

**INTERSECTIONS OF WELFARE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS  
AND SINGLE MOTHERS' ACTIVISM IN THE U.S.**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the lived experiences of single mothers involved with child welfare services and mothers' activism against child welfare services, in order to more deeply understand the intersections between and meanings of the welfare and child welfare systems in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the U.S. This study had two research questions: 1) how have the material and symbolic dimensions of change worked together in shaping the post-1990 restructuring of both areas of welfare services? And 2) how have mothers responded to these reforms? Specifically, what is the nature of mothers' activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring? This study used a theoretical framework that draws on scholarly understandings of governance, feminist theorizing of policy change, and anti-racist feminism and decolonizing theory. This qualitative study employed a mix of data collection and analysis strategies. The primary data was collected through in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 16 study participants, who were parents (mostly mothers) involved with child welfare services and/or activism and their advocates. My analysis of the interviews was directed by strategies of critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis, based on feminist standpoint epistemology. The findings of this study reveal that the combination of two systems after welfare reform created the material and symbolic conditions that blame and punish single mothers for having children without resources. Enacting a neoliberal gender order that expects that women assume social reproduction privately, children can be removed from single mothers when they cannot uphold this expectation. This study also found that mothers' activism against child welfare services showed their feminist struggle to demand welfare rights as social and economic justice. This study highlighted that patriarchal gender orders have been institutionalized through the implementation of social welfare policy, and mothers have organized activism to challenge such gender orders.

## **DEDICATION**

To all single mothers and welfare warriors.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

ASFA: Adoption and Safe Families Act

CPS: Child Protective Services

NWRO: National Welfare Rights Organization

PRWORA: Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

WW: Welfare Warriors

W-2: Wisconsin Works

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

They [Child Protective Services] don't like moms and they don't see the kids as human. They really don't see the children as human beings, they treat them like little animals. Move 'em here, put them there. Do this, do that. Put them on drugs. You know they really don't see the children of poor moms as human. The only way you can understand it, if you think about the complete history of this country [the U.S.] *constantly* doing that to the children of the Africans and the children of the Indians, and the children of immigrants. *Constantly* treating poor kids like pieces of furniture. You know, use them to fill up the boarding schools. Or use them to sell down south to another *factory*, another plantation, whatever. You know they use those kids from birth. And that really is what they're doing in child welfare. They're using the kids of the poor moms from birth, to make money and to keep them—their prejudices alive (Gowens<sup>1</sup>, Welfare Warriors Director, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

Historically, the state has intervened into gender relations through social welfare policy and corresponding institutions, regulating the norms of womanhood and motherhood in a patriarchal ordering of social relations of power. Policies and institutions have intertwined and been employed to maintain specific political and economic orders, along with the specific class, racial, and gender orders that are simultaneously reinforced through these institutional policy processes. The neoliberal restructuring of welfare states has not only had a detrimental effect on marginalized populations, but also continues to arrange power relations in ways that reinforce poverty and oppression. An underlying issue has been, who will take responsibility for social reproduction and how do public policies intervene in gender relations about whose responsibility this ought to be and becomes; ultimately, women continue to be culturally assigned such responsibilities (Campbell, 2000, pp. 4-5). Specifically, the welfare (in a broad sense of the term)<sup>2</sup> of

children both constitutes, and is constituted by, gendered public discourses that continue to affect and shape the current forms of welfare and child welfare systems (Cannella, 2003).

In the U.S., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was introduced in 1996 through reform of the existing welfare program. TANF replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Many single mothers lost their entitlements to income support based on their being as full-time care providers, which since 1935, AFDC had assured. In most states, single mothers must now work unpaid full-time (30 hours or more) in order to fulfill the work requirements to receive TANF (Hill, 2012, p. 39). Simultaneous to these welfare policy changes, foster care caseloads expanded very rapidly throughout the late 1980s and 1990s (Berrick, 2011, p. 28), and more than doubled from 1985 to 2000 (Swann & Sylvester, 2006, p. 309).<sup>3</sup> It is critical to note that the growth in foster care caseloads has mainly affected families headed by single mothers (Slack et al., 2003, p. 518; Paxson & Waldfogel, 2002; Wells & Marcenko, 2011), and has disproportionately impacted racialized<sup>4</sup> mothers (USHHS, 2016, p. 2; Roberts, 2002).

What becomes clear is that there is an apparent overlap between families receiving public assistance and families involved with child welfare services (Courtney, Dworsky, Piliavin, & Zinn, 2005). Poverty, 'race', and single motherhood are the three key factors that disproportionately affect family involvement with child welfare services. In 2011 in the U.S., 70 percent of children with single parents (22 percent of children overall) lived in poverty (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013). Surely, poverty has negative effects on child well-being in the form of "family and environmental stresses, lack of resources and investments, and the interplay of social class/cultural patterns and

poverty” (Danziger & Danziger, 2010, p. 263). However, historically single motherhood and neglect were mutually and simultaneously constructed as social problems; many of the defining indices of child neglect were essential to the survival of families headed by single mothers (Gordon, 1988, p. 84). Single mothers’ as part of welfare rights organizations have actively organized to challenge the welfare and child welfare systems. In addition, from 1995 to 2005, “there has been child welfare class action litigation [a civil court procedure under which one party, or a group of parties, sues as representatives of a larger class of individuals] in 32 states, with consent decrees or settlement agreements in 30 of these”, and “[t]hese lawsuits have often been used as tools to address failures by child welfare agencies to provide adequate services to children and parents and to achieve systemic reform that might otherwise have required legislation or many individual lawsuits” (Kosanovich & Joseph, 2005, p. 2).

There is considerable scholarship examining single mothers’ experiences of the welfare system and welfare reform. Feminists point out that TANF’s illegitimacy provisions—illegitimacy reduction bonus, funding for abstinence-before-marriage sexuality education and promotions of abstinence, married family formation bonuses (to increase the percentage of children residing in marital families), child support provisions, and work requirements for single mothers and only one parent in two-parent families—has contributed to reduced single motherhood (e.g. Mink, 2006). Moreover, feminists have pointed out that welfare programs rest on assumed moral codes of mothering; ‘good’ mothering is assessed as morally deserving of income support (for example, Gazso, 2012).

Research also explores single mothers’ experiences of the child welfare system. In

this work, feminists point out how the historical and political construction of child maltreatment shifts in response to changing social norms, conditions and power relations, particularly around family, which continues to be based on patriarchal domination of the family, a male-dominated, father-dominated form of family (Gordon, 1988). Moreover, feminists point out that child protection is a process that evaluates ‘maternal capacity’ and employs mother-blame, i.e. mothers are to blame for their children’s perceived lack of health and well-being, as a way to reinforce a binary division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothering (e.g. Davies, Krane, Collings, & Wexler, 2007).

However, there is little research that attempts to look at how the two systems—welfare and child welfare—connect in mothers’ lives, and how they experience and respond to these interconnections. Such research is important because it is primarily the same mothers who experience the two systems at once: poor and often racialized single mothers. Moreover, most studies of the child welfare system are subdivided into research on specific portions of the system (such as investigation, risk assessment, services, etc.); each portion, however, comprises a part of the entire system which produces the disproportional representation of poor racialized mothers on caseloads, in combination with welfare reform and workfare programs. As well, in these same studies, there is an overwhelming lack of emphasis on the person experiencing the child welfare system. *For example, a mother has a life history before the involvement of child welfare services. She may have had to cope with a lot of other situations and realities before engaging with child welfare services, e.g. being kicked out of a group home, losing TANF, working at Walmart, or being stalked by an abusive ex-partner. She may have to travel by bus to the courts to review her child welfare case and arrange her work schedule around court*

*dates and her child's supervised visits. She may try to make the child happy at visits, as well as go to mandatory parenting classes and therapy sessions, which she may feel are not relevant to her reunification with her child and perceive as actually insulting. She may find marks of physical abuse on her child which are the result of foster care placements; she might complain to her caseworker, but her caseworker may ignore her. So she may take photos of the abuse at visits and then show these to her caseworker. Because of her insistence, her supervised visits may be stopped, and she may never know where her child is and how her child is doing. She may panic, go to the privatized child welfare agency, try to talk with the caseworker, but may still be ignored. So, she might yell at the agency, and be kicked out. She may find other mothers who have experienced the same situations as her, who then decide to organize a group and protests in front of the agency. All while suffering from depression. Her life story is going on. What is lacking are investigations that center mothers' lived experiences—experiences like these—in the two welfare systems. Particularly lacking are perspectives that see mothers who are involved with child welfare services as real people who are also involved with multiple other social, political, and economic webs and relations. This centering of mothers' experiences with/in two systems has the potential to reveal important aspects of power relations and gender orders, especially in relation to ideas about women's responsibility for social reproduction.*

The primary purpose of my dissertation research was to learn from the lived experiences of single mothers involved with welfare and child welfare services in order to more deeply understand the intersections between the two systems and their implications for mothers' lives, including mothers' activism as a response to these. Two secondary

research questions that this research examined were: 1) How have the material and symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy change worked together in shaping the post-1990 restructuring of both welfare and child welfare? And 2) How have mothers responded to these reforms? Specifically, what is the nature of mothers' activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring?

To address these research questions, I adopted a theoretical framework that draws on scholarly understandings of governance, feminist theorizing of policy change, and anti-racist feminism and decolonizing theory. Incorporating Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', this framework enables the exploration of the interactions between policy processes and single mothers' experiences. By examining these interactions, the central aim is to illuminate the material and symbolic dimensions that both relate to and give rise to mothers' activism. In this way, I analyze welfare and child welfare policy as "cultural practices of governance" (Campbell, 2000, p. 7), and analyze how governance in the area of child welfare connects with wider political and economic orders.

My research used qualitative methods to understand mothers' lived experiences. The primary data was collected through in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 16 study participants, the majority of whom were single mothers involved with child welfare services and/or activism. In-depth data about their daily experiences as single mothers enabled me to understand the processes through which these mothers cope with and/or explain their life conditions around the welfare and child welfare systems. My analysis of the interviews was directed by strategies of discourse and narrative analysis, and rooted in feminist standpoint epistemology. The combination of my theoretical framework with my analysis strategies enabled me to frame mothers' stories, to grasp



mothers' experiences, perspectives, standpoints, self-defined identities, and meanings of their experiences, in relation to symbolic and material changes of welfare systems.

Through these specific techniques, I was also able to explore how power relations and symbolic and material conditions connect to participants' stories of their experiences of the two systems.

Ultimately, the findings of this research suggest that the combination of two systems post-1996 welfare reform produced the material and symbolic conditions that blame and punish single mothers for having children without the economic and social resources to care for them. Enacting a neoliberal gender order that expects that women assume social reproduction privately, children can be removed from single mothers when they cannot uphold this expectation. As will be shown throughout this dissertation, the current welfare *systems* function in such a way as to disproportionately surveil and oppress impoverished families headed by single mothers, particularly racialized mothers, who are believed to be individually responsible for their poverty. The two systems are remarkably similar in how they provide services to correct mothers' 'immoral' behaviours in the name of child welfare (in a broad sense). However, what will be made clear is how mothers' behaviours, those deemed problematic by the two systems, can be understood as the result of a lack of resources and supports needed by any mother in order to manage both wage work and caregiving work. Thus, single mothers positioned in the two systems in which they are demonized under neoliberal discursive and material conditions; the two systems require that people use their own private resources to satisfy children's (material) needs. Not only do impoverished single mothers have difficulty accessing resources, but then becoming involved in the two systems itself presents other

social barriers. Mothers experiencing this reality, however, are not without agency. This research reveals mothers' activism against child welfare services, highlighting their feminist struggle to demand social and economic justice. Through their activism, mothers challenge violence and patriarchy which directly connect to women's economic insecurity. Indeed, through their activism mothers starkly reveal the cultural practices of governance of welfare and child welfare systems.

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents a broader context for the dissertation, reviewing the existing and relevant literature on welfare and child welfare. It provides a detailed overview of the theoretical frameworks that will be engaged in the project and further discusses the central research questions underpinning this research. As well, I outline my understanding of policy studies, including my focus on discourse. And I discuss my understandings of welfare rights movements, and their linkages to social welfare policy and single mothers' lives. I also describe the theoretical framework that has been chosen to frame this dissertation research. Chapter 3 discusses the research methods that were employed over the course of the dissertation project. Here, I outline my methodological perspectives, as well as the data collection methods and analysis strategies that I used. In Chapter 4, I use the primary data collected in fieldwork to examine mothers' experiences with and perspectives on welfare, child welfare systems, and welfare reform, specifically the relationship between the material and symbolic conditions of the child welfare system and welfare reform. I explore: 1) the relationships between welfare reform and the child welfare system for single mothers; and 2) mother-blame in the child welfare system. In Chapter 5, I use the primary data collected in fieldwork to examine how CPS and mothers hold different

understandings about child well-being and motherhood, and how these understandings are linked to changes in single mothers' material and symbolic realities given welfare reform. This chapter highlights the nature of mothers' activism in response to these changes. In Chapter 6, I discuss what I see as my central research findings, derived through the analysis presented in Chapter 4 and 5. Mothers' experiences presented in Chapters 4 and 5 overwhelmingly demonstrate how the two welfare systems constitute mothers as a problem and work together to blame mothers for having children without resources. The chapter ends by discussing the larger implications of the central findings. Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide a summary, critically examine limitations, and make suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Contextualizing and Understanding the Relationships between Welfare Systems and Single Mothers' Activism**

In this chapter, I review the current literature on the neoliberal reforms of welfare and child welfare systems, and single mothers' activism in the U.S. I see five main areas to constitute this scholarship. Specifically, I focus on: 1) the historical context of social welfare policy and welfare rights movements; 2) the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-193); 3) U.S. child welfare policy; 4) neoliberalism and 'the discourse of dependency' and subsequent changes to welfare and child welfare systems; and 5) the contemporary welfare rights movement.

Where I review the literature that historically analyzes social welfare policy and welfare rights movements, I limit my focus to research that most closely connected to, and seemed to inform, the current experiences of single mothers involved with these two systems. My approach is to trace a genealogy of social welfare policy and welfare rights movements. Specifically, I review scholarship on welfare rights movements since this literature shows that welfare rights have been demanded as women's rights (e.g. Mink, 2002a), and welfare rights movements have struggled for the recognition and validation of single motherhood as well, such as rights for women to have independent households from men and rights to be free from patriarchy. Particularly useful for my research project is feminist scholarship on the welfare rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s in

the U.S. (e.g. Nadasen, 2005; Kornbluh, 2007) and current welfare rights activism, which helps to inform my own understanding of the historical relationships between the welfare rights movement and current activism on child welfare services. I then focus on the post-1990 restructuring of the welfare and child welfare systems to understand how current practices connect with and relate to changes in single mothers' material and symbolic living conditions; it is important to examine the connection between the changes in mothers' living conditions and the changes in the welfare systems.

In order to understand the relationships between the neoliberal reforms of welfare and child welfare systems and single mothers' activism, I review the literature on neoliberalism and 'the discourse of dependency', which are two of the most reoccurring discursive themes in work on social welfare policy. I draw discourse as "a web of meanings, ideas, interactions and practices that are expressed or represented in texts [. . .], within institutional and everyday settings" (Bischooping & Gazso, 2015, p. 129). It is widely accepted in the literature that 'the discourse of dependency' greatly impacts neoliberal restructuring in welfare states, produces citizenship stratification, and rationalizes punitive workfare policies by shifting understandings of gender differences. Therefore, feminists have theorized ways to demystify this discourse; to articulate how this discourse has been embodied in social welfare policy and its practices, in single mothers' everyday lives, and in relation to neoliberalism (e.g. Hancock, 2004; Cassiman, 2008). However, how neoliberalism and 'the discourse of dependency' are articulated in the provision of child welfare services has been less examined compared to how these discourses work through welfare services.

A few other assumptions underpinned my literature review. In selecting literature,

I review published scholarship on the welfare and child welfare systems, reforms and activism (related to these systems mainly in the U.S. and Canada), as well as work that focuses on women, especially single mothers, I selected literature that engages feminism. Though this study focuses on the U.S., I reviewed the literature on Canada as well, due to the limited amount of research on this topic. While welfare systems in these countries reveal some similar characteristics, especially in relation to single mothers' experiences, it is important to note that they are different.

In the final section of this chapter, I describe the theoretical framework that has been chosen to frame this dissertation research; a theoretical framework that draws on scholarly understandings of governance, feminist theorizing of policy change, anti-racist feminism and decolonizing theory.

## **Literature Review**

### **A historical genealogy of restructuring welfare and child welfare systems in the U.S.**

Social welfare policies have been shifted by discourses on single motherhood. Welfare reform as “the end of welfare as we know it” (claimed by President Bill Clinton) was a commitment to ending single motherhood, and was also known as ending independent motherhood (Mink, 2006, p. 155). In this section, I will review key literature in order to trace a history of restructuring welfare and child welfare systems in the U.S., from a genealogical perspective (Foucault, 1988; Foucault, 1995)<sup>5</sup>.

Compared to other industrialized states, the U.S. has a significantly high poverty rate, especially for women and children, partly resulting from its meagerly funded and

stigmatizing programs for low-income citizens (Nadasen, Mittelstadt, & Chappell, 2009, p. 3). O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) point out that welfare systems designed as 'poor relief' rather than 'social rights' tend to be less effective as a counterweight to dominant social forces in markets and families (p. 31). In the U.S., benefits are closely tied to employment, thus reflecting the nation's deeply gender- and race- segregated labor market; this tradition is especially visible when compared to many other industrialized nations that offer universal benefits as a right of citizenship (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 5). Danziger and Danziger (2010) point out that the U.S. social safety net provides smaller benefits to fewer low-income families compared to other industrialized states: The U.S. spends only about three percent of GDP on social expenditures for the nonelderly, compared to about 12 percent in the Scandinavian countries and more than six percent in Australia, Canada, and the U.K. (p. 257).

A number of studies have tried to understand the roots of American exceptionalism; many explanations emphasize the relative weakness of the U.S. labor movement, while others highlight Americans' deep commitment to a Puritan work ethic, the sanctity of the free market, and individual responsibility. Moreover, "numerous factors—from the particular structure of the New Deal welfare state, to the nation's shifting attitudes about race and gender, to the increased political power of corporate America—have worked to constrain welfare state development and to determine the fate of AFDC" (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 3).

Nadasen et al. (2009) continue to emphasize two critical features of U.S. aid to the poor, which have been widely accepted across the literature (see for example Cannella, 2003): 1) welfare, broadly defined, has always been shaped by distinctions

between the ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ poor, influenced by Elizabethan Poor Laws that assured public assistance for the ‘deserving’ poor, but not for the ‘undeserving, idle poor’; and 2) deep suspicion about the worthiness of impoverished Americans. In terms of the second feature, AFDC was used to shape and control behaviour, to push needed workers into low-wage labor, and for monitoring and correcting the behaviours of recipients, particularly in relation to sexual activity and parenting (pp. 3-4).

Feminist research has shown how the distinctions between the deserving and underserving poor has, historically speaking, shaped the hierarchical order of the worthiness between men and women, among women, and even among single mothers based on specific assumptions about gender, race, class, and sexuality (e.g. Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Little, 1994).<sup>6</sup> In addition, “[s]ince the 1980s, scholars have paid more attention to the welfare state’s role in reflecting, as well as shaping, race and gender relations,” all the while continuing to view welfare programs as a primary instrument for mediating class relations (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 4).

Research has also examined how welfare (also referred to as public assistance) has been continually restructured over the two-hundred-year history of industrial capitalism in the U.S. (Morgen, Acker, & Weigt, 2010, p. 19). While the Social Security Act of 1935 (Pub. L. 74-241) federalized mothers’ pensions into Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) and established the basic infrastructure of the U.S. welfare system, it also established separate welfare systems for social insurance (in the form of pensions for the elderly and unemployment insurance for workers) and public assistance (in the form of ADC and assistance to disabled children) (Iceland, 2013, p. 135). Much research claims that the passing the 1935 Act created two unequal tiers upon which the liberal U.S.



welfare state was built, which reinforced “gender and race inequalities [that] consigned most women and people of color to the means-tested programs” (Morgen et al., 2010, p. 21; Nadasen et al., 2009). President Lyndon B. Johnson’s ‘War on Poverty’, created the Food Stamps Act of 1964 (known today as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: SNAP), Medicare (for the elderly) (1965), and Medicaid (for low-income families) (1965). Federal antipoverty and social welfare expenditures more than doubled from 1965 to 1972, while poverty rates were cut in half between 1959 and 1973 (Morgen et al., 2010, p. 23). In 1974, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program federalized benefits available for disabled and elderly people. Moreover, “the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 represented significant steps toward civil and political equality for African Americans” (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 41).

While AFDC rolls were increasing, Congress attempted to address the growing ‘welfare crisis’ in 1967 when it passed a series of amendments to the Social Security Act (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 43). The 1967 reforms were premised on the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, popularized by Lewis (1959), which attributed the problem of poverty to individual poor people themselves rather than to broader structural barriers to economic mobility, and claimed that such cultural traits as dependence to cause poverty were generationally taught and passed; the *Moynihan Report* notoriously connected this explanation to African American poverty and welfare (Nadasen et al., 2009, pp. 44-45).

Scholars demonstrate how the paradigm shift toward reducing the role of welfare began with the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 in order to realize longstanding attacks on AFDC (Morgen et al., 2014; Nadasen et al., 2009). The growing

hegemony of conservatives and neoliberal ideologies<sup>7</sup> shifted the policy focus to rebuild declining U.S. economic and political power, support traditional morality and ‘family values’, and cut ‘big government’. Studies also suggested that, in doing so, “[a]id to the poor was vilified for ostensibly having failed the poor and the nation by promoting dependency and enabling promiscuity, teen pregnancy, single parenthood, matriarchal African American families, and the growth of an urban ‘underclass’” (Morgen et al., 2010, p. 24; Cannella, 2003; Nadasen et al., 2009).<sup>8</sup>

President Reagan cut social welfare programs in his first term, and in his second term, the administration promoted a variety of changes in social welfare policy, including tightening program eligibility, increasing work requirements, and giving states more flexibility in how they met federal program mandates (Morgen et al., 2010, p. 24). In 1988, Congress passed the Family Support Act (FSA) (Pub. L. 100-485) and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS), instead of the Work Incentive Program (WIN), began to provide work requirements. The purpose of the JOBS program was “to assure that needy families with children obtain the education, training, and employment that will help them avoid long-term welfare dependence” (42 U.S.C. § 481(a)). However, because of the high increase in caseloads, many states initiated more restrictive policies under waivers to focus on employment more than education and training; these were later approved by and reinforced through the Clinton administration. Morgen et al. (2010) claim,

The FSA reinforced the view that poverty was an individual problem resulting not from capitalism, racial or gender discrimination, or failures of the market, but from the poor choices, values, and behaviors of individuals and families and the alleged dependency-producing impact of intergenerational poverty and welfare (p. 25).

In a similar vein, research has also explored the restructuring of child welfare in

the U.S. (e.g. McGowan, 2010; Berrick, 2011). The 1961 Amendment called ‘AFDC-Foster Care’, which authorized the use of AFDC funds to cover the associated costs of foster care for AFDC-eligible children removed from their homes, increased the number of children entering foster care because of its open-ended federal funding for child welfare services (McGowan, 2010, pp. 35-36). Federal and state funding for social services expanded rapidly, especially after the passage of the 1967 Amendment of Social Security Law permitting the purchase of services from voluntary agencies (McGowan 2010, 37). Passed in the 1970s, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 (Pub. L. 93-247) and the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA) of 1980 (Pub. L. 96-272) are regarded as two of the most significant laws that continue to direct child welfare services today.

While CAPTA introduced mandatory reporting systems in all states,<sup>9</sup> it did not clearly define child abuse or neglect, which has created numerous problems over time (McGowan, 2010, p. 39). CAPTA provides federal funding to states “in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities and also provides grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations, including Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations, for demonstration programs and projects<sup>10</sup>” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, p. 1; see also Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 71). The second law, AACWA, is regarded as “one of the key laws for child welfare reform, because it used funding incentives and procedural requirements to implement a wide range of placement prevention and permanency planning” (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 72). AACWA instituted a number of changes to child welfare policy: it introduced the concept of ‘permanency planning’, which is to seek a permanent and

stable home for every child, as the primary objective of child welfare policy; it mandated a series of mechanisms designed to redirect funds from foster care to prevention and adoption services; it created new Title IV-B funds for preventive services; it set a cap on foster care funding; and it provided open-ended funding for adoption subsidies for children defined as “hard to place” (McGowan, 2010, p. 39).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, child welfare policy shifted again, this time with a focus on ‘family preservation’, and initiating a number of family preservation programs aimed at keeping families together. In 1993, Congress passed legislation for the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Pub. L. 103-66), which created a mechanism to offer funding and support services to birth families (McGowan, 2010, pp. 40-41).

### ***The welfare rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S.***

In the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., the welfare rights movement advocated for welfare rights (the right to have income security) for families headed by single mothers. During this period, the movement organized and created ‘the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO)’. Activism around welfare reform reveals how the development of AFDC was shaped through particular politics of race and gender in the 1960s (the civil rights movement and feminist movement), but also produced a cultural logic around welfare that stigmatized those who needed social support; these elements were present in the AFDC almost from its inception. In its early history, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) (the former program of AFDC) was a relatively minor program, serving primarily White widows. When Black or African American<sup>11</sup> mothers began to claim assistance in

the 1950s and 1960s, the goals of the program shifted from supporting women's mothering— as the early goals/history of the program reinforced patriarchal ideals for the White widow class—to requiring racialized mothers to take paid employment outside the home, or supporting women's employability (Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 6). This policy shift intersected with the race and gender politics. While women were still not expected to be main providers for her families, racialized mothers were neither expected to be stay-at-home mothers. The welfare rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s was overwhelmingly led by Black or African Americans, estimated to represent 85 percent of the women involved in the movement, even though Black or African American women made up 48 percent of the caseload in the mid-1960s (Nadasen, 2005, p. 28).

Feminist studies suggest that the demand for welfare rights were connected to women's standpoints in the movement. Edmonds-Cady (2009) demonstrates women's standpoints as mothers intersected with their races, based on oral histories collected from the women who participated in the movement. While Piven and Cloward (1978) frame the movement as a poor people's movement at the bottom of the Black or African American community, Nadasen (2005) reinforces the importance of women's standpoints; "women in the welfare rights movement did not consider themselves only poor people or welfare recipients, but also black, brown, or white, mothers, tenants, community members, and consumers" (p. 15). The significance of the different and multiple standpoints that women in the movement identified with suggests that there are many different experiences and meanings of welfare rights, particularly as they intersect with gender, race, and class.

The struggle for welfare rights in the 1960s and 1970s culminated around three main points that still matter today. First, the value of mother work was promoted by claiming that welfare is a right for caregivers (Costa, 1986; Mink, 2002a; Nadasen, 2005). Costa (1986) claims that the welfare rights movement was (especially a Black or African American) women's movement, fighting to achieve wages for domestic work and recognition that social welfare is a women's right (pp. 96-97: see also Nadasen, 2005, P. 32). Echoes of this argument are present today. Mink (2002a) suggests reconceptualizing welfare as "the income owed to persons who work inside the home caring for, nurturing, and protecting children" (p. 19), based on the argument that "all mothers' care-giving is work" (p. 29) regardless of race and marital status. By focusing on the activism and organizing of especially by Black or African American women, these scholars suggest focus on whether the devaluation of mother work persists in the current workfare policies, particular seen through 'the discourse of dependency', which will be turned to in more detail later in this chapter.

Second, the welfare rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s affirmed single motherhood, meaning that women can have independent households from men (e.g. Sapiro, 1990; Nadasen, 2002; Nadasen, 2005). As Sapiro (1990) points, since AFDC was designed to benefit women in their capacity as wives and in a limited sense as mothers until the late 1960s, it did little to support them; as earners in their own right (p. 45). In her own research, Nadasen (2002) discusses how women in the movement believed that all women should have control over their sexuality and reproduction, and autonomy in choosing their partners (p. 281).<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these studies point towards how the

welfare rights movement challenged patriarchy, which continued to see women as dependent on and submissive to men.

Third, the welfare rights of the 1960s and 1970s movement prioritized the rights of mothers based on race. Current research continues to examine how welfare experiences intersected with race, class, and gender, and ultimately suggests that to have welfare rights means to have the right to mother, especially for Black or African American mothers in U.S. specific contexts. Michel (2000) claims that motherhood has long been seen as women's 'natural' function and even a duty, even though the right to mother is not firmly established in the law (p. 37). However, Nadasen (2005) demonstrates that, historically, Black or African American women "had never been seen primarily as homemakers or mothers" (p. 286), were "more often [been] seen as laborers than as mothers, [and] were considered less deserving of public assistance than other women" (p. 9). As Nadasen (2005) continues to make clear, "[s]ince slavery, black women had been forced, because of lack of options, to care for other people's children" (p. 142), and have struggled for the right to raise their own children (p. 283). In the welfare rights movement, receipt of welfare was regarded as an option to expand Black or African American women's choices to mother and to challenge the racist exploitation of Black or African American women in the labor market.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that the movement for welfare rights in the 1960s and 1970s itself intersected with gender, race, and class in relation to specifically workfare policies (e.g. Mink 2002a; Nadasen 2002; Nadasen 2005; Kornbluh 2007). Kornbluh (2007) points out how pro-welfare-to-work arguments over Work Incentive Program (WIN) made clear that any policies without valuing women's social reproduction (either

demanding women's rights for wage work or income support rationalized by support for widows) functioned oppressive especially for Black or African American women: Even if Black or African American women could find jobs, they tend to be marginalized in low-wage positions, such as domestic workers for White families. And, even if they could be full-time mothers, by the income support for widows, they were subject to patriarchal ideals that devalues their domestic work in their own family homes (Kornbluh, 2007, pp. 99-100). Importantly, welfare was then based on the ideal of family wage that protects men's right as breadwinners and not the rights of women as workers in domestic settings unpaid (Kornbluh, 2007, pp. 99-100). Kornbluh (2007) points out that NWRO proposed 'Guaranteed Adequate Income' because Black or African American women needed to have alternatives to conventional employment or marriage (p. 160); this proposal can be connected to current single mothers' activism, as will be seen.<sup>14</sup>

### **Reforming welfare in the 1990s: PRWORA and its implications.**

In 1996, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was introduced under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-193), which replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).<sup>15</sup> With this change, many single mothers lost the entitlements that they received as primarily full-time care providers, which AFDC had assured since 1935. In 1996, 80 percent of the TANF population was single mothers with children (Greer, 2007, p. 2). In order to receive TANF in most states, single mothers now had to engage in unpaid work full-time (30 hours or more) to maintain work requirements (Hill, 2012, p. 39). TANF's



‘work-first’ vision promoted personal responsibility for economic self-sufficiency, even though its population was primarily single mothers (e.g. Nadasen et al., 2009).<sup>16</sup>

In its development, PRWORA: gave considerable authority to states to design their TANF programs; changed federal funding into a block grant; legislated a five-year lifetime limit to receive cash assistance; held states accountable to targeted reductions in caseloads and clients meeting work requirements; excluded most legal immigrants (non-citizens) from eligibility for various forms of public assistance; and promoted marriage and stringent child support enforcement (Morgen et al., 2010, p. 25). With these developments in mind, the four major goals of TANF were nonetheless stated as: 1) assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; 2) reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; 3) preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and 4) encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Kilty, 2006, p. 115). As Kilty (2006) importantly points out, the goal of welfare reform was not to reduce poverty, but to reduce welfare caseloads (pp. 115-116).

In Wisconsin, welfare reform started in 1986. Before the passage of PRWORA, over half of the states used waivers (the federal waiver from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under Title IV, Section 1115, of the Social Security Act that allows states to implement welfare demonstration programs, Johnson, 1995) to begin welfare reform; studies suggest that none did so more extensively than Wisconsin (see Wiseman, 1996; Moore & Aurora, 2009; Krinsky, 2013). Wisconsin’s work-based programs began with the Work Experience and Job Training Program in 1987 and culminated with the 1996 passage of Wisconsin Works (W-2), which contributed to

caseload declines that exceeded that of any other state with a comparable urban population, institutionalizing diversion efforts to prevent applicants from going on the rolls in the first place (Wiseman, 1996; Moore & Arora, 2009). Collins and Mayer (2010) claim, “[t]heir [Wisconsin’s] large reduction in caseloads took on new meaning when the 1999 Legislative Audit Bureau evaluation estimated that within the first year agencies had generated profits of \$ 33 million and community reinvestment funds exceeding \$ 47 million,” that seemed to be achieved by abuses (underspending) of their government allotted funds by the for-profit firms and community organizations that the state had contracted to administer the program in Milwaukee (p. 72). In addition, Wisconsin has relied extensively on sanctioning (usually decreasing the amount of welfare benefits or removing the entire benefits) W-2 participants to enforce work activity (Moore & Arora, 2009, p. 112). According to Moore and Arora (2009), a statewide audit (2001) found that 21 percent of the caseload were sanctioned during the preceding year, and that 45 percent of these participants were sanctioned in error and often in ways that did not accord with state policy (p. 112). Moore and Arora (2009) suggest how work-based approaches to welfare reform in Wisconsin contributed to the disparity in the economic circumstances of single mother families (p. 122). They reveal that while nationwide statistics between 1993-2005 show the number of extremely poor, single mother families—those with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty threshold—as having decreased, along with the number of poor single mother families in general—those with incomes below the poverty threshold, Wisconsin has seen a marked increase in the number and percentage of both extremely poor families and families close to or above the poverty line (Moore & Arora, 2009, p. 122). They claim that “The proportion of poor, single mother families in

Wisconsin with income below 50 percent and the proportion with incomes equal to or above 75 percent of poverty each increased by approximately a fifth” (Moore & Arora, 2009, p. 122).

### *Workfare.*

Feminist analyses of the welfare state have emerged within broader conversations around the constructions of power and control. In particular, feminist critiques of neo-Marxist theories have pointed to the role of the state in reproducing patriarchy as well as capitalism; while others have interrogated the ways in which liberalism and democratic perspectives construct, and are constructed by, gender relations (Cannella, 2003, p. 179). Feminists have also discussed that relationships between women and the state have been changed through workfare policies—the enforcement of unpaid work while residualizing welfare (Peck 2001, 10), which is “a government program which requires recipients of public assistance to ‘work off’ the value of their benefits through unpaid labor in community service projects” (Hawkesworth, 1985, p. 163). Particularly, these discussions analyze how governments do not seek to promote women’s economic independence through wage labor, especially independence from male breadwinners, or recognize the need of home-based care for children; instead, women are now expected to perform double work inside and outside the home in order to assure the economic survival of their families (Mayson, 1999, pp. 92-96).<sup>17</sup> By comparing the U.S. and Swedish cases, Orloff (2006) claims that the development of ‘women-friendly’ policy depends on how state support for caregiving activities and employment is configured (p. 233).

In much of the literature, feminists rely on cross-national comparisons of welfare states to reveal the degrees of de-commodification of labor (states' social programs to deal with income equality), depending on the extent to which an individual's or families' welfare relies on market participation (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 37), and therefore the degrees and ways to which workfare (the strategy of commodification) is implemented, can intervene into women's responsibility for social reproduction and resulting impoverishment (see for example Baker, 1996; O'Connor et al., 1999; Orloff 2006; Sugimoto & Morita, 2009). Feminist research suggests that both approaches—commodification and de-commodification—keep gendered work structures untouched, so that the character of gendered arrangements in the labor market remains critically unchanged (O'Connor et al., 1999, p. 146; Fraser, 1997; Bashevkin, 2002; Mckeen, 2003).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Gilbert, Parton, and Skiveness (2011) suggest that family policy expenditures are one of the major measures used to operationally define the degree of defamilialization—the degree to which social welfare family benefits reduced the individual's dependence on kinship, and that the 'liberal' welfare state regimes' approach to family policy has the lowest levels of spending and defamilialization (p. 7). Gilbert, et al. (2011) claim that liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare state regimes are also “varied in their approaches to [the] role of the state, vis-à-vis family, particularly in the degree to which social welfare family benefits reduced the individual's dependence on kinship—a process known as *defamilialization*” (p. 7). They show that the levels of spending on family policy benefits in the U.S. (and Canada), especially from 1980 to 2005, were comparably lower than other OECD countries. This suggests how the U.S.'s residual model shapes the macro context of state expenditures on family benefits, which

can move the welfare and child welfare systems towards individualizing poverty. Overall, these studies suggest that it is critically important for us to separate and understand welfare in two meanings, based on welfare rights movements: 1) welfare as care allowance, as used in policies before restructuring; and 2) welfare as a right, as welfare rights movements have demanded mothers' rights. In other words, these studies suggest how workfare policies continue to diminish the possibility of welfare rights as mothers' rights.<sup>19</sup>

Wisconsin Works (W-2) was signed into state law in 1996 (1995 Wis. Act 289), developed by the previous workfare programs in Wisconsin. Under W-2, eligible recipients who were not caring for newborns were put into one of four employment-related tiers. Conceptualized as a 'ladder', recipients' employment or work placements varied in the degree to which they resembled 'real world' jobs: W-2 Transitions (\$ 628 a month), Community Service Jobs (\$ 673 a month), Trial Jobs (minimum hourly wage), and Unsubsidized employment (no cash grant) (Collins & Mayer, 2010, pp. 63-64). Wisconsin uses competitive subcontracting with various public and private organizations for W-2 operation (Wiseman, 1996, p. 533; Folk 1996a, p. 57). This competitive subcontracting, which was brought in order to increase the capacities to implement work requirements, "resulted in the most radical privatization of welfare policy in the United States, with private service providers assuming responsibility for the administration of cash assistance" (Gooden & Martin, 2005, p.247). Private contractors (workfare/W-2 agencies) in Milwaukee earned more than \$ 26.2 million in profits during the first round of W-2 contracts from 1997 to 1999, and also gave themselves and their staffs nearly \$ 2

million above and beyond what the agencies themselves received in profits, while cutting caseloads dramatically (Rotker, Ahlstorm, & Bernstein, 2002, p. 530).

### **Child welfare policy in the U.S.**

#### *An overview of child welfare policy in the U.S.*

The U.S. child welfare system is comprised of 30 to 40 separate federal child welfare programs (see for example Greenberg et al., 2002).<sup>20</sup> While each of these programs are influenced by a number of public policies including the PRWORA, each state has its own child welfare policies that must be navigated in addition to the federal level policies. These child welfare programs include: adoption, child protection, income support, education, early intervention, family support, foster care, medical care (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 80),<sup>21</sup> along with anti-poverty policies and programs (Shanks & Danziger, 2011)<sup>22</sup>. Child welfare practices, procedures, and legislation rests upon family-state relations that intersect with social, political, and power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Swift, 1995a, pp. 151-171), and state-market relations, particularly as neoliberalism has extended market rationality to new domains including social services (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011, p. 177).

In 2011 in the U.S., there were approximately 742,000 cases recorded as confirmed instances of child maltreatment, whereas approximately 407,000 children were in foster care (USHHS, 2013a, p. 2). However, most child maltreatment cases (more than three-quarters) involve neglect (USHHS, 2013b, p. 20).<sup>23</sup> As Berrick (2011) explains,

A rather smaller number of children live in family situations that are so harmful or pose such extreme risk that they are separated from their parents, either temporarily or permanently, by the states. [. . .] Children placed in foster care are more likely to come from families with single parents with very low incomes (p. 23).

Inadequate financial resources is an important factor in children's out-of-home placement, in addition to the 'race' of parents, the age of children, and caregivers' substance use (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2012, p. 1749; Berrick, 2011; Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016). Indeed, much literature shows that poverty, 'race', and single motherhood are the three key factors to disproportionately affect family involvement with child welfare services (in addition to mental health issues and substance use issues which are exacerbated by poverty, racism, and overloaded care) (for example, Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 53; Roberts, 2002).

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, foster care caseloads expanded very rapidly, reunification rates dropped, and adoption rates stagnated (Berrick, 2011, p. 28). The increase in the number of children placed in foster care has been attributed to significant increases in the use of crack cocaine among women in urban areas (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 52; Berrick 2011). However, other research suggests that the use of crack cocaine as a means/justification to remove children resulted in racially disproportionate statistics (Roberts, 1997; Nelson, 2003). Research findings such as these must be understood in light of the fact that no state passed its federally mandated Child and Family Service Review (based on the criteria outlined below)<sup>24</sup>, and that two-thirds of states were in litigation as a result of class-action lawsuits (Berrick, 2011, p. 28).

The significant shifts in child welfare policy happened around the same time of the 1996 introduction of PRWORA, particularly the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-89). The ASFA instituted some of the same conservative sentiments that led to the passage of PRWORA (McGowan, 2010, p. 42), both reflecting backlash against the concept of family preservation. ASFA was

introduced based on the argument that the 1980 AACWA—which required states and child welfare workers to show “reasonable efforts” to keep families together—was responsible for the fact that too many children were languishing in foster care, often for years at a time (Gainsborough, 2010, pp. 38- 39). Other federal policies introduced in 1994, 1996, and 1997 were less concerned with maintaining children’s birth families, and more interested in creating opportunities for children to live in new families formed through adoption (Berrick, 2011, pp. 24-25). The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-382) and the Interethnic Adoption provisions of 1996 (Pub. L. 104-188) promoted transracial adoptive placements for racialized children. ASFA then diminished the emphasis on family preservation, promoted the speedy termination of parental rights and adoptive placements when reunification was not feasible, and provided additional funding for states, such as through adoption incentive bonuses; states that do not comply with its provisions risk losing a portion of their Title IV-E and Title IV-B funds (McGowan, 2010, p. 42). The Adoption Incentive Program<sup>25</sup>, which will be argued more in detail in Chapter 6, introduced by ASFA, has been reauthorized to provide payments to states that increase the number of children adopted from the public out-of-home care system (4,000 dollars for each child adopted for states). Meanwhile, no fiscal incentives exist for parents who successfully reunify (Berrick, 2011, p. 27).

In addition, ASFA brought with it a particular emphasis on child well-being. Historically, the U.S. child welfare system focused on the question of parental fitness, on 1) safety and 2) permanency. In this context, safety was understood as “the protections of children from abuse or neglect in their own homes or in foster care,” (USHHS, 2000, p. 2-1; Shireman, 2003, pp. 52-53) and permanency meaning that “children [have] stable



and consistent living situations (. . .), continuity of family relationships, and community connections” (USHHS, 2000, p. 2-1; Shireman, 2003, pp. 52-53). With the introduction of ASFA, well-being became another expected outcome for the delivery of child welfare services, in addition to safety and permanency (USHHS 2000, pp. 1-3-1-4; Wulczyn, Barth, Yuan, Harden, & Landsverk, 2005, pp. 7-22). Well-being as a goal for providing child welfare services means “families having the capacity to provide for their children’s needs, children having educational opportunities and achievements appropriate to their abilities, and children receiving physical and mental health services adequate to meet their needs” (USHHS, 2000, p. 2-1; Shireman, 2003, p. 53). In this way, child well-being is tied to family well-being. As Pecora and Harrison-Jackson (2016) state, “achieving child well-being means that families must have the capacity to care for children and to fulfill children’s basic developmental, health educational, social, cultural, spiritual, and housing needs” (p. 58). Wulczyn et al. (2005) claim that well-being is a much broader concept than safety and permanency and is influenced by factors that are often beyond the direct control of parents; as such, it cannot be logically accommodated in a system of rules that attempts to determine whether parents have fulfilled their role as caregiver (7-22). How each state performs in terms of these three outcome domains, (1) safety, 2) permanency, and 3) well-being,) is reviewed by the federal government, through the Child and Family Services Review (USHHS, 2000, p. 1-4; Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 58). It is through this review that states experience federal oversight in the most immediate way (Gainsborough, 2010, p. 155; Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016).

