were teen mothers never attained a diploma or GED in comparison to only 6% of women who had not experienced teenage pregnancy. The study also showed that the younger the adolescent mother, the less likely for her to earn a diploma. When the teen mother gave birth before 18 years, only 38% managed to obtain a certificate before reaching 22 years, compared to when the teen mother gave birth between 18 and 19 (Batsche et al.), where 43% never earned any educational credentials (Datta et al., 2017).

Summary

In Chapter 2, I presented a summary of the information assembled for the literature review. Foster care poses challenges across all life phases for female youth growing up in the foster care system. I covered the conceptual and theoretical frameworks guiding the study. I also discussed the theoretical basis for using the photovoice approach, which will be expanded in the next chapter. Some of the struggles confronted by the participants include homelessness, poverty, variations of behaviors, neglect, and abuse, was supported by the literature.

Chapter 3 will examine and rationalize the photovoice design chosen to conduct this research study. Additionally, the chapter will offer an overview of the recruitment, data collection, and analysis process.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will present the foundations that supported using photovoice as a powerful but alternative method of data collection. Photovoice operates as a representation of the participant's perception and voice in sharing their insights into their realities through photos and descriptive accounts (Rose, 2016; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1999). Using this technique and other digital methods for participatory research proposes an imaginative option for marginalized participants to increase understanding of the studied phenomena. Chapter 3 will discuss the study's design and rationale, aspects of photovoice, researcher role, participant recruitment, data trustworthiness, ethical protocol, and sample size. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis process will also be described.

Research Question

The objective of designing research questions for a study is to provide insight, increased knowledge, and narrow the studied phenomenon's focus. In qualitative design, the research questions operate as parameters to determine the type of data to collect and elucidate the study's precise rationale (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Punch, 2014; Patton; 2002). The following question guided the research: What learned realities do female youth reveal through the photovoice process that could be implemented in the present and future programs designed to improve their outcomes after transitioning from care?

Research Design and Rationale

The research was based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative data uses observation, interviews, and perspectives collected from participants to rationalize, explore, and understand human behavior and their connection to the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Stringer, 2007). This approach has become a rational foundation in interpretive studies (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The investigative process concentrates on compiling and interpreting the collected data and facts to present a richer understanding of the participants' realities.

Photovoice, a participatory action research method, was included to illustrate and understand the female participants' lived experiences growing up in foster care. This research type focuses on describing and understanding a person's human experience (Polkinghorne, 1970). justified that this research type focuses on describing and understanding a person's human experience. This tradition was built on a string of disciplines developed over time, including sociology, anthropology, and psychology, to decipher and dissect humans' problematic behaviors (Holloway & Bailey, 2011). It can be used as a transformative tool for empowerment, positive social change, and a vehicle to convey the participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Holloway & Bailey, 2011). Photovoice was used to cultivate a sense of power and motivate female youth to share their stories, which can help understand how policy impacted their well-being. Photovoice is also a type of collaborative research where the participants can also benefit from the results (Brake, Schleien, Miller, and Walton, 2012).

History of Photovoice

Photovoice was designed to give each participant a sense of control over what they would like their target audiences to understand concerning their situation (Wang & Burris, 1997). The process places cameras in the participant's hands to produce images and words to articulate and provide an awareness of what is necessary to improve and strengthen their community (Pauwels, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997, 1999). The participants can view the camera as a way to show their lived experiences and realities. The goal is to emphasize this method's capacity to act as an action-oriented catalyst because both the researcher and the researched can benefit from the findings.

Numerous photovoice projects have been created to encourage and engage underrepresented individuals and groups. For example, Health in Our Hometown is a photovoice project that brings together youths in 13 different Minnesota communities to document how they maintain healthy initiatives (Community Blueprint, 2016). Adoptables is another project that provides a visual platform for disabled youths to share their UK foster care system experiences (Coram UK, 2015). Fournier et al. (2014) also created a project that examined orphan children living with HIV in Uganda. Finally, Burles and Thomas (2012) conducted a photovoice study exploring young adult women's thoughts on serious illnesses such as their mortality and were despondence over their future outcomes.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher was to collect information and other relevant resources to construct a full picture of the participants' lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

As the study progressed, my role as the observer's role will evolved into observer-participant because one aspect of the photovoice process includes one-on-one interviews, which can be achieved through face-to-face contact or Skype or Facetime. The interview process is meant to gain greater insight into the participants' realities and understand the variables contributing to their behaviors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). Once the initial contact was made between the participants and me, contact via phone was also an option form for updates and follow-up information.

Impartiality and objectivity are essential when conducting a study. The need to maintain neutrality and fairness during the data collection process is imperative for the study to eliminate potential biases, feelings, and advice that could raise validity and reliability (Holloway & Biley, 2011; National Academies, 2009). However, my study was participant-driven and empowered female participants to share personal experiences through their photographs and narratives. Further, the participant can be considered co-researcher in the study, empowering them to be representative and advocate on the issues that affect their community.

Regarding photo etiquette, the participants were asked not to take pictures of other individuals, especially when they could be identified. The participants' will maintain ownership of all photographic images and documents if they decide to withdraw from the study. All data collected from the participants were documented and not misused or modified to maintain its integrity (Stringer, 2007). Any identifying data collected, such as color-coded or numeric identifiers, will be destroyed and shredded. Most importantly, all collected data will be kept in a securely locked draw in my home

office for up to 5 years.

Methodology

Recruitment, Participant Selection, and Sampling

A population represents an object or individual with a series of connective and collective attributes (Franfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). The population needed for this study were female, 19 – 25 years old, and grew up in the NYC foster care system. A diverse selection of female participants (i.e., ethnicity, homeless, abused, failed adoption, teen pregnancy, juvenile incarceration, and success stories) was the goal to allow for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and outcomes. Choosing this population was centered on their shared experience growing up in the foster care system. The goal was to understand policies' impacts on their lived experience as adults through the themes and patterns emerging from the data (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012).

The plan was to reach out to organizations for recruitment (i.e., Janie's Fund, National Foster Youth Institute, New Yorkers for Children, and Youth Villages). Additionally, recruitment was done through word of mouth, networking, and recommendations from potential participants through the distribution of a recruitment flyer posted via the Internet. For the organizations that agreed to help in the recruitment search, I asked if the flyer could be placed on their websites as an e-mail blast. The recruitment flyer provided a brief explanation of the research study and included the required criteria for anyone interested in participating.

The first step in the recruitment process was identifying criteria representative of the targeted population. For example, one condition was that each individual had to be

female between 19 and 25. Each participant also had to have spent a minimum of 1 year in the foster care system during adolescence. The time a youth spends in the system varies, so it was essential to choose the participants who could best reiterate their lived experiences through the photovoice process. The final selection was based on their response to the questionnaire and the initial face-to-face meeting. Each participant chosen had to have transitioned from the foster care system at least 1 year before this study. Transitioning from the foster care system was limited to female youth who aged-out of care and or left the system through other means (e.g., children who released through kinship care, adoption, incarceration, or those of legal age who ran away and are no longer a dependent of the system). The legal age for exiting foster care occurs between 18 and 21 years of age.

Sampling in research is characterized as selecting a specific category or make-up to represent the target population being investigated. The determination of what constitutes an appropriate sample size in research has been a topic of discussion among researchers because of the impact it has on the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). When choosing the adequate sample size in qualitative studies, the number of samples is dependent on what the researcher is trying to accomplish. A small number of participant samples can be used to encapsulate a wide range of issues related to the investigated studies (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). Because of the limitation of time to complete this study, the sample size of 15 to 20 participants allowed for an in-depth comprehension of the participant's perspective during the data collection phase. The most crucial sampling factor was to

ensure that the results will support and add value to the collected data.

Further, the main precondition for establishing sample sizes in qualitative research is tied to the concept of saturation. Saturation can be defined as a benchmark for the deferment of additional information and examination for a study (Bowen, 2008; Guest, 2006; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In other words, determining the total number of samples needed for an adequate representation of the population being studied relies on the type of study being conducted and the number of participants necessary to resolve the research questions being asked.

Snowball sampling was used to collect a sufficient number of participants. This sample type is used when recruiting a participants who meets specific criteria that could be somewhat arduous, especially when the study is of a sensitive nature (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2009). This sampling method was chosen because it provides the best chance of collecting data based on its relevance and significance to the proposed research question. Additionally, it might be the easiest way to recruit females who experienced growing up in foster care.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation stage in research is the steps used to support the research's progression by determining what action plan is required to develop and test the instrument (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). A study's instruments are the tools used to collect and gather data, facts, figures, and digital reproductions from research subjects (Stringer, 2007). The instruments used for collecting data was a digital camera phone, photographs, self-narratives, and interviews. Social media platforms, Facebook, and

Twitter messenger applications were also an option for collecting data when the participants and I could not meet in person. These instruments were chosen to be the most appropriate for this study population.

