

Manufacturing Bad Workers:  
How Oppressive Practices in Child Protection are Maintained

Joanne J. Azevedo

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## Abstract

This research seeks to better understand the institutional mechanisms that work to maintain oppressive practices in child protection social work settings. This research examines the ways in which the child protection system continues to function in discriminatory and punitive ways that are not reliably effective at keeping children safe from abuse or neglect. These oppressive functions remain despite what can be presumed to be the best of intentions of legislators, policy makers, administrators, and child protection social workers (CPW), and despite the countless legislative, policy, and practice changes that have been embarked upon to reform child protection in Ontario in the past. Using methods informed by Institutional Ethnography (IE), this research examines how the various attempts at reform to the child protection system in Ontario have changed the ways that frontline child protection workers carry out their work and interact with their service recipients. In addition to an IE approach, this research incorporates autoethnography to include direct experiences and observations as a means to unpack some of the ways that frontline CPWs experience, respond to, and are complicit with oppressive practices. Also included is an examination of a recent reform in Ontario, the implementation of the *Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)* between 2014 and 2019. CPIN provides an opportunity to examine how child protection work is organized, and some of the ways that CPWs themselves are recruited into the ‘work’ of maintaining the status quo. Participants shared their experiences around the ways that CPIN integrated neoliberal rationalities, solidifying commitments to cost-saving, efficiency, and heavy regulation. Rather than disrupting structures of oppression endemic to the systems of child protection, reform efforts like CPIN serve to maintain and even further entrench disparities. To sustain itself, child welfare draws CPWs into understandings of ostensible benevolence as ‘child saviours’, fostering relational distance that allows for and enables dehumanization, and employs rigorous and fear-motivated accountability circuits that keep workers in line, while punishing those who fall outside them. In other words, the child welfare system, to sustain itself, *must* be invested in manufacturing “bad” workers.

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*Dedicated to Mary Anne and Joseph Balant,  
I wish you could be here to see this*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This research seeks to better understand the ways that institutional mechanisms work to maintain oppressive practices in child protection social work settings. My dissertation, *Manufacturing Bad Workers: How Oppressive Practices in Child Protection are Maintained*, looks at the ways that, despite what can be presumed to be the best of intentions of legislators, policy makers, administrators, and frontline child protection social workers, and despite the countless legislative, policy and practice changes that have been embarked upon to reform child protection in Ontario in the past, the child protection system continues to function in an oppressive, discriminatory, and punitive manner that is not reliably effective at keeping children safe from abuse or neglect (Gillingham, 2006; Herrenkohl et al., 2020).

That child welfare or child protection systems are oppressive has been argued by many scholars (Blackstock, 2009; Blackstock et al., 2005; Chen, 2009; Choate et al., 2021; Clarke, 2011; Clarke et al., 2021; Davies et al., 1999; de Montigny, 1995; Derezotes et al., 2005; Dumbrill, 2003, 2010; Fortier & Wong, 2019; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Herrenkohl et al., 2020; Kikulwe, 2016; King et al., 2017; Landertinger, 2021; LeFrançois, 2013a; Lonne et al., 2009; Mandell et al., 2007; Margolin, 1997; McKenzie et al., 2016; Mohamud et al., 2021; Palmater, 2020; Parada, 2002; Phillips & Pon, 2018; Pon et al., 2011; Sinha et al., 2011; Swift, 1995a; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004; Wong & Yee, 2010). This research does not seek to prove or verify that child welfare practices are or can be oppressive, as it is clear that there is an ever-growing knowledge base that does so, but instead looks at the ways that oppressive practices are maintained and perpetuated.

Calls for reform to child welfare are not new, but rather perennial; observably cyclical and recurring. As in past cycles, there is yet again a growing chorus of voices calling for change to contemporary child welfare, noting that this system is rooted in “rescue and removal,” an approach that is “deeply flawed in its orientation, lacking in its evidence of effectiveness, and fiscally unsustainable” (Herrenkohl et al., 2020, p. 9). Building on the scholarship that critiques the adoption of risk discourses and managerial forms of governing and organizing social service work (Baines, 2004, 2010; Baines et al., 2012; Baines & van den Broek, 2017; de Montigny, 1995; Gillingham, 2006; Griffith & Smith, 2014; Parada, 2002; Stoddart, 2017; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004), this research is an examination of the effect of changes to frontline child protection social work practice when legislative and policy shifts are made, or when different practice and administrative tools are introduced into the child welfare workplace.

