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# The politics of exclusion: Engaging the voices of systems youths.

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**THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION:  
ENGAGING THE VOICES OF SYSTEMS YOUTHS**

by

**Yolanda Lambe**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
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## ABSTRACT

The Canadian child welfare system is responsible for protecting and providing for those who cannot live with their families of origin. While the system exists to assist those children and young people it brings under its auspices, I argue that the system is punitive and blatantly negates and ignores the very real needs of those who enter it. Using qualitative methods, this study concentrated on these youths' relationships with their families, communities and the system. Utilizing critiques of the system and more recent arguments that focus on the responsabilization, exclusion and control of "anti-citizens", it is argued that systems youths, replete with their reputations as deviant and troubling, do not receive the resources nor time to become "responsible" and self-governing and, as such, they cannot become full-fledged citizens in their communities. The life outcomes of systems youths are jeopardized, confirming that the system is punitive and exclusionary.

## DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to all the participants who shared their most intimate experiences with me for the purposes of this project. I cannot thank you enough for allowing me into your lives and for opening up the way that you all did. Your courage to speak out about your experiences encourages your system peers to do the same. Your help with this project is greatly appreciated.

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Tapper - you stood by me, sacrificed a lot and worked very hard to help me finish this chapter of my life. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my best friend and "spiritual guru" Jenn – it seems like a lifetime ago when I met you and said to you, "sit down by, you're making me nervous". I am forever grateful to you and your family for allowing me into your lives, and of course, your fridge and waterbed.

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To my family – Tony and Pamela, I'm so proud of you both. Dad, without you, we would not be what we are today – a real family. You truly are "the best in the west." All my love, Sis.

Yolanda Lambe

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This research takes as its departure point the Canadian state's inability to remain the "guarantor of social security" for Canadian families, and how the decline in welfare programs and services affects marginalized populations. Canadian families are increasingly forced to deal with the reduction and/or elimination of traditional state social and financial supports. The impact of responsabilizing families and the emphasis now placed on these families to deal with their own social and financial needs has left them unable to provide for their children. As such, there are many more families at risk of having their children entering the child welfare/protection system.

Neglect is the number one reason young people enter the system (Canadian Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003 [CIS], 2005, p. 33) and their entry may have something to do with the elimination of entitlement to social resources and the newest form of governing, advanced liberal governing, or the management of traditional State affairs through individual and community programming (self-help groups, state funded agencies) that require citizens to police their own conduct according to certain morals that inform the communities in which citizens live. Nikolas Rose, in his book *Powers of Freedom* (1999), argues that regardless of why individuals cannot, or will not, conduct themselves appropriately, if they offend the public consciousness and morality informing the communities in which they live, they risk exclusion from their communities. Deemed as problematic or deviant by the moral community, marginalized

subgroups are branded as “anti-citizens” and may find themselves confined to what is known as a “zone of exclusion.”

Young people who become detached from their families of origin and enter the system are discursively constructed in various discourses as trouble-makers who have been inoculated with immoral values. Often reared by parents who have seemingly rejected the morality informing their communities, there are myths which posit these youths as unruly and unable to govern themselves, and as such, they are considered anti-citizens. They are without familial ties, living in a system wherein policies and laws are contradictory, punitive and damaging to their mental health (and physical health), and they are feared by those who consider themselves to be morally righteous citizens. Good, hardworking, upstanding and responsible citizens and their families resist a shared sense of responsibility for the well-being of the less fortunate, regardless of how or why they became unfortunate in the first place (Rose, 1999).

This “responsibilization” (Garland, 2001) of individuals for their own well-being is extremely detrimental to the well-being of the systems youth. It impacts the likelihood of a positive life-outcome for the individual young person. Without the ability to obtain requisites for living in an individual’s community and without fitting into the “norm”, these people risk exclusion from their communities. It is argued here that negative outcomes of systems youths are directly related to the perpetuation of irrational fears that these youths are troubled and troubling held by the individual’s moral community.

By engaging with nine current and former systems youths from Newfoundland, information obtained from in-depth interviews allowed much insight into how these young people understand and comprehend their realities within the system, or zone of

exclusion. Youths interviewed were asked questions regarding their involvement and/or exclusion within their families, the system and the communities in which they lived. Results from this study indicated that young people feel excluded from their communities. Indicative of their feelings of exclusion include their feelings that both workers involved in their care and members of the community considered them to be problematic, trouble-makers and living on what one participant referred to as “kiddie welfare.” These perceptions of systems youths suggest that they are less than worthy of substantial resources that would help them achieve the requisites to become full-fledged “citizens” who could engage in school, work or family life.

While the results of this small study do not represent the experiences of all systems youths in Newfoundland or in Canada, the literature review and findings indicate that much has to be done in order for this subpopulation to succeed in our communities. Further research is needed to substantiate the effects of the systems treatment of youth, the role responsabilization strategies play in the marginalization of youths and how persistent “myths” of delinquency amongst the systems youths population shape interveners treatment of system youths in their schools and other community contexts.. As this thesis documents, programs and services offered to these young people must change if they are to succeed as productive citizens within their Canadian communities.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Conceptualizing the “System”

According to the report *Child Welfare* in 2002, released by Child and Family Services Information, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence [NCFV], in 2000 every province and territory in Canada is governed by its own child welfare, child protection or child and family services legislation which means that services and programs vary considerably throughout Canada, as does the age of entitlement to provisions offered. Under the UN Convention of Human Rights for the Child (CRC, 1989) to which Canada is a signatory, children and youths under the age of eighteen (18) have the rights to protection and the “opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child” (CRC, 1989, Article 12(1)). This is an extremely important clause when referencing such a vulnerable subpopulation that has been branded as troubled and troubling and as such, are met with resistance when it comes to being heard.

For the purposes of this research, the “system” refers to a constantly changing legislated pastiche of programs and services that may or may not be offered to young people who cannot or will not remain with their primary caregivers, usually their biological parent(s), who maltreat, neglect or mistreat and occasionally those who are orphaned.

In this project, when referencing Newfoundland “systems youths”, the term refers to young people living in the system who are over the age of 16 years old but under the

age of 18 years<sup>i</sup>. Generally, the term is utilized within this thesis as an all encompassing term that refers to young people who have, or were, deemed in need of protection or assistance as indicated in the respective legislation governing that province or territory (usually between the age of 16, but under the age of 19, or 21 years of age). Youths enter the system for various reasons; however maltreatment, apprehension, and the idea that the system offers a safer environment for them are the most prominent reasons for becoming a “systems youth.” As we will see shortly, the realities of these youths who are “shuffled back and forth among foster homes, psychiatric hospitals, emergency shelters, residential schools, and juvenile justice facilities”(as described by Athey, 1995 in Slesnick & Meade, 2001, p. 518) are unfortunate and saddening. The term “systems youth” refers to all youths living in any of the above placement types. However, for this study all nine participants entered the system through child welfare intervention.

Prior to entering the system and receiving the title of temporary or permanent ward, youths who are in need of protection and/or services (or those who have already been identified as needing intervention) have contact with numerous “interveners”, or individuals who become involved in the young person’s life once they become a systems youth. Interveners may include social workers, counsellors, physicians, psychiatrists, probation officers and any other individuals involved in the formal and informal care of the youth. Because there is an abundance of various interveners that play some part in the day-to-day life of a systems youth and the types of placements<sup>ii</sup> available are many, the entire gamut of services offered through foster care, youth justice and psychiatric placements are considered in this thesis as the “systems domain.”

Before moving onto the analytical tools used to examine exclusion from the system youth's perspective, some of the arguments presented herein may be misconstrued and, as such, they require some clarification. Arguments presented in this thesis indicate that systems youths have problematic life histories and have higher rates of behavioural and mental disorders than their non-systems peers. In addition, these young people have significantly higher rates of involvement with youth justice and psychiatric institutions.

The purpose of this discussion is not to conceptualize parents, systems youths or interveners as intrinsically bad people who have something wrong with them and the ways they understand their existence (Rose, 1999, p. 334). These arguments are presented to illustrate how rearing a child within a familial environment that is less than conducive to fostering positive mental health and positive life outcomes affects them before they enter the system. I also argue that any psychological and/or psychiatric problems existing before entering the system are only exacerbated upon entry into the system.

This discussion is also necessary to demonstrate how maltreated and neglected young people are constructed as troublemakers and why they are feared within their communities. Problematic before they enter the system, the State does not acknowledge that any pre-existing issues that are untreated upon entry into the system will cause future psychological harm to the young person. A complete psychological or psychiatric assessment is not required upon entry into the system and thus any pre-existing notions of deviancy or deficiency cannot be challenged. In practice, most youth who enter the system seem to enter with a label of trouble or troubling. They come from troubling families, those who occupy the peripheries of our society. Many members of so-called moral communities express fear of these perceived deviants and miscreants, and systems

youths embody these perceptions. In addition, the fact that these youths have a dependency on scarce community resources during a time when responsibility for one's own outcome is deemed especially important, it is likely that these young people will be excluded from their communities.

In summary, the "system" is made up of legislated, mandated responsibilities of appendages of the State (such as non-governmental organizations, provincial, territorial, and federal governments) to care for, supervise and protect children and young people from abusive, neglectful families, and less often, orphaned children and youths. Furthermore, because the system includes a wide array of placement types to place/house these children and young people, we refer to the entire gamut of placement types, and available services and programs as the systems domain, staffed with strategically placed interveners.

### Problematizing the System

#### *Familial Responsibilities*

Collectively agreed upon by provincial and territorial child and family services systems, parent(s) are responsible for the "care, protection and supervision" of a child and these responsibilities are to be carried out by the family, defined as the "basic social unit of society" (NCFV, 2002). Fulfilling these fundamental responsibilities has become very difficult for many families (and other caretakers) over the last decade. In recent years there has been a marked increase in cutbacks to social programming (Jennissen, 1997; Little, 1998; Lundy & Totten, 1998; Luxton, 2002; Parkin, 1997; Wieggers, 2002) and the expectations of the family (as well as community agencies and groups) to assume

responsibility for the care of their families with little or no state support (Garland, 2001) has risen dramatically.

As highlighted in the introduction, neglect is the number one reason for entering the system (CIS, 2005) and entering the system has much to do with the availability of financial and social supports for families (Luxton, 2002; Weigers, 2002). Arguably, the lack of resources has a direct impact on the increase in numbers of children and young people having formal involvement with interveners. Families who cannot provide for their children, for whatever reason, within their communities are marginalized families, who are frequently blamed for their predicament and become the focus of the “control gaze” of interveners or, as Rose (1999) refers to them, “control agents.” Only the neediest children are placed in the system, and there is a noticeable lack of sufficient resources to assist socially excluded families and children (Khoo, Hyvonen, & Nygren, 2003, p. 507).