Adoption incentive bonuses and the emphasis on well-being through ASFA contributed to the expanding definition of neglect<sup>26</sup> in child welfare policy. Even before

these changes, neglect was the most difficult form of maltreatment to define,<sup>27</sup> as it is not necessarily an automatic result of poverty (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2002, p. 441). However, in their day-to-day practices with families and children, child welfare case workers, service providers, and legal professionals<sup>28</sup> are able to make decisions about children's safety and risk in regarding to neglect (and abuse) in 'the best interests of the child' by taking child well-being into consideration. To protect children whose well-being is at risk in these contexts can increase the number of interventions. In fact, "[a] substantial proportion of reports are related to issues that bear on well-being, such as exposure to domestic violence, school nonattendance, and conduct disorders" (Wulczyn et al., 2005, p. 10).

Together, these studies suggest that the discourse embedded in policy and the common practices of child welfare professionals shape definitions of child well-being and neglect. Ultimately, it is these definitions which are used to determine who is a 'good' mother and who is a 'bad' mother. As Campbell (2000) claims, "the decline of maternal instinct was the commonly identified source of the policy problem" (p. 170). Gordon (1988) also points out how child intervention is not only used negatively, to patrol against transgressors, but also positively to promote specific family structures and relationships (p. 83). Child welfare practices can then be understood as reactions shaped by feelings of fear; fear of the decline of 'maternal instinct' and perceived 'traditional' nuclear family structures, in addition to the fear that racialized people will no longer occupy subordinate social positions (Campbell, 2000, p. 176). Swift (1991) points out,

If the underlying schema of neglect rests on the ideal of a two-parent, middle-class, dominant-culture family, it is quite logical that parents not matching this ideal are the most likely to become clients of the child welfare system—the poor, single mothers, and those who are culturally different (p. 260).

While there is a growing body of literature that examines the child welfare system across the U.S., there is limited research that closely examines the child welfare system in Wisconsin (with the exception of Courtney 1996; Courtney et al. 2005; Courtney, Dworsky, Piliavin, & McMurtry, 2008). In Wisconsin, specifically in Milwaukee County, Courtney et al. (2008) found that workfare and child welfare programs serve increasingly similar populations with similar needs (p. 272). In 1997, the state created the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) and took over child welfare programs in Milwaukee in order to correct the problems that had plagued the county-run system.<sup>29</sup> In this take-over, the state significantly increased child welfare funding and privatized most of the child welfare services (Courtney et al., 2008, p. 275). Courtney et al. (2008) claim that privatization is a central element of both welfare and child welfare reforms in Wisconsin (p. 276). Moreover, they point out how the two systems are disruptive, despite an overlap in the clients. For example, geographic distinctions in service areas of the two systems (six geographic regions to provide TANF and five regions to provide child welfare services in Milwaukee county) can interfere with the collaboration of the private agencies that provide TANF and child welfare services in Milwaukee (p. 283). Also, CPS agencies may refer their clients to W-2 agencies, while “W-2 agencies have no incentive to give priority to child welfare services clients since such families typically have multiple barriers to employment and are therefore less likely to contribute favorably to the agency’s measurable contract outcomes” such as the number of employment, while “a family participating in W-2 who had all of the children placed in foster care might contribute to the ‘success’ of that W-2

agency by removing from the agency's responsibility a particularly difficult case" (p. 283).

### ***Racism.***

Whether and how racism plays a role in contemporary definitions of child neglect has been of interest to some scholars. Studies suggest that a racial disproportionality and disparity exists in the U.S. child welfare system, and that racial differences and disparities in service provisions and quality need to be carefully considered (see Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 68; Roberts, 2002). Black or African American children account for 29 percent of the foster care population, but account for only 16 percent of the total national population. Meanwhile, based on 2010 statistics, White children accounted for 41 percent of the foster care population (USHHS, 2011, p. 2), but were 74 percent of the total national population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Racialized people additionally experience poverty at much higher rates than White people in the U.S. (Shanks & Danziger, 2011, p. 26); poor children were three times more likely than other children to experience 'maltreatment' (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 68). As Pecora and Harrison-Jackson (2016) state, "for children, living in poverty is associated with a host of negative consequences, including poor physical health, diminished cognitive abilities reduced educational attainment, increased emotional and behavioural problems, and higher risk of maltreatment" (p. 65; see also Danziger & Danziger 2010, pp. 263-266). Moreover, relationships between poverty, 'maltreatment', and other negative child developmental outcomes appear to be mediated in part by stress (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 65; Danziger & Danziger, 2010, p. 263).

Environmental risks also affect the health and well-being of children and families based on race. As Shanks and Danziger (2011) note, children and families living in poor neighborhoods are doubly disadvantaged by frequent exposure to numerous interpersonal, social, and environmental risk factors; about 31 percent of Black or African American children born between 1985 and 2000 experienced neighborhood poverty (p. 26). While higher poverty rates among Black or African American children contributes to their disproportionate representation in foster care caseloads, this disproportionality is argued to also reveal discourses about who is ‘deserving’ of motherhood as embedded in policies and practice; a fact that is further underscored by the controlling of Black or African American women’s bodies (e.g. Nelson, 2003; Flavin, 2009). Several policies are suggested as intervening who is ‘deserving’ motherhood. For example, “[i]n the 1960s and 1970s, poor women of color were the targets of coercive and punitive sterilization efforts in federally funded birth control clinics and in state legislatures” (Nelson, 2003, p. 184). Nelson (2003) points out the historical connections of this policy to the Hyde Amendment (1976), which excludes most abortions from Medicaid (federal health insurance program for the poor) funding, while Medicaid funds sterilization. Reproductive rights activists point out that “poor women who want to limit their fertility temporarily might choose to be sterilized because they anticipate not being able to afford an abortion if other forms of nonpermanent contraceptives fail” (Nelson, 2003, pp. 181-182).<sup>30</sup>

Pointing out the historical connections of these policies with child welfare policy regarding racialized women’s reproduction rights, studies suggest that, in order to regulate motherhood and deny single motherhood through child welfare policies, Black

or African American women's bodies become symbolic of 'bad' motherhood and, at the same time, they are physically separated from their own children (e.g. Roberts, 2002; Nelson, 2003; Flavin, 2009). Black or African American children are twice as likely to be removed from their homes, and less likely to be given family-based safety services (Rivaux et al., 2008, p. 153). As Roberts (2002) states, this is because "[g]overnment authorities appear to believe that maltreatment of Black children results from pathologies intrinsic to their homes and that helping them requires dislocating them from their family" (p. 17). Racialized children removed from their homes by child welfare services are usually placed in White foster or adoptive families (CWLA, 2007). Thus, A. Smith (2005a) claims that the current child welfare system continues a legacy of the boarding/residential school systems experienced by Indigenous children in the U.S. and Canada. It functions as a racist and genocidal colonial policy that aims to give 'civilizing' instruction to racialized children through cultural genocide (pp. 35-54). It is important to note that the rate of Indigenous children in foster care in the U.S. also shows a disproportion to nation-wide population statistics (USHHS, 2011).

The National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect reports consistently finding a powerful relationship between family structure, socioeconomic characteristics, and 'maltreatment' rates (Sedlak, McPherson, & Das, 2010, pp. 7-10). Black or African American and White children also significantly differ on some risk factors such as their socio-economic status and parents' marital status (Sedlak, et al., 2010, pp. 7-10).<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, other studies report finding no 'race' differences in actual incidences of maltreatment (see for example Miller & Ward, 2008, pp. 216-217; Rodenborg, 2004, p. 111; Shireman, 2003, p. 121). However, other research findings reveal that larger

differences in maltreatment rates between Black or African American and White children in the “not low income” classification, in which higher rates were observed for Black or African American families as compared to White families (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson 2011, 68).

There is clearly a need for more critical research on these issues. As Pecora and Harrison-Jackson (2016) note, “given differences in family structure, child-rearing practices, and relationship to community, the degree to which these [protective] factors are moderated by race and ethnicity is unclear” (p. 68). While some of the protective factors associated with, for example, socioeconomic status and academic success seem to apply evenly, other factors such as faith-based affiliation or supportive family milieu, may be conditioned on or differentially more important among Black or African American, Latino, and other children with strong racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 68-70).

### *A general overview of existing scholarship.*

The literature on child welfare policy and its subsequent practice—child welfare services—include a broad range of other topics: legislation, spending, social work and child welfare, the context of child welfare services, frameworks for child welfare services, the child welfare system, and community services for children and families (Shireman, 2003). The topic of crisis intervention itself is broad, and includes: child protection and family preservation, foster care system, other types of out-of-home care, adoption, and at-risk youth (Shireman, 2003). As well, according to Pecora and Harrison-Jackson (2016), a number of theoretical orientations underpin the design of policies and

programs in child welfare. These include: ecological models, child development theories, social learning and social support theories, and risk and protective factor frameworks (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 60). Value positions in children's services depend on how much the individual person values: 1) routine state intervention or limited state intervention; 2) child-centered or family-centered approaches; and 3) social control or empowerment (see R. Smith, 2005, pp. 31-33). A great deal of research has been done on evaluating the effectiveness of the child welfare system to determine future child welfare reforms, although again, this research can reflect a variety of value positions (see for example Myers, 2006; Kamerman, Phipps, & Arieh, 2010; Collins et al., 2012).

A key issue that is affecting the field is the lack of common procedures for describing and classifying child maltreatment (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 56). Because of this, researchers have tried to address the problem by using data to define maltreatment; maltreatment has been operationalized by its severity, incidence, chronicity, extent, type, age of onset, and the perpetrator of it (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 56). Even with this data, the field still lacks a common definition for child maltreatment (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 56), while finding such a definition would be a double-edged sword. Moreover, even though the available research on protective factors associated with child maltreatment is limited, research has been growing. Protective factors have been defined by three general categories: individual characteristics, family characteristics, and the presence of supportive others (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, p. 67). In addition, a number of policy challenges are identified by the research. These challenges include, among other things: 1) family support services are not funded; 2) changes to key child welfare funding mechanisms require careful



consideration; 3) policymakers need to recognize the seriousness of, and make changes to reduce, racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity; 4) kinship care funding, licensing, and practice policies need to be aligned; and 5) cross-systems collaboration should be strengthened (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 76-81; Myers, 2006; Berrick, 2011).<sup>32</sup>

Feminists have pointed out that the everyday practice of child welfare professionals and the child welfare system need to be understood as thoroughly gendered and racialized, and rooted in class-based assumptions. Single mothers have experienced the child welfare system and its specific cultural assumptions, especially those about motherhood, set by these gendered, racialized and classed social structures. Scourfield (2003) suggests that discrimination takes place at a structural and institutional level, as well as at the level of front-line practice; discriminatory services occur because discriminatory policies and practices exist at an organizational level (pp. 20-21). Historically, the child welfare industry has focused on mothering rather than parenting, based on the Western ideology of motherhood, which has resulted in higher levels of surveillance for racialized cultures and the overrepresentation of racialized children in child welfare (see Scourfield, 2003, pp. 19-23; Gordon, 1988). Feminists have focused on the relationships between child welfare and ideologies of motherhood, racism, domestic violence, and mothers' lived experiences. One central concern for feminist research is why women's rights and children's rights tend to be separated and argued antagonistically (Russell-Brown, 2003). In addition, Roberts (2014) suggests that "[f]ocusing on the regulation of black mothers brings to the fore the child welfare system

as a critical institution of social supervision, on a par with workfare and prisonfare” in addition to policing in the U.S. (p. 1778).

### **Neoliberalism and ‘the discourse of dependency’.**

Neoliberalism (what is also described as ‘Neo-Conservatism’ by some U.S. scholars, Brown, 2006) is defined as “an economic doctrine which gives supremacy to free markets as a method of handling not only the economic affairs of nations, but also as a political ideology which can be applied to all manner of governance issues” (Hartman, 2005, p. 59). The dominance of free-market rationalities created the conditions in which individuals are to be responsible and self-sufficient (not dependent on the state), the state is to create small government (less interference in individuals’ lives), and engage in market competition (free trade is prioritized), by engaging with privatization, deregulation, and reduction of spending on health, education, and welfare (see Pollack & Rossiter, 2010, p.156). Neoliberalism establishes such particular forms of domination and exclusion (Brodie, 1995, p. 50), and has brought about “the creation of new relationships between the nation-state and its citizens, between employers, including the state and their employees, between service providers and their clients and among citizens” (Dominelli, 1999, p. 15).

Three major shifts in the U.S., created through the neoliberal restructuring of welfare policies have created the policy context in which my dissertation research is situated.

First, neoliberal market doctrines have come to control the administration and professionalization of social services. Dominelli (1999) claims that, as long as

professionals are managerially competent and financially successful, and the less they know about the area they are investigating, governments deem them as better suited to their tasks/roles (p. 19). Preston, George, and Silver (2014) also point out that mandated services and agencies, largely funded by government, relinquish a critical lens amidst new and primarily fiscal related pressures; they state that:

Some have succumbed to the neoliberal demands of accountability (surveillance of practice through regulation), effectiveness (evidence-based practice and the focus on predicted outcomes that reinforce capital), and efficiency (short-term, individual intervention that assume a deficit characterization of service users and communities) (p. 62).

Moreover, this shift has resulted in the growing popularity of directive or supervisory approaches when dealing with poor people (Bashevkin, 2002, p. 137). For example, the Learnfare program in Wisconsin, which required teenage AFDC recipients to attend school as a strict condition for receiving AFDC benefits, provided a model for other countries to follow, particularly for Canadian provinces (including Ontario) as well as in Britain (Bashevkin, 2002, p. 137). In this way, neoliberal approaches become a form of treatment, “a set of regulatory practices that attempts to bring individuals into conformity with the state’s ideal of the productive citizen” (Campbell, 2000, p. 177). Under neoliberal paternalism, the nature of social services has shifted to guiding clients from pathology to normalcy (Soss et al., 2011, pp. 233-237). This has created the conditions in which social service providers tend to push “hard on rules, directions, and administrative oversight as critical to reshaping individual behaviour in a manner that was ostensibly more responsible and consistent with middle-class norms” (Bashevkin, 2002, p. 137). As these studies suggest, the frontlines of welfare and child welfare

services became central sites in the disciplining of poor mothers according to neoliberal political and policy logic.

Second, the restructuring of welfare services—in the form of workfare policies—has occurred alongside a changing labor market through a neo-liberal agenda. Peck (2001) observes an iterative relationship between workfare policies and the labor market. He suggests that workfare strategies impact the labor market through the introduction of screening, recruitment, and employment systems, while job-market rules and discipline, in turn, shape workfare programs (Peck, 2001, p. 352). Under neoliberal incentives to keep employment precarious (Hartman 2005, 64), workfare policies function to compel program participants into accepting contingent / precarious jobs in employment contexts that are determined by the prevailing conditions of local labor markets (Peck, 2001, p. 356). The result is that “employers—whether they are hiring current or former workfare workers or not—find that they are able to access a ‘flexible’ pool of employees who have no alternative but to accept what is on offer” by policing the boundaries of the labor market (Peck, 2001, p. 349). Continuing this analysis, Hartman (2005) also claims that anti-welfare rhetoric contributes to securing conditions that help capitalism to flourish; in this way, governments can actively engage in propping up the working poor by using negative discourses around welfare ‘dependency’ (pp. 64-67).

Third, neoliberalism has institutionalized welfare systems in such a way that women must engage in social reproduction through increasingly precarious employment. Bezanson (2006) claims that the emerging gender order “reflects the contradiction that while women are now fully integrated into the labor market, they retain responsibility for much of the private work of social reproduction” (p. 23). Bezanson suggests that this

contradiction is justified in the contexts of neoliberalism and corresponding devaluation mother work. The state then intervenes into the tension between social reproduction and capital accumulation by transferring the costs of social reproduction onto already overburdened women. This gender order shapes social citizenship, which is “increasingly associated exclusively with labor market participation” (Bezanson, 2006, p. 33) where once it was associated with women’s social citizenship rights to income support from the state on the basis of their being mothers, or caregivers. Social citizenship as defined through labor market participation “creates crisis tendencies in social reproduction for low-income people in particular” (Bezanson, 2006, p. 23), which also increases the probability that mothers will experience firsthand child welfare services. Morgen et al. (2010) observe similar challenges to achieve work-family balance among low income families in the U.S. (p. 98). With welfare reform, poor women have lost what little flexibility they had to arrange and maintain a balance between paid work and unpaid caregiving work.

Specifically, privatization in not only welfare services but also child welfare services is further evidence of neoliberal restructuring in general. Privatization of welfare services were introduced especially after welfare reform: “Within five years of passage of PRWORA, all but one state has outsourced their TANF obligations, a market estimated at \$ 1.5 billion with nearly one-third of state contracts going to commercial operators” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 105). Wacquant (2009) claims that, in the U.S., workfare firms specializing in overseeing the poor are key agents in “the new state apparatus joining workfare and prisonfare into a single institutional mesh entrusted with the double regulation of poverty on the work and crime fronts” (p. 108).<sup>33</sup>

The privatization of child welfare takes the shape of services that are mostly contracted out (Freundlich & Gerstenzang, 2003, p. 15). After Kansas fully privatized its child welfare services in 1997, other states began following suit (Crum, 1998, p. 48), and by 2000, initiatives to privatize child welfare services were identified in 22 states (Collins-Camargo, Ensign, & Flaherty, 2008, p. 73). However, private agencies respond to the incentives or risks in the contract with the state (Zullo, 2006, p. 26), and critics warn that privatization may create incentives for the agencies to increase profits by providing less costly and potentially less effective services (Hubel et al., 2013, p. 2050). Specifically, current models of contracting out often involve performance-based targets and incentives, which “connect payment to the achievement of pre-established goals, whether in the form of process indicators, outputs, or outcomes” (Freundlich & Gerstenzang, 2003, pp. 17-18). Since 1997, Wisconsin’s child welfare system has been highly privatized. For example, BMCW provided only Access (to take referrals on cases of alleged child abuse/neglect from the public) and Initial Assessment services. All other services were provided by private agencies. BMCW’s three big contractors were St. Aemilian-Lakeside, Inc., Integrated Family Services, and Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin, which I visited during my fieldwork. For example, St. Aemilian-Lakeside’s annual expenses of 2013 were about 16 million dollars (Saint A, 2015).

When people are asked about the causes of poverty, there are two main answers that people give (or a mixture of these two): 1) poverty is the fault of individuals (because of lazy and irresponsible behaviours); or 2) circumstances play the principle role (such as a lack of child care options, job shortages, racism, and other forms of discrimination) (Iceland, 2013, p. 79; Sparks, 2003, p. 178). ‘The discourse of dependency’ belongs to

the first answer—the causes of poverty are individualized, poverty is attributed to ‘different’ cultures, poor people are blamed for their poverty—an answer that has been especially mobilized and entrenched with welfare reform.

Fraser and Gordon (1994) maintain that ‘dependency’ is an ideological term coded as antithetical to ‘independence’ (p. 311); “postindustrial culture has called up a new personification of dependency: the black, unmarried, teenaged, welfare-dependent mother”, which is “a powerful ideological trope that simultaneously organizes diffuse cultural anxieties and dissimulates” social bases of its meanings (p. 327). Moreover, the perspective that views single mothers as ‘welfare dependents’ enforces the positive value of employment by putting the negative value on receiving welfare (e.g. Albelda, 2002, p. 88).

‘The discourse of dependency’ was prevalent in the congressional discourses of both Republicans and Democrats in the lead up to the welfare reform of 1996. Both parties referred countless times to the ‘Welfare Queen’, and portrayed welfare recipients as Black or African American (or occasionally Hispanic), as avoiding paid employment, spending their welfare checks on drugs and liquor, and neglecting their many children (e.g. Sparks, 2003; Nakagawa, 2009), enforcing the individualization of poverty: welfare ‘dependency’ became a behavioural problem not a poverty problem.

Neoliberal welfare restructuring in the U.S. therefore instituted a ‘discourse of dependency’ that composed Black ‘pathology’ and ‘bad’ motherhood through single mothers’ bodies. Research demonstrates how the construction of the ‘normal family’ as a nuclear heterosexual two-parent Western family was used to develop policies (Gring-Pemble, 2003). Roberts (1997) points out that, while White illegitimacy was not

perceived as a cultural or racial defect, “Black unwed motherhood” was viewed as a major social problem (p. 17), so that “[s]ingle motherhood is viewed as a Black cultural trait that is infiltrating white homes” (2002, p. 63).

Schram (2002) explains that conservative attempts to individualize poverty (such as the attempts made by the conservatives Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead) use Othering to decide how the ‘differences’ of welfare recipients are interpreted (p. 170).<sup>34</sup> Specifically, the differences that characterize welfare recipients are regarded as the ‘otherness’ and ‘other’ culture that is set apart from White middle class people and culture. It is from these ‘othered’ characteristics that Black ‘pathology’ is derived. From this position, welfare was “a ‘black program’ for those ‘other’ people who were not conforming to white, middle-class work and family values” (Schram, 2002, p. 165).<sup>35</sup> Schram’s study further suggests that welfare policies continue to reinforce white supremacy through ‘the discourse of dependency’ as Othering in order to make sure that ‘different’/racialized people absorb low-wage labor, people who are needed in order to maintain the current economic system under neoliberalism. Moreover, Sparks (2003) suggests how ‘the discourse of dependency’ justifies a circular logic, a ‘vicious cycle of poverty’, which establishes even tougher disciplining policies for the poor. In welfare policy discourses, single motherhood continues to be regarded as both the cause and effect of welfare use, substance use, and child neglect.<sup>36</sup>

Another interpretation of welfare recipients’ ‘differences’—characteristics that are interpreted as the causes of poverty—should be the effects/results of sexism, racism, and classism, especially in the context of declining job opportunities for low-skilled workers due to deindustrialization, globalization, and the decline in unionism (Iceland,



2013, p. 109). Based on this interpretation, welfare policies should take into account the reality of racialized and gendered biases and barriers that exist both inside the home and in labor markets. Instead, policies disregard the reality of biased social structures, dismissing the significance of the lack of childcare and decent jobs. Together, these studies continue to show how welfare reform mobilized and utilized ‘the discourse of dependency’ to enforce the ideal ideological and material conditions necessary for neoliberalism.

### **The contemporary welfare rights movement.**

Given that this study explores single mothers’ activism, it is important to review the literature on the contemporary welfare rights movement, in addition to contemporary social movements around child welfare services, which is rarely explored (see for example, Tobis, 2013). Since the collapse of the NWRO in 1975, a number of local welfare rights groups have emerged and dissolved. In the 1970s and 1980s, welfare rights activists revived the NWRO’s demand for a guaranteed income, but they began to emphasize employment as the key to escaping poverty; they did this while also defending AFDC as a critical safety net (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 75). The Welfare Rights Coalition was formed in 2005 and is the only welfare-rights-centered national coalition, consisting of approximately forty grassroots welfare rights groups across the U.S. (Ernst, 2010, pp. 143-144). Particularly after the 1996 welfare reform, the Coalition’s activism has shifted its focus from welfare rights to anti-poverty activism. While there is not much literature that analyzes the contemporary welfare rights movement, the work of McNeil (2012), Reese (2011), and Ernst (2010) has produced key texts that provide information on the

contexts of and frames of analysis necessary to understand mothers' activism against child welfare services in the U.S.

McNeil's *Street Practice: Changing the Lens on Poverty and Public Assistance* (2012) provides case study analyses of five non-profit organizations' (NPO) grassroots research and advocacy work, in order "to commence the work of developing social change frameworks that serve to offer alternatives to those originating in academe" (p. 156).<sup>37</sup> McNeil (2012) points out that the NPOs have done action research for their advocacy work based on their own collective action frames; the frames are seen to create the necessary space for organizations to reveal systematic injustices and move closer to their advocacy goal (pp. 147-148). A part of collective action framing includes the concept of 'frame bridging' (making linkages of collective action frames), and the case study demonstrates the importance of 'frame bridging' to advocacy work, such as coalition building and participation, collaboration, developing allies, and bridging techniques with media (pp. 151-152). The case study also provides support for the importance of combining ground level, empirical research and action-based advocacy (p. 156). McNeil (2012) suggests that, while the frames of activist organizations are shaped by dynamics of society, action research can democratize knowledge and be infused with a social justice philosophy, especially when it employs frame bridging techniques. *Street Practice* suggests that single mothers' activism against child welfare services has potentially used action research techniques in order to provide mothers, families and the wider public with knowledge of the child welfare system.

Reese (2011) articulates how the current welfare rights movement is structured to move further away from women's rights. Reese (2011) makes a crucial observation

that “policymaking does not end when legislation is passed—policy implementation is policy making” (p. 168). Even after the welfare reform of 1996, grassroots activists, other welfare advocates, and their allies “mobilized and sometimes managed to shape the state and local implementation of federal welfare reforms in small but significant ways that improved the lives of low-income Americans” (Reese, 2011, p. 168). However, according to Reese (2011), coalition-building, both inside and outside of the state, has been the key for making policy gains in activism (p. 168), an argument similarly found in *Street Practice* (2012).<sup>38</sup> Reese (2011) discusses how most of the welfare rights campaigns that she examined depended on the resources of other groups, either from foundation grants or union members’ dues and how it affected directions of their activism:

These resources made these campaigns possible but also limited their breadth and longevity. Resources were allocated for particular kinds of welfare issues and not others and were often time-limited, which shaped and constrained the kinds of policy gains that could be made (p. 32).

She makes an important distinction about how funding works in organizational structures and the impact that funds can have on an organization’s goals:

[E]xternal funds do not simply facilitate the organization of poor people; they may constrain and channel it, as funding is allocated for specific purposes. When elites control these funds, such as in the case of foundation grants, they often allocate funds for purposes that do not threaten their own interests (Reese, 2011, p. 32).

The reality is that grassroots activists continue to face both internal and external pressures in the process of advocating and fighting for their causes.

Single mothers’ organizations, such as Welfare Warriors and Every Mother is a Working Mother Network, have continued to maintain welfare rights are women’s rights (as guaranteed adequate income); an argument articulated on the basis of the care-giving work that women continue to do. These demands are similar to the NWRO in the 1960s

and 1970s, and advocates use feminist strategies to challenge the devaluation of poor mothers' caregiving work within welfare reform policies. However, these demands usually bring the situations that they have few coalition-building among welfare rights groups or policy makers. The research done by Reese (2011) suggests that, due to these dynamics, single mothers' organizations were unable to influence the design of state welfare reform policies.<sup>39</sup> In Wisconsin, leaders of other welfare and children's advocacy groups believed that the goal of completely abolishing welfare-to-work requirements would get little support from state policymakers (Reese, 2011, p. 134). Reese's study suggests that while mothers' organizations continue to advocate and fight for issues that strongly connect the child welfare system with welfare rights as women's rights, they continue to have limited influence on policy outcomes.

On the basis of these studies, it becomes more and more apparent how the dismissal of single mothers' activism and women's rights organizing by the current/mainstream welfare rights movement is not only affected by welfare restructuring, but reflects citizenship stratification and an increasingly neoliberal gender order. Reese and Newcombe (2003), for example, demonstrate how stratification and gender orders affect organizations, for instance when the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) started the split chapter of NWRO in order to overcome NWRO's limited membership base and agenda (p. 306). They suggest that ACORN used a broader economic justice frame, and got more alliances, resources, and recognitions than NWRO, WW, and EMWM. These studies suggest that, though workfare created a greater demand to struggle with/for workers' rights than in the 1960s welfare rights movement, this trend of a welfare rights movement—to focus more on

universal worker's rights while dismissing women's rights—has been shaped by larger American welfare politics, neoliberalism and workfare policies. Abramovitz (2000)

claims:

The labor unions and large community-based organizations, often led by male organizers, stand behind worker's rights. They organize workfare participants, campaign for a livable wage, and lobby for jobs. [. . .] they [poor women] still have to remind their allies that, as women, they need the option of choosing when paid work is best for them and their families and when it is not (pp. 147-148).

Again, this is similar to the argument of the welfare rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s over WIN. Together, these studies suggest that this trend of dismissing women's rights in welfare/anti-poverty activism has also potentially contributed to the political and public disregard for social movements and activism on child welfare services more generally.

While it is becoming a generally accepted fact that welfare politics succeeded in fading out women's rights in the welfare rights movement, Ernst (2010) makes us pay attention to the contributions of this 'failed' movement. Criticizing how Piven (2008) and others focus on social movements' particular policy outcomes to assess success, Ernst (2010) points out that there is the potential to erase a broader and on-the-ground understanding of 'success' (p. 137). Ernst (2010) states that "what [is lost] when scholars attempt to measure success primarily in terms of policy outcomes" are the positive impacts of social movement organizations, those that are not professionalized and have little influence over particular policy choices for the poor, on growing political communities: this kind of growth cannot be measured only through policy outcomes (p. 137). Due to Ernst (2010)'s focus on colorblind racism and intersectionality in welfare rights movements, she suggests that "'failed' movements that create or redefine collective

subjectivities have the power to make much larger changes than those that pursue and succeed at accomplishing relatively narrow policy outcomes” (p. 137). She illustrates that the “not in my lifetime” perspective on social change is an aspect of social movements that can empower participants and can create more fun in the change-making process (pp. 136-137). Ernst (2010) reinforces the idea that measuring the success of social movement organizations, particularly in the case of welfare rights movements, should not narrowly focus on policy outcomes; success must take into account social justice movement building and mobilization. Ernst’s study demonstrates the importance of a perspective that considers social justice in order to assess the contributions of single mothers’ activism, even though single mothers’ activism has influenced policy outcomes less than other welfare rights groups.

### **Theorizing and Researching Single Mothers’ Experiences and Activism**

The current literature demonstrates scholarly engagement with the changes that have occurred in the welfare and child welfare systems, especially in terms of understanding the discourses that underscore these changes and the subsequent implications for single mothers’ lives. While there has been a great deal of research assessing welfare reform post-1996, and separate research on child welfare system reforms, little analysis has been done about the connections *between* welfare reform and reforms of the *child* welfare system, specifically Child Protective Services (CPS). Almost no research has examined how both of these areas of welfare services have involved activism in response to these changes. Some existing studies do explore the relationships between child well-being, parental child maltreatment, and child protective intervention

and a variety of factors: for example, mandatory work requirements (see Wang, 2015); low-wage employment (see Morgan & Kickham, 2001); parental economic circumstances (see Vondra, 1993; Campbell, Cook, Lafleru, & Keenam, 2010); domestic violence (see Wilson, 1998; Edelson, Gassman-Pines, & Hill, 2006; Dosanjh, Lewis, Mathews, & Bhandari, 2008; Hughes and Chau, 2012); housing and school instability (see Zlotnic, 2009; Font & Warren, 2013); child welfare reforms (see Erickson, 2000; Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016); privatization (see Freundlich & Gerstenzang, 2003), and welfare reform (see Chapter 4). But these studies do not often employ feminist analyses or center feminist methodological or epistemological concerns. Studies that do (while still relatively rare in number) address the following three critical intersections within and across welfare reform and child welfare reforms focus on: 1) a structural analysis to comprehend the current child welfare system (Swift, 1995a; Reich, 2005; Swift & Callahan, 2009); 2) the perspectives and experiences of impoverished mothers involved with child welfare services (Smagner & Sullivan, 2005; Neblett, 2007; Hall & Slembrouck, 2010; Sykes, 2011); and 3) social movements and activism on child welfare services (Tobis, 2013). However, by examining these three intersections from a critical feminist perspective, this dissertation sets out to specifically explore how the reforms of the two systems are connected with and shape single mothers' experiences with CPS, including their 'actions for change' through social movement involvement and activism on child welfare services.

### **Research questions.**

At its foundation, this dissertation project understands policy decisions to be brought about by existing welfare discourses (for example the problem of ‘dependency’ and the unaffordability of welfare) and struggled against by differently positioned political actors (Young, 1990; Nakagawa, 2009). Over the course of the research process, I have continued to look deeper into how other discourses than existing welfare discourses surrounding the cultural meaning of child welfare were invented, consolidated, and materialized through policy making and implementation processes that are part of governance practices; especially as these practices regulate impoverished (racialized) single mothers’ lives given post-welfare restructuring. My first primary question for this dissertation research was: how have the material and symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy change worked together to shape the post-1990 restructuring of both welfare service areas? In order to answer this question, this project explores what the symbolic and material conditions that allow welfare reform are, in addition to examining the current welfare and child welfare systems, in order to understand the relationships that exist between them. I specifically asked: How do the two systems connect? How do the two systems function and work together?

My second primary research question was: how have mothers responded to these reforms? Specifically, what is the nature of mothers’ activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring? As single mothers have actively organized against CPS and the child welfare system, I asked: Why and how have single mothers organized their activism? What have they challenged about welfare systems? And how does their activism connect to and relate with welfare restructuring? This project carefully examines the different understandings that CPS and single mothers hold



about child well-being and parental child maltreatment, particularly as they are connected with changes in impoverished mothers' material and symbolic realities given welfare reforms. In asking these questions and carrying out this research, I consider the material and symbolic implications of this conflict between CPS and mothers' differing understandings, especially in the U.S. context that continues to intensify the criminalization of poverty (see for example Wacquant, 2009).

### **Overarching framework.**

While much literature has analyzed the welfare system as a practice of governance, there has been little research analyzing issues of governance in the area of child welfare. Aiming to remedy this gap, I use (poverty) governance as an overarching theoretical framework, embedding insights from feminist critical policy analysis and anti-racist and decolonizing feminism, to analyze intersections in the welfare and child welfare systems, and to understand how material and symbolic conditions created through these systems relate to mothers' lived experiences and activism.

To explore how the material and symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy change have worked together in shaping post-1990 restructuring for both areas of welfare services, and how mothers have responded to these reforms, I am guided by the theories of Foucault (1991), Campbell (2000), and Soss et al. (2011). My theoretical framework draws on scholarly understandings of governance, feminist theorizing of policy change, and anti-racist feminism and decolonizing theory, which are ideally suited for examining the interrelations between welfare systems and mothers' activism.

First, Foucault's concept of governmentality (1991) is much used in research on mothers' activism against welfare systems. In his work, Foucault reveals that the governance of states is not necessarily the direct ordering or forcing of people's actions by governments, but it is power over life in two forms: the discipline of the body (an 'anatomy-politics' of the human body) and the regulation of populations (a 'bio-politics' of the population) (Foucault, 1990, p. 145). While in 'anatomy-politics' the body is conceived as a machine that is to be optimized and disciplined (Foucault, 1990, p. 139), 'bio-politics' intervenes at the level of the generality (levels at which the general phenomena of populations are determined), rather than modifying phenomena as it relates to a given individual, insofar as she/he is an individual (Foucault, 2003, p. 246). This art of government is multiple and immanent, introduces the economy to the political, and organizes knowledge by power in order to set a rationality for states to manage populations (Foucault, 1991). Understanding governmentality in this way gives this research a foundational framework from which to analyze social welfare policies, especially how 'anatomy-politics' and 'bio-politics' operate through child welfare policy implementation as governance.

Second, my interest in the relationships between welfare systems and mothers' activism is grounded in a feminist critical policy analysis, particularly informed by Campbell's conceptual model of 'governing mentalities'. In 'governing mentalities', Campbell (2000) turns Foucault (1991)'s concept of 'governmentality' towards the material and discursive practices that underpin governance (pp. 51-52). In *Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice* (2000), she states that 'governing mentalities' "derive their power to compel from both symbolic and material registers. They are

cultural process[es] of formation and figuration that shape public policy debates and outcomes” (Campbell, 2000, p. 50). Different from conventional policy analysis, feminist critical policy analysis examines the structures of political exclusion, social isolation, and economic marginalization by focusing on cultural assumptions, that which Campbell calls ‘governing mentalities’ (Campbell, 2000, p. 8). The cultural assumptions which are not made explicit around gender, sexuality, class, and racial-ethnic formation not only shape policy-making process and implementation, but because policy is turned to as a critical site of cultural ‘truth’, the cultural assumptions which are not made explicit are often assumed to be ‘true’. This becomes particularly evident in how policy embodies characteristics of single mothers who are involved with welfare and child welfare services, simultaneously encoding the meaning, political significance, and presumed incidence of receiving welfare and child welfare services (Campbell 2000, p. 8). Rather, single mothers’ experiences with social welfare policy should decide the ‘truth’ of gender, sexuality, class, and racial-ethnic formations. Campbell’s approach enables me to examine the interactions between policy processes and single mothers’ experiences of material and symbolic dimensions of reforms.

Third, I draw on the conceptual framework of ‘poverty governance’, as theorized by Soss et al. (2011) in *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*. They claim that, “[n]eoliberal paternalism defines the operations of American poverty governance today, both as a mentality of rule [. . .] and as a regime of practice” (p. 298), emphasizing how “a cultural construction of blackness remains a potent force in American poverty governance” (p. 301). Using this particular framework of governance, which focuses specifically on the poor in the U.S., allows me to analyze

especially impoverished racialized single mothers' relationships with the welfare systems and the state. 'Poverty governance' is when governments employ a variety of policy tools and administrative arrangements not to end poverty, but to secure (in politically viable ways) the cooperation and contributions of poor people for the smooth operation of societal institutions; this is achieved through civic incorporation, social control, and the production of self-regulating subjects. The burdens of people who live and work in poverty are indispensable for capitalism to flourish in order to ensure the quality of life that most people expect (Soss et al., 2011). In *Regulating the Poor* (1993), Piven and Cloward develop the classic theory of welfare programs, which states that welfare programs for the poor have historically operated in combination of labor market as derivative institutions shaped by pressures from dominant political and economic orders (see Soss et al., 2011, p. 295). In their text, Soss et al. (2011) articulate how poverty governance currently functions in the welfare system. They claim that, today, poverty governance operates as a productive project of discipline (p. 296). Adapting Soss et al. insights enables me to consider how governing mentalities in the area of child welfare are connected to political and economic orders, how child welfare relates to American poverty governance as a welfare program (especially since the system tends to equate poverty with neglect, and there is a disproportionality in the class of the people involved with the services), and how racism functions in the poverty governance of child welfare.

Poverty has broad economic consequences that affect and/or interfere with economic growth (for example the creation of a low wage labor pool and the costs associated with childhood poverty, though these 'costs' are also part of the social services industry), and also social and political consequences (such as social disorder, crime, and

public distrust in democratic institutions) (Iceland, 2013, p. 4). In order to avoid ‘negative’ consequences and to secure the ‘positive’ consequences associated with poverty, governments use disciplinary and regulatory technologies to govern the poor in ways that contribute to capitalist economic growth. In so doing, specific ideas about citizenship and democratic ideals are developed as/in relation to poverty governance, historically changing the ways that political and economic orders are responded to. In fact, the majority of means-tested benefits have been designed to keep people in poverty, rather than to help them move out of it (O’Hare, 1996, p. 33; Iceland, 2013, p. 143). A notable example is the welfare reform of 1996, in which, “[u]nquestionably, the purpose of welfare reform was to reduce welfare caseloads” (McNeil, 2012, p. 10) and not to end poverty. The ‘creaming effect’ of workfare policies (Peck, 2001, p. 347)<sup>40</sup> has only separated poor people into the working poor and those who still need public aid. For example, the employment rate of never-married mothers rose from 43 percent in 1992 to 65 percent in 1999 (Iceland, 2013, p. 106). However, most of them work at poverty-level jobs (Jones-DeWeever, Peterson, & Song, 2003, p. 17), and the rate of extreme poverty still increased after welfare reform (Lyter, Sills, & Oh, 2002, pp. 4-5). Through poverty governance, the government succeeded in diffusing social insecurity by reforming programs for the poor (such as AFDC and food stamps), which were twelve times less costly than programs directed at the middle and upper classes (Wacquant, 2009, p. 80).

Even after welfare reform, poverty governance continues. In *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (2009), which explores the criminalization of poverty, Wacquant points out the gendered double regulation of the poor in the U.S.; 90 percent of welfare recipients in the U.S. are mothers, while 93

percent of inmates in the U.S. are male (p. 15). Moreover, six in ten occupants of county jails were Black or African American and Latino (41 percent and 19 percent, respectively) whereas these two communities put together represent barely one-fifth of the national population in 1995 (Wacquant, 2009, p.70), while both White and Black or African American TANF families were about 32 percent and Hispanic TANF families were 30 percent in 2010 (USHHS, 2010). However, it is important to note how this percentage of mothers overlaps with the population involved with child welfare services. There are many similarities between the regulation of men in the criminal justice system and women in the child welfare system. These are: an increase in the number of incarceration and child welfare cases over the last couple of decades, the overwhelming involvement of poor people, racial disproportionality, and the relationship with public aid programs targeted at the poor (see Wacquant, 2009, pp. 41-75). Poverty is a legitimized structural aspect of neoliberalism, which constitutes neoliberal ideology as well as the insecurities that both generate and are generated by neoliberalism; governance becomes a way to discipline poor people into the ‘underclass’, which sustains the symbolic and material conditions necessary for neoliberalism/neoliberal ideology. Both areas (criminal justice and child welfare) function as the post-1990 poverty governance of the ‘underclass’. According to Soss et al. (2011),

From the 1960s on, conservatives brandished the troubled lives of the poor as evidence of liberal failure and as a wedge issue to divide the Democratic coalition. Pathological images of poor, minority neighborhoods became a repository and the violent, drug-dealing gangbanger. A new ‘underclass’ was discovered, and its problems were folded into a broad narrative of declining morality and authority (p. 293).

The discourse of the ‘underclass’ not only understood the poor as morally inferior people in need of public aid, but as a class of people who needed to be disciplined; the

discourse was enacted through welfare policies that enforced and implemented “programs treating the poor as cultural similes of criminal who have violated the civic law of wage work” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 60). In this way, the term ‘underclass’ started to refer to “‘nonnormative’ behaviours present in many high-poverty neighborhoods, such as dropping out of school, having children out of wedlock, receiving welfare, having low attachment to the labor force, and abusing drugs and alcohol” (Iceland, 2013, p. 54). The result is that these ‘nonnormative’ behaviours come to represent the causes of poverty, though in fact, these poverty-related problems first have to be constructed as ‘nonnormative’ behaviours. When behaviours are identified and understood as ‘nonnormative’, they are then discursively and materially criminalized in order to reinforce their ‘nonnormative-ness’. As Wacquant (2009) states, “[i]t is not criminality that has changed here so much as the gaze that society trains on certain street illegalities [. . .] on the dispossessed and dishonored population” (p. 4).