Data Collection

Photovoice will be used as the principal data collection method to understand the participant's insight and experiences better. According to Meo (2010), the purpose of photo-elicitation for this specific study is to use a photograph as a visual data collection tool to evoke a more in-depth, meaningful picture of the lived experiences being researched. The photovoice method provides a unique platform for the marginalized, underrepresented, and underserved individuals to bring to light their concerns and needs and critically reflect on the issues that define their communities. Photovoice utilizes interviews, photography, and brief narratives to allow the participant to amplify and record their realities. Of particular relevance is identifying and addressing the root causes that contribute to the challenges and adverse outcomes experienced by females who grew up and transitioned from foster care.

Photovoice allows the participant to visually share their stories because they control what they want their audience to see. As a researcher, we can interpret and analyze the data to learn how their experiences impacted them. The process can potentially help participants advocate and collaborate with other like-minded individuals to promote positive change in their communities. How and where the data is collected could also have an impact on the study findings. Potential locations for meetings with the participants would be limited to public venues to assure comfort and safety (Creswell,

2013; Maxwell, 2013). Since the introduction of digital technological advancements, a digital camera, preferably a camera phone, will hopefully capture the participants' unique and personal photographic images to chronicle their lived experiences after aging out of foster care. The reason for this decision is not to overwhelm but to give them the option to use a device that may already be a part of their everyday life. The qualifying questionnaire will be designed to determine if the candidate meets the study's qualifying criteria. On the off chance that one or of the chosen participants does not own a camera phone, an inexpensive point and shoot camera would be provided for the duration of the data collection process.

A camera phone with its access to many photography applications will be easier to use than a professional digital camera with its surplus of features and buttons they will not understand and need. Furthermore, a professional camera is costly and not as easy to carry. After a quick training session (Appendix B), each participant will be asked to take at least 15 – 20 sets of continuous photos of 6 or more photo strips to capture the realities they remembered and experienced them to share with others. This method is also meant to raise awareness about their needs and concerns.

To add a sense of uniqueness, I would like each participant to take a sequence of continuous shots. Most traditional photovoice projects consist of 1 caption per photograph. Instead of the conventional approach, I plan to ask each participant to produce an uninterrupted series of shots to conceivably create a more visual and complete picture of their memories as they lived them. On most camera phones today, the quick action is called a burst shot. A burst shot allows the photographer to take one shot after

another as long as their finger remains on the shutter button (Agomuoh, 2018; Zappa, 2016). When the finger is lifted, the image capture process ends. The final product will consist of 5 photographic strips per person containing 2 - 6 digital stills per strip chosen by each participant to best reflect their lived experiences. The participants will be given three weeks to complete this task. When aligned with a brief written narrative, an image can enhance, reinforce, and clarify the message that each study subject wishes to communicate to their target audience. The story is described as a string of connecting occurrences that recount an experience (Denzin, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1985; Stringer, 2007). The key stakeholders, in this case, the young women, are empowered and encouraged to share their realities

Unstructured face-to-face interviews are a valid informal instrument for engaging the participant in conversation to gather relevant information relating to a chosen topic. It provides the participant with a feeling of control while setting each individual's stage to apply their voice to personify their perceptions and experiences (Stringer, 2007). One advantage, this method allows for the collection of more vibrant and in-depth information (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). The participants potentially possess an abundance of knowledge due to their experiences that can be analyzed and generate valuable information for favorable policy and social change (Guillemin, 2004). The study participants' benefits include empowerment and a sense of ownership for contributing their voices and experiences to positively affect their communities. Two interviews will be scheduled for over 30 days and will take place in a safe public location. The initial meeting will be scheduled for 90 minutes.

The plan is to discuss each participant's potential role in the study, complete a 7-question questionnaire, present an informed consent form, reinforce the research's purpose, reassure each participant of their anonymity, confidentiality, and answer any questions that may arise. The second face-to-face meeting, scheduled for 60 minutes, will discuss and determine the final photos used in the study. During this meeting, I will ask each participant for permission to record (with the stipulation of removing any unwanted words, statements, and or language as decided by each participant) to ensure the data's authenticity and trustworthiness during the transcription process (Creswell, 2009).

All documents and accompanying information will be stored on a password-protected flash drive to protect each participant's anonymity. However, if they prefer not to be recorded, I will use transcribed handwritten notes to record their interactions. All data collected from the participants will be documented and not modified to maintain its integrity. Once the interviews are transcribed, I will ask each participant to look over the transcript to ensure that the information is accurate. This stage will also allow for any changes to be made if requested by the participant. I will research the best transcription service option to document and edit interviews and any additional data collection mode.

The researcher's objective is to identify, decipher, and organize, through the participant's words, developing relationships and patterns without inserting bias or altering the meaning of the participant's original portrayal. The need to maintain impartiality and fairness during the data collection process is imperative for the study to eliminate any potential biases, feelings, and advice that could question validity and reliability (Maxwell, 2013; National Academies, 2009; Stringer, 2007). Additionally,

identifying data collected, such as color-coded or numeric identifiers, will be destroyed and shredded. Most importantly, all collected data will be kept in a securely locked draw in my home office.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process helps the researcher uncover, locate, and categorize emerging patterns and themes to help the reader or target audience understand the participants (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The plan uses a thematic content analysis to examine the differences and similarities uncovered in the data (Rose, 2012). This type of research would also allow for the coding of the transcripts assembled through interviews and personal narratives. The coding process depends on the kind of questions to be answered and the needs of the individuals or groups who will use the information (Saldana, 2012). Furthermore, I will utilize the network sampling technique to recruit other potential newcomers from the study participants.

The analysis begins by understanding and sorting the collected information. The plan uses a continual iterative approach to categorize and dissect the data for patterns and themes (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The process will undoubtedly be repetitive because of the need to carefully sift and examine the implications of developing themes and patterns. An inductive coding framework will investigate the themes and patterns emerging from the data and findings to understand its meaning (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The objective is to identify, decipher, and organize, through the participant's words, developing relationships and patterns without inserting bias or altering the meaning of the participant's original portrayal. Patton (2002) stated patterns and themes

of significance could be overlooked during the data analysis process if the researcher is not careful. The emphasis will shift to identifying patterns and themes analyzed through the collection of data to measure these objectives carefully.

The analysis process takes on a distinct value when viewing photographic images and videos. According to (Firth, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2008), it is known that there are several conceptual frameworks to analyze data while the opposite holds for interpreting and analyzing visual data. For example, when examining images, we explore what we see and how we interpret its meaning. An extra effort must be made to identify the patterns and themes that are not immediately visible to determine the purpose and uncover its implications.

Training

The start of this session will begin with going over the consent form details and addressing all questions and concerns. A signed consent form will be collected from each participant before the start of the meeting. Each of the participants will be given a brief individual training session as part of the one-on-one meeting. A total of 30 minutes will be given to each participant; to provide an overview of the photovoice process. This step is necessary so each participant can convey the impact of their lived experiences growing up in care. There will also be a review of how to use the continuous function application or burst on their cell phone, if available, to produce the still photographic strips needed for this study. The sessions will be ongoing if one or more participants need additional one-on-one time to address concerns, answer other questions, or make changes to their contributions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trust and validity is essential in a research study. Balancing the study's legitimacy is associated with checks and balances (Kornbluh, 2015; Krefting, 1991). Researchers are entrusted with certifying the study's reliability using developed strategies to support the research's integrity. To provide credibility in the study, I will give a factual depiction of the phenomenon through data triangulation. Triangulation is a process that allows for several different sources of collected data to be used to craft a greater awareness and strengthened the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The standards to be used are transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

A prolonged contact is also a viable option, primarily since it can address the gaps in future studies determining the participants' long-term outcomes. For example, long term follow-up is usually not an option for most student research studies due to limitations in the amount of time allotted to complete one's research. One of the benefits of prolonged contact is the researcher has an increased amount of time developing stronger bonds of trust and gaining a greater understanding of the population being studied and the phenomenon of interest (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Member checks, another option, are defined as a constant verification of the collected data taken from the participants to help control and or eliminate any bias.

Ethical Protection of the Participants and Informed Consent

An explanation of the research will include my role as the researcher and the purpose of the study. Each participant will be reminded of the study's voluntary nature

and will be encouraged to ask questions. They will also be informed they can withdraw any time in the research process without fear of reprisals. Clarification will also include the assurance of not being questioned or contacted if they decide to withdraw from the study. I will guarantee any potential information collected from them will be deleted and not used in the study. Their decision will be respected.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep all personal information collected from the participants private and confidential. When the study's results are published, all names, numbers, and identifiers that can identify will be erased. All data collected will be kept on a password-protected flash drive and external hard drive stored in a locked storage cabinet in my desk. Additionally, the information will be held on a password-protected computer in my home office for five years (per university requirements). I will be the only person with access to the locked storage cabinet and passwords for all electronic storage files. After the allotted time, all collected information will be shredded and disposed of properly.