#### *The Rising Number of Systems Youths*

The estimated number of child welfare investigations in Canada (excluding Quebec) has risen by approximately 86% between the years of 1998 and 2003 (CIS, 2005, p. 94) while the approximate number of children and young people placed in “out-of-home” arrangements after an investigation is estimated to be at 8% (p. 98). The Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC, 2001) indicates that between 1996 and 2001, “the estimated number of children in public care (foster care) increased by 50%” and the numbers continue to climb.

We cannot offer an exact number in terms of how many children and young people live in the systems domain. The following numbers are approximate (since the



Canadian federal government does not track these individuals) but we can state with some degree of certainty that the Canadian systems domain involves well over 100 000 individuals. Approximately 75 000 children and young people are involved with the child welfare/protection component of the system in Canada (Ferris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003, p. 26), and another 25 000 more young people live in the youth justice system. This number does not include individuals who have been placed in the system for a short period of time (temporary wards), those who are returned to their families or those in the custody of psychiatric or treatment centres. Nor does it account for all youths who have had formal involvement without being removed from the family home, or those who live on the streets.

#### *Advanced Liberal Governing and the Systems Domain*

The current advanced liberal sociopolitical climate that emphasizes self-sufficiency (and the assistance of preventative partnerships within the community such as self-help agencies and newly formed agencies funded by the government) and the prerequisites needed for participation in communities (education, meaningful employment and familial and/or community ties) makes life particularly difficult for individuals who have no parental supports to assist them financially and socially. Socially excluded and unwilling or unable to conduct themselves appropriately, these families of “anti-citizens” (Rose, 1999) are subject to further exclusionary policies – including losing their children to the custody of the State.

Across the systems domain, Parton (1998) maintains that social service workers have always occupied the space between the respectable and dangerous classes. Canadian families who are unable to provide the basic necessities for their children may be branded

as neglectful (thus unable to govern themselves and disrespecting the community values) parents by interveners (CIS, 2005). It cannot be emphasized enough that *all* families who have children in the system are *not* “bad” parents. The logical conclusion is that if financial and social supports are unavailable to those in need, rates of child abuse (neglect mostly) investigations will rise, and so will the number of children who are apprehended by interveners.

### Anti-Citizens (Family and Youths)

#### *Household Characteristics and Functioning Issues*

During the data collection phase of this research (June 2003), the most recent statistics available on those families who had been investigated for maltreatment incidents were available from the findings from the Canadian Incidence Study of Maltreatment and Neglect (CIS, 2002). The main household (parental or other caregivers) functioning issues identified at that time included the presence of domestic violence, alcohol abuse, a lack of social supports, mental health disorders and parental childhood maltreatment respectively. The more recent CIS (2005) identifies domestic violence, few social supports, mental health issues, history of parental childhood abuse and alcohol abuse as the most common functioning issues respectively.

Rearing a child in an environment with many negative household and caregiver functioning issues will likely impact the child/youth negatively and leave him/her with personal behavioural and mental health issues. Kaplan and colleagues (1999) have noted for example that systems youths have many emotional and/or behavioural issues that are either internalizing or externalizing in nature. Internalizing disorders are those problems that are primarily bothersome to the young person himself or herself and externalizing

disorders “generally refer to behavior that negatively affects others, usually behaviors that are aggressive or antisocial” (Kaplan, Labruna, Pelcovitz, Salzinger, Mandel, & Weiner, 1999, p. 43).

#### *Pre-System Youths Characteristics and Functioning*

Some individuals who enter the system do not externalize their abuse (Higgins & McCabe, 2001, p.574). These youths may instead internalize their life history experiences as is the case with depression and anxiety. Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are the most common mental health issues affecting systems youths (Garland, Hough, McCabe, Yeh, Wood, & Aarons, 2001; Kaplan et al., 1999; Kurtz, Thornes, & Bailey, 1998; Lyons & Rogers, 2004; Stein, Mazumdar, Evans & Rae-Grant, 1996).

When speaking to the above mental health issues common to children and young people investigated for child maltreatment in the CIS 2005, 50% of children and youths in families investigated had a “child functioning issue”, and 40% of the children and youths had a “child behavioural issue” prior to entering the system (CIS, 2005). The rates of emotional and behavioural problems affecting the population of children and young people in the Canadian child welfare/foster care component of the system is between “48-80% of the population” and “living in this system places youth at-risk for a psychiatric disorder” (Stein et al., 1996, 385-391). These authors suggest that high levels of psychiatric issues within this specific subpopulation are a result of their pre-systems experiences and the fact that youths are older (perhaps a reflection of responsabilizing youths for their own well-being) when they come into the system.

These young people, replete with their mental, behavioural and moral shortcomings generally have poor outcomes, negative peer involvement (Kashani & Alan, 1998), are more likely to stay in the system longer, and are also at risk for further institutionalization (Raychaba, 1993; Ulzen & Hamilton, 1998). It is acknowledged among child welfare/child protection interveners that school-aged systems youths are an extremely disadvantaged group with the majority of youths emancipated from the system doing so without a high school education, living skills or job experiences (Altshuler, 2006; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Zetlin & Weinburg, 2004). In our current sociopolitical climate wherein values of concern, honesty and self-reliance (achieved through education, work skills, community involvement, etc.) are paramount (Rose, 1999, p. 267), systems youths are at an extreme disadvantage within our communities. They cannot engage within their communities at the same level as their non-systems peers with respect to high school completion rates and employment. This places them at risk for many problematic behaviours and, ultimately, exclusion from their communities.

Not all young people can be coined “problematic” and not all young people fail to make a successful transition to adulthood. Research on resiliency amongst the systems youths population has noted that many of them thrive while in care. A good working relationship between the child or young person and his or her social worker and a relationship where the soft, mindful and judicious use of power (de Boer, C., & Coady, N., 2007) is noted as being important in the outcome of a systems youth. As expected, the permanency and continuity of relationships for these young people is especially important (Cashmore, J., & Paxman, M., 2006; Fong, R., Schwab, J., & Armour, M., 2006) and

social supports once one ages out, or leaves care are in part indicative of whether the individual will be successful or not upon leaving (Fong, Schwab et al., 2006). In addition, high quality relationships with the female caregiver, quality friendships and higher self-esteem have been associated with lowered anxiety rates for systems youths and successful psychological adjustment (Legault, L., Anawati, M., & Flynn, R., 2006, p. 1033).

### *The (Im)morality Associated with Pre-Systems Youths*

In terms of morality associated with pre-systems youths and their families, we need only look to family values campaigners who have been engaged for quite some time in promoting the virtues of “good” families and “good” future citizens (Stacey, 1996, p. 48-57). These special interest groups are concerned with so-called problematic families as they threaten the existence of the normative familial form. What appears to be lost on these individuals, what has been noted for over 25 years, is the fact that society stands to “gain a person capable of becoming an adequate parent for children of the future” (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1979, p. 7) when they bring a child or young person into the system. Unable to see past the probability that the parents of systems youths have apparently inoculated them with values that leave them lacking in some form or another (Donzelot, 1979), the mentality that individuals without or unattached to a normative familial form are problematic by default serves to perpetuate the negative constructs of systems youths and places them at further risk of exclusionary and controlling techniques.

### Critiquing the System

#### *Insider Status*

Before engaging any further with the analytical framework, we must briefly discuss the “inside” aspect of the system.. As the investigator of this study, I must divulge my own special connectedness to this project. I am what Kanuha (2000) terms a “former insider.” As a former insider, I have a special bond with those in the system and an emotional and moral need to assist those living in the system, to attempt to make it a better place for rearing children and youths. Martyn Kendrick (1990), discussed momentarily, calls for former systems youths to help in any way that we can so we can bring attention to the plight of systems youths. I was extremely lucky as I experienced only two placements, both in family foster homes. However, life did not get easier as time went by and, in fact, upon my departure for my second year of post-secondary studies, I was dropped off three hundred kilometres away and was expected to live on my own without any social, financial or familial supports outside of the student loan money I received, which barely covered my rent. Many systems youths have friends that they rely on when they have too much to deal with, have no money or food, or have no other place else to go for the night. The feelings of being abandoned and let down once again are reiterated for the individual who is living, or has lived, in the system once the system decides, through legislation, that the youth is an adult. Generally, “real” families do not kick their children out once they reach a certain age. However, the system does, which suggests the lack of moral, financial and social supports available to systems youths

I personally know the punitive nature of the system, the feelings of shame and pain, and I connect with others who have been through, or are going through, the same things I did between the years of 1994 and 2000. Even at the age of eighteen, I had to sign contracts that limited my behaviours ( a means of responsabilizing the young

person). There were restrictions that I had to agree to if I was to avail of system services. For example, I had to supply receipts to my social worker to prove that I had bought groceries instead of drugs or alcohol. If I did not provide receipts and there was an inkling of speculation as to whether I was dishonest with my social workers about anything, questioning by my social workers was likely. Finally at the age of twenty, on my birthday, I left the system once and for all. In my own personal experience, it was too controlling and punitive, and interveners were often difficult to deal with. Living in the system was not all bad, however, as supports were available (though with strings attached) and it did offer an alternative to home or the streets.

Having provided the reader a brief insider's perspective, my personal perspective as an insider - it is pertinent to critique the system in a more comprehensive and thought-provoking manner. Speaking to graduates of the "system" in his book *Nobody's Children: The Foster Care Crisis in Canada*, Kendrick (1999) contends that we should help, "however [we] are able" (p. 201). Kendrick's call for help reminded me that the "[silence] is precisely what one needs to fight against. The stigma attached to children in care by society dictates that they keep silent, as if they themselves were to blame for the nightmare that constitutes childhood in care" (p. 201).