Lastly, I have infused insights from anti-racist and decolonizing feminism into my overarching theoretical framework. Specifically, this project centralizes a critique of racism in U.S. social welfare policy. Race has had distinctive effects on welfare politics in the U.S. (such as systematic exclusions of racialized people in welfare systems and continuously using rhetoric to stereotype Black or African American women as ‘bad mothers’), and has been used as a critical institutionalizing tool of social welfare policy by ‘playing the race card’ (see Abramovitz, 2006, pp. 32-34). Agathangelou (2004) claims that “[t]he state mediates the relation between racialized and gendered capital and labor” through policies and laws, which then “controls labor markets and the cost of reproducing labor” (p. 37). Ultimately, the criminalization of poverty is inseparable from

the criminalization and destruction of Black or African American communities (e.g. Scully, 2002), as well as the policing and criminalizing of women's reproduction, particularly of Black or African American women (e.g. Flavin, 2009). This is especially so in the U.S. context, since institutions have functioned to realize specific racializing and gender orders of the state, as seen in the case of poverty governance.

These racial and gender orders intersect in the area of child welfare through poor single mothers' bodies. Federal and state policies have defined "what it means to be a woman" by expecting women to marry, procreate, give birth, and parent in specific ways (Flavin, 2009, p. 3). These policies "enforce standards regarding which women are fit to have control over their own reproduction and, as well, who may become and remain mothers", which is then reinforced through multiple institutional sites (such as welfare systems and criminal justice systems) (Flavin, 2009, p. 24). Ultimately, these processes create and exercise an ontology of motherhood.<sup>41</sup> My research therefore implicitly examines how the ontology of motherhood is regulated in the welfare and child welfare systems, which connects with the neoliberal gender order of the state through the framework of governance. Specifically, regulatory reproductive policies have resulted in negative social rhetoric related to Black or African American women's reproduction, and "Black reproduction is increasingly vilified and effectively criminalized" in neoliberal times (Rousseau, 2009, pp. 174-176). Historically, institutions such as slavery and welfare were legitimized in order to control Black or African American women's bodies and to regulate the ontology of motherhood. For example, "the 'black welfare queen' has been constructed out of need for an 'other' to legitimate the middle-class white man of virtue" (Schram, 2002, p. 172).



## **Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the current literature on the neoliberal reforms of welfare and child welfare systems, and single mothers' activism in the U.S., introduced my research questions, and described the overarching framework of my research. Specifically, the first half of this chapter reviewed literature from five main areas of scholarship in order to set the context for my own dissertation research: 1) the historical context of social welfare policy and welfare rights movements; 2) the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996; 3) the U.S. child welfare policy; 4) neoliberalism and 'the discourse of dependency'; and 5) the contemporary welfare rights movement. The second half of this chapter introduced my research questions, noting how these are grounded in, and linked to, existing scholarship. Finally, I described the theoretical framework that was chosen to guide this dissertation, which draws on scholarly understandings of governance, feminist theorizing of policy change, and anti-racist feminism and decolonizing theory.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Method**

Mine is a qualitative study of the intersections between welfare and child welfare systems and reform, and single mothers' activism. In this chapter, I review the specific methods that I used to study the relationships between post-1990 restructuring of welfare systems and mothers' activism. I discuss my sampling, data collection, protection and ethics, analysis strategy, coding of data, and limitations. My analysis of qualitative data was directed by incorporation of discourse and narrative analysis strategies, based on feminist standpoint epistemology, which enabled me to explore governance in welfare systems based on single mothers' lived experiences.

### **Research Questions**

Remember that the research questions that guided my research were:

1. How have the material and symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy change worked together to shape the post-1990 restructuring of both areas of welfare services?
2. How have mothers responded to these reforms? Specifically, what is the nature of mothers' activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring?

### **Qualitatively Exploring Single Mothers' Experiences of Two Welfare Systems**

My incorporation of theories of feminist critical policy analysis and anti-racist and decolonizing feminism directed me towards answering these questions through qualitative inquiry. As Mayan (2001) writes, “[q]ualitative inquiry explores the experiences of people in their everyday lives”, and is used 1) to describe a phenomenon about which little is known, and 2) to capture the meaning of data which are collected in the form of feelings, behaviour, thoughts, insights, and actions rather than in the form of numbers (p. 5). Qualitative inquiry is ideally situated to answer the questions because it can provide rich understanding of structural analysis based on single mothers’ lived experiences with two welfare systems and their activism. Mothers’ experiences intersect with their social locations, their race, class, age, etc., as well as with the two systems. As well, this project explores the meaning of their experiences. What does it mean that a mother is involved with child welfare services, for herself, her children, her family, her community, two welfare systems, and society?

### **The Case Study**

This study was done in the U.S., because its neoliberal welfare restructuring has shaped gender relations and women’s social reproduction work, and also the U.S. presented characteristics that suggested it was an appropriate country in which to study the intersections of welfare and child welfare systems (see Chapter 1 and 2). Specifically, the case of one state in particular, Wisconsin, played a leading role of welfare reform. Narrowing the focus makes sense, since each state designs and administers its own welfare policy. In 1993, three full years before the federal government initiated a similar policy move, Wisconsin enacted legislation to end AFDC in the state by 1999. In its

place, the state enacted Wisconsin Works (W-2), a radical, work-focused program which introduced privatization into the administration of the welfare system in 1996 (Heaney, 2004, p. 243). Due to this policy change, the decline in the number of welfare rolls in Wisconsin was much higher than other states: “[T]he number of families receiving welfare in the United States declined by 56 percent between January 1993 and January 1999, but Wisconsin’s caseload declined by 80 percent during that period” (Courtney et al., 2005, p. 121). Moreover, Wisconsin, particularly in Milwaukee, made significant reforms to its child welfare services and between the end of 1990 and the end of 1999, out-of-home care caseloads grew by 86 percent in Milwaukee (Courtney et al., 2005, p. 122). Underpinning the larger research questions of this project, there is a simple one: How did welfare reform connect to the expanded provision of child welfare services? Again, Wisconsin is an ideal place to focus on in order to examine this question, because the post-1990 relationships between welfare reform and CPS played out in a unique way in this part of the U.S.

## **Sampling**

I use a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling to engage participants in this research. The convenience factor refers to the choice of setting and city. Because this study places focus on one state in particular, Wisconsin, and because the research questions focus on social movements and activism on child welfare services, I elected to meet parents and their advocates through the Welfare Warriors (Milwaukee, WI). Welfare Warriors was selected because the organization is known for its activism on child welfare services in Wisconsin. Mothers and activists know that it is the organization

that advocates for the rights of single mothers in poverty. Welfare Warriors (WW) is a nonprofit organization of mothers and children in poverty, established in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1986, and is comparable to the non-profit activism groups observed in Chapter 2. In their mission, they claim,

We [WW] work to create a voice for mothers in poverty through our own organizations and media. Through street activism, advocacy, and our newspaper, *Mother Warriors Voice [(MWV)]*, we fight for the creation of a federal program to guarantee that all children have support to the age of 18. We educate and agitate until all communities recognize that ‘Motherwork IS Work’ and must be paid and prioritized by the community and in the workplace. We actively protest the devastation being caused by ‘welfare reform’ (WW, n.d.a).

WW has a mothers’ hot line, a monthly meeting, and have organized many demonstrations and events for mothers and children, funded by donations, some grants, subscription fees of *MWV* and their own fund raising events. They have organized activism to challenge the child welfare system, as well as the welfare system, in Milwaukee, WI.

In order to find participants for interviews, I used purposive sampling. With the permission of WW, I was provided with access to their records of mothers and grandmothers who had contacted them due to their involvement with child welfare services. These records were created by WW for the Mothers and Grandmothers of Disappeared Children (MaGoD) Project. This project:

was founded in 1992 to provide support and legal advocacy to moms whose children have been wrongfully removed by Social Services. This Project also works to change the practices and laws that allow the government to needlessly remove children from loving homes, their siblings, and their mother (WW, n.d.b).

I contacted potential participants by telephone, explained my research, and asked if they would be interested in participating. If a mother showed interest, then I set up a time and a place for the interview.

This study only used the following inclusion criteria for participants: potential participants had to be involved with child welfare services, or involved in social movements and activism on child welfare services. Because I met the participants through the WW, most of them were involved with both child welfare services and activism on child welfare services. I assumed that a few participants would be mothers based on the history of mothers' activism against welfare reform (as discussed in Chapter 2) and the records to which I had access. However, I did end up recruiting two male participants because one was an active advocate volunteer of the organization, and another one was a father who was also involved with child welfare services.

All participants completed demographic questions at the beginning of their interview. In this way, I was able to gather basic demographic information from participants. These questions included: their age, marital status, racial/ethnic/cultural background, education, if they rent or own a house, total household income, the number of months receiving AFDC/W-2 (if applicable), the number of people in their household, the number of children they have, and children's ages (with them, fostered, or other), if applicable. This information provided contextual information about participants' social, economic, and cultural locations and conditions.

The number of participants that made up the qualitative sample is 16 (14 women and two men). I interviewed 13 mothers, one father<sup>42</sup>, and one aunt about their relationships with children who were involved with child welfare services (see Appendix A for their descriptions). All of them were single parents, except one parent who was married<sup>43</sup> and one volunteer advocate for the WW. This advocate was also the only person not involved with child welfare services who was included in the sample; this

person was included because their interview was very informative, due to the interviewee's experiences and knowledge as an activist.<sup>44</sup> Overall, the participants were aged between 19 and 70, 10 of them being between the ages of 19 to 34. Half of the sample (which equaled eight mothers) were Black or African American, four of them were White, one was Hispanic, one was Indigenous, and two were bi-racial and multi-racial. With regard to levels of education, two had less than high school, three had some high school experience, four had GEDs, five had college degrees, and two had BAs. Most of them rented their places, and 10 had experiences in receiving AFDC (four) or W-2 (six). Their annual household income varied, from the annual amounts of zero to 50,000 dollars (which was especially dependent on the number of people in the household), and some chose not to answer this question at all; however, seven answered that their monthly household income was less than 1,000 dollars. As mentioned above, all had children, 15 of the 16 participants were involved with CPS, and 9 of the 16 participants had children in foster care at the interview time. At the time of the interview, four participants had a complete reunification with children (which means that they were currently unified with all children), and one had a partial reunification with children (meaning she was unified with only some of her children) after having them in foster care. One had TPR (Termination of Parental Rights).

**Table: Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Sample (N=16)**

<i>Average</i>	
Age (women and men)	39
Number of children	3.0625
Number of children who had been in foster care	2
<i>Frequency counts</i>	
Gender	
Women	14
Men	2
Relationship with children who were involved with child welfare services	
Mother	13
Father	1
Aunt	1
None (Advocate)	1
Marital Status	
Single	14
Married	2
Race	
Black or African American	8
White	4
Hispanic	1
Indigenous	1
Multi-ethnic/Bi-racial	2
Level of Education	
Less than high school	2
Some high school	3
G.E.D.	4
Post secondary complete	7
College	5
BA	2
Public Assistance	
AFDC	4
W-2 (TANF in Wisconsin)	6
Other/None	6
Participants of Children involved with CPS	
No involvement (Advocate)	1
Investigation only	1
Foster Care	14
Reunified at the interview time	4
Ongoing at the interview time	9
TPR at the interview time	1



## **Data Collection**

The primary data source consisted of in-depth face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. While the sample size is small, feminist critical policy analysis assumes the importance of in-depth data about participant's daily life experiences as mothers. Qualitative data's central goal is to trace the process of social relations of power rather than just merely capture outcomes. Based both on my epistemological and methodological framework, this approach allows me to capture and reflect the nuanced processes through which mothers deal with and/or explain their life conditions as intersecting with the welfare and child welfare systems. Statistics and other data that the state tends to collect and compile usually does not capture these dimensions.

The interview guide I relied upon included semi-structured and open-ended questions (see Appendix B). In order to understand the diverse perspectives and experiences of impoverished single mothers involved with child welfare services and their advocates, I adopted a conversational style that enabled participants to talk about any related topics that they wanted to discuss, while using the interview guide as a support and reference. As for the interview questions, they were designed to invite participants to reflect on their experiences: 1) with welfare reform and CPS, including the discourses of welfare reform and CPS; and 2) participating in activism on child welfare services, if applicable.

The data was collected during a fieldwork trip to the WW, from June to July 2013. I have personally known the director of the WW, Pat Gowens, since 2007. I first visited the WW in 2007, with Chieko Akaishi, the director of a single mothers' organization in Tokyo, Japan, called 'Single Mothers' Forum'. Participant recruitment

started in June 2013 and ended in July 2013, coinciding with the completion of 16 interviews (all in the month of July). By the 16<sup>th</sup> interview, no new themes came up in stories, suggesting that theoretical saturation was achieved. For each interview, I started with demographic questions. Then I moved on to questions that specifically addressed participants' experiences with Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Services (CWS), and the welfare reform of 1996/W-2, if applicable. Next, I asked the questions about how they see the relationships between the welfare reform and Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Services (CWS). Lastly, I asked questions about participants' engagement with activism on child welfare services, if applicable (see Appendix B).

Most of the interviews were about one hour in length, except for two of the interviews that were about 30 minutes; this was because they have been involved only with child welfare services and not with activism, so they did not answer as many questions as those participants who had been involved with both elements. However, I want to note that these interviews were also important to the project, because they provided accounts of participants' experiences with and stories about child welfare case involvement. Also, the interview with the director of the WW, Pat Gowens, lasted for about four hours. The interviews took place in locations that were chosen by participants, in order to make meeting convenient for them. Ten interviews were held at the office of the WW (Mothers Organizing Center), five interviews were at the participants' homes, and only one interview took place in a park near the participant's home.

In addition, my own participant observations have been included as part of the data. Detailed field notes and researcher memos were used to record information about

what I learned about the welfare and child welfare system; I took notes and memos during each field work trip, as well as during and after the interviews with participants. By being in the field, I was able to experience the living conditions that, while not directly connected to child welfare services, gave context to mothers' experiences and everyday living situations. This context helped to give me a deeper understanding when mothers would talk with me about their involvement with child welfare services. Again, these experiences and insights were crucial in order to analyze everyday lives of women in the specific local and community context of Milwaukee. By being part of the daily activities in the WW Office, I could get to know and talk with many people outside of interviews, and even continue to interact and connect with interview participants. In so doing, I took away insightful ideas from these interactions and conversations, even though I cannot specify the information in this dissertation, due to confidentiality.

During the fieldwork trip, I participated in multiple actions of the WW as a 'volunteer advocate'. Every Friday, I attended meetings of the MaGoD project, while helped me to meet more mothers and WW volunteers. In these meetings, we discussed many issues, from mothers' cases to our action plans. Every Thursday, I called the parents on the list to inform them about meetings and to encourage them to come to the meetings. Sometimes, I could talk with them about their cases on the phone, which was an important point of connection, as they did not always show up at meetings.

At times, I also attended children's court with some mothers as an advocate of mothers, though I was not allowed to enter into the actual court for children's privacy/confidentiality (note: no one can enter court, even if they are family members; only guardians and legal professionals with direct involvement are allowed to be present

in the court during case hearings involving children). At children's court, I distributed the newspaper of the WW, and talked with the lawyers of mothers. I also went to criminal court and the house of corrections with one mother, who was challenging the criminal charge that she had abused her son; a challenge she was making with the help of WW.

In addition, I visited the CPS side, the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) and its private partner agencies; the three big contractors, Integrated Family Services, Children's Service Society Wisconsin, and St. Aemilians. Over the course of these visits, I was able to talk with a worker at BMCW and ask questions in an informal interview. I was not allowed to talk with anyone working in the private contractors. However, I did meet a parent who had come to the agency to make complaints, and was able to talk with this parent about their experiences.

During the first half of the trip, I stayed at the director's house, so was able to have continued conversations with her (even when at home), which was very informative. For the second half of the trip, I stayed at the apartment of a mother (an interview participant) who was involved with CPS, and also actively engaged with the MaGoD project. Though I did not anticipate it, I witnessed how CPS treated this mother and her children, how they intervened in her entire life; I experienced first-hand how child welfare involvement affected her and her children's lives. Because I was staying at her apartment, and one of their meetings was held at there, I was invited by the mother to stay and participate in the meeting between her, the case worker and the visitation worker. Lastly, I participated in one of WW's protests in front of the new BMCW building. By working as a volunteer advocate with the WW, I was able to meet many people (not just interview participants). It was through these conversations that I was able to collect the

data/information that gives added depth to my participant observations recorded as field notes and memos. Together, these notes, memos and interview transcripts constitute the body of the data.

### **Protection and Ethics**

The qualitative interviews that I conducted were reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conformed to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Prior to the interviews, detailed information about this study was provided to all of the participants, including procedures for the interview and their rights as participants. Also prior to the interview, each participant was asked to document their voluntary participation in the project by signing a consent form (see Appendix C). Each interview was recorded on an IC recorder, with the participant's permission before the interview began. I made sure that participants knew that they did not need to answer to any questions, including the demographic questions, that they did not feel comfortable answering; I suggested that they could tell me to 'skip the question', and some of them used this strategy. For their participation, participants were given 20 U.S. dollars to thank and compensate them for their time spent in the interview. There was only one participant who refused to receive the honorarium.

### **Analysis Strategy**

This project uses a qualitative analysis strategy that employs Mayan (2001)'s approaches to qualitative inquiry. In order to analyze the current welfare systems, this

project explores the lived experiences of mothers involved with child welfare services and their advocates, and the meaning of their experiences. My analysis of the interviews was directed by incorporation of discourse and narrative analysis strategies, based on feminist standpoint epistemology, an approach that has a particular affinity with my overarching theoretical framework (see Chapter 2).

By centering feminist standpoint epistemology, I explore what standpoints grounded in mothers' experiences suggest about welfare systems or what standpoints mean to mothers' responses to reforms. According to Harding (1986), sexism and androcentrism as social biases and prejudices "enter research particularly at the stage of the identification and definition of scientific problems, but also in the design of research and in the collection and interpretation of evidence. [. . .] such biases can be eliminated by stricter adherence to the existing norms of scientific inquiry" (p. 161). Moreover, D. Smith (1987) points out that an 'expression' of social relations itself is the very privileging of those who can interpret and express of the relations (p. 116). According to D. Smith (1987), writing the social—making one's own observations—is shaped by the relevance of the discourse for the writing, and "the account she writes [. . .] is specifically structured [. . .] by the silences of those who are also present" (p. 116). To avoid such 'objectifying', privileging, and appropriation in research, feminists have theorized feminist standpoint theories to "explore the ongoing socially ordered matrices differentiating experience and the extended social relations immanent in the everyday" (D. Smith, 1987, p. 141). As Naples (2003) writes, standpoint is grounded in the experiences of the oppressed group, "embodied in specific actors who are located in less privileged positions within the social order and who, because of their social locations, are

engaged in activities that differ from others who are not similarly situated” (p. 76).

Standpoint can offer new knowledge that is not consistent with an existing body of knowledge that the privileged and oppressing group controlling the interpretive context accepts as true (Collins, 1989, p. 753). Harding (1986) claims,

A feminist epistemological standpoint is an interested social location. [. . .] the conditions for which bestow upon its occupants scientific and epistemic advantage. The subjugation of women’s sensuous, concrete, relational activity permits women to grasp aspects of nature and social life that are not accessible to inquiries grounded in men’s characteristic activities (p. 148).

Black feminist thought specializing in “formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African American women” (Collins, 1989, p. 750) can challenge the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge-validation process, because “Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups” (Collins, 1989, p. 747).

To qualitatively analyze welfare systems from the standpoints of mothers involved with child welfare services, and who are also mostly impoverished and racialized, enabled me to make visible what is invisible from traditional top-down policy analysis (Naples, 2003, pp. 158-159). I explore intersections of welfare systems and activism from an aspect that is rarely investigated, and what feminist standpoint suggests: mothers’ experiences and everyday lives.

Moreover, feminist standpoint epistemologies also inform how I understand and frame the data. A standpoint is “achieved through critical, community-based reflection of how one’s knowledge is shaped by prevailing power structures and cultural conditions”, so that “a standpoint is the position from which one is knowingly reflexive about the

interview and about the larger process of knowledge production of which it is part” (Bischoping & Gazso, 2015, p. 45). To understand what mothers’ standpoints suggest, I used discourse and narrative analysis strategies; I framed interview data as mothers’ stories, themselves representing of, and shaped by, wider discourses. I am informed by the work of Riessman (1993) in my narrative analysis, while I simultaneously apply insights of Foucaudian discourse analysis (Bischoping & Gazso, 2015). By using these strategies, I shared authorship of interview data with the participant narrators, in what became a joint construction of meaning (Bischoping & Gazso, 2015, p. 43).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, stories are not presented as ‘truth’ in a positivistic sense, but as lived-truth that provides the necessary data to grasp mothers’ experiences, perspectives, standpoints, self-defined identities, and the meaning of their experiences, all in relation to the symbolic and material social policy changes of welfare systems.

Knowledge-production is imbued with relations of power (Foucault, 1990, p. 60), so that feminists have developed strategies “to explain the absence of women ‘both as agents and as subjects of inquiry’ throughout received public knowledge” (Code, 1995, p. 20). As Code (1995) claims, “women and other socially disadvantaged groups of people are not only invisible in the data from which conclusions are drawn, but can also find no way for making their experiences count as informed or knowledgeable” (p. 20). This is partly due to the fact that “[m]ost members of a society learn to interpret their experiences in terms of dominant language and meanings; thus, women themselves (researchers included) often have trouble seeing and talking clearly about their experiences” (DeVault, 1999, p. 66). Because dominant discourses often exclude women’s experiences, or are produced explicitly by excluding women’s experiences,



women often have a hard time understanding their own experiences. If this is the case, how can we, as women, understand our own experiences? How do women know the world in relation to the dominant ways of “how people know the world” (Code, 1995, p. 23)?

In this project, the interviewees are mothers involved with child welfare services and their advocates. In dominant discourse (see Chapter 2), they are mothers who have abused or neglected their children, so that CPS became involved to protect the children. However, they were also the mothers who contacted WW for help because they did not believe that they had ever abused or neglected their children, even though CPS still removed them. In light of these contradictions, how did the mothers understand their own experiences of activism? To analyze their interviews, I incorporated narrative analysis to explore how they know the world. According to Riessman (1993),

Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself. [...] The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant’s story and analyses how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity (pp. 1-2).

Following this approach, a number of questions that I asked were: How do mothers tell their stories about their involvement with the child welfare system? How do their advocates tell the stories which are told to them by the mothers? I also asked: How do dominant discourses about mothers on welfare, and mothers’ relationships with CPS, come to relate with mothers’ stories? How do mothers speak against the dominant discourses? What are the counter-narratives available for mothers? How do mothers identify the changes in their sense of self and the meaning of motherhood after interventions by CPS? How do mothers try to convince me, the interviewer, that they are

not ‘bad’ mothers in their stories? These questions are important to consider because, as Riessman (1993) states, “[a]nalysis in narrative studies open up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told *that way*?” (p. 2)

By using this approach, I could focus on not only how mothers understand their experiences with welfare systems, but also the perspectives and standpoints that they have come to hold about the systems. What is important to learn about is the meaning that mothers ascribe to the experiences that they have. In this way, “[n]arrativisation tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning” (Riessman, 1993, p. 19). Over the course of this project, I have repeatedly heard mothers say that CPS took children, that they had to go to court, and that they had to go to parenting classes. Centering narrative analysis, the aim is to understand how mothers understand what these actions mean. What do mothers suggest about what these actions mean? As they tell their stories, their perspectives and standpoints become clear. Their experiences with child welfare services are affected by their specific social locations, which made them forge unique perspectives and standpoints on the welfare systems.

Moreover, people often make sense of their lives by telling and interpreting stories (DeVault, 1999, p. 87), which also helps them to make sense of their own selves. How events and actions are selected and accounted for in the telling of stories relates to one’s sense of self and reveals identity. According to Butler (2005), “narrative capacity constitutes a precondition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one’s actions through that means” (p. 12). However, narratives that give an account of myself (for example) will be disoriented by what is not mine and I will have to make

myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable (p. 37). Therefore, Butler (2005) cautions that “we will not be able to be very authoritative when we try to give a full account with a narrative structure” (p. 37). When mothers have to start telling stories in the situation that they are regarded as abusive or neglectful by CPS, while they do not regard themselves as abusive or neglectful, how do/can mothers make sense of their own selves?

To articulate mothers’ stories with these inquiries in mind, I also used discourse analysis. In particular, the symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy changes were analyzed through mothers *talking through* discourses, which aimed to reveal the meanings that they assigned to the changes. Mothers’ stories were analyzed in order to consider how discourses shape social interactions and institutions and vice versa, and also how discourses represent and/or shape social identities and vice versa (Bischooping & Gazso, 2015, pp. 155-166). Thus, I assumed that mothers’ stories were about discourses that they experienced in their everyday lives and with welfare systems. For example, the discourse that ‘jobs exist’ shaped institutional work requirements, even though the reality was that there were not enough jobs. Institutional work requirements then shaped ‘the discourse of dependency’, which impacted and shaped the social identities of single mothers. Mothers’ stories reflect such discourses, and how these discourses intersect with the material conditions of welfare systems. I was particularly interested in understanding: what discourses do mothers’ stories reflect? How do mothers experience and interpret these intersections? How do mothers’ stories connect to their social locations and positionalities? How do mothers become placed in discourses on welfare systems? How do mothers relate to welfare discourses and the dominant discourses around welfare and

mothers in/on welfare? How do mothers buy, negotiate with, internalize, or challenge the dominant discourses? How do mothers forge their own discourses, and especially through activism? What are mothers' own discourses? Asking these questions, this analysis can reveal the intersecting relationships between discourses and material conditions of welfare systems and mothers' experiences and activism.

In addition, it is important to articulate the mothers' stories in order to assess welfare systems and dominant messages about them, because these mothers' stories are rarely heard. Even in their own court room cases, mothers' stories are often not heard, which reveals a significant issue about how the current welfare systems work. Code (1995) claims,

the misogyny is not equally distributed: educated, articulate, well-dressed, heterosexual, and not-too-forceful white women, who are not too young or too old or too 'pretty,' have by far the best chances of being heard in consulting rooms, classrooms, courtrooms, and the offices of various bureaucracies throughout the affluent Western world (p. 35).

A critical feminist anti-racist and anti-oppressive approach takes seriously what stories that are rarely heard tell us.

### **Coding of Data**

All of the interviews with parents and their advocates were audio-taped and password protected. From January to April 2014, two Ph.D. students transcribed the interviews, including the verbal communications. Each transcript was then checked in order to enhance the accuracy of transcription. The transcribed data was analyzed using the qualitative software program NVivo 10. NVivo 10 allowed me to organize and analyze the mothers' stories by topics, and to find common and different themes across

all 14 mothers' and two men's stories. First, I read each story on its own, and then coded and organized data into tentative categories. This step was similar to the topic of coding that was used by Glazer and Strauss (1967) in grounded theory. The next step that I took was to organize the now coded data by both common and different elements, then rereading the stories organized through the tentative categories. At this stage, I interpreted and analyzed the data through the theoretical framework, and used the strategies of narrative analysis and discourse analysis articulated above—and the questions they prompted me to raise about my data—to aid in my identification and development of common themes across the interviews. The thematic categories that became most apparent through the narrative and discourse analysis provided exemplary examples of opinions and beliefs about, and meanings of, social welfare policy (see Gazso, 2006, p. 288), and based on feminist standpoint epistemologies, also uncovered “the tensions between the women’s everyday lives and the demands placed on them by policy implementation criteria” (Naples, 2003, p. 147). In my presentation of my findings throughout the remainder of the dissertation I chose to include excerpts to illustrate the thematic categories rather than focus on a respondent’s narrative at length.

### **Limitations**

It is important to point out the limitations of my sampling techniques. The use of convenient and purposive sampling suggests bias. All of the participants were recruited through the WW, which meant that participants were connected with them in some way or another. First, this meant that all participants needed and sought out help to deal with their cases in child welfare services, which means that they had problems with child

welfare services. Thus, this might reveal a potential bias in my sampling technique, as I did not find any participants who had no problems with child welfare services (for example, who were satisfied with the child welfare services they received). It is not the point of this research to suggest that society does not need social and welfare services to protect children. What this research suggests is that child welfare is a difficult area, and it is not difficult to imagine that there will be conflicts between parents and child welfare services / providers. However, because of the high numbers of cases reported, and the racialized disproportionality in cases that are reported, it is difficult to conclude that the parents involved in this project are exceptional cases. I want to again emphasize the neoliberal context that serves to discipline and punish the poor, and the ways that racialized families—particularly those of single, impoverished mothers—are surveilled and policed. It is within this context that this study focused on the lived experiences of people that have been systematically marginalized.

Second, having only recruited participants through WW also meant that all participants were still able to reach the WW; this meant that each of the participants still had some resources (for example, access to public spaces or to a community, mobility, literacy, other health reasons, etc.) that helped them find and access the group. WW uses physical copies of their newspaper to try and reach as many people as possible; they know that poor people usually do not have access to internet, and their first target is poor mothers. Due to my sampling technique, I was not able to reach people who were even more socially, economically, and culturally marginalized than the people that I did get the chance to speak with (for example, those who have no access to public spaces or to a community, either in person or through the internet, and who might potentially be limited

in terms of mobility, literacy, other health reasons, etc.). I witnessed and repeatedly heard about mothers who, even having accessed the WW for help, gradually had to give up their children to CPS due to many difficult situations; these difficult situations ultimately affected their ability to return to the organization for support.

### **Summary**

This chapter describes the central methods that were used in this research. This project used a qualitative method, and a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling for the data collection. Again, the total number of participants used in the qualitative sample was 16. In terms of the analysis strategy, this project used narrative and discourse analyses, informed by feminist standpoint epistemology, in order to interpret and develop the themes from the qualitative interview data. This chapter also explains the protocols that were used to protect the research data, the ethics procedures that were followed to obtain the qualitative data, and some potential limitations of this project.

## Chapter 4

### The Post-1990 Relationships between Wisconsin Welfare Reform and CPS

They [W-2 and CPS] control the money and they control your kids. They can take your money and they can take your kids if they want (P11, 55, Indigenous Single Mother, two children in care and five children with her).

It's [W-2 and CPS] different companies. [. . .] It's keeping the money for *themselves*, which is federal money I guess (P1, 32, White Advocate Volunteer).

Wisconsin welfare reform created specific material and symbolic conditions through which single mothers could be regarded as having maltreated children. The neoliberal entanglement of these two systems intensified the organization and arrangement of a gender order, where social reproduction is the individual responsibility of women. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the participants' experiences and perspectives on welfare and child welfare systems suggest such entanglement. First, I review other scholarship to contextualize my own study findings. Second, I engage with the participants' narratives and I read them to point to how they speak to the entanglement and relationship between the material and symbolic conditions of the child welfare system and welfare reform. I draw specific attention to how particular discourses on mothering connect with mothers' everyday lives. Third, I explore what narratives suggest about the experiences that participants reported in the child welfare system, and how they further illustrate how these experiences were connected to parallel or related material and symbolic conditions created by welfare reform.



## **Welfare Reform and the Child Welfare System: In Brief Review**

In the U.S., approximately five percent of allegedly maltreated children are placed in foster homes (Paxon & Waldfogel, 2003, p. 452). The children of most participants in this project (14 out of 15 cases) were removed to foster care. Although participants' experiences of the child welfare system cannot be generalized to every person's involvement with the system (as not all children are removed by CPS), their narratives suggest how the removal of children was potentially connected to the socioeconomic status of parents. The stories illustrated common experiences of those whose children were removed and certain characteristics of the child welfare system; specifically, how the child welfare system is connected to the welfare system and its reform. In most cases, participants had received some public assistance (e.g. SNAP, SSI, Medicaid). In 10 of the cases specifically, participants had received AFDC or W-2 (Wisconsin Works: TANF in Wisconsin).<sup>46</sup>

Those few studies that explore the relationships between welfare and the child welfare system (e.g. Paxon & Waldfogel, 2003; Wells & Guo, 2004; Courtney et al., 2005; Wells & Guo, 2006; Nam, Meezan, and Danziger, 2006; Courtney et al., 2008) focus on how welfare reform has affected family involvement of child welfare services. First of all, "[b]y statute, TANF requires states to maintain foster care and adoption assistance programs as a condition of receiving the TANF block grant" (Mink, 2006, p. 158; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, 1996a). Mink (2006) suggests that "[t]he coup de grace in TANF's war on single motherhood is its collaboration with child removal programs" (p. 158). Moreover, research has shown that, in the U.S., CPS caseloads significantly increased around the time of welfare

reforms (Swann and Sylvester, 2006; Berrick, 2011), while welfare caseloads decreased across the U.S. (Danziger, 2010) (see also Chapter 2). According to Nam et al. (2006), “foster care entry rates among children from welfare families rose in the first year of full implementation of a state’s welfare reform program” (p. 1183). Moreover, statistics show that welfare and child welfare populations overlapped; about half of the families referred to CPS were receiving welfare at the time of the referral, and more than half received welfare in the past (Paxon & Waldfogel, 2003, p. 460). “More than half of all foster children come from welfare-eligible families, and between 70 percent and 90 percent of families receiving in-home support services through CPS receive welfare” in the U.S. (Nam et al., 2006, p. 1182).

Nam et al. (2006) specify three possible ways that welfare reform shapes family involvement with CPS. First, since income is one of the strongest predictors of child maltreatment, they point out that changes in income, i.e. a decline, brought about by welfare reform might affect welfare recipients’ risk of involvement with CPS (p. 1182). Paxon and Waldfogel (2003) also suggest that decreases in a state’s welfare benefit amounts would increase poverty among children, and increases in poverty increase (the likelihood of) maltreatment (p. 460).<sup>47</sup> Second, Nam et al. (2006) claim that employment (wage jobs) may also increase welfare families’ risks of involvement with CPS when they cannot arrange appropriate child care or are unable to balance the demands of work and family (p. 1183). Moreover, this risk can be affected positively or negatively depending on the kind of wage job the mothers get and their satisfaction doing such jobs (for example, if the mother is happy or is stressed out from her job) (Paxon & Waldfogel,

2003, pp. 461-462). Third, Nam et al. (2006) claim that changes in welfare rules might increase reports in child welfare:

In some states, welfare agency staff are required to report those whose benefits are penalized for noncompliance with program rules to CPS and have them assessed for potential child maltreatment. In addition, in most states, welfare workers have greater contacts with their clients under PRWORA than they did under the old welfare system; many are required to visit their clients' homes and identify barriers to self-sufficiency. As a result, welfare workers may now be more likely to notice child maltreatment, which may increase their reports of child abuse and neglect (p. 1183).

Gainsborough (2010) also suggests that “the poor, particularly those receiving welfare are more subject generally to state scrutiny and therefore more likely to be observed mistreating their children than their middle-class counterparts” (p. 11). Moreover, research has pointed out the conflicting requirements from welfare and child welfare services (especially for mothers whose children, some of them, not all children, are removed from them): mothers are required to work or to participate in work-related activities in order to receive cash assistance (re: work-fare), and also to participate in social and other services concerning reunification in the first twelve months of their children's placements into foster care (Wells & Guo, 2006, p. 956). When welfare and child welfare services are provided by completely separate (private) agencies, they can create conflicting expectations. Moreover, mothers whose children are removed from them are no longer eligible for W-2 (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, n.d., as cited in Nadasen et al., 2009, pp. 210-213).

In addition, Paxon and Waldfogel (2003) claim that foster care may actually serve as a substitute for welfare. Foster care is often provided by relatives of the child placed in care. These relatives are eligible to receive payments as foster families, payments which may exceed the welfare benefits that the mother could have qualified for had she retained

the child in her own care.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, they claim, “low welfare benefit levels may result in fewer absent father-working mother families and more children in foster care” (pp. 463-464). Ironically, pre-1996 AFDC eligibility requirements are currently still used to ensure a child for federal foster care allowance at home of anyone else than a parent’s home, while the requirements no longer insure the child’s eligibility for welfare assistance in the parent’s home, because states can use Title IV-E if the child satisfy the eligibility (The Title VI-E Foster Care Program) (DeVooght, Fletcher, & Cooper, 2014, p. 20; see also Pelton, 1997, p. 549). According to Pecora and Harrison-Jackson (2016), “More than 6.7 million children—about 1 out of every 12 U.S. children—are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives” (p. 80), while more than one out of five children live in poverty in the U.S. (Addy et al., 2013). In addition, Courtney et al. (2008) claim, TANF agencies provide only social services to support parents’ paid work and not their parenting; any other services to support parenting must be provided by other state and local child welfare agencies (p. 283). Thus, they suggest, the problem with current welfare policy is its failure to take account of the other social services needed to help parents balance the demands of paid work and parenting: in other words, the role that public assistance programs (especially AFDC) had played in supporting the work of child welfare services before welfare reform was ignored (pp. 284-285). Specifically, in Wisconsin, “in the process of trying to preserve families, the child welfare system often provides support to families in the form of targeted financial assistance (e.g., help with paying utilities or rent), in-kind benefits (e.g., child care), and various social services, but it does not have the resources to give ongoing financial support to poor families” (Courtney, 1996, p. 70). Such financial support had partly been provided by AFDC, but it

has disappeared after welfare reform. Narratives of this project support the claim that AFDC supported the work of child welfare services because it provided support for caregiving to parents, while TANF no longer cares about parenting and also mothers are quite poor and under major scrutiny as paid workers.

In Wisconsin in 2008, the administration of W-2 has shifted from the 'Department of Workforce Development' to the newly created 'Department of Children and Families'. Included in this new Department are child support enforcement, child welfare, foster care, and domestic abuse services. Ironically, this shift indicated that, finally for the first time, mothers were recognized and categorized as caregivers of children by the administration; however, in this shift, women themselves disappear from the view of W-2, as they are now instrumentally incorporated into child welfare and family formation goals, all with the expectation that they are working (Collins & Mayer, 2010, p. 147). This suggests that welfare reform introduced workfare policies by ignoring the work that women were doing as caregivers, while they now ignore women as wage workers in order to make women assume caregiving privately.

## **Mothers' Experiences of Welfare Reform and its Implications for the Child Welfare System**

### **CPS involvement promoted by welfare reform.**

Mothers' narratives suggest that the material conditions brought about by welfare reform were related to their concurrent or subsequent relationship with child welfare services. As discussed in Chapter 2, welfare reform resulted in the shift from AFDC to TANF. The Wisconsin Works Program (W-2) was signed into law in 1996 and

implemented in 1997. Recall that W-2 is also well-known as one of the most radical work-focused workfare programs in the U.S. (Heaney, 2004, p. 243). Between January 1993 and 1997, Wisconsin experienced a 44 percent reduction in its AFDC caseloads ((81,291 families versus 45,586 families, respectively) prior to the implementation of W-2, and another significant decline in August 1997; the month before implementation of W-2 began there were 34,491 families receiving AFDC. By September 2000, 6,772 families were receiving TANF under W-2 (Courtney et al., 2008, p. 275). These declines reflect TANF's principle to end entitlement to cash assistance (Corbett, 1996, p. 53). However, these declines can also be understood as connected to the economic climate and the labor market. Collins and Mayer (2010) suggest that the number of welfare cases closely tracked the unemployment rate. State budget allocations for W-2 have continued to drop since 1999 in light of economic climate improvements (p. 73). Following the recession that began in 2001, Collins and Mayer (2010) observe that welfare caseloads climbed; by 2003 women who had left the welfare rolls during the strong economy of the late 1990s reentered the program in (especially southeastern) Wisconsin (p. 73).

While these tendencies are somewhat generalizable at the federal level (Danielson & Klerman, 2008), Milwaukee County in Wisconsin, where participants of this project resided, has a distinct position in the sense of racial geography. In December 1993, there were a total of about 58,950 mothers receiving AFDC in Wisconsin; notably, about 30,140 were in Milwaukee county and about 28,810 were in other counties. Overall in Wisconsin, White mothers consisted of 43.9 percent of the population, and Black or African American mothers consisted of 40.7 percent of the population; in Milwaukee county, White mothers consisted of 16.6 percent and Black or African American mothers

consisted of 66.1 percent; and in other counties, White mothers consisted of 72.4 percent and Black or African American mothers consisted of 14.1 percent (Cancian & Meyer, 1996, p. 58). In 2000, Milwaukee was recognized as the most racially segregated city in the U.S. (Collins & Meyer, 2010, p. 44). As Collins and Mayer (2010) state, racialized segregation caused the racialized job market partly due to business decisions and trends in government investment (p. 44). Such segregation made it easier for conservative politicians to frame southeastern Wisconsin's economic problems as issues of race—the moral failures of the inner-city residents (Collins & Mayer, 2010, p. 44).

The caseload of children in out-of-home care, including foster care, in Wisconsin had grown by 61 percent, from 4,891 in 1988 to 7,873 in mid-1994. Most of the growth has taken place in Milwaukee county (82 percent) since about a half of the population in Wisconsin reside in Milwaukee county (Courtney, 1996, p. 69). Moreover, between the end of 1990 and the end of 1999, the out-of-home care caseload grew by 86 percent in Milwaukee (Courtney et al., 2005, p. 122). In Wisconsin in 2008, Black or African American children represented 8 percent of the child population and 54 percent of the children in foster care. In contrast, White children represented 80 percent of the child population and 37 percent of the state's foster care system (Bowman, Hofer, O'Rourke, & Read, 2009, p. 1). The more recent statistics shows that the caseload of children in foster care in Wisconsin had decreased from 7,610 in 2008 to 6,637 in 2011 (USHHS, 2013a, p. 362). These statistics show that Wisconsin, especially Milwaukee county, experienced more significant statistical changes than other states on the caseloads in the areas of both welfare and child welfare, around the time of welfare reform of 1996, intersected with racial segregation and disproportionalities.

Some mothers I interviewed recalled their experiences of being on AFDC, either as a mother or a child. These mothers claimed AFDC enabled women to leave insecure and unstable relationships, to be independent of men, and to build secure and stable homes for children, even though they also experienced intense social stigma and bad treatment by social workers (see also Clayton, 2002; WW, 2002a; Liegghio & Caragata, 2016). According to Pat Gowens, the director of WW:

Moms would have that option of getting something from the welfare system to help tide her over whether, like I say, with an injured child, with herself being sick, with herself being unemployed, with herself being battered. Whatever reasons you needed the government's support, it was there. It was prejudiced and it was a problem, but it was there (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

P2, a mother who was involved with CPS before welfare reform recalled:

I was actually better off [on AFDC] than when I was living with my husband, because it was like I had three kids instead of four. And besides most of the money that he had was spent for alcohol and drugs (P2, 70, White Single Mother, two children in care and one child with her).