Any proposed testing of human subjects either by photovoice or other means must adhere in strict accordance with Walden University guidelines. The approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board for working with human subjects will be taken to ensure that all potential participants' rights are protected and not at risk for potential exposure (Creswell, 2013; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Maxwell, 2013).

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an outline of the methodology, including an overview of the

study research design and rationale, target population, data collection instruments, coding, and data analysis. A description of the Walden University Internal Review Board's ethical requirements and protocols was also reviewed. Chapter 4 will address the research question, Photovoice methodology, and discuss the research findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The goal of this study was to allow me to gain a clearer and more in-depth insight into the experiences of 11 females who grew up in the NYC foster care system. The research question was constructed to explore and understand the challenges confronted by this population: What learned realities of female youth revealed through photovoice could be implemented in the present and future programs designed to improve their outcomes after transitioning from care. Photovoice, a qualitative method, was used to structure the collection of data analyzed in this research study. Participants were asked to paint a visual picture of their lived experiences and perspectives through photographs and words. The realities shared by the participants spans diverse periods in their lives before, during, and after transitioning from care. The photovoice approach functioned as a gateway for using the strength and representation of a photo and marginalized groups' stories to influence public policy, capturing policymakers and practitioners' attention in understanding the realities of marginalized individuals and implement changes that are most relevant to their needs. Chapter 4 also presents a detailed outline explaining the process of deciding on the best research setting, participant demographics and recruitment, and how data were collected and analyzed.

Research Setting

During the process of identifying suitable locations for the meetings, the local library was suggested. Each participant felt comfortable with the site and agreed to meet at the library in a convenient downtown or midtown Manhattan location. All gatherings

were scheduled and conducted in a private library study room to secure face-to-face confidential dialogue and interaction without being interrupted.

Participant Demographics

The final selection of participants who met the study criteria was 11 individuals between 19 and 25 years of age. Of the 11 participants, six aged out of care without finding a permanent family or a supportive adult. Of those six, four aged out at 18 years old while the other two left care at 20 and 21 years old respectively. Two of the participants were adopted. One of the two adoptees was adopted at 21 by the long-term foster parent she was raised by since she was 16. Of the three remaining participants, one was legally fostered by her grandmother from age 17; another remained in a long-term placement until she was 21. Finally, another participant who was homeless chose to run away at 16. She is now 20 years old and has no legal connection to the foster care system. The entire group covered diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds; however, this was not part of this study's original design and was therefore not included in the analysis.

Data Collection

Following the approval of Walden's Institutional Review Board (Approval No. 2019.10.3 1 14:53:39-05'00'), I began the recruitment process. The plan was to identify, research, and contact a minimum of six to eight selected youth organizations that deal with former foster care youth and adolescents from the New York City (NYC) foster care system. Once the appropriate contact person was found, I proceeded to explain the purpose of the study. I emphasized the study's sensitive nature and asked if a recruitment flyer could be posted on their website as an e-mail blast in my mission to recruit potential

female participants. I reiterated the importance of confidentiality and reaffirmed that the e-mail blast specified that any potential volunteers were to contact me directly. The importance of the request was underscored to keep their identities private and confidential only to me.

All interested participants were primarily recruited through an e-mail blast sent from youth-based organizations that agreed to put the recruitment flyer on their website. I did not see the need to find out which organizations decided to put the recruitment flyer on their website. In two cases, one person was handed a copy of the recruitment flyer, and the other learned of the study by word of mouth. I exchanged contact information (i.e., cell numbers and or e-mail addresses) with potential participants who demonstrated an interest in the study. Before starting, a questionnaire (Appendix A) was sent to each participant to complete to determine if they met the required criteria for volunteering.

The interview phase began in late November 2019 and concluded early in January 2020. For the first series of face-to-face meetings, I met separately with 14 individuals in NYC over four different dates and times. It made the most sense to schedule the sessions in this manner since I needed to travel from New Jersey to NYC. It was also more accessible and manageable for the participants to meet in a central location. Most of the sessions took place on weekends. I was fortunate to be able to set-up multiple sessions per scheduled appointments. Each face-to-face meeting took place in private study rooms at libraries located either in a midtown or downtown NYC location. On the final day of Session 1, I determined 11 volunteers met the required criteria to participate. I decided to continue with the 11 participants and would have recruited more if saturation was not

achieved.

The initial meeting was scheduled for 90 minutes, which allowed for the review of the consent form and addressing any questions and concerns that might arise. I explained the purpose of photovoice and discussed how the method would be utilized. All participants were reminded their involvement was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point in the process if they decided not to proceed. The data collection instrument was a camera phone. I provided them with a copy of the photo description form (Appendix B) to help in their decision making while deciding on the type of photograph that best described the event they wished to share. An emphasis was placed on the importance of respect, safety, and photo ethics during the collection of photographic data. For example, not taking photos of others, especially without their expressed permission. I also made a point to remind the participants when choosing locations not to take any unnecessary risks and to keep their safety and welfare a priority. A time frame of 7 days was given to complete the photography stage. It was determined that the time frame would be sufficient to allow for retakes and address any potential concerns. All of the participants completed this stage in less than the allotted time.

During the second meeting, scheduled for 60 minutes, I discussed using photography to document their experiences. I presented each with a copy of the photo description sheet (Appendix B) with three questions to help align their photos to the stories of their lived experiences. I did not offer any input in the final selection of pictures or their meanings to avoid bias.

Wang's (1997) photovoice method suggests using a participatory group dialogue

session to share and discuss the collected photographs' meaning. However, I found that holding individual dialogue sessions with each artist was more helpful in this study due to its probable sensitive nature and, most importantly, protecting each participant's confidentiality and privacy. To further protect confidentiality, each participant was identified with a pseudonym and code name of P1, P2, etc. This method allowed me to assemble and document their contributions accurately. I wanted to eliminate any potential for causing any stress or discomfort for the participants in sharing their pictures and accounts in a group atmosphere.

Data Analysis

This study's outcome resulted from two primary sources: interviews and photographs taken by the participants. Once all the interviews were concluded, I used an online transcription service to transcribe the recorded conversations. Eight of the 11 interviews were recorded. Three of the participants declined to be captured on audio. They handwrote their responses to the three questions listed on the photo description sheet (Appendix B) instead. I did perform some edits to the transcribed data. For example, some of the audio was inaudible and did not translate correctly. To remedy this issue, I made a comparison of the recording with the transcribed document for authenticity. I sent copies of the audio and written transcript to the participants to confirm the transcript's accuracy.

Two of the three participants who declined to be recorded asked if they could submit a different set of images. They felt that their first submission of photos did not support the story they were trying to disclose. They were given 3 days to resubmit their

final selection of pictures via email or text when complete, which they did. After confirming the authenticity of the transcripts, I proceeded to the next step. I uploaded the interviews and the participants' photos into NVivo 12 software for Mac for analysis. NVivo was a valuable software tool for analyzing and coding the collected qualitative data. The software also allowed for the coding of media and photographic files, which played an essential role in this study. Coding and dissecting first-hand accounts from the participants were more personal and informative.

At first, I read each transcript multiple times to familiarize myself with the participants' responses. Next, I searched and isolated similarities in expressions, experiences, and wording and saved them as child nodes in Nvivo. The child nodes are an array of similar codes and phrases found during the coding process that are either removed or merged under the parent nodes. All the data were then categorized and coded to identify emerging patterns and themes. A thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014) was utilized to examine the emerging themes and codes derived from the collected data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Care went into upholding this study's legitimacy and authenticity to correspond to the trustworthiness of the components described in Chapter 3. Transferability, dependability, and confirmability were supported and strengthened through triangulation, which allocates for three sources of data to understand the phenomena and substantiate the soundness of the research (Creswell, 2013; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Transferability

Transferability is characterized as using findings collected in one environment to the extent of its benefits and usability with a different population in a different climate (Rolfe, 2006). This study gave me a chance to delve into the impact of growing up in foster care on the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. The research focused only on females, and all needed to be between 19 and 25. They were also required to have aged out and or left the NYC foster care system at least 1 year before the start of the study. While organizing this research, I strived to stay on track with the original design plans. However, when a change was necessary, I added notes to document any changes. This study can be duplicated domestically and internationally with the option of changing the design, gender, age, or even substituting other marginalized, underserved populations in its place.

