



‘I should participate because it's my own life’: Participation of Norwegian foster care youths

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Abstract

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Children and youth participation have been valued since it was regulated in the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. Scholars established various models to promote it (Hart, 1992; Sinclair, 1998; Shier, 2001; Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010). However, there were limited studies about the participation in foster care youth in Norway, especially from youths’ perspectives. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the participation experiences of youths in Norwegian foster care. The experiences covered the perceptions of speaking up their voices, respecting to their opinions, taking their opinions into account, as well as making decisions in their daily lives.

Qualitative design research was used as a methodological approach with a transformative perspective as its interpretive framework. Three female youth age between 17 and 20 were recruited from a non-profit organization called The Change Factory (Forandringsfabrikken in Norwegian) for interviews. The researcher conducted online interviews with a semi-structured interview guide. Thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis.

The results of the study showed that Norwegian foster youths perceived that their participations were not meaningful enough to affect their lives, even though they had daily participations. The youths also indicated that the levels social workers took part of their lives or in their decision-making process were different when they reached the legal age of medical consent and adulthood. Notably, the youths conveyed that on some occasions they were not willing to participate in. The factors contributing to the youths’ participation included adult-driven factors, a lack of trust and safety, cooperation, motivation, and fear. All the factors interplayed with each other and also had impacts on whether the youths would give up or keep practicing their participation. Lastly, the impacts that influence their participation the most contained life-changing possibilities, being master of their own lives, standing up for themselves, and fighting for rights of other children and youths.

The study concluded that youth participation has still not been valued enough from the youths’ perspectives. Making this improvement possible requires the awareness of the presumption, attitude, and power of professionals, practitioners, and policymakers towards children and youths.

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List of Abbreviations

CDP	Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families
CPS	Child Protection Service
CWA	Child Welfare Act
CWS	Child Welfare Service
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Participation right of young people has been an important issue in recent decades. There has been a change of mainstream views from “adult professional leading” towards “children as consultants,” especially in child welfare system (Bessell, 2011). The latter view means that children should have a say to the decision in their lives rather than passively following the decision made by their adults. This change has a lot to do with the Articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989. Article 12 of UNCRC gives children the rights to participate and demands that the children’s voices are both heard and taken into account in decision making, especially when it comes to the decisions affecting children’s lives (Lansdown, 1997; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Young, McKenzie, Omre, Schjelderup & Walker, 2014a; Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup, Omre & Walker, 2014b). However, Healy (1998) indicates that there is always a debate between paternalism and children participation. It can be difficult for adults, especially for the professionals, who used to make decisions for others and thus might doubt the competences of service users (Young et al., 2014b).

Although there was no direct study regarding the participation of foster care youths, it is still notable that previous studies indicated a lack of participation by children and young people in out-of-home care during the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Bessell, 2011; Manson, 2008). Youths in foster care are defined as children or young people who have been removed from their original families due to parental issues or familial problems. Even though foster care has been considered the best alternative care for those children who are in adverse situations (Nordenfors, 2016), the use of this alternative does not always guarantee that difficulties of foster children, such as mental health problems, delay development, juvenile crime and teenage pregnancy, are solved (Jackson Foster, Beadnell & Pecora, 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2017; Yi & Wildeman, 2018; Palmer & Ahn, 2019). And after these children left the foster care, they still have to face, often alone, such challenges as housing, employment, and various financing issues in their early adulthood (Deans, Minneci, Nacion, Thackeray, Scholle, & Kelleher, 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015; Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day & Landsverk, 2017). Besides, the needs of these children, such as the rights of education, privacy, non-discrimination, participation, and being respect, may not be met (Calheiros, Patrício, & Graça, 2013; Magalhães, Calheiros, & Antunes, 2017). In accordance with the Article 2 of UNCRC that asserts that “no child should be treated unfairly on any basis” (UNCRC, 1989), the participation right of foster care children should not be overlooked due to their vulnerable situation. The goal of valuing children’s voice is not easy to reach due to the adult-child

power relations in the child welfare system (Mason, 2008). For example, when the professionals and children have different opinions, some professionals might oppose or disregard children's opinions by legitimizing their actions as protection for children (Lansdown, 1997), since children are deemed as incompetent, immature and are not able to take responsibilities (Lundy, 2007), while the professionals are intrinsically afraid of losing authority and control (Lansdown, 1997).

Statistics Norway (2019) shows that there were 57,013 notifications to the Norwegian Child Welfare Service (CWS) during 2018, and the number of children who are in foster care was 8,071. Although the Norwegian government mainly aim to use intervention programs so that the children who are reported to the CWS stay with their families, the reality is that there is still a great number of children who are placed in foster care for long-term (Backe-Hansen et al., 2013). Checkoway (2010) recognizes that participation has a positive influence on young people's well-being and future. Also, Bessell (2011) assumes from the result of her study that the participation of children in out-of-home care, including those in foster care and residential care, in decision making may make a positive influence on their educational, health, and behavioral outcomes. Fortunately, the Norwegian government has emphasized children participation since they ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and incorporated it into the Norwegian legislation in 2003 (Backe-Hansen et al., 2013). The Norwegian non-profit organizations The Change Factory and Save the Children engage in empowering children and young people to express their voices to fully practice their participation rights. Nevertheless, The Change Factory (2019) indicates that the opportunities offered to youth, especially those in the child welfare system, to make their voices heard are still limited, even though this is what the Norwegian welfare system highly recognized.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it is important to have a deeper exploration of the participation of foster care youths, to understand how it looks like in their real worlds and what can be improved. Due to the knowledge gap in the field, this research aims to reveal Norwegian foster care youths' experiences of participation. The experiences of participation include the perceptions of speaking up on their own behalf, respecting and taking into account their opinions, as well as making decisions in their daily lives.

Even though there is no universal definition of the term "youths", the United Nations (UN) (1985) defined youths as the young people whose age are between 15 and 24 for its statistic purpose. According to Youth Policy in Norway (2017), there are three sub-groups for the definition of youths in their government report, which are 12-15 years old, 16-19 years old

and 20-26 years old. In addition, the Norwegian Child Welfare Act [CWA] entitles youths to receive assistance from the state up to 23 years old. Based on a comprehensive consideration on these definitions, the researcher set the age range of the term “youths” between 15 and 23. Following the definitions of the UN (1985), Youth Policy of Norway (2017) and the CWA (2013), the “youths” in this study are defined as young people whose age is between 15 and 23. In addition, the term “foster care” or “foster home” refers to the family-style alternative care, which consists of foster parents and sometimes includes also foster siblings. In order to enrich the understanding of the target group, the researcher also reviewed the literature contained the children and youths in “out-of-home” care contexts, which resemble the context of foster care. However, the cases such as ethnic minority groups, juvenile delinquencies, and children’s disability care, are excluded.

1.3 Significance of the Study

There are two main significant aspects of this study- in academic field and in social work practice. Križ and Skivenes (2015) interviewed Norwegian child welfare officers about their perceptions of children’s participation and Backe-Hasen (2018) studied formal and everyday participation in foster families in Norway. However, neither of these two studies focused on the perceptions and viewpoints by the youths themselves. So far, there exist only few studies where the focus could be considered as somewhat related to the perceptions of foster care youths on participation. Therefore, this study aims to close the knowledge gap in this field. Furthermore, the researcher believes that a good research should have great impact on the field of practice, and therefore the other important contribution of this study is that the findings of the research not only speak up for the foster care youths, but also demonstrate the implications in regard to their biological parents, foster care parents, professionals in child welfare system, and even policymakers. The studies by Sinclair (1998); Percy-Smith and Thomas (2009); and Checkoway (2011) show that young people can be empowered and strengthened through youth participation which could positively contribute to their lives in adulthood. Head (2011) states that promoting participation benefits not only individuals but also the whole society. The ideal goal of this study is through the dissemination of its results to make some positive changes in the lives of this disadvantaged group to benefit both their development and future lives.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the discussion above and the research purpose, the main research question is “what are the experiences of participation for youths who have/had lived in foster care in Norway?” and follows by three supportive questions as below:

- 1) What perceptions do Norwegian foster care youths have about their participation?
- 2) What are the factors that have contributed to the participation of Norwegian foster care youths?
- 3) How does the participation of Norwegian foster care youths impact their lives?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

My thesis consists of five chapters (introduction, literature review, methodology, research results and analysis, and conclusion). I also have attached six appendices (the informed consent letter, interview questions, NSD approval, the voice of participants transcript, the timeline, and the non-plagiarism declaration).

Chapter two: Literature review

2.1 Foster care

Foster care is an alternative care in the child welfare service or child protection service, which offers better living conditions and life quality to children at risk or in adversity. Yi and Wildeman (2018) reported that 4% of children who has investigated by Child Protection Service (CPS) end up in foster care every year in the United States. Even though foster care is seen as the best alternative when biological parents are no longer able to take care of their children (Nordenfors, 2016), children in foster care are still found to be the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in society (Yi & Wildeman, 2018). The multi-dimensions intervention with the focus on child, family, foster care, and neighborhood is needed for decreasing the children's entry into foster care (English, Thompson & White, 2015).

2.1.1 Causes of removal and placement in foster care

Children end up in foster care with two possible conditions - mandatory care order by the state or voluntary placement agreement from their original parents. When the state issues a mandatory care order for the children's removal and placement, it usually involves various reasons, most of them are parental and familial issues, such as unsatisfactory child's upbringing, maltreatment, parental mental illness and substance abuse, traumatic events in the family, housing, and financial issues (Jackson Foster et al., 2015; Vanderfaeillie, Pijnenburg, Damen & Van Holen, 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2017). Compared to the children from other vulnerable groups, such as children in poverty or children in a single household, foster children have more possibilities to experience parental issues mentioned above (Turney & Wildeman, 2017). Among those parental and familial problems, English et al. (2015) indicates several predictors of children's placement, including the depressed mental conditions of parents, maltreatment of children's mental health, the previous records that the family has been reported to the CPS and the lack of social support from the nearby community.

Furthermore, Jackson Foster et al. (2015) found an intergenerational pathway to predict the risk of children's placement. Their study demonstrates that the mental health issues of alumni in foster care are related to the poor functioning of their father, which subsequently are associated with alumni's negative social support, and therefore raise the risk of their children being placed in out-of-home care. Even though children placed in foster care with a voluntary placement agreement is not as common as court-ordered placement, there were still more than 21,000 of those children in 2013 (Hill, 2017). And Hill (2017) finds that children who are placed in foster care voluntarily by their parents are related to children's diagnosis

and behaviors as well as parent's lack of ability to deal with their children, who differ from the ones with court orders. Adeboye and Höjer (2017) explore the causes of separation between young people from SOS village and their parents in Portugal and Nigeria. These are the illness of caregivers, the inadequate capability to take care of children, and, in both countries, abandonment of the children by their caregivers.

2.1.2 Children and youths in foster care

Most children are initially placed into foster care at their school-age (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2015), while children from Nigeria are placed much earlier when they were infants (Adeboye & Höjer, 2017). Also, children might experience a few temporary placements before they are placed in foster care at their school-age (Adeboye & Höjer, 2017). Compared to younger children who ended up in foster care due to lack of care from their parents or caregivers, older children are reported to have more behavioral, social, and emotional problems, and cognitive difficulties. (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2015).

One of the common themes that previous studies contributed to understanding children in foster care is the health issues, including poor mental health, behavioral problems, and delay development. (Brown, Courtney & Curtis Mcmillen, 2015; Jackson Foster et al., 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2016; Greiner & Beal, 2017; McGuire, Cho, Huffhines, Gusler, Brown & Jackson, 2018). Foster children are more likely to have ADHD, anxiety, depression, behavioral or conduct problems and language problems compared with those who are out of care (Turney & Wildeman, 2016; Greiner & Beal, 2017). Jackson Foster et al. (2015) refer that foster youth have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which has a lot to do with their biological father's poor functioning and mother's mental health problems. Some foster youth still demand mental health help after they leave the foster care (Brown et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of high-quality, comprehensive health care system (Deans, Minneci, Nacion, Thackeray, Scholle & Kelleher, 2015). Szilagyi, Rosen, Rubin and Zlotnik (2015) indicate four barriers for foster children to receive health service: limited historical health information, lack of coordination among care institutions, confidentiality, and financing issues. Deans et al. (2015) propose a framework of comprehensive health service for foster young people from the day they are placed into the foster care til they leave. They suggest the four health services should be provided during children's foster care period. These start with an intake assessment when young people initially enter into foster care system, and continue with three other services: routine preventive care, mental health care, and trauma-related specialized care.

In addition to mental health issues, foster children may experience other predicaments. Even though there is no specific study about the academic performance of the foster children, Berge,

Cancian, Han, Noyes and Rios-Salas (2015) show that the children in out-of-home care have lower math and reading performance compared to other children in the CPS. Also, Yi and Wildeman (2018) present that these children are more likely to be related to criminal cases later in their life. Moreover, many of the children in the foster care have experienced placement instability, and this might have negative influences in their lives (Waid, Kothari, Mcbeath & Bank, 2017; Chambers, Crutchfield, Willis, Cuza, Otero, Goddu Harper & Carmichael, 2018; McGuire et al., 2018). The most common mentioned impacts of constantly moving are the loss of relationships between foster children and their caregivers or workers (Waid et al., 2017; Chambers et al., 2018) and others like the feeling of exclusion, abandon, unsafety and uncertainty (Chambers et al., 2018). Similarly, Unrau, Seita and Putney (2008) indicate that foster youth who is on multiple placements might experience loss. There have been identified six areas of such loss: the loss of power over one's personal destiny, the loss of friend and connection to school, the loss of personal belongings, the loss of siblings, the loss of self-esteem, and the loss of normalcy (p.1259). Furthermore, McGuire et al. (2018) has discovered that placement instability has a positive relationship with mental health problems, especially internalizing and externalizing symptoms in behavioral problem, and suggest there might be the bilateral relationship between them.

2.1.3 Challenges in teenager-hood and leaving care

Some young people in foster care face other issue such as teen pregnancy and, therefore, early parenthood. Palmer and Ahn (2019) find that it is common for the young girls in foster care to have early pregnancy and this will lead to negative consequences to both mother and child, such as lack of support and resources, housing issue, poor parenting, mental health concerns, and even substance abuse. For those who have aged out of the care, they might face challenges like unstable housing and employment, lack of health care service, and the support for independent living (Deans et al., 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015; Fowler, et al., 2017). Many of the aging-out youths usually are employed on and off with considerate low earning (Dworsky & Gitlow, 2017).

Fowler et al. (2017) write that those young people who do not unify with their family of origin experience a higher risk of housing problems and mobility. Besides, Katz and Courtney (2015) report that about one-third of young people felt their needs had not been met, especially the readiness to tackle finances. There are examples of youths who left care earlier than they are required as they felt disappointed and dissatisfied with foster care systems, and there are examples of youths who left foster care without any participation in the process (Mccoy, Mcmillen & Spitznagel, 2008). Young people in those situations may have more difficulties in their independent young adulthood. Although former foster young adults show

their resilience on adaptation and dealing with obstacles (Chambers et al., 2018), the well-being of this vulnerable group should always be valued.

Foster parents play a crucial role in helping foster children and youth adapt to their placement when they enter foster homes and their transition when moving out; some strategies could be helpful, such as commitments, feeling of belonging, and stable routines (Munford & Sanders, 2016). However, it is a challenging task to foster adolescents, especially those who went through many negative experiences in their past lives. Shuker, Sebba, and Höjer (2019, p.394) identify three themes in the papers about taking care of foster youths, including “autonomy and control,” “risk, resilience, and trauma,” and “relationship, identity, and stigma.” In addition to foster parents, Augsberger and Swenson (2015) point out that child welfare caseworkers have the role of teaching, modeling, and enhancing positive relationships for youth in care.

2.2 Participation

2.2.1 Definition of participation

There has been no universal and explicit definition of participation, but it could be a concept of people engage in or get involved in activities in general. The participation provides the opportunity for the people who are of concern to involve in the process actively (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). In the field of social work, service user’s participation usually refers to the extent of participating in the process of decision-making (Harris & White, 2018).

When it comes to children and youth’s participation, it has been gradually acknowledged as a significant part of children’s daily lives regardless of its unclear and ambiguous definition (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). And it has a lot to do with the Articles in UNCRC, which protect the right of children and youth participation (Checkoway, 2011). Article 12 states that “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight” (UNCRC, 1989, p.4). Besides, Article 5 of UNCRC regulates that adults should guide children to exercise their rights (UNCRC, 1989). Based on mentioned above, the definition of participation in my research includes three dimensions: 1) Youths speak up their voices freely; 2) Their views are respected and taken into account; 3) They get involved in the decision-making process that affects their lives.