#### *Kendrick's Critical Analysis*

Kendrick (1990) employs a critical analysis of the "crisis" engulfing the systems domain across Canada and offers the following explanation as to why this system of protection and services does not work and cannot work in its current capacity:

[The system] doesn't work because the assumptions and infrastructures designed to process these children through their school years and through puberty are sterile, middle-class, bureaucratic, and severely limited. It doesn't work because the system designed to care for these children is

more intent on controlling than on nurturing them. It doesn't work because it forces a dependence on the system that at age 16 or 18 it abruptly terminates, leaving the young people alone, unprepared, and confused. It doesn't work because the system is unwieldy and under regulated and its representatives frequently undereducated. It doesn't work because nobody has listened to the children. (p.8)

As a former systems youth, I could not have stated the above any better. This system is a "virtual non-system" that is mismanaged, under-resourced and under-staffed (Costin, L.B., Karger, H.J. and Stoesz, D., 1996, p.10). Although written some time ago, Kendrick's critique of the system is still very much applicable today. The system still constitutes a stifling bureaucracy informed by a morality that is foreign to these youngsters. If the system operated in the manner it is supposed to operate (offering surrogate parenting and actually fulfilling those responsibilities), one would expect that it is an appropriate space where children and young people are care for and protected. However, it is a system wherein behaviours are policed, love and care are institutionalized, and "we know that there is no guarantee that the child will find authentic human connection" (Martin, 2003, p. 261). The systems domain could be conceptualized as a multitude of placements that house "nobody's children" (Kendrick, 1990) and "disposable children" (Golden, 1997).

As discussed earlier, the system continues to turn out thousands of young people without the appropriate supports (Canadian Child Welfare Association [CCWA], 1990; Lundy & Totten, 1998; Mech, 1994; Scannapieco & Schagrin, 1995), which would assist them in actually achieving this "successful transition to adulthood" supposed offered by the system (NCFV, 2002). As well will see, with recent shifts in governing and changing



societal expectations of citizens, it is extremely difficult for systems youths to become engaged and successful citizens.

### *Discursive Constructs of Systems Youths*

We have seen that pre-systems youths have an abundance of mental and behavioural problems. It has also been suggested here that entering this system places a young person at-risk for a psychiatric disorder by default. What we have essentially is a large number of young people who, through no fault of their own, may have emotional and/or behavioural problems who have no place to call “home.” Discursively constructed in various political, academic and media discourses that “associates immorality with marginal social groups, which are identifiable by race, class and gender” (Schissel, 1997, p. 31), systems youths are constructed as deviants and delinquents and are perceived to be “ungovernable” and lacking in “self-regulation” (Kelly, 2000, p. 472). As Garland (2001) has maintained, the “stock welfarist image of the delinquent as disadvantaged, deserving, subject of need has all but disappeared” (p. 10).

As political ideologies toward systems youths continue to harden (Costin et al., 1996; Garrett, 1999; Golden, 1997; Lundy & Totten, 1998; Schissel, 1998), Canadians continue to “wage war on” these children because they are considered one of the most “dangerous threats” to our society (Schissel, 1998, p. 9-10). As Colley and Hodkinson (2001) argue in their discussion of the social exclusion of youths in Britain, their “disadvantage is defined as deficit or disease, which deftly locate it within the individual and serves to undermine any acknowledgement of the social” (p. 341). Without acknowledging the very real impact of the decline of social programs and resources, and

placing blame on young people, as a society we are setting our most vulnerable and needy young people up for failure as citizens in our communities.

In addition, the construction of systems youths as “dangerous threats” to the moral fabric of, and security of citizens within, our communities prohibits them from articulating the significance of their life histories of being oppressed and marginalized within their families, communities and the system. Denying systems youths the opportunity to voice their discontent and to reflect upon their experiences and life histories, these youths do not have the opportunity to heal from their emotionally volatile pasts (Lambe, 2006; Manser, 2004).

### Responsibilization

According to David Garland (2001), the idea of “responsibilizing” citizens for their own successful outcomes is indicative of the demise of the welfare state and the rise of a new form of governing citizens. Advanced liberal governing, including the devolution of traditional State affairs onto communities and individuals, was advocated as a more efficient and responsible means to govern as it was increasingly difficult for the State to be the guarantor of social progress or social security. Citizens had come to rely on social supports from the State, but the State could no longer offer these supports that were in such high demand. As an adaptation of the State, responsibilizing citizens and communities for their own well-being and that of their families requires that members of the family, the parent(s) mainly but also including volunteer and other community agencies that support these efforts (as partners in prevention), provide materials and guidance needed to produce responsible, self-reliant citizens who can be their own guarantor of their social security.

As responsabilization gains momentum in Canada, those working with excluded subpopulations are well aware of the fact that the State is denying, negating and ignoring the realities of the material and immaterial deprivation experienced by marginalized groups in Canada (Jennissen, 1997; Little, 1998; Lundy & Totten, 1998; Luxton, 2002; Parkin, 1997; Wiegers, 2002). As Canadians, our rights to private and public welfare activities continue to lessen and the meaning of “deservingness” (who is worthy enough to receive supports from the state and its appendages)<sup>iii</sup> is continuing to shrink drastically and has been for nearly a decade (Jennissen, 1997; Little, 1998). The dependence on State welfare and social resources is a forced and unpleasant dependence for all, especially for young people who do not have access to their families but instead have the State as “parent.”

I have argued that the systems youths subpopulation is profoundly affected by this withdrawal of the welfare state. As a subpopulation that has little or absolutely none of the social or financial supports or access to familial resources that their non-systems peers do, they have to deal with the repercussions of the discursive constructs as discussed above and depend on mere pittance of welfare resources. In Newfoundland, the governing legislation that protects and assists children and youth in need is the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2001* [CYFSA 2001]<sup>iv</sup>. The CYFSA (2001) is a contradictory piece of legislation – it has different provisions for young people in need who have entered the system (CYFSA 2001, ch.11, s.3). If a young person enters the system before he or she is sixteen years of age, they “may be offered” supports and services until the age of twenty-one years. However, if a young person enters the system after the age of sixteen years, they are offered only two years to achieve the requisites to

participate successfully in their communities. It is a preposterous expectation for policy makers, government officials and community members alike to think that systems or former systems youths are able to conduct themselves appropriately (employed, housed, familial and community affiliations) without the chance to actually achieve an education, work skills, and to secure familial ties.

In Newfoundland, when young persons in the system celebrate their sixteenth birthday, they are considered “emancipated youth” and are free to sign themselves out of the system (unless incarcerated or institutionalized) and live as individuals within their communities (CYFSA 2001). They are no longer required to have contact with a multitude of interveners, which is perceived as a good thing by many systems youth. As discussed earlier, the multitude of youths who have negative outcomes is extremely high, and even at twenty-one years of age, without additional supports and services, these youths are unprepared to live on their own (Davis & Barrett, 2000; McMillen & Tucker, 1999). We need only look to the extension of young people’s adolescence and their dependence on their parents as young adults and the increasing need to obtain higher levels of education to access gainful employment opportunities (Boyd & Norris, 1999) to demonstrate how systems youths in particular, with the State as parent, are extremely disadvantaged. In 1999, 67% of unmarried young adults aged twenty to twenty-four in Canada resided with their families of origin (Boyd & Norris, 1999, p.3).

While not an intentional adaptation, responsabilization is a punitive measure by the State rendered technical by its appendages (Garland, 2001). It has been shown that when systems youths leave the system, they leave uneducated, without work skills, social skills and financial security. Rose (1999) states that “those who cannot support

themselves through the job market fall back upon the resources of their families” (p.264). Returning home is not a feasible option for many of the young people who leave the system. In addition, the young person who has lived in the system has not had the same access to opportunities as their non-systems peers. Quite frankly, systems youths are not responsabilized, and the responsibility for any subsequent issues arising from this non-responsibilization must be laid at the feet of those who exist to “help” those in need – the State, its appendages, and the interveners involved in the care of the systems youths.

### *Anti-Citizens and Zones of Exclusion*

In his book *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Nikolas Rose (1999) suggests that an individual’s conduct is the only thing that matters in this political era. Without acknowledging the social aspects of why marginalized populations are in a certain predicament, little attention is given to *why* the individual cannot or will not conduct themselves appropriately due to the lack of interest in the social. It is *how* an individual conducts himself or herself that will be judged by citizens that set out the moral values which inform a community. Essential to this advanced liberal moral community are the values of “hard work, respectability, self-help, self-control and personal responsibility” (Rose, 1999, p. 185).

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released a report that described the envisioned citizenry of Newfoundland. At the time of data collection, this report was the most current available. The report, entitled *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* [NLSSP 1998] described the envisioned citizenry as “a healthy, educated, distinctive, self-reliant and prosperous

people living in vibrant, supportive communities within sustainable regions” (NLSSP 1998, iii). The strategic social plan outlines the values the government wishes to embrace, the values which inform the moral community of Newfoundland and Labrador – “self reliance, collaboration, social justice, equity, fairness”.

Utilizing some of Rose’s concepts, we might understand the system as a “zone of exclusion” wherein exclusionary control strategies are deployed by control agents to deal with perceived “anti-citizens”, or those who cannot or will not conduct themselves appropriately within their communities. Importantly, all anti-citizens are apparently extended an offer of inclusion within the moral community through a moral rearmament of the anti-citizen (Rose, 1999, p. 266). This strategy of moral rearmament takes form as services which allow for the betterment of one’s self. The services which may or may not be extended to systems youths are indicative of an offer of inclusion to morally rearm the systems youth who is perceived to be unable or unwilling to engage in circuits of civility such as work, education and family. The services that systems youths may or may not be offered include financial, residential and educational services. Providing systems youths with services that “assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood” (NCFV, 2002) reflect this idea of a moral rearmament, and the desire to achieve a certain envisioned citizenry.

In advanced liberal regimes, anti-citizens are considered to be rational actors who have actually chosen their poverty, criminality, and to some degree even mental health problems (Rose, 1999). If your neighbours believe this to be true, there is no empathy nor is there any concern as to the underlying reasons for why a young person behaves the way he or she does. However, as stated in the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA, S.C.

2002, c.1), the well-being of young people is to be recognized by all members of society. The developmental challenges and needs of young people are to be acknowledged by society and members are to try and understand the underlying causes of youth crime instead of simply turning away without offering help.

In practice however, the rational actor brought his or her misfortune upon himself or herself. With systems youths, we have established that they are not given enough time or enough resources so that they may leave the system as able individuals who wish to contribute to society and “adhere to the core values of honesty, self-reliance and concern for others” (Rose, 1999, p. 267). It is difficult to adhere to such values when, as we will see in the discussion of the results of this study, you live in abject poverty and cannot care for yourself, you feel that no one cares about your life outcome and also feel that society appears to have given up on you as an entitled individual, instead placing you in a category of troubled or troubling.

Systems youths are not given a chance to heal from their pasts as even if they did attend therapy/counselling, the sad reality for many is that they may only have two years to assist in overcoming their personal issues, which is insufficient. I draw from my own experiences here to say that counselling is a long, drawn out process that takes many years to fully reconcile with a negative life history. As stated above, to imply that a young person actually rationally chooses to be a criminal, mentally ill or poor, suggests that there is a grave misinterpretation of the lives of this specific (and all other) marginalized subpopulation which needs rectification if we are actually going to help these young people, as child protection services were established to do so (Mann, 2000).