Dependability

Dependability signifies the quality of the data collected, and if over time, the study findings can still be deemed reliable (Guba, 1981; Amankwaa, 2016). I created an audit trail from the assembled notes to document how the data were collected and applied for dependability. The audit trail allowed me to track the data from and transparency. During the analysis stage, I followed all data from its starting point to confirm its accuracy, secure its confidentiality, and stay in compliance with university guidelines.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a benchmark used to ascertain that the words and perceptions collected from the participants are undeniably theirs and not the researcher's bias. In

qualitative research, confirmability describes the ability to examine the study findings' authenticity by other studies and researchers (Amankwaa, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Stringer, 2007). I kept detailed accounts during the collection and analysis of data gathered from the participants to authenticate and validate to diminish any outside influences. However, I needed to make several minor edits to the individual transcripts since some of the recordings were inaudible. Once I established that the recordings matched the transcript, I sent a copy to each of the participants for review. This step was done so all the participants could verify the accuracy of their comments and responses. The review process also allowed each participant to address any concerns or make any changes they felt might have misrepresented their recollections.

Result Summary

As the study progressed, I realized the value of the participants' disclosures during the interview and the final photo selection process. The coding phase used NVivo and an open-coding system to generate and classify the data's relevance to the research. During the analysis, five themes emerged to answer the research question consistent with the study's research.

- Lack of Self-Worth ($f=49$)
- Perceptions of How Others See Them ($f=27$)
- Silent Voices ($f=15$)
- Challenges and Emotional Upheaval ($f=83$)
- Positive Support and Personal Transformation ($f=32$)

The aggregate frequencies (f) for each code are found in Appendix C and were used for

the final analysis. It should be noted that frequencies for codes occurring once throughout the data were combined with related codes. Additionally, some of the codes are found in multiple themes.

Participants Photos and Narratives

The original objective was to produce a series of photo strips to emphasize participants' lived experiences but it was harder to comprehend for at least 50% of the participants. It was later decided that each participant could take any number of individual photographs they felt best portrayed their perspectives and realities to make it easier for all. The total number of photos presented by the participants during our second meeting was 38. Of the 38 shots, 16 were chosen and discussed by each individual for the final selection. Three participants supplied one photo each, three provided two each, and the last three participants supplied one photograph each. The remainder of the images not used were discussed; however, the participants chose not to include them.

Theme 1: Lack of Self-Worth

This theme, which signifies a loss of power and lack of confidence, emerged when participants described being removed from their homes and placed in foster care. All the participants identified with this theme. During the interviews, all shared recollections of trauma and some form of abuse. Some of the reactions included mistrust, feeling unwanted, broken, and afraid to describe their circumstances impacted them. Additional codes and frequencies can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Lack of Self-Worth

Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Feelings	19
Foster care	16
No one cared	12
Hard to trust	12
Broken	11
Afraid	9
Loss of control	9
Abuse	8
Trauma	8
In pieces	6
Unwanted	5
Lost	5
Not worthy	4
Confused	3
Unsettled	3
Neglected	3
Vulnerable	2
Taken away	2
Anxiety	2
My fault	1
Scarred	1
My color	1
No one chose me	1
Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Feelings	19

The following comments and photographs were inserted to represent the theme lack of self-worth:

- Foster care
 - when I first entered care, um, as a result of the abuse I experienced, I felt afraid and confused and lost P3.
 - ...growing up in foster care was hard and traumatic P4.

- Hmm. Well, being in foster care, especially as the new kid was tough P6.
- It was where I knew nobody. It was just, it was a lot of transition P7.
- Unsettled
 - Moving from home to home without reason or notice was hard to put into words. I ran away because I hope it was easier than what I was going through. It wasn't P1.
 - Wanted to go back to what I knew, I felt lost P11.
- Hard to trust
 - Although I still find it hard to trust others, especially men. Um, I'm trying to change though, but sometimes it's hard to show how I really feel P6.
 - I also just have so many feelings that I didn't know how to share, could share, and I had no one to have in my life to trust at that point P8.
- Broken
 - It was how I felt and still feel a lot of time. Like pieces of me breaking away P4.
 - I felt like everything that happened in my life was my fault, that I was not good enough P5.
 - I was physically and mentally abused by my dad P6.
 - I had a traumatic childhood P10.

Figure 1: Pieces of me. P4 stated, “pieces of me were chipped away each time I moved to another home.”



Figure 2. Cracked and broken. P10 stated, “I felt cracked and broken back then.”



Theme 2: Perceptions of How Others See Them

This theme emerged as the participants spoke of how they viewed others' opinions and assumptions aimed at them. Using the photo description worksheet (Appendix B) as a guide, they shared how many individuals they interacted with in one way or another seemed to blame them for their situation. Some of the codes associated with this theme included foster care, lost, not worthy, and labels. See Table 2 for additional codes and frequencies connected to this theme.

Table 2

Perceptions of How Others See Them

Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Foster care	16
Broken	11
Unwanted	5
Lost	5
Not worthy	4
Confused	3
Labels	2
New Kid	1
Not pretty enough	1
Person of color	1
My fault	1
I was a paycheck	1

The following comments and photographs were provided to represent the theme perceptions and how others see them.

- Unwanted
 - I was a paycheck P1.
 - But if there are neglected and denied, then chances are they will not flourish P2.
 - Well, every day was a struggle before foster care, not much better after I

was taken away. No one really asked or cared about what I wanted or needed P6.

- Not worthy
 - o Nobody took the time to know about me out or find out what I needed P1.
 - o Um, I, I always thought being a kid of color was also a strike against me. Maybe that's why no one chose me P6.

Figure 3. Labels. P5 stated, “Well, because I know that's how many people see me. You know? Like they put a label on me. Stay away from her. She's broken. She's damaged, even though that's not very true.”



Theme 3: Silent Voices

This theme developed as the participants disclosed memories, feelings, and challenges faced after being taken from their homes—the only one they knew before being placed in the foster care system. There is a stigma associated with being a child in foster care (O'Donnell, 2016). Feelings of guilt and perceived shame for some of the participants led to identity issues, repressed emotions, and the silence of their voice once entering care. See Table 3 for additional codes.

Table 3

Silent Voices

Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Feelings	19
Foster care	16
No one cared	12
Hard to trust	12
Home	9
Afraid	9
Loss of control	9
Abuse	8
Trauma	8
Tough	8
Moving	8
Present	7
Keeping others at a distance	7
Alone	6
Unwanted	5
Hard to forget	5
Lost	5
Not knowing	5
Memories	5
Survive	4
Confused	3
Neglected	3
Vulnerable	2
Taken away	2
Anxiety	2
Struggle	2
Tears	2
Searching	1
Navigate	2
Scarred	1
No one chose me	1
Denied	1
My fault	1
Nightmares	1
Lost hope	1

The following comments and photographs were inserted to represent the theme of silent voices.

- Struggles
 - Moving from home to home without reason or notice was hard to put into words P1.
 - If the roots are given what they need, then most likely that tree will develop and grow P2.
 - Never felt like I was home P4.
 - I still have nightmares from my experience in care P9.
 - My mom, she, she was fighting her own demons. But she was all I had, and you know, my mom wasn't perfect, but she was all I had P11.
- No one cared
 - Nobody cared P1.
 - I'm not even sure what I can say about it. It's just more of a feeling of being unwanted or forgotten P4.
 - Well, I was in foster care for a long time. No one wanted me P6.

Figure 4. Tears I've cried. P6 stated, "...after so much time, I, I lost hope and hid my tears and feelings I guess. That's why I took those pictures."



Figure 5. My journey. P7 stated, "...keeping people at a distance, not wanting to like bring down my wall or even be vulnerable."