2.2.2 Children and youth participation

Children and youth participation consist of multilevel concepts, and those concepts are often

interrelated (Markogiannaki, 2016). Young people's participation is not only a right protected by UNCRC as mentioned above, but a role which is seen as an active, influential and competent agent, as well as a process which entitles young people to fully engage in their own lives (Checkoway, 2011; Bassot, 2012). In addition, youth participation is also a learning process that requires a model to learn from and opportunities to practice it, which are usually offered by others, such as public institutions or government (Bassot, 2012). Participation can also be learned from the interaction with more experienced counterparts (Hart, 2008). And participation should be practiced not only in a significant decision but also in daily lives (Sinclair, 1998; Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup, Omre & Walker, 2014). Furthermore, children's participation can also be regarded as a power issue, a tension between children and their parents, or significant adults in their lives (Hart, 2008; Markogiannaki, 2016). McLeod (2007) attributed unsuccessful interaction between children in care and professionals to power plays, and the resolution for it was trust relationship that required authentic listening and time. Also, Shier (2001) states that it requires adults to share their power and responsibility with children to achieve a greater extent of participation. If making decisions is too much responsibility for children, Head (2011) considers adults tend to ignore the children's ability to decision-making rather than putting this burden on them. In child protection practice, Healy (1998) thinks the power issue is not easy to deal with, and it requires workers to identify dynamic and complex relations within existed contexts.

Several factors are contributing to youth participation. In the family context, González, Gras, Malo, Navarro, Casas and Aligué (2015) find that being listened and sharing activities with parents were the perceptions of youths' family participation. And this benefited their subjective well-being. Checkoway (2011) finds various factors influencing youth participation, for example, demographic characteristics, attitudes from significant adults, beliefs from religion or society, media, and policy. Similarly, Gal (2017) indicates that obstacles of participation should be considered at both micro-level and macro-level. The micro-level meant predetermined child characteristics, such as age, gender, level of development, cognitive and emotional qualities; the macro-level referred to institutional contexts, such as workers' reluctance and organizational barriers. Also, Križ and Roundtree-Swain (2017) find that children's and youth's legal age, access to the information, and ability to advocate for themselves were influential to their participation. Besides, Kennan, Brady and Forkan (2018) consider a good quality of the relationship between children in care and their workers as a key to facilitate effective children's participation. If the workers deemed children as inability and dependency, then the absence of children's participation would be justified in the name of protection (McCafferty, 2017). However, Husby, Slettebø and Juul (2018) find that the children's participation could be improved when there was a partnership with children in care, such as trusting relationships and emotional supports.

Furthermore, many scholars found that social factors, such as income, education, and socioeconomic status, also have great impacts on youth participation (Checkoway, 2011; Markogiannaki, 2016). Percy-Smith and Thomas (2009) summarize that participation is a pathway for young people to respond to the violence from the structure, such as maltreatment, discrimination, and conflict. Regarding social engagement, Voorpostel and Coffé (2015) find young adults whose parents are separated have a lower interest in political voting and civil volunteering. Bassot (2012) presents that children in higher social class are more active in participation than lower-class children. Checkoway (2011) also finds that young people from different social classes have different focuses and interests in the activities and affairs they want to participate in. For instance, young people from higher-income families tend to engage in formal politics like voting, while the lower-income take more actions on fighting for their justice and equality (Checkoway, 2011). In addition, Markogiannaki (2016) refers that children in low socioeconomic families influenced more by the power issue between them and their parents. Based on the discussion above, the evidence indicates that the participation of young people in vulnerable and adverse should be more concerned.

2.2.3 Models of participation

Even though there is no specific theory about youth participation, but many scholars propose their models of effective children and youth participation. One of the most famous ones was provided by Hart in 1992; he adopted the model of adult participation from Arnstein (1969) and was well known as “the ladder of participation.” There are three nonparticipation rungs, including “manipulation, decoration, tokenism” from rung one to three, and the “degree of participation” starts from the rung of “assigned but informed” following by “consulted and informed, adult-initiated and directed, and child-initiated shared decisions with adults.” His model offers an explicit picture to see how adults allow children to participate. The key element to improve the participation from the area of “nonparticipation” to “degree of participation” is that adults start to let children be part of the events with clear information.

Sinclair (1998, p. 137) proposes four ways to apply this concept to involve children in planning their care, namely “providing information, consultation, attending meetings, and receiving a record of decisions,” which could improve children’s participation through the entire care planning process. He emphasizes the importance of participation from the beginning to the end of the process. And Shier (2001, p.110) offers another framework with five levels of participation: “(1) Children are listened to. (2) Children are supported in expressing their views. (3) Children's views are taken into account. (4) Children are involved in decision-making processes. (5) Children share power and responsibility for decision-

making.” His model is further clarified by three stages at each level, which is “openings, opportunities and obligations.”

At last, Wong, Zimmerman and Parker (2010) propose their “The TYPE pyramid,” which focuses on the children-parent participation compared with youth-driven participation of previous frameworks. TYPE means the “Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment,” and there are three characteristics, which are “empowerment, youth-adult involvement, and five participation types” make it differ from others (Wong et al., 2010). Five participation types include “(1) Vessel, (2) Symbolic, (3) Pluralistic, (4) Independent, and (5) Autonomous (p.104).” Among them, Vessel and Symbolic belong to adults-driven participation while Independent and Autonomous belong to youth-driven, and Pluralistic is the ideal type that the control is shared by both adults and youth with youth express their view and are active in participating (Wong et al., 2010). The aforementioned models offer the researcher diverse points of view to understand the concept of youth participation and have a better idea of how to work with youth in practice.

2.3 The Norwegian context

2.3.1 The Norwegian Child Welfare Services

Berrick and Skivenes (2013) point out that Norway has a social-democratic welfare state regime, which social service is a right to every citizen; its universal and free welfare system benefits the family with its low expense regarding service for kids such as pre-school, school, health and dental care. The CWS in Norway aims to ensure the safety, well-being, and best interest of children and youths who are in adverse conditions and offer them services when it is needed to support their healthy and positive development, and it is regulated by the CWA (2019). The Norwegian CWS takes the family service orientation with in-home services, which means that the Norwegian state tends to support families in various ways before the court decided to take the children away from their families (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013; Backe-Hansen et al., 2013). As the national strategy was stated in the report from Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality (2016, p.8), “Prevention, early intervention, support for families, and good provision and services throughout the country are key.” In 2018, there are 55,623 children and youths aged 0-22 received support from the CWS, and 60% of them receive the help at home (Bufdir, 2019; Statistic Norway, 2019). Among the assistance from the CWS, strengthening children's development and parenting skills are two main focuses, which account for 41% and 32% of the total support measures in 2018 (Bufdir,2019). Unfortunately, even though keeping children in their families is the primary task of the CWS,

there are still several children placed in out-of-home care at the end (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013).

According to Bufdir (2019), the most common two causes of children and youth's placement are a lack of parental skills and a severe conflict in a family; however, there is usually more than one reason for children to receive the assistance from the CWS. Christiansen and Anderssen (2009) also identify three important aspects of the reasons and process that the Norwegian CWS workers of decision-making on children's removal and placement, including constantly concerning conditions in the family, the experience of back-and-forth process, especially the interaction with parents, and the appearance of triggering factors. And it is less likely to reunified with their families of origin again once the children are placed foster care or residential care, as the supportive and preventive services had been tried for a period (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013). The CWS offers various assistance to children and youth up to their age of 23, but they can decide if they want to receive the services after the age of 18 (Bufdir, 2019). The young people between age 18-23 may receive financial support, such as housing and education (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013).

2.3.2 Foster care in Norway

The Child, Youth and Family Administration (Norwegian Barne-, ungdoms- og familieetaten, abbreviated Bufetat) is a governmental organization managed by The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family (Bufdir), which takes charge of the child welfare institutions, foster homes and specialized home remedies in Norway (Bufdir, 2019). In terms of foster care, it not only offers foster care services for the children and youths in need but recruits the foster homes, and their services are all regulated by the CWA and the Family Welfare Office Act (Bufdir, 2019). For example, the CWA (§ 4-15) stipulates:

“The placement shall be chosen on the basis of the child's distinctive characteristics and need for care and training in a stable environment. Due account shall also be taken of the desirability of ensuring continuity in the child's upbringing, and of the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Account shall also be taken of the likely duration of the placement, and of whether it is possible and desirable for the child to have access to and other contact with the parents.”

And the CWA §4-22 says:

“Persons selected as foster parents shall have a special aptitude for giving children a secure and good home, and be capable of discharging their responsibilities as foster parents in accordance with the conditions on which the duration of the placement etc. (see section 4-15), is based. The Ministry may make regulations regarding the criteria that shall be applied when

selecting foster homes, regarding the foster parents' rights and duties, regarding the child welfare service's duty to provide guidance and to follow up foster homes, and regarding supervision of children in foster homes.”

According to Bufetat (2019), the general criteria of being foster parents include: “1) age and ability to give children a safe home; 2) stable life situation; 3) good cooperate skills; 4) overall good health; 5) economy, housing and a social network that allows the child to live; 6) good conduct and present satisfactory police certificate.” During the process of becoming foster parents, they receive 30 hours training of PRIDE course and two home visits; and full reimbursement as economic support after a foster child arrives, including monthly child benefit, clothes, health care services, transportation expense, etc. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013; Bufetat, 2019). They will also receive supervision four times a year since the foster care has started, and it will become semi-annually after two years; the purpose of the supervision aims to see whether further supports are needed to offer to foster child or foster parents (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013; Bufetat, 2019).

Bufetat not only offer foster homes, which are the private household with foster parents who cooperate with municipal CWS and child’s biological family, but also state family homes, emergency homes, visiting homes depends on different needs of children and youths, and there are more municipal foster homes in the system (Bufetat, 2019). At the end of 2018, there are 62% of children and youth in the CWS lived in foster homes (7,270 children) and around 5% in state family homes, emergency homes (Bufdir, 2019; Statistic Norway, 2019). However, the report from the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality (2016) indicates that there is difficulty in providing adequate foster homes, and it results in long waiting times for the children in need.

2.3.3 Youths in foster care in Norway

There were 1,113,074 children under 18 in Norway in 2018, and 57,013 notifications to the CWS during the year (Statistic Norway, 2019). 8,868 children were placed in out-of-home care at the end of the year, either in foster homes or welfare state institutions (Bufdir, 2019; Statistic Norway, 2019). In the year of 2018, there are 8,071 children under 18 and 1,547 young people age 18-22 who lived in foster homes (Statistic Norway, 2019), which is the most used placement in Norwegian system (Bufdir, 2019). In terms of age, most of the children who are placed in foster care are at school age (Bufetat, 2020), the statistic displays that 98% of children in the age group 6-12 years and 76% of youths in the age group 13-17 are placed in foster care (Bufdir, 2019).

The health issue of foster children and youth is a common theme that Norwegian scholars were interested in, and they contributed to healthy developments of foster children and youth. Vis, Handegard, Holtan, Fossum and Thornblad's (2016) 8-year longitudinal study finds Norwegian foster girls' mental health problems appeared increasingly later in their teenagerhood compared to boy's early onset of their mental issues. The results indicate that there is a gender difference in the development trajectory of mental issues among foster youths; therefore, different strategies are required for foster girls and boys. Larsen, Baste, Bjørknes, Myrvold and Lehmann (2018) investigate 405 foster youths who are age between 11 to 17 and their foster families in Norway about their mental health problems and their use of health care service. The results show that 48.8% of them had presented mental health problems, and 74.5% of foster families had contact with health care services. And they also find most of the youth and their families have much higher utilization in primary health care services than Children and Adolescent Mental Health System (CAMHS), therefore, they suggest that the monitoring should be implemented in primary health care to identify the special need of foster youth and the cooperation between different services should be enhanced.

Similarly, Lehmann and Kayed (2018) suggest that the model of early identification and assessment for mental health care of children in alternative care in Norway should be developed, especially the collaboration between CPS and CAMHS, and better with digital instruments. They also call for a group of trained professionals who specialized in children and youth with complex needs and other services from GPs, such as child protection physicians. Other than the services in the system, foster care parents have a lot to do with the health problems and well-being of foster children and youths. Jacobsen, Brabrand, Liland, Wentzel-Larsen, and Moe (2018) find that the emotional investment of foster parents benefits their foster children's social-emotional functioning. Especially the commitments from foster parents have a potentially short-term influence on foster children's externalizing behavior, while the acceptance from foster parents have a potentially long-term influence on foster children's dysregulation behavior. Also, Angel and Blekesaune (2015) indicate the support of foster parents is associated with the fewer placements that foster children have experienced. Their study also points out that foster children who live with their relatives are less likely to change placements than those in non-kinship homes. Vis et al. (2016) show that foster children in kinship foster homes or placed in the same community as their original families have fewer mental health problems.

The foster children and youth in Norway are entitled by the Norwegian government to have a supervisor who is given sufficient training and guidance from the day they enter foster care until they reach the age of 18, and that was emphasized through amendments to the CWA in

2014 (see § 4-15) to ensure the care in foster homes is proper and satisfactory. Also, foster children are entitled to have the other personal contact person or “person of trust” besides the care worker from the CWS, and all of them together to ensure that the rights and interests of the children in foster care have been fulfilled (Becke-Hasen, 2018). In addition, aftercare services for the foster youth in Norway has been stressed in the CWA in recent years (see §1–3 and § 4-15). Aftercare services aim to provide assistance for the young people age 18-23 in order to support their transition from the care to independent lives (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families (CDP), 2019). Norwegian foster youths have right to receive the aftercare services, until the age of 23, either maintain the original one they had or replaced by other assistances (Berrick & Skivenes, 2013; Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016) And even if they refuse the aftercare services, they should be contacted again within a year (CDP, 2019).

In practice, Bakketeig and Backe-Hansen (2018, p.39) states that the experiences of young adults’ transition from care in Norway have influenced by the interconnection of three elements– “positive and supportive relationship with caseworkers, participation in decision-making and individualized and flexible services.” Also, within a similar structural context, Sinkkonen and Kytälä (2015) examine the experiences of supportive housing in the aftercare program for Finnish young people who left foster care. Even though their study shows the positive experience from young people in general, they stressed other skills should be strengthened in the aftercare program for care leavers, such as financing, employment, health care, and planning independent lives.

2.3.4 Participation in Norway

Children and youth’s right of participation has been protected by the Norwegian state since it ratified the articles of UNCRC in 1991 and incorporated it in Norwegian legislation in 2003 (Backe-Hansen et al., 2013), and the participation in the CWS has been strengthened since the CWA was amended in 2014 (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016). According to the Norwegian Constitution (§ 104), children have the right of being respected, heard and valued when it comes to the affairs affecting their lives, and it should be done in line with their age and development. Also, the CWA (§ 4-1) states:

“The child shall be given the opportunity to participate and steps shall be taken to facilitate interviews with the child. Children who have been taken into care by the child welfare service may be given the opportunity to be accompanied by a person whom the child particularly trusts. The Ministry may make further regulations regarding participation and regarding the duties and function of persons of trust.”

In the report from Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality (2016), it indicates that youth participation in the public affair and healthcare has been much promoted, and it articulates “safety, participation, and commitment” are three main goals that Norwegian government works for children and young people in Norway. For example, the state invites youth representatives from counties to exert influence in decision- making processes at a national level, such as develop the strategies and action plans, and co-determinate in healthcare. Also, there are regular contact meetings among the state authorities, youth organizations, municipalities, and county authorities to ensure the participation of the children and youth (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016). Furthermore, in the speech of Minister Solveig Horne at the conference Children's Rights in Alternative Care in 2016, she emphasized the responsibility of the state to protect the rights of the children in alternative care. Also, she mentioned that children in the CWS should have their participation in every stage of their cases, especially participation in decision-making can help to reach the best interest of the children, and they should be given adequate information before they participate. However, Fylkesnes, Taylor and Iversen (2018) find the youth participation of ethnic minority youths in out-of-home care in Norway is relatively precarious. The youths must show their competency to make their voice be heard and considered. And their participation is usually hindered by case trajectories, bureaucratic characterizations, and limited resources in the CWS, as well as related to youths’ economic structures (Fylkesnes et al., 2018).

There is limited recent literature about children and youth participation in the Scandinavian context could be found in English. Akerstrom, Aytar and Brunnberg (2015) conducted Swedish interactive research with youths about their participation within a school context, which invites youths to be their research partners. From student’s analysis, the participation contains the key elements such as “accessibility in communication and education; having friends; and being able to exert influence;” on the other hand, from adult researchers’ analysis, “supportive relations, students’ agency and barriers to participation” are identified as main themes (p.139). The results between researchers and their research partners are correlated and corresponded. Besides the supportive relationships with interacted adults, the positive social relationships with counterparts are emphasized in participation in school.