*Summary*

Because of the decline of social supports as a consequence of the withdrawal of the welfare state, many families are placed in a position where they cannot provide the basic necessities of life for their children. These families are at-risk for losing their children to the system. Once inside, the systems youth is quickly introduced to the punitive nature of the system – it is not a surrogate parent; it is a cold, unpredictable and punitive system that, as Kendrick (1990) suggested, is more concerned with controlling the young person than with nurturing them.

Discursively constructed as deviants and trouble-makers, deprived and depraved (Havemann 1986 as cited in Mann, 2000) the very real issues that the youth brought into the system are left not dealt with and, due to the nature of the system, these issues are compounded. The systems youth exits the system even more mentally unstable and further excluded from their communities (this does not apply to all systems youths) now that they are unattached to any familial form, without educations, jobs or homes. The reality that the majority of youths enter the system due to neglect is seemingly lost upon the general population, and the fact that the current system further harms these young people appears to be of no concern to citizens in our communities. If the young person, as an anti-citizen, did in fact receive an offer of inclusion (e.g., attendance at an alternative school program or time to find employment while still on assistance) but could not or would not conduct themselves appropriately, they are excluded from their communities, risking permanent sequestration from their community (Rose, 1999). Upon reaching the age of “inevitable disposability” (referring to the age limits for provision of services and programs as described in the provincial or territorial legislation) and without the requisites to engage in these communities that stress the importance of education, hard



work and responsibility, in time it is plausible that a majority of systems youths will likely find their way to the streets or in jails or mental institutions.

The negative outcomes of these individuals are absolutely unnecessary as these young people enter a system that is supposed to care for, protect and supervise, not punish them further. The system must also be made responsible for breaking myths regarding why young people end up in this system that is a zone of exclusion (Rose, 1999). It is not the young person's responsibility to tell the entire community (and country) why they entered the system and that they are not "bad". They have already been betrayed by those who should give unconditional love – their parent(s). It is a grave injustice to systems youths if we continue to allow them to leave the system as anti-citizens who are unable to participate in their communities.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### The Study: Engaging the Voices of Systems Youths

In the discussion below, how young people living in the system, conceptualized here as a zone of exclusion, understand their exclusion from their families, the community and the system itself are examined. Specifically, the significance of family is explored, the punitive and exclusionary nature of the system and the systems youths' experiences within the community are explored and substantiated with interview information obtained from the in-depth interviews carried out with the youth participants.

#### Purpose

This project had two main purposes. The main purpose of the study was to allow for a safe healing space (no judgement or consequences) where systems youths could describe their life histories thereby giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions about the system while also assisting in their healing process. The young people who participated in this research acknowledged the opportunity to have "voice" and valued the interview experience.

The second purpose of this research was to obtain insider information on how youths perceived their experiences within their families, communities and within the system.

#### Methodology

*Researcher as Instrument/Naturalistic Inquiry*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) articulate many characteristics of “operational naturalistic inquiry” arguing that “once one is selected, the others more or less follow” (p.39). This project was approached with the mindset that “realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts” and my position as a former insider within this system enabled me to use my “self” as a “value-based instrument”, to inform the direction of this study (p.40). According to the naturalistic paradigm, it follows then that I utilize my own intuitive or tacit knowledge which “mirror(s) more fairly and accurately the value patterns of the investigator” and I used qualitative instruments to deal with the “multiple realities” of systems youths.

#### *Instrument Design*

A semi-structured, in-depth ethnographic interview instrument was designed to elicit feedback from participants. A variation of “unstructured interviewing” incorporating components of the “oral history” technique was used because it was the most appropriate form of data collection with participants for several reasons. Firstly, as Fontana and Frey (1994, p.368) indicate, “the oral history captures a variety of people’s lives” and “is a way to reach groups and individuals who have been ignored, oppressed, and/or forgotten”. Secondly, this technique was selected because while it allows researchers to reach the “ignored, oppressed and/or forgotten”, it is also concerned with the identity formation of systems youths. Research has indicated that “opportunities to articulate life experiences aid in fostering the movement of adolescents through key developmental tasks, particularly those related to identity” (Chalmers, 1996, p.97). Manser (2004) has also found that sharing life histories are healing to the individual who

has been silenced for fear of embarrassing themselves and their families, and for fear of repercussions by interveners involved in their care.

The semi-structured interview questions designed for this project were open-ended and designed with the best interests of the participants in mind as there was some risk of psychological harm due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked. Also, the questions were designed in a manner that would allow for all participants to respond to most, if not all, of the questions to some degree. The following questions comprised the semi-structured schedule (separately attached as Appendix D):

1. Will you tell me how you come to be involved with the system?
2. What was that like for you – leaving home and coming into the system?
3. What types of services and supports do you receive? How do you get them?
4. What has been the best experience you've had with the system?
5. What has been the worst experience you've had with the system?
6. What image do you think the public (outside of the system) have of you?
7. What image do you think the workers in the system have of you?
8. What advice would you have for young people coming into, or at risk for entering the system?
9. What would you change about the system – what types of things would make it better?
10. What does the future hold for you?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to add or further comments?

Prior to engaging in the actual interview, a short survey was given to the participant to obtain basic demographic information about experiences within the system. The full demographics instrument can be found in Appendix C and the findings from this instrument are presented in Table 1 to follow.

### *Interview Format*

All participants were read and were required to sign the informed consent form (Appendix B) prior to beginning the interview. Before asking open-ended questions, the demographics instrument was given to each participant to complete. After the demographics instrument was completed, and the interviewee was asked if they were comfortable and wished to continue with the interview, the cassette recorder was started and the very first in-depth question was asked. As the interview progressed, all questions were answered by participants, however not necessarily in the order as listed above. Upon completion of the interview, interviewees were debriefed to ensure their well-being and they were given a list of resources and supports for the area (Appendix E).

Interviews were conducted in a variety of environments in June 2003. Upon setting up an interview time, the participant was asked where they would like to conduct the interview. If the interviewee had no issue with others knowing they had participated in the project, the interview was conducted in an office in one of my contact's place of employment. Other locales included personal homes, outdoors in parking lots and public yet private spaces and one interview was conducted in a local pub. The main concern regarding where the interview was conducted was the comfort of the individual being interviewed, and the decision as to where they wanted to conduct the interview was solely at the discretion of the interviewee. This allowed the participant to feel somewhat in control of the interview (thereby keeping the interview less formal and intimidating) and also assisted with the concept of the "systems youth as expert."

The length of the interview process ranged dramatically with some interviews lasting less than thirty (30) minutes and some lasting longer than sixty (60) minutes. This

was a direct reflection of the amount of experience the young person had with the system, how they felt about their families, and their thoughts on their experiences with the system and the public (community). The length of the interview may have also been impacted by the level of comfort the participant felt when discussing the questions as listed above.

### *Sampling*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest that “maximum variation sampling will usually be the sampling mode of choice” for the naturalistic inquirer to “detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour” and to obtain “as much information as possible” (p. 201). The sampling mode selected for this study did not include maximum variation sampling due to issues of time and money. The mode of sampling utilized in this study was both convenient and purposive. I selected Newfoundland as the site of inquiry and thus the site of sampling selection for several reasons. Firstly, it was convenient for me because of the residential and financial resources available to me in this area. It was also convenient in terms of the mode of sampling because of my own prior involvement with the Newfoundland system and my established connections with various youth services employees or local interveners. My contacts assisted me with gaining access to the individuals who participated in this project.

The sampling mode was purposive and reflected the purpose of this study: to allow for a safe healing space where systems youths could describe their life histories thereby giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions about the system while also assisting in their healing process. Secondly, the sampling mode suggested the purpose of obtaining insider information on how youths perceived their experiences within their families, communities and within the system.

A random sampling method of this population was not possible due to issues of time and money, various ethical considerations and the fact that this population is a traditionally hard-to-reach group. The “snowball sampling technique” (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) was utilized to recruit interviewees for this project. I began my recruitment of potential interviewees by calling on my existing contacts within informal networks as well as approaching five other identified community serving agencies that systems youths are likely to frequent. Due to various ethical considerations, I did not seek contact information for participants, but supplied my existing contacts with research participation requests or letters of information (see Appendix A) and requested that they inform other potential participants about the project.

#### *Confidentiality, Anonymity and Privacy*

The particulars of the informal networks called upon to assist in locating potential research participants must remain anonymous to reduce the possibility of research participants being identified. This is also necessary to protect the privacy of the various agencies that were approached for assistance in recruiting subjects for this study.

Approximately one hundred research participation requests were hand delivered to six different youth serving agencies. Fourteen young people contacted me to set up interview appointments. Only nine individuals (two males and seven females) actually completed the interview process.

#### *Biases and Limitations*

As expected from all researchers, we are required to openly discuss our own personal biases as well as sampling biases when carrying out and presenting the results of our research. My personal biases stem from the fact that I am a former systems youth

who shares a similar life history as her participants. My life history and understanding of the issues facing systems youths in Newfoundland were helpful in some regards (informal contacts, designing the research instrument and hearing the voices of my participants clearly); however it was nearly impossible to remain detached from the issues of each individual interviewed. Unable to remain detached from the participant, females in particular, had a couple of implications for me as the researcher. I was only able to conduct two interviews per day as it was a very personal experience that “brought me back” to a time where I was in a similar position as these youths and this was difficult emotionally. Secondly was the fact that I could not do anything personally to alleviate any of the detriment experienced by my participants and this was upsetting and unnerving.

Returning to biases, another stems from the fact that this research is explicitly youth focused, engaging only the voices of current and former systems youths. No interveners were asked to participate in this study. The fact that this study only gathered information from systems youths limits the scope of our understanding of how the system operates as a zone of exclusion (or not) from the perspectives of interveners. Having had more time and resources, interveners would have been interviewed and this would have credited much valuable information to the project.

The biases encountered when completing this research were anticipated given the knowledge that the sample size would be small and the fact that systems youths are an extremely hard-to-reach population (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Moreover, this research did not generate, nor was it ever intended to generate, a representative sample of the experiences of all systems youths in Newfoundland. Additionally, the results from this



small project were never intended to be generalized to the experiences of the entire population of Canadian systems youths.

A limitation of this study concerns the validity of the data. The data was not coded using a computer software program, nor were my interpretations of the data cross referenced with an outsider's interpretations.