These narratives suggest how mothers experienced the material conditions that AFDC secured for them, in a way contributing to the well-being of both children and their mothers in poverty. Specifically, P2's narrative suggests that AFDC could help women to be independent of men, so that conservative politicians would want to get rid of AFDC. Such material conditions under AFDC starkly contrasts to the material conditions created under TANF. This suggests welfare reform was underpinned by a critical shift from the discourse of public or collective responsibility to individual responsibility (especially of social reproduction), as per neoliberalism, in conceptualizations of mothers' entitlement to welfare to satisfy children's basic needs. For example, mothers were able to attend college while they were on AFDC, which



helped them to get jobs that would provide enough for their families, hence reducing the supply of desperate, low wage labors.

PRWORA, however, provided a number of regulations that discouraged states from enrolling TANF recipients in college or degree-granting programs in particular. These regulations included its work-first approach, the education cap (TANF caps enrolment in school at 30 percent of recipients) including those seeking to complete high school or obtain GED, and the exclusion of recipients enrolled in postsecondary education for longer than 12 months from a state's calculation of its work participation rates (Jacobs & Winslow, 2003, p. 196). Under TANF, education was no longer deemed necessary for mothers because under the discursive shift toward the individualization of poverty, correcting paid work aversive behaviours such as 'lazy welfare dependency', was regarded as more important than providing long term educational skills. In 1995, about 136,000 AFDC recipients were enrolled in higher education through JOBS, while about 54,000 TANF recipients were engaged in any type of activity that could include postsecondary education in Fiscal Year (FY) 1997 in the U.S. (Jacobs & Winslow, 2003, p. 197). AFDC recipients were 13 percent more likely to pursue postsecondary education than were other women in poverty in 1996, while TANF recipients were seven percent less likely than other women in poverty to go to college in 1998 (Jacobs & Winslow, 2003, p. 197). P4, who had experienced W-2, strongly felt that W-2 should provide mothers with the opportunity to get an education.

If you really want to help someone, giving hours for *school* should be important because you're not going to get a high paying job if you don't have an education. So, if you really want people out of welfare, help them get a good education so that they can actually get a job that's going to be able to support their family (P4, 27, Biracial Married Mother, two children in care).

Her narrative suggests how mothers could expect that policies would help get them out of poverty, but how in reality they only help them to get low or minimum wage jobs. P8 (23, African American Single Mother, two children in care) claimed that W-2 workers made W-2 participants do what the workers themselves would never want for themselves. P7 (43, African American Single Mother, one child in care) suggested that W-2 usually offered programs for not pharmacists, bank tellers or secretaries, but certified nursing assistance (which is a caregiving work that produces a wage). When workfare policies aim to help people get the minimum kind of job, without providing opportunities for the development of human capital (e.g. by providing support while people gain education and learn skills),<sup>49</sup> this potentially creates generally greater economic hardship for already marginalized people and contributes to the perpetuation of generational poverty and growth of the precariat.

Mothers' stories suggest that welfare reform brought more poverty and homelessness to mothers than before, in accord with feminist literatures to point out women's impoverishment resulted from ignoring women's responsibilities for social reproduction in social welfare policies (see Chapter 2). Many mothers have had to work either at temporary jobs under TANF with lack of sufficient childcare, and/or have had to stay in abusive relationships. Women are oriented to stay in these relationships in order to be able to support their families. Meanwhile, these situations can be viewed by CPS as risk factors for child maltreatment, since they can interfere with children's well-being (especially their material well-being). P1, who was the advocate participant in this project, has helped many mothers regarding issues with W-2. He pointed out how W-2 would connect to the child welfare system:

W-2 kind of set the stage for there to be an increase in child welfare cases... because W-2 does create more poverty and more homelessness. There's more likely to be more child abuse, neglect at least cases that *could* be opened, justifiably according to the law. I think people are in poverty, they're gonna have less resources, they're not gonna be able to handle stuff *as well*. I think people are forced to do that. So, they're kind of forced into a situation where there's more likely to be abuse and neglect more, what could be *seen* as abuse and neglect by case workers (P1).

As this advocate confirmed, mothers could experience material situations created by post-welfare reform that then invited CPS involvement. Wisconsin Department of Children and Family (WDCF) (2016) defines impending danger (a foreseeable state of danger) threats, in "Child protective Services Safety Intervention Standards", for safety and risk assessment in Wisconsin. The definitions include: "[f]amily does not have or use resources necessary to assure the child's basic needs [shelter, food, and clothing]" (p.39) and "[l]iving arrangements seriously endanger the child's physical health" (p.41; see Appendix D: Safety and risk assessment in Wisconsin). Mothers' stories suggest that such situations of lack of resources were actually resulted from welfare reform. Mothers and the advocate claimed that W-2 participants often did not receive actual training and necessary services such as child care. P11 suggested how welfare reform created material hardships such as housing problems which could connect mothers to CPS:

A lot of mothers, because they couldn't provide *food* or clothing or... housing for their children, ended up losing their children. Children went to *jail* they went on to *foster homes* they ended up getting taken, you know?..... From their families. The less money that mothers have, they weren't able to take care of their children, 'cause they lost all their money [by welfare reform].

In fact, in FY 2015, 27,002 children (10 percent) were federally removed to foster care for inadequate housing (USHHS, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, not only the welfare system stopped supporting mothers and their children post-1996, but also it started referring these mothers to CPS. P13 pointed out the connections of two systems:

They [W-2 and CPS]’re *connected* because most of the referrals [to CPS] come from your welfare [W-2] (P13, 26, Jamaican Single Mother, two children in care).

Romero, Chavkin, and Wise (2000) suggest that a substantial amount of interaction between CPS and TANF, such as formal procedures for TANF referrals to CPS and for CPS to handle cases referred from TANF, can be increased by changes resulted from PRWORA (p. 806; see also Slack, Lee, & Berger, 2007). Below, I illustrate post welfare reform material situations by strategically categorizing impoverished mothers into three groups: 1) mothers on TANF, 2) mothers working at temporary jobs (not on TANF), and 3) mothers who are denied TANF, on SSI, and/or homeless (and/or mothers who are forced to stay with their abusive partners). All of them suffered respectively in different ways, but shared the risk of being involved with CPS.

### ***Mothers on TANF.***

Six mothers experienced being on W-2, and all of them complained about how the workfare program actually did not support them to get ‘good’ jobs (e.g. secure jobs with reasonable pay and benefits), contrary to their expectations. Basically, they had to work unpaid (usually placed for unskilled manual work, Collins & Mayer, 2010, p. 123) or participate in work-related programs for 40 hours a week in order to receive 653 dollars a month regardless of the number of children they have.<sup>50</sup> Some called this a modern/new millennium form of slavery.

You’re paying us less than two dollars an hour. You’re paying us less than minimum wage. [. . .] It’s *slavery*. And they don’t get incentives for hiring people, why would they do that? I went to a company where 70 percent of the people who was working there were all W-2 recipients. So, you have 70 percent of your workforce working for *free* for *you* making you a lot of money (P13).

It's a type of slavery because the mother now has to work off this cheque which is a child support cheque, you gotta work off your child support and you gotta work for any employer in the country who wants free workers. Who doesn't want to have to pay social security, doesn't want to pay unemployment compensation, doesn't want to pay taxes, doesn't want to have... any control because if you're a slave of course they don't have to have any protective, proper treatment. So, it was terrible (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

Moreover, private W-2 agencies try to connect mothers to minimum wage jobs.

They [W-2 agencies] hook people up with something like McDonalds, which is better than W-2 and at the same time that's not like a long-term job that's not really gonna give them sustainability necessarily if they're getting minimum wage<sup>51</sup> (P1).

It seems like they [W-2 agencies] don't help you get a job that's actually a *career* job. It's like 'here's a job for 8 dollars an hour'. [. . .] I'm going to be *stuck* in the system forever if I keep... if you keep teaching me to get jobs that only *pay* 8 dollars an hour (P4).

The welfare system, which was supposed to be in place to support children and their families, increasingly became a means to mobilize a cheap workforce (which can connect mothers to CPS). This suggests that when workfare policies cut child support (AFDC) for children and mothers living in poverty, they also, in fact, created the ideal material conditions for employers under neoliberalism (see Chapter 2).

***Mothers in low waged and temporary employment: working poor mothers.***

Many mothers sought out temporary jobs instead of being on W-2, because working at temporary jobs created better income conditions than being on W-2 (see also Clayton, 2002; Sojourner, n.d., as cited in WW, 2002b, pp. 10-11).

It's better workin' even if it's a temp job you get paid every week for a temp job and you get, you make more off of a *temp job* than you do off of once a month of W-2 so... I think it's better to find some work than to be on W-2 (P8).

Before that when we were on AFDC we could refuse to take jobs like Walgreens that didn't pay 40 hours of work and didn't give any sick pay. We would just say 'that's ok, I'll stay on welfare'. [...] Now you have to compete to get the worst

jobs—in my day, the jobs that none of us moms would do, now you have to compete with 50 other women to get the job. Because there are so many women who are desperate for any job. And have to take it because there is virtually no... actual child support guaranteed through the welfare and who's going to want to have to work for no pay? (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

These narratives suggest the principle of 'less eligibility, which means that welfare must always be less than the lowest paid jobs, was applied to welfare reform. Moreover, what emerges in these narratives supports the claim that many scholars make, that workfare policies create temporary jobs on par with neoliberal logic, which, in turn, maintains precarious employment (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Peck, 2001; Hartman, 2005; Wacquant, 2009; Collins & Mayer, 2010).

The next problem for mothers is how to secure child care after securing temporary jobs or even when on W-2. The narratives show that W-2 agencies usually do not provide enough services to support mothers' work outside of the home, such as childcare, housing, transportation, and actual job training. This lack of support can make mothers more vulnerable to CPS intervention. The advocate participant, P1, who visited private W-2 agencies with mothers (since agency workers tend to change their attitudes if mothers bring their advocates, especially male advocates, according to activists of WW), witnessed how many case workers did not provide the services that could be made available to women, such as child care. The lack of child care in particular can produce a risk that mothers will come into contact with CPS. According to Folk (1996b), child care subsidies were to be available under W-2, though there were shortages of child care suppliers, especially providers of infant care, care for special needs children, before-and after-school care, and night and weekend shift care, particularly in Milwaukee, WI (p. 67). Breikreuz (2005) also points out that a lack of affordable and flexible child care,

even with full child care subsidies available, can impact on low income mothers' employment as one of impacts of welfare-to-work policies on single mothers (pp. 157-160).

WW have noticed that there are many CPS cases where mothers have had to leave children alone to go to work due to a lack of child care (see also Sojourner, n.d., as cited in WW, 2002b, pp. 10-11). P1 claimed,

I knew a couple of families who did that. Well one mom she left her baby at home and that wasn't good. But, and went to work, but I mean what other choice do they have? She wasn't authorized for day care for like in group she said she'd be authorized for day care when her job started, which didn't make sense. So, she didn't really feel like she had any other choice. So yeah, she left her kid at home and then the kid was at home crying. So, her roommate called the cops and then, became a big child welfare issue (P1).

P13 experienced a similar situation, where her W-2 agency canceled their childcare arrangement on the first day of the new temporary job which she found. However, she made the opposite decision from the above case and refused to go to work so that she would not lose her children; instead, she lost the job. When mothers must negotiate working temporary jobs or working for W-2 with insufficient childcare, they can risk CPS involvement.<sup>52</sup>

***Mothers neither on TANF nor in employment.***

Narratives also suggest that there is an even worse situation than being on W-2: if parents are denied (or sanctioned) W-2, or if they reach their life-time limit, they get zero income (or less than W-2 benefits) for not only mothers but also their children (in cases that mothers cannot find jobs or cannot work; except mothers on SSI for their

disabilities). Both these situations create an even higher risk for the involvement of CPS in their lives.

The biggest thing is denial. I think people are denied a lot and told, ‘You can’t get W-2.’ Even if someone’s homeless (P1).

The reality that children and families cannot receive any assistance if and when they have no income signals that welfare has become a neoliberal project that aims to individualize poverty, and correspondingly diminish the role of the state in recognizing and responding to structural factors that create poverty such as women’s work of social reproduction. Some participants claimed that W-2 still helped them as a child support program, and to pay rent, utilities and health insurance, despite its ineffectiveness for employment.

Moreover, some participants claimed that private W-2 agencies tended to discourage mothers from being on W-2, and sanctioned them by cutting their monthly benefit amounts.<sup>53</sup> Some participants talked about how the delayed and inconvenient administration process discouraged them from being on W-2.<sup>54</sup> As well, these processes became stricter after welfare reform. Thus, the rate of mothers who are not receiving TANF but who are eligible has actually increased after welfare reform (Hays, 2003, p. 8).<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, TANF-sanctioned mothers are reported to CPS (Mink, 2006, p. 158; Nam et al., 2006, p. 1183).

Moreover, welfare reform involved changes in administrative functions. Specifically, “governing authorities at the front lines of welfare provision have been immersed in efforts to foster a market mentality. [. . .] The sanctions they impose on incomppliance are framed as ‘wage deductions’ for a client’s failure to do her job” (Soss et



al., 2011, pp. 49-50) in order to discipline clients to be the state's ideal of the productive citizen.

They [W-2 agencies]'ll cut you. The W-2 send you a letter in the mail sayin' 'Oh you're only getting 100 this month 'cause you ain't do this right'. They *do* stuff like that so... If you don't do somethin' right they can take your money. And you can't do nothin' about it! (P8)

These narratives suggest that the material conditions based on the need of 'disciplining' poor people created through welfare reform have brought more poverty and homelessness to mothers. But again, poverty and homelessness are two factors that invite connections to CPS. Children become the major site of contestation in this emerging governance modality whose primary goal is to configure a certain gender order of management and control.

Because most mothers are being denied a cheque and cash, there's so many women with zero income, now there's many more vulnerable children to be taken because they'll use homelessness as grounds to take the kids. And more women stay with batterers and so there's more reasons to take the kids because of the battering (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

This narrative suggests that the government uses the children as a way of ordering social relations that parents must use private resources to raise children and such ordering affects specifically certain subjects. P1, a WW advocate, maintains that CPS uses homelessness as one of the reasons to remove children. Again, CPS sees an impending danger in "[l]iving arrangements [that] seriously endanger the child's physical health" (WDCF, 2016, p. 41; see Appendix D). For example, P12 claimed that she was homeless when her child was removed by CPS. She was homeless because her group home would not let her and her baby stay.<sup>56</sup>

When they [CPS] took my baby from me I went through a lot of stuff... when they took my child from me even during my pregnancy with Linda I was poor, out on the

streets, had nowhere to go (P12, 19, African American Single Mother, two children in care).

Even when mothers seek out alternative living arrangements, such as shelters, they continue to be stigmatized as 'homeless'. As P15 explains, the child welfare system functions to discourage homeless mothers from going into shelters, because these shelters' workers may report about mothers to CPS (Rodriguez & Shinn, 2016).<sup>57</sup>

You can't live on the streets with your kids. Then of course you go to shelters and they take your kids away because you're homeless and you have no money. It's very, very dangerous (P15, 34, African American Single Mother, two children in care).

Mothers in this project experienced the material conditions of poverty, homelessness, and lack of childcare set by welfare reform and W-2, conditions which precipitated CPS involvement. Though the relationship between poverty and maltreatment is the subject of debate within the field, the extensive literature on predictors of child welfare involvement implicates poverty and its attendant financial hardships (Marcenko, Lyons, & Courtney, 2011, p. 432). For example, children in low socioeconomic households were five times more likely to experience maltreatment than other children in 2005-2006 (Marcenko et al., 2011, p. 433). Echoing the work of Marcenko et al. (2011), the narratives of mothers in this project suggest significant connections between situations that are considered a risk of maltreatment and the reform of the welfare system. Nam et al. (2006) conducted research on the interaction between previous paid work experience and current efforts to explain CPS involvement. They found that as the percentage of months worked increased, the risk of being investigated by CPS decreased. Meanwhile the risk of investigation increased among those without prior work experience. Considering this finding in light of my participants' experiences,

it suggests that mothers with prior work experience are more likely to get better jobs compared to mothers without the experience, but they are also less likely to be investigated by CPS. And the worse the jobs that mothers take, the greater the risk of being involved with CPS. This dynamic is similar to the ‘creaming effect’ of workfare programs (e.g. Peck, 2001, p. 347).<sup>58</sup> That is, welfare reform generally worked well for people who could get living wage jobs, though this was very rare. For example, the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau (2005) found that more than one half of former W-2 participants have not earned incomes that exceed the federal poverty level (see Gowens, 2005, pp. 1-2).

During my fieldwork, I did not hear of any success stories of mothers on W-2. P1 claimed that when he questioned UMOs (one of the big workfare firms in Wisconsin) about the company’s low rates of getting people into successful jobs in the long term, they answered that they have 23 people in high paying jobs among thousands of their clients. The Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau (2005) also “identified concerns with DWD [the Department of Workforce Development]’s program management and its oversight of W-2 agencies that, if addressed, could increase the program’s effectiveness in helping participants find and retain unsubsidized employment” (p. 65). The ineffectiveness of W-2 and the overall lack of living wage and even temporary jobs are ignored by W-2 agencies, while mothers are expected to get any (minimum wage) jobs and to provide caregiving to their children privately. These expectations have been shaped and enforced by the individualization of poverty discourse, which was intensified under neoliberalism.

### **Individualizing poverty intensified in welfare and child welfare discourses.**

The material conditions created under W-2, which I examined in the previous section, are rationalized through symbolic discourses of mothering that further work to individualize poverty. Mothers' narratives reflect these interconnected discourses.

As discussed in Chapter 2, welfare reform in the U.S. was achieved through discourses around dependency, such as the 'Welfare Queen' discourse, which functioned as a way to attribute causes of poverty to individual behaviours. Mothers' narratives further suggest that the symbolic discourses which have been entangled with other discourses of 'good' or 'bad' motherhood, in both welfare and child welfare systems. Specifically, this section reveals how the discourse of 'good' motherhood has been re-contextualized in both areas. Though ideas about and definitions of 'good' mothering were similar before and after welfare reform, they are used in neoliberal policy contexts to deny entitlement to welfare and to market-ize social reproduction as well as social services, especially those that emphasize the correction of mother's behaviours; mothers are expected to satisfy children's basic (material) needs through private care services. Discourses on mothering can move between the political realms—social spaces in contemporary governance (Fairclough, 2003, p. 33), be recontextualized, and produce different meanings and consequences (Asimakou & Oswick, 2010, p. 282), while they are experienced by the same bodies of mothers who are situated in the contexts of welfare and child welfare.

Notable from the narratives, the construction of only employed mothers as good mothers enforced by welfare reform is interrelated with the ideas of good motherhood used by the child welfare system. This discourse applied to poor women, who may need

public assistance for caregiving their children, and so had particular implications. By reinforcing the idea that good mothers are working mothers, governments skirt around public or collective responsibility to support caregiving and social reproduction.

Following the logic of the discourse, if poor mothers cannot work or are unable to find suitable jobs, then they become ‘bad’ mothers. On the other hand, the prototypical, White, middle-class, ‘good mother’ is not supposed to work “in a job that [takes] her away ‘too much’ from her parenting responsibilities” (Weingarten, Surrey, Coll, & Watkins, 1998, p. 7). Welfare reform required a discourse on mothering like this in order to make single mothers, who are the primary caregivers for their children, employable and participants in workfare programs.

Welfare reform also intensified the long-standing idea that mother work is not work. Through the phrase ‘mother work’, feminists have called for an understanding of the complexities of mothering that takes into account the ideological, material, and emotional facets of mothering and its diversification across culture and class (Davies et al., 2007, p. 25). Mother work often extracts a high cost for large numbers of women, as communities would not survive without women’s mother work (Collins, 1994, p. 50). Thus, the labor involved in mothering must be validated and legitimized as work, though it has not been valued. And yet, by valuing employment in waged jobs and entangling this validation with ‘good motherhood’, welfare reform succeeded in devaluing the mother work performed by impoverished mothers even more than before welfare reform.

P8 pointed out that W-2 agencies do not regard mother work as work:

It [mothering]’s a twenty-four-hour job! I mean you should get paid *every* by the hour! like a regular job ‘cause it’s harder than a regular job. [. . .] I guess mothering is not a *job* to them [W-2]. You know, it’s not a job. They want you to *get* a job so... (P8).

This narrative points to how mothers experience the discursive construction of ‘good’ motherhood under W-2 but, additionally, in tandem with individualizing poverty: in order to be regarded as a good mother, it becomes the mothers’ responsibility to find employment and keep their job in addition to performing caregiving work privately.

Narratives reflect how mothers experience the ‘good motherhood’ discourse in the child welfare system and how such discourse is interconnected to the ‘good motherhood’ discourse in the welfare system. Again, the focus is placed on individual women: it is access to resources that decides if the mother is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (e.g. Edin & Kefalas, 2005, p. 166). Narratives of mothers suggest that ‘good’ motherhood in the area of child welfare is shaped by “a neoliberal response to caregiving that relies on individual parents’ private resources instead of public support for families” (Roberts, 2012, p. 1490). The same kind of sentiment can be found in the area of welfare. There is a refusal to see a collective responsibility for children’s welfare (in a broad sense) (Roberts, 2002, p. 89),<sup>59</sup> while adding well-being to safety and permanency as an expected outcome of the child welfare system. The federal government defined ‘well-being’ as: “families having the capacity to provide for their children’s needs, children having educational opportunities and achievements appropriate to their abilities, and children receiving physical and mental health services adequate to meet their needs” (USHHS, 2000, p. 2-1; Shireman, 2003, p. 53).

In both the areas of welfare and child welfare, recontextualization of the discourse of ‘good motherhood’ has been achieved through the creation of its discursive counterpart, that of ‘bad motherhood’; mothers who do not have employment and need public assistance are bad because mothers are supposed to provide material well-being

for their children, even if they have to turn to private services to do so. ‘Good mothers’ are therefore mothers who change behaviours and thereby escape poverty. Mothers’ narratives reflect how they experience the discursive construction of poor mothering as bad mothering, and therefore were blamed for their own poverty (the individualization of poverty). However, these notions were intensified under the neoliberal context to shift the cost of social reproduction from the state to women. This discourse states that mothers are poor and, thus, bad because they are lazy, not because they cannot find/keep jobs or child care. This discourse, however, sharply contrasts with the material reality mothers claimed they had experienced. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail the notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad motherhood’ in relation to mothers’ engagement in activism against the child welfare system.

In particular, narratives suggest how mothers experienced this discourse: single mothers are ‘bad mothers’ because they are at greater risk of unemployment, have potentially less access to resources, tend to be poor, and are on welfare and/or homeless. Mothers’ narratives show their experience of this discourse through interactions with CPS workers/agents.

I’m single! And I was on welfare and they [CPS] don’t like that so... I’m automatically a bad mom to them [CPS] (P8).

Someone there, who’s in head of it [Rep. Glenn Grothman], he believes that being a single mother is child abuse. So, it’s kinda hard to say what their mentality is. If you already believe that, because I’m a single mother I have conducted child abuse, then there’s not much more you can really go on. Because that’s not even logical. What about the father who left the kids? What about, because I’m a single mother because you deported my husband? You know? What, what about that? No, because I’m a single mother I’ve already conducted child abuse and I have no rights and I’m not supposed to ask for proof of anything. I’m just supposed to believe everything you say because I’m a mindless machine who doesn’t have any thoughts of her own (P13).

These narratives suggest that mothers challenged the individualization of poverty through equalizing single motherhood as ‘bad’ motherhood. Contrastively, Rep. Glenn Grothman, who was on the Wisconsin State Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board, proposed a bill to list single parenting (non-marital parenthood) as a contributing factor to child abuse and neglect (S. 507, Wis. 2011) (Gowens, 2013b, p. 53). Following the individualization of poverty rhetoric, it is logical for Rep. Grothman to add single parenthood as a cause of abuse because, from this point of view, if single mothers are living in poverty with their children, this is the result of the mother’s own choices and actions. Single motherhood itself is a behaviour indicative of ‘bad motherhood’. Many mothers talked about how they were targeted by CPS for their family composition and, thus, subject to greater scrutiny and surveillance. These narratives on ‘targeting’ reflect how CPS reproduces the discourse that mothers without resources, mothers on welfare and single mothers are ‘bad’.

They [CPS] think that all people on welfare just probably aren’t good parents and are lazy. They’re easy targets (P4).

They [CPS]’re not fair with single mothers. They feel like they can get over on single mothers and they might think that single mothers are dumb, stupid, naïve, don’t know nothing (P12).

P4 shared about how her caseworker asked her personal information, such as questions pertaining to her marital status, income, and education, in order to close the case with CPS faster. Single mothers are routinely questioned about their personal lives and relationship status in order to determine their ‘fitness’ as mothers. This questioning specifically reveals how mothers experience the symbolic discourses of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood which ultimately work to individualize poverty in the welfare and child welfare systems.



Moreover, narratives suggest that these discourses are productive; the difficult material conditions impoverished single mothers face are created and/or perpetuated by moral rhetoric around mothering. For example, participants' narratives suggest that single mothers hesitate to seek out community support such as shelter and food services because they are afraid that they might be reported to CPS and that CPS would then remove their children. This intersection of the symbolic and material conditions produced by welfare and child welfare that single mothers experience contributes to enforcing the ideal of a two-parent household. Indeed, this is also one of the two goals that welfare reform promotes: (wage) work and marriage.

Some of them [the CPS workers] may hate single moms and think that it's better for you to be with a man to support you and stuff like that but I think women are more independent anyways by they self, without a man (P8).

Her narrative shows how she interpreted her experiences with CPS. In fact, her narrative points out CPS workers as the carriers of the ideal of a two-parent household set by policies by claiming that she felt single mothers were hated. P1 claimed that a mother is usually treated better when she is with her husband than when she is by herself at the W-2 agencies; and single fathers usually access services for workfare programs much faster than single mothers (see for example, Sandline, 2004; Siegel & Abbott, 2007). These narratives suggest that single mothers are simultaneously located in two systems that enforce the patriarchal neoliberal order, which assumes the demands of social reproduction are met privately and, at the same time, individualizes women's poverty.

Narratives show that mothers in this project live their lives at the intersection of two institutions: welfare and child welfare systems. Further, the material and symbolic conditions of their lives are created through the entanglement of the two systems. Single

mothers experienced firsthand the material hardships brought on by welfare reform, but rather than politicians and policy makers understanding these hardships as resulting from the reforms, they are attributed to their individual behaviours. These hardships, in turn, mark single mothers as ‘bad mothers’ in need of contact with the child welfare system, and these effects were intensified under neoliberalism.

### **Mother-blaming in the Child Welfare System**

In this section, I focus on the interview ‘narratives’ as the ways my interlocutors tell their stories in order to understand mother’s experiences of the child welfare system. I want to emphasize here that my analysis does not involve evaluating whether mothers’ narratives are true or not. Rather, I am interested in what the mothers claim about the system, why they make claims about the system in those ways, and what the narratives suggest about the material and symbolic conditions created by intersecting welfare and child welfare systems.

First, it is important to see the organization and administration of the child welfare system, or its intended organization and delivery (see also Appendix E: an overview of the CPS process in Wisconsin). Due to an increase in the number of reported maltreatment cases, which can be seen as the result of mandatory reporting laws (different in each state but funded by CAPTA as of 1974), investigation and intervention are the two primary functions of state child welfare systems in the U.S. (Gainsborough, 2010, pp. 5-6).

In almost every state, child maltreatment reports are initially screened to determine whether a full investigation is warranted. Cases that have been screened-in are

then investigated by child welfare workers, who find either that the case is unfounded or that it can be substantiated. These investigations involve home and school visits, as well as interviews with the child, other family members, neighbors, and teachers (Gainsborough, 2010, p. 6). For substantiated cases, workers must decide whether to recommend: 1) sending the child home without services; 2) sending the child home with supervision or support services; or, 3) removal from the home. If the child welfare agency wants to remove a child, a court hearing is held to determine placement and the court decides among the same recommendations. If the court agrees with the agency's recommendation of removal, the child is then either placed in a foster home, a group home, shelter, or residential facility, or with relatives in kinship care, where the child remains under the supervision of the child welfare system. Once placement has been established, a case plan is developed that specifies what steps parents need to take in order for the child to be returned to their home/custody. In the case of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), workers also specify an alternative future for the child, such as adoption. Over the course of this process, regular court hearings are held to determine what progress is being made in the child's case; such as if the birth family is completing the reunification plan or not. If the birth family does not complete the reunification plan, then parental rights are terminated and the child is either placed in a permanent home (adoptive, relative, or guardian) or remains in foster care until they are aged out of the system (at the age of 18 or 21, depending on the state) (Gainsborough, 2010, pp. 5-7).<sup>60</sup>

Mothers' narratives suggest that they experienced 'mother-blame' for poverty, another mothering discourse, through these CPS processes. As Davies, Krane, McKinnon, Rains, and Mastronardi (2002) argue, when the shift was made from a broad

concern for the social welfare (in a broad sense) of children and families to a restricted focus on protections, e.g. detecting, investigating, and assessing instances of abuse and neglect, the system and its actors began blaming mothers (p. 623). Wells (2011) reinforces this argument:

Once a mother is identified as maltreating, the child welfare system casts her primarily in relation to a set of risk factors that has to be managed and a set of professional discourses that construe her as an object of corrective treatment (p. 440).

Below, I would like to explore how narratives suggest about the relationships between post-1990 welfare restructuring and mothers' experiences of child welfare services; specifically, how the neoliberal welfare restructuring of two systems created the area of child welfare as the site where poor mothers were to be disciplined into 'the underclass' through poverty governance.

### **'Bad mothering' and correctional services as its 'fixing'**

Mothers' narratives suggest that the kinds and content of services offered by CPS to mothers reveals mother-blame for poverty. A critical point made in the mothers' narratives about their experiences with the child welfare system was that they were unsatisfied and they perceived the services as mother-blame. For example, many mothers in this project complained about the psychological evaluations that are mandatory conditions for reunification with their children. All mothers in this project were required to take evaluations such as these, and some were formally diagnosed as a result of the evaluations.<sup>61</sup> There are surely mothers who do experience mental health issues that interfere with caring for children.<sup>62</sup> However, mothers' narratives overwhelmingly reflect that they interpret their experiences of psychological evaluation as mother-blame.

For all but one of the mothers in this study, the services that were mandated as a condition of mothers and a father getting their children back focused on behaviour rather than the acquisition of resources.<sup>63</sup> The mothers and a father had to meet multiple conditions to have: supervised visits with their children, psychological (or competency) evaluations, parenting classes, nurturing classes, domestic violence classes, anger management classes, alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) classes, individual therapy, family therapy, drug therapy, parental aid, and group meetings with case workers, visit supervisors, and/or parental aides. As P8 lists,

Parenting classes, the group domestic violence um... I'm still doin' therapy. Um, the psych evaluation. I did that already. A restraining order against the father I did that. Um and counselling which I'm still uh doin' and I complete that next month but the therapy is no timeline on that. So, I met my conditions and I still didn't get my children back (P8).

While it might be assumed that these services could be helpful for mothers, all participant mothers and father complained about the relevance of the services to their lives.<sup>64</sup> These responses seem not so specific for my study participants. As Sykes (2011) observes, parents “may ‘go through the motions’ of service plans, because they want to keep their family together, but they view service plans as punishment, rather than as a means to improve behavior caseworkers see as problematic” (p. 449).<sup>65</sup>

CPS generally expects that mothers will participate in certain services, such as going to parenting classes and therapy, because these services have become part of the predictable repertoire of court personnel for proving reduction of risks to safety of children. This repertoire guides casework practice and management. As Smith and Donovan (2003) note, “[j]udges and attorneys routinely inquire about the same services (parenting classes and drug treatment) and the same court mandates (drug screen and

psychological evaluations)” (p. 556). Moreover, whereas some services are considered inappropriate, some are expected. How services are understood as ‘appropriate’ is influenced by judges, in the media by newspaper columnists, by public officials (Smith & Donovan, 2003, p. 556), and by professional literature. In response to pressures from the court to do so, caseworkers tend to associate client progress with which services are completed rather than by which changes have occurred (Smith & Donovan, 2003, p. 554).

The result is that,

The issue is no longer whether the child may be safely returned home, but whether the mother has attended every parenting class, made every urine drop, participated in every therapy session, show up for every scheduled visitation, arrived at every appointment on time, and always maintained a contrite and cooperative disposition (Roberts, 2002, p. 80).

Wells and Marcenko (2011) point out that it is natural that mandatory service conditions (such as parent education, supervision, and case management) do not provide effective outcomes in relation to child welfare because these services do not address the actual factors that made possible the mothers’ CPS involvement. Such factors included inadequate income from paid employment, lack of transportation, housing, and/or child care (p. 421). Especially regarding children’s material well-being, this chapter has already established that welfare reforms created many mothers’ material conditions wherein maltreatment (or risk) are then identified.

While all other participants experienced the services that CPS provided as irrelevant, P3 (19, African American Single Mother, one child in care) claimed that CPS actually helped her. When CPS brought her child to a medical doctor without her consent, P3 warned CPS that she would start a lawsuit because she still had her parental rights over the child (Parental consent generally is required for the medical treatment of minor

children, and in Wisconsin, one parent/guardian consent is required for general care, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine, AAP, 2003; UW Health, n. d.). The supervisor of Integrated Family Services (one of the three big private child welfare contractors in Milwaukee, WI) told the mother that he wanted to “make a deal” with her in order to avoid a lawsuit. As she was trying to separate from her partner, CPS found a new place for her and her children, paid the rent, bought beds for her children, and returned her first child to her, even though before the medical mistake had happened, CPS had been trying to take her second baby from her without a court order. According to her:

As of now they’re really helping me now. As of right now. No, just because I said that I had a law suit. When I told them that I had a law suit against them, all of a sudden, I just think... they switched my worker, they trying to help me. [. . .] So, the lawyers said that I had a law suit. Ever since then, seem like their whole attitude changed (P3).

Before this mother advocated on behalf of herself for her rights as a mother, the services that were offered to her were similar to what the other participants experienced:

I had to do parenting classes, I had to do anger management. [. . .] yeah, supervised visits, yup. I had a couple of workers, I had to do supervised visits where they come to the house, every... they bring... well first it started with my baby. We was only getting like two visits a week” (P3).

What P3’s case suggests is that all mothers need and could benefit from the services that P3 ultimately received; services to give assistance and provide the necessary resources for family preservation. However, it must be remembered that the child welfare system is not designed to give resources to parents, but is made to direct parents to finding resources for themselves (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010). And yet, even this apparent CPS purpose, of assisting parents to access necessary resources such as shelters, did not happen for the others.

Before welfare reform, these services were mostly managed by the welfare system and not the child welfare system. Yet after welfare reform, the focus shifted toward prioritizing parents' employment and or work in the welfare system (see also Chapter 2). Before and after welfare reform in child welfare, maltreatment continues to be recognized as caused by mothers' behaviours (understood largely through symbolic discourses), and services were mainly designed for correcting mothers' behaviours. Through neoliberal policies, the women's responsibilities for social reproduction intensified thus, leading many of them to precarious employment. Many of the mothers' stories have pointed to how mothers experienced the dominant and circulating discourses of mother-blame for poverty in the receiving of such child welfare services; poverty or poverty-related problems came to be identified as the result of mothers' behavioural problems in the child welfare system, while poverty was already individualized in the welfare system.

For example, in situations of domestic violence (DV), mother-blame for poverty is especially present; poverty is the fault of individuals, and mothers' behaviours are responsible for it. Poverty-level welfare incomes create material conditions wherein many women are forced to stay with abusive partners (Scott, London, & Myers, 2002). One of the common reasons for CPS to remove children from mothers is their 'failure to protect' children from their abusive partners, even when mothers and not children experience the abuse. Rates of exposure to DV are particularly high among children involved in the child welfare system; federally estimates of up to 50 percent of children have witnessed DV (Haight, Shim, Linn, & Swinford, 2007, p. 42). More than half of all survivors of DV in the U.S. have had contact with CPS at some point during their abusive relationships (Dosanjh et al., 2008, p. 833). Surely, exposure to DV can cause stress for children. But



as Haight et al. (2007) suggest, children can need their mothers to mediate traumatic stress caused by exposure to DV (p. 44). In reality, WW suggests that this rule of ‘failure to protect’ keeps many abused mothers from reporting DV to authorities (e.g. police) (see also Dalton, 2009). They are resistant to getting help because they are afraid of losing their children to CPS. By placing the responsibility of protection on mothers alone, the ‘fail to protection’ policy works in favor of abusers and promotes their continued engagement in DV. Strega et al. (2008) claim that,

When men batter mothers, the ‘problem’ is also defined in terms of mother’s alleged ‘failure to protect’ rather than in terms of the actions of the perpetrator. Mothers are also held to be at fault when children are physically assaulted by a father or father-figure. [. . .] In the United States, where the notion of ‘failure to protect’ has been most vigorously deployed, researchers did not find a single instance in which a man had ever been prosecuted for his failure to protect his children from an abusive mother. [. . .] More commonly, social workers ignore dangerous men when assessing risk and family functioning and also fail to engage with men who may be assets (p. 706).

Mothers are blamed for DV, and become those who need DV classes and who need to be disciplined, while the larger contexts such as poverty-level welfare incomes and precarious employment that could bring the situations of DV are not taken into account in the child welfare system.

A 19-year-old White single mother who had just graduated from high school came to a MaGoD meeting when I was doing my fieldwork at WW.<sup>66</sup> Her 28-year-old boyfriend had used pepper spray and a frying pan to abuse her, and CPS removed her twin babies. While her parents were willing to house her and her babies and she had moved in with them, CPS denied this option on the basis of her father’s alleged criminal record and their insistence that the parents’ home had cockroaches. According to this mother, CPS insisted that she needed to have her own place, which must have two

bedrooms for the twins. At the time of our meeting, she was unemployed and looking for a job, since she lost her eligibility for W-2 when CPS removed her babies. During the meeting, her boyfriend was waiting outside in his car. She did not have her own cell phone and used his cell phone when she needed to make a call. She was not even in possession of her own wallet. After the meeting, WW never heard from herself again and were unable to reach her. A friend of hers who WW could finally reach told us that she had returned to her abusive boyfriend's place; this meant that she had given up her babies. P11 described how DV connects to patriarchy:

A lot of mothers were forced to keep the men in the home for [the men's] being beating them [mothers] or maybe molesting their kids because they needed that man's money or that man's help around the house and they end up losing their kids you know. They felt 'Well I have no way to keep my kids so I'm gonna let this man stay here, do whatever he wants to me and my kids. I have no money now. *He* has it. *He* controls everything'. You know (P11).

These suggest that mothers are blamed for being abused even when they are staying in relations solely to achieve some decent standards and gain access to resources that are needed for children's material well-being. Surely, children may need to be protected from such situations. However, the protection services—the removal of the child from the mother rather than protecting and helping both of them—not only does not engage with lack of resources but also attribute DV issues to mothers' behavioural problems the same way as other child welfare services such as parenting classes and therapy. The perpetuation of abusive situations seems to be deeply connected to material conditions and gender ideology under patriarchy. With even less material support and resources available post welfare reform, it can be suggested that women/mothers may be even more vulnerable to being blamed for their 'behaviours' and 'bad mothering' when they are in

abusive relationships. In doing so, mothers experience the neoliberal discourses that parents should satisfy children's need privately.

### **Conflicts with carriers of the mother-blame discourse.**

Many mothers complained about CPS administration and services, but also their social workers and legal professionals a lot. WW and some mothers claimed that social workers would decide the cases based on if they liked or hated the mother (see also Mom and Grandma, 2007). Most of the mothers felt hated by their CPS workers and judged as 'bad mothers', confirming the reach of discourses of mothering into everyday lives and multiple policies.<sup>67</sup> It was on these largely symbolic grounds that mothers felt like their children were removed and they had mandatory conditions. These narratives in which mothers blame child welfare professionals as the counter-narratives available for mothers to challenge the dominant discourse additionally show how mothers experienced mother-blame for poverty in the child welfare system. In an attempt to challenge the discourse and practice of mother-blame, mothers try to refocus the blame back onto child welfare professionals—the carriers of the mother-blame discourse—instead of allowing the blame to be placed on them. These narratives show how mothers challenge the dominant discourses in order to claim that they are not bad mothers. Specifically, case workers, visit supervisors and their lawyers, people who have the most often and direct interactions with mothers, easily became objects of blame by mothers, who, simultaneously, felt blamed not by the system but by their immediate workers for their poverty and 'bad' mothering. This suggests how post-1990 welfare restructuring shapes

the dynamics of ‘the disciplining’ and ‘the disciplined’ blaming each other at the front line of the systems, and this tension intensifies mother-blame for poverty.

Mother-blame is implicated in how both social workers and mothers are surveilled and scrutinized through the computer software that CPS uses in its offices/processes. This is especially evident through risk reduction processes that are governed by a logic of risk assessment and “spell out what is to happen to reduce risk, name responsible parties, and specify criteria and deadlines for completion” and which forms a record of action to monitor the performances of supervisors, workers, and mothers (Swift & Callahan, 2009, pp. 191-193).<sup>68</sup> Social workers’ daily practice is shaped by the structural nature of child welfare agencies and through their involvement in both investigation and service provision (Altman, 2008, p. 54).<sup>69</sup> It is important to recognize the “organizational influences and factors” (Kemp et al., 2009, p. 109) that create an environment where “[CPS w]orkers perceive strong pressure to be a detective or enforcer of policies, and not a client-centered service provider as per their training as social workers” (Lee, Sobeck, Djelaj, & Agius, 2013, p. 635) in the neoliberal context of paternalistic services to guide the poor to normalcy (see Chapter 2). In response to expectations from their supervisors, judges, attorneys, public officials, and even local media, caseworkers seem to do what they are expected to do, conforming to practices that achieve legitimacy (Smith & Donovan, 2003, p. 558).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, CPS workers usually work in an environment with multiple demands and limited resources (DeRoma, Kessler, McDaniel, and Soto, 2006, p. 266).<sup>71</sup> Social workers’ standing as professionals relies on moving the case along, on demonstrating their efficiency, and on maintaining a record of solid accountability to the organization employing them. Ultimately, their practices are

bound to the managerial objectives of saving the employer money and on justifying money spent. In doing so, any room for professional maneuvering and creativity comes to be limited (Swift & Callahan, 2009, pp. 223-226). All of these factors suggest that potential conflicts between mothers and social workers function as a way to attribute the blame of systemic problems to either (or both) of them.

Mothers' narratives suggest that conflicted interactions between mothers and child welfare professionals—blaming each other about systemic problems—are based on the contents of services that are navigated by child welfare policies—behavioural correctional services. However, these conflicts would further intensify the need to discipline mothers. Research shows how important it is that mothers comply with their case plans and defer to social workers in order to be reunited with their children (e.g. Reich, 2005, pp. 73-112; Altman, 2008, p. 52; Flavin, 2009, p. 185; Wells & Marcenko, 2011, p. 421). As Swift and Callahan (2009) state, “[p]arental compliance is an important part of the risk assessment process itself, and it is usually a critical item listed in the tool to be scored” (p. 187; see also Appendix D), and “mothers must show signs of or ‘perform’ deference to the authority of the state in order to reclaim custody of their children” (Wells & Marcenko, 2011, p. 440).<sup>72</sup> This expected deference speaks to the submissiveness that mothers must demonstrate not only to CPS, but also to the state. As Reich describes,

In a larger sense, parents who show deference symbolically communicate that they believe that the state is trustworthy and that they long to comply with the expectations of normative parenting so they may become full members of the ‘moral community’ the social worker represents (Reich, 2005, p. 91).