Notably, Becke-Hasen (2018) wrote a book chapter about children’s formal and everyday participation in foster families, which gives me clear a picture of the situations within the Norwegian context. In terms of formal participation of foster children, Becke-Hasen (2018) states that even though foster children have legal participatory rights, the fulfillment of their participation relies on the relationship between the children, their biological and foster parents, as well as relevant workers and professionals. On the other hand, everyday participation requires collaboration with others within the context; it usually takes time and not always with

satisfactory results. Also, foster parents may regard foster children's participation as their responsibilities; therefore, they practice it as give-and-take exchange with the premise that foster children's participation requires their contribution first (Becke-Hasen, 2018). However, Becke-Hasen (2018) mentions several themes in this field has not been much research, such as the relationship between children and others they interact with (not only other children in foster families but also significant adults), children's desire and willingness to participate, and how social workers discuss the everyday participation with foster children other than formal and the legal approach of participatory right. The unanswered questions in the filed inspired my interview questions to form a holistic understanding of the participation of foster care youths.

Chapter three: Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach

The research aims to explore the experience of youth participation in Norwegian foster care. The main research question is: “what are the experiences of participation of youths who have/had lived in foster care in Norway?” This research requires a strategy to unveil the meanings of youths’ experiences. Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research allows the views of participants to be heard in the contextual understanding and brings out the results with deeper and richer meaning rather than collecting statistical data and examining scientific models (Bryman, 2012). The research is qualitative design research with a transformative perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as its interpretive framework, aiming to explore the social relationships and potential issues in youths’ experiences and provide it to the policymakers and professionals in the field to reinforce youths’ participation in their lives.

Transformative Perspective

I chose a transformative perspective as the underpinning epistemology of my research. I believe the knowledge and experiences of individuals are social-related. And from my previous work experiences as a psychologist and a caregiver of the residential institution, I found the social relationships and the issue in the society has a lot to do with individuals’ lives, especially those in adverse conditions. Therefore, as a researcher, I would like to seek for hidden social issues in participants’ stories. In addition, I am a foreign student from an oriental background conducting my research in the Norwegian context, I should be aware of the cultural difference between my participants and me and respect their value. The transformative perspective is in line with what I believe and my point of view. As the implication from a transformative perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I conducted my research together with my participants through our conversation and discussion, rather than leading interviews by myself.

Furthermore, as a social worker, I believe that I have the mission to contribute myself to change the lives of vulnerable people, which was the reason I put my focus on foster care youths and their right to participation. I wanted my research is not mere academic results but makes an improvement on the participation of youths living in foster care, and hopefully change their quality of life. An interpretive framework as a transformative perspective, which addresses advocacy for a marginalized group, collaborates with participants, and makes changes happen (Creswell & Poth, 2018), entitles me to put my beliefs into actions, not only in academic field but also in practice.

3.2 Participant recruitment

3.2.1 Recruitment criteria

Based on my research background and purpose, there are some clear key characteristics, compositing the targeting group, including age, duration of living in foster care and English-speaking abilities. Therefore, criterion sampling was adopted in this research. As my research interest was about the participation of Norwegian foster care youths, hence, the youths with the experience in foster care in Norway was the most important criterion.

The details of the criteria for sample selection are described as follows;

1. Range of age

The selected youths are between 15 to 23 years of age. There are a few reasons for the range of age. First, the youths with the life span from childhood to teenager-hood (and young adulthood if they turn 18) might have more experiences in different fields that could offer adequate information about their participation. Second, youths in this range of age are more capable of expressing experiences and opinions clearly in a better English-speaking level to avoid language barriers. Finally, youths over 15 have the right to sign their informed consent without permission from their parents. Children in foster care might have custody issues between the parents and public sectors, which causes the consents from parents are not reachable or time-consuming.

2. Duration of has/had lived in a foster home

The youths who are removed from their original families and placed in foster homes and have (or had) the experience living in foster homes for more than one year are the suitable participants for my research, as I seek to understand the participation of foster youths which requires their long-stay experiences in that particular setting.

3. English-speaking ability

Even though most of the youths in Norway have a good English level, I select my participants with this criterion as the language barrier should be carefully considered, especially English is neither researcher nor participants' native language. Therefore, participants should feel comfortable with and confident in expressing their opinions and feelings in English.

3.2.2 Criterion sampling

After my consideration, I chose to use criterion sampling as I had clear recruitment criteria for

my target group. I had no network in Norway since I was a foreign student; therefore, I contacted the institutions in which their service users might fit the criteria of my research. The institutions I contact included two regional offices of Bufetat, a non-profit organization named “The Change Factory”, the CPS in Stavanger, the National Association for Child Care Children, and a youth club in Stavanger. Some of them were recommended and introduced by my supervisor and a classmate who was a social worker in Norway. Formal research request letters with clear recruitment criteria were sent to the institutions via email. The procedure took about a month, starting from the end of February to the end of March.

Finally, the interviewed youths are recruited from contact through The Change Factory due to accessibility. The worker from The Change Factory contacted me in the third week of March, saying that she found suitable participants for my research from the youths she worked with. The youths she found agreed to participate in my research, and she arranged the interviews for us. Through the contact with The Change Factory, not only the participants fit criteria could be reached efficiently, but also they have knowledge and experiences with participation, which could provide rich information to answer the research questions. At the end of March, there were three youths from The Change Factory recruited by the criterion sampling method.

Three research participants, Ling-Shi, Shan-Ying and Jau-Ying¹, are all girls whose ages are between 17 and 20 years old, and two of them are over eighteen. They are all Norwegians and live in Norway. They attend high school and work part-time in The Change Factory at the same time. The ages they moved out of their original families were between 14 and 16 years old. After that, two of them first moved to institutions before they moved to foster homes, and the other one moved to foster homes and then institutions. One of them stayed with one foster family, but the other two experienced three and six foster homes, respectively. They had around one to three years of experience in foster homes before, but all live independently with friends in rental places now.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews procedure

¹ I gave my participants pseudonyms in Mandarin, my native language, to show the interaction between my participants' and my cultural backgrounds. Each Mandarin pseudonyms were given based on the impression I had on the interviewed youths. Ling-Shi (凌曦 in Mandarin) contains the meaning of strength and energy from the Mandarin characters. Shan-Ying (善盈 in Mandarin) refers to the sense of kindness and content. Jau-Ying (昭穎 in Mandarin) shows her powerfulness and wisdom.

I chose semi-structured interviews to collect my data, which was considered to be useful for gaining insights into how individuals view and interpret the important issues, events as well as the world where individuals situated by Bryman (2012). My research aims to explore the experiences of participation of Norwegian foster care youths, and this requires the collection of their opinions, views, and feelings about participation in their lives. Semi-structured interviews with a prepared interview guide, which focused on the topic of participation in my research, entitled me to collect the information that I needed to answer my research questions. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews retain the flexibility for following up questions during interviews to elicit the true reality of participants, as Bryman (2012) emphasized that the researcher could interact with participants with an open-minded attitude when using this method. The natures of semi-structured interviews make it the most appropriate way to cope with the unique participation experiences of foster care youths.

I conducted a small group interview and an individual interview via online communication devices during the last ten-day period of March. The reason I chose to conduct online interviews was due to COVID-19² pandemic. At the time of my interviews, the Norwegian government suggested their citizens stay at home and keep social distancing. Therefore, the online interview was the most suitable alternative to complete the interviews. And the reason I chose the mixed design of a small group interview and an individual interview was that Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying, preferred to be interviewed together, which they felt more comfortable for them. Due to the consideration of the ethical concern, I agreed to interview them in a small group. Since Jau-Ying was not in the same city with Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying; thus, I had an individual online interview with Jau-Ying. I sent consent informed letters (see appendix 1) to the workers from The Change Factory a day before I had interviews with them as I had no direct contact with the interviewed youths. The worker printed out for Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying and forwarded it to Jau-Ying. Since Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying had an interview with me in the office which the worker worked, while Jau-Ying was in a different city from them. I received signed consent letters of Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying from the worker before our interview started, and Jau-Ying sent it to me when I got her Messenger contact for the interview. The online small group interview with Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying was conducted via Skype, which took about one and a half hours in the third week of March, while the individual online interview via Messenger with Jau-Ying took forty minutes, which took place in the fourth week of March. The interview with Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying was conducted when they were in a room in the office of The Change Factory, while the interview with Jau-Ying when she was in her room alone. And I was alone in my room during the interviews. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in a quiet and private environment. Before the interviews are

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

started and recorded, I emphasized the rights of participants in the informed consent letter and made sure of the agreements of participants. The information participants gave captured by audio recording devices.

After every interview, I spent a period to note down my observation about our communication and the impression of the participants and the whole interview process. I also wrote my reflection down not only after the interviews but also during the process of analysis from time to time. I believe that the notes from observation and reflection from the researcher contribute to the research, which is in line with the idea of cooperation between the researcher and participants that were emphasized in the transformative perspective by Creswell and Poth (2018). These notes helped me to build a general picture of the interviews and functioned as a reminder for data analysis to find out important information as well as essential issues to discuss later.

3.3.2 Interview guide

The interview guide (see appendix 2) was the instrument of my research for data collection. It contains five parts, including personal background, knowledge of participation, perceptions of participation, factors contributing to participation, and impacts of participation. The questions in my interview guide were developed based on my research interests, purpose, and knowledge from previous studies. There were 16 questions in the interview guide.

In the first part, I asked them to give me a brief introduction about themselves, especially the information on the timeline of their removal from their original family and their moving among foster care. I would have some follow-up questions if they did not mention some important information, such as the number of foster homes they had stayed, the family members in their original family and foster homes, and the current situation they have now. This part of the information is for me to have a general picture of their life trajectories. The second part was about their knowledge of participation. Even though there was a definition of participation from literature, I would like to know what they thought participation was as this might relate to their answer to my research questions. In addition to the definition, I have one question about the activities they participated in and one question about their experiences of learning participation. These three questions in the second part depicted the basic image of their participation and warmed up for the subsequent three research questions.

Part three to five were designed according to research questions one to three. The third part of the questions was related to research question one, which was the interviewed youths' perceptions about their participation in their lives. The questions in this part covered three

aspects of perceptions in four different fields, including the original family, the foster home, The Change Factory, and the CPS. Three aspects were accorded to the right emphasized in Article 12 of UNCRC, which included speaking their voice, being heard and taken into account, and decision-making. Besides, I added some questions which were suggested in previous studies to capture more information about their participation. In the fourth part, the questions were asked to collect their views of the factors contributing to their participation, which were corresponding to research question two. Here I divided questions into supportive factors and hindered barriers. And I added their relationship with adults, which was considered an influential factor in youths' participation in literature.

In the last part, the questions were about the impact of participation in participants' lives, which correlated to research question three. The questions covered the influence of past experiences of their participation in their participation now and their perceptions of the importance of participation in their lives. Since they worked with The Change Factory, I asked them the impacts of participating in The Change Factory on their participation as following up questions. In the end, I asked them to give some recommendations for improving youth participation. I added some following up questions randomly during the whole interview process to gather more detailed information and examples from my participants.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Transcription

As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggests, it is necessary to transcribe the collocated verbal data into written form to analysis data with thematic analysis method. I used two online audio transcription from the website called "Rev" and "Temi," which are voice-recognition transcription websites helping researchers to transcribe the audio data automatically, as the reason that transcribes verbal data word to word is a time-consuming work like Bryman (2012) point out. Noticeably, the accuracy of the written transcription is vital (Braun & Clarke, 2006), so I checked back and forth between the written transcription and the audio-recordings at least two times after transcription is done by the websites to make sure the written transcription was fully correct.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

The interview transcriptions were analysed by the method of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, by Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.79) definition, is "a method for identifying,

analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of participation of Norwegian foster care youths, and I explored it with three supportive research questions that contained the domains of perception, factor, and impact of participation. I chose thematic analysis because it helped me to discover the recurring themes from the interviews with a series of questions asking my participants’ experiences and views in three domains. Also, by using this analysis, the similarity and difference within and between my participants can be seen during the process. The common knowledge about their participation could be revealed after examining the similarity from the information they offered, showing the meaning of the perceptions, factors, and impacts of their participation. The emerged themes finally formed the answer to my main research questions- “what are the experiences of participation of youths who have/had lived in foster care in Norway?” In addition, one of the significances of my research is to make an influence on the field of practice, that requires not only a general description of the surface meaning from my participants’ information about their participation but also the deeper meaning and potential issues that are hidden behind the surface. Therefore, thematic analysis, which allows researchers to explore both the “semantic” and “latent” level of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), is the most suitable analysis method for me to reach my purpose.

I conducted the thematic analysis following the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87). The steps include ‘familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.’ The steps guided new qualitative researchers like me to conduct a thematic analysis with an explicit process. I described the process of my work on following the steps of thematic analysis as below.

First, I familiarized myself with my data not only through listening to the audio recording and checking on the written transcription back and forth but also organizing the written transcription into the table in Word file. And then, I used Nvivo 12 Pro program to generate the initial codes by going through the transcription word by word. And I marked 34 initial codes, including (by order of English letters) “be able to,” “consequence,” “diminish,” “difference,” “empowerment,” “facilitated factors,” “factors influenced participation,” “feedback,” “forced to accept or participate,” “gap between thought and done,” “hinders,” “impact and importance,” “important questions should be asked,” “information,” “motivation,” “negative feelings,” “no exception for participation,” “not able to participate,” “not being heard enough,” “over 18 years old,” “positive experiences,” “prepossessed thought of adults,” “Pro’s knowledge,” “relationships,” “safe,” “take it seriously,” “The Change Factory,” “the master of their own lives,” “the parts they participate,” “together,” “trust,” “want or willing,” “what they learned from their experiences.” After initial codes were

generated in the Nvivo program, I checked every code and the contents related to them repeatedly and searched for recurring themes. Thanks to thematic analysis, I identified eleven themes of my research in the end, naming “variance from place to place,” “not enough participation in the significant things,” “legal age matter,” and “experiences of reluctant participation,” “not enough participation in the significant things,” “legal age matter,” and “experiences of reluctant participation.” “not enough participation in the significant things,” “legal age matter,” “experiences of reluctant participation,” “adult-driven,” “lack of trust and safety,” “cooperation,” “motivation,” “fear,” “life changes,” and “empowerment,” and the results are presented in chapter four.

3.5 Validity, reliability and outer validity

To enhance validity and reliability in my research, I took some actions from the strategies stated in Creswell and Poth’s book (2018), including reflections of the researcher, feedbacks from participants, involving the external audience, and enhancing the quality of transcriptions.

First, I had self-reflexivity during the whole research process, even since the literature review. By examining my position, experiences, and cultural background, I could avoid the potential influence of ethical consideration. For example, the power relation between my participants and I might influence their answers to my questions. Secondly, I asked my participants to read and confirm their interviews and comment on these. Also, I sent my work to my participants for their feedback after their voices were written in the part of the results of thematic analysis and the description of their voice. By doing this, the accuracy of my participants’ accounts can be ensured. Thirdly, I offered the description of my participants’ voice in the appendix (see appendix 4), which could be examined by external audiences, showing the transparency of my research. Lastly, the accuracy of the written transcription has been checked by collating between the written transcription and the audio-recordings more than two times.

Regarding outer validity, my research results can only apply to the participants in my research. However, the people with the same gender, history, and under the same circumstance and context might produce similar results.

3.6 Ethical consideration

My research participants, the youths in foster care, are the vulnerable group in our society who lived in adversity with some negative experiences in their lives. Therefore, ethical concerns should be considered carefully to avoid any harm during the process of my research.

From my past working experiences, I identified that the trust relationship and a safe environment are essential to this group. The vulnerable youths felt safer when they had more information about what is going to happen, and when they knew that the adult can keep privacy for them. Therefore, informed consent and privacy were emphasized in my research as the valued ethical principles that Bryman (2012) indicates. Moreover, from the experiences being a psychologist before, I identified the power issue between the researcher and participants and the possibility of re-traumatization as vital ethical concerns in my research, which were also reminded by Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman (2010) in their article. Especially, some questions in my research asked them to recall the memories of their past experiences, which might trigger their negative feelings.

“Informed consent,” “privacy,” “power issue,” and “re-traumatization” are the most crucial ethical considerations that I valued in my research for my participants, and I tried my best to take some actions to deal with these concerns. When it comes to informed consent, since the interviewed youths are contacted through The Change Factory, the second-hand contact may inevitably cause the gap of information. Therefore, I not only sent the informed consent beforehand to the worker who contacted them, but I ensured that they understood it by reiterating some critical information and their rights as research participants before our interviews began. Also, after my reiterating, I asked if they had questions or concerns as well as confirmed their voluntaries in my research. Furthermore, I emphasized to my participants that they could always withdraw from the research without any reason and could contact me or the other relevant person or institution even the interviews were finished. This followed the remind of Homan (1992) that consent should not be a procedure for researchers but the protection for participants. All the actions were taken before the formal interviews began. In terms of privacy, even though it was addressed in the informed consent, it should be considered more in two different ways. On the one hand, my participants should feel safe and free to express themselves without worrying about if their words might be identified against their willingness. Therefore, even though the names of my participant are anonymous and replaced by pseudonyms I made for them, I checked carefully if identifiable information and background were linking to a certain individual from the stories they offered in my research. In addition, I sent the relevant contents of my work to my participants to check if there was any information they concerned about to be recognized and wanted to remove it. On the other hand, their data and audio recordings were protected in an encrypted file with the password that I only I know. And I followed the guidance from the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) to store the data and the password separately to avoid the chance of access to my participants’ personal information.