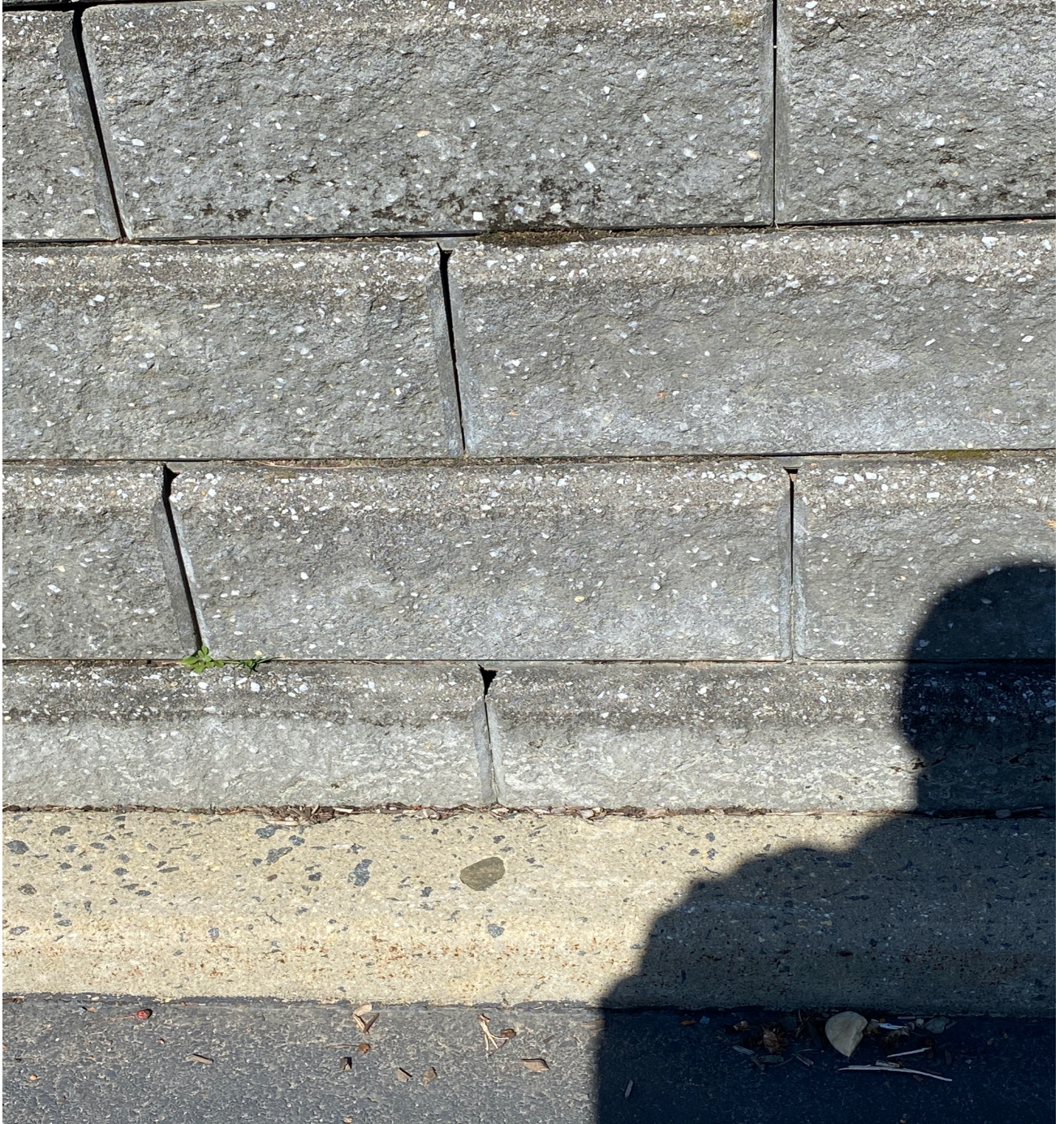
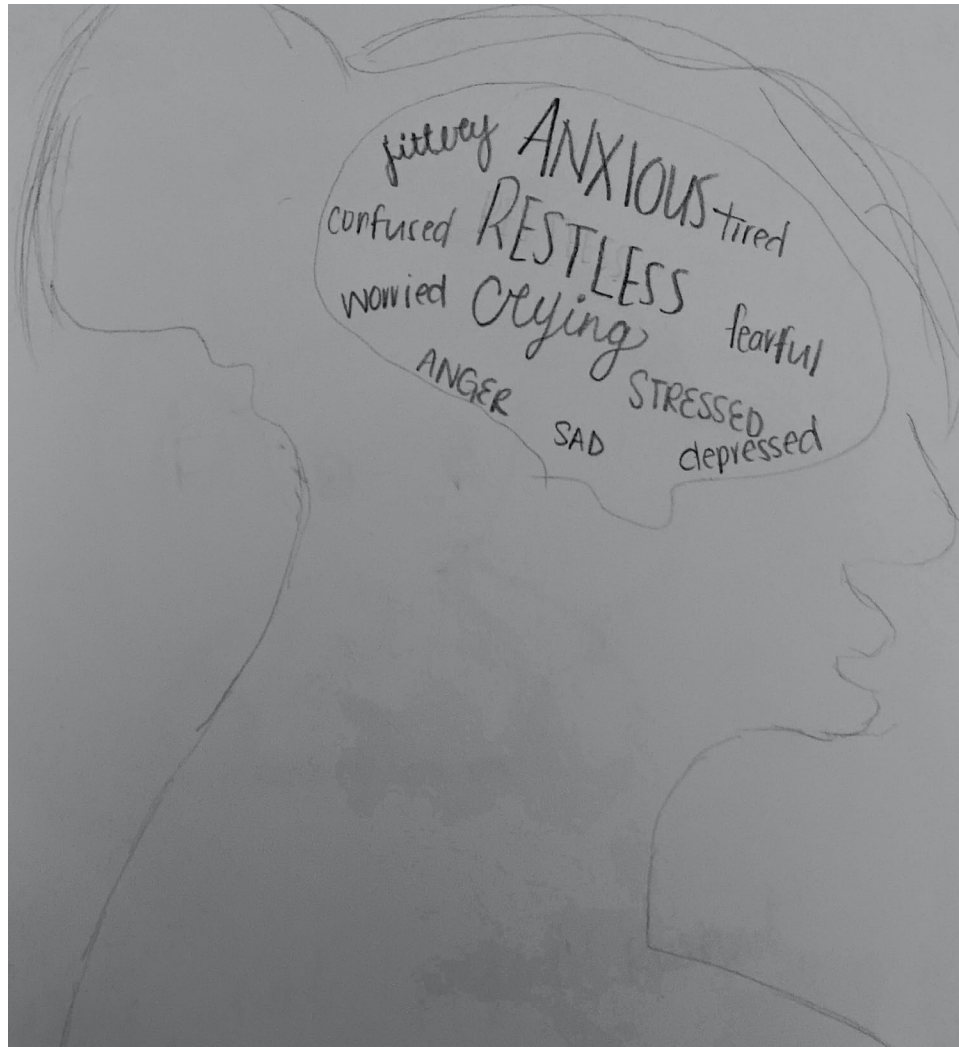


Figure 6. Fear and anxiety. P8 stated, “....it felt just easier to this day to start making things in the words that I felt.”



Theme 4: Challenges and Emotional Upheaval

This theme emerged as the most dominant of the five themes. It was a recurring factor felt, experienced, and shared by all the participants. After entering the foster care system, they all spoke to the challenges and emotional upheaval that affected their lives and behaviors. The unexpected and abrupt transition was traumatic and life-altering. In

all their recollections, reflections of mistrust, loss of control, multiple relocations, difficulties, the unknown, and trauma were echoed. A list of additional codes is found in Table 4.

Table 4

Challenges and Emotional Upheaval

Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Feelings	19
Foster care	16
No one cared	12
Hard to trust	12
Rocky	10
Broken	11
Home	9
Afraid	9
Loss of control	9
Abuse	8
Trauma	8
Tough	8
Moving	8
Keeping others at a distance	7
Alone	6
School	6
Unwanted	5
Hard to forget	5
Lost	5
Not knowing	5
Memories	5
Survive	4
Confused	3
Neglected	3
Vulnerable	2
Taken away	2
Anxiety	2
Struggle	2
Tears	2
Navigate	2
Searching	2
Running away	2
Scarred	1
No one chose me	1
Denied	1
Nightmares	1
Lost hope	1
Obstacles	1
Negative challenges	1

The following comments and photographs were inserted to represent the theme of challenges and emotional upheaval.

- Loss of control
 - Choices were made for me. I did not have control of anything P1.
 - I lost my freedom because people I didn't know controlled every aspect of my being while in care P9.
- Mistrust
 - I didn't really trust many people P3.
 - It was just a lot of like not knowing, and so that was just really hard for me P7.
- Challenges
 - I ran away because I hope it was easier than what I was going through. It wasn't P1.
 - ...when I was put into the system, I felt I needed to be invisible to survive P2.
 - Well, growing up in foster care was hard and traumatic P4.
 - Being in foster care, especially as the new kid was tough P6.
 - Like I didn't know where I was going from day to day. I felt lost P7.

Figure 7. Street life. P1 stated, “It was my truth for a long time especially after running away from foster care.”

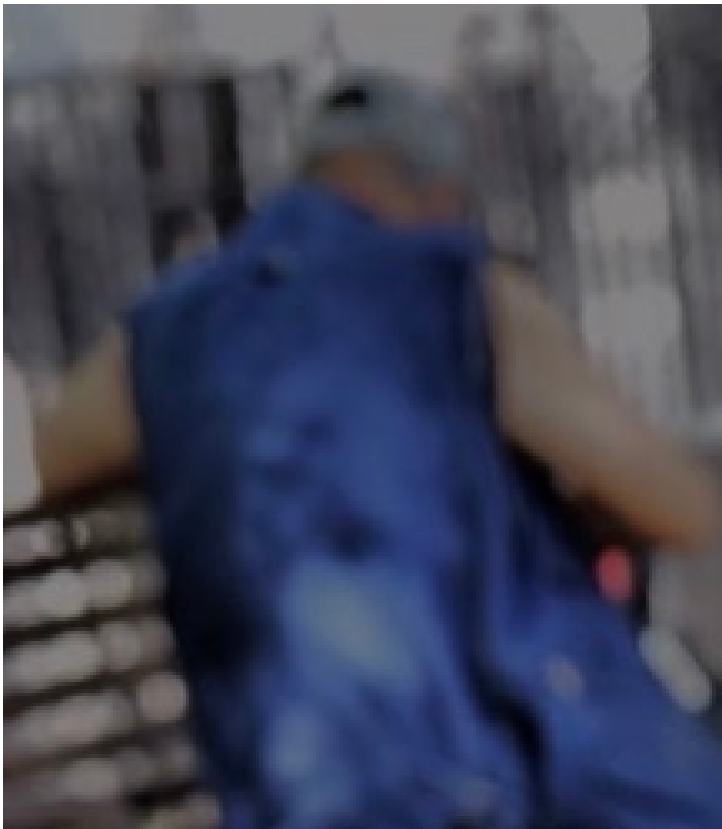


Figure 8. My journey. P7 stated, "They really signified a lot in different areas of my life."