Many mothers' narratives show how their in-compliance affected their cases negatively. For example, P14 (45, Multiracial Single Mother, Aunt of two children in

care) claimed that her caseworker suddenly changed her attitude after P14 did not follow her advice. Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) also described how the removal and unfair treatment of children perceived by mothers can make mothers become incensed; this can cause disagreements with caseworkers over their allegations, which can aggravate the case. I found that most mothers who participated in this project were uncooperative with their case plans because they could not understand the relevance of the services (e.g. supervised visits, parenting classes) they were assigned. These suggest that some mothers potentially feel forced to concur with mother-blame, that they have behavioural problems that need to be disciplined. Yet mothers were even more blamed for such ‘behaviour’.

### **Understanding the blame game.**

Mothers’ narratives suggest that the behavioural correctional services create and function in support of a mother-blame discourse for poverty, and that the material implications of the discourse of mother-blame intersect with the reforms that have been made to the welfare system. Specifically, after welfare reform, for the mothers involved with child welfare services due to lack of resources, behavioural services in child welfare came to mean mother-blame for poverty—‘disciplining the poor’.

Furthermore, from a genealogical perspective, mothers’ stories suggest that neoliberal poverty governance is producing women’s experiences: child welfare services are provided not because these mothers need to be disciplined, but instead these very services construct these mothers as ‘those who need to be disciplined’—‘the underclass’. In other words, in the post-welfare reform context, behavioural correctional services in

child welfare function to create the need to discipline poor mothers. Behavioural correctional services define good motherhood as if these norms existed from the beginning: ‘Good mothers’ are employed; ‘Good mothers’ do not leave children alone for any length of time; ‘Good mothers’ are not in abusive relationships. Indeed, these norms are created through behavioural services by symbolically categorizing poor mothers as ‘bad mothers’ and materially disciplining mothers’ bodies into ‘the underclass’. Basically, these kinds of statements are in turn enforced by a neoliberal gender order for a biopolitics, whereby good mothers are those who have the economic means to access private care services in order to satisfy children’s material well-being at all times, in the context of the very restructuring of the two systems.

On the other hand, I read mothers’ narratives to suggest that their experiences in the child welfare system can be seen as an anatomo-politics. As a discursive practice, disciplining practices of mothers’ bodies exercise material effects that shape experiences and interpretation of child maltreatment as ‘bad’ mothering (see Campbell, 2000, p. 6). These processes regulate mothers’ bodies and everyday lives for eroding their sense of selves (see Chapter 5) and disempowering by repetitions of (re)confirming and endorsing mothers as ‘bad’ mothers. Many mothers talked about how they were degraded through processes, e.g. at parenting classes, supervised visits, court hearings. For example, when I went to Children’s Court with P12 we were told that the hearing was postponed due to the lack of a document that was needed from the father of the child. We returned home by taking two buses, totaling one and a half hours. P12’s attorney did not show up to the court at all, as if she already knew that there would be a postponement at the court. On our trip to the court, the mother was nervous but also excited, as if she was expecting

some better decisions to be reached. Over time, experiencing delays and postponements in the process works to degrade, depress and disempower mothers. Moreover, P13's supervised visits were canceled because she refused signing the consent form of professionals' sharing information of her on going case assessment. She was worried about her child who would not understand why visits were suddenly canceled and would not know when the child could see her mother next time, while she was resisting to give her workers more authority, not showing her deference to the state. She ended up signing the form at the meeting after two visits were canceled. These suggest that these mothers' bodies are regulated through disciplining as confirming/endorsing them as 'bad' mothers, and simultaneously poverty is managed in everyday lives of mothers' bodies as legitimized structural aspect of neoliberalism for poverty governance.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I demonstrated mothers' experiences with and perspectives on welfare, child welfare systems, and welfare reform. Through their stories, I showed how welfare reform created the material and discursive conditions whereby single mothers then became regarded as committing maltreatment by the child welfare system. Mothers specifically experienced mother-blame in their relationships with the child welfare system—their lacking resources was ultimately attributed to, and the result of, their (bad) mothering behaviors.

In this chapter, I therefore established that mothers' narratives can be read as revealing the entanglement of these two welfare systems. These interlocking systems



subsequently produce and reinforce a neoliberal gender order wherein the individual responsibility of women for social reproduction is continuously reproduced.

## Chapter 5

### CPS and Single Mothers' Activism in Wisconsin

I'm not the only parent that this has happened to, the only Mother. If I had money, if I was rich and White, I would have my son and my daughter by now (P11).

I understood through activism that I'm not just a number on some W-2 paper. I'm not, my kids are not just a pay cheque for the judge and the CPS workers to get rich off of<sup>73</sup>. You know, we're *people* and we *matter*. We have rights. And I shouldn't allow anybody to treat me as if I'm less than a human being. Regardless of what color we are (P13).

The U.S. child welfare system has been actively challenged by activism, especially the activism of single mothers. In this chapter, I use interviews with single mothers and their allies to explore the nature of single mothers' activism against child welfare services, given post-1990 welfare restructuring, with a focus on the Wisconsin context. First, I contextualize and then examine what the interview narratives suggest about the conflicts between CPS and mothers that has brought the activism—how CPS and mothers hold different understandings about child well-being and motherhood; and how these understandings are linked to changes in single mothers' material and symbolic realities given welfare reform. Next, I discuss how and why single mothers participated in activism with WW, and the implications of their activism for the child welfare system, mothers, and their communities.

#### Welfare Rights, Welfare Activism: Contextualizing the Conflicts

Since the beginning of the 1990s, single mothers' activism has challenged systemic oppression in the child welfare system in the U.S. Even though this activism is relatively small in scale, it has been increasingly present over the last decade. Mothers have experienced oppression in the actual, everyday processes of the system (for example, processing paper work, administration delays, scheduling of appointments, etc.), in their daily interactions with child welfare professionals, and in the ways that CPS treats their children (Dumbrill, 2006; Altman, 2008; Sykes, 2011). Moreover, the over-representation of racialized persons in contact with the current child welfare system has been questioned, and it is suggested that this over-representation is primarily the result of systemic structures rather than each child welfare professional's individual 'biased' perspectives.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, it is within these dynamics, tensions and questions that this project traces single mothers' experiences, perspectives and their activism in relation to the child welfare system, always understanding that the child welfare system is intimately connected to welfare and its post-1990 restructuring. In particular, recall that the second primary research question of this project is: How have mothers responded to these reforms? Specifically, what is the nature of mothers' activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring? To understand how mothers have responded with activism in relation to reforms of both systems, before focusing on their activism, this project explores: What are the conflicts between mothers and child welfare professionals/CPS? I emphasize here, as I did in Chapter 4, that this question is not about which actor is true or right, but rather, in order to understand the nature of mothers' activism, what do narratives about conflicts imply (and about what)? While I

demonstrated the conflicts between mothers and CPS over behavioural correctional services in Chapter 4, in this chapter I further explore conflicts over the concepts that support the discourse of mother-blame for poverty; specifically, conflicts about ‘maltreatment’, ‘well-being’, and ‘parenting’.

Looking back on my interviews with mothers, a father, and an advocate, how they described their experiences of the child welfare system highlights the intersections of social structures, specifically in regard to dominant definitions of family life. Reich (2005) points out how the therapeutic state serves to reinforce dominant definitions of family life without addressing the underlying structures of inequality that contribute to parents’ perceived failures: meanings of family life that reflect beliefs about gender, race, and class are embedded in the expectations to attempt to ‘fix’ families by requiring parents to attend meetings, demonstrate their desire to improve their lives, and comply with state definition of adequate parenting (p. 5). Thus, it was through their activism that they not only demanded fair treatment (as mothers and caregivers), but they also challenged dominant cultural ideas about gender, race, and class; ideas that shape definitions of ‘neglect’ and ‘abuse’, ‘maltreatment’ and ‘risk’ of maltreatment, ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate’ parenting, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood, and ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ families. Ultimately, these definitions determine who is allowed to make up a family (or who is not allowed), who can be a mother (or who cannot be a mother) and, importantly, who has the right to define these definitions. In other words, mothers’ activism was brought by the conflicts between mothers and CPS over these definitions in the post-1990 welfare restructuring contexts.

Feminist analysts, such as Swift (1995a), Davies et al. (2002), and Pelton (2011), have looked critically at theory and practice in the field of child welfare. According to Davies et al. (2002), feminists in particular have problematized the gendered nature of child welfare, its workforce, client population, and the assumptions that underlay intervention (p. 625).<sup>75</sup> Feminists have documented how mother-blame is endemic in the area of child welfare, and based on unrealistic expectations of mothers, especially given how mothers and mothering are constructed in contemporary Western societies (Davies et al., 2002, p. 625).<sup>76</sup> Moreover, feminist studies have focused on the experiences and perspectives of mothers who are involved with child welfare services. Though substantive studies which focus on such experiences are relatively rare, there has been a growing body of research into this area since the 1980s, with particular emphasis on the varied and complex nature of single mothers' experiences and perspectives (Pelton, 2011, p. 482).<sup>77</sup>

While research into mothers' perspectives of and experiences with child welfare services is limited, there is a larger body of literature that focuses on child welfare workers (e.g. Zell, 2006; DeRoma et al., 2006; Altman, 2008; Lee et al., 2013). This literature examines the kind of work that welfare workers do and how this work intersects with the legal system, resources and services, funding, and policies.<sup>78</sup> An example of this kind of research is that of Swift and Callahan (2009), who examine how child welfare workers' and agents' decisions and judgements are shaped by policy discourses and the everyday material realities of the system. As they note, workers, especially frontline workers, have limited spaces to use their discretion and give input given the neoliberal surveillance of social service systems (Swift & Callahan, 2009). However, such system

dynamics shape the relationships between mothers and child welfare professionals, and impact the processes and outcomes of services provided.<sup>79</sup> Disagreements and conflicts between mothers and child welfare workers/professionals can be expected within these kinds of dynamics, and finding suitable resolutions is no easy matter.<sup>80</sup> In fact, these conflicts are not necessary; rather than being the result of interactions between the mothers and workers, conflicts are largely created by child welfare policies themselves. For example, correctional services based on mother-blaming (as I demonstrated in Chapter 4) can induce more conflicts between mothers and professionals than services to assist their resources. Pelton (2011) makes a key point when he asks “[u]ncooperative with what?” (p. 483):

Child welfare assistance will be welcomed by impoverished mothers when it is non coercive, and when they have a voice in identifying what aid they need. It is often said of them that they are ‘uncooperative,’ as if this is a fatal sign of a culpable mother, and a general personality trait. But the question is never asked, ‘Uncooperative with what?’ If a mother was ‘uncooperative’ with the prospect of entering a parenting program, was she uncooperative with the offer of emergency cash to pay her utility bills, help with housing, or an offer of day care? But the parents are treated as children, with demands imposed on them, and their voice denied (p. 483).

The relationships and conflicts between mothers and child welfare professionals/CPS are shaped and structured through the content of policies, which not only mandate how services and goals are attained, but reflect and produce characteristics and behaviours that are used to determine and judge motherhood.<sup>81</sup> While an imbalance of power exists between mothers and child welfare professionals/CPS, we must examine how this power imbalance is structured in and set by policy itself.<sup>82</sup> Thus, while conflicts are presented in daily child welfare practice between mothers and (especially front-line) child welfare professionals, the problems that mothers have challenged with activism are

about how the child welfare system is set up (so that it results in producing these conflicts): based on mother-blame and the individualization of poverty.

### **Conflicts about ‘Maltreatment’, ‘Well-being’, and ‘Parenting’**

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, mothers see their experiences with the CPS system as constituted by a discourse of mother-blame. In this section, I clarify and examine what narratives suggest about the conflicts that has caused mothers’ activism: Specifically, 1) how the form of risk assessment is connected to mother-blame and the individualization of poverty, and 2) how ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood are connected to material well-being of children in the processes of CPS, both of which mothers’ activism has challenged.

#### **Reducing risks: A behavioural approach.**

In the form of risk assessment, the concept of child maltreatment, which is understood as child abuse and neglect (see also Chapter 2), is used by CPS to focus investigation, assign blame, and engage in punitive treatment of mothers, rather than achieve prevention and solicit mothers’ willing cooperation.<sup>83</sup> Pelton (2011) suggests that if the child welfare system is re-structured to establish a public agency divested of its investigative, judgmental behaviour and foster care placement functions, and instead devoted to offering a wide array of preventive and supportive programs and service to families (such as integrated substance use treatment programs and relation-based services subject to parents’ voluntary acceptance of services), then definitions of child abuse and neglect would greatly narrow.<sup>84</sup> Instead, clients in the child welfare system are only

offered the services that agencies have at their disposal, which is often not what people actually need. As P13 reflected: “The way I understand neglect and they [CPS] understand neglect makes no difference. Because the law states what neglect is” (P13).

Wisconsin Statutes (the Children’s Code) define abuse and neglect as:

‘Abuse’ means (a) physical injury inflicted on a child by other than accidental means, (b) sexual intercourse or sexual contact, (c) sexual exploitation of a child, (d) permitting, allowing or encouraging a child for prostitution, (e) causing a child to view or listen to sexual activity, (f) exposing genitals, pubic area, or intimate parts, (g) manufacturing methamphetamine at a child’s home, and (gm) emotional damage for which the child’s parent, guardian or legal custodian has neglected, refused or been unable for reasons other than poverty to obtain the necessary treatment or to take steps to ameliorate the symptoms (14g).

‘Physical injury’ includes but is not limited to lacerations, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, severe or frequent bruising or great bodily harm (14g).

‘Emotional damage’ means harm to a child’s psychological or intellectual functioning. ‘Emotional damage’ shall be evidenced by one or more of the following characteristics exhibited to a severe degree: anxiety; depression; withdrawal; outward aggressive behavior; or a substantial and observable change in behavior, emotional response or cognition that is not within the normal range for the child’s age and stage of development (5j).

‘Neglect’ means failure, refusal or inability on the part of a caregiver, for reasons other than poverty, to provide necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care or shelter so as to seriously endanger the physical health of the child (12g). (48. Wis. Stat. § 02).

However, child maltreatment—neglect and abuse—is judged by risk assessment and perceptions of safety. Child welfare agencies are charged with investigating or assessing reports of maltreatment and are required to intervene in order to protect children from ‘further’ maltreatment (Pecora, Chahine, & Graham, 2013, p. 144). This means that CPS has to first assess whether maltreatment has occurred (or is happening), and then if there is still a ‘risk’ of maltreatment. Each state’s formalized risk assessment tools have been “developed as an objective approach to examining and predicting future



occurrence of child maltreatment based on a variety of individual, parenting, and family risk factors related to maltreatment recurrence” (Lee et al., 2013, p. 635). Safety and risk assessment are central to decision-making regarding what actions should be taken to protect children from maltreatment (Pecora et al., 2013, p. 144). According to Arad (2001), some 42 states in the U.S. have adopted one or another model of risk assessment in order to provide guidelines to improve the quality and consistency of the decisions reached. However, these models are controversial: they have not been planned properly, they are not empirically based, and their validity has not been adequately established (Arad, 2001, p. 48). As Pecora et al. (2013) note, risk assessment models and frameworks are continuing to be researched and improved in order to make them more effective and comprehensive in the broader context where judgements are made.

In the U.S., a variety of biological, psychological, and environmental factors are investigated to determine maltreatment. These factors can be categorized as: child risk factors, child protective factors, parental/family risk factors, parental/family protective factors, community/social/environmental risk factors, and community/social/environmental protective factors. As the number of risk factors increase, the likelihood to determine maltreatment (as happening) becomes greater. However, it must be emphasized that none of the following factors alone are sufficient to produce a finding of maltreatment: employment, family structure and living arrangement, grandparents as caregivers, socioeconomic status, family size, child’s age, county metropolitan status, perpetrator’s relationship to the child, and perpetrator’s alcohol use, substance use, and mental health issues are factors to consider (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 62-65).

In Wisconsin, parental risk factors are understood and applied as teen parenting and low educational attainment, substance use, and mental health issues, while parental protective factors are defined as nurturing caregivers and healthy relationships, parental resilience and social connection. Risk factors that relate to families are single parenthood and domestic violence, while protective factors focus on family structure. Risk factors relating to children are low birth-weight infants and children with physical and emotional disabilities. A major risk factor relating to the community is poverty, while protective factors that relate to the community are supportive communities and schools, adequate housing, access to health care, and financial stability (Maguire-Jack, Kibble, Cranley & O'Connor, 2010). More accurately, in Wisconsin, "Child Protective Services Safety Intervention Standards" are used for safety assessment, present danger assessment, protective planning, safety analysis, safety planning, and the management of child safety (WDCF 2016; see Appendix D). The standards specify the definitions of risk of safety, and one of the definitions of risk of safety includes parents' lack of resources to meet children's basic needs, as discussed in Chapter 4. Thus, in practice, this can make it possible to connect neglect with poverty. Even though Wisconsin is one of the 13 states which makes it clear that poverty is exempt from the definition of neglect in the law (State Child Welfare Policy Database, 2011), I have already established in Chapter 4 that the material realities of single mothers in particular become the subject of assessment by CPS, who then reinforces a neoliberal gender order through mother-blame. Maguire-Jack et al. (2010) show that, among all of Wisconsin's cities in 2008, the overall risk (which is the accumulation of the above risks) of maltreatment was the highest in Milwaukee and Menominee. As Swift and Callahan (2009) argue it, the apparatus of risk allows

assessments to be made in simplified terms about life experiences, without input from those being assessed, and for professionals to control, scrutinize, and act on specific populations with public approval, so that

In the presentation of risk assessment, the safety of children is assumed to rest entirely on their parents' behaviour, and safety is promised primarily on the bases of investigation and surveillance of those parents. Missing altogether are social threats known to endanger children, most notably poverty and poor housing (Swift & Callahan, 2009, p. 176-177).

Thus, the apparatus of risk functions to institutionalize the individualization of poverty. As Lash (2000) claims, "risk cultures always start not from the risk but from the blame, start from the 'who to blame'" (p. 51). Through welfare state restructuring, the negative consequences of risks (such as unemployment) are managed by distributing risk positions (rather than class positions) onto individuals with little to no state accountability/responsibility (Levitas, 2000, pp. 202-203). Rather than risks of maltreatment existing first and the child welfare system following to manage these risks, the concept of risk assessment in a neoliberal context involves managing child maltreatment in such a way as to construct mothers as who are to be blamed and disciplined.

Mother-blame can be seen in the ways the assessments are done, in the ways poverty is individualized, and the times definitions of neglect and abuse are expanded to fit the specific political and economic orders shaping child welfare policy. According to Arad (2001), most studies have identified that the factors most closely related to decisions to remove children from their homes are the features/characteristics of parents, especially of those of mothers (p. 48). Such variables that focus on parental features/characteristics include: 1) poverty or lack of a secure source or income; 2)

physical, psychological, and mental health issues, hospitalization in a psychiatric institution, and/or problems functioning; 3) lack of parental cooperation with the child protection worker; and 4) single parenthood (even when single-ness results from divorce or widowhood) (Arad, 2001, p. 48).<sup>85</sup> All factors but single parenthood are on Wisconsin's CPS Safety Intervention Standards (WDCF, 2016; see Appendix D). These factors are used by caseworkers and professionals to decide if the mother is a good or bad mother. As Swift and Callahan (2009) maintain, in ways similar to Lash (2000), "Among the primary functions of risk assessment are the assignment of blame and the assessment of liability" (p. 221). Moreover, these factors are assessed in relation to mothers' economic capacities to give 'quality of life' but this judgement is based on dominant forms of family life that center capitalist and heteronormative values; 'well-being' of the child is determined through caseworkers' viewpoints, observations and assessments as a goal in addition to the goals of 'safety' and 'permanency' in the system, e.g. Wisconsin's CPS Safety Intervention Standards refers to well-being (WDCF, 2016).<sup>86</sup>

The mothers in this project highlighted in their stories how they were confused about and unsatisfied with the safety and risk assessments to which they were subject. For example, some mothers claimed that neglect defined by CPS was not according to the law, and that CPS could define neglect in different ways.

Based on her firsthand experiences as the director of WW, Gowens has checked and examined the CHIPS (Children in Need of Protection or Services) petitions of mothers involved with CPS many times. Based on what she has seen, Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) claimed that most of the CHIPS petitions were repeats with stories told by the caseworkers which only focused on what the mothers did or did

not do. On the one hand, these stories can be thought of as caseworker observations that should be assessed critically in order to determine risk factors. On the other hand, when mothers' material conditions/resources (specifically their lack thereof) are automatically and uncritically connected with discourses/ideas about 'good' and 'bad' motherhood/ing, the observations made in safety and risk assessments reinforce the individualization of poverty. Said more simply, by focusing on the behaviour of mothers, the assessment of risk functions to individualize poverty. Because the risks and remedies are standardized to apply to people, risks are assumed to be connected to their behaviours and not to society or social structures. As Swift and Callahan (2009) conclude, "the remedies to address risk then lie in changing those behaviours" (p. 203). Thus, the risk assessment institutionalizes the individualization of poverty not only at the initial assessment but also at the following processes of intervention such as providing services, so that mothers have challenged the hidden doctrine of mother-blame/individualization of poverty with activism.

### **Motherhood defined by resources.**

In this section, I explore the relationships between conflicts and the individualization of poverty: specifically, what narratives suggest about the relationships between mothers' material conditions and CPS notions of 'good' and 'bad' motherhood. I do so in order to establish this difference of opinion as a source of conflict and therefore reason for mothers' activism.

### ***Constituting 'good' motherhood.***

For most participants, child well-being meant providing for the needs of children, making sure that they are healthy and safe, and taking care of them and loving them. While each participant mother had a similar definition/understanding of child well-being, the notion of 'good' motherhood was markedly different for each. However different their understandings around 'good' motherhood were, mothers mostly talked about trying to do the best for their children, self-sacrifice, and the need to respect their children.

Narratives further suggest that mothers understood that CPS had different notions about child well-being and good parenting compared with their embodiment of motherhood. These differences were about money and neighborhood.

I'm not the only parent that this has happened to, the only Mother. If I had money, if I was rich and White I would have my son and my daughter by now (P11).

Their [CPS] decisions almost always weigh towards simply *money* and neighborhood. So, they don't want you in a poor neighborhood, the kids. Now all of our neighborhoods are bad (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

In her interview, P5 (33, African American Single Mother, six children in care) claimed that the judge on her case referred explicitly to the quality of neighborhoods in relation to assessing her children's well-being. The majority of the narratives suggest that CPS focuses on specific class and employment standards to determine the material well-being of children and the quality of their protection. Any challenge to the norm of motherhood, as determined by the state, can disqualify mothers from their mothering and serve to individualize poverty and discrimination of poor mothers. In addition, narratives show how 'good' motherhood is associated with employment by the child welfare system, which is a simultaneous assumption of the welfare system.

Meaning of motherhood [for CPS] means you got a job, no matter what you gotta have a job, a house and a car (P15).

If you got a job—the woman got a job, and she had a kid and everything, and they get the right to get their kid back and everything (P10, 45, African American Single Mother, three children in care).

Mothers experienced the expectation that, in order to satisfy children's material well-being, they would have to seek out (private) care services so that they can go to work. Recalling the contents of Chapter 4, it is clear that these expectations are experienced in both the child welfare system and the welfare system. P3, a 19-year-old mother, claimed that CPS does not understand young motherhood:

It's *hard* to be a mom. It's very hard especially at the young age that I am. It's very *hard* and then they [CPS] just think that you supposed to just up and have thousands and thousands of dollars. But it's hard because it's not enough jobs out here for kids that's my age. It's hard to get jobs. And plus, it's hard to get jobs without education—full education, like GED or some type of diploma. But. I umm, they don't understand. They think that you just supposed to wake up and be *rich* and can do everything on your own (P3).

P3's reflection implies two discourses simultaneously. First, the discourse of 'good' motherhood as it relates to employment; if she had a job, she could have access to resources and would be able to give material well-being to her children, even if by private means. Second, the individualization of poverty discourse; it is her responsibility to find and keep a job. She felt that job availability and the hierarchical nature of the job market that young mothers tend to have a harder time trying to find stable and secure jobs were ignored. These narratives therefore suggest that social inequality and unjust conditions would likely to be attributed to individuals in the implementation, ultimately, work to individualize poverty. If 'good' motherhood is associated with money, neighborhood, and employment, then most participants automatically fit into the category of 'bad' motherhood. The less resources, the more mothers would risk to be involved with CPS. In fact, such 'good' motherhood maintains its normative status by supporting the 'self-

sufficiency' promoted through a neoliberal gender order; 'good' mothers are not 'bad' because they are 'self-sufficient' and do not rely on or need any support from the (capitalist) state.

Playing devil's advocate, it is common sense that material resources are important for children's well-being, particularly in the mainstream capitalist, hierarchical society that can be found North America/the U.S. Narratives of mothers in this project suggest that they surely notice this importance. P4, for example, talked about the gap between the resources she wanted to give her children and the resources she was actually able to provide her children. Particularly, most participant mothers recognized the material differences between what their children received when in foster care and when with the participants themselves. P2 describes:

First of all, they [CPS] had a trial weekend for him [her son] to be at a potential foster family and they [foster parents] said oh, we bought him some new clothes and treated him nice and all he did was talk about the stuff he did with you and how you took him to kinder concerts and other things. He said they were school teachers. They said we're simple people, we don't do stuff like that. And you know obviously, they had a lot more money. I just researched where I could get stuff that was supposed to do that was free or low cost (P2).

P2 seems to recognize the dominant discourse that children's material well-being is connected with good parenthood; significantly, that 'good parents' equals to those who have money. This discourse is present in her narrative despite the fact that she, too, is able to find the necessary items and things required to take care of the family's basic needs and survival; the entertainment and recreation she can provide just might not be as costly. P12 describes a similar situation:

I think because they put my baby on *Rocawear* and *Old Navy* and *Vonda* and uh *Baby Phat* and they doin' better than me. Like I can put my baby in that too if y'all would just give me my child but... (P12).



P12 here seems to be pointing to the larger struggle that she finds herself in about motherhood. Again, her narrative reflects the idea that good parenthood is connected with children's material well-being as negotiating with the dominant discourse; she makes the claim that she herself could also provide for her child along these lines, if only her child had not been removed. P8 continues to emphasize the significance of material worth and goods in assessments of good parenting in her account:

My kids come and visit me they're 'Oh Mommy, they [foster parents] bought me this, they bought me that, um.' They don't, my kids don't talk about the love and like if they fell down, like the nurturin' that they get. My kids are amped up off the stuff that they *buy* them. That's where when the case worker come to my house or interview my kids about *me* that they say that 'Mommy love me' you know my kids even tell them 'Mommy would never hurt me' you know and stuff like that (P8).

P8 stresses how buying things for children is prioritized over/as loving children, and challenges how CPS conflates material well-being as love in assessments of child well-being. Together, these narratives suggest that, while foster care families can provide material resources to children that impoverished single mothers may not be able to provide (even though these types of resources might not be necessary for basic survival or needs), mothers are stripped of their ability to provide emotional support to children which, from their perspectives (and not necessarily shared by CPS), supports child well-being.<sup>87</sup> There appears to be conflicts over how to understand/define the notions of child well-being and 'good' motherhood; specifically, over the emphasis that the child welfare system places on the material resources necessary for child well-being in addition to safety and permanency.

### ***Constituting 'bad' motherhood.***

The mothers had certain ideas about what neglect entails. Clearly, for most of them, what this meant was not taking care of their children. For example,

Neglect is [...] Doesn't take care of their kids, doesn't have anything for them, doesn't you know provide the simplest things (P6).

You not trying to understand your kids, you not trying to go ahead and take care of your kids at all. You're annoying them, you're not giving your kids the kind of clothes and stuff they need. You ain't feeding your kids what you supposed to be feeding them (P10).

These narratives show that mothers' definitions of neglect are similar to the one on the Wisconsin Statutes. Many mothers insisted that CPS would use anything in order to claim that neglect or maltreatment was happening; that is, the neglect and/or maltreatment mothers were being accused of was not regarded as neglect or maltreatment from their perspectives.

First, mothers felt judged as bad mothers by CPS, primarily because they were poor and also because they are single mothers. WW frames the 'illegal' government removal of children from poor mothers as one of the tools in the 'war on the poor' (WW, 2014a; 2014b). Gowens claimed that, for CPS, if mothers are poor, caseworkers perceive "the kids are better off without you", and that CPS tends to target the poor (for example, CPS targets poor neighborhoods) (personal communication, July 24, 2013). Notions of 'bad motherhood' are therefore connected with the material hardships that single mothers experience. As P11, P8 and P5 articulated:

Because you're a poor mother you can't take care of your child, because you don't have a *husband* you don't have a lot of *money* a nice *home*... you're not working, that's how I think they [CPS] understand it [maltreatment] (P11).

I guess they [CPS] figure a bad mother, they figure it's better to be in a home with a mother and a father. So, if you don't have a father figure or *married* that's a bad mother. You know 'specially if you're a single mama, a *single mother* and... (P8).

I guess they [CPS] probably feel like if you a single mother then you can't raise these kids by yourself or something, I guess. Because they probably think it's like a lot of kids on one person. I don't know (P5).

When economic insecurity is assumed to be the material conditions of single mothers, it is used to symbolically justify stigma of single motherhood and the promotion of heterosexual marriages. These narratives suggest that mothers in this project particularly experienced the discourse that single mothers are poor because they do not have their husbands in their interactions with CPS. When the poverty of single motherhood is connected with/understood as male absence, this is then thought to signify 'bad' motherhood. As Mink (2006) observed, the second main goal of welfare reform (employment being the other goal) was the promotion of marriage. Through mothers' narratives, it is apparent that marriage promotion is also encouraged in the child welfare system as well. In the context that the state wants to get mothers off welfare (TANF), the survival of families headed by single mothers tends to be interpreted as a risk factor of maltreatment in the child welfare system. These systemic interpretations normalize middle class notions of parenting.

Second, the majority of narratives suggest that many mothers felt judged as bad mothers. One of the major criterion of this constitution was inflected through race in the child welfare system. P8 and P3 stated:

I'm Black so, I'm automatically a bad mom [for CPS] (P8).

At times they [CPS] do seems like they can be a little racist. It's just, like stuff that they think about you. The stuff that they write about you. Like they always make it seem like you're the one with the problem. When half of that stuff do not be true, that they write on that paper and give to people. Like your judges and stuff (P3).

P5, an African American mother, specifically pointed out how CPS assumes a certain way of parenting that is different from her culture.

I think there's racism. [. . .] Just about the culture thing like they think that we're supposed to raise our kids the way that they want us to raise our kids. But it's a difference of how we raise our kids that, you know, yeah.... (P5).

Similarly, P11, an Indigenous mother, claimed,

If you're not *White*, you don't have a pair of high shoes on, a brief case, and a suit or a dress or a skirt on, you can't be a mother, you know? You don't know nothing about mothering (P11).

P11 claimed that CPS treats racialized women differently from White women. From her experience, she claimed, CPS seemed to accept only a white middle-class way of mothering. Surely, many White (single) mothers are involved in child welfare services. However, these narratives suggest how racialized mothers tend to perceive their CPS experiences as intersecting with race and class, particularly in the context of the highly-segregated city that is Milwaukee.

According to Mosby, Rawls, Meehan, Mays, and Portinari (1999), poor and racialized parents may be perceived to violate middle class notions of discipline. Mosby et al. (1999) claim that the Black or African American preference for physical discipline leads to a higher rate of reported cases of abuse and of initial contact with social services than White families, and an unwillingness on the Black or African American parents to alter their parenting styles (p. 490). Disciplinary practices are listed in safety and risk assessment in Wisconsin (see Appendix D). Many mothers in this project insisted that any kind of parental discipline towards their children was regarded as maltreatment by CPS. When I interviewed P7 (43, African American Single Mother, one child in care), her partner shared about an experience of trying to discipline his 17-year-old-step-son when the son brought home a stolen car.<sup>88</sup> When the father told his son to get out of their house and take the car, the son started hitting the father and the father then whipped<sup>89</sup> the

son's buttock.<sup>90</sup> The father insisted on the need to chastise children; otherwise, there is the possible risk to get lost in peer-pressures and to be involved in crimes. He emphasized this need, specifically in the contexts of poor neighborhoods, which have different dynamics from those in the suburbs.

Moreover, P5 claimed that she also used whupping to discipline her children.

However, whupping is regarded as abuse by CPS. As P5 said,

They [CPS] don't want me to discipline the kids with whupping them or nothin'. But like they want me to just talk to the kids. But when I talk to the kids they don't listen but when I whup them they co-operate. 'Cause I know when I was younger and I got a whupping it meant we were to act right. So just like now, they don't want me to spank the kids so the kids basically just get to do what they want to do (P5).

P5 claimed that she disciplined her children in the same way that she was disciplined by her family. When CPS became involved, they wanted her to engage in discipline by relying on services that (typically) White middle class people usually do, such as going to therapy and, as she claims, in an effort to try to make her children be more like their (White people's) children. P12, who was charged with the verbal abuse of her child, claimed "they [CPS] think hollerin' at your kid or callin' your kid sexy is verbally abuse" (P12). An advocate volunteer, P1, claimed that when WW met with the Chief Justice of Children's Court, he said that his focus was children being hit for any reason, no matter if it was lightly or even smacking a kid (P1).

Though it might be difficult to distinguish between discipline and abuse, these narratives reveal mothers' social positions in these systems, and highlight how class and race are major criteria in the decision about who is able and not able to engage in good parenting: 1) poor parents may need to use discipline more often because they cannot afford to use rewards in parenting; and 2) compared to middle class parents in suburbs,

parents in poor neighborhoods face peer pressure to use discipline as a way to try to circumvent children's potential involvement in 'crime'/criminalization. Moreover, Black or African American parents may need to discipline their children more than White parents in order to protect children from troubles in the country, such as increased racial profiling and surveillance (especially in Milwaukee).<sup>91</sup>

These narratives point to 'bad motherhood' discourse as a dominant one in these services, and suggest that if a mother were to whup a child, and if for example she is also Black or African American, single and lives in a poor neighborhood, risk factors accumulate and increase the likelihood that she will be accused of 'maltreatment' and 'bad motherhood'. Living in poor neighborhoods, disciplining children by whopping, leaving children alone and unattended for any length of time, having a dirty house, and/or staying with an abusive partner, were all regarded as maltreatment in the mothers' cases. Actions such as these constituted mothers as bad and were illustrative of their problematic 'behaviours' that were in need of correction through mandated conditions, such as parenting classes and therapy. Yet, did mothers have other choices/behaviours than these actions/decisions? Or were these choices not made for their survival in the post-welfare-reform contexts? One caseworker that Sykes (2011) interviewed said:

One of the reasons it is hard to address neglect is because first you have to convince [parents] they have a problem. They associate with people who support their behavior. Basically, they tell each other that it's okay. We step in as an outsider and try to tell them it's not okay. But who are we? (as cited in Sykes, 2011, p. 454)

Let us assume that these actions were problematic. However still, are these actions proof that these mothers need to be disciplined by parenting classes and therapy? Should remedies to address these actions be behavioural correctional services? Mothers could have: disciplined children by rewarding instead of whopping; lived in a place where they

did not need to discipline children so hard (such as in suburbs or in a place with less racial profiling); hired a child care person instead of leaving children alone; bought a cleaner instead of keeping a dirty house; stayed away from abusive partners instead of being abused; had more resources; and/or been on AFDC to access more resources. But these mothers live *in poverty* partly as a result of neoliberal restructuring and its governance. Thus, what is left unquestioned are the social conditions and inequality, especially symbolical and material conditions brought by post-1990 welfare restructuring, that shape and then inform their survival strategies; strategies that can then constitute the presence of maltreatment in the shape of risks—which is then attributed to mothers’ behaviours and called ‘bad motherhood’, that mothers’ activism has challenged.

### **Single Mothers’ Activism against the Child Welfare System**

In this section, I demonstrate what kinds of activism are undertaken by this study—activisms against welfare and child welfare systems. First, I provide an overview of each of these activisms, and then I explain how these activisms intersect at single mothers’ activism.

In order to demand reunification with their children and/or to challenge the oppressive child welfare system (which continues to individualize poverty), there are both individual and collective (mothers’) activism that organizes against child welfare services in the U.S., though there are few studies of this activism (see for example Tobis, 2013). Those who have been (or still are) involved with child welfare services, who have worked (or still work) in the field, and those who are interested in anti-poverty movements have been the main organizers of this kind of activism. There have also been

some politicians, such as the former Georgia senator Nancy Schaefer (Republican),<sup>92</sup> representative Gwen Moore (Democrat), and representative Maxine Waters (Democrat), who have made significant contributions to the cause. Compared to any other places in the U.S., New York City has a relatively high number of parent-led grassroots organizations under the Child Welfare Fund. Founded in 1991, the Child Welfare Fund is a small foundation that focused its resources largely on increasing the power of parents in New York's child welfare system (Tobis, 2013, pp. 52-53). Tobis (2013) explains that across the United States, other parent-led grassroots organizations, such as 'DHS (Department of Human Services)-Give Us Back Our Children, Philadelphia', 'Parents Anonymous', and 'Parent Partners, IOWA' focus their activism on parents' rights to participate in developing policies and practices, to quality legal representation, and to support other parents who are/were involved with the child welfare system (pp. 145-166).

The lack of literature/examining the current welfare rights movement reflects that this movement shifted or perhaps weakened after welfare reform; activism is now organized as an anti-poverty or labor movement (Ernst, 2010; Reese, 2011; McNeil, 2012). As Gowens (2009b) states, "[o]nly a few struggling welfare groups, Minnesota's Welfare Rights Committee, Milwaukee's WW, West Virginia's DAWG [Direct Action Welfare Group], California's LIFE-TIME [Low-Income Families' Empowerment through Education] and CCWRO [Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.] continue to resist" welfare reform (p. 3), its effects on parents' lives, and its intersections with other policies (e.g. CPS). Reese (2011) claims that most welfare rights campaigns remained fairly small-scale, even though new groups joined them in the late 1990s (p. 42). Reese notes that "[t]he small scale of post-1996 welfare rights campaigns



reflects the enormous challenges that the current welfare system creates for organizing a mass-based welfare rights movement” (p. 42).<sup>93</sup> Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) claimed that WW lost almost all of their volunteers, about 20 activist mothers, who regularly worked for the organization within one year of the welfare reform, because they became busy participating in workfare programs or taking low-wage jobs. This loss was a huge devastation for the organization’s work. For example, there had been six mothers who staffed the Mom’s telephone line, a call-in help-line where mothers who needed help or who were in crisis could talk directly with and receive guidance/support from a volunteer/mother, before welfare reform. Now, there is no longer a Mom’s telephone line (although Gowens still talks with mothers on phone when she can do so).

Considering groups that seem to represent the current welfare rights movement, welfare rights and single mothers’ organizations, such as ‘Welfare Warriors (WW)’ (Milwaukee, WI)<sup>94</sup> and ‘Every Mother is a Working Mother Network (EMWMN)’ (Philadelphia, PA and Los Angeles, CA)<sup>95</sup>, have actively organized against the child welfare system. For these organizations, welfare rights are clearly women’s rights, and so welfare rights directly connect to child well-being and child welfare. WW distributes copies of their quarterly newspaper, *Mother Warriors Voice*, across the U.S., so that mothers can share their child welfare ‘horror’ stories and survival guides. This has encouraged some mothers to create their own groups, for instance ‘Mothers of the Disappeared’ in POWER (Portland Organizing to Win Economic Rights, Portland, ME) and ‘Stand for the Children’ (HI) (Gowens, 2013a). Having heard about the organization or having read the newspaper, many mothers from across the U.S. have contacted WW to

get help regarding government removal of their children because they believe that they never abused or neglected their children.

Collectively, these mothers have demanded that their own local child welfare services develop proper legal procedures, such as providing evidence of neglect or abuse, and fair hearings to mothers. The lobbying by activist organizations prompted representative Gwen Moore to introduce a bill in House in 2012 (WW, 2012, p. 33), “to provide funds to state courts for the provision of legal representation to parents and legal guardians with respect to child welfare cases” (Enhancing the Quality of Parental Legal Representation Act of 2011). Unfortunately, this bill was not passed (H.R. 3873, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2012). Had the bill passed, the funds could have significantly improved the quality of legal representation for parents and legal guardians. For example, “[l]egal representation for parents in New York City Family Court changed dramatically in 2007 when the New York City Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator provided \$ 9.4 million to pay three existing, well-regarded legal offices to represent about half of the parents who appear in child removal proceedings in Family Court in the Bronx [ . . . ], Brooklyn [ . . . ], and Manhattan” (Tobis, 2013, p. 171).<sup>96</sup>

Mothers’ groups have organized many protests, demonstrations, events, vigils, speak outs, and support groups in response to the child welfare system. For example, EMWMN has organized the advocacy group ‘DHS (Department of Human Services) /DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) Give Us Back Our Children’ in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. WW has created a weekly support and advocacy group called ‘Mothers and Grandmothers of Disappeared Children (MaGoD)’; it was established in 1992. All of these groups participate in an international feminist network

called ‘Global Women’s Strike’, which involves recognition and payment for all caregiving work.

As part of their support and advocacy, MaGoD of WW created survival plans for their members. They created a telephone tree so that they could call one another after a visit with their children, since they suffered the loss of their children the most after the visits. In addition, mothers share the names of helpful professionals and attend each other’s court cases whenever possible (even though they are not allowed to go inside the courts based on children’s confidentiality) (Gowens, 2013a).

WW also tries to inform mothers (across the U.S.) to “demand a jury trial, if they take your child,” because by the time mothers find WW, they have usually already lost their right to a trial by either judge or jury (Gowens, 2013a). In the law of Wisconsin regarding “hearing upon the involuntary removal of a child or expectant mother”: If a child is removed from the physical custody of the child’s parent or guardian without the consent of the parent or guardian or if an adult expectant mother is taken into custody without the consent of the expectant mother, the court “shall schedule a plea hearing and fact-finding hearing within 30 days after a request from the parent or guardian from whom custody was removed or from the adult expectant mother who was taken into custody. The plea hearing and fact-finding hearing may be combined. This time period may be extended only with the consent of the requesting parent, guardian, or expectant mother” (48 Wis. Code. § 305). Some of the mothers in this project claimed that even though they asked for jury trials, trials were either delayed or not held at all. According to WW, a lack of jury trials is prevalent among other cases than interview participants as well (WW, 2009c, pp. 53-54; WW, 2009d, pp. 51-54; Gowens, 2012, pp. 43-44). In fact,

Joseph Donald, a chief judge of Children’s Court in Milwaukee, WI, admitted at a meeting with WW in 2013 that he had never had a jury trial in his two years as chief judge. During his time as chief judge, two mothers in the group had demanded a trial by jury. Moreover, a district attorney told WW that “he has never had a jury trial in a child welfare case in his 18 years working in children’s court” (Gowens, 2013c, p. 33). In 2002, only 74 fact-finding hearings were held in the total 1299 cases opened in Milwaukee county, though “[t]he hearing is heard only by the judge unless one of the contesting parties has requested a jury trial at the plea hearing” (Zeller & Hornby, 2005, p. 15; pp. 28-39).