When dealing with the power issue, the dynamics among the researcher, interviewed youths

and the contact person from The Change Factory should be viewed carefully. There might be some undesirable situations that happen due to the power issue. For instance, the young adult might be reluctant to participate in the research, but the relationship with the contact person make them hard to refuse. To avoid this situation, I ensured my participants' voluntaries before we started the interviews. And they said they were asked if they wanted to participate in my research by the worker, but then they could make a decision freely by themselves. Thus, it was their free wills to participate. The other situation in the power issue was that the youths might reveal more than they think they are comfortable with due to the imbalance power between researcher and interviewees, which might come from the age difference, education level, or other reasons. Therefore, creating a sharing power environment is essential. I started the conversations with the participants by introducing myself and welcomed them to ask more questions from their curiosity. After a brief conversation of knowing each other, I emphasized two things. The first one was about the language. I said to them that since I am not a native English speaker, they could ask me freely if they did not understand me. The other thing was about their right to access and withdraw the data they offered, which showed that they had control of their participation in my research. I tried to reduce the power issue by making a connection with my participants, showing the limitation of myself and sharing the control of their data with them. Lastly, the issue of re-traumatization was considered in my research. The interviewed youths shared their background and their past experiences, which included some sensitive and private events that might cause some negative emotion during interviews, even after they left. Therefore, I addressed that they had the right to decide what they want to share, and they can stop the interview at any moment when they feel uncomfortable. Also, I told them that they could contact me if they found there was any negative influence after the interviews, and they needed some help. Besides, I was sensitive about their emotion and avoided to go deeper when I noticed they were reluctant to talk more about it. For example, one of the participants showed that she did not want to talk about her original family; hence I moved to the next question instead of asking more about it. I valued all the ethical considerations greatly and took some actions to deal with them in detail to protect the interviewed youths from the harm of participating in my research.

NSD approval

To ensure participants' privacy cautiously, I reported my research project to Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD), which is a formal organization in Norway examining the process of personal data protection and offering guidance for researchers to follow. After a month of my reporting, I received the comments from the NSD, which suggested to mark my participants as "health data" as they are interviewed due to their social conditions, and the

usage of a private device for interview recording should be permitted by the responsible institution. I followed their suggestion to make some changes to their website, also I get the permission letter and uploaded it. Finally, I received the approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) in the middle of March 2019 with the reference number 585956 (see Appendix 3). That means the privacy issue in the research has been carefully inspected and controlled, and the researcher followed the guidelines of the NSD.

Chapter Four: Research results and analysis

4.1 Results of thematic analysis

I have identified eleven themes. Theme one to four, which are “variance from place to place,” “lack of trust and safety,” “cooperation,” “not enough participation in the significant things,” and “experiences of being forced to participated,” are related to research question one. Theme five to nine, which are “adult-driven,” “lack of trust and safety,” “cooperation,” “motivation,” and “fear,” are related to research question two. Theme ten and eleven, which are “life changes” and “empowerment,” are related to research question three. Figure 1 shows the themes from the data analysis according to the research questions.

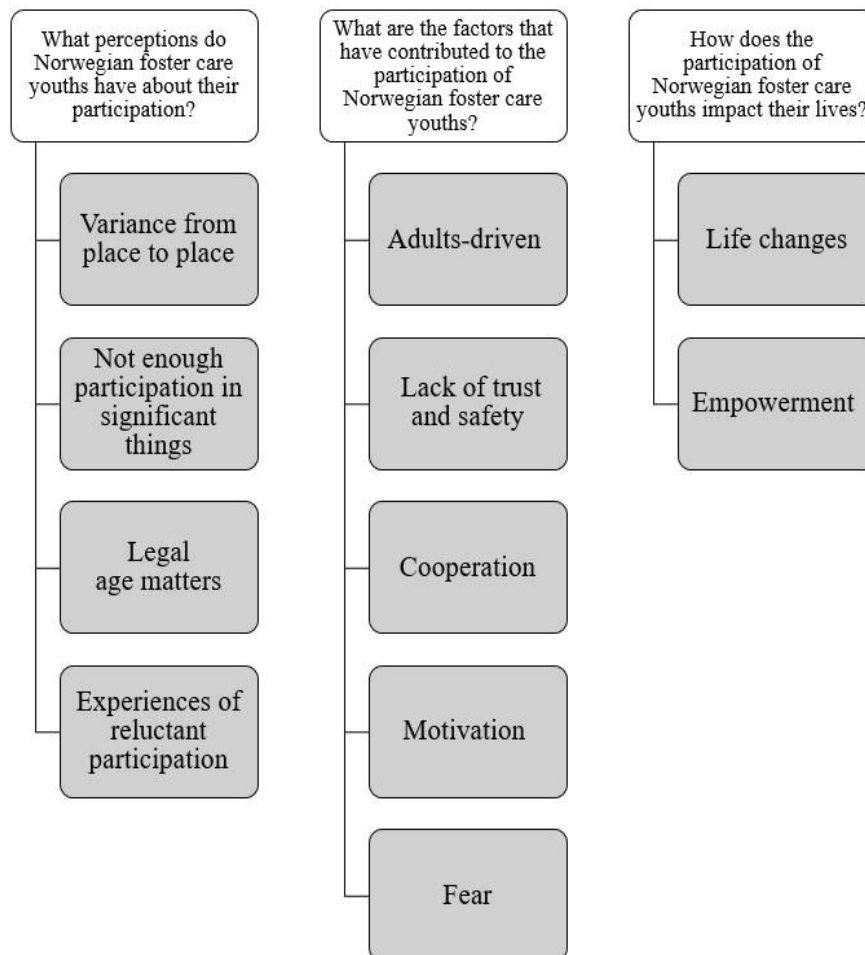


Figure 1. Themes developed from data analysis.

Theme 1: Variance from place to place

The participants had some different perceptions and experiences about their participation in different fields. Some of the perceptions came from their earlier life stages, so they needed to recall the experiences, such as the perceptions about their participation in their original family or foster homes (as they all moved out now). And the perceptions of other fields such as The Change Factory and the CPS may be collected from a few years ago till now.

Even though it seemed to have some common perceptions and experiences among three participants in different fields, there were differential reactions when I first asked about their perceptions about their participation in general.

For example, Ling-Shi felt she did not have a chance to participate at all.

I have not been like allowed to participate in anything, really. If I have, it's been like small things, like things that haven't really been that important to me. Like, I mean, I can't even think of anything because it's just been like, really. (Ling-Shi)

While Shan-Ying thought she had many experiences that she could participate in, and she described herself as “lucky” to be able to participate a lot.

In my case, I've been able to participate in a lot, like where I want to move. They've been very open to my suggestions and wishes. So I've been able to, I've got the opportunity to participate in a lot of things in the CPS. And also into foster care, like they asked me if I want to move to this family or if I don't want to do it, if isn't safe enough. (Shan-Ying)

The overall experiences in four required fields in the lives of three participants are presented below. And I present them in the following order: the original family, foster care, the CPS, and The Change Factory.

When it comes to the youths' original family, the complicated relationship and negative interaction among interviewed youths and their families made them feel that they did not have participated in their families. For example, Ling-Shi said she did not trust her parents and did not believe her voice would be taken seriously.

In my original family, I never...mm... I didn't really have anything to say, and that's kind of the answer to everything, like I never said anything because I can't trust them. I didn't

say anything but I knew like if I said something small, even, then I probably won't be respected, and then it probably won't be taken into account. (Ling-Shi)

Jau-Ying also described a similar situation in her family, especially the authority of her parents.

I didn't feel like I had the choice or ability to do it because I didn't feel like anybody would take me seriously. And I didn't feel like I was heard and I didn't feel like, uh, you know, I just felt kind of pushed down every time I tried. (Jau-Ying)

Even though Jau-Ying had a negative perception of her participation in her family in general, but she mentioned that she was able to participate in some things like dinner or activities. However, some restrictions existed when it came to who and how long she was visiting her friends.

There were restrictions on like who I could go visit or you know, how long I could visit my friends and um, that kind of stuff. But other, yeah, like activities and things like that, I chose myself. Yeah, I felt like a participated in that. (Jau-Ying)

Three participants experienced more than ten foster homes in total, and their experiences of participation in foster homes were related to how foster parents treated them. From their experiences, most of the foster parents were open and respected their daily participation like meals and sports. However, they did not feel they have enough participation in some important affairs to them, such as mental health service and contact with the original family.

For Shan-Ying, the experiences were mixed since she stayed more than five foster homes, and the degree of participation depended on the feeling of safety that Shan-Ying had towards the foster homes.

It's been very mixed, like my experience. In some foster homes I felt like I just didn't feel safe enough to tell them what I wanted or like I didn't feel that they wanted to like hear my opinion. So I didn't want to say anything. But in some foster cares, I felt like it was a safe place and they, they may wanted to hear my voice or like my opinion. (Shan-Ying)

Jau-Ying's mixed experiences came from the things she could participate in. She felt she had her participation in daily routine but not in mental health decisions. And she thought her foster parents did not have enough knowledge about mental health.

There it was a little bit like mixed cause I felt like I couldn't express or say my opinions that much because they just didn't understand it. Um, they didn't understand how I felt. They didn't understand why I felt what I felt, um, because they just didn't understand a lot about mental health. Um, so in that way I didn't feel like I could express myself because I didn't understand it, but they were always like, when it came to like all the other things, they were really open and would listen to me and you know, respected and I could decide, you know, a lot of things myself without any problems. (Jau-Ying)

Ling-Shi felt that her foster families take away their chance to participate because the foster parents heard something negative about them from the PCS and believed in that information.

They heard a lot of about me from the CPS, and they got a lot of information from them, so they already thought I was sick... and I had a lot of problems, and therefore, like, I don't have a lot of opinion on my life, so my opinion was not really important. So I stop talking to them, in the foster homes, cause I didn't see the point. (Ling-Shi)

When talking about experience in The Change Factory, two of the participants said, "I can say whatever I want" immediately. All the participants expressed their positive perception of the participation in The Change Factory. They considered it an open and safe place to express their voice, and the people there always respected their opinion and took their views seriously. They described the relationship with The Change Factory as a team that they can discuss and make the decision together. Working with The Change Factory also was empowerment to them as they felt good about their participation in advocating the participation of children and youth in Norway.

Ling-Shi expressed her feeling of safe and empowering in her experiences of participating in The Change Factory. And she described the non-hierarchical collaboration between the youths and the workers in The Change Factory.

Here I can say whatever I want, cause the people here, they believe in me and they believe that I have knowledge and they take that knowledge like, seriously and they believe in that. So here it's very, very safe to say anything, both like difficult things or like things that I am just thinking about or things that I might be like scared to say other places, because of like what others might think or, yeah, it's, I'm pretty safe here. (...) Here it's very like we work together. So it's not like the adults and us, it's like we're a team together. (Ling-Shi)

Jau-Ying had the same perception as Ling-Shi and added that they worked it out together

when there was a disagreement about the decision.

There I feel like I can say whatever I want. They always respect what I have to say or what my opinions are on things. And it's a very open place where you can, feel with what you feel without anything else happening. You can pretty much say anything and it's fine and people will listen to you and people respect you. And if they don't agree on a decision making, then we'll just talk about it and discuss it and figure it out. (Jau-Ying)

Unfortunately, most of the perceptions of participation in the CPS were negative. All three participants expressed the process of their experience with the CPS from trying to participate at first to losing their trust and quitting their participation at the end. And the key reasons that cause these negative consequences were related to how the workers deal with the information that youths provided and the attitude from the workers.

Ling-Shi illustrated the process from trying to participate at first to the quitting of her participation in the end in the CPS.

When I first came to the CPS, I tried to like say how I felt and they didn't take it seriously and they didn't listen to me and then they just, everything I said just went straight to my parents and I couldn't trust them. And then I stopped talking to them or like I stopped saying like how I actually felt and what I actually needed help with. (Ling-Shi)

Jau-Ying experienced similar frustration of not being able to participate in the CPS.

In the start they would hardly ever listen to me. They would talk to my everybody else around, behind my back, make decisions for me without even asking me about them or asking me how I felt about them. And just pretty much just go around my back about a lot of things and just didn't talk to me a lot. And they, it just wasn't nice cause I didn't feel like I was a part of my own life in a way. (Jau-Ying)

Notably, two of them considered there was a gap between what had been written in the law and what had been done in reality, as Jau-Ying said: "it is done differently."

And Ling-Shi supported this view by sharing her experience as well.

They just decide things like over my head and, in the law, it says that we have a right to participate in our lives. But nobody has really like, said that how you do it. So it's kind of open for everyone. And then they're supposed to like write down how you've participated,

but then they can really just write anything and then say that like, OK. But then a lot a lot of children say that they're not being participated with. (Ling-Shi)

However, Shan-Ying has some positive experiences with the CPS, which related to how the workers viewed her.

It's been a very mixed and I think that has a lot to do with the caseworkers and how they like what they think of me. And how would they see me as like if they see me as an important like person in the case. And if they like really want to hear my voice and opinion, then and it's much easier for me to be honest and just tell them what I want. (Shan-Ying)

And for Jau-Ying, she believed that the CPS had tried their best to find her the foster home as she wished, but then she had no choice when the foster home has been found for her, which was a kind of conflict experience.

I do think they tried their best. I mean, of course all my wishes weren't fulfilled, but I do think they tried their best and there's not that many foster homes either compared to how many children need foster homes too. So I understand that it's hard to find a foster home anyway. So I think they tried their best to find a good one. But I think the only negative thing about that is they always knew who my foster home was weeks before I did, and then when they finally told me who it was, and then I didn't even have the chance to say no, I didn't want them. So in a way, I say, (they) listen to my wishes, but when they find a foster home, I don't, I didn't feel like I had the right or I couldn't say that I don't want to live there. They always told me like, you have to try it out and blah, blah, blah. And I had to at least live there for six months and things like that. So it's kind of like they listened to my wishes, but at the same time when I knew who it was, I couldn't say no or you know, that's where I had to move in. (Jau-Ying)

At last, Shan-Ying and Jau-Ying pointed out the difference after they turn 18 years old, which made them have much more participation in everything in their lives, and no one can no longer make the decision for them against their wills. Like Jau-Ying described:

When it comes to the CPS, I participate a lot because especially now that I'm 18. Cause they don't legally have to be in my life unless I want them to. So when it comes to that, I feel like I'm participating more because they asked me more about like how I want things or, I'm able to have like a bigger voice now. Because I turned 18. So in that way I feel like I'm participating more because I could kind of run my life how I want it and they

can't really decide anything for me, it's more that they're just there to help. So like I get to decide what I want them to help me with or, it's more, it's a much more like open dialogue now than it has been. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 2: Not enough participation in significant things

Even though the interviewed youths felt they were able to get involved in everyday participation most of the time in their lives, they did not feel they had enough participation in the most critical decisions and meaningful activity. And this made them feel they were not part of their own lives. Therefore, as Ling-Shi said “So then like the small things seem like less important” and as Shan-Ying’s feeling that “Often in foster homes, I felt like the things I can participate in isn't like important.”

For instance, Ling-Shi described how she was kept away from decision making about the important things in her life.

I haven't been able to participate in things that have actually meant something in my life, like where I want to move or if I even want to move. Most of it has been decided by adults and they've made a lot of excuses for me not to participate in my own life cause I've been dangerous and sick and stuff. So all the important stuff then like, or what felt important in my life, like what contact I wanted with like mental health services or what contact I wanted with my original family. (Ling-Shi)

Besides, Jau-Ying shared the experience of not being allowed to participate in the activity that was meaningful to her at the time when she was in a tough situation.

They (foster parents and the workers from the CPS) kind of had a little bit control over and kinda decided a lot for me. I wanted to play handball, for example, and they told me that I couldn't because that would cost this and this or things like that. And then they were like, well, you could do this and that instead. Because at that time, the activity that I wanted to do means a lot because that's kinda like my thing or something I really want to do in a hard time and in a hard situation, and it would have helped me. But I didn't feel like I was listened to when I tried to explain that. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 3: Legal age matters

Two of the participants are over 18 years old now, and they experienced the extent of their participation, including their views being heard and their decision making, had changed due

to the legal age. For example, Jau-Ying mentioned that she had the legal right to decide for her medical issue after she turned 16 years old, but she had to follow adults' decisions before. Also, the legal age had its influence, especially when it came to their affairs and cases related to the CPS, such as moving out of the original family, moving among different foster homes and institutions, as well as their contact and meeting with their original families. And as Jau-Ying turned 18 years old now, she could decide more freely for herself now.