*Analytic Strategy:*

Interview data were subjected to thematic analysis using Strauss' (1987) guidelines for qualitative data analysis. Themes were identified using the research question as a guide (experiences within families, the community and the system) and then organized using a basic file card system, which were then placed into separate documents (computer files) and quotes from participants that reflected each theme were used in the results section to appropriately highlight important data.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

#### Sample Demographics

A total of nine (n=9) youth participated in this study, with two males and seven females completing the interview process. Five other females expressed interest in participating in the study but for various reasons (e.g., baby was sick, no babysitter, changed mind) these young women did not complete an interview.

The average age of the participants was 19.9 years, with 18 years of age being the youngest and 26 years of age being the oldest. The average age at entry was 13 years; however, the age at entry is slightly skewed due to the youngest participant entering when s/he was 5 years old and the oldest participant entering when s/he was 17 years old.

Characteristics and status of the nine participants are summarized in Table 1 below. To ensure anonymity, participants are referred to throughout the study using coded initials (which are the initials of various musical artists). Additionally, in order to protect the privacy of the two male participants in this study, gender was not included in the table summary.

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of study participants

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>FD</b>	<b>VJ</b>	<b>MF</b>	<b>LK</b>	<b>SM</b>	<b>VW</b>	<b>JJ</b>	<b>FA</b>	<b>MS</b>
<b>Age</b>	18	18	25	18	19	19	18	26	18
<b>Age at Entry</b>	5	17	14	12	12	16	12	14	15
<b>No. of Workers</b>	100	8	2	6	>10	2	7	4	5
<b>No. of Systems Placements</b>	40	1	4	20	>10	>5	5	11	>15
<b>School Status</b>	FT High School	FT High School	College Graduate	No	No	No	FT High School	No	PT High School
<b>Work Status</b>	No	No	FT	No	No	No	No	FT	No
<b>Youth Justice Placement</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Treatment Placement</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Child Welfare Placement</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Current Financial Stability</b>	Not Well	Okay	Okay	Not Well	Okay	Not Well	Not Well	Okay	Okay
<b>Has Used Food Banks</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Is Using Food Banks</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Access to Safe/Stable Housing while in System</b>	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Currently in Unsafe Housing</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Current Placement Type</b>	Indep Living	Indep Living	On Own	Indep Living	Indep Living	On Own	Indep Living	On Own	Indep Living
<b>Mental Health Status</b>	Okay	Not Well	Okay	Okay	Okay	Okay	Okay	Very Well	Okay

The following represents a summary and discussion of the themes covered in the interviews with the nine systems youth participants, focusing on the voices of the participants as key sources of data. Firstly, participants' experiences with their families and a brief overview of the household and parental characteristics are presented; next these young persons' experiences with the system and within their communities as systems youth are explored.

Experiences Within the Family

The findings in this small study indicated that, despite any community view of their families as irresponsible in these times of responsabilization, troubling to family values campaigners promoting the normative familial form or placing a strain on scarce community resources that are assist with familial matters, or most importantly, the fact that their families maltreated or neglected them, it appears that systems youths are still very much attached to their parents and siblings.

Once the interviewing process began, and the question of “Will you tell me how you came to be involved with the system?” was asked, it was surprising that participants did not immediately indicate the presence of any of the aforementioned parental and household issues. For example, when one participant (“MF”) was asked if there was any sort of maltreatment or neglect in the family, s/he had nothing to say about alcohol, abuse or mental illness immediately, but later in the interview stated that:

*My mother had her first mental breakdown when I was six years old and I walked on eggshells my whole life. Dad drank a lot and was very strict but kinda mentally fucking retarded too (laughs).*

Neglecting to mention negative familial functioning issues and household characteristics may suggest that these young people thought that these issues were difficult to acknowledge. It may also suggest that they did not view these characteristics as being problematic enough to warrant discussion. The negativity surrounding them as children growing up in these environments may have amounted to normalcy for them and, as such, drinking and drug use, for example, were non-issues for them personally. While they may know that the majority of families do not have drug or alcohol abusing parent(s), their personal experiences with the matter may not have been significant

enough for them to associate coming into care with that household characteristics or functioning issue specifically.

We could also argue that the reason why participants did not identify troubling characteristics as a reason for coming into the system is that young people do not wish to speak out or about their familial problems. A young person may not wish to have their peers know about their alcoholic mother or drug-abusing father. These are the secrets that are to be kept amongst family and never shared with the outside community.

Upon recognizing that the first question of “How did you come into care?” was not eliciting significant feedback, I decided to share with some of the participants a little about the reasons why I came into the system at fifteen years of age. I then followed up my statement by asking the individual “did you experience any of those things?” Responses elicited thereafter were noticeably different in that the participants were more open to discussing the “secrets” mentioned a moment ago since I, too, had my own experiences with the types of issues that brought them into the system. It occurred to me that I was accepted as an insider and that the young people thought that I just “knew” what it was like to grow up in such an environment.

While all of the interviewees had experienced some form of maltreatment and/or neglect, when asked what advice they would give young people in the system or those at risk of entering the system, most responses were directly associated with the significance of the familial bond – many were quite adamant about trying to work it out with their families, suggesting that the system is the last resort. Interviewees were very persistent the participants as follows:

*(K)eep in contact with them. I mean blood is blood. Friends come*

*and go. But your family is who they are.*

Participant "AM"

*(Your) (f)amily's all you got. Whether you likes it or not, they're all you got. They may not be the best but they are your family. Stick by your family...*

Participant "JJ"

*(F)amily is everything, family's all that you really got when it comes down to it...*

Participant "LK"

*You needs your parents...I learned the hard way, I never kept in touch. And now I just got nobody to turn back to.*

Participant "FD"

We can infer from the above that these young people still had very strong emotional ties to their parent(s) despite any maltreatment and/or neglect. There is a need, or at least a sense that they should, protect the family and apparently some sort of inherent bond to the parent(s), who did not provide a safe and nurturing environment for them as children and adolescents. As a former insider, I can also attest to feelings that may appear to be absurd to the outsider. Regardless of the frequency and severity of maltreatment and/or neglect experienced, the need to protect the family is very real.

Not every participant shared these feelings, however. One particular interviewee was very angry about her/his situation and it was very blatant that s/he wanted no further contact with family. As "VJ" expressed:

*One night, Dad got loaded drunk and I was like that's it, I'm gone. Ever since then, like, I don't know, if I woke up tomorrow and saw my dad getting shot I wouldn't care.*

It also appears that systems youths believe that all other options should be exhausted before a young person enters the system. When asked what advice they would give to youths at-risk of entering the system or those in the system, many participants expressed the needs to try and work it out at home. One participant “SM” stated that youths should *“Try to work it out at home if they can, if it doesn’t work, leave”*. Another interviewee, “MS” was adamant about staying at home and working it out saying *“Oh God. If you can stay home and you can live with your parents – do it.”*

In sum, it is apparent that the family still plays a huge part in the young person’s life, although they may not be attached to their families and may not have contact with them, as was the case for several of the interviewees for this project.

#### Experiences Within the Community

As discussed earlier in the literature review, constructs of systems youths posit them as trouble-makers, deviants and dangerous which directly affects their moral status as citizens within their communities and how they are treated as human beings. When asked about the kind of images the community may have of them as systems youths, nearly all participants replied with “troublemakers” or “bad”. For example, “JJ” expressed the systems youths as troublemakers notion by community members:

*People think we’re crazy or we’re gonna rob ya, or we’re gonna do something to ya, you know? You’re like, no man, I’d never ever go rob off anybody, but that’s just the way they think. Robbing everything, troublemakers, we’re no good. We don’t have high enough standards for everybody else*

Another participant, “LK” stated that the words foster care automatically conjures up images of troubled and troubling young people: *“People think that people who have been*

*through foster care are nothing but trouble. . . : it's like we got trouble branded on our foreheads". And as "FD" suggests:*

*You had to be in trouble at some time in your life to get you taken away from your parents. That's the way they looks at it. Which is not always the case, it's your family that makes you get taken away. How is it my choice to be taken away from my family. . . ?*

These young people, as stated earlier, are apparently feared as they are unattached to any familial form, nor do they fit in with the norm when comparing them to their peers. There is a blatant or assumed immorality that is associated with excluded subpopulations (Schissel, 1998, p. 31), in this case, poor youth without families who depend on the system for inadequate supports and programs.

Interviewees identified areas of concern within their communities where the negative stereotyping was extremely problematic – namely, finding a place to live, attending school, and the police. The perceptions of systems youths as outcasts, troubled and troubling, is expressed through the following interview excerpt:

*(T)hey think (we're) little shit disturbers. Like it's really hard. Like Gracie and I have been looking at a few houses and it's hard. But as soon as you mention the words New Beginnings program, they kind of like, you know, we're not gonna rent to you because we're afraid our house is gonna get beat up and you're gonna have parties and wreck everything and you're just basically gonna be little shit disturbers. So it's really hard to find an apartment. . . (I)t's really hard school wise. Like the principals and stuff? Like they know you're in youth services and . . . they know that you're an emancipated youth and they know that you're on your own. They kind of look at you as if you're gonna cause trouble for school and cause trouble for them? Like I've had a lot of altercations with a lot of teachers looking down at me for no reason?*

Participant "MS"

In reference to landlords, another participant (VW) replied:



*Well, a lot of landlords actually do not, like some landlords, I can't say a lot of them, but some landlords know of the program and do not accept people from the program because they've had bad experiences with them before. say people damaging their property and getting evicted, and partying.*

During one interview, when asked if they had ever experienced any attitude from students and teachers, participant "SM" replied, "*Yah. Big time. Cause they think you're bad, so, you know what I mean? If you're in a group home, you got to be bad.*"

Activities of the police also attest to the feelings and insights of systems youths as being excluded from their communities. Given the fact that the police serve and protect the public, they are always watching for illegal activities, but they also keep a close eye on those individuals they have had contact with before or their associates. As systems youths bear the label of troubled and troubling, the police are especially cognizant of their whereabouts, and according to some of the participants in this study, make a point of driving by places where these young people are likely to frequent. Conducting one interview on a curb, a police cruiser passed by us and slowed down, which may have had to do with the fact that I was interviewing someone they had in their custody just a day earlier. As one participant stated:

*(I)if you go outside on the step to have a cigarette and a cop drives by, they're looking at the building, that's because some of the people that do come in are in trouble with the law and that gives them pretty much a stereotypical view of the young people – they're always out drinking, they're partying, they're out breaking stuff and vandalizing.*

Participant "SM"

Another interviewee, Participant "VW" talked about the difficulties in finding housing and the trouble with police, stating that, "*The . . . cops look at us and say,*

*you know, we gotta watch out for this crowd.*” Participant “FD” had a direct experience with the police that reflected how the police stereotyped s/he as a result of where they had come from, in terms of his or her family. As they stated:

*I'm after having police stop me . . . he goes, your trouble. I says, why? Because my family's been locked up and that, that means I'm trouble? It got nothing to do with me what other people does. He goes, I'll be watching you, he says. You're nothing but trouble.*

It is apparent that young people living in the system are looked at differently than their non-systems peers. They believe they are looked down upon by people in authority (landlords, principals and teachers and the police) and stereotypes of them as being troubled and troubling impact and disrupt their lives. As stated above, landlords do not want system youths in their apartments for fear of wrecking the place and the police slow down and keep an eye out for known systems youths and, by default, their associates too. Principals and teachers also view systems youths with suspicion.

