

# **TALES OF TRANSITION:**

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HOW CANADIAN YOUTH CONCEPTUALIZE AND MANAGE EMANCIPATION FROM CHILD WELFARE CARE**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Tales of Transition: Gender Differences in How Canadian Youth Conceptualize and Manage Emancipation from Child Welfare Care**

Little is known about how Canadian young people leave child welfare care. This study examines the reality of one child welfare population the year after they reached 18, the age of majority. There are significant gender differences in care career: boys enter care earlier and leave care later. Those of either gender who enter care late leave care early.

A random sample of 15 boys and 15 girls participated in a four-phase qualitative study in which they

- completed the Canada Census 1991 Long Questionnaire presented on a notebook computer;
- produced an oral narrative about how they conceptualized and managed the adolescent transition, which was 'direct scribed', i.e., transformed into text under the narrator's direction;
- analyzed the narrative as a story; and
- attended a gender-specific discussion group.

Twelve of each gender completed the interviews, and 14 in total attended the focus group.

Three variations on care-leaving are examined, 'early leavers' who leave before 18, those who 'age out' on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and those who receive extended care while living in the community, some since 16, the earliest age at which this is permitted. Participants are considered within the context of their age cohort on several Census variables: ethnicity and migration, economics, and social resources. Many participants are parents, and most males were involved with the justice system; I suggest these are the only occupations for which they feel they are qualified.

The data is analyzed for evidence of a care and/or an order (justice) orientation (adapted from Gilligan et al). I suggest that 'ethical bilinguality', fluency in both the language of care and the language of order sufficient to allow their appropriate use, may be a protective skill in the child welfare system, where there is an omnipresent contradiction between two perspectives: the order of legislation and the care of surrogate parenting.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

The work contained herein is based on my own original research, assisted by the thought and work of others as acknowledged within the work. Aside from the views of the research participants which are owned and acknowledged as their own, the views expressed are that of myself alone, and not of the University of Bristol, the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto, my colleagues and mentors, or any other persons.

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date

# Tales of Transition: Gender Differences in How Canadian Youth Conceptualize and Manage Emancipation from Child Welfare Care

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