There's much more freedom and I'm not like, not that I was scared, but now, there's not that chance anymore that they just move me somewhere, they can't just move me anymore. I have more rights to own my own case and things like that (now), because when you're under 18, you still legally have to have a voice, but it's done very differently and they're responsible for you, so they get to do more things in your life when you're under 18 and decide more. But I feel like I definitely am more heard now than I was when I was under 18. (Jau-Ying)

Shan-Ying and Jau-Ying both mentioned that the role of the CPS turned from the responsible one, who had more power to make the decision, to the passive helper who only offered assistance when the youth need. And this made the youths felt they had more freedom and control in their own lives after they turned 18 years old. As Shan-Ying described:

I think it (participation) changes a bit, the older you get, unfortunately. Because like, now I am over legal age, they can't like boss around and make a lot of decisions for me. Now I'm in some kind of after care, I have a case worker, I can reach out if there's anything that I need help with, but they don't make any decisions for me now. (Shan-Ying)

However, from their perspective, the age should not be an excuse when children and youth fulfill their participation. They emphasized that children should have a say no matter how young they are. As Shan-Ying said, she "had so much to say" when she was eight or nine years old.

Ling-Shi shared her experience of speaking to children when she worked with The Change Factory, showing that:

A lot of grown-ups are or, and in a lot of laws and stuff it says you have to like do it (let children participate) gradually when they grow up and stuff. But then kids like that The Change Factory has spoken to that are like six years old saying that I need to be participated with, cause like I have a lot to say and my opinion has to be taken seriously. (Ling-Shi)

Jau-Ying expressed the same perspective as Ling-Shi by saying:

They should be able to participate no matter what. And they should get the same information as we do no matter what. It's just how you say it, you know? Um, and yeah, they, it's their life too. I mean, no matter if you're seven years old or 12 or 17, you should be able to say what you mean and participate in things. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 4: Experiences of reluctant participation

Even though participants would like to participate as much as possible in every life-affecting affair, there are some occasions that they are reluctant to be part of them. Those occasions are usually arranged by others, mostly adults or workers from the CPS. They mentioned occasions such as counseling, meetings with the original family, foster family or the CPS, or family activity with foster families. Ling-Shi gave examples of the situation:

I've been in a lot of like counselling that I didn't want and like mental health, like I stayed in hospitals that I didn't want to stay in. (...) Things I didn't want and like I had to meet my biological family that I didn't want. (Ling-Shi)

The reason Shan-Ying did not want to participate at the family conference was that she felt she was there to be blamed by her family in the meeting.

Sometimes they wanted me to go to meetings and I didn't want that and they like made a decision, but I had to get like this family counseling meetings. They invited my whole family and I didn't want to be in that meeting or like have my family talk about what I've been doing wrong and stuff. (Shan-Ying)

And Jau-Ying tried to explain to her foster parents the reason she did not want to join the cabin with them, but she was not listened to and not able to decide by herself.

They (foster parents) had a cabin and I didn't really want it to go, like ever. Um, but they made me go. So when it came to that, that wasn't very fun cause they wouldn't listen to why I didn't want to go or yeah, they just made me go. Um, and even though I really didn't want to, and of course I wanted to like here and there, but they really like to go there like twice a month and I didn't really want to do that. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 5: Adults-driven

The perceptions of the interviewed youths' participation mainly reply to adults they met or interacted with. Notably, Ling-Shi emphasized that the relationship with adults was not necessarily built upon how well or how long they met each other.

There doesn't necessarily, you have to be like a relationship. Like, I don't have to know the person very well. If I meet an adult who does everything right, like that could be enough to like, let me say what I actually feel. Cause it just depends on how they meet me and not like if I've spoken to them five times before. We don't have to necessarily know each other that well. It could be like the first time I meet them, but then could still, it could still get safe enough for me to say how I feel. (Ling-Shi)

Similarly, Jau-Ying described “good chemistry” of positive relationship between adults and her.

I mean like kind of the chemistry I have with an adult, if I feel like it's a good chemistry and I feel like I have an open and honest relationship with an adult. And just really feel like I can really talk to you. I can be honest to you and I can open myself up without any consequences or, you're not listening or things like that. That will just motivate me to participate more. (Jau-Ying)

And this kind of relationship was also mentioned in Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying' interview as open, safe, and trust relationships.

From the information they talked about the adults, I identified three key elements, presumption, attitude, and power that played an important role. The interviewed youths mentioned many people around them had presumption about them, even before meeting them in person. And there are two types of presumption, one is “prejudice,” and the other one is “believe in others.” The former one refers that some people have prejudice about children's ability, for instance, children were too young to participate; while the latter one refers that present workers or foster family heard from previous ones about their judgments of the youths and rather believing in that information than asking or knowing the youths by themselves. The example for the former one as Shan-Ying said: “they were telling me that I was too vulnerable and too sick to participate;” while the latter one, as Ling-Shi said, when the foster family heard from the CPS and did not listen to her, it felt like “my voice just like got taken away by the CPS” and similar example from Jau-Ying when she talked about her foster family.

In addition, Ling-Shi pointed out that sometimes the adults keep children away from

participation in the name of protection and believed that was the right way to do, which Ling-Shi thought “they did not realize how much damage it makes.”

A lot of grown-ups have these like thoughts about some children like, oh, no, they're too young to be participating in their own lives or she's too sick or she's too dangerous. And that like stops that thought of letting kids participate in their own life. But we know that that's not really a thing, like too sick or too dangerous. (Ling-Shi)

In terms of attitude, the attitude of the adults they interacted with influenced the interviewed youths' participation a lot. And the attitude that adults had was sensed by the youths not long after their first contact with the adults. According to the participants, they were not willing to express themselves and participate in if the adults had an attitude of knowing what is best for youths or not listening to them. Ling-Shi expressed her feeling when adults that attitude about her.

I notice that they think that they know best or that they like come in with a solution already and then they're like, yeah, what do you think? And then they already have whatever they're thinking there. And then I just feel like, why are you even asking me? Cause you've already decided apparently. (Ling-Shi)

Compared to Ling-Shi experienced mostly negative attitudes from adults, Shan-Ying experienced a significant difference between the worker who wanted to hear her voice and the worker who thought her voice did not matter. And the decision made by the former one was much better than the latter one.

Unfortunately, like a lot of people, I don't think they have been brave enough or like understood how important it is to hear my voice and like bring me in the case and like the decision making. But clearly when I've had case workers who really wanted to hear my voice, the decisions has been a lot better than when they don't want to hear my voice or they think that my voice doesn't matter. (Shan-Ying)

Jau-Ying also shared a similar perception, and she added that the attitude from adults would influence her participation.

It influenced it a lot cause, if I know that they will listen and they really care about me and they really want to help me, then that makes me want to participate more than an adult who I really feel like doesn't care, who is just doing their job or has pushed me a lot with my feelings or things like that. Then that just kind of breaks down my motivation to

participate. (Jau-Ying)

She added her frustrating experience of giving up her participation.

I just had given up because I had experienced so many times that I wasn't listened to when I tried to participate. So, at a point I was just like, well why should I, because I won't be listened to anyway. (Jau-Ying)

On the other hand, when the youths could feel that the adults' attitude towards them was positive and believed in the knowledge or strength that youths had, then it would benefit their participation. According to the participants, children and youths' knowledge not only needed to be believed in but also be acknowledged. As Ling-Shi stated: "they haven't been like, we know that you have a lot of knowledge and you do have an opinion on this. They haven't told me that. So then I maybe thought I didn't have it." Add on this, Ling-Shi could sense if adults believed in her not long after they met, as she said:

When people, adults believe in you and believe that you have knowledge at all, that could be a lot of different from people who like, cause kids notice what adults think of us, like they think if we are smart and we have a lot of knowledge about our lives, then we notice that they think that about us, like the minute they walk into the room, we can tell, but to like, (be able to) speak up your mind, you have people around you think that about you, who like, and tell you, but also like who believe in you. (Ling-Shi)

Lastly, the power issue between adults and youths often was a barrier for youths to fulfill their participation. For example, Jau-Ying described how her parents reacted to her when she tried to participate.

I didn't feel like I was allowed or able to express my feelings or, express how I actually felt or, give my opinions on things without getting in trouble or, being yelled at. I didn't feel like I could. (...) It was kinda like, don't talk back to me or, listen to your parents or, you're just a kid, blah, blah, blah. You don't know anything or that kind of stuff. (Jau-Ying)

Also, Ling-Shi mentioned the power-inequality relationship between workers from the CPS and the children and youth were under 18 years old, and how workers from the CPS did not share the power with the youth and kept them away from participating in decision-making.

Maybe they asked me like one question once and then they wrote like in the papers that like I participated in this decision. And then I was like, no, I didn't. Because it didn't feel like, cause I didn't actually have anything to say, because they like sort of decided on it already. But they still said that I participated in it. (Ling-Shi)

Theme 6: Lack of trust and safety

The common feeling the participants expressed were lack of trust and the sense of safety. They often said they did not feel safe enough to express themselves, and they need a safe enough place to participate. And this depended a lot on the person they interacted with. Shan-Ying expressed that feeling of trust and safety was a prerequisite for her participation.

It has to be like a safe person that I feel like I can trust and that person has to meet me in a way that makes me feel like this is a safe place. (Shan-Ying)

Ling-Shi agreed with Shan-Ying, and they both thought adults should make it “safe enough” for expressing their opinions and feelings.

Grown-ups haven't made it like safe enough for me to say it and safe enough for, or like even asked me those questions, like they've never given me a chance to speak up. (Ling-Shi)

Also, Shan-Ying added that if the place was safe enough for her to say her feeling and thinking at the time she was moved out of her original family, then there might be a better arrangement for her.

If they had made it safer for me to express myself and would have cooperated with me in the decision making, then things would have been so much different, and I could have maybe told them like how I felt. (...) If I had been able to express myself in a safe environment when I was like eight or nine years old, I think like my whole life would have been different and I would have, maybe lived in like a safe home. (Shan-Ying)

All my participants had the experience of losing their trust in many of the adults around them. They mentioned two kinds of situations they lost their trust. On the one hand, the information they offered to the CPS had gone directly to their parents, which all three participants experienced it. For example, Shan-Ying mentioned:

I had lost my trust to them because the things that I first told them (the workers from the

CPS) once straight to my parents. (Shan-Ying)

On the other hand, they tried to participate in their cases at first, but then found they were not able to do so. The negative experiences influenced their trust in those adults and then made an impact on their willingness to participate more with those adults. As Ling-Shi stated: “I don’t think they know how much trust we lose when we don’t get to participate.” Jau-Ying even lost her trust in adults and had a trust issue due to previous experiences she had.

All the decisions they made without me or without me participating have been, that’s hurtful and they are why I’m here today. But at the same time, I lost my trust to adults. I have big trust issues and things like that because of it. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 7: Cooperation

From the experiences of the interviewed youths, they believed the cooperation between the adults and them is vital. Letting the youth participate in the thing affected them was the best way for cooperation. They thought they did not have enough cooperation before; thus, they addressed the importance of it. Like what Jau-Ying mentioned:

Cause if a youth is unable to participate in things, then that does, it won't go good. And the cooperation between the youth and adults will be worse. I think if you make a decision without talking to child that's bad. (Jau-Ying)

Shan-Ying supported this view by pointing out that the information from youths could be missed if there was no cooperation.

If the adults make decisions without like participating with us, there can be a lot of things that we haven't told them about in our life, but they would never know because it just went over our head and we lost the trust we had with them. (Shan-Ying)

They also believed that cooperation could bring much useful help and a better solution. More cooperation meant more participation with them, and it meant to be a team and make decisions together, like Ling-Shi stated: “If they were trying to help me, they had to let me participate and they had to be on a team with me to make that help. Cause that's like their only shot to find a good solution.” And Ling-Shi believed her life would be much better with good cooperation like she stated:

The bad things would have been 10 times better if I got to participate. Cause then they

would actually find good solutions. If they make it safe enough and then really take our voice seriously and makes good decision together with us, then that makes for a good life I guess. (Ling-Shi)

Theme 8: Motivation

The participants emphasized that they always want to participate in the things related to them, especially those important decisions. Like Ling-Shi stated: “I know that in my life, I've always wanted to participate in and I've always had an opinion.” Participation in their lives made them feel being part of their own lives. However, even though they have the motivation to participate, many times, they were not able to participate in the things they wanted. In addition, Jau-Ying added that the empowerment from others around her enhanced her motivation to participate even more.

I've always been a person who really wants to participate. I had it in me that I would just really wanted to, and it was important for me, but I also had people around me who would tell me that, you know, Jau-Ying, stand up for yourself, you know, fight for yourself and, kinda like motivated me more to participate in things, and like speak my own voice. So yeah, I think those two things are the most motivating things for me to participate. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 9: Fear

When the interviewed youths had the feeling of fear about their participation, it reduced their willingness to participate. They might fear what would happen after they tried to express themselves, for example, all three participants worried if the words will be confidential. Like Ling-Shi described:

When I don't know what's going to happen with what I say, like if I don't know if they're going to tell my parents or, tell like every other social worker or, my foster home what I've said, um, then that makes it a lot scarier. (Ling-Shi)

Also, Jau-Ying worried about what people would say about and react to it.

I think fear of not being listened to or fear of things happening around my back or. fear of even just like fear of showing my own feelings. I had that for a while, showing my own feelings. And kinda like fear of, if I say this, what will happen or things like that. I think just fear in general was the main reason why I didn't participate in some things. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 10: Life changes

The interviewed youths believed that whether being able to participate in the things affecting them caused the life-change influences in their lives. Even though the first intention was good, such as moving them out of their original family to protect them, as Ling-Shi said:

So even like things that they have done that were good in my life, Oh it could have been better if I got to participate. (Ling-Shi)

However, things went worse when it was a lack of youths' participation. And they are the ones who lived with the consequences no matter they were good or bad. Shan-Ying shared a positive experience that was life-changing to her.

I told them that I wanted to move in with my girlfriend and her family as a foster home and they agreed and I was very, like, that was life changing for me because yeah, that's what I wanted. And that's what I felt like was the best decision. (Shan-Ying)

On the other hand, Ling-Shi believed that many decisions could be made better to change her life positively if she was able to participate in. She had experienced many times in her past life that the adults made a lot of strange decisions that made her life worse.

So that didn't really help because they made a lot of strange decisions cause they didn't talk to me about it. (...) When they didn't understand that they just made decisions that work kind of like against it's point. For example, they moved me a lot of places that were bad for me and make my life worse, which is off the point. And they just like gave lots of information to my parents, which just made it worse. So because I didn't get to have an opinion, a lot of the help they gave made my life worse. (Ling-Shi)

Jau-Ying added that she was the one who had to live in life, which was influenced by the decisions made by others.

What they decided I have to live with the rest of my life and the consequences of what they do and what they decided I have to live with for the rest of my life. (Jau-Ying)

Theme 11: Empowerment

The previous experiences of being able or not participate in their lives actually brought some positive strength in their lives. They realized how important was participation to them, and

they would like to try their best to keep themselves to participate in their own lives as much as possible. And being able to participate was such empowerment to the individual, as Jau-Ying mentioned: “If I can participate in things, I feel like, one thing is it kind of boosts myself a self-image because I feel like I, I'm heard I'm important.” The empowerment from the impact of previous experiences about their participation in the past could be categorized into two types: “being master in their own life” and “fight for it.”

After the experiences of being deprived of their participation, the interviewed youths expressed their eagerness to have more participation in their lives. They want to be able to be part of their lives, have control of it, and be master in their own lives. As Jau-Ying said, “I feel like I should participate in that because it's my own life.” Also, they believed they should be able to be part of the decision-making as they have the knowledge, opinion, and feeling of all the things that happened in their lives. As Ling-Shi stated: “I was in a lot of different systems. I moved around a lot, and I had a lot of ways to express that. Like, I had a lot of feelings inside of me.”

In addition, the positive experiences of participation in The Change Factory made the youths not only realize the importance of their participation but also empowered them to fulfill their participation in real lives. That also helped Jau-Ying to trust people again and was able to express herself.