Figure 9. Searching. P11 stated, “I was dropped into the unknown when I started...”



Theme 5: Positive Support and Personal Transformation

This theme came to light as the participants spoke of the hardships; however, 60% of the participants revealed how supportive relationships positively impacted their lives. Positive support is pivotal to the question guiding this study. What learned realities of female youth revealed through Photovoice could be implemented in the present and future programs designed to improve their outcomes after transitioning from care. Some of the responses included comfort, freedom, lucky, and family. Additional codes are found in Table 5.

Table 5

Support and Personal Transformation

Codes	Frequencies (<i>f</i>)
Feelings	19
Home	9
Walks	8
Family	7
Comfort	7
Pets	6
Love	6
Support	6
Better	6
Lucky	6
School	6
Happy	5
Memories	5
Positive changes	4
Freedom	4
Path	4
Survive	4
Thoughts	3
Adopted	2
Mentor	2

The following comments and photographs were inserted to represent the theme of support and personal transformation.

- Support
 - I consider myself one of the lucky ones because I made it through all the negative challenges with the help and support of a few close friends P1.
 - I was lucky to have a mentor though who helped me to understand and make sense of my experience in foster care. I was encouraged along the way to be the best version of myself that I could be and not to let my circumstances define me P2.

- I am working to put everything that I dealt with in the past. Starting a new with the love and support of my adopted family P5.
- Happy
 - Well, my life very much happier now P2.
 - The only thing I can say or add is that I'm actively working to be a better me P6.
- Positive changes
 - Um, it, it helps me reflect on all the positive changes that have come and how I life is turned around. So, uh, I just taking these walks, being with these pets, being with my husband, um, it just makes me feel positive. It makes me reflect on how I like this better now P3.
 - Things are slowly getting better P8.
 - I was lucky that the last placement became my last.... P9.
 - I thank my grandmother for being my savior P10.

Figure 10. *New beginnings*. P3 states, "I feel happy. I feel loved....".



Figure 11. Freedom. P9 stated, “It represents my freedom to do and be what I want.”



Summary

Chapter 4 discussed and reviewed the themes that emerged from the collected data. Tables were presented to emphasize the codes that revealed each of the five themes. Each of the eleven participants, using their voice, shared poignantly different but heartbreaking similar accounts amassed through questionnaires, interviews, narratives, and photographs. The data collected in this chapter allowed for a significant but more enhanced understanding of the experiences they lived, the events they witnessed, and the hardships that will forever be imprinted in their memories.

Chapter 5 will further explore the study findings and their implications. The limitations of this photovoice study, recommendations for continued and or future

research, and final reflections will also be discussed. Furthermore, I will review the potential impact of positive change and the importance of supportive relationships for many young and adolescent females in foster care.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study's original purpose was to analyze the challenges that female youth face growing up in foster care systems to gain an increased awareness and understand of their lived experiences. The study employed a photovoice methodology using interviews, questionnaires, photographs, captions, and narratives written by the participants to encourage ease of expression without judgment. Knowing the therapeutic value for vulnerable, marginalized groups in using photos to connect and illuminate the stories they chose to share was informative. The people with the most to say are usually the ones whose voice has been censored and forgotten. This chapter discusses the research question guiding this study as well as the interpretation, limitations, and implication of the findings. Recommendations for additional research and concluding reflections will also be included in this chapter.

Interpretation of the Findings

Photovoice demonstrated a distinct system for collecting and assembling data to understand the lived experiences of females growing up in the NYC foster care system. Photovoice underlines the substance and narrative behind the photograph rather than its quality (Wang, 1999). Photovoice is a means to encourage participants to take part in the research process while offering an immediate collection of data for the researcher (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997; Wang, Yuan, & Feng, 1996). All the participants freely provided their time and energy.

In this study, photovoice allowed each participant to replicate their lived

experience as they remembered and understood it. As discussed in Chapter 2, females youth entering foster care encounter various challenges, which adds to their traumatized and unsettling journey through the child welfare system. Some of the challenges can be attributed to lack of communication, multiple placements, maltreatment, and for many an inadequate preparation for life after care, which leads to a decrease in emotional, developmental, and intellectual growth (Benson & Bougakova, 2017; Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2014; Havelicek, 2014; Stott, 2014). For instance, several of the participants who experienced numerous placements found it somewhat difficult to form attachments because they never knew when they might be uprooted.

All participants were subjected to some form of neglect, abuse, and traumatic distress before entering the system. One shared that entering care magnified her situation. Stressful encounters and growing up in flawed systems can work against them and impede their social, mental, and physical health, as evident in the participants' recollections. Many participants who did not have the security of a support network chose to withdraw and remain silent. In sharing their memories and experiences, it can be assumed many of their needs were not effectively addressed. Statements of mistrust, fear, and feelings of loss were high on the list of attributes shared by the young women. None of the participants mentioned having essential life skills training or access to resources to assist in their transition. However, for those who spoke of having supportive relationships, an assumption can be made that they had help in navigating many of the unknown challenges of transitioning to independence.

The information gathered and provided has achieved the goal of presenting first-

hand accounts and recollections offered by the participants. This photovoice study aimed to explore the challenges female youth confront growing up in the foster care system. Through our interactions, I learned how their lived experiences in care impacted their lives, behaviors and how they attempted to process their views to fit into the world they live in. In observation, all remained resolute in their recollections despite the discomfort, sadness, and hurt evident in their face and gestures. But as a result of their knowledge and involvement in characterizing their lived experiences, this participatory method positioned each participant as a contributor to understanding this marginalized community's concerns and desires (Freire, 1995; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997; Wang, 1999). The findings show the challenges endured and the impact it had on their realities growing up in foster care. The emphasis is not placed on the individual's photographic skills but rather on their willingness to interpret their journey through powerful images and words that depict their real-life experiences.

Findings and Links to the Empowerment Theory

The transition from foster care to independence is a complicated undertaking for females without compulsory instruments and preparedness. These youth are subjected to particular jeopardy and unsolicited opportunities (Jones, 2014). The study results align with the literature supporting some of the challenges encountered as they rose through the foster care system. The results also helped in understanding how many of the participants were able to meet the challenges.

Through the interview process, I learned that all participants dealt with a feeling of loss and trauma when forcibly removed from their homes and placed in foster care.

They also expressed losing a sense of control. Many felt that no one cared enough to ask what they wanted or that no one would listen if they spoke out. Three participants specifically mentioned their freedom of choice was taken away, and most decisions were made without their input. One participant described how unknown individuals "controlled every aspect" of her being. Another participant shared how choices were made for her. She stated that she did not have control of anything. There was a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness.

In contrast, empowerment is the ability to effectively control one's life by acting on its authority (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). All the participants slowly seemed to experience a level of control after gaining independence. The process was taxing for those who ran away or aged out of the system. However, 60% of the participants who had a support system also reported that knowing someone who unconditionally stood by them to inspire and encourage them made the transition a little easier. One participant expressed how her past cannot be changed, but knowing she is loved helped her look forward to a positive and happy future. The study's findings are in line with previous research on utilizing the empowerment approach to link to potential social change.

Another discovery from this study was the impact that photovoice played in the participants' commitment to sharing their stories, which is directly linked to the empowerment theory. Though empowerment theory has several interpretations, it can be defined as an action to encourage, support, and enable marginalized individuals or groups to overcome the feelings of hopelessness and understand the power they hold through knowledge and education to become advocates for positive change in their communities

(Rappaport, 1990; Zimmerman, 2000). The empowerment theory also denotes the ability to elevate, inform, and educate individuals on multiple levels in understanding the influences that shape their existence (Maton, 2008; Rappaport, 1981). The participants' role as co-designers and co-researchers supported and allowed the participants to contribute to the research and represent their lived experience without fear of scorn or ridicule.