We can infer from the above that the troubling characteristics associated with systems youths impacts their lives in extremely important ways – a place to live, going to school and dealing with the police. These experiences do little to reinforce the positive aspects of the individual's life experiences and serve as a constant reminder that they are viewed as atypical within their communities. Without a place to live, they cannot obtain a semblance of a normal life – they cannot receive services and supports nor can they obtain a job without an address. Without an education, which is extremely important today with so many young people attending colleges and universities to obtain higher-paying positions in the work force, systems youths are placed in a very difficult predicament. If teachers and principals are singling out systems youths as troublemakers, such behaviour may actually serve as a deterrent for attending school and may partially

account for the high levels of truancy and high rates of dropping out of school amongst systems youths.

### Experiences Within the System

Young people often enter the system during a very difficult period of their lives – adolescence. While trying to deal with life histories of trauma, psychiatric or psychological issues and attempting to make some sense out of broken and fragmented realities, they are also trying to simply grow up (Kools, 1997; Salah-Din & Bollman, 1994). Adolescence, being the most confusing and difficult period of transition for all young people (Kools, 1997), is especially difficult for those living in the system. It appears from this research at least that the young people interviewed felt that emotionally and physically, they are treated by some interveners<sup>v</sup> without due regard to their well-being, disregarding the fact that these young people have a multitude of “non-adolescent”<sup>vi</sup> issues to contend with. Some of the findings in this small study were disturbing, but as a former insider, unsurprising.

Intent on controlling the conduct of the systems youths, the behaviors for which they are punished are simply unjustifiable and again speak to their moral worth as individuals in our society. As systems youths, they are seen as “nobody’s children” (Kendrick, 1990) and “disposable children” (Golden, 1997), it is necessary to understand why these young people are treated harshly without apparent cause for concern in terms of their well-being. Earlier, findings from Boyd and Norris (1999) indicated that now, more than ever, young adults are returning to their families once they receive their educations. We can logically infer that if parents are taking their adult children back into their homes, it is highly unlikely that they would have made them leave home as young

adolescents for behaviors such as yelling, crying or even running away. In the system, instead of investigating why the young person is yelling, crying or running away, they are punished for behaving in these ways and pushed further into the zone of exclusion (Lyons & Schaefer, 2000, p.68).

In terms of the punitive nature of the system, two types of punishment were revealed by engaging with the young people through in-depth interviews. One type of punishment might be conceptualized as being a result of legislation and the resultant policies and procedures that are derived from what was described above as contradictory and counterproductive legislation. This type of punishment ensures that the youth displaying behaviours that may be misconstrued as disrespectful or in compliant (such as running away) are met with a heavy hand, and are pushed further into the zone of exclusion. A young person who runs from a family foster home will likely be placed in a more restrictive environment once they are caught and remanded back into the custody of the state (Lyons & Schaefer, 2000, p.68). One participant's experiences with the system speaks directly to this type of punishment. Having stated that they started out in family foster care, when asked what happened next, participant "FD" replied:

*I ended up in group homes, then in the group homes came trouble and I got locked up and I ended up in (secure custody) and then I ended up in open custody.*

In this study, it was made very clear by the participants that their experiences in the system were punitive, perplexing and difficult to justify. One young woman, placed in a group home, shared her experiences with me, experiences that one would never expect to happen in the home of non-system peers:

*Like if you did anything wrong, you were barred up there (group home) for two weeks. All kinds of things get you there*

*(kept in the group home, without privileges). Running away, cursing would be another one. . . a minimum of a week to two weeks. I ran away and I got two weeks I think it was. All day long I was up in that room. Your friends aren't allowed to see you. They makes you do home schooling, so you can just imagine.*

Participant "SM"

Even more disturbing, as a researcher who had never experienced a group home placement, was the story told by one young woman (participant "JJ") who had just been placed in the group home and was experiencing the initial trauma of being separated from her family and all she ever knew:

*The second day I was there, I got really upset. You're only allowed to have one incoming call and one outgoing call and you had ten minutes on the phone for each one. I called my mom and I was so upset on the phone with my mom, I was bawling. And there was a beep and I never answered it and I lost my privileges for a week because of that. Cause I didn't tell them there was a beep and I lost my privileges. It was the head social worker there and I didn't answer it. I was like, you're fucking cracked. Look at me here, I'm a state, you know and can you have some kind of sympathy for me? But they didn't, and I was like I didn't care, I'll remember that. You can go to fuck. That's the way I still am.*

When another participant was asked about their life history in the system, they shared a story that speaks to another type of punishment – one that does not have its roots in legislated or mandated policies or practices but could be a response from one particular intervener. The interviewee stated that once they went into open custody, they got kicked out of there,

*Just because I wouldn't turn out my light actually. They were having a lot of problems, they were like sitting on people to restrain them who wouldn't go to bed. It was like really loud there, and I was like, I'm not fucking turning off my light, I'm being good, I'm not doing anything, I'm reading. They were like, I'm going to call and get you taken out of here. I'm like I don't fucking care.*

Participant "FA"

Feedback elicited from the interviewees about how workers/interveners treated them suggests that their punitive treatment, treatment one cannot imagine a non-systems peer experiencing stems from the fact that interveners themselves may share the knowledge that these young people *can* be treated harshly and punished unfairly. This includes interveners pushing youths from placement to placement without any questioning as to why they were moved. Many of these young people, those in this study specifically, really did not have anyone to turn to for help in such situations, another indication of the exclusion that they felt as a systems youth. Indeed, these young people appear to be pawns in a chess game that can be moved and tossed about without regard to their well-being. As indicated in the above quotation, a young person was threatened with physical relocation because she refused to turn out her light because she was reading. Of course all youth require rules, but most young people are not kicked out if they refuse to turn off their light, or lose all their privileges because they did not take an important call.

Experiences with interveners who make many decisions regarding the services and supports youths receive frequently appear to be negative interactions that leave the young person feeling helpless and without control over their lives. On the other hand, having little or infrequent contact with interveners was also troubling and emotionally difficult for the young person to deal with because, as they suggested, it made them feel unimportant as individuals. For example, Participant “SM” stated that s/he “*couldn’t get a hold of (my) social workers. It could be weeks and weeks. Their case load was too big for you. . .*” Participant “VW” echoed these sentiments of feeling unimportant to those involved with her/his care, suggesting that systems youths were viewed as rejects in the system: “*A lot of people won’t say it, but you always do, its always in the back of your*

*head. The feeling that, like, I feel like a reject*". Another statement made by one of the participants (FD) in this study spoke volumes to the feelings of exclusion by systems youths: *"I'd say between social workers, police and probation officers, no one gives a shit about kids"*.

This contradictory relationship that exists between youth and intervener is a difficult one to assess and understand. It may be conceptualized as being mainly one-sided, that is, the intervener has much more power and control over the life of the systems youth. Within a matter of minutes and a phone call a young person's life can be turned upside down and they are throwing their clothes in a garbage bag getting ready to be shipped off to their next placement. Not all individuals have bad experiences with interveners, but more often than not, they have had some negative experiences with those who occupy the space conceptualized in this thesis as a "zone of exclusion."

To further understand the systems domain as a zone of exclusion, we merely have to look at its composition – it consists of group homes, treatment facilities, youth custodial centres and other placement types wherein we can locate tens of thousands of children and young people who live daily without consistency, few role models, interveners that constantly change and few resources to live adequately independently<sup>vii</sup>. By taking a brief glimpse at the expectations placed on youths within the system, the resources available to them and the time constraints on their abilities to become full-fledged citizens within their communities, the counterproductive nature of the system is revealed. Instead of actually making a successful transition into healthy and productive adults, many young people (existing anti-citizens) find themselves being pushed further into the system and become "non-citizens" because they have repeatedly shown to

interveners (or control agents) that they are unable or unwilling to conduct themselves appropriately within their communities.

Many of the research participants in this study expressed how the system placed unrealistic expectations on them (through legislated governing and policies specific to various youth serving agencies) and how they could not meet these expectations. Stated earlier, the CYFSA 2001 indicates that if a young person came into the system before the age of sixteen years, they *may* receive supports and services until the age of twenty-one years. However, if a young person is sixteen years of age and under the age of eighteen years, they are only entitled to provisions from the State until their eighteenth birthday. One participant, “VJ”, who came into the system after the age of sixteen stated quite clearly that the amount of time allowed in the system *“ain’t worth shit. Six months ain’t worth shit if that’s all you can stay on it”<sup>viii</sup>. Everyone should get the same privileges.”* Another individual echoed these sentiments by referencing the very real denial of the State (through community based programs) to acknowledge the financial and social supports required by systems youths to succeed in their transition to adulthood. “FD” blatantly stated that *“if you get in at the age of sixteen, you’re only allowed to stay in for two years, it’s pointless. It’s not gonna do shit for ya.”*

We must ask ourselves what a young person who has experienced maltreatment or neglect and tremendous disruption in their lives can possibly hope to attain within two years of support, especially with less than adequate support. Some participants in this study indicated that they lived on “kiddie welfare” and upon exiting this system at age eighteen years or twenty-one years, they would be moving on to “HRE” (Human Resources and Employment) or welfare. Living on “kiddie welfare”, as Participant “MS”



shared, amounted to being unable “to get a hair cut, ‘cause [I] don’t have any money.”