It (The Change Factory) made me see some bigger pictures of things. So I feel really grateful to participate in The Change Factory and be a big part of it. And at the same time, it's kind of made me even more kind of like mad at the system because I have seen so much more like, Oh yeah, they did that to me. They took that decision and that was wrong because at the time I did, I felt it was wrong, but I didn't know that it was like wrong, wrong. You know what I mean? Like I have a much bigger picture on how wrong it actually is. (...) It has made me be able to stand up for myself more. It has helped me trust myself more and trust other people more. It has really helped me be able to really say what I mean and speak my own voice. (Jau-Ying)

Now, the participants felt that they were able to be the master of their own lives. As Jau-Ying firmly claimed:

Making those decisions for me has made me today be like, well, nobody's gonna do that again. You know, like, I am going to participate in whatever has to do with my own life. (Jau-Ying)

In addition to being the master in their own lives, the youths wanted to fight for the issue of inadequate children and youth participation. Even though previous experiences about their participation had some negative influence on them, but that also made them stronger as Jau-Ying described, “so all the kind of like the bad experiences I have with me, not participating has made me stronger in a way. And I think that is a good thing for me right now.” They also put this strength into action, which is participating in The Change Factory, and trying to fight for the participation of them and the children around Norway. Like Jau-Ying was motivated to fight for the children who were going through the same issue as she experienced.

I'm more kind of like motivated now and I'm more motivated to help other kids who need to be listened to and need help and that where adults won't listen. It makes me kind of want to be that adult that they never had or it makes me want to be the opposite of the adults who didn't make me participate in things. (Jau-Ying)

Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying also described their work in The Change Factory was to “try to give Pro’s knowledge out to all of Norway and make them (adults) start doing it (let children participate in).” They were motivated to make an impact on this issue and hoped it could change one day.

So we're trying to like give it (Pro’s knowledge) out to all of Norway and make them start doing it. But it's kind of hard because they have like, a lot of adults also think they let kids participate, but then it doesn't like, or kids don't say that they feel like they're being participated with. So that's an issue. (Ling-Shi)

With the contribution in The Change Factory now, Jau-Ying felt “really good” about herself as well.

I just feel better about myself too because I feel like I'm participating in something that is really important and that makes me feel good because it means that I'm helping, you know, I'm saving other children too and that just feels really good. (Jau-Ying)

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 What perceptions do Norwegian foster care youths have about their participation

Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying named five key points of participation, which originate from the Pro's knowledge by The Change Factory. The Change Factory (2019) engages in promoting the participation right of young people in welfare systems by offering them occasions and opportunities to express their opinions and perspective. It works with the philosophy of letting the voice of young people in welfare systems to be heard and understanding their need and expectation of being helpful. The Pro's knowledge is the collected experiences, opinions, and views from the children and youth around Norway. According to Ling-shi and Shan-Ying, the five keys include (1) provision of adequate information; (2) safe environment and trust relationship; (3) mutual decision-making to get the better solution; (4) written work should be checked by children and youth; (5) ability to provide feedback. Both of the participants believe in Pro's knowledge not only because it was collected from the children and youth they talked to, but also due to the fact that these keys are very relatable to the most of the experiences in their lives. Ling-Shi in the small group emphasized that the grown-ups should be "a little bit braver to ask important questions" but not only make an excuse not to let children and youth participate in their own lives. On the other hand, Jau-Ying said that participation to her was about the fact that she could express her opinion, know what other people around said about her, and being able to participate in planning her own life. Their answers showed that they had good knowledge on what participation was about.

Concerning the first research question, "What perceptions do Norwegian foster care youths have about their participation," the perceptions of interviewed youths about their participation were both positive and negative, varying across different fields and depending on the adults they interacted with. However, the interviewed youths reported more negative experiences than positive ones. They presented their daily participation, such as meals and activities, which were mostly taken care of by foster parents. Shan-Ying showed her positives experiences with some workers from the CPS who cared about her and saw her as an important person. Jau-Ying acknowledged the workers had tried their best to find her a foster family that could fit her wishes and demands. However, Shan-Ying used "lucky" to describe her positive experiences, showing that it was not common to have satisfying participation in her life.

Among their negative experiences, they mentioned issues of being oppressed by biological parents' authority, not being fully understood in regard to mental health situations by their

foster parents, and the lack of trust in their relationships with workers of the CPS. González et al. (2015) show that youths perceived their well-being to be associated with being heard by their parents. However, having a voice and being heard did not exist in my participants' experiences with their biological parents. Gal (2017) states that children in an unstable family environment might have fewer skills of participation; nevertheless, this situation could be improved by foster parents. The interviewed youths reported that they indeed got involved in some daily life participation. However, Ling-Shi and Jau-Ying mentioned that their foster parents were not able to understand their mental health issues; thus, the foster parents took away their participation in decision-making when it came to this issue. Earlier evidence shows that 48.8% of youth in foster care in Norway have experienced mental health problems (Larsen, et al, 2018), which seems to be a common issue of foster youth. Munford and Sanders (2016) show that foster parents had been working hard to acquire relevant knowledge and skills to be able to take the best care of their foster children, but sometimes dealing with complex issues might be overwhelming to them. Jau-Ying said that she did not feel her foster parents understood her mental health issue; Ling-Shi said her foster parents believed in the words from the CPS worker and considered she was too sick to make her own decision. There is an obvious gap between the hard-working foster parents from the study (Munford & Sanders, 2016) and my participants' perception. I think that this can be explained by the fact that foster parents might hold their knowledge and presumption to deal with the problem but forget to get to know their foster children and listen to their opinions on this particular problem. One should always provide possibilities for the children to express themselves on an issue and communicate with their parents and care givers prior to dealing with this issue when working with children and youth.

The interviewed youths expressed many negative experiences with the CPS. Ling-Shi and Jau-Ying mentioned that they were not being heard and not able to express themselves; instead, the judgments about them were taken without them, and thus they were kept away from their participation. They often were excluded from and deprived of decision-making possibilities with the excuse that they were too sick to make decisions. This finding resonates with Mccafferty's (2017) work that shows that social workers tended to take away children's autonomy, and participation was provided based on the notion of children being incompetent and in need to rely on adults. Hence, my participants had the perception that they did not have enough participation in the things meaningful to them, such as the places to move and the contact with their original family, which social workers were responsible for.

Shan-Ying shared her positive experiences working with the workers from the CPS, showing that some of the workers included their service users in the process and thus tried to provide children and youth with opportunities for participation. According to her, these workers saw

her as an important person and valued her voice, which established trust and a supportive relationship. The finding is consistent with earlier studies (Augsberger & Swenson, 2015; Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017; Kennan, et al., 2018), reporting that children and youth participation are considerably associated with the positive relationship between workers and children. Compared to the experiences with the CPS, the interviewed youths had a much positive perception of their participation in The Change Factory. They felt they were respected and understood by workers there. Also, they thought they could express themselves freely, and their views were taken into account. They described their participation as teamwork, and the decisions were made together with everyone's voice heard.

My participants experienced that their age mattered when they practice their participation. After they turned legal age, they did not only get their voice heard but also got to make more decisions by themselves. Article 12 of UNCRC emphasized that children and youth should be treated in accordance with their age and level of maturity. However, it might be misinterpreted by some workers that children could have participation only when they are mature enough to form their view (Mccafferty, 2017). Norwegian foster care youths are entitled to have aftercare service (CDP, 2019), which allowed my participants to experience the difference of how the CPS workers provided for youths' participation after the youths turned eighteen. Their perception is in line with Križ and Roundtree-Swain's (2017) study that shows that the youths' voices were valued more seriously, and they were able to decide more when they were 14 or older. Notably, from the youths' perspectives, the role of the CPS worker also changed from an active decision-maker to a passive helper as the youth has reached their legal age. This is a pronounced change from a role of power to make the decision for and on behalf of foster care children and youth to a role of an assistant when foster care youths seek it.

Most of the studies about youth participation had as one of their aims a proposition to find a better way to improve it (Gal, 2017; Mccafferty, 2017; Kennan, et al., 2018), but the experiences of youths unwilling to participate were rarely focused on. Becke-Hasen (2018) mentioned that the topic of children's desire and willingness to participate requires more research. Therefore, I included this topic as the topic for my interview questions to get information about their experiences of reluctant participation, if such existed. In connection with this topic, all my participants mentioned the meeting with the CPS worker or arranged by the CPS worker, such as family meetings. The negative relationship and tension between them and their parents made the participation unpleasant. But they were forced to participate in even it was against their wills. Jau-Ying offered another example of reluctant participation: a family activity in foster parents' cabin she had to visit at weekends that was supposed to take place twice a month. Munford and Sanders (2016) reported that foster families needed to let their foster children participate in their activities in order to improve foster children's sense of

belonging. However, from my participant's perception, it became an unwilling participation from her side as she could not make her own decisions.

To sum up, the perceptions of foster youths about their participation in different fields in their lives varied from place to place. However, the participants reported more negative perceptions than positive ones. This shows that the participation of foster care youth has a room for improvement. Especially, the participants were not satisfied with their participation in meaningful and important to them. They felt they only participated in small, unimportant things but not significant ones that really affected their lives. Lastly, there is a pronounced difference in the extent of participation before and after the participants has reached legal age. The participants' experiences of reluctant participation also require more attention from the researchers, foster family and social workers and others who are advocating for foster youths' participation.

4.2.2 What are the factors that have contributed to the participation of Norwegian foster care youths

Concerning the second research question, "what are the factors that have contributed to the participation of Norwegian foster care youths," I found that the most of the experiences related to their participation had a lot to do with the adults they interacted with. Thus, the adults do make a significant impact on the youths' participation. The reported experiences that contributed to the participants' poor participation are the lack of trust, safety, and cooperation. Besides, the youths' motivation to get involved in the things related to them would enhance their participation. At the same time, fear of the negative consequence might make them hesitate if they should participate.

As for the participation, the interviewed foster care youths highly relied on the adults around them. This is in line with several earlier studies (Augsberger & Swenson, 2015; Gal, 2017; Becke-Hasen, 2018). The finding in my study further shows that there are three essential elements of adults-driven participation. These are presumption, attitude, and power issue. In my participants' stories, they often experienced that adults had presumption on the youths and assumed that they were too sick, vulnerable, or dangerous to decide on their own. This finding supports Lundy's (2007) view that adults often see children as incompetent and immature, and, therefore, not responsible enough to make decisions. Also, Mccafferty (2017) suggests that the organization like the CPS should abandon their notion of children being vulnerable and irresponsible, and change their strategies from the strategies grounded in protectionism into the strategies grounded on strength and empowering. In terms of attitude, my participants said they could feel if the adult had a positive or negative attitude, which would influence youths'

willingness to participate. Similarly, Gal (2017) reports that workers' reluctance was one of the barriers that hinder children from fulfilling their participation.

When it comes to the power issue in participation between children and adults, this issue is not uncommon in research (Healy, 1998; Shier, 2001; Hart, 2008; Markogiannaki, 2016). In line with these the outcomes reported in the mentioned studies, my finding shows that the foster care youths felt they were oppressed by their parents when they wanted to express themselves in their family. Also, the lives of the youths relied on the CPS workers since they were responsible for protection. However, many of the workers that the youths met did not share the power with the youths to include them in the process of decision making. Lansdown (1997) points out that some CPS workers might have held power due to their fear of losing authority and control. Mccafferty (2017) explains that sometimes CPS workers wanted to avoid failure of children's protection, so they tended to have their subjective interpretation of children's participation, which may not include children's voice.

Notably, even though earlier studies find that predetermined children's characteristics and abilities might influence their participation (Gal, 2017; Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017), my participants emphasized that such characteristics and abilities should not be considered to be good excuses for not letting children and youths participate in affairs affecting their lives. Gal (2017) reports that age, gender, level of development and emotional qualities were factors contributing to youths' participation, while Križ and Roundtree-Swain (2017) find that self-advocacy, access to information, and age were elements which may hinder or facilitate youth participation. However, my interviewed participants reported that some adults liked to take age and mental status as excuses to keep them away from participation. My interviewed participants believe that every child should have a say expressing their thinking and feelings, no matter what their age is. Article 13 of UNCRC states that children have the right of the freedom of expression, and it includes the right to express themselves in any format of their choice. Therefore, there is always a way for children and youth participation, regardless of their age or capability.

According to the interviewed foster care youths, the adults' presumption, attitude, and handling of power issue do not only influence the extent of youths' participation but also their relationship with adults. The youths lost their trust in the adults and did not feel safe to express themselves when they sensed that the adults held negative impressions of them or were reluctant to fulfill their participation. This is in line with Augsberger and Swenson's (2015) study, that shows that being listened to and understood were what youth expected in a trustful relationship with their workers, and that a non-judgmental listening was a key to establish this relationship. For my interviewed participants, the trust and honest relationships

were possible if they could express themselves freely without worrying about consequences.

Husby et al. (2018) find that trust relationships were one of the key elements of promoting children's participation when they interacted with professionals. All my interviewed participants mentioned trust and feeling safe as the factors that were essential to their participation. Unfortunately, they mostly experienced a lack of trust and safety from the adults they interacted with. Many times, the trust was broken since the adults revealed the information that youths offered to others. For example, the words that youths told the CPS workers went directly to the youths' parents, causing more trouble. Due to their previous negative experiences, the participants were very cautious with their words and the people they told. These concerns are in accord with the findings from Augsberger and Swenson's (2015) and Mccafferty's (2017) studies. Augsberger and Swenson (2015) report that foster youths expressed the concern that what they shared with the CPS workers could be shared further with other professionals and their foster parents. Also, the youths in their study showed a clear distinction between those they could trust and open up to, and those that they viewed as not worthy of trust. Mccafferty's (2017) study shows that safe space was essential for the foster care youths to express themselves without fear. In both Mccafferty (2017) and my study, meaning of safety did not only refer to physical space but also to psychological feelings. Physically, the place should be child-friendly and meet children's requirements (Mccafferty, 2017); psychologically, my interviewed participants thought that the adults should make them feel the environment was "safe enough" to participate in.

My participants emphasized that cooperation improved their participation. Cooperation for them meant that adults let the youths participate in the affairs affecting their lives. To be more specific, cooperation meant the existence of opportunities for receiving information from adults, expressing their views and feelings, and being part of decision-making. They wanted to be one team with adults. This finding resonates with the concepts of the participation model proposed by Wong et al. (2010) that addressed children-parent participation rather than youth-driven participation. According to this participation model, both adults and children shared power, and the children were able to have their voices heard and participate. Also, Križ and Roundtree-Swain (2017, p.37) point out the importance of accessing information and viewed it as "a stepping stone towards participation." My interviewed participants believe that their participation with good cooperation could lead to better decisions and thus outcomes of their lives.

The interviewed youths have described their motivation to participate and their fear of the consequences of participation. The former one facilitated their participation, while the latter one hindered them from participation. These two factors were rarely mentioned in previous

research studies. This means that the studies about participation were less focused on the youths' psychological condition as these privileged the foster care youths' ability and external factors. However, according to my interviewed participants' experiences, the youths' participation could be beneficial if adults could empower the youths taking into account the motivation of the youths or eliminate their fear by establishing a trustful and safe relationship.

Summing up, all the factors found in this research, adults-driven, trust and safety, cooperation, motivation, and fear influenced the participation of the interviewed foster care youths. The factors can be viewed as interconnecting and decisive for the degree of youth participation. Taking into account my findings and findings from earlier studies, we can describe the relations between these factors. Motivation could start up the participation, if it is based on a trustful and safe relationship between youths and adults. And adults' presumption, attitude, and handling of power issue have an impact on both relationship and participation of the youths. The cooperation between youths and adults could strengthen participation, while fear of negative outcomes would reduce youths' willingness to practice their participation. All the factors together make the youth participation into a process based on chain-reaction. The youths would want to participate if they are motivated to do so, but their participation would be either hindered or facilitated depending on the adults they met. The feelings they appear based on these experiences, such as feeling of safety and feeling of fear, would influence the youths' willingness for further participation and even become decisive factors if the youths might consider quitting any active participation or keep on participating.

4.2.3 How does the participation of Norwegian foster care youths impact their lives

Concerning the third research question, 'how does the participation of Norwegian foster care youths impact their lives,' the interviewed youths reported their participation could be viewed as a life-changing factor. Also, their previous experiences of participation and the participation in The Change Factory, in particular, have empowered the youths to stand up for themselves as well as fight for other children and youths' rights.

According to my participants' experiences, participation has a life-changing impact. They felt that they did not have enough participation, and therefore, they lost the chance to have better options when the decisions were made. They believe that if they could participate more in the affairs affecting them, their life experiences would be much better. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence that could be found in earlier studies on the impact of participation on youths' lives. However, McLeod's (2007) study has demonstrated that one could expect positive consequences in the future when the voices of children who experience adverse

situations were listened to. Notably, my participants felt dissatisfied with their participation, and hence thought that their lives were worse than expected. It seems that they rarely had someone in their lives to trust and promote their participation. However, the CWA (§ 4-1) states that “children who have been taken into care by the CWS may be given the opportunity to be accompanied by a person whom the child particularly trusts.” Thus, foster children are entitled to have a contact person or “person of trust” other than the CPS worker who ensures that the rights and interests of foster care children and youths have been fulfilled (Becke-Hasen, 2018). Nevertheless, this “person of trust” seemed to be missing in my interviewed participants’ stories. Another missing thing in these stories was a lack of feedback mechanism integrated in the foster care system that ensures that children and youths’ voices are heard.