According to WW, most often the mother is not informed that she has a right to a jury trial within 30 days of the children’s removal. Instead, mothers are urged to agree with the court’s jurisdiction (48 Wis. Code. § 13 (4)).<sup>97</sup> Mothers desiring to regain custody of their children must then agree to meet a list of conditions that BMCW and the judge imposes on them. On the one hand, fact-finding hearings are civil courts, not criminal courts, and thus have a lower level required as proof, often referred to as ‘balance of probabilities’ rather than ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ as in criminal cases. In Wisconsin, a child may be held if the intake worker determines that there is “probable cause” to believe the child is within the jurisdiction of the court, and child is at risk of abuse, neglect, or running away (48 Wis. Code. § 205).<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, fact-finding hearings are crucial to procedural justice, as this is when the state is forced/required to prove the allegations with evidence, judged by a jury (48 Wis. Code. § 305). This is a right of parents according to the law. Garlinghouse (2013) claims, “[t]he state is allowed to completely sever the highly protected right of family integrity only if it finds the

custodial parent unfit by a clear and convincing standard of evidence,” and “parents have a right to a hearing on parental fitness and cannot be denied custody based solely on a presumption or stereotype” (p. 1233).<sup>99</sup>

EMWMN created the film, “DHS (Department of Human Services): Give Us Back Our Children,” in which mothers and a grandmother talk about their battles to reunite their families after the Philadelphia Department of Human Services took their children (Gowens, 2013a). This film became an important vehicle in activists’ tactics to bring about change (Gowens, 2013a) and to educate people about the reality of the child welfare system. In addition, Masters’ students at School of Social Work, the University of South California, created the film “DCFS: Give Us Back Our Children” to feature activism in Los Angeles, California. These films show the faces and voices of mothers and grandmothers, actual people and families that are involved with and impacted by child welfare systems and, thus, mobilized to engage in activism. WW and EMWMN also organized the first annual, international week of ‘Stop the War on the Poor’ in July 2014 and demanded the end of what they consider the wrongful removal of children in Washington D.C., Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Ireland, and London, England.<sup>100</sup>

While these groups have played a pivotal role in fighting for the rights of mothers and children in poverty, they have received little support from other advocacy groups and activists—they have few activist allies—not to mention the general public. While feminist and welfare rights activists helped shape the U.S. welfare system, more recently U.S. welfare politics has also shaped activism (see Ladd-Taylor, 1994, p. 139). Resources are usually allocated for particular kinds of feminist or welfare issues, and not for others

(Reese, 2011, p. 32). While WW and EMWMN have influenced policy outcomes less than other welfare rights groups, they continue to contribute to social change from a feminist perspective (see Ernst, 2010).

Most of the participants in this project turned to activism after their involvements with child welfare services, while some of them started engaging with activism to challenge the welfare system, even before welfare reform. Moreover, some participants engaged in activism to challenge both the welfare and child welfare systems, while others have engaged in activism to challenge the child welfare system alone. And some of participants had experience with other feminist, anti-racist, or anti-poverty movements. Ultimately, each participant differed in their positions about how much to challenge the child welfare system, even though they shared the position that children tend to suffer more after the involvement of child welfare services than before. In what follows, I show mothers' stories and how this study's participants started engaging with (single mothers') activism against child welfare services, what their actions were, how activism helped both participants and their community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and how their activism connect to the conflicts I explored in this chapter.

### **Sense of self.**

Sense of self is a theme that refers to how mothers' self-identities were affected by involvement with child welfare services and how parents engaged in activism in response to this (e.g. to take back control, to try to change their situations, and/or to participate in actions against CPS). Narratives show that mothers' sense of self were

eroded simply from being separated from children: mothers could not perform mothering.

P13 and P10 spoke explicitly to this:

I don't feel like a mother. A mother is supposed to be, you know, I'm supposed to be nursing my baby. I can't... *comfort* my baby because the songs that I used to sing to comfort her now makes her depressed because I'm not with her. So, that's stripped me away because now I have to try to find a new way to comfort my child and let her know that I'm gonna be there. But how am I gonna be there if they keep changing our visitation? They keep taking away our visitation you know and she doesn't know what she can believe or trust in anymore. How am I supposed to be a mother if I'm not even *allowed* to? (P13)

My sense of self *is*: I'm missing my kids. I'm missing my kids but... you know it's *lonely*, for my kids and stuff. And as a mother. And when your kids ain't with you, you do belong with your kids and you wish you didn't make the mistake... I had made a mistake (P10).

Their narratives suggest that their sense of self seems to be associated with their motherhood role based on the dominant discourses idea of what it means to be a mother.

P12 and P8, also showed that mothers interpreted their experiences and interactions with CPS as mother-blame which negatively impacted how they felt about themselves.

Because they [CPS]'re tryin' to make me feel that I'm really mental, that I'm, I really don't, I'm not capable of supporting or takin' care of a child. That's how they make me feel and like my feelings hurt and they make me feel like... (P12).

It's like they [CPS] try to say I'm not a good mom! It at first it affects me.... I was startin' to believe them a little bit which I shouldn't have at first but... I'm a good mom. I love my kids, I take care of my kids, um... I put my kids first. I do whatever for my children (P8).

Narratives suggest that mothers experienced the conflicts brought by discourses of mother-blame and the state's version of 'good' and 'bad' motherhood based on mothers' resources as having a significant impact on their sense of self. Many times, mothers had to accept these discourses when they were involved in CPS processes, which in fact betrays and denies their own sense of self and motherhood. P15 suggested that eroding mothers' sense of self was on purpose so that mothers would give up fighting with the

system. Most mothers in this project were still actively fighting against CPS in their cases; I did not interview parents who had given up their fight (before TPR). When calling for a MaGoD meeting, I could talk with a grandfather of the child whose birth family gave up fighting on telephone. He told me that he had been worried because his grandson's facial expressions changed highly negatively since the out of home placement, though they had to give up his custody and parental rights. The second time that I talked with him on phone, he told me not to remind him about the grandson and not to call him anymore, and he did not talk about his grandson any more. There must be many parents who give up fighting back against the system for a variety of reasons, including mother-blame. In some of the cases that I observed, I witnessed firsthand how child welfare involvement/cases and separation from their children challenged mothers' (and other family members') mental health.

Narratives show that all mothers and the father suffered the most from being separated from their children. It must be emphasized that they did not understand (or accept) the reasons why they had been separated from their children. Mothers' suffering was magnified in their difficult interactions with child welfare processes, where they were constantly judged as 'bad' mothers. P10 claimed that she no longer even wanted to stay at her home because her children were gone. Her parental rights had been terminated; she claimed that she was waiting for her children to turn 18 years-old so that she could see them again. She regretted leaving her children aged 1, 3, and 5 years old at home alone for approximately 20 minutes, to go buy food and medicine on a cold day. Though she blamed herself a lot for this incident, she felt her children should not be taken just because she left her child for '20 minutes'. Her children, however, were removed



because of her poverty and her receipt of welfare, which perpetuated this poverty.

Moreover, her children were removed because poor mothers are placed in the welfare discourses of ‘bad’ mothering under neoliberalism.

Many mothers were particularly concerned about their children’s safety in foster care. During supervised visits with their children, some claimed that they found (and took and showed me pictures of) traces of physical abuse in foster care. Their narratives show that mothers who have children placed in foster care suffer because their children could suffer in foster care and, moreover, mothers feel they cannot protect their children from those potential dangers. The irony of this, of course, is that mothers lost their children because they themselves were perceived to ‘fail to protect’ them.

On the other hand, narratives also suggest that mothers who become involved with activism seemed to receive a lot of support for maintaining a positive sense of self (resisting mother-blame) by being helped by and helping others. Narratives show that engagement in activism enhanced their sense of self. As P13 and P8 claimed, their self was affirmed by engaging with activism:

I understood through activism that I’m not just a number on some W-2 paper. I’m not, my kids are not just a pay-cheque for the judge and the CPS workers to get rich off of. You know, we’re *people* and we *matter*. We have rights. And I shouldn’t allow anybody to treat me as if I’m less than a human being. Regardless of what color we are (P13).

It [WW] made me a stronger person a stronger mother a stronger woman. Not to give up so easily. Um they’re here helping me to fight with me and for me. (P8).

Narratives, such as the ones above, continue to show how mothers in this project experience mother-blame in the child welfare system; participating in activism helped the participants’ build a positive sense of self to push back against the discourses of mother-blame and good and bad motherhood.

Moreover, narratives indicate that mothers' sense of self might be eroded in many other different contexts as well. WW has taught women skills to engage with CPS in order to win reunification of their families. Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) claimed that it is hard for mothers to adopt these skills. She suspected that this is partly because the communities that most mothers come from do not always enable the learning of other basic skills, such as going by step-by-step (because of their focus on survival) and 'playing the game'<sup>101</sup>, in the first place. Mothers are usually used to being helpless and powerless, so they do not feel comfortable developing skills to fight back. In her narrative, we see how sense of self intersects with social location and resources, particularly a lack thereof.

### **Mothers' actions.**

In interviewing mothers, I learned that the main goals for their actions were to publicize and raise awareness about the problems associated with child welfare services and to help other mothers learn about and know their rights. Mothers analyzed the child welfare system, focusing on classism, racism, and sexism, and that these analyses (action research) seemed to create the base for their activism—mothers' own discourses, to challenge, negotiate, or change the system as collective action frames. P8 and P13 described the purpose of their activism in these ways:

Basically, just fightin' for the mothers. Fightin' for the mothers that really can't fight for themselves. Like to have a voice for them (P8).

To help mothers know their rights. Because a lot of mothers don't know their rights. And the judges and the lawyers are not telling them. They're lying to them. So, you know, I guess, it definitely would be to let people know what's going on. Open their eyes in a sense (P13).

Narratives also suggest that another goal of activism was to help children who were wrongly removed return home (this is child well-being in their perspective). P12 and P10 described:

We work on getting our child returned home, the court dates and contacting the lawyers and keep in contact and appointments with our child. Tryin' to get as much contact as we can with our child while they're outta our custody (P12).

The goal is to help people, help the mothers, help the families together. Not just the kids, they [WW] are working for the families you know (P10).

In addition, narratives suggest that the final goal was “to stop the war on the poor!” (P13) Gowens reinforced this, by claiming that the goal for both WW and the MaGoD project is to stop the war on the poor:

Stop the *legal*, social, economic warfare on the poor which CPS is certainly the tip of the iceberg in terms of warring on the poor *just* to get money. No matter how much their prejudices drive *them* to take children, the bottom line is it's a big giant money making operation. [. . .] The only way we can do that is we have to socially get people to understand that it's an issue. That it's a problem. So, we have to raise awareness, that's what the singing and the protesting and all the writing and movies and whatnot (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

Together, these narratives suggest how mothers have organized and used activism not only to help mothers win reunification for their families, but also to raise awareness about how the child welfare system as a systemic institution disproportionately oppresses poor people, an oppression associated with welfare reform (especially in the context of the privatization of child welfare services) as their own discourse. Indeed, WW has actively organized their activism to challenge the welfare system both before and after welfare reform.

Most of the participants had participated in the MaGoD (support group) meetings, and were also involved in marches, protests, or events organized through WW. P11 and P10 described their experiences:

We marched downtown, we marched all over. We did *a lot* of protesting. We wanna protest a building now on 27th Street [BMCW] (P11).

Well protest, protest, we was standing in front of 17 30 west umm... Getting your kids... trying to get the kids back and stuff like that. And we brought out signs and everything. And then we went to different places and we do the same thing (P10).

Moreover, the WW newspaper played an important role in their actions. Some of the mothers participated in making and/or passing out the newspapers. P2, a long-time activist, worked on the newspaper at the time of our interview, and claimed that the newspaper is “giving people a voice who are out there working against the system, which is broken” (P2). Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) also claimed that,

Our newspaper does a good job of exposing the problem. We *have* to continue to remember to have a *positive* story in every issue is possible. That’s a goal of course—Mary’s story [Gowens, 2013d, pp. 12-14 (She reunified with her children with the help of WW)] made a big splash. A lot of people contacted us *because* they read Mary’s story. And people are you know feeling more positive *because* they read Mary’s story. And so, that’s why I’m saying if we could have more successes we could report on it would be nice. And it helps the community be able to deal with it.

Newspaper articles not only empower readers by raising awareness about the problems in the system and connecting them with others similar experiences, but also give instructions about how to deal with child welfare services and processes. As the partner of P7 claimed, reading articles in the newspaper about cases people were winning their child welfare cases—by not stopping, not giving up, and getting proof to support their cases—it gave him the idea to make sure to get evidence. P10 claimed that she liked to volunteer passing out the newspapers. In addition to newspaper organizing work, some mothers helped the WW by cleaning their office (Mother Organizing Center), helping with the rummage/side-walk sales, and running WW’s board meeting. All of these

actions combine to ensure that WW and MaGoD continue to offer services and support to mothers and the wider community.

Another important action that mothers do is to support parents about their child welfare cases, in order to win reunification for families. This challenges and renegotiates the governance order to constitute good and bad motherhood based on resources. P12 claimed that WW educated her about the law and that she was able to learn the necessary laws for herself, so that CPS could no longer manipulate or control the situation. As she claimed, WW taught her,

How to fight for my kid, how to get a jury trial. How to know that I'm gonna have witnesses, how to not let my lawyers, DA and my judge gang up on me and try to talk me into not going to a jury trial (P12).

P5 also claimed that WW taught her that she did not have to plead guilty for anything in the case that she not guilty of; WW taught her what she could and could not say in court. P7's partner, whom I also spoke with, claimed that he got a sense that something can be done if we just do not stop. He claimed that he had a long talk with Gowens, and that she told him not to give up because what was happening to them (and in the system as a whole) was unjust; he told me that he always thought about her and always tried to do what she told him to do. P6 (30, Hispanic Single Mother, four children in care) claimed that she wished that support groups like WW existed everywhere, so that any person involved with CPS could receive help, to know what their rights are, and what they can do to fight back against CPS. P5 claimed that WW meant a lot for parents, because WW helped people get children back for free and gave good advice. For example, she claimed that she could text a WW's volunteer every time she had a question, such as "Could you tell me why they [CPS] wanted me to do this?" Moreover,

she claimed that she received a lot of help with paper work, and also for digesting and figuring out her ideas. Gowens (personal communication, July 24, 2013) claimed,

Mary tells *everyone* how much we helped her get her kids back. And so, the few, you know, the moms who do get help it makes a big difference in their life. It makes a huge difference in their life.

Mothers' activism played an important role in helping them find their voices, which had often been silenced through experiences of poverty and oppression and mother-blaming. Moreover, participant mothers continued to emphasize the important role that WW plays in helping women. As P8 and P12 stated,

They [WW] mean a lot to women. It's without them, women would give up you know on their kids you know they would give up fightin' for what they believe in (P8).

They [WW] believe that... they should never, I mean a woman should always have her rights. That she should never be... *violated* or whatever (P12).

In essence, mothers regarded their problems with CPS as a women's/feminist issue: Their actions were not based on just the goal of reunification with their children but also achieving women's rights.

### **Positive implications for resisting injustice.**

Narratives showed that activism helped participants in two main ways. Activism generated the possibility of: 1) a community, and 2) validation of people's own feelings, in addition to teaching rights and also giving support for personal battles. Firstly, the significance of having a community was a common theme across many of the narratives; particularly, how community was a key support for and from activism. In communities, mothers can share their experiences and learn from each other. Especially, as narratives suggest, it was important for mothers involved with child welfare services to know that

the problems they experienced with CPS were actually common problems that others also experience. In connecting with other mothers, they could see and understand that their problems are more structural and systemic, rather than individual, though they also blamed individual child welfare professionals. P13 and P8 emphasized the significance of connecting with other mothers who were going through the system:

[The] support you get is being around people who *know* and have experience in the situation that you're in, knowing that you're not the only one. And they offer really good advice in regards to what's going on (P13).

There's these people out here believin', that has gone through when I'm goin' through...um, so, it's basically I'm not alone of what I've thought about the CPS and they're here advertising that exactly what I mean (P8).

Importantly, P10 claimed that WW does not create boundaries around race, which is rare in an intensely segregated city like Milwaukee (Collins and Mayer, 2010, p. 44). P10 stated:

The WW, it doesn't matter what color you are. It doesn't matter about the sex, race, color, you know... you can be white, blue. They *still*, the WW, they will still support you (P10).

Moreover, Gowens claimed that activism brings growth to communities and children, and WW's work in particular focuses on helping mothers and children grow:

They [children] learn that they shouldn't be ashamed of their moms. They learn poor isn't a crime. They learn that there's a war on the poor. [. . .] Even if it's temporary, the kids feel a lot better about themselves when they're, you know, out here protesting and they're hearing us insist there's a war on the poor. [. . .] it really helps for the kids to have other adults around saying 'no, it's not your mother. It's not your fault. You know there is a war, there is a problem.' You know and however much they understand it, it really helped and you know all these kids... we had so many kids involved (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

The aspect of community building is such an important part of WW resistance of injustice in order to challenge the dominant discourses and their material conditions.

Secondly, narratives show that activism can help validate people's own feelings, which is crucial as the system constantly blames mothers as 'bad' mothers (as discussed in Chapter 4 and the beginning of this chapter). Some mothers claimed that WW gives people courage and hope. P10 and P8 stated:

They [CPS] push you to the limit where you don't want to keep going. So, they keep aggravating you. you know? And they get more... and the WW give you more support. It's good, it's a good program (P10).

For me it was more of hope that stood out for is hope. Because they [WW] gave me more hope than I had you know for my children getting' returned (P8).

Again, it is important to highlight that some mothers claimed that their ability to be/remain positive was directly related to engaging in activism. Especially as narratives suggest that public protests are fun and can make people feel empowered. For example, WW gives community 'destruction' awards and goes to sing Christmas carols (lyrics changed for the purpose of the protest) to the government buildings and some of the big private welfare and private child welfare agencies every year. P13 and P1 described:

We went to Madison to give an award, a community destruction award. That was awesome. Just uh the look on those peoples' faces when they thought they were getting a real award and then finding out it's a community destruction award is priceless. 'Cause they just sit up there and smile and giggle and then when they hear the words they're like 'Oh. Hell, this is not good. They're not praising us for taking peoples' children. Oh, no!' 'Cause they're all happy, like 'Yeah! You're kidnapping children and you're happy with it. But we're not.' You know, and once they found out that we were not happy with them kidnapping peoples' children their faces were like 'Uhhhhh.' Yeah, they looked really stupid. It was funny. So, that was worth it (P13).

When I first started, I always did go to the caroling. That was my big thing, where we sing the Christmas carols. I always loved that. You know I thought it was offensive, a lot of the words were like very out there and people would get all like 'Ah!! I loved getting kicked out of places.' That was fun. So that was why I kind of started more (P1).



These narratives suggest that, in fun and creative ways, they constantly organize, confront, and challenge the systems, in which these mothers would be often silenced respectively. Gowens maintained that WW's public protesting is fun, makes people happy, and is important to make the victims of CPS feel better in life. As she explained, protests are a way that victims can finally fight back and people can speak out on behalf of the people who have been victimized:

Doing *it* [public protest] makes you feel empowered. You actually do feel better because you're not just doing nothing. And you're face... you know you do need to face your abusers (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

WW empowers survivors of relationships with CPS, mostly impoverished and racialized single mothers. They do so by involving mothers in challenging the forces of patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, able-ism and capitalism behind child welfare services that continue to oppress these same mothers. Connecting their activism against child welfare services to single mothers' activism, P13 explained:

To single mothers it's like the union type, you know? Within the union, you have someone that fights and represents you. I believe that's what WW are for single mothers. You know? They fight and they try to represent them (P13).

Together, these narratives continue to describe how mothers' activism supports single motherhood and the right to mother, similar to the welfare rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s (see Chapter 2).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I compared what narratives suggest about the different understandings of child maltreatment and well-being, and good and bad motherhood held by CPS and participants. I highlighted mothers' firsthand experiences in the system to

show that there are conflicting viewpoints about what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood. This is particularly the case when CPS and the state disregard social inequality and oppressive social conditions when making judgements about mothers by individualizing poverty. These conflicting viewpoints were the roots of mothers’ activism. In reading these narratives as sites of contestation of dominant discourses, as well as sites that provide insight into the ways women come to organize themselves to change their conditions and circumstances, I showed how many of these activists creatively challenge the structures that they find themselves in. Their stories emphasize how these mothers, through their activism and community organizing, have been able to challenge mother-blame, the individualization of poverty, and patriarchal power structures inherent in the design and administration of child welfare and welfare services.

## Chapter 6

### Connecting Welfare and Child Welfare Systems:

#### The Individualization of Poverty and Mothers' Activism

Condemn me for a messy house  
Condemn me for having no spouse  
Condemn me for being poor  
Yes condemn me for more and more.

Condemn me for living in a car  
Condemn me for not keeping my house up to par  
Condemn me for living where I can  
Condemn me for loving a drinking man

Condemn me for all that's wrong  
Condemn me for 'just' getting along  
Condemn me for making mistakes  
After all they're perfect for God sakes

Condemn me for my anger and fear  
Condemn me for not shedding a tear  
Condemn me for being a trusting soul  
Condemn me for a child's life being stole[n]

Condemn me because of a murderous man  
Condemn me over and over and again and again  
Believe the stories and all the lies  
Listen to all the BS that files

Watch the papers every day  
See what these liars have to say  
Lose your children and the family you love  
And you'll no longer be meek and gentle as a dove

Go through the 'systems' burning hoops  
Through the ups and downs and all their loops  
Go to 'parenting' to improve your love  
Through counseling to prove your love and through hell to end all love.

This is why I call myself condemned.

I feel like lies and tortures will never end (Messer, 1992, p. 7)

Welfare reform has affected mothers' experiences not only in the welfare system but also in the child welfare system. In this chapter, I engage in a discussion of findings of this project in relation to my research questions and I consider the policy implications of them. Specifically, I show how the two systems have coalesced partially through neoliberal welfare restructuring and how mothers experience poverty governance; to make these connection, I look at how the welfare system intersects with the child welfare system, the discourses and material conditions around this intersection, the relationships between the intersection and the neoliberal gender order, and how mothers' activism has responded to the intersection.

### **Consorting Systems Blame Mothers for Having Children without Resources**

Welfare reform in the U.S. involved the creation of workfare policies in order to 'fix' the 'problem' of the welfare system: single mothers' 'welfare dependency' (which is a reoccurring discourse). As reviewed in Chapter 2, Fraser and Gordon's (1994) genealogy of dependency tracked the historical changes linked to those who were placed in/identified with in the category of dependency; they claim that "postindustrial culture has called up a new personification of dependency: the black, unmarried, teenaged, welfare-dependent mother" (p. 139). Workfare was therefore justified through such discursive constructions of the perceived realities of single mothers. Through 'the discourse of dependency', single mothers' need for welfare, which was poverty, was attributed to their individual behaviours and attitudes. As the discourse claims, they are on welfare because they are dependent on welfare. Even further, the symbolic discourse

of the ‘Welfare Queen’ depicted (racialized) single mothers on welfare as lazy women who are having out-of-wedlock children in order to get welfare benefits because they do not want to work for a wage (e.g. Sparks, 2003; Hancock, 2004).

Alongside these discourses, the meaning of receiving welfare benefits (as under AFDC) changed. There was shift from seeing welfare as government support for children in poverty (as child support) to seeing it as a disincentive for single mothers to work. Therefore, workfare was created in order to make work ‘appealing’ and used work requirements to force single mothers to find and get jobs. Workfare clearly presumed and implied that mothers are on welfare because they do not want to work. They are poor not because they cannot get out of poverty or there are not enough living wage jobs and child care available, but because they behave as though they do not want to work and instead want to stay on welfare. Indeed, two of the four purposes of welfare reform as stated were to “end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage” and to “prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies” (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, 1996b).<sup>102</sup>

Through the discourses underscoring and/or producing welfare reform, especially single mothers are pathologized as having personal/psychiatric deficits and/or as lacking moral responsibility. Accordingly, the problem of the welfare system became not children’s and their mothers’ poverty, but mothers’ individual behaviours and attitudes. In fact, the federal and state governments succeeded in hiding the need to solve the problem of poverty among single mother headed families by instead focusing

attention elsewhere, such as by examining the availability of living wage jobs, working conditions, and gendered and racialized hierarchical working structures (Nakagawa, 2009). The governance of poverty involves making people unaware by creating knowledge to hide systemic ways to produce cultural ‘truth’. Edin and Lein (1997) revealed that low-wage jobs, which are often precarious in nature, usually made single mothers worse off than when they had been on welfare before welfare reform (pp. 86-87). In 1996, 39 million Americans lived below the federal poverty line, but fewer than 13 million (approximately 9 million children) received AFDC payments, while 69 million Americans (including 6 million full-time workers and 5.5 million part-time wage earners) lived in households posting annual incomes equaling less than 150 percent of the poverty threshold (Wacquant, 2009, p. 80). Finding a job, earning enough to support a family, removing barriers to employment, and developing marketable skills are challenges faced by any poor adult under unequal systemic working structures in the U. S. However, what distinguishes welfare recipients from other poor people is that the vast majority of recipients are children being raised, most often, by a mother on her own (Albelda, 2002, p. 85). Under social conditions based on the ideal of family wage of the Standard North American Family (SNAF), single mothers are often impoverished for providing caregiving work (D. Smith, 1999), and, thus, need welfare as “the income owed to persons who work inside the home caring for, nurturing, and protecting children” (Mink, 2002a, p. 19).

Moreover, the work requirements justified through welfare’s discourse of dependency to prioritize participation rates in workfare programs and decreasing the number of people on welfare rolls instead of creating opportunities (such as education)

for recipients to work for a living wage. Again, the discourse maintains that poverty is caused not by society or social structures, but by single<sup>103</sup> mothers' lazy and welfare-dependent behaviours and attitudes that need to be corrected through forcing mothers to participate in workfare programs. Even though there were concerns raised by researchers and politicians about workfare policies during the creation of welfare reform, these problems were regarded as less important than increasing the participation rate of work requirements and decreasing the number of people on welfare rolls. The concerns raised were; 1) the legal implications of work requirements, as many workfare participants who do not get private sector jobs will be paid less than the minimum wage (see Collins & Mayer, 2010, pp. 132-135), and 2) job availability and unemployment. For example, Wisconsin had to create 50,000 to 60,000 new jobs to virtually have zero unemployment, but the Governor's plan created 50 or 100 new jobs around the time before welfare reform (Welfare Reform, 1996, p. 36). In light of these problems, passing the reforms made clear that the overall aim was even not to shift welfare dependent mothers towards employment but to move them just off welfare.

As discussed in Chapter 2 and confirmed in this project, welfare reform worsened the material conditions of, and perpetuated poverty among, families headed by especially single mothers. The narratives of mothers in this project suggest that there was no possible way to get out of poverty, especially due to the lack of either temporary or living wage jobs. Mothers' narratives suggest that the possible ways to survive after welfare reform are to; 1) work at temporary jobs, 2) engage in workfare programs as a condition of benefit receipt (i.e. to work for free in order to receive benefits), 3) stay in family relations that may be abusive, whether mothers are on workfare or not, or 4) to become

homeless. And yet, workfare programs often only assist mothers in getting minimum wage jobs. Kahn and Polakow (2002) claim that, without a postsecondary education, those leaving the welfare rolls are at best employed in jobs that pay on average \$ 6.61 per hour (at the time when the nominal minimum wage was \$ 5.15), a wage that does not raise families above the poverty line and does not provide health insurance (p. 159).<sup>104</sup> In other words, without an education, mothers are not likely to earn an income that is sufficient to support their families. Rather than creating sustainable and secure work, workfare programs increased temporary jobs in the job market (see Peck, 2001). Welfare reform used the rhetoric that single mothers must work for a wage without fixing the problem of job availability and unemployment, and simultaneously created the ideal conditions of labor market for poverty governance.

Meanwhile, the U.S. child welfare system focused on protecting children from maltreatment, and maintaining or creating safety, permanency, and well-being<sup>105</sup> for children during the period of welfare reform—and post-welfare reform. As discussed in Chapter 5, maltreatment is assessed by an increasing number of risk factors. However, the assessment tools used to identify maltreatment function in such a way as to individualize poverty. For example, socioeconomic status, employment, and family structure and living arrangement, are considered key risk factors for child maltreatment (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 62-64).<sup>106</sup> Mothers are then judged by these risk factors to decide if they are good or bad mothers, without taking into consideration social conditions and environments as risk factors. Swift (1995a) discloses that the category of neglect indicates that most families who do not have access to resources for the continuous maintenance and supervision of clean and orderly homes and children—



babysitters, relatives, bank loans, jobs, washing machines, a car, decent clothes, a cleaning person, occasional holidays, counselling, and therapy, by which working or middle class families can be treated— must rely instead on agencies such as child welfare and welfare (pp. 85-86).<sup>107</sup> Mothers have been blamed for their lack of resources but this lack has been brought about by larger social conditions; nonetheless, this lack is what the child welfare system historically views as neglect (Swift, 1995a). The findings of this dissertation project argue that neoliberal restructuring of welfare positioned the state to govern poor mothers in the child welfare system based on rules of the market; mothers who experience the child welfare system are judged through the same discourses that individualize poverty, themselves entrenched in the welfare system. The discourses of ‘dependency’ and the ‘Welfare Queen’—in line with neoliberal rhetoric—made it possible to blame mothers for their poverty. These discourses follow mothers from welfare and continue to play out (i.e. they are judged based on these discourses) when they encounter child welfare. The individualization of poverty therefore moves between these two welfare systems. As well, child welfare assesses the quality of mothers’ mothering through risk assessments that entrench poverty as ‘THE’ problem that predicts bad mothering and/or child maltreatment; in this way, these mothers are likely to be judged as ‘bad mothers’. Key to this judgement is that mothers enter into a relationship with child welfare based on how they have already been conceptualized as bad mothers under welfare. Further, the child welfare system has its own tools for ‘confirming’ that these mothers are, indeed, bad mothers: they are poor. Poverty and bad mothering are co-constituted.

As Wells and Shafran (2005) state, “[m]others with children in foster care are a

subset of the population of mothers who historically have used cash assistance” (p. 88). They found in a county in Ohio, 81 percent of mothers with children in foster care had an average monthly income from wages and cash assistance that fell below the extreme poverty level (or half the poverty threshold) (Wells & Shafran, 2005, p. 78). The services that child welfare provided for these mothers were mainly those related to the mandatory conditions mothers must meet which focus on behavioural correction; for example, parenting classes and therapy; both are traditionally used to fix behaviours that cause maltreatment. However, the *factors that made possible the involvement of child welfare services in the lives of poor and single mothers*, such as inadequate income from paid employment, and lack of housing, transportation, child care, and/or money for things like food or utilities (Wells & Marcenko, 2011, p. 421), *remain unaddressed* (Swift & Callahan, 2009, p. 189).<sup>108</sup> Moreover, lacking resources to satisfy children’s material well-being is attributed to mothers’ behaviours. Single motherhood, in particular, is seen as a ‘problematic’ behaviour from patriarchal perspectives. If mothers are single, then they can be likely confirmed as bad mothers in the child welfare system.

Moreover, the ways in which mothers have responded to both welfare policies and systems through activism suggests that child maltreatment or other indicators of bad mothering are not simply due to individual inadequacy, but connected to wider dimensions of social inequality including the ways the state involves itself in the life of the poor. For example, in the welfare system, poor single mothers were regarded as welfare dependent mothers. Through WW, mothers directly challenged the coinciding mother-blame discourse and its material implementation (via workfare policies) by claiming that they were independent mothers and advocating for the social value attached

to their mothering. As mothers claimed, they are full-time caregiving workers because mother work *is work* (see Nakagawa, 2009). In the child welfare system, poor single mothers are potentially defined as bad mothers. Again, through their activism, mothers challenged mother-blame discourse and its material policy implementation, as per service conditions and the removal of children. Mothers instead claimed that they are good mothers who take care of children, emphasizing that mothers' caregiving work is important for children's well-being.

In addition, the findings of this project suggest that mothers' activism emerged due to the perceptions of these systems as oppressive from a feminist perspective: welfare and child welfare systems were perceived to be participating in the war on the poor. By claiming "stop the war on the poor", activist mothers then vocalize that the actual problems are policies and systems themselves for the governance of the poor. Taking a systemic approach, activist mothers demonstrate that it is policy and systems that are most likely to oppress poor single mothers and their children, and which also fail to address the problems of social structures, inequality, and poverty; both systems' individualization of poverty exacerbates the living conditions of, specifically, families headed by single mothers.

The activism of mothers interviewed in this project can be situated in the larger feminist movement of 'activist mothering' (e.g. Naples, 1998; O'Reilly, 2008; Gumbs et al., 2016). The term activist mothering highlights women's gendered conceptualization of activism on behalf of their communities, often defined beyond the confines of their families, households, and neighborhoods. Similar to the activist mothering by community workers hired in Community Action Programs (CAPs)<sup>109</sup> during the War on Poverty,

mothers' activism against the child welfare system showed characteristics of 'community care-taking'. Constructing 'community' as a convergence of racial-ethnic identification and class affiliation, their activist mothering showed self-conscious struggles against racism, sexism, and poverty (see Naples, 1998, p. 114). Single mothers' activism showed their feminist struggle to demand welfare rights as social and economic justice in order to challenge male dominance, violence, and patriarchy, all directly connected to their and other women's economic insecurity. Especially, single mothers' activism demonstrated that "sexism and racism, intensified and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of black women" (hooks, 1981, p. 22) in the child welfare system, so that "Black women have a self-defined standpoint on their own oppression" (Collins, 1989, p. 747) based on their experiences.

This project finds that, while the welfare and child welfare systems (and the labor market) are separate systems that do not transparently communicate with one another, poor single mothers face these two systems as a combined force. In facing two systems rather than one single system, they are exposed to intersecting discourses and material conditions that both shape, and are shaped, by these same systems (in the contexts of the labor market that these mothers likely to confront: lack of jobs and precarious employment). In other words, the two systems work together to achieve mother-blame (individualize poverty) and so produce, represent, and justify poverty governance.

Specifically, this project finds that two systems are similar in how they provide services aimed at disciplining/correcting mothers' 'immoral' behaviours for the welfare (in a broad sense) of children. As welfare reform defines work in terms of wage, workfare

aims to replace women's desire to mother (which is currently unwaged) with a strong market-ethos. In order to achieve 'good' motherhood, mothers have to work for a wage as well as to do caregiving work, the latter being of secondary importance. Similarly, child welfare corrects mothers' parenting; they are to rear their children based on middle class norms of mothering, which means engaging in "intensive mothering," managing work outside (wage work) and inside the home (caregiving work) (Hays, 1998) in order to achieve 'good' motherhood. It is important to note that such intensive mothering requires resources, e.g. affordable and accessible child care, for enabling women to cover their double duty (as Swift (1995a) claims above). This kind of mother (a cultural construction) is in direct contradiction with the reality of mothers without resources.

Thus, the findings of this project ultimately suggest that these systems suffer design 'flaws' with the end result being the setting-up of women without resources to 'fail'. Apart but together, these two systems epitomize a paradox: they aim to correct mothering even though they are designed in such a way as to set mothers up to 'fail'. This project's findings suggest that single mothers are in fact positioned to accomplish, and then are 'demonized' under, the neoliberal discursive and material conditions that requires people to use private resources/services to satisfy children's needs and well-being. Being simultaneously involved with welfare and child welfare systems becomes another social barrier that any caregivers without resources have to confront, particularly after welfare reform. Those then are most likely to be single mothers. Therefore, these systems can present these mothers as 'failures', and materially perpetuate the racist and classist discourses that understand the 'underclasses' as morally inferior and in need of discipline through poverty governance (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Generally, workfare programs do not provide single mothers high enough incomes for their families, and actually increase the chance to experience conflicts when trying to balance the demands of parenting and working outside the home (which is exacerbated with a lack of resources) (e.g. Burnham, 2002; Morgen et al., 2010). While these material conditions can affect children's material well-being, the cause of the conditions are attributed to mothers' behaviours, who are then regarded as 'failures'. Mothers' inability to balance the extreme demands of wage work and caregiving work is then counted as a risk factor for maltreatment by the child welfare system (e.g. inadequate income from employment and lack of child care).

These 'failed' mothers may then most likely be transferred to rely on child welfare services (or to get married with a patriarch) in order to supplement the lack of resources especially after welfare reform. Traditionally, the child welfare system offered services that focused on mothers' behaviours, rather than helping them to find/attain resources. In fact, the child welfare system is not designed to give or help mothers with resources in any way. And yet, parenting, domestic violence, AODA, anger management classes and therapy, services that child welfare services apparently do offer, do not change the underlying problems created by a lack of resources, such as adequate income and child care. Even if mothers can learn parenting skills or take domestic violence classes, they still need shelters, jobs, child-care, etc., in order to put these 'skills' into practice. The result is that mothers are perceived to have 'failed' in two systems.

Yet I cannot stress enough that these 'failures' are almost inevitable because of how the two systems individualize poverty and work together to blame mothers when they cannot live up to upper-middle class norms and ideals. How can poor mothers prove

that they are good mothers in their economic situations? Are there any possible chances for poor mothers to show that they are ‘good’ mothers in the systems? The findings of this project suggest that this is not likely. Rather, mothers risk losing welfare (TANF) once their children are removed to foster care, which means that their material conditions can become even worse after the involvement of child welfare services. In light of this, how is it ever possible for a mother to get her children back if her financial situation becomes even worse? In these conditions, it is quite reasonable that mothers feel as though they ‘fail’; the two systems continue to engage with them as if they have, and this ‘failure’ is reinforced when their children are removed from them.

After welfare reform in the U.S., there were higher percentages of mothers with children who did not receive cash assistance, and children placed in foster homes (Wells & Guo, 2006, p. 951). Moreover, “mothers’ incomes have a greater effect on the speed of reunification after welfare reform than before” (Wells & Guo, 2004, p. 74), and “children who entered foster care after welfare reform were reunified more slowly than were children who entered foster care before welfare reform” (Wells & Guo, 2006, p. 953). These post-welfare reform changes are in-line with the findings of this project, which suggests that the relationships between the two systems (welfare and child welfare, which are then impacted by the labor market), post-1996 welfare reform created material and symbolic conditions that blame single mothers for having children without resources. Under the neoliberal gender order that expects women to assume the responsibilities of social reproduction through private means (as a bio-politics: the regulation of populations, Foucault, 1990), impoverished single mothers who fail to do this are punished by removing their children (as an anatomico-politics: the discipline of the human

body, Foucault, 1990). In doing so, individualizing poverty and mother-blame—cultural practice of governance—in the welfare and child welfare systems justify the state of Wisconsin’s avoidance of any responsibility for ensuring basic needs (such as health care, education, housing, and financial support) and welfare of children (in a broad sense).<sup>110</sup>

### **Mothers’ Activism against ‘Poverty Pimps’**

This project finds that mothers’ activism has specifically challenged how the neoliberal shift of the child welfare system has created an industry of ‘poverty pimps’<sup>111</sup>, an industry wherein which child welfare practices seem to be partly controlled by financial incentives, intermediated by the privatization of child welfare services, and constituted by discourses to individualize poverty (as can be seen in the privatized workfare programs).

On March 9, 2009, WW organized a photo bus tour of the \$108 million Bureau headquarters, and some of its contractors among the 169 private agencies and therapists funded by BMCW: 1) the Milwaukee Center for Independence, which provided mandatory parenting and nurturing classes in addition to case management; 2) Children’s Family and Community Partner, run by Children’s Hospital, which was the largest Bureau agency (\$ 22.2 million); and 3) ‘LaCausa’, which was the \$11 million Bureau agency. The goal of the tour was to expose “the Child Welfare Empire to celebrate international women’s day” (WW, 2009b, pp. 28-31).<sup>112</sup>

As WW (e.g. 2009a) specially claims, the imposition of mandatory conditions on mothers in the name to ‘win the return of their children’ is what creates the ‘child welfare empire’ for ‘poverty pimps’: a middle-class or working-class salary for professionals in



public and private agencies. In the organization's conceptualization, public and private child welfare agencies—the pimps—get state benefits for providing services to mothers. They govern mothers' (working women) correction of their behaviours through professional services like therapy and classes. Meanwhile, while foster and adoptive parents—the consumers—receive state funds for rearing children who were conceived, birthed, and nurtured by mothers' caregiving work. Mothers pointed out that money is to be made from, and professional jobs ensured through supervised visits, psychological evaluations, parenting classes, nurturing classes, domestic violence classes, anger management classes, alcohol and other drug abuse classes, individual therapy, family therapy, drug therapy, parental aid, and group meetings with case workers, visit supervisors, and parental aides (WW, n.d.c, p. 2), and these services have been mostly provided through privatized (or non-profit) child welfare agencies, especially in Wisconsin (see Chapter 2).<sup>113</sup> In fact, because standardized risk assessment instruments with their scoring system are used to measure change in behaviours, the change has to be demonstrated (and risk reduced) by the services, which is not necessarily appropriate to the situation facing individual parents, and the result for many mothers is repetition (Swift & Callahan, 2009, pp. 187-192).

While these mandatory classes and therapy are based on the assumption that poverty is an individual concern, and do not change the underlying problems created by a lack of resources, service providers—the pimps—have financial incentives to provide these conditions for mothers. As discussed in Chapter 2, current models of contracting out (privatization) in child welfare often involve performance-based targets and incentives, which “connect payment to the achievement of pre-established goals, whether

in the form of process indicators, outputs, or outcomes” (Freundlich & Gerstenzang, 2003, pp. 17-18). As a result, Levy et al. (2012) claim, these agencies must focus on structuring their workforce to manage financial risks and provide cost-effective services, and “this puts workers under increased pressure to meet deadlines for achieving permanency, finalizing adoptions, or placing children with relatives” (p. 176). Not only is mothers’ behavioural change likely to be assessed in the form of services, but also these services are provided to achieve certain goals tied with financial incentives. Former Georgia senator Nancy Schaefer, who introduced a bill to reform the child welfare system (S. 415, Georgia, 2008), also reveals the pimping system in “the Unlimited Power of Child Protective Services” (2009):

There is a huge bureaucracy made up of judges, court appointed attorneys, Guardian Ad Litem, social workers, state employees, court investigators, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, foster parents, adoptive parents, and on and on, who are looking to the children in state care for their job security. [ . . . ] The federal and state financial incentives [ . . . ] have turned CPS into a business that takes children and separates families for money.