Another individual shared their experiences with respect to the resources they were receiving, vehemently stating that the supports provided were inadequate:

*Wha? Forty dollars every two weeks? What (are) you supposed to get out of forty dollars every two weeks? They pays your rent and gives you forty dollars every two weeks? . . . (for) food, clothes, hygiene. What the frig you supposed to get out of forty dollars?*

Participant “FD”

One can certainly empathize with this young person. To be expected to survive on forty dollars every two weeks to purchase food, toiletries and other items is unrealistic. The system does seem to set these young people up for failure and, albeit unintentionally, places them in a position where their only rational choice for survival includes such things as drug dealing and prostitution, which were mentioned during several interviews conducted for this research.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis related research engaged with only nine young people, and therefore it is not possible to state that the experiences described herein are exactly the same as the experiences of their systems peers. However as indicated in the literature review, the experiences shared within this research project are somewhat reflective of the experiences shared by their systems peers. In this thesis I have argued that the system houses tens of thousands of children and youth who have effectively been brought up to be anti-citizens. They are assumed to have refused the morality informing the community that they live in – namely, hard work, respectability, self-help, self-control and personal responsibility according to Rose (1999). With its cuts in social spending, downloading onto the voluntary sector via partnerships and the move away from social responsibility for the outcome of Canadian citizens, the State is still responsible for the care of children and youth who are neglected, maltreated and/or abandoned or orphaned. The number of children and youth entering the system continues to rise. It has also been argued herein that the children and young people entering the system have, or may have, mental health or behavioural problems, which are exacerbated upon entering the system.

Known as “nobody’s children” and “disposable children”, these young people are feared within our society because they present as troubled and troubling. The response by the community to these young people as perceived anti-citizens is less than conducive to fostering positive outcomes and is sometimes blatantly punitive toward the individual young person. Within their communities they are feared, and subjected to treatment their non-systems peers are not such as discrimination by landlords, teachers and principals

and the police. The system of supports and services that is in place to assist these individuals is inadequate and does not begin to address the monetary nor social or psychosocial needs of the young people it is supposed to assist in their transition to adulthood. From this research, it appears to be next to impossible for the systems youth to attain the requisites necessary to engage in their moral communities given the mere few years they have to attain a high school education, work skills, amend ties with their families and/or participate in community activities.

Without these requisites, it proves a great feat to overcome to be successful in attaching yourself to the moral community in which you live. Maintaining an existence outside of the zone of exclusion is hard to do with a history of being troubled and troubling to your community. It is possible however, as seen with a few of the individuals who were interviewed for this study. Some participants felt they were now integrated into their communities because they held jobs and were doing okay financially, but these participants could definitely recall a time in their life when they did not feel so integrated, but instead felt that they were indeed outcast and excluded from their families, the community and the system itself.

#### *Future Study Needs*

The three main areas of inquiry in this study – experiences of system youths with regards to their families, the community and the system must be examined from a more holistic view. This could be done through interviewing interveners also as their perspectives and experiences would allow for a more comprehensive study, and would also allow us more insight into the lives and experiences of systems youths. Such a study

may very well implicate the positive aspects of the system as identified by systems youths and might be explored and expanded upon. Discursive constructs of system youths as troubled and troubling might be examined and challenged while at the same time exploring the argument that the system perpetuates myths of delinquency and troubled youth in that they do not provide them with the appropriate resources and supports to become part of the engaged citizenry.

It is necessary, given the State's inability to be guarantor of social security and progress to its citizens that we, as a society, become and remain self-reliant and sufficient. To those of us who cannot however, such as the systems youths population, we must empathize with the plight that these young people experience and assist them in becoming so-called citizens through the implementation of policies and programs that actually help the young person become engaged, self sufficient and independent. Programs that would allow for this to happen include those that are realistic and logical. We cannot expect, as in the case in Newfoundland, a sixteen year old young person with a grade nine education to be prepared for college within two years. It is impossible. This young person would be, without the assistance of the State for at least another three to four years, come to be confined to what we might refer to as other zones of exclusion – the adult welfare system, prison or homelessness.

### *Recommendations*

Some recommendations for policy and practice include:

1. Adequate monetary supports to assist the young person in his or her daily living expenses. While five out of the nine participants said that they were doing okay financially, many made reference to the lack of financial support they were receiving from the system.

2. Ensuring that every systems youth has access to safe and stable housing.
3. Assisting with educational programs, and offering alternative schooling.
4. Assisting with employment searches and job placements.
5. Rehabilitation programs – drug and alcohol programs were sparse and there was a waiting list to receive services outside of the province.
6. Availability of psychological and psychiatric services if needed or required.
7. Programs advocating familial contact (if desired by the young person).
8. Youth-driven and youth-run support groups. Many young people expressed a desire to be a part of a group where they could express their feelings and thoughts about being in care.
9. Giving young people the ability to change social workers and other interveners involved in their care without judgement and/or scrutiny if they feel that their needs are not being met.
10. Ensuring that there are only interveners who are qualified (including those who have lived in the system and have insider status) and committed to their obligations to systems youths. This may be done through an annual performance exam, and a brief consultation with the intervener by managers in the system.
11. Examining the stigma attached to systems youths and beginning a public campaign to dispel myths surrounding the youth in care population.
12. Put in place advisory committees of young people which system interveners are required to consult with regarding programming and their effectiveness.
13. Concrete policies limiting powers of interveners to move youths from one placement to another without a thorough investigation as to why they are being moved.

The above recommendations were based on the issues that came up most frequently during the interviews. Granted, these are only a few recommendations that would see systems youths fare better in our society. Recognizing the current contradictory and punitive legislation and policies is a start and engaging the voices of young people must be a major component of any future studies and policy making decisions.

### *Conclusion*

Given that there are a hundred thousand children and young people in the system as I write this, we must show these young people that they are valued and worth something morally to our society and that they are not “nobody’s children” and

“disposable children”. They must be given the opportunity to challenge the myths that posit them as deviant, deficient and defiant. Sufficient resources and an appropriate amount of time to secure their ties with the community through obtaining an education, as well as work and social skills must be available. We should also afford them the opportunity to reconcile their differences with their families if they so desire, which is especially important in our current sociopolitical era wherein familial attachment is almost a necessity of young adulthood. Activities of police and school personnel and the consequent profiling of systems youths as problematic should be examined.

Unless we do these things, the exclusionary nature of the system will remain the same for those unfortunate enough to have to enter it. Myths suggesting that these children and youths are troubled and troubling will remain, and they will feel and be excluded from their communities because they are different from their non-systems peers. For many of the youths who will leave the system, a zone of exclusion, they will graduate onto other zones of exclusion such as the adult welfare system, the justice system or mental health system. We must really acknowledge the voices of young people in the system and work with them if we are to make the system a more appropriate place for rearing young people. Indeed, they are entitled to be heard under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and their well-being supposedly looked after by the YCJA (2002). Only after we have listened to the young people can the punitive and exclusionary nature of what has been conceptualized here as a zone of exclusion be revealed, explored and examined and changed.

APPENDIX A  
Research Participation Request (Letter of Information)



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AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE:  
ENGAGING THE VOICES OF YOUTHS

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**LETTER OF INFORMATION**

## **Who and Why?**

I am a former youth in care from Newfoundland undertaking a research study to complete my master's degree at the University of Windsor. I am interested in "engaging with the experts", or those people who have experienced being "in care" or "the system" and listening to their experiences with the system.

People over the age of eighteen (18) who are in and from the system, including people who have experienced youth correctional and/or mental health facilities, are invited to participate in this study.

Youth in and from the system are often not consulted about their experiences and their concerns. The lack of youth voice has an impact on what the system looks like in terms what it does and does not do to help youth.

Participants in this study will have an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns about the system and give concrete feedback about their experiences with their families, communities and the system.

## **Are you interested?**

To voluntarily participate in this research, you must be 18 or older and have been involved with the system as a foster child, youth in care or youth in custody.

If you decide to voluntarily participate, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey and engage in a face-to-face interview (60 minutes). The interview is scheduled and will be conducted at a time and place of your choosing and will be audio-taped with your permission.

## **What about potential risks or discomforts?**

There is a possibility that you may experience some emotional discomfort or upset during the interview because of the sensitive nature of the questions guiding this research project. For example, some questions will explore your feelings about your family (being separated) and your feelings on how you are treated within and/or viewed by your community.

Some people have found that talking about these experiences, especially with people who have had similar experiences or understand where they are coming from, helps them understand their experiences in ways that foster emotional healing.

At the end of the interview we will undergo a debriefing. I will ask you how the interview was for you, address any concerns that you might have and provide you with a list of contact information for residential and social supports, including emergency services available in Newfoundland.



### **Confidentiality**

The cassette tape of our interview will be kept in a locked and secure place, accessible only to me. To reduce the risk that your interview information (say the name of an agency that you dealt with) will become associated with you, all personal identifying information will be removed and replaced with false names during the coding of the interview transcript.

Your un-coded transcript will be kept in a separate secure location which is accessible only to me.

After I have completed the transcriptions, the cassette tapes will be destroyed. Upon completion of this study, all identifying information will be destroyed. The coded information will remain on file for twenty years and with your permission, may be used for subsequent research purposes.

You can at any time ask to review the interview tapes or the transcriptions of your interview information.

### **What rights do you have?**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may remove your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. I also have the right to withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

### **Is there payment for participation?**

There is no payment for participating in this research. I will be writing a summary report for you at the end of the study.

### **When are the interviews?**

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me as soon as possible by phone or email. Interviews must be completed before June 23, 2003.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Yolanda Lambe (Student Investigator)  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
University of Windsor  
401 Sunset Ave. Windsor, ON N9B 3P4  
Email: [lambe@uwindsor.ca](mailto:lambe@uwindsor.ca)  
Telephone: 709-754-5489

Dr. Alan Sears (Student Supervisor)  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology

University of Windsor  
Email: [asears@uwindsor.ca](mailto:asears@uwindsor.ca)  
Telephone: 519-253-3000 x.3494/3723

If you call and I am unavailable, please leave a message with only your first name, contact number or email address. I will be in touch within a day or two of receiving your call or email. Collect calls are encouraged and will be accepted.

This research study has been reviewed by the University of Windsor Ethics Review Board. If you have any questions about this research, or your rights as a research participant, please contact:  
Research Ethics Coordinator  
University of Windsor  
519-253-3000 x.3916  
[ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH :  
ENGAGING THE VOICES OF YOUTHS**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Yolanda Lambe, a graduate student from the University of Windsor's Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The findings of this research study will be used to contribute to a Master's level thesis project. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact:

Yolanda Lambe  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Windsor  
401 Sunset Ave. Windsor, ON N9B 3P4  
Email: [lambe@uwindsor.ca](mailto:lambe@uwindsor.ca) (checked several times daily)  
Phone: 709-754-5489 (Newfoundland; valid until June 23, 2003).  
519-944-0460 (Windsor home telephone number)

**NOTE:** If you call and I am unavailable, please leave a message with ONLY your first name and a contact number or email address. I will be in touch within a day or two of receiving your call or email. Collect calls are encouraged and will be accepted.