Even though the previous experiences of participation were dissatisfying, the interviewed youths reported that they had learned from their lacking participation. They realized the importance of their participation, and thus, they made themselves participate every time they have been given a chance. They felt their lives were decided by adults before, especially, by the CPS workers. Therefore, they wanted to take back control over their own lives when they could. Similarly, Wolfsen et al. (2010) identify that lacking control contributed to children’s fear during the process of their case in the CPS system. Unrau et al. (2008) find that the youths experience recurring losses of power when the youths are subjective to multiple placements. The youths expressed that they experienced the lack of knowledge and the feeling of lack of control over their lives. Moreover, Shuker et al. (2019) cited the work of Coleman (2011), who noted that the psychologically controlling from parents or carers would cause youths to experience a feeling disrespected and might be related to their low self-esteem. However, these could be avoided through improving the level of youth’s autonomy of participation. According to my participants’ experiences and previous research, better participation could make youths’ experiences of lives more positive in its various aspects.

My interviewed participants earlier experiences did not only empower them to stand up for themselves but also fight for the rights of other children and youths. They joined The Change Factory, becoming Pro (young people as experts) to advocate for the rights they should have. By helping other children to participate, my interviewed participant had reported better self-image. Also, the positive experience of participation in The Change Factory has empowered them to be more active in their participation. These findings support previous research studies’ findings that state that the youths could be strengthened through their participation, and thus benefit their future adult lives (Sinclair, 1998; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009; Checkoway, 2011). Besides, Head (2011) points out that active participation has brought advantages to both individuals and society. My interviewed participants were good examples of it. There are also those who criticise The Change Factory’s intentions and means (Bennett, 2019), as these

indicate that the written scripts used by The Chang Factory in their presentations have replaced the real voices of the children and youth, and that The Chang Factory has utilized the vulnerability of the children and youth and thus it manipulates these. However, my interviewed participants conveyed their satisfaction with their participation in The Change Factory's activities, and the examples they told me were from their own experiences or the children they had talked to. There might be issues (or not) in the Change Factory's activities that need to be examined, but the contribution that youths made on promoting the right of participation and the empowerment they gained should not go unmentioned or be overlooked.

To conclude, participation has played a key role in the lives of the interviewed foster care youths, as they tried to participate in as many affairs as possible. Some of it can be explained as the choices taken to remedy the past experiences of lacking participation. As Jau-Ying said: "I should participate in that because it's my own life!" Both positive and negative experiences of participation have strengthened my participants' opinions of fulfilling their participation. The experiences of standing up for themselves and fighting for other children's right of participation have empowered my interviewed participants to contribute more to promote children and youths' participation.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This study aims to explore the experiences of participation of Norwegian foster care youths. The experiences of participation include the perceptions of speaking up their voices, respecting and taking into account their opinions, as well as making decisions in their daily lives. The experiences of youths' participation focused on different fields, such as the original family, foster family, the community (The Change Factory in this research), and the CPS. And the interviewed youths' perceptions in different fields, the factors influencing their participation, and the impact of their participation in their lives were three main sectors that contributed to the pathway of achieving my research goals.

Overall, my interviewed participants perceive both positive and negative experiences regarding their participation; however, they reported more negative experience than positive ones. My participants indicated that their participations were not meaningful enough to affect their lives, even though they had daily participations. Besides, they identified that the levels social workers took part of their lives or in their decision-making process were different when they reached the legal age of medical consent and adulthood. Notably, even though my interviewed participants had wanted more participation in their lives, there were some occasions they were not willing to participate in. Examples of reluctant participation were family meetings and meeting with CPS workers. When it comes to the factors contributing to the youths' participation, the adult-related factor, such as their presumption, attitude, and handling of power issue, have played an important role. Add to this fact, the trustful and safe relationship was influential when the youths decided to open themselves up. Besides, the youths' participation was promoted if adults cooperated with them by listening to their voices and involving them in decision-making. Lastly, the interviewed youths always had their motivation to participate, but their fear might stop them from participating. All the factors can be viewed as interconnecting and decisive whether the youths will give up or keep practicing their participation. Thanks to their earlier experiences, my interviewed participants recognized the importance of their participation, and that made them stand up for their rights to participate. They believed good participation could change their lives in a better way. Therefore, they contributed themselves to advocating on children and youth's rights with The Change Factory. By doing that, they expected the children and youth in the Norwegian CWS could have satisfying fulfillment on their participation.

There are a few reflections from the research. First, it is noteworthy that most of the factors contributing to youth participation were adults related, besides motivation. They rarely talked about the other foster children or peer being part of the factors influencing their participation.

It shows how influential that adults could be to the participation of the youths. It is crucial to be aware of adults' presumption and attitude about the youth they interacted with. As adults and professionals, we should be mindful of and reflect on our assumptions and perspectives of children and youth, as well as handling of power issues between us. From the research, I realized the importance of getting rid of the adult's presumption and attitude of children and youth but trying to listen to them first. From my perspective and working experiences, adults do not always agree with the children or youths and fulfill whatever they want but put ourselves in the children's or youths' shoes and understand what messages they try to deliver. Besides, being aware of professionalism is another reflection I have after my interviews. Even though I have a lot of relevant knowledge from my education, children and youths are the ones who live their lives. They have their opinions and feelings from what they have experienced, and I should respect and learn from them. Lastly, I saw the empowerment of participation from my participants. The interviewed youths were described as sick, dangerous, and vulnerable by the adults that they interacted with. However, I saw these girls talk to me about their participation with confidence and strength, and clearly expressed the experiences of their participation. Especially, I could see the sparkles from their eyes when they talked about their work with The Change Factory, contributing themselves to the promotion of children and youth participation. Notably, there was the language of the culture as the limitation of my research. If I understood Norwegian culture and the language of culture better, my results could be more detailed.

Future research could have larger samples and recruit participants from different organizations in order to collect diverse voices and apply them to a broader population. Also, there are some themes in the research rarely being recognized in earlier literature, such as motivation and fear. Future research could focus on the psychological factors that influence the participation of foster youth. Furthermore, adults were the main character in the experiences of the youths' participation, but other children and youth were not mentioned. Future research could explore the role of their counterparts in children and youths' participation, including their biological siblings, foster siblings, and peers. Lastly, like the aforementioned "person of trust" seemed to be in law but absent in the youths' stories, it is worthy of understanding how the "person of trust" functions in youths' participation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Informed consent letter

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

“Participation of youth in foster care in Norway”?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore youths’ experiences of participation in Norway, particularly those in foster care. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

My research aims to explore youths’ experiences of participation in Norway, particularly those in foster care. The experiences of participation include the perceptions of speaking up their voices, being respected to their opinion and taken into account, as well as making decisions in their daily lives.

The main research question is “what are the experiences of participation of youths who have/had lived in foster care in Norway?” and follows by three sub-questions as below:

- a) What perceptions do youths in foster care in Norway have about their participation?
- b) What are the factors that have contributed to the participation of youths in foster care in Norway?
- c) How does the participation of youths in foster care in Norway impact their lives?

This is a master’s thesis from Pei-Yu Lin, a master’s degree student of an Erasmus Mundus Program of the European Master in Social Work with Families and Children.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Universitetet i Stavanger/ Institutt for sosialfag is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

I am looking for youths who fit following criteria to interview their experiences of participation in their daily lives.

1. Your age is between 15 to 23.
2. You have/ had lived in foster care more than a year.

3. You feel comfortable with and confident at speaking English.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you are interviewed individually or in a small group. It will take approx. one and a half hour. You will be asked to share about your perceptions of your participation in different fields in your life (such as the family of origin, foster home, community, and the Child Welfare System) in Norway, and some recommendations to improve your participation in the future. Your answers will be recorded electronically. I will also take notes during interviewing.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- My supervisor and I will have access to the personal data. And I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on 31st of August. The personal data, including any digital recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Universitetet i Stavanger/ Institutt for sosialfag, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Universitetet i Stavanger/ Institutt for sosialfag via Pei-Yu Lin (p.lin@stud.uis.no) and my supervisor Mikhail Gradovski (mikhail.gradovski@uis.no)
- Our Data Protection Officer: Oyvind Munthe
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email:(personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Student



Pei-Yu Lin

23/03/2020

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "Participation of youths in foster care in Norway" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx 31st of August, 2020

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix2 Interview Questions

- 1) Please give a brief introduction of yourself and your life, especially when you left your family and foster care (and left care if that have happened)?
- 2) What do you know about participation?
 - 2-1) What is the definition of participation to you?
 - 2-2) What activities or affairs do you participate in your life? And how
 - 2-3) Have you learned how to speak up your voice? When and how?
- 3) What perceptions do you have about your participation in different fields such as with your original family, in foster home, community, and child welfare system?
 - 3-1) What perceptions do you have about speaking your voice?
 - 3-2) What perceptions do you have about your voices and views being respected and taken into account?
 - 3-3) What perceptions do you have about decision-making?
 - 3-4) Was there any situation that you think you should participate in, but you were not? Or you think that things might happen differently with your participation?
 - 3-5) Can you choose what do you want to participate freely in your life?
 - 3-6) Was there experience that you didn't want to participate but you were forced to?
- 4) What are the factors that have contributed to your participation?
 - 4-1) What supportive factors do you think that help your participation?
 - 4-2) What barriers do you think that hindered you from participating?
 - 4-3) How does your relationships with the adults you interact with influence your participation?
- 5) How does your participation impact your life?
 - 5-1) How is the importance of participation in your life?
 - 5-2) How does your participation in the past influence life now?
 - 5-3) What are your recommendations about improving youth participation?

Appendix 3 NSD Approval

NSD Personvern

16.03.2020 15:19

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 585956 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, presupposing that it is carried out in accordance with the information given in the Notification Form and attachments dated 16.03.2020, as well as in dialogue with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION The project will be processing special categories of personal data about health, and general categories of personal data, until 31.08.2020.

LEGAL BASIS The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is therefore explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a), cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding: - lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent - purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes - data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed - storage limitation (art.

5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data. NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13. We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data. To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Karin Lillevold Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

Appendix 4 Voice of Ling-Shi, Shan-Ying & Jau-Ying

Based on the information provided in the small group interview with Ling-Shi and Shan-Ying and the individual interview with Jau-Ying, I organized it and presented the finding by each participant to make their voice more explicitly.

Ling-Shi

In terms of the perceptions of Ling-Shi's participation in general, she did not feel she had participated in her past life. As she said: "I have not been like allowed to participate in anything, really." especially in her original family and the CPS.

In my original family, I never...mm... I didn't really have anything to say, and that's kind of the answer to everything, like I never said anything because I can't trust them. I didn't say anything but I knew like if I said something small, even, then I probably won't be respected, and then it probably won't be taken into account. (Ling-Shi)

Even though her foster home let her participate in some daily life decisions, but when it came to important decisions, the parents from foster home tended to listen to the saying from the worker from the CPS and considered that she was too sick and dangerous to make decisions without even trying to understand what she felt and thought, and that made her feel that all her voice was taken by the CPS.

They were just there and then they decided that I was too sick and then too dangerous and then I didn't even get a chance to say how I felt. (Ling-Shi)

They (foster parents) heard a lot of about me from the CPS, and they got a lot of information from them, so they already thought I was sick... and I had a lot of problems, and therefore, like, I don't have a lot of opinion on my life, so my opinion was not really important. So I stop talking to them, in the foster homes, cause I didn't see the point. (Ling-Shi)

Ling-Shi had many negative experiences with the CPS, and she described it as the "worst" experience of her participation. She mentioned that she tried to participate first; however, she felt not been heard and taken into account, which made her stop participating. And the worst thing to her was that the worker from the CPS made the decision and claimed she had participated, which she did not agree with. However, she could do nothing about it at the time,

as she said: “the kids in the CPS actually their whole lives rely on whether or not those caseworkers know how to let kids participate.” She also experienced some reluctant participation arranged by the CPS. Even though she did not want to participate in “the meeting with biological family” or “a lot of counseling,” she had no choice but to participate in.

When I first came to the CPS, I tried to like say how I felt and they didn't take it seriously and they didn't listen to me and then they just, everything I said just went straight to my parents and I couldn't trust them. And then I stopped talking to them or like I stopped saying like how I actually felt and what I actually needed help with. (Ling-Shi)

They just decide things like over my head and, in the law, it says that we have a right to participate in our lives. But nobody has really like, said that how you do it. So it's kind of open for everyone. And then they're supposed to like write down how you've participated, but then they can really just write anything and then say that like, OK. But then a lot a lot of children say that they're not being participated with. (Ling-Shi)

Maybe they asked me like one question once and then they wrote like in the papers that like I participated in this decision. And then I was like, no, I didn't. Because it didn't feel like, cause I didn't actually have anything to say, because they like sort of decided on it already. But they still said that I participated in it. (Ling-Shi)

The only positive perception of Ling-Shi's participation seemed to happen in The Change Factory, and she said it was the place that she could say whatever she wanted. And she felt they “work together as a team but not as the adults and children.”

Here I can say whatever I want, cause the people here, they believe in me and they believe that I have knowledge and they take that knowledge like, seriously and they believe in that. So here it's very, very safe to say anything, both like difficult things or like things that I am just thinking about or things that I might be like scared to say other places, because of like what others might think or, yeah, it's, I'm pretty safe here. (Ling-Shi)

She emphasized that she did not have participated in the important things in her life.

I haven't been able to participate in things that have actually meant something in my life,

like where I want to move or if I even want to move. Most of it has been decided by adults and they've made a lot of excuses for me not to participate in my own life cause I've been dangerous and sick and stuff. So all the important stuff then like, or what felt important in my life, like what contact I wanted with like mental health services or what contact I wanted with my original family. (Ling-Shi)

From her experiences of talking to children with their participation when she worked in The Change Factory, she pointed out that children always need to have a say even if they were young.

A lot of grown-ups are or, and in a lot of laws and stuff it says you have to like do it (let children participate) gradually when they grow up and stuff. But then kids like that The Change Factory has spoken to that are like six years old saying that I need to be participated with, cause like I have a lot to say and my opinion has to be taken seriously. (Ling-Shi)

When being asked about the factors that influenced her participation, Ling-Shi thought the five keys of participation from The Change Factory represented the main factors that facilitated her participation. But she also added that the views that adults had on her would make an impact on her participation. The adults' presumption and negative attitude towards children could hinder Ling-Shi's participation, whereas the belief from adults motivated her participation.

I notice that they think that they know best or that they like come in with a solution already and then they're like, yeah, what do you think? And then they already have whatever they're thinking there. And then I just feel like, why are you even asking me? Cause you've already decided apparently. (Ling-Shi)

When people, adults believe in you and believe that you have knowledge at all, that could be a lot of different from people who like, cause kids notice what adults think of us, like they think if we are smart and we have a lot of knowledge about our lives, then we notice that they think that about us, like the minute they walk into the room, we can tell, but to like, (be able to) speak up your mind, you have people around you think that about you, who like, and tell you, but also like who believe in you. (Ling-Shi)

She explained the idea relationship depended on how safe she felt from the person rather than how long they had known each other.

There doesn't necessarily, you have to be like a relationship. Like, I don't have to know the person very well. If I meet an adult who does everything right, like that could be enough to like, let me say what I actually feel. Cause it just depends on how they meet me and not like if I've spoken to them five times before. We don't have to necessarily know each other that well. It could be like the first time I meet them, but then could still, it could still get safe enough for me to say how I feel. (Ling-Shi)

Ling-Shi also pointed out another barrier that hindered her participation, which was the fear of not knowing the consequence of the things she shared.

When I don't know what's going to happen with what I say, like if I don't know if they're going to tell my parents or, tell like every other social worker or, my foster home what I've said, um, then that makes it a lot scarier. (Ling-Shi)

In addition, she expressed that she always has the motivation to participate, as she said: "I know that in my life, I've always wanted to participate and I've always had an opinion." However, not feeling safe enough stop her participating more, as she mentioned: "Grown-ups haven't made it like safe enough for me to say it and safe enough for, or like even asked me those questions. Like they've never given me a chance to speak up." At the same time, she believed when adults keep the children from participation, they "lost the trust" from the children. And she thought those adults did not understand the importance of letting children participate in their own lives.