Findings and Links to the Upstream Concept

All participants experienced trauma, which led to loss, hardships, and changes in behaviors. They described deep-rooted feelings of mistrust due to being overlooked and ignored. One persistent issue was the constant relocations suffered by all without knowing the reason or cause. These findings may explain behavioral changes exhibited by the participants. Some of the behaviors shared included putting up walls, hiding feelings, anxiety, and depression.

According to upstreamist Manchanda (2013), identifying, recognizing, and effectively managing the setbacks is more beneficial if effectually addressed and mended at its root cause rather than focusing on the warning signs every time symptoms of the same problem become visible. For example, one plan could involve bringing all related parties to the table to share their input, ideas, and concerns to uncover and reimagine any potential threats to policies or strategies at its weakest points. This action could theoretically serve two purposes: First, it brings together a meeting of the minds, those who establish the guidelines, and the experience of those who are directly affected by the policies. Second, it provides opportunities to marginalized individuals and groups to

become advocates in their journey to change and potentially reframe policy positively.

Overall, the study results demonstrated that the photovoice methodology inspired the participants to find their voice and possibly assisted in providing their intended audience with a richer perception of their plight, experiences, and needs. Photovoice is not a permanent fix; however, for this study, it functioned as an instrument to address the needs and challenges faced by the participants, possible solutions, and the shared requisite for change.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are commonplace in most research studies and should be considered when deliberating the meanings of the findings and results of its interpretation. First, the recruitment criteria search was limited to former female foster youth ages 19 - 25, who transitioned from foster care at least one calendar year before starting the study. Race, religion, or ethnic background was not a deciding factor in the final recruitment selection. Second, participants from the NYC foster care system was the population recruited for this study. This location also included the outer boroughs of Brooklyn, Bronx, Staten Island, Queens, and Manhattan. Third, all participants were required to have owned a camera phone to participate. A blanket statement cannot be made of the study's findings because of its small sample size. If there was more time, it could have been opened to a significant larger number of participants from other states or countries to allow for more perspectives and lived experiences. Misrepresentation was a limitation to the photovoice process as well because the viewer could affix a different meaning to the image other than intended by the participant. For this reason, each contributor was asked to include a

caption and brief narrative to explain its significance.

Recommendations

As a photographer, I was passionate about employing a medium I was very familiar with and often used to provide a platform to uplift this specific group of marginalized individuals' voices. Whether using a professional camera, simple point-and-shoot, or the highly visible and used camera phones, photovoice methodologies offer new possibilities, inspiration, personal growth, and perhaps building self-confidence.

Photovoice, established by Wang & Burris (1994, 1997), as participatory action research tool to promote, empower and encourage marginalized members to identify, discuss, and focus on issues that affect the individual and communities they live. Even though a deeper understanding of the challenges these participants faced was brought to light, we also learned how supportive connections could bring about constructive transformations.

Recommendations for further research include implementing Photovoice and other comparable digital methods in school curriculums to expand the investigation of the challenge's females in foster care face. This suggestion could be a forward step in using this methodology to identify at-risk and other female youth who get lost in the system and may be prone to follow the wrong path. This research should be designed to follow a specific number of individuals to track behavioral changes from their first day in care, leading to adulthood. This suggestion aligns with empowerment and the upstream concept. The experimental research can begin with six locales in the most vulnerable regions to assess its clarity, foresight, and impact on the participants to see if this type of study shows promise.

Another recommendation includes broadening the scope of studies focusing on representing females 24 years and older who aged out or ran away from foster care. In reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), an examination can be conducted to learn if the child's race, ethnicity, and family history are underlying causes in the treatment and length of time a child spends in care. Lastly, continued examinations of the impact of supportive relationships on foster care youth compared to children who chiefly raised themselves. The best way to learn about their experiences is to listen to the children's voices in care.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study demonstrated that implications for social change is achievable. There have been apparent failures and breakdowns of policy in the child welfare system; however, there have been confirmed changes over the years generated through modifications of legislation and preceding guidelines (Pew Commission, 2008). The findings also provided additional insights articulated in the respective stories collected from the participants. Transformation begins by embracing the youth's voice; after all, they are the key advocates who can speak their truths because they lived it, not the practitioners who decide for them. Studies explicitly dealing with growing up in the foster care system often disregard the youth's voice. While photovoice's mission is to inspire community change through images and words, social change's potential lies in framing real-life solutions and policies to improve and support female youth transitioning from care. This community can be strengthened through opportunities that identify and develop compulsory strategies to increase leadership cultivation, political and civic

engagement. The implications are vast for foster care specialists, policymakers, politicians, and other relevant officials working with disadvantaged and at-risk youth populations. Social change can occur on multiple tiers that include governmental, behavioral, and societal fronts.

Governmental

The goal is to interpret and translate their revelations into viable programs that produce significant results to increase the chances for success after exiting the child welfare system. Redefining ineffectual outdated policies with fresh and novel insights from individuals with little to no influence or political power can also contribute to systemic transformation (Wilson, 2019). The decision-makers can examine and access the findings that emerged from the photovoice research for its potential value in expanding their knowledge and understanding of the female youth's real-life experiences growing up in care. This underrepresented and marginalized youth population can use their voice to uplift, inform, and educate foster care practitioners and policymakers on their community's fundamental necessities. The potential for constructive transformation is more significant now due to the glaring rise of voices for injustice and change worldwide. An informal summit, face-to-face, and or online web conferences is one example where all the related parties can discuss and brainstorm possible innovative concepts to address any challenges encountered. The potential for constructive transformation is more significant now due to the glaring rise of voices for injustice and change worldwide.

Behavioral

Changes in behavior was a prevalent factor expressed by the participants. The action of being unexpectedly removed from their home was a frightening and traumatic experience for all. Over time, the fear and stress led to feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and other behavioral changes. One participant shared how being taken from her home heightened the distress she felt after entering care. The participant's responses seem to support the perception that their concerns were not immediately addressed. The opportunity for change can begin with establishing a photovoice or other arts-based method to encourage youth to freely communicate their thoughts and feelings about the ordeal of being in foster care.

Society and Negative Characterizations

A vital issue that emerged from the findings connected to the participant's perceptions of how others see them. In society, there are stigmas, misconceptions, and preconceived assumptions associated with youth in foster care. For many of these kids, as long as they are in the foster care system, this adverse label will follow them wherever they go. As a result, children in foster care tend to keep others at arm's length because they find it hard to know who to trust regarding their circumstances (Farmer, Selwyn, and Meakings, 2013). These negative labels can represent roadblocks to successful transitions and contribute to sources of risky, unhealthy, and unlawful behaviors.

Social change can begin with lessons of tolerance to lessen the sting and undesirable connotations of foster care. One idea can include interactive role-playing for school-age kids ages 5 - 18. The purpose would be to create awareness and educate others

about how they are impacted by foster care. For one brief moment in their day, one child can be someone other than themselves and hopefully share feelings and thoughts without fear. Additional social change ideas include developing and implementing youth-centered programs specifically for foster and other at-risk youth to provide support, build self-esteem, self-love, and confidence. The programs can potentially be designed to provide opportunities to teach and inspire these kids to become leaders and advocate to gradually change the attitudes and misconceptions about growing up in foster care. Utilizing community centers or after-school programs as possible sites can be the beginning of building like-minded collaboration and partnerships.

Conclusions

For this study, Photovoice, a participatory action approach, proved to be an innovative and creative method for participants to offer meaningful insight and understanding of their realities. The participants communicated and shared their experiences on their terms, representing themselves as they felt others should see them. Whether their declarations were constructive or problematic, I learned how their new and unfamiliar circumstances affected their everyday lives. I was surprised at how much each participant was prepared to share because their accounts were exceptionally personal, informative, and heartbreaking. Harnessing their energy, valuing their voice, and using their experience to pinpoint and address their community's needs could be a constructive step for youth engagement and positive change. Their disclosures demonstrated there is so much more to discover and comprehend. After all, they are the experts of their situations because they lived it; soliciting their suggestions and views can add

authenticity to potential future resolutions.

The process can progress further by meeting this population's needs and creating partnerships with like-minded organizations to act as a guidepost to develop the techniques and preparation needed as potential future change leaders. According to Rappaport (1986), to inspire power in others can theoretically lead to positive change and an elevation in awareness and knowledge. Mobilization of real power is needed to effect change. For that to happen, females growing up in care should have personal agency in the outcomes that affect their lives. Representation, advocacy, education, and political access can go a long way to having their voices heard.

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Appendix A: Qualifying Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What age did you enter the foster-care system? _____ Exit care? _____
3. Did you experience multiple placements while in foster care? Y___ N___ If yes,
1-4___ 5 or more___
4. While in care, did you feel your needs and concerns were met? Y___ N___
5. Do you believe you were prepared for life after foster care? Y___ N___
6. Did you have a role model or mentor while in care? Y___ N___ If yes, are they
still in your life now?
7. Do you own a camera phone? Y___ N___

Appendix B: Photo Description Worksheet

Describe your photo.