If you would like to speak to the student supervisor of this research study, please contact:

Dr. Alan Sears  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Windsor  
401 Sunset Ave. Windsor, ON N9B 3P4  
Email: [asears@uwindsor.ca](mailto:asears@uwindsor.ca)  
Telephone: 519-253-3000 x.3494 or x.3723

**INFORMATION ON THE STUDY "ENGAGING THE VOICES OF YOUTHS":**

***PURPOSE OF THE STUDY***

Young people who become separated from their families and enter the "system" (juvenile justice, foster care, mental health, youth services) are confronted with many personal, social and economic challenges. These youths are rarely consulted about their experiences however and as a result, these challenges have not been adequately addressed

from the point of view of those who are impacted most – the young people themselves. The main purpose of this project therefore is to gain insight into the experiences of young people who have become separated from their families and have been involved with the “system”.

#### *WHAT IS REQUIRED OF PARTICIPANTS?*

I will conduct a one (1) hour interview, conducted at a location and time of your choosing. Please note however that **interviews must be completed before June 23, 2003**. I will also ask that you complete a brief questionnaire. Your interview will be cassette taped upon obtaining your permission to do so. The interview and the questionnaire are the only processes you will undergo in this research. Your data will be used towards Master’s thesis work, and may be used for subsequent research. You may at any time make me aware that you do not want your information used for the purposes of this specific research or any future research projects.

#### *ARE THERE ANY POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?*

There is a possibility that you may experience some emotional upset or discomfort during the interview because of the sensitive nature of the questions guiding this research project. As a participant in this study, you have the right to refuse to answer any question that may be asked of you and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. At the end of the interview, whether we have addressed all of the research questions or not, we will undergo a debriefing in which I will ask you how the interview was, address any concerns that you might have and provide you with a list of contact information for financial, social and personal services and supports, including emergency services, that are available in Newfoundland. There is also a possibility, although highly unlikely, that you would lose some privacy if the responses in your interview were to somehow become associated with you.

#### *POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY*

This project is concerned only with the experiences of those individuals who have experienced separation from their families and who have entered into the system. If you decide to voluntarily participate in this study, you will have an opportunity to voice your opinions, concerns and issues with the way the system operates and whether or not you think it needs to be changed in some ways. The interview questions are also designed to explore your feelings on being separated from your family and your feelings on how you are treated within or viewed by your community. Some people have found that talking about these experiences, especially with people who have had similar experiences or understand where they are coming from, assists them in making sense of their experiences in ways that help them heal emotionally. I expect that the results of this study will also assist those who are interested in improving the lives of youths living in the system. It is hoped that the results of this study will

stimulate further debate about the necessity and importance of engaging with youth “experts” in the system.

### *CONFIDENTIALITY*

The cassette tape of our interview will be kept in a locked and secure place, accessible only to me. To reduce the risk that your interview information (names of towns and social workers for example) will become associated with you, all personal identifying information will be removed and replaced with false names during the coding of the interview transcript. Your un-coded transcript (the transcript with identifying information) will be kept in a separate secure location which is accessible only to me. After I have completed the transcriptions, the cassette tapes will be destroyed. Upon completion of this study, all identifying information will be destroyed. You can at any time ask to review the interview tapes or the transcriptions of your interview information. Any personal information that is obtained in connection with this study will not be disclosed to anyone without first obtaining your written permission to do so.

### *IS THERE PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATING?*

There is no payment for participation in this research study. However, you will be asked if you wish to receive a summary of the research findings when they become available. If you indicate that you wish to be informed of the results, I will require your email or postal address. Upon distributing the results of this study to you, your contact information will be deleted from research records.

### *RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS*

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw your consent at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

### *ETHICS REVIEW*

This study has been reviewed by the University of Windsor Ethics Review Board. If you have questions regarding this study, or your rights as a research subject, please contact the:

Research Ethics Coordinator  
University of Windsor  
519-253-3000 x.3916

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*SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE*

I understand the information provided for the study "**Engaging the Voices of Youth**" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

**Name of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

In my judgment, the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this research study.

**Signature of Investigator** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX C  
Demographics Instrument

ENGAGING THE VOICES OF YOUTHS  
SURVEY

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE KEPT AND REPORTED IN A MANNER WHICH PREVENTS IDENTIFICATION.

1. Are you male or female? (m or f) \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How old were you when you came into the system? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many social workers and/or probation officers have you had while in the system? (an approximate number is okay too) # \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many placements did you experience while in the system? (an approximate number is okay too) # \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you currently attending school?
  - a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_ (if YES, please answer 8b&8c)
  - b. Are you attending part-time or full-time or complete? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. What type of school do you attend?
    - i. High school \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. High school equivalency courses \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. College or trade school \_\_\_\_\_
    - iv. University \_\_\_\_\_
    - v. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you currently employed?
  - a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_ (if Yes, please answer 9b)
  - b. Are you employed part-time or full-time? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What types of placements did you experience while in the system? Please select all those that apply:
  - a. Custodial Placement \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Treatment Placement \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Child Welfare Placement \_\_\_\_\_
9. How well would you say you are doing financially right now?
  - a. Very well \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Okay \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Not well at all \_\_\_\_\_

10. Have you used food banks?  
a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Do you currently use food banks?  
i. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_
11. While in the system, did you have access to safe/stable housing?  
a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you currently have access to safe/stable housing?  
a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is your current placement type?  
a. \_\_\_\_\_
14. How well would you say you are doing emotionally right now?  
a. Very well \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Okay \_\_\_\_\_  
c. Not well at all \_\_\_\_\_
15. Would you like to receive the results of this study later this year (2003)?  
a. Yes or No \_\_\_\_\_  
b. If Yes, please supply me with a working email or postal address below:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR FILLING OUT THE SURVEY!

WE WILL NOW BEGIN OUR INTERVIEW!



APPENDIX D  
Ethnographic Questions/Instrument

1. Will you tell me how you come to be involved with the system?
2. What was that like for you – leaving home and coming into the system?
3. What types of services and supports do you receive? How do you get them?
4. What has been the best experience you've had with the system?
5. What has been the worst experience you've had with the system?
6. What image do you think the public (outside of the system) have of you?
7. What image do you think the workers in the system have of you?
8. What advice would you have for young people coming into, or at risk for entering the system?
9. What would you change about the system – what types of things would make it better?
10. What does the future hold for you?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to add or further comments?

APPENDIX E

Supports and Services available to participants.

**SOME SUPPORTS AND SERVICES:**

**Mental Health Crisis Center Newfoundland & Labrador 1-888-737-4668  
(immediate help 24/7)**

**National Youth In Care Network (NYICN in Ottawa) 1-800-790-7074  
[www.youthincare.ca](http://www.youthincare.ca)**

**Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Newfoundland & Labrador  
1-877-753-3888 [www.childandyouthadvocate.nf.ca](http://www.childandyouthadvocate.nf.ca)**

Adolescent House 709-777-5180

Al-Anon Family Groups 709-722-2666

Alcoholics Anonymous 709-579-5215

Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit (current information on “the system” in  
Canada) [www.canadachildwelfareresearch.org](http://www.canadachildwelfareresearch.org)

Canadian Mental Health Association 709-753-8550

CANLEARN (education and financial resources) [www.canlearn.ca](http://www.canlearn.ca)

Care Center for Women 709-738-CARE

Casey Family Program (for Former Foster Youths; American site)  
<http://fostercarealumni.casey.org/index2.asp>

Club D - Depression Support Group 709-753-5111

Distress & Suicide Help Line 1-800-232-7288

Emmanuel House (residential services St. John's) 709-754-2072

(Employment) Skills Assessment & Training Center 709-729-1094

Family Support Network (Family & Friends of People with Mental Illness) 709-753-  
8550

Family Violence Treatment and Training Program 709-777-3640

Iris Kirby House (women and children only) 709-722-8272

Janeway Family Centre 709-777-2017

Naomi Center 709-579-8434

New Beginning for Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse 709-634-5034/2519

**Newfoundland & Labrador Human Rights Association website**  
**<http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/nlhra/>**

**Newfoundland & Labrador Human Rights Commission (government)**  
**1-800-563-5808 <http://www.gov.nf.ca/hrc/>**

Newfoundland & Labrador Student Aid – (709) 729-5849  
<http://www.gov.nf.ca/youth/>

Planned Parenthood Newfoundland 1-877-666-9847

Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Center 709-726-1411 or 709-738-2775

Sexual Abuse Community Services 709-634-5112

St. John's Women Center 709-753-0220

Survivors of Suicide Support Group 709-834-4027

The Bridge Program 709-777-7715

Voices for Children (Ontario; lots of good information) [www.voicesforchildren.ca](http://www.voicesforchildren.ca)

WorkinfoNET (Canada wide employment search tool) [www.workinfo.net.ca](http://www.workinfo.net.ca)

We all need help and support at different times and for different reasons. It is often hard, especially for those of us who have been involved with the system, to ask for what *we* need. Remember that you should not be afraid, ashamed or angry with yourself because you need something that will help you in life. If you find you don't get what you need from an agency or support group, look elsewhere and ask others about what has helped them.

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#### Legislation:

Child, Youth and Family Services Act. 2001, c-12.1. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Youth Criminal Justice Act, S.C. 2002, c.1.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989.

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<sup>i</sup> According to the legislation consulted for the purposes of this research, the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2001) ch.2 s.1(o), a youth is defined as an individual who is over the age of 16 but under the age of 18. Due to the potential for some negative psychological impact on the interviewees, participants in this study were 18 years of age or older.

<sup>ii</sup> Family foster homes, group homes, kinship care, institutional youth justice and psychiatric institutions.

<sup>iii</sup> Discussed at length in Little, M. (1998). *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>iv</sup> Governing at the time of collection of data, June 2003.

<sup>v</sup> Due to policies and procedures, and as findings in this study suggest, the young person is punished simply because the intervener wants to assert their control over the young person's physical and emotional being.

<sup>vi</sup> Issues non-systems youths would not necessarily have to deal with such as finding food and shelter and possibly going without these absolute necessities.

<sup>vii</sup> There are programs referred to as "semi-independent" and "independent" living programs. These programs are designed to gradually guide the young person into adulthood with the supports and services of various youth-serving agencies.

<sup>viii</sup> Youth programming as legislated in the CYFSA 2001.