Ling-Shi emphasized several times about the importance of cooperation between adults and children. Cooperation with her was to let her participate in and be a team with her. She believed that would "the bad things would have been 10 times better" because then they could "find better solution" and therefore, "make better help." But Ling-Shi also mentioned that adults should "make it safe enough and then really take our voice seriously and makes a good decision together with us" to make better things happen.

For question 3 about the impact of participation in her life. She said it was the "most important." She believed her life would be better if she could participate in the crucial decisions, and those "strange decisions" which made her life worse could be avoided.

So that didn't really help because they made a lot of strange decisions cause they didn't talk to me about it. (...) When they didn't understand that they just made decisions that

work kind of like against it's point. For example, they moved me a lot of places that were bad for me and make my life worse, which is off the point. And they just like gave lots of information to my parents, which just made it worse. So because I didn't get to have an opinion, a lot of the help they gave made my life worse. (Ling-Shi)

Since she had so many experiences about not being able to participate, she asserted the importance of participation. She believed she had the knowledge about herself so that adults should take them into account. As she stated: "I did know what I needed. Like I was in a lot of different systems. I moved around a lot and I had a lot of ways to express that. Like, I had a lot of feelings inside of me." Therefore, she wanted more adults, especially professionals working with children and youths, could realize the importance of children's participation. And she was making an effort on it with The Change Factory.

So we're trying to like give it (Pro's knowledge) out to all of Norway and make them start doing it. But it's kind of hard because they have like, a lot of adults also think they let kids participate, but then it doesn't like, or kids don't say that they feel like they're being participated with. So that's an issue. (Ling-Shi)

Shan-Ying

In terms of the perception of Shan-Ying's participation in general, she thought she "had been able to participate in a lot," However, there were mixed experiences in different fields. Shan-Ying did not think she had a say about her original family. And since she had stayed in several different foster homes, she had various perceptions about them.

In my case, I've been able to participate in a lot, like where I want to move. They've been very open to my suggestions and wishes. So I've got the opportunity to participate in a lot of things in the CPS. And also into foster care, like they asked me if I want to move to this family or if I don't want to do it, if isn't safe enough. (Shan-Ying)

In some foster homes I felt like I just didn't feel safe enough to tell them what I wanted or like I didn't feel that they wanted to like hear my opinion. So I didn't want to say anything. But in some foster cares, I felt like it was a safe place and they, they may wanted to hear my voice or like my opinion. (Shan-Ying)

Besides, Shan-Ying did not think the things she participated in were something really important. As she described, “like often in foster homes, I felt like the things I can participate in isn't like important. It's just about like what you want dinner or like the small things in life.” And the important things to her were like “family contact and when to see her family or her friends.” However, she did feel like expressing it, or she did not feel safe enough to express it.

Shan-Ying agreed with what Ling-Shi said about the perception of the participation in The Change Factory, especially the cooperation like she said: “we cooperate a lot in what we are going to do and how we're going to work.” She added that they could decide together “how they are going to do a conference, what they are going to say and what’ the important things are.”

Also, Shan-Ying had mixed experiences about her participation in the CPS. She thought it related to the workers’ attitude and view on her. She experienced both the workers who valued her as an important one and those who did not take her seriously.

It's been a very mixed and I think that has a lot to do with the caseworkers and how they like what they think of me. And how would they see me as like if they see me as an important like person in the case. And if they like really want to hear my voice and opinion, then and it's much easier for me to be honest and just tell them what I want.

(Shan-Ying)

Unfortunately, like a lot of people, I don't think they have been brave enough or like understood how important it is to hear my voice and like bring me in the case and like the decision making. But clearly when I've had case workers who really wanted to hear my voice, the decisions has been a lot better than when they don't want to hear my voice or they think that my voice doesn't matter. (Shan-Ying)

Even though she expressed that she was lucky to have opportunities to participate a lot in the CPS, there were some reluctant participations happen there, which were similar to Ling-Shi’s experience. She gave an example of those unwilling activities, such as family counseling. She described: “They invited my whole family and I didn't want to be in that meeting or like have my family talk about what I've been doing wrong and stuff.”

Besides, as she was over 18 years old now, she shared some changes that she felt when she turned legal age. She thought she had more control over her life and could make decisions by herself without the CPS’ intervention. And the role of the CPS became the passive helper.

I think it (participation) changes a bit, the older you get, unfortunately. Because like, now I am over legal age, they can't like boss around and make a lot of decisions for me. Now I'm in some kind of after care, I have a case worker, I can reach out if there's anything that I need help with, but they don't make any decisions for me now. (Shan-Ying)

When it came to the factors that contributed to her participation, she mostly agreed with Ling-Shi's opinions. But she mentioned many times during the interview that the lack of trust and a safe environment influenced her willingness to participate. And she believed if she felt safe enough to express herself when she was eight or nine years old (her first contact with the CPS), "I think like my whole life would have been different, and I would have, maybe lived in like a safe home," as she said. And she shared that she lost her trust to the workers from the CPS as "the things that she first told them once straight to my parents."

It has to be like a safe person that I feel like I can trust and that person has to meet me in a way that makes me feel like this is a safe place. (Shan-Ying)

If they had made it safer for me to express myself and would have cooperated with me in the decision making, then things would have been so much different, and I could have maybe told them like how I felt. (Shan-Ying)

In addition, Shan-Ying thought when the adults from the CPS or foster care showed that they knew the best for the children, it made her felt the place was not safe to express herself. And this might have a negative impact on the cooperation between the adults and the children.

If the adults make decisions without like participating with us, there can be a lot of things that we haven't told them about in our life, but they would never know because it just went over our head and we lost the trust we had with them. (Shan-Ying)

In the last part of the interview about the impact of participation in Shan-Ying's life, she agreed with Ling-Shi's views again, And she emphasized that participation could lead to the right decision and useful help to the children in need. She shared an example that showed her participation made her life changed in a better way.

I told them that I wanted to move in with my girlfriend and her family as a foster home and they agreed and I was very, like, that was life changing for me because yeah, that's what I wanted. And that's what I felt like was the best decision. (Shan-Ying)

Jau-Ying

In terms of the perceptions of Jau-Ying's participation, she has various experiences in different filed. In the original family, Jau-Ying felt the authority from her parents and thus did not dare to express herself.

I didn't feel like I had the choice or ability to do it because I didn't feel like anybody would take me seriously. And I didn't feel like I was heard and I didn't feel like, uh, you know, I just felt kind of pushed down every time I tried. (Jau-Ying)

I didn't feel like I was allowed or able to express my feelings or, express how I actually felt or, give my opinions on things without getting in trouble or, being yelled at. I didn't feel like I could. (...) It was kinda like, don't talk back to me or, listen to your parents or, you're just a kid, blah, blah, blah. You don't know anything or that kind of stuff. (Jau-Ying)

In the foster home, Jau-Ying had both positive and negative perceptions about her participation there. She felt she was able to participate in most things; however, she felt not been understood when it came to the issue of mental health. She said she could not make the decision by herself before her legal age of health care. Also, she shared an example of reluctant participation in her foster home. She felt her voice was not taken into account and could not make the decision by herself when she expressed why she did not want to go to the family cabin.

When it came to like all the other things, they were really open and would listen to me and you know, respected and I could decide, you know, a lot of things myself without any problems. (...) when it came to like mental health and my problems that I had, they didn't understand it, so it was just hard for me to open up because they wouldn't get it. (Jau-Ying)

They (foster parents) had a cabin and I didn't really want it to go, like ever. Um, but they made me go. So when it came to that, that wasn't very fun cause they wouldn't listen to why I didn't want to go or yeah, they just made me go. Um, and even though I really

didn't want to, and of course I wanted to like here and there, but they really like to go there like twice a month and I didn't really want to do that. (Jau-Ying)

In terms of the perception about her participation in The Change Factory, Jau-Ying said she could say whatever she wanted. She described it as an open and safe place with respectful people. Even if there was a disagreement, they could talk and discuss it to deal with it.

There I feel like I can say whatever I want. They always respect what I have to say or what my opinions are on things. And it's a very open place where you can, feel with what you feel without anything else happening. You can pretty much say anything and it's fine and people will listen to you and people respect you. And if they don't agree on a decision making, then we'll just talk about it and discuss it and figure it out. (Jau-Ying)

When Jau-Ying talked about her participation in the CPS, she pointed out the apparent difference when she was 18. She felt the things were going behind her, and she did not even have a chance to participate in, but after she turned 18, the workers from the CPS could not decide anything for her anymore. Therefore, she felt like she had more participation and a “bigger voice” as the CPS “could not really decide anything for her,” and she could “run her life as how she wanted it”. Also, she no longer needed to be scared of “being moved somewhere”. As Shan-Ying mentioned, the role of the CPS became passive helper when the youth was over 18 years old.

Now, of course I listened to me a lot, especially in a lot last year too. In the start they would hardly ever listen to me. They would talk to my everybody else around, behind my back, make decisions for me without even asking me about them or asking me how I felt about them. And just pretty much just go around my back about a lot of things and just didn't talk to me a lot. And they, it just wasn't nice cause I didn't feel like I was a part of my own life in a way. (Jau-Ying)

About the age difference, she also experienced the same when it came to the health issue. She mentioned that the law in Norway entitled the youth over 16 years old to have the right to decide on health care. And she said she “had to go” before she turned 16 years old. Also, she pointed out that even the children under 18 had right to “have a voice”, but things had been done “differently”, as “they (the workers from the CPS) were responsible for the children, so they get to do more things in children’s life.”

Even though she had mostly negative perceptions with the CPS before she turned 18 years old,

she acknowledged the CPS had made much effort to find her foster home based on her wishes. However, she experienced that she had no choice again when the foster home was found.

I do think they tried their best. I mean, of course all my wishes weren't fulfilled, but I do think they tried their best and there's not that many foster homes either compared to how many children need foster homes too. So I understand that it's hard to find a foster home anyway. So I think they tried their best to find a good one. But I think the only negative thing about that is they always knew who my foster home was weeks before I did, and then when they finally told me who it was, and then I didn't even have the chance to say no, I didn't want them. So in a way, I say, (they) listen to my wishes, but when they find a foster home, I don't, I didn't feel like I had the right or I couldn't say that I don't want to live there. They always told me like, you have to try it out and blah, blah, blah. And I had to at least live there for six months and things like that. So it's kind of like they listened to my wishes, but at the same time when I knew who it was, I couldn't say no or you know, that's where I had to move in. (Jau-Ying)

In addition to the experiences in different fields, Jau-Ying mentioned that she could not participate in the things which she considered very meaningful to her.

They (foster parents and the workers from the CPS) kind of had a little bit control over and kinda decided a lot for me. I wanted to play handball, for example, and they told me that I couldn't because that would cost this and this or things like that. And then they were like, well, you could do this and that instead. Because at that time, the activity that I wanted to do means a lot because that's kinda like my thing or something I really want to do in a hard time and in a hard situation, and it would have helped me. But I didn't feel like I was listened to when I tried to explain that. (Jau-Ying)

When it comes to the factors contributing to her participation, Jau-Ying mentioned the attitude of the adults, the trust, and the chemistry between her and the adults. She felt “hurtful” when the decisions were made without her participation, and it could cause “the lost of trust” and “worse cooperation between the adults and her.” After her several failures of trying to express herself, she gave up to participate in as she had the thinking of “I won't be listened to anyway.”

It (relationships with the adults) influenced it (participation) a lot cause, if I know that they will listen and they really care about me and they really want to help me, then that

makes me want to participate more than an adult who I really feel like doesn't care, who is just doing their job or has pushed me a lot with my feelings or things like that. Then that just kind of breaks down my motivation to participate. (Jau-Ying)

And she explained the “good chemistry” with adults:

If I feel like it's a good chemistry and I feel like I have an open and honest relationship with an adult. And just really feel like I can really talk to you. I can be honest to you and I can open myself up without any consequences or, you're not listening or things like that. That will just motivate me to participate more. (Jau-Ying)

Jau-Ying viewed herself as a person who had high motivation to participate, and she was even motivated when others encouraged her. However, her fear was the most significant barrier to her participation.

I've always been a person who really wants to participate. I had it in me that I would just really wanted to, and it was important for me, but I also had people around me who would tell me that, you know, Jau-Ying, stand up for yourself, you know, fight for yourself and, kinda like motivated me more to participate in things, and like speak my own voice. (Jau-Ying)

I think fear of not being listened to or fear of things happening around my back or. fear of even just like fear of showing my own feelings. I had that for a while, showing my own feelings. Um, and, and kinda like fear of, if I say this, what will happen or things like that. I think just fear in general was the main reason why I didn't participate in some things. (Jau-Ying)

Lastly, like two other interviewed youths, Jau-Ying believed the participation was significant in her life, and it made a massive impact on her, as she stated: “what they decided I have to live with the rest of my life and the consequences of what they do and what they decided I have to live with for the rest of my life.” And the previous experiences made her claimed determinedly that “nobody's gonna do (decide for her) that again” and “I am going to participate in whatever has to do with my own life.”

In addition, the participation in The Change Factory not only made her realize the participation she should have but also empowered her to stand up for herself, get her trust

back as well as express herself.

It made me see some bigger pictures of things. So I feel really grateful to participate in The Change Factory and be a big part of it. And at the same time, it's kind of made me even more kind of like mad at the system because I have seen so much more like, Oh yeah, they did that to me. They took that decision and that was wrong because at the time I did I felt it was wrong, but I didn't know that it was like wrong, wrong. You know what I mean? Like I have a much bigger picture on how wrong it actually is. (Jau-Ying)

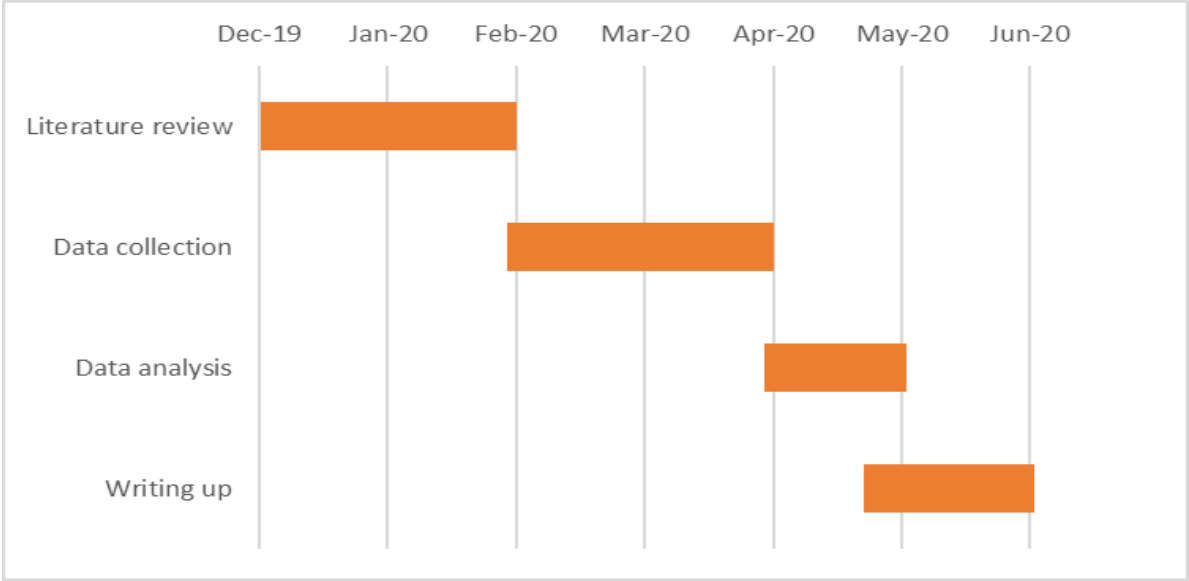
It has made me be able to stand up for myself more. It has helped me trust myself more and trust other people more. It has really helped me be able to really say what I mean and speak my own voice. (Jau-Ying)

Jau-Ying held empowerment and fought not only for herself but also for other children though participating in The Change Factory, Especially those who experienced the same like her, as she said: "It has just made me want to fight more for children who's going through this now." And the feeling of "I can help" even "boosted her self-image."

I'm more kind of like motivated now and I'm more motivated to help other kids who need to be listened to and need help and that where adults won't listen. It makes me kind of want to be that adult that they never had or it makes me want to be the opposite of the adults who didn't make me participate in things. (Jau-Ying)

I just feel better about myself too because I feel like I'm participating in something that is really important and that makes me feel good because it means that I'm helping, you know, I'm saving other children too and that just feels really good. (Jau-Ying)

Appendix 5 Timeline



Appendix 6 Non-plagiarism declaration

I hereby declare that the Dissertation titled '**I should participate because it's my own life': Participation of Norwegian foster care youths** submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Program in Social Work with Families and Children:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize, and will result in a failing grade (F) in the program.

Date:15/06/2020.....

Signature:
Pei Yu Lin.....

Name:PEI-YU LIN.....