For example, “the child welfare system in New York City is a \$ 2 billion dollar enterprise, employing about 14,000 people in city bureaucracies and voluntary agencies that are involved in the lives of roughly 100,000 children and their families a year” (Tobis, 2013, p. 51). The findings of this project suggest that a portion of child welfare funding that is now used to correct mothers’ behaviours would be better used as public support for child welfare (in a broad sense).

As Schaefer indicated as “the federal and state financial incentives”, there are two specific financial policy contexts entangled with the privatization of child welfare services (see Chapter 2), and which are notable in navigating child welfare practices: 1) the federal child welfare funding structure and 2) the Adoption Incentive Program. The

allocation of federal child welfare funding is identified as contributing to the shift from family preservation to adoptions. The total U.S. child welfare spending in 2012 was 28 billion dollars (460 million dollars in Wisconsin). This spending is for child welfare activities and services, such as protective, prevention, in-home, foster care, and adoption services, and associated administrative costs. Title IV-E, which is an uncapped program, and can only be accessed once children have already been removed from their birth families, is the vast majority of federal funding (DeVooght, Fletcher, & Cooper, 2014) (48 percent in 2006). Other funds come primarily through capped programs. Of these, Title IV-B (which states use for prevention and family preservation work) is the only other financial source exclusive to child welfare services, and Title IV-B accounted for only five percent of child welfare spending in 2006. Most of the remaining funds (44 percent in 2006) came from Medicaid and two other block grant programs—the social services block grant and TANF (Schwartz & Lemley, 2011, p. 556).

Schwartz and Lemley (2011) point out two major criticisms of the current funding system: 1) funding is insufficient for preventative or reunification programs and 2) the only source that provides funding at adequate levels—Title IV-E—may not be used for children who are not in foster care (p. 557). According to them,

Critics claim that the current funding structure creates perverse incentives for child welfare officials to remove children from their homes in order to provide services—that the combination of fixed funding for prevention and support services but open-ended funding for out-of-home care creates an incentive for public agencies to use foster care as the first response rather than offering other services to keep families intact” (Schwartz & Lemley, 2011, p. 557).

As Roberts (2002) echoes, “Funding shortages combine with other institutional limitations to dilute agencies’ family preservation efforts” (p. 142); this occurs in a neo-liberal gender order that prioritizes discourses that individualize poverty. In fact, Title VI-

E waiver demonstrations<sup>114</sup>, flexible funding waivers that support placement prevention, reunification, or post-permanency supports, have provided significant positive changes in child welfare practices, which include an overall decline in the out-of-home placement population in Florida and Ohio. Due to the positive outcomes of the waiver demonstrations, the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-34) allowed ten waivers in each of fiscal years from 2012 to 2014 (Crayton, 2012; Casey Family Programs, 2014).

The Adoption Incentive Program (also known as the Adoption Bonus Program, and now renamed the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments Program) was introduced by ASFA of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-89), and has been reauthorized to make payments to states that increase the number of children adopted from the public out-of-home care system (\$ 4,000 for each child and \$ 6,000 for each child with special needs).<sup>115</sup> Though initially 20 million dollars was authorized and appropriated in the FY1999 budget, and authorized to cover all subsequent years (FY2000-FY2003) because states earned more than anticipated in FY1998, an additional 23 million dollars was appropriated in the FY2000 budget, resulting in a total amount of 43 million dollars appropriated in the FY2000 budget (Maza, 2000, 445). Federal adoption assistance expenditures rose to 1.3 billion dollars in FY2002, and the expenditure was projected to be 2.044 billion dollars for FY2007 (Hansen, 2007, p. 1412). As Hansen (2007) states, “[t]he success of state and federal policy in the late 1990s to promote adoptions is apparent in the doubling adoptions with state agency involvement, from about 25,700 in 1995 to 51,000 in 1999 to just over 52,000 in 2004 and 2005” (p. 1414). Studies have affirmed that higher adoption subsidies are associated with more adoptions from foster

care, and that adoptions have increased under ASFA, although the strategies used by states to increase adoption from foster care has not been adequately studied (Hansen, 2007, p. 1413; Wulczyn, Chen, & Hislop, 2002).<sup>116</sup> Roberts (2002) claims that this bonus program created financial incentives for state and private agencies to keep children in foster care and to place them in adoption, while no financial incentives exist to keep them in their homes or return them there (p. 123). Moreover, adoption is less expensive for government than long-term foster care,<sup>117</sup> and this has encouraged some states to move “towards contracting out adoption services to private agencies [to] continue to improve efficiency” (Hansen, 2008, p. 2428).

To promote adoption is surely important for achieving permanency for children who are placed in foster care. According to Gomez, Ryan, Norton, Jones, and Galan-Cisneros (2015), “[t]he inability to achieve permanency exposes them [children and youth] to numerous risks including: placement instability, mental and behaviour health concerns, physical health challenges, insecure attachments, disrupted relationships, social stigma and isolation, further abuse, and educational instability” (p.507). If youth age out of foster care, they “do not have the financial, medical, or social support tools necessary to bridge this transition successfully, placing a significant burden on youth leaving care”, and there are negative educational, employment, mental and physical health, and criminality outcomes among the population (Scannapieco, Smith, & Blakeney-Strong, 2015, p.294-295). Moreover, research finds many youths who age out of foster care will become homeless (Bender, Yang, Ferguson, & Thompson, 2015, p. 223). However, Rolock and White (2016) suggest that little is known about the long-term success of the placements of children at federally assisted adoptive and guardianship homes, and that,

although the vast majority of children tend not to experience post-permanency discontinuity, Black or African American children, and children with more moves in foster care, maybe at greater risk at discontinuity.

Moreover, while the number of adoptions was increased, every year a certain number of youth age out of foster care. In 2015, nine percent (20,789) of the all children and youth who were discharged from foster care were aged out of foster care (or the emancipation of minors), while 51 percent was reunified with parent(s) or primary caretaker(s), six percent were living with other relative(s), 22 percent were adopted, and nine percent were in guardianship (USHHS, 2016, p. 3). Akin (2011) claims, “[a]ge, race/ethnicity, and child [physical] health/mental health were three of the most consistently studied and statistically significant variables with respect to exits to permanency” (p. 1000). Black or African American children have a lower probability of reunification than White and Hispanic children (Connel, Katz, Saunders, & Tebes, 2006, p. 782), and being White or Asian American/Pacific Islander was a significant predictor of being adopted, while being Black or African American, Hispanic, multiracial, or Indigenous American was significantly associated with remaining in foster care (Snowden, Leon, & Sieracki, 2008, p. 1325). Snowden et al. (2008) claim examining adoptions from a contextual perspective is critical for better understanding why some children are adopted and others are not, with the ultimate goal of improving permanency for these children (p. 1327). Moreover, how child welfare services would affect differently toward populations based on their social positions needs to be examined (e.g. Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016; see Chapter 2).

The financial contexts have potentially shaped child welfare practices (especially those that are privatized) as the social supervision of problematic populations as poverty governance. Mothers can be judged as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (i.e. if mothers need mandatory classes and therapy, and if their children need out-of-home care) by their service providers—pimps—based on not only the discursive conditions to individualize poverty but also the material conditions to financially reward (and profit) the providers themselves (see Nakagawa, 2016). For example, Delbalzo (2006) claims that “Americans fall under the spell of adoption industry”,<sup>118</sup> while adoption and legal guardianship costed \$ 5.04 billion (of the total expenditure of \$ 29.1 billion) in the U.S. in FY2014 (Rosinsky & Connelley, 2016). On the other hand, little is known about what happens to the children involved with child welfare services after the child welfare system fade out, but their foster care exits and well-being seem to be intersected with their social positions especially about their races, mental and physical health issues, and disabilities. This potentially creates the ‘class cycle’<sup>119</sup> which reproduces social arrangement and governance of gender, race, and class. Thus, mothers’ activism is against ‘poverty pimps’ and it reveals the problems of the child welfare system, while mothers’ activism is also against poverty governance writ large.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reviewed the central findings of this project. These main findings culminate in two main arguments. I argued that: 1) the welfare and child welfare systems work together to blame single mothers for their poverty and therefore inability to economically provide for their children (re: the individualization of poverty), particularly

after welfare reform and under the (new) neoliberal gender order which makes women assume social reproduction privately; and 2) mothers' activism has challenged the discourses of dependency and mother-blame, the material implementations of mother-blame in the welfare and child welfare systems, and how the current two systems themselves exacerbate the material conditions for families headed by single mothers. In addition, I argued how mothers' activism is linked to efforts to confront and challenge 'poverty pimps' in the current child welfare industry.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

Housework is a huge rock  
That a woman pushes up a hill  
Day after day, week after week  
Till it reaches the top  
And comes crashing down in thirty seconds  
Crushing her in its wake.  
Again she rises  
Pushes it to the top  
Again it falls  
Again and again and again  
Till she screams out  
'Why am I doing this?'

The man says 'This defines your identity'.  
The man says 'This will relieve depression'.  
The man says 'Failure to push that rock  
Mean we will take your firstborn son,  
The child you bore in your womb 10 months,  
And give him to a better rock pusher'.

The woman says 'I need paid employment'.  
The woman says 'I must support my family'.  
The woman says 'This has no meaning or reward'.  
The man says 'Pushing the rock is your job'.  
The man says 'A good mother pushes her rock'.  
The man says 'Failure to push that rock  
Means we will take your firstborn son,  
Who you took through toilet training and tantrums,  
And give him to a better rock pusher'.

'Failure to push it is child abuse'.  
'Getting kids to help you is child abuse'.  
'Failure to push that rock up the hill  
Means we will take your firstborn son,  
The child you walked to the school bus each morning,  
And give him to a better rock pusher'.

'Failure to push it makes your son skip school'.

'Failure to push it makes your daughter tell lies'.  
'Failure to push that rock up the hill  
Means we will take your firstborn son,  
The child you brought thorough a stormy puberty,  
And give him to a better rock pusher'.

Housework is a rock she pushes daily,  
Pushes it though she knows it will fall  
Pushes it though her firstborn son,  
The child who gets paid for the job he does,  
Has decided to live with a better rock pusher  
While his mother pushes the rock unceasingly.  
The man says 'This will relieve depression' (McCrank, 1992, p. 15).

In this final chapter, I conclude with the findings of my dissertation research in answer to my primary and secondary research questions. I consider the limitations of this research and suggest future research directions.

### **Summary of Findings**

The main purpose of this dissertation was to engage the lived experiences of single mothers involved with welfare and child welfare services and mothers' activism against child welfare services. Specifically, I wanted to more deeply understand: 1) how the material and symbolic dimensions of post-1990 social policy change have worked together in shaping post-1990 restructuring of both areas of welfare services; and 2) how mothers have responded to these reforms, specifically, the nature of mothers' activism against child welfare services given post-1990 welfare restructuring.

Both my research and my interviews with the mothers have pointed that the combination of two systems after welfare reform created the material and symbolic conditions that blame and punish single mothers for having children without resources. Under a neoliberal gender order where women are expected to assume social

reproduction privately—which is regarded as ‘good’ mothering, the current welfare systems disproportionately oppress impoverished families headed by (racialized) single mothers who are not able to live up to systemic expectations, and created unequal bodies as a part of colonizing project. Just as mothers’ poverty is individualized, so too are they to be individually responsible for their achievement of economic security and such ‘good’ mothering. The removal of children becomes a form of punishment that ‘bad’ mothers—mothers unable to live up these expectations—are forced to bear.

The genealogy of welfare reform showed that welfare reform worsened the material conditions of families headed by single mothers through the individualization of poverty. This was achieved through the rhetoric that single mothers must work for a wage, but without the accompanied actions of fixing structural problems of job availability and unemployment. These individualizing poverty discourses entrenched through welfare reform were recontextualized in the child welfare system, which similarly individualizes poverty by not addressing the factors that led child welfare services to be involved in single mothers’ lives in the first place. It is within these intersecting policy contexts that mothers have organized activism to challenge the material implications of the two systems and their accompanying discourses of mother-blame, dependency, the Welfare Queen, good and bad motherhood, single motherhood, and the underclass, as the governance of poverty. In addition, mothers’ activism revealed their feminist struggle to demand welfare rights as social and economic justice, challenging male violence and patriarchy, which are directly connected to women’s economic insecurity.

This project's findings from qualitatively exploring single mothers' experiences of two welfare systems through narrative and discourse analyses informed by feminist standpoint epistemology have additionally exposed how the two systems are similar in how they provide services to correct mothers' 'immoral' behaviours, e.g. their poor work ethic, their maltreatment of children, for the welfare (in a broad sense) of children. However, that these behaviours were often the result of lack of needed resources to manage and balance both wage work and caregiving work after welfare reform has been woefully overlooked by the two systems. Thus, single mothers are, in fact, located in a contentious position under neoliberal discursive and material conditions, which require all people to use private resources to satisfy children's needs and well-being, and are at risk of being demonized still further. Being a part of two systems then itself becomes another social barrier for single mothers, especially after welfare reform. Rather, material practices of disciplining poor mothers' behaviours created the discourse of 'the underclass'—the need for disciplining the poor; it is not that poor people are disciplined for their underclass behaviours but that they are disciplined into the underclass. In this way, neoliberalism achieved ideal ideological and material conditions necessary for poverty governance: poverty is managed and perpetuated as a legitimized structural aspect of neoliberalism.

The findings of this project further suggest that another particular gender order has been institutionalized through the implementation of the two systems: marriage with a male. This kind of marriage is privileged in order to demonize "women who are caught without a male—who were not either married or dependent on the paid work of a male" (Cannella, 2003, pp. 187-188). This project, from a genealogical perspective, found that

the welfare of children (in a broad sense) both constitutes and is constituted by gendered public discourses, which “are of blame and catastrophe, and have become entirely gendered by creating women as immoral beings who require either state or spousal corporeal, economic, and domestic control” (Cannella, 2003, p. 174). These gendered public discourses barely mention males’ and governments’ responsibilities for the welfare of children (in a broad sense). The result is that the existence of ‘immoral’ single mothers creates the need for state control, and “women (and especially poor women) have literally become the instruments for delivery of children to the patriarchy” (Cannella, 2003, p. 174). This hidden cultural assumption has been shifted to a ‘truth’ by implementing welfare and child welfare policies as a cultural practice of governance (see Campbell, 2000). In fact, single motherhood is blamed because of its potential to threaten and subvert patriarchy: “[u]nmarried black women represent the ultimate irresponsible mothers—women who raise their children without the supervision of a man” (Roberts, 2012, p. 1492). Consequently, more than 80 percent of parental neglect cases handled by CPS involve single mothers living in poverty in the U.S. (Sykes, 2011, p. 448), all the while it is crucial to note that physical (and sexual) abuse is often perpetrated by males (WDCF, 2015b, pp. 41-42).

This project also suggests that the oppression inherent in welfare systems depends on each mother’s suffering—especially in terms of the internalizing force of self-hatred. Over the course of this research, employing an anti-racist and decolonizing feminist perspective, it became explicitly evident how mothers’ (and their children’s) bodies are materially violated, which can cause those oppressed to self-blame as they internalize the colonial project.

A. Smith (2005a) discloses that the colonial project's use of violence against Indigenous women establishes the discourse that Native bodies are inherently violable, and claims,

As a consequence of this colonization and abuse of their bodies, Indian people learn to internalize self-hatred, because body image is integrally related to self-esteem. When one's body is not respected, one begins to hate oneself [...] [W]hen the bodies of Indian people are designated as inherently sinful and dirty, it becomes a sin just to be Indian. Native peoples internalize the genocidal project thorough self-destruction (p. 12).

Similarly, the colonial project against (racialized) single mothers in the U.S. has forced mothers to "internalize [racial and class] oppression that it has transformed into a self-hatred" (Bond, 2000, as cited in Silliman, Fried, Ross, & Gutierrez, 2004, p. 14). Particularly in the area of child welfare, many Black or African American single mothers involved with CPS suffer from depression and internalizing self-hatred. Mothers are even accused of their "self-destructive impulses" (see Reich, 2005, p. 23), which become the justifications to use TPR (Termination of Parental Rights).

As evident in this project, mothers' activism has created an avenue towards emancipation by helping mothers to validate their feelings. Mothers in this project learned through WW and interaction with each other that the system is the problem, and not mothers. Moreover, they connected their child welfare cases with issues of social equality and justice. How much emancipation mothers' activism has contributed to society is difficult to assess as it is not straightforward to see activism's contribution to policy outcomes, but is clear that mother's activism contributes to the building of social justice more broadly (see Ernst, 2010).

### **Study Limitations**

This project has several limitations. In addition to the potential sampling technique limitations that I discussed in Chapter 3, it could be said that another limitation was that the sample size was small. However, the interview participants were relatively different in terms of socio-demographics. In addition, some of them were long time activists, so over the years they have encountered and/or helped many cases regarding welfare and child welfare systems. Moreover, I also read many cases from *MWV* that mothers themselves reported, which helped me to build a broad sense of the kinds of child/welfare cases that have (and still are) happening from mothers' perspectives. In-depth interviews for this project, which sought mothers' stories of their lives, were a rich source of data that helped to fill in a gap in scholarly and policy-based literature on the intersections of welfare and child welfare systems. Moreover, I note once again that there is an apparent lack of rigorous qualitative research on activism related to the child welfare system. This project attempted to fill in such gaps in the wider literatures.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Little research has: 1) analyzed the connections between welfare reform and reforms of the *child* welfare system, specifically Child Protective Services (CPS) (and also the connections between welfare and child welfare systems); 2) employed a structural analysis to comprehend the current child welfare system; 3) focused on the perspectives and experiences of impoverished mothers involved with child welfare services, and; 4) considered social movements and activism on child welfare services. Most studies on the child welfare system subdivide the system into specific areas, and do not often take up anti-racist and/or feminist analyses as central methodological or

epistemological concerns when framing problems, designing inquiries and carrying out research. No research has yet used ‘governance’ as a framework for thinking about the system as a whole. My study brought all these analytical angles together and traced through a set of interviews with single mothers, the implications of governance, and the entanglement of welfare and child protective services on their everyday lives. More research is needed though on all of these points, particularly in relation to policies/policy making and the histories, and political and economic orders that intersect these issues.

My contributions toward the understanding and prioritization of this structure has brought to the fore the importance of more studies. Future feminist research needs to include a response to the relationships between domestic violence and the child welfare system (e.g. Jenney, Mishna, Alaggia, & Scott, 2014), including an analysis of whether and how domestic violence shelters report abused mothers to child welfare services (see for example Renner, Slack, & Berger, 2008). In addition, because this study illustrated how mothers’ activism challenges systemic oppressions in only the child welfare system, future research should branch out and examine how other kinds of activism engage with similar issues such as quality issues of legal representation for parents in courts (see Tobis, 2013) and governance issues in other areas (see Soss et al. 2011). Another potential area for research is the effects and efficacy of privatizing child protection services (see Humphrey, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2006). Moreover, we need future research to examine the placements of children at federally assisted adoptive and guardianship homes in a long term from a contextual perspective (see Snowden et al. 2008; Rolock & White, 2016).



Given that this project focuses on mothers who have been fighting for reunification with their children, future research in this area could also address experiences of mothers who stopped trying to get reunification. This project suggests that many mothers are forced to give up their children, even before reaching TPR (such as the case of a mother with twins, who came to WW to get help but then gave up). In the current context of mother-blame and promoting adoptions, it is important to explore what makes mothers give up their children.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, this project focused on the specific context of Wisconsin, so future research needs to focus on and seriously consider the dynamics of child/welfare in other state contexts. In addition, child welfare services tend not to be directly experienced by researchers, so researchers need to try to use (or create) methods which enable them to see as much as possible the mothers' diverse experiences with child welfare services. It is crucial that research see mothers' experiences in mothers' own terms, and one such possible method for achieving this could be through Participatory Action Research (see Eubanks, 2011).

Finally, the findings of this project have implications for feminist scholarship on reproductive justice. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is an apparent racial disproportionality in the population involved with child welfare services, especially in foster care populations across the U.S. Similar to my observation of how CPS cases are concentrated in poor racialized neighborhoods in Milwaukee, Roberts (2008) claims, “[i]n the nation’s cities, child protection cases are concentrated in communities of color. Many poor black neighborhoods in particular have extremely high rates of involvement by child welfare agencies, especially placement of children in foster care” (p. 127). It is vitally important to understand how “[n]ationally, 60% of the children in foster care are

black, Latino, or other races” (Tobis, 2013, p. 24), and “[i]n New York City, 96% of the children in care in 2007 were children of color” (Tobis, 2013, p. xxiv). The racial disproportionality of the children in child welfare must be explored in relation to reproductive justice. Overall in the U.S., “reproductive freedom depends on wealth and social status” (Roberts, 1997, p. 245), so that “the failure to ensure reproductive justice lands hardest on the most vulnerable members of society” (Flavin, 2009, p. 182). As Flavin (2009) aptly states, “[t]oday, the state weighs in not only on whether a woman can terminate her pregnancy but also on whether a woman can continue a pregnancy and give birth (and under what conditions), raise her children, and enjoy reproductive health free from violence or fear” (p. 183).

There is still not enough literature that focuses on issues surrounding the regulation of racialized women’s and poor women’s reproduction (see Silliman et al., 2004), let alone how women organize and mobilize to challenge this regulation. As well, this project suggests that future research on reproduction as well as research on social welfare policy and its outcomes needs to take intersectional anti-racist and decolonizing feminist perspectives in order to account critically for the lived experiences of women.

This project explored single mother's lived experiences with welfare and child welfare systems, and revealed poor (racialized) single mothers are at risk of governance by not one but two welfare systems. This project suggested that these women potentially have lived in and/or fought against the dire reality: systemic deprivation of children. Two systems are common in depicting and judging mothers' behaviours by omitting their mother work—women's social reproduction work—as apparatus for the state: as an activist mother claims, the years devoted to love and the care of children, the endless rounds of maintaining a home, nurturing important lives, and the character, value, and resources needed to perform those tasks are rarely taken into consideration when assessing mothers in two welfare systems (Hanson, 1995, p. 1: see also Nakagawa, 2009, p. 11). The governing mentalities make two systems be compelled to punish single mothers, because single mothers embody a threat to reveal that social reproduction should be a shared responsibility, while women are forced to assume this responsibility (see Campbell, 2000, pp. 223-225).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participants' Descriptions of Involvement with CPS.

<b>Participants' descriptions of involvement with CPS.</b>	
All participants except one volunteer advocate (P1, 32 years old, White, interviewed on July 26, 2013) (15 participants) had experienced the involvement with CPS for their children (or a niece and nephew for one participant). All allegations were against the mothers of the children. Two participants experienced the involvement with CPS before welfare reform, and the rest of them experienced it after welfare reform.	
1	Gowens: Director of WW. 68 years old. White single mother of three children. All children in her care (interviewed on July 24, 2013).
2	P2: Long-time activist of WW. 70 years old. White single mother of three children, aged 12, 10, and 7 at the involvement of CPS. Two children in outside care (the treatment centers and foster homes) separately. Both returned after three years (before welfare reform) (interviewed on July 26, 2013).
3	P3: 19 years old. African American single mother of two children, aged 2 and 10 months. One child in outside care (foster home). She returned after one year (interviewed on July 16, 2013).
4	P4: 27 years old. Biracial married mother of two children, aged 7 and 2 months. Two children in outside care (by their grandmother). Both returned after one month (interviewed on July 18, 2013).
5	P5: 33 years old. African American single mother of six children. Six children in outside of care separately. Three children (aged 18, 16, and 14) returned after six months. Three children (aged 13, 11, and 10) were in a group home (interviewed on July 20, 2013).
6	P6: 30 years old. Hispanic single mother of four children, aged from 7 to 12. Four children in outside care (three foster homes). All returned after one year (interviewed on July 30, 2013).
7	P7: 43 years old. African American single mother of three children, aged 25, 22, and 18. One child (18 years old) in outside care. (interviewed on July 15, 2013).
8	P8: 23 years old. African American single mother of two children, aged 4 and 3 (and pregnant). Two children in outside care (foster homes) separately. TPR process for two children (interviewed on July 26, 2013).
9	P9: 55 years old. White single father of seven children, aged from 12 to 30. One child (12 years old) in outside care (foster home). TPR process for the child (interviewed on July 19, 2013)
10	P10: 45 years old. African American single mother of three children, aged 14, 13, and 11. Three children in outside care. TPR for all children after 7 years (interviewed on July 19, 2013).
11	P11: 55 years old. Indigenous single mother of seven children. Two children in outside care (foster homes and group homes) separately. TPR for one child. Another child (16 years old) was in a group home (interviewed on July 23, 2013).
12	P12: 19 years old. African American single mother of two children, aged 2 and 5 months. Two children in outside care (foster homes) separately. TPR process for

	one child (2 years old). Another child (5 months old) was in a foster home (interviewed on July 25, 2013).
13	P13: 26 years old. Jamaican single mother of two children, aged 7 and 2. Two children in outside care (foster homes) separately (interviewed on July 25, 2013).
14	P14: 45 years old. Multi-racial single mother of four children. One niece and one nephew in outside care (foster homes) separately (interviewed on July 30, 2013).
15	P15: 34 years old. African American single mother of two children, aged 12 and 5 (and pregnant). Two children in outside care (by their grandmother) (interviewed on July 15, 2013).

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

### **Interview Questions:**

Researcher: Shihoko Nakagawa

Participants: The current and former members of the MaGoD (Mothers and Grandmothers of Disappeared Children) Project of the WW, and their advocates

Note: Some changes and addition to these proposed questions will occur during and between the interviews.

(\* for advocates)

### **Demographic Questions**

- Age
- Marital Status
- Race/Ethnicity/Cultural Background
- (Sexual Orientation)
- Education
- Rent/Own House
- Total household income
- Number of months receiving TANF/W-2
- Number of people in the household/ Number of Children, their ages (with you, fostered, or other)
- (Age at the birth of first child)

### **1. Questions about the experiences of Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Services (CWS)**

1. Can you tell me about *your case of child protective intervention* done by CPS/CWS? Did CPS offer an *evidence of neglect or abuse*? If so, what was it? If not, what was their reason for the intervention?
2. What kind of *requirements* did CPS/CWS make you go through (e.g. supervised visits, parenting classes)? How do you feel about the requirements? What conditions did you meet so far to get your kids back? How do case workers treat you?
3. In your relationship to CPS/CWS, have you gone to *courts for hearing*? Can you tell me about this experience? (prob. how do you feel about the court process?) Did you have a jury trial?
4. \*How do you *feel* about CPS/CWS?
5. \*How has CPS/CWS changed *your life, your family, and your community*?
6. How was *your life style* (e.g. your income, your standard of living, housing, and work (including mothering)) changed by CPS/CWS?
7. \*How do you think the meaning of *neglect* is understood by CPS/CWS? Has this meaning changed? In your opinion, what are the reasons CPS/CWS may understand neglect differently than you do?
8. \*How does CPS/CWS understand *child well-being and child maltreatment*? Is this different from how you understand child well-being and child maltreatment? If so, how?
9. \*How do you think the meaning of *motherhood* (prob. single motherhood) is understood by CPS/CWS? Has this meaning changed? In your opinion, what are the reasons CPS/CWS may understand motherhood differently than you do? (prob. ideas



of race)

10. \*How does your relationship with CPS/CWS affect *your sense of self* (as a mother)?
11. \*How do you think CPS/CWS might be experienced differently by *people of color, women, and single mothers*? Do you find racism/sexism/classism about CPS?
12. What *benefits* have you experienced because of CPS/CWS?
13. What *challenges* have you experienced because of CPS/CWS?
14. \*What *changes* would you make to CPS/CWS?

## **2. Questions about the experiences of the welfare reform of 1996/W-2**

1. \*What do you know about *the changes made to welfare in Wisconsin in the 1990s/the welfare reform of 1996*? Can you tell me how you felt about these changes?

If you know the changes/the welfare reform

2. \*How do you think *the meaning of motherhood* (prob. *child well-being, single motherhood*) has changed because of changes to welfare? In your opinion, what are the reasons governments using reforms to change how we think about motherhood? (prob. ideas of race, ideas of child well-being)

If you are/were on welfare/W-2

3. What kind of experiences did you have to go through for *welfare/W-2* and at *the welfare office* (e.g. administrative processes)?
4. \*How have (changes to) welfare/W-2 changed *your life, your family, and your community*?
5. How was *your life style* (e.g. your income, your standard of living, housing, and work (including mothering)) changed by (the changes to) welfare/W-2?
6. \*How have you heard the expression of "*welfare queen*"? What does it mean to you?
7. \* How does welfare/W-2 affect your *sense of self* (as a mother)?
8. \*How do you think (changes to) welfare/W-2 might be experienced differently by *people of color, women, and single mothers*?
9. What *benefits* have you experienced by being on welfare/W-2?
10. What *challenges* have you experienced because of being on welfare/W-2?
11. \*What *changes* would you make to welfare?

## **3. Questions about the relationships between the welfare reform and Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Services (CWS)**

1. \*In what ways, do you see welfare and child welfare as *connected* to each other?
2. \*Would you say there are *similarities or differences* between welfare and CPS/CWS?
3. \*Would you say there is *overlap between the changes* made to welfare and changes made to CPS/CWS?

## **4. Questions about engagement with activism on child welfare services**

1. \*Can you tell me how you *started* engaging in activism against child welfare services?
2. \*What were the major *motivations* for you to engage in activism?
3. What are/were the major *supports* you get from your activism?
4. \*What kind of *activities or events* have you participated in so far?
5. \*What are/were *the goals* for the MaGoD Project/the WW and for you? How do you

- feel these goals match your own goals for activism?
6. \*What do you think activism against child welfare have *achieved* so far? What do you think are the reasons for the successes? OR What do you think are the reasons the activism have *failed* so far?
  7. \*How did your understanding of *motherhood* (prob. *child well-being, single motherhood, and race*) change by your activism? How did your own *sense of self* (as a mother) change through your activism?
  8. \*What do you think are the biggest changes your participation in activism has brought to *your life*, as well as *your way of thinking*?

(If you have not participated)

9. \*What do the activism mean to *you, your family, and your community*?
10. \*What do you think the activism mean to *people of color, women, and single mothers*?
11. \*What do you think the activism mean to *feminism* today?
12. \*Can you tell me anything that you think is *special* about the MaGoD Project/the WW?

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

**Study name:** Single Mothers and Child Welfare in the U.S.: Post-1990 Welfare Reforms

**Researcher:** Shihoko Nakagawa (Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Program in Women's Studies, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada) Email address: ----- Office phone: -----

**Purpose of the research:** is to explore the post-1990 relationships between Child Protective Services (CPS) and welfare reform in Wisconsin, the nature of mothers' activisms against child welfare services, and the different understandings mothers may hold about child well-being and parental child maltreatment in comparison to CPS.

**What you will be asked to do in the research:** is to share your experiences 1) with welfare and Child Protective Services/Child Welfare Services, and 2) of your participation in activisms against child welfare services if applicable. The interview that I will be conducting with you will be of approximately one hour (or a maximum of two hours).

**Risks and discomforts:** You may experience some discomfort in discussing your experiences. To mitigate the risks of any psychological triggering, I will provide suggestions of mental health resources that are available in the area or region where you are located.

**Benefits of the research and benefits to you:** Your answers will enable you to share your valuable thoughts and ideas and/or may help you resolve some questions you have about Social Services and Child Welfare Services. The results of this study will increase knowledge about Social Services and Child Welfare Services, and be used to recommend changes to Social Services and Child Welfare Services.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the relationship you may have with the researcher or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** The interview will be recorded to ensure an accurate reproduction of your words. The tapes will be kept in strict confidence and will be destroyed once the research is over. Only a made up name for each participant will appear in the final transcripts of the interviews; **your real name will not be identified in any written account of the research.** Moreover, I will be using your answers as a basis for my doctoral dissertation. While aspects of the interview data will be included in the dissertation and may be published, **your identity will always be kept in confidence and will not be shared with anyone.** Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the research?** This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please feel free to contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, (5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University) at phone ----- or e-mail (-----), or the Program Director of Graduate Program in Women's Studies, ----- (206G Founders College, York University) at phone ----- or e-mail (-----).

**Legal rights and signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in "Single Mothers and Child Welfare in the U.S.: Post-1990 Welfare Reforms," conducted by Shihoko Nakagawa. I have understood the nature

of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Appendix D: Safety and risk assessment in Wisconsin** (*italics added by the author*)

<b>1. Items to assess present danger threats at initial assessment/investigation</b>
<b>1) Maltreatment</b>
The child is currently being maltreated at the time of the report or contact Severe to extreme maltreatment of the child is suspected, observed, or confirmed The child has multiple or different kinds of injuries The child has injuries to the face or head The child has unexplained injuries The maltreatment demonstrates bizarre cruelty The maltreatment of several victims is suspected, observed, or confirmed The maltreatment appears premeditated Dangerous (life threatening) living arrangements are present
<b>2) Child</b>
Parent's viewpoint of child is bizarre Child is unsupervised and unable to care for self Child needs medical attention The child is profoundly fearful of the home situation or people within the home
<b>3) Parent</b>
Parent is intoxicated (alcohol or other drugs) now or is consistently under the influence Parent is out of control (mental illness or other significant lack of control) Parent is demonstrating bizarre behaviors Parent is unable or unwilling to perform basic care Parent is acting dangerous now or is described as dangerous Parent's whereabouts are unknown <i>One or both parents overtly reject intervention.</i>
<b>4) Family</b>
The family may flee The family hides the child <i>Child is subject to present/active domestic violence</i>
<b>5) Child Vulnerability</b>
Age Physical Disability Mental Disability Provocative Powerless Defenseless Non Assertive Illness Invisible
<b>2. Items to assess impending danger (a foreseeable state of danger) and develop safety plans at safety assessment at the conclusion of initial assessment/investigation</b>
<b>1) The Extent of Maltreatment</b>

<p>Nature and extent of maltreatment  Symptoms  Specific events and circumstances  Condition and location of the presenting child  Duration  Progression  Pattern</p>
<p><b>2) Circumstances Surrounding the Maltreatment</b></p> <p>Isolation  Stress and coping  Violence  Multi-generational / historical  Explanation for maltreatment, events or family circumstances  Openness and truthfulness  Mental health issues  Substance use issues  <i>Parents'/caregivers' response to CPS.</i>  History and duration of the maltreatment; chronicity and pervasiveness.  Contextual issues such as the use of objects, threats, intentional, bizarre.</p>
<p><b>3) Child Functioning</b></p> <p>Child vulnerability  Special needs or unusual behaviors  Sense of security compared to fearfulness  Developmental status  Physical health and healthcare  If school age, school attendance and performance  Suicidal, homicidal, or dangerously impulsive behavior  Developmentally/age appropriate social outlets; peer relationships; physical activity  History of being sexually reactive/sexual acting out  Signs of positive attachment with parent or caregiver  Nature of affect; mood; temperament  Behaviors in terms of being within or beyond normal limits  Sleeping arrangements  Child perceptions about intervention for self or other family members  Appropriateness of child's responsibilities within the home and family condition of the child  Usual location(s) of the child  Accessibility of the child to danger or threatening people</p>
<p><b>4) Adult Functioning</b></p> <p>Reality orientation  Reality perception  Problem awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance  Self evaluation as part of life situation  Openness and defensiveness  Mood and temperament  Emotional control</p>

Self control  
 Self aware  
 Coping  
 Impulse management  
 Problem solving; planning  
 Judgment  
 Acts  
 Assertive  
 Approach to meeting needs and desires  
 Accountable  
 Dependable  
 Reliable  
 Trustworthy  
 Sensible  
 Settled

**5) Parenting and Disciplinary Practices**

Parent/caregiver self perception and attitude about parenting  
 Parent/caregiver history of parenting including how parent/caregiver was parented  
 Parenting style; awareness and rationale for parenting style  
 Parent/caregiver knowledge of child development  
 Parent/caregiver perception of the child  
 Parent/caregivers recognition of the child's needs  
 Nature of attachment existing between parent/caregiver and child  
 Parent/caregiver expressed concern and empathy for the child  
 Parent/caregiver tolerance of the child  
 Parent/caregiver reaction toward the child; manner of responding  
 Interaction between the parent/caregiver and child  
*Parent/caregivers manner of expression and communication with the child*  
 Parent/caregiver alignments; alignment with child  
 Parent/caregivers attitudes about; willingness and ability to supervise and protect  
 Parent/caregivers ability to accurately identify threats to child safety; recognize danger  
 Parent/caregivers ability to defer their own personal needs in favor of the needs of their child  
 Parent/caregivers recognition of a child's need for supervision and protection  
 Parent/caregivers perception regarding their responsibility to protect  
 Parent/caregivers motivation to protect and meet basic needs  
 Parent/caregivers ability to recognize a child's strengths, needs and limitations  
*The nature of child care in terms of providing basic needs compared to the child's age and his/her extent of self sufficiency*  
*Parents'/caregivers' understanding and beliefs about their primary role to assure basic needs and protection*  
*Parents'/caregivers' knowledge and skill to provide basic needs*  
*Parents'/caregivers' ability to access resources and/or plan how to use resources to meet basic needs*  
*Type and nature of disciplinary approaches*

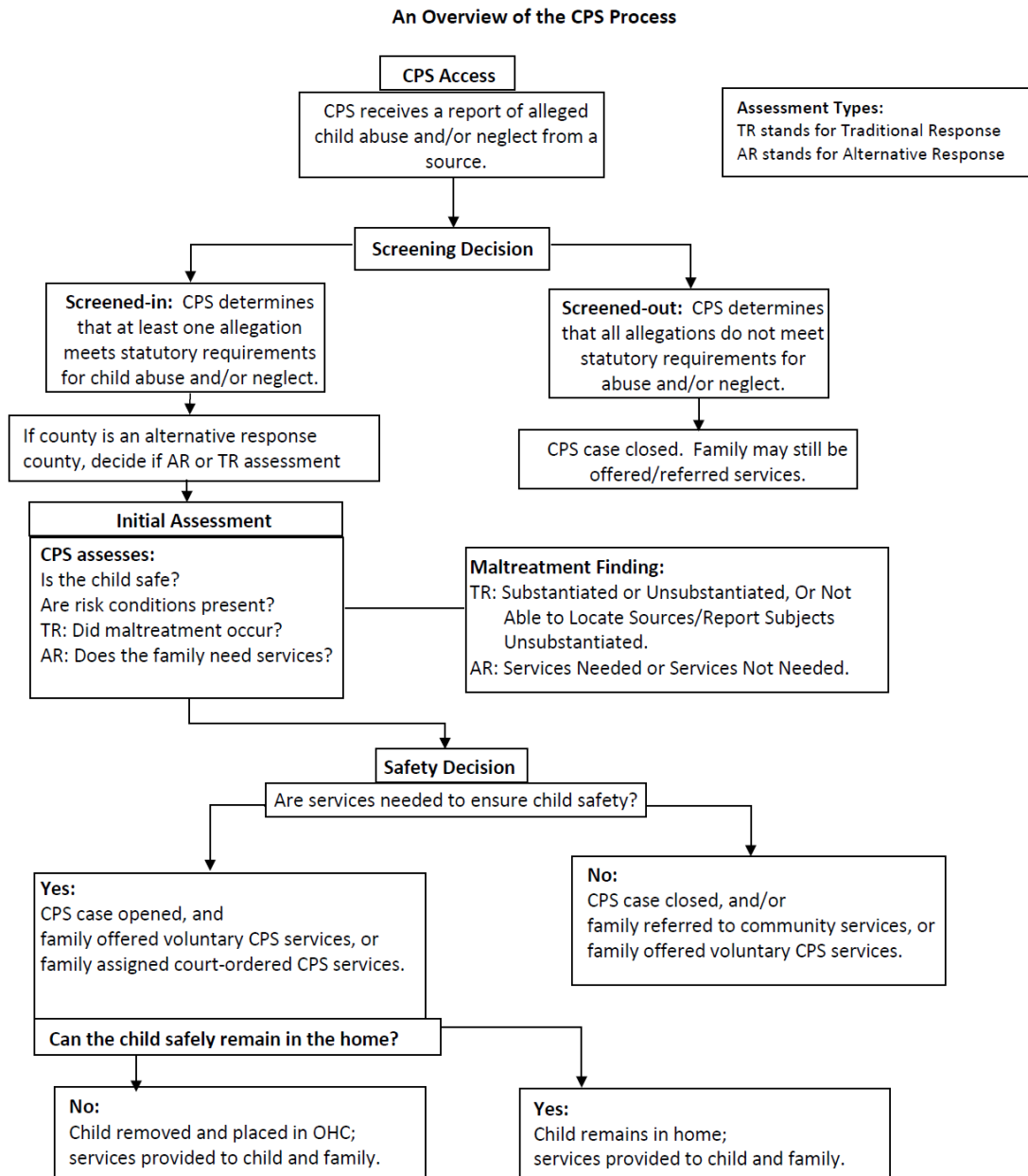
Purpose for discipline Plan for approaching discipline Parents'/caregivers' self awareness regarding the effectiveness of disciplinary approaches and their reaction(s) toward the child Parents'/caregivers' expectations for the child behaviour and response Parents'/caregivers' emotional state related to discipline Balance of discipline as a function of parenting compared to other parenting Responsibilities
<b>3. Items to assess and identify parent/caregiver protective capacities when a child is unsafe</b>
<b>1) Behavioral Protective Capacities</b>
The parent/caregiver has a history of protecting The parent/caregiver takes action. The parent/caregiver demonstrates impulse control. The parent/caregiver is physically able and has adequate energy. The parent/caregiver has/demonstrates adequate skill to fulfill responsibilities. The parent/caregiver sets aside her/his needs in favor of a child. The parent/caregiver is adaptive as a caregiver. The parent/caregiver is assertive as a caregiver. The parent/caregiver uses resources necessary to meet the child's basic needs. The parent/caregiver supports the child.
<b>2) Cognitive Protective Capacities</b>
The parent/caregiver plans and articulates a plan to protect the child. The parent/caregiver is aligned with the child. The parent/caregiver has adequate knowledge to fulfill caregiving responsibilities and tasks. The parent/caregiver is reality oriented; perceives reality accurately. The parent/caregiver has accurate perceptions of the child. The parent/caregiver understands his/her protective role. The parent/caregiver is self-aware.
<b>3) Emotional Protective Capacities</b>
The parent/caregiver is able to meet own emotional needs. The parent/caregiver is emotionally able to intervene to protect the child. The parent/caregiver is resilient. The parent/caregiver is tolerant. The parent/caregiver displays concern for the child and the child's experience and is intent on emotionally protecting the child. The parent/caregiver and child have a strong bond and the parent/caregiver is clear that the number one priority is the child. The parent/caregiver expresses love, empathy, and sensitivity toward the child.
<b>Definitions of impending danger threats</b>



1. No adult in the home will perform parental duties and responsibilities.
2. *One or both parents/caregivers are violent.*
3. One or both parents'/caregivers' behavior is dangerously impulsive or they will not/cannot control their behaviour.
4. One or both parents/caregivers have extremely negative perceptions of the child.
5. *Family does not have or use resources necessary to assure the child's basic needs.*
6. One or both parents/caregivers fear they will maltreat the child and/or request placement.
7. One or both parents/caregivers intend(ed) to seriously hurt the child.
8. One or both parents/caregivers lack parenting knowledge, skills, or motivation necessary to assure the child's basic needs are met.
9. The child has exceptional needs which the parents/caregivers cannot or will not meet.
10. *Living arrangements seriously endanger the child's physical health.*
11. The child is profoundly fearful of the home situation or people within the home.