Why did you take this picture?

How does this photo convey the meaning of your experience as a female youth growing up in foster care?

Appendix C: Aggregate Frequencies

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
care	4	53	6.58%	care, cared
foster	6	24	2.98%	foster
feel	4	17	2.11%	feel, feeling, feelings
home	4	16	1.99%	home
know	4	16	1.99%	know, knowing
time	4	15	1.86%	time, times
lost	4	14	1.74%	lost
pieces	6	13	1.61%	piece, pieces
away	4	11	1.37%	away
hard	4	11	1.37%	hard
trust	5	11	1.37%	trust
wanted	6	11	1.37%	want, wanted, wanting
experiences	11	10	1.24%	experience, experiences
broken	6	9	1.12%	broken
going	5	9	1.12%	going
help	4	8	0.99%	help, helped, helping, helps
alone	5	8	0.99%	alone
good	4	8	0.99%	good
life	4	8	0.99%	life
love	4	8	0.99%	love, loved, loves
things	6	8	0.99%	things
stop	4	7	0.87%	stop, stopped
needed	6	7	0.87%	need, needed
neglect	7	7	0.87%	neglect, neglected
afraid	6	7	0.87%	afraid
day	3	7	0.87%	day
felt	4	7	0.87%	felt
forget	6	7	0.87%	forget
people	6	7	0.87%	people
school	6	7	0.87%	school
wall	4	7	0.87%	wall
abuse	5	6	0.75%	abuse, abused

moving	6	6	0.75%	move, moved, moving
tree	4	6	0.75%	tree
understand	10	6	0.75%	understand
unwanted	8	6	0.75%	unwanted
another	7	5	0.62%	another
better	6	5	0.62%	better
different	9	5	0.62%	different
entered	7	5	0.62%	entered
find	4	5	0.62%	find
happy	5	5	0.62%	happy
kid	3	5	0.62%	kid
never	5	5	0.62%	never
roots	5	5	0.62%	roots
stay	4	5	0.62%	stay
survive	7	5	0.62%	survive
confused	8	4	0.50%	confused
control	7	4	0.50%	control, controlled
damaged	7	4	0.50%	damaged
distance	8	4	0.50%	distance
fear	4	4	0.50%	fear
frightened	10	4	0.50%	frightened
hope	4	4	0.50%	hope
keeping	7	4	0.50%	keeping
mom	3	4	0.50%	mom
new	3	4	0.50%	new
past	4	4	0.50%	past
peeling	7	4	0.50%	peeling
pets	4	4	0.50%	pets
scared	6	4	0.50%	scared
share	5	4	0.50%	share
thoughts	8	4	0.50%	thought, thoughts
turned	6	4	0.50%	turned
walking	7	4	0.50%	walking, walks
worthy	6	4	0.50%	worthy

anxiety	7	3	0.37%	anxiety
anxious	7	3	0.37%	anxious
best	4	3	0.37%	best
breaking	8	3	0.37%	breaking
chipped	7	3	0.37%	chipped
chose	5	3	0.37%	chose
close	5	3	0.37%	close
dad	3	3	0.37%	dad
denied	6	3	0.37%	denied
develop	7	3	0.37%	develop
fault	5	3	0.37%	fault
forgotten	9	3	0.37%	forgotten
given	5	3	0.37%	given
grow	4	3	0.37%	grow
light	5	3	0.37%	light
listening	9	3	0.37%	listening
living	6	3	0.37%	living
lucky	5	3	0.37%	lucky
magnified	9	3	0.37%	magnified
making	6	3	0.37%	making
many	4	3	0.37%	many
memories	8	3	0.37%	memories
men	3	3	0.37%	men
mentally	8	3	0.37%	mentally
moods	5	3	0.37%	moods
nobody	6	3	0.37%	nobody
physically	10	3	0.37%	physically
signifies	9	3	0.37%	signified, signifies
someone	7	3	0.37%	someone
taken	5	3	0.37%	taken
trauma	6	3	0.37%	trauma
traumatic	9	3	0.37%	traumatic
triggered	9	3	0.37%	triggered
vulnerable	10	3	0.37%	vulnerable

water	5	3	0.37%	water
words	5	3	0.37%	words
working	7	3	0.37%	working
also	4	2	0.25%	also
anybody	7	2	0.25%	anybody
areas	5	2	0.25%	areas
asked	5	2	0.25%	asked
aspect	6	2	0.25%	aspect
attention	9	2	0.25%	attention
attract	7	2	0.25%	attract
bring	5	2	0.25%	bring
change	6	2	0.25%	change, changes
closer	6	2	0.25%	closer
comfort	7	2	0.25%	comfort
cope	4	2	0.25%	cope
cracked	7	2	0.25%	cracked
downs	5	2	0.25%	downs
easier	6	2	0.25%	easier
fight	5	2	0.25%	fight, fighting
freedom	7	2	0.25%	freedom
friends	7	2	0.25%	friends
heart	5	2	0.25%	heart
husband	7	2	0.25%	husband
interest	8	2	0.25%	interest
invisible	9	2	0.25%	invisible
knew	4	2	0.25%	knew
label	5	2	0.25%	label
last	4	2	0.25%	last
leave	5	2	0.25%	leave
long	4	2	0.25%	long
looking	7	2	0.25%	looking
loop	4	2	0.25%	loop
mistrust	8	2	0.25%	mistrust
much	4	2	0.25%	much

nightmares	10	2	0.25%	nightmares
obstacles	9	2	0.25%	obstacles
others	6	2	0.25%	others
positive	8	2	0.25%	positive
pretty	6	2	0.25%	pretty
pulled	6	2	0.25%	pulled
putting	7	2	0.25%	putting
quiet	5	2	0.25%	quiet
reflect	7	2	0.25%	reflect
rockiness	9	2	0.25%	rockiness, rocky
sign	4	2	0.25%	sign
something	9	2	0.25%	something
speak	5	2	0.25%	speak
strike	6	2	0.25%	strike
stuff	5	2	0.25%	stuff
support	7	2	0.25%	support
symbolize	9	2	0.25%	symbolize
system	6	2	0.25%	system
tears	5	2	0.25%	tears
tough	5	2	0.25%	tough
transition	10	2	0.25%	transition
unsettled	9	2	0.25%	unsettled
ups	3	2	0.25%	ups
abandoned	9	1	0.12%	abandoned
adopted	7	1	0.12%	adopted
always	6	1	0.12%	always
baby	4	1	0.12%	baby
books	5	1	0.12%	books
bumpy	5	1	0.12%	bumpy
challenges	10	1	0.12%	challenges
childhood	9	1	0.12%	childhood
choices	7	1	0.12%	choices
circumstances	13	1	0.12%	circumstances
dark	4	1	0.12%	dark

dead	4	1	0.12%	dead
dealt	5	1	0.12%	dealt
demons	6	1	0.12%	demons
droplets	8	1	0.12%	droplets
dropped	7	1	0.12%	dropped
encouraged	10	1	0.12%	encouraged
escape	6	1	0.12%	escape
everything	10	1	0.12%	everything
expecting	9	1	0.12%	expecting
experienced	11	1	0.12%	experienced
family	6	1	0.12%	family
getting	7	1	0.12%	getting
giving	6	1	0.12%	giving
gone	4	1	0.12%	gone
grandmother	11	1	0.12%	grandmother
happier	7	1	0.12%	happier
hid	3	1	0.12%	hid
issues	6	1	0.12%	issues
mentor	6	1	0.12%	mentor
misplaced	9	1	0.12%	misplaced
negative	8	1	0.12%	negative
older	5	1	0.12%	older
opposite	8	1	0.12%	opposite
paths	5	1	0.12%	paths
paycheck	8	1	0.12%	paycheck
perfect	7	1	0.12%	perfect
personally	10	1	0.12%	personally
placement	9	1	0.12%	placement
present	7	1	0.12%	present
puddles	7	1	0.12%	puddles
ran	3	1	0.12%	ran
real	4	1	0.12%	real
receiving	9	1	0.12%	receiving
return	6	1	0.12%	return

rough	5	1	0.12%	rough
running	7	1	0.12%	running
savior	6	1	0.12%	savior
scary	5	1	0.12%	scary
searching	9	1	0.12%	searching
sense	5	1	0.12%	sense
slowly	6	1	0.12%	slowly
smooth	6	1	0.12%	smooth
spending	8	1	0.12%	spending
spouse	6	1	0.12%	spouse
starting	8	1	0.12%	starting
stormy	6	1	0.12%	stormy
struggle	8	1	0.12%	struggle
taking	6	1	0.12%	taking
thank	5	1	0.12%	thank
true	4	1	0.12%	true
trying	6	1	0.12%	trying
unknown	7	1	0.12%	unknown
waiting	7	1	0.12%	waiting
well	4	1	0.12%	well