(WDCF, 2016)

## Appendix E: An Overview of the CPS Process in Wisconsin



TR: Traditional Response  
AR: Alternative Response  
OHC: Out-of-Home Care  
(WDCF, 2015b, p. 59)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gowens requested me to use her real name to quote her interview in this project. All other names were changed to pseudonyms. Moreover, I would like to mention that Gowens is White, while she has worked with many racialized women as the director of the organization.

<sup>2</sup> While the word of ‘welfare’ is used broadly to indicate programs and services for the poor in the U.S. such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and Medicaid, I use the word of ‘welfare’ in this dissertation in the limited sense to only indicate a care allowance for families with dependent children, such as AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and TANF. I use ‘public assistance’ for the broad meaning of welfare. When I use the word ‘welfare’ more broadly indicating well-being and happiness, I add (in a broad sense of the term).

<sup>3</sup> Foster care caseloads decreased by 23.3 percent between 2002 and 2011 (USHHS, 2013a, p. 2). However, since 2012, the number was increased every year from 397,301 (2012) to 427,910 (2015) (USHHS, 2016, p. 1).

<sup>4</sup> I use the word the ‘racialized’ for indicating ‘people of color’, those who are differentiated from the norm according to ‘race’.

<sup>5</sup> Genealogy is to eschew origins, seeking numberless beginnings that reveal the dispersions and deviations inherent in descent (A. T. Smith, 1994, p. 41). Foucault (1988; 1995) reveals that power already affects how we tell history and arrange historical acts in a specific order, and not these acts happened based on the reasons or norms but these acts had actually created the reasons and norms.

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, previous research has brought to light the many constituencies that have informed the evolution of the American welfare state: elderly people, veterans, social workers, single mothers, politicians, policy makers, and tax payers (Nadasen et al., 2009, p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> In the U.S., neoconservatism can mean the same as, or has similarities with, neoliberalism (Brown, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, conservatives wielded anti-welfare discourses, such as ‘underclass’ discussions, which blamed AEDC for poverty and social disorder among the urban racialized. However, many liberal politicians accepted the basic contours of the conservative argument, while only welfare rights activists—joined by a handful of allies among middle-and working-class feminists, religious organizations, and community organizers—offered a real alternative to the growing attack on poor single mothers and AFDC (Nadasen et al., 2009, pp. 63-84; Ellwood, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Approximately 48 states are mandated by law to report child maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> Demonstration programs and projects are the programs that allow states to use federal funding.

<sup>11</sup> I use ‘Black or African American’ (and ‘White’) in order to problematize the construction of ‘race’ and to respect and represent their self-identified identities.

<sup>12</sup> Nadasen (2005) claims that her research participants “defended their status as single mothers and disputed arguments vilifying them. For these welfare activists, liberation meant preserving their right to be women and mothers independent of men” (p. 146).

<sup>13</sup> “For Black women, the struggle to preserve their right to be mothers was viewed historically as a challenge to the subordination of African Americans” (Nadasen, 2002, p. 280). See also Gumbs, Martens, & Williams, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Internal tension in NWRO was created between the radical positions of Black or African American mothers with male staff members around family ideals and work for wage. This revealed how the eventual decline of NWRO resulted from the gendered, racialized and classed assumptions underlying WIN (Nadasen, 2002, pp. 291-293).

<sup>15</sup> There have been a number of studies assessing welfare and post-welfare reforms, on a variety of topics including the contexts of welfare reform, poverty, and family relations, and race, ethnicity, and immigration in relation to welfare reforms (see for example, Albelda & Withorn, 2002; Kilty & Segal, 2006). Advocates in favor of welfare reform focus mainly on: 1) the decline in TANF; 2) the increase in employment rates of single mothers during the 1990s; and 3) the decline in child poverty during the 1990s. In contrast, opponents of welfare ‘reform’, those who view the 1996 welfare reform as welfare ‘destruction’, focus mainly on: 1) the recent increase in child poverty; 2) the decrease in employment rates among single mothers since 2000; 3) the increase in the number of people receiving neither work nor

welfare; and 4) the steep decline in TANF participation among eligible families (Nathan, 2007, pp. 369-385). Moreover, there has been a focus in post-welfare reform research on moral perspectives, leaver studies, devolution and disconnection, and sanctioning (McNeil, 2012, pp. 11-13). Much scholarship focuses on the racism that exists in both welfare reform and post-welfare reform (see for example Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Schram, Soss, & Fording, 2003). Studies continue to suggest that poverty persists among mothers who have left welfare for the labor market (Mink, 2002a, p. 105). Welfare leavers do not experience improvements in terms of stress levels and mental health status as they exit the rolls, nor did the lives of children improve as a result of welfare reform and increases in mother's employment (Shanks and Danziger, 2016). Meanwhile, participation in other antipoverty programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), housing assistance, and Individual Development Account (IDA), has grown (Shanks & Danziger, 2016, pp. 31-36). Danziger and Danziger (2010) claim, "welfare reform furthered a profound shift in social welfare spending away from the nonworking poor and toward the working poor that began in the early 1980s" (p. 261).

Feminist analysts have pointed out several issues that have received less attention, specifically how welfare and post-welfare reforms intersect with gender, race and class and/to regulate women's everyday lives. According to Christopher (2004), there are five fundamentals of feminist research on welfare reform: 1) the research questions are drawn from women's lived experiences; 2) the research addresses the influence of social, economic, and political institutions on women's everyday lives; 3) the research uses feminism as a theory of action; 4) the research acknowledges and accounts for women's unpaid work; and 5) the research highlights power differences between women and men (pp. 153-154). As Harding (1987) points out, introducing the 'subjective' element into the analysis is critically important for feminist analyses, because it deconstructs the binary between what is 'subjective' and 'objective', increases objectivity, and decreases 'objectivism' by increases of a critical understanding of objectivity (p. 9). Therefore, feminists have analyzed welfare and post-welfare reforms by examining single mothers' experiences and/or articulating single mothers' voices, particularly through interviewing them (for example, Naples, 1998; Seccombe, 1999; Collins & Mayer, 2010). Feminists suggest that the TANF regime's refusal to invest in mothers' employment opportunities and earning power, paternity establishment, and child support rules reveals the assumption that fathers are the best substitute for welfare, and that "the TANF regime treats wage work as the alternative to marriage, not to welfare—as punishment for mothers' independency" (Mink, 2002b, p. 97).

<sup>16</sup> Greer (2007) claims, "the road to becoming self-sufficient through the mandatory work program impacts [women's] roles as mothers and providers and ultimately affects the future of their children" (p. 2).

<sup>17</sup> Workfare trends, trends characterized by states' intervention, are combined with the cultural and economic shifts to promote women's employment (mainly not to provide their families but to supplement men's (especially low-wage) employment) across the 'developed' countries (Orloff, 2006, pp. 230-231).

<sup>18</sup> While the commodification approach contains a basic social fault line, dividing breadwinners from others and placing considerable disadvantages onto those mostly women (Fraser, 1997, p. 53) based on the devaluation of women's care-giving work, the de-commodification approach consolidates the gendered divisions of labor in the home. However, it is important to emphasize that the notion of de-commodification does not necessarily account for gender differences and needs (Fraser, 1997; Bashevkin, 2002; Mckeen, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Because of Esping-Andersen's (1990) analysis of welfare regimes, which emphasized the de-commodification of women's labor as a main characteristic of welfare in comparison to the current workfare trends of commodification of women's labor, social welfare policy analyses continue to be shaped through the dichotomous argument of commodification or de-commodification.

<sup>20</sup> The major programs are the Child Welfare Service Program, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, the Foster Care Maintenance program, the Adoption Assistance program, the Independent Living program, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and other federal programs including the Social Services Block Grant, Medicaid, and TANF block grants (Greenberg et al., 2002, p. 43).

<sup>21</sup> For example, the key policies enacted after PRWORA are the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-89) (Allen & Bissell 2004), Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Pub. L. 106-169), Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 (Pub. L. 108-36), the Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 (Pub. L. 108-145), and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-351) (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 82-84).

<sup>22</sup> The current federal anti-poverty programs are Subsidized Housing (1937), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (1964) (changed from the food stamp program in 2008), Women, Infants, and Children (1972), Supplemental Security Income (1974), Section 8 (1974), Earned Income Tax Credit (1975), Hope VI (1993), Child Care and Development Block Grant (1996), TANF (1996), Workforce Investment (1998) (Shanks & Danziger, 2011, pp. 34-45).

<sup>23</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013b), “[m]ore than three-quarters (78.3%) of victims were neglected, 18.3 percent were physically abused, and 9.3 percent were sexually abused” (p. 20). “In addition, 10.6 percent of victims experienced such ‘other’ types of maltreatment as ‘threatened abuse’, ‘parent’s drug/alcohol abuse’, or ‘safe relinquishment of a newborn’” (USHHS, 2013b, p. 20).

<sup>24</sup> “[A]n accountability mechanism developed by the U.S. Children’s Bureau to assess child welfare system performance in the areas of safety, permanency, and stability” (Berrick, 2011, p. 28).

<sup>25</sup> The program is now renamed as the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments Program.

<sup>26</sup> According to Swift (1991), the usual presentation of neglect is ideological in form (p. 246).

<sup>27</sup> Paxson and Waldfogel (2002) claim that “it is often split into subcomponents that relate to physical, medical, and educational neglect” (p. 441).

<sup>28</sup> I refer to all of them as child welfare professionals in this dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> According to WDCF (2015a), “[b]eginning January 1, 1998, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) assumed responsibility for administering child welfare services in Milwaukee County, which had previously been under the Milwaukee County Human Services Department. DHFS (now the Department of Children and Families, DCF) assumed responsibility for child welfare services as required by legislation enacted in the 1995 and 1997 legislative sessions in response to a lawsuit filed against the State and Milwaukee County. The suit alleged that the state and the county were in violation of federal law and that the administration of child welfare services in Milwaukee County was so poor that it failed to keep children safe.”

<sup>30</sup> Moreover, CRACK (Children Requiring a Caring Kommunity) (a private organization founded in Anaheim, CA), now called Project Prevention (Silliman et al., 2004, p. 10), gives women 200 dollars to have sterilization (A. Smith, 2005b, p. 126), and “openly targets susceptible poor and minority women for its sterilization program,” while many of those who opted for sterilization had their children placed in foster care programs and hoped to regain custody (Nelson, 2003, pp. 180-181).

<sup>31</sup> In 2006, 56.1 percent of Black or African American children with specific family risk conditions lived in single parent households, compared to 20.8 percent of their White counterparts; 45.9 percent of Black or African American children with the conditions lived in a family of low socio economic status, compared to 15.0 percent of their White counterparts (Sedlak et al., 2010, pp. 7-10). “The child is classified as in a family of low socioeconomic status if the household income was less than \$15,000, the parent(s) were not high school graduates, or the household participated in a poverty program” (Sedlak et al., 2010, p. 8).

<sup>32</sup> Other challenges are: 1) child maltreatment prevention services are underfunded and lack federal guidance on what would be a coherent approach; 2) differential response approaches to child protective services intake need additional testing; 3) policies and funding to treat mental health and substance use problems must be coordinated with child welfare services; 4) all-youth in high school should receive the tutoring and employment experiences that build work-related skills; 5) policies should provide fiscal incentives to improve high-school graduation rates and to support postsecondary education and training for children and youth in foster care; 6) policies should include the likelihood that youths will achieve and maintain permanency in a reasonable period through foster care, reunification, relative placement, guardianship, or adoption; 7) tribal access to federal child welfare services funding should be increased and existing infrastructure should be improved; 8) agency policies should promote better assessment and support of LGBT youth in out-of-home care; 9) transition policies and support for emancipating youth must be overhauled; and 10) performance-based contracting should be fully implemented (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 76-81; Myers, 2006; Berrick, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> This ‘new state apparatus’ is characterized by the interpenetration of the public and private sectors, and by the fusion of the state functions of cultural branding, moral amendment, and social control (Wacquant, 2009, pp. 105-108).

<sup>34</sup> In general, there are usually two interpretations of our differences, especially of those who are oppressed, but always the interpretation of one side, the more privileged and powerful, and importantly not

having the very differences, dominates and controls the discourse, creates the category of “otherness” antithetical to their values, puts the people who embody the “otherness” into the category, and attribute the results of differences to those who embody the “otherness” due to their “otherness.” This is why feminism has claimed the importance of a standpoint theory. ‘The discourse of dependency’ is no exception, conservatives’ interpretation of the differences of welfare recipients—basically their understanding of the causes of poverty—control welfare policy discourses and brought welfare reforms, while poor people’s interpretations of their own differences were ignored. Young (2000) reveals such gaps as internal exclusion: people “may find that their experiences as relevant to the issues under discussion are so different from others’ in the public that their views are discounted. [. . .] People lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others even when they have access to fora and procedures of decision-making” (p. 55; see also Sparks, 2003, p. 175).

<sup>35</sup> However, in fact, it was not that they did not conform to the values, but they were put into the category being excluded from the values in order to reinscribe notions of ‘black inferiority’ and ‘white supremacy’. Therefore, (racialized) poor people are blamed about not conforming to the ‘normal’ values, and it attributes the responsibility of poverty to the poor themselves, but indeed it is inevitable that those who are forced to embody the ‘otherness’ cannot fit the norms that are constructed by excluding them from the norms.

<sup>36</sup> Sparks (2003) points out, “[p]oor unmarried mothers were also censured for the fact that children who grew up in households without fathers seemed more likely to be suspended from school, have emotional problems, and display antisocial behavior” (p. 179).

<sup>37</sup> These organizations are the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Community Voices Heard, Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project, the New York City Coalition against Hunger, and Picture the Homeless, which all serve impoverished populations in New York City (McNeil, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> This is because coalitions can: expand the variety and numbers of people who get involved in the cause; help gain the attention of power holders; add legitimacy to activists’ demands; improve activists’ access to policy makers; increase the effectiveness of demonstrations, boycotts, and lobbying campaigns; and improve groups’ strategic capacity and leverage (Reese, 2011, pp. 31-32). However, it is important to note that there are also potential downfalls to coalition building, such as how coalition work can interfere with groups’ autonomy and the ability to meet their own organizational needs and goals (Reese, 2011, p. 32).

<sup>39</sup> “In Los Angeles, most local welfare rights groups and unions mainly worked within the basic framework of welfare reform. From their perspective, challenging the devaluation of poor mothers’ caregiving work within welfare reform policies was not an attainable goal in the short term” (Reese, 2011, p. 133).

<sup>40</sup> Peck (2001) explains the ‘creaming effect’ as: “A paradox of employability-based strategies is that they tend to be most effective for those already nearest the front of the employment queue, sharpening up the job skills and work attitudes of the most job-ready, while offering much less to those facing significant barriers to employment (such as discrimination, disability, or lack of childcare)” (p. 347).

<sup>41</sup> Flavin (2009) claims, “[t]oday, the language is less overtly racist, but the underlying sentiment remains: some women should be prevented from exercising their reproductive rights; other women’s reproduction should be supported and encouraged” (p. 5).

<sup>42</sup> This father was included in the sample because his story helped me learn about a single mother’s case. He also spoke about the contexts in which people experience child welfare services. He was struggling to get the custody of his son, after he found out that the son had been in foster care due to the charge against his (single) mother. His interview was not quoted in this dissertation, but it consisted of a valuable data.

<sup>43</sup> See endnote 103.

<sup>44</sup> This male advocate was included in the sample because he had knowledge about many single mothers’ interactions with welfare and child welfare systems, and also single mothers’ activism against both systems. His interview was quoted in this dissertation only when it was relevant; it consisted of valuable data.

<sup>45</sup> The standpoints, positionalities, social locations, and privileges of both interview participants and me as a researcher were investigated in the process of narrative analysis. Specifically, I asked what are the borders between ‘home’ and ‘field’, ‘researcher’ and ‘research participants’ (Katz, 1994, p. 67), and how ‘home’ and ‘field’ are economically, politically, and culturally interdependent (Wolf, 1996, p. 36). Moreover, I asked how sexism affects myself and informants, and functions environments, how fieldwork

itself affects research, and how power relations are constructed and struggled through gender relations as well as the unequal power relations between researchers and the researched (Hsiung, 1996). I also asked how these power relations connect to the meanings of stories, e.g. what makes me want to understand stories in specific ways, and how such my desire connects to sexism, power relations, and knowledge production.

<sup>46</sup> I also asked the participants what they thought about the relationships between welfare and child welfare and got insightful ideas from them (see Appendix B).

<sup>47</sup> Paxon and Waldfogel (2003) also found that the effects of extreme poverty on all types of maltreatment become larger (p. 453).

<sup>48</sup> Moreover, non-parental caregivers such as relatives can receive TANF child-only case grants (Anthony, Vu, & Austin, 2008), and child-only caseloads has increased its percentage in the entire TANF caseloads (Speiglmán, Brown, Bos, Li, & Ortiz, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Gowens reminded us that education does not solve all of the problems caused by capitalist demands connected to exploitation: Even if someone get away from exploitation through education, others will be exploited if the system is the same: “so the simple solution was education—forgetting that someone would still pick the food” (Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013). We need to change the capitalist economy that depends on exploitation in addition to creating opportunities of education.

<sup>50</sup> All W-2 participants are placed in one of four tiers of employment or employment experience: Unsubsidized Jobs, Trial Jobs, Community Service Jobs, or W-2 Transitions (Folk, 1996a, p. 56). The mothers seemed to place in the tier of Community Service Jobs. See Collins and Mayer (2010).

<sup>51</sup> In 2017, the minimum wage in Wisconsin is \$7.25.

<sup>52</sup> Ironically, the situation would get easier for mothers after the involvement of CPS: “What benefits, huh? Well, now I’m allowed to work. I can work. ‘Cause I don’t have to worry about daycare. ‘Cause they have my kids, so... that’s the only benefit” (P13).

<sup>53</sup> Performance-based contracting would create an incentive for these companies to achieve specific goals, yet not necessarily to reduce the caseload (see Butz, 2014; 2015).

<sup>54</sup> They claimed that the verification process usually included unnecessary private questions (e.g. when was the last time they had sex) which functioned as deterrents.

<sup>55</sup> For example, one mother was not able to get the W-2 cheque because she could not afford to go to another state to get her birth certificate. The W-2 agency tried to deny her cheque by insisting that she may be an immigrant (as cited in Gowens, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Teens in foster care experience pregnancy two to three times as often as the general adolescent population, and teen parenthood is associated with overrepresentation in the child welfare system (Aparicio, Pecukonis, & O’Neale, 2015, p. 44). In fact, in one sample, one third of girls in foster care had been pregnant by age 17 at least once, half by age 19, and two thirds by age 21 (Aparicio et al., 2015, p. 44). Moreover, “4.5 out of 10 pregnant teens have a history of sexual abuse and that sexual abuse increases teens’ odds of pregnancy 2.21-fold” (Aparicio et al., 2015, p. 45). Furthermore, Garlinghouse (2013) claims that teen mothers in foster care usually “face infringements that provides two types of constitutional claims: due process and equal protection” (p. 1245). The nature of foster care placements brings limitations on mothers’ decisions; mothers have to move from group homes that are not for mothers and babies, and have a risk to become homeless, and hence the involvement of CPS.

<sup>57</sup> It depends on each state about whom the state defines as mandatory reporters of abuse and neglect (if it includes workers of homeless shelters). Homelessness is not equal to abuse or neglect, while many families tend to be referred to CPS at homeless shelters (Rodriguez & Shinn, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> See endnote 40.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts (2014) also suggests that

The state intervened to provide special institutionalized services—primarily placing children in out of home care—only when parents fail to fulfill their child-rearing obligation. At that point, the state places all the blame on parents, without taking into account the economic, political, and social barriers to providing for children (p. 426).

Roberts (2002) points out three related ways which this approach to child welfare is defective: 1) “it places all responsibility for taking care of children on their parents, without taking into account the economic, political, and social constraints that prevent many parents from doing so” (p. 89); 2) “child protection is activated only when families are already in crisis” (p. 90); and 3) “because the system

perceives the resulting harm to children as parental rather than social failures, state intervention to protect children is punitive in nature” (pp. 90-91).

<sup>60</sup> Most workers in private organizations have a social work degree (Levy, Poertner, & Lieberman, 2012, p.180).

<sup>61</sup> According to WW, many mothers (which includes some of this study’s participants) are diagnosed as bi-polar, borderline personality disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), incompetent, delusional, etc. by CPS-sided professionals (e.g. Kubein, 2004; Sutton, 2011, p. 30).

<sup>62</sup> A study shows that mothers with a mental health diagnosis were found to be almost three times as likely as mothers without a diagnosis to have had any involvement in the child welfare system (Westad & McConnel, 2012, p. 30).

<sup>63</sup> All participants’ allegations were not proved by the state, so that mothers had two options: 1) Mothers agree giving jurisdiction to judges who give mothers mandatory conditions and do the mandatory conditions for reunification, or 2) to have a fact-finding hearing (by a judge or jury) in order to make the state prove the allegations. Most participants did not know that they had an option to refuse to meet conditions because their allegations are not proved yet so that they had not had to meet conditions. Some participants agreed to give jurisdiction without noticing that there was another option. Some participants refused to give jurisdiction and meet conditions.

<sup>64</sup> Especially, some participants claimed that AODA classes were irrelevant, because the CPS required them these classes, even though they did not have alcohol or substance use issues.

<sup>65</sup> Foremost to recognize is that nearly all of the people attending CPS/court mandated services are involuntary or non-voluntary clients. As Altman (2008) further discusses, child welfare clients frequently have not asked for nor do they want services; many do not see the need and/or value of the service of their families. They come to the attention of child protection through a judgement of their failures as caretakers, with goals too often selected and imposed on them by the child welfare system (p. 56).

Moreover,

The unavoidable reality that child welfare involvement is mostly involuntary looms large as a factor influencing engagement in services. Not only do parents struggle with issues of power and powerlessness, but many also lack the knowledge and skills to find their way through the complex services and systems that child welfare involvement entails (Kemp et al., 2009, pp. 106-107).

<sup>66</sup> According to the CHIPS petition that she had, the three main reasons that CPS protected her twin 6-month-old girls were: 1) her aunt called CPS that she had been assaulted by her boyfriend, 2) there was a bruise on one of the babies’ back (which according to the mother was her birth mark), and 3) the statistics and research that DV causes many problems for witnessing children (re: the ‘Fail to Protection’ code).

<sup>67</sup> Most mothers also claimed that they felt they were hated by legal professionals, and they had not been treated fairly in court. In a hearing that reviews a case in Children’s Court, there are many actors present: a judge, a district attorney (DA), a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL, an attorney for the child), case workers, a court appointed attorney for the mother, and the mother. Mothers cannot bring anyone, even their parents, into hearings due to the confidentiality of the case for the child. Many mothers claimed that all of the other people present worked together against them at the hearings. I went to the Milwaukee Children’s Court as an advocate for mothers (but could not be present inside the hearings), and found that most judges, DAs, lawyers, GALs, and case workers in the hearing courts were White, except for the mothers, security guards and a few caseworkers. Mothers complained that their judges and their own attorneys were on the CPS side. Even though state appointed lawyers were not helpful (from the mothers’ perspectives), most of the mothers could not afford to hire private lawyers. Their narratives suggest that mothers tend to believe that they are easy targets for CPS, because CPS knows that most impoverished mothers cannot afford to hire a private lawyer to defend their case, even if they never abused or neglected their children.

<sup>68</sup> Child welfare professionals’ subjective reactions are socially structured, reflecting the social and economic expectations, the personalized definitions of causation, the individualized patterns through which cases are organized and acted upon, patterns held in place by a complex supporting structure of legal and administrative practices that continually direct our attention to individual mothers, and socially constructed images of perpetually scarce resources for the poor, of the experienced problems of rationing resources, and of social definitions of worthiness required of recipients (Swift, 1995a, p. 158).

<sup>69</sup> Altman (2008) claims,



Agency factors that workers identified as being significant to the success of engaging families included making sure the workers have enough time to do their work, adequate supervision and training, and the presence of support services that can enhance worker effectiveness and efficiency. Almost all caseworkers mentioned obstacles such as high caseloads, numerous foster care visits, and having to do overwhelming amounts of paper work (p. 54).

<sup>70</sup> Smith and Donovan (2003) claim that

If service plans are constructed to reflect outsiders' expectations rather than the evidence-based or family-centered strategies demonstrated to be the most effective practices for helping families, families' chances to obtain meaning help from the service system could be undermined, and families' chances for reunification could be reduced (p. 560).

<sup>71</sup> Studies suggest that such constraints of the system which case workers experience lead to out-of-home placement in practice (Roberts, 2002; Smith & Donovan, 2003; Zell, 2006; Kemp et al., 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Parents who fail to demonstrate any sort of compliance with service activities are likely to be labeled 'resistant' by workers, because workers see compliance as a step in the process of 'true' engagement (Altman, 2008, p. 52). Blaming women for their situations, "[o]fficials and workers in a variety of roles and settings often evaluate a woman's position based on how 'compliant' or willing she is to defer to their authority and accept their judgment of herself" (Flavin, 2009, p. 185).

<sup>73</sup> They are not necessarily getting rich off of this.

<sup>74</sup> Rivaux et al. (2008) finds that "rather than racial bias in the assigning of the risk score itself, disproportionality may be better explained by racial/ethnic differences in the risk threshold workers use to make case decisions" (pp. 165-166).

<sup>75</sup> Swift (1995b) points out that women, including women who work in the area of child welfare, continue to be 'missing persons' in the arena of child welfare, despite a number of attempts by feminists to cast child welfare as a feminist issue.

<sup>76</sup> Davies et al. (2002) point out that assessments in child welfare tend to reinforce a binary division between 'good' and 'bad' mothers (p. 625); meanwhile these categories are socially constructed. They continue to describe how this good/bad binary tends to be mediated through the discrepant social locations occupied by social workers (usually middle-class, young, White, and often childless) and mothers (usually poor, young, visible minorities, and single mothers); social work interactions that give rise to risk assessments and child protection protocols are produced in these contexts (Davies et al., 2002, p. 625). In order to recognize mother work, Swift (1995b) suggests recasting mothers as caregivers, "as providers of labor as well as affection", rather than continue to see mother's as victims of their own childhood traumas or as clients who are inevitable supplicants. In so doing, mothers' lives and efforts can be understood and made visible in new and different ways (p. 495).

<sup>77</sup> In particular, the special issue of *Children and Youth Services Review* (March 2011) was devoted entirely to single mothers with children in foster care. Wells and Marcenko (2011) claim that, in the introduction of the issue, knowledge of mothers with children in foster care is scant:

We lack knowledge of the relationship between a community's social structure, structures such as the proportion of single-mother families a community has, and the community's reunification rate; of the social and clinical characteristics of single-mother families with children in foster care; of how such mothers respond to interventions designed to meet their unique needs; and of the complex social-psychological processes through which they reunify or fail to reunify with their children in foster care (p. 419).

The above are some of the issues that this special issue attempts to address, with most articles trying to present and center mothers' perspectives in analyses of the theories and practices of child welfare (2011).

<sup>78</sup> Zell (2006) claims that "[c]ase workers play an important part in implementing child welfare policies, and have a unique, untapped perspective about the child welfare system, their clients, the organizations they work for, and the policies that regulate their work" (p. 87).

<sup>79</sup> Pelton (2011) argues on how to create a positive client-provider relationship, since most interventions are conveyed in the context of a relationship (p. 484).

<sup>80</sup> Davies et al. (2007) suggest a key contradiction in relation to the possibilities for clinical work within a statutory practice:

While workers may wish to establish a safe relational space in which to explore mothering with their clients, they must do so within the contradictions of care and control which characterize protection work. The development of a relationship presents risks of betrayal for both workers and mothers (p. 31).

<sup>81</sup> Pelton (2011) claims that

The parents accused of child abuse and neglect are faced with an agency supported in its coercive ways by the policy, the law, public opinion, stereotypes of ‘abuse and neglect,’ psychological evaluations commissioned by the agency rather than by the parents, the power to threaten child removal, and indeed the legal emergency power to remove children on spot (p. 483).

<sup>82</sup> As Pelton (2011) states, mothers who feel threatened and fear, and perceive themselves to be at the mercy of a caseworker’s perceptions, judgements, and decision-making authority, will respond with the only meager strategies available to the powerless, be ‘manipulative,’ and lie or to say what others want to hear (p. 483). The conflict dynamics would make the both parties, case workers and the agencies and mothers, not to admit their real needs for attaining child welfare: Pelton (2011) claims that as much as mothers’ rejections and resistance to the accusation of child neglect, case workers and the agencies also should reject and resist to “any notion that they fail to provide needed supports and fail to make reasonable efforts to preserve families, and deny that structural changes in the child welfare system are needed” (p. 482). Parents’ subjective realities are equally important as the subjective realities of caseworkers (Pelton, 2011). Even though it is policies that can intensify conflicts between mothers and child welfare professionals in the system, these conflicts then create a ‘reason’ to treat ‘uncooperative’ mothers as objects in need of ‘correction’. ‘Correction’ through mandatory courses and training classes, self/group therapies, and services that are directed and evaluated by professionals, points towards how neoliberal power relations try to make mothers fit into the dominant cultures ideas of family life and motherhood (i.e. two parent, heterosexual, upper-middle class, able bodied) (see also Chapter 4).

<sup>83</sup> Pelton (2011) claims that we need a system that actually works with parents in order to help them overcome their child welfare problems, based on prevention and willing cooperation rather than on investigation, blame, and punitive measures, and such a system would have to advocate against “the absurdly broad use of the terms ‘abuse and neglect’ which currently are in place and which drive the current system” (p. 485).

<sup>84</sup> Pelton (2011) claims,

The concepts of ‘child abuse and neglect’ are semantic constructions of social problems that focus blame on parents and prejudge causation. They are emotionally charged terms that, in the broad and vague ways in which they have been defined, have been used to cover and disguise a wide array of events that have multiple causes and multiple forms. In effect, they have been used to stereotype impoverished parents, and largely mothers, experiencing diverse child welfare problems (p. 484).

<sup>85</sup> Other features/characteristics are: 1) a poor mother-child relationship and/or poor father-child relationship; 2) poor household management; 3) substance use; and 4) criminality (Arad, 2001, p. 48).

<sup>86</sup> The present study examines the relationship among variable parental features, child protection workers’ assessments of the quality of life that parents make it possible for children to enjoy, and the workers’ decisions on removal, investigating if poor enough quality of life translates into risk to a child’s safety and development, and if child protection workers perceive parents who do not enable their children to enjoy a decent quality of life as putting them at risk (Arad, 2001, pp. 48-49).

<sup>87</sup> Orme and Buehler (2001) point out the link between foster care placement and child behavioural problems.

<sup>88</sup> Children become adults at age 18 in Wisconsin.

<sup>89</sup> “Whup” means 1) to defeat someone easily in a sport or fight, or 2) to hit someone and hurt them very badly, especially using something such as a belt (Longman Contemporary English Dictionary, n.d.).

<sup>90</sup> Regarding corporal punishment of parents,

When the actor’s conduct is reasonable discipline of a child by a person responsible for the child’s welfare. Reasonable discipline may involve only such force as a reasonable person believes is necessary. It is never reasonable discipline to use force which is intended to cause great bodily harm or death or creates an unreasonable risk of great bodily harm or death (939 Wis. Stat. § 45 (5)(b)).

<sup>91</sup> I got this idea when talking with Karen Swift.

<sup>92</sup> Schaefer exposed the corruption of the Georgia child welfare system, had actively taken actions, and died (in an odd way) in 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Firstly, according to Reese (2011), public assistance is provided to only the very poorest of citizens, and the impacts of welfare reform on the working class are indirect and not widely recognized, even though welfare reform contributed to keeping the wage floor low and increases job competition at the bottom of the labor market (p. 42). Secondly, Reese (2011) states that, “the implementation of federal and state welfare reform policies also created additional barriers to mobilizing public assistance recipients” (p. 42). Work requirements increased the time that mothers spent working and transporting themselves to and

from their workplace and their children's daycare, and drastically reduced the time that they had available to organize or protest (p. 42).

<sup>94</sup> The Welfare Warriors is a nonprofit organization of mothers and children in poverty, established in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1986. They have a mothers' hot line, a monthly meeting, and have organized many demonstrations and events for mothers and children, funded by donations, some grants, subscription fees of *MWV* and their own fund raising events.

<sup>95</sup> Every Mother is a Working Mother Network's "roots are in the welfare rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and in the International Wages for Housework Campaign (WFH) which has campaigned for recognition and payment[s] for caring work since 1972". They claim, "[w]e fought for and won a resolution in the Platform for Action of the 1977 US Conference on Women in Houston Texas (a conference mandated by Congress)" (EMWMN, n.d.). They submitted a testimony to be included in the record of the Senate Finance Committee's hearing on *Welfare Reform: A New Conversation on Women and Poverty* (111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., September 21, 2010) (EMWMN, 2010).

<sup>96</sup> This provided parents with "a multidisciplinary legal team consisting of a lawyer, a social worker, and a parent advocate who previously had a child in foster care," that "provides holistic support for families, recognizing that families need guidance and social services as well as a legal representation to prevent placement of a child in foster care or make reunification of the family possible" (Tobis, 2013, p. 173). In the result, the Center for Family Representation reported that in 2011, it kept 73 percent of their clients' children out of foster care entirely, and the median for those who entered and left care was just 2.2 months, significantly shorter than the New York State median of 19.9 months and the New York City median of 6.4 months (Tobis, 2013, p. 173). This shows that the current lack of funding for legal representation and low quality of the representation as its result can have lead unnecessary adoptions and infringed parents' and children's constitutional rights.

<sup>97</sup> Parents are encouraged to sign the petition requesting jurisdiction of the court before a plea hearing and fact-finding hearing for the involuntary removal of a child. See also endnote 63.

<sup>98</sup> Federal laws require social workers to present evidence to a judicial officer in dependency court demonstrating the child's harm or risk of harm (Berrick, 2011, p. 24). In Wisconsin, within 48 hours of removal, BMCW and the District Attorney must file a CHIPS (Children in Need of Protection or Services) Petition to be presented in Children's Court (48 Wis. Code. § 299 (4) (b)). In CHIPS cases, BMCW and the DA are expected to prove with a preponderance of the evidence that abuse or neglect occurred (48 Wis. Code. § 981(3) (c) 4). "States differ in the level of evidence required to substantiate a report of maltreatment: some require 'some credible evidence,' while others require 'a preponderance of evidence' (Paxson & Waldfoegel, 2002, p. 442).

<sup>99</sup> In the U.S., family integrity and parental rights have been protected as a fundamental right. A parent's rights to raise her children in the manner she sees fit

has become one of the strongest rights implied from the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and interference with the right to family integrity requires intermediate scrutiny analysis where the government must show a compelling interest in protecting the welfare of children (Garlinghouse, 2013, p. 1231).

<sup>100</sup> It demanded 1) passage and implementation of the RISE Out of Poverty Act (H.R. 814, 113<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2013-2014) and 2) the Social Security Caregiver Credit Act (H.R. 5024, 113<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2013-2014), 3) child welfare agencies' stop to removing children from families because of poverty, racism, sexism or other bias, 4) living wage for mothers and other caregivers, and 5) resources for the care of people, not war and occupation (EMWMN, 2014; WW, 2014a, pp. 6-9)

<sup>101</sup> 'Playing the game' means that mothers negotiate and follow the charges and mandatory conditions even if they do not agree with them, and show deference and compliance to their caseworkers and case plans even if they are pretending to do so. See also van Daalen-Smith (2008) about the relationships between self-silencing and mental health issues.

<sup>102</sup> Other two purposes are to "provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives" and to "encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families" (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, 1996b).

<sup>103</sup> I mostly focus on single mothers in this project, because single motherhood is a critical main factor to decide lived experiences of women, especially in relation to the involvement of child welfare services. My data includes one married mother, though she got relatively better services compared to other

single mothers in this project, and her children were reunified with her in a month (much faster than other participants' cases).

<sup>104</sup> The coverage of health insurance became expanding after the enactment of the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-148, Obamacare) ("Impact of," 2016).

<sup>105</sup> Well-being has never been high on the list, though it is assessed by safety and risk assessment (see WDCF, 2016).

<sup>106</sup> Children in low socio economic status households experienced some types of maltreatment at more than five times the rate of other children; Compared to children with employed parents, those with no parent in the labor force had two to three times the rate of maltreatment overall; Compared to children living with married biological parents, those children whose single parent had a live-in partner had more than 8 times the rate of maltreatment overall (Pecora & Harrison-Jackson, 2016, pp. 62-64).

<sup>107</sup> In other words, there are separate systems for poor and wealthier families: Public child welfare departments handle almost exclusively the problems of poor families in order to effectuate a number of public policies, ranging from the provision of relief at minimum cost to the prevention of future crime (Roberts, 2002, pp. 26-27).

<sup>108</sup> According to Kemp et al. (2009), "[m]any parents report that their most pressing needs are overlooked or inadequately addressed by child welfare services" (p. 104). Altman (2008) also claims, as designed for a policy shift from family preservation to adoption, "[c]lients' recognition of the need for a deliberate, planned, and urgent progression of activities leading toward reunification were overshadowed by unrelated agency demands on workers, and the privileging of services to children and foster parents over services to parents" (p. 57).

<sup>109</sup> Community Action Programs (CAPs) shows a good example for how activist mothering of community workers can change political and economic context influenced their political practice:

The War on Poverty offered the first government-sponsored attempt to involve the poor directly and formally in decision making, advocacy, and service provision in their own communities. [. . .] 125,000 poor residents were hired by the CAPs as community organizers, day-care workers, counselors, and teachers' aides (Naples, 1998, pp. 1-2).

Similarly, parents who have lost custody of their children and then regained it have been hired by child welfare agencies in more than 20 states to help other parents regain custody of their children (Tobis, 2013, p. 145). For example, in New York City, a movement has developed in which parents who have had children taken from them and young people who have lived in foster care are taught their rights and are trained to serve as advocates for themselves and others, to testify at legislative hearings, to work in child welfare agencies as mentors and coaches for parents with children in foster care, and to advise senior government officials (Tobis, 2013, pp. xxx-xxxi).

This movement drove such radical change as the number of the children in foster care was dropped from 50,000 in the early 1990s to 14,000 in 2012 (Tobis, 2013, p. xxxiv).

<sup>110</sup> Flavin (2009) suggests a similar tendency of the states' avoidance in the criminal justice system: many women's capacity is constrained by their social conditions, including poverty and limited employment and housing options, as well as restricted access to abortion and contraceptives, gynecologic care, and drug treatment. [. . .] Workers in the criminal justice system, including judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys, and correctional staff and administrators, often ignore the context in which women's actions take place in favor of assuming it is completely within a woman's power to enter drug treatment or set up a new household (p. 5).

<sup>111</sup> WW has used this notion at their protests.

<sup>112</sup> WW claims, "This timely action addressed the economic incentives for unjust removal and detention of children from safe homes. It exposed the failure of the BMCW to properly place and monitor children separated from parents" (WW, 2009b, pp. 28-31).

<sup>113</sup> According to WW, these mandatory conditions "have been increased dramatically as non-profits/professionals have become dependent on funds generated by providing mandatory services. These 'services' are routinely and repeatedly mandated regardless of the parents' situations" (WW, n.d.c, p. 2). "Services are highly prescriptive and often structurally organized in ways that lead to parental failure" (Reich, 2005, p. 256). Moreover, the increase of mandatory conditions can be rationalized by the need to discipline and punish for mothers in order to be able to change their problematic behaviours. The caseworkers interviewed by Smith and Donovan (2003) indicate that to assign services and tasks are not always intended to help parents acquire skills or make changes needed for reunification, but sometimes intended to punish parents for their wrongdoing: for instance, one case worker exemplified if a mother "did

a lot” she could demonstrate that she had paid her price or had been duly punished for neglecting her children. The caseworker claimed,

I have a case right now. It’s a brand new case where the mother left the kids alone, and the house was dirty, and they got her on a lot of other charges, and she wants the kids back, and she’s working toward getting the kids back. But we went to court and the first thing the [Guardian Ad Litem] GAL says, ‘Well, it’s gonna take her a lot. She’s going to have to do a lot to get her kids back’ (as cited in Smith & Donovan, 2003, p. 555).

<sup>114</sup> “In 1994, congress passed Public Law 103-432, which established Section 1130 of the Social Security Act (the Act) and gave the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS) the authority to approve states conducting child welfare demonstration projects involving the waiver of certain requirements of Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. Since 1996, 23 states have implemented one or more waiver demonstrations in several service categories. Oregon received the first flexible funding waiver in October 1996, followed by North Carolina in November 1996, and Ohio and Indiana in 1997. All four states received extensions of their original waivers, three of which (Indiana, Ohio, and Oregon) remain active. California and Florida joined the original states before federal authority to grant new waivers expired in March 2006” (Crayton, 2012, p.18).

<sup>115</sup> While the number of children in out-of-home care had increased from 242,000 in 1983 to almost 500,000 in 1995, the number of adoptions of children in out-of-home care had remained relatively flat at between 17,000 and 20,000 (Zell, 2006, p. 85). In December 1996, President Clinton directed the Secretary of USHHS to develop specific recommendations for strategies to achieve permanency more quickly for children in out-of-home care and to double the number of adoptions to 54,000 in FY2002, and USHHS created the report *Adoption 2002* to recommend rewarding states by an annual financial bonus for each adoption finalized over a baseline number of adoptions, later established in federal legislation (Maza, 2000, pp. 445-446).

<sup>116</sup> Wulczyn, Chen, and Hislop (2002) suggest that a significant increase in the probability of adoption occurs after the passage of ASFA, while states have different adoption dynamics.

<sup>117</sup> Adoption decreased administrative costs by 1.6 billion U.S. dollars between 1983 and 1986 (Hansen, 2008, p. 2428).

<sup>118</sup> Delbalzo (2006) claims, “a study by Market-Data Enterprise discovered the business of adoption brings in more than \$ 1.4 billion each year” in the U.S.” (p. 43).

<sup>119</sup> These words were suggested by Karen Swift.

<sup>120</sup> Moreover, I heard about some cases where mothers appeared to have died due to the suffering that they experienced from their child welfare cases to cause mental and/or physical health issues during my field work trip. Furthermore, even mothers who won reunification told stories of continued suffering after reunification, due to the continued involvement of child welfare services in their families’ lives. All these issues and experiences should be explored.