This thesis begins with a review of some historical shifts implemented in the province of Ontario since the inception of child welfare social work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a stronger focus on changes since the 1990s that have set the stage for the mechanisms of the current system. I continue by tracing that lineage with an examination of the current child welfare legislation, and procedural documents, drawing out some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin them. Later in this thesis, there is an examination of the most recent significant reform to be implemented in the province of Ontario, that being the implementation of the *Child Protection Information Network*, or CPIN. CPIN provides an example, a case study that illustrates some of the consequences of the recurring policy and practice changes, as well as the relationships between these changes and the perseverant systemic inequities observable in

social work practices. This thesis will argue that the net effect of these efforts to reform child welfare actually leaves structures of systemic racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, (dis)ableism, sanism, classism and other forms of oppression, firmly intact.

There have been many large-scale policy reforms imposed on the child welfare system in Ontario, of which CPIN is one of the most recent. CPIN is a new database which was developed and deployed across the province of Ontario between 2014 and 2019. The implementation of CPIN provides an excellent opportunity to examine the consequences of shifts in policy and practice, to consider the choices that are made at the policy level and how those choices impact the child welfare workplace, and ultimately how each of these elements impact upon direct child welfare social work practice.

Using methods that are informed by Institutional Ethnography (IE), this research examines how the various attempts at reform to the child welfare system function to alter the ways that frontline child protection workers (CPW) interact with their service recipients and how these workers carry out their work. This research is also a deeply reflective work that combines approaches of IE with autoethnography to examine my direct experiences and observations as a means to unpack some of the ways that frontline child welfare social workers experience and respond to policy and legislative shifts. The use of autoethnography helps to bring forward some of the ways that frontline social workers are drawn into and become imbedded in and many ways complicit with oppressive systems and practices. I reflect on my experiences of disjuncture (Smith, 1990b), using these as data to reveal how I and other frontline social workers like me can be drawn into work processes that function to maintain oppressive practices. Over the course of this research, I have come to understand my own

actions and my own complicity in a system that is known to be sexist (Swift, 1995a; Margolin, 1997), classist (Pelton, 1978), as well as racist and colonizing (Palmater, 2020; Fortier & Wong, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014; LeFrançois, 2013a; Phillips & Pon, 2018; Pon et al., 2011).

The field of child welfare in Ontario has undergone numerous legislative, policy, and practice changes over the last three decades, imposed at intervals by different sitting provincial governments. All have been part of loudly professed claims of governmental commitments, through inquiries, task forces, committees, inquests, round tables, commissions, and other policy making mechanisms that claim to improve safety for children and services to their families. To those who work in the field of child welfare, these changes foster persistent anxiety and uncertainty. These successive changes have repeatedly caused disruption to the work, creating seismic shifts in the nature, pace, and quality of the work. In many situations, it is not clear that these changes to child welfare policies and practices have improved child well-being and safety, nor is it entirely clear that these changes have resulted in improvements in services to families in need of support, *nor* have they addressed concerns about systemic oppression (Gillingham, 2006; Herrenkohl et al., 2020, Stoddart, 2017). I argue that despite the stated purpose, these changes to the child protection sector in Ontario change very little of the heart and soul of child protection work. On the surface, these changes may look significant. However, these shifts in policies and work processes do not change the most fundamental aspects of child protection processes – namely, the foundational premise that circumstances that cause danger and harm to children, such as child neglect and abuse, are solely the result of individual parental pathologies rather than being related to systemic inequities and entrenched systemic racism, cisheteropatriarchy, (dis)ablism, sanism, and classism. There is little evidence that these

legislative or policy changes do what they claim, or claim to aspire, to do. There is evidence that these changes instead function to maintain a system that polices and punishes particular groups of people who are deemed as “risky” (Callahan & Swift, 2012; Dumbrill, 2003; Pollack, 2010; Pon et al., 2011; Swift, 1995a, 2010; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004) and fail to address systemic inequities in a meaningful way.

The findings in this research support the argument that many of the changes to the child protection system in Ontario function to further entrench the social work role of policing poor, Indigenous, and racialized families, intensify the gatekeeping of resources, and maintain the structural status quo. This research shows that shifts in work processes function as a mechanism that intensively organizes and coordinates the work of child protection workers (CPW), acutely restricting professional decision-making. These changes work to maintain and enforce a rigid and narrow interpretation of child welfare’s legislated mandate, steering CPWs away from care work or social work, towards administrative and managerial tasks.

Furthermore, this organizing of the work is done in such a way that child protection social workers themselves are recruited into the ‘work’ of maintaining the status quo. Through discourses of accountability and their accompanying fear, workers are recruited into maintaining established power structures. They are governed to comply with a system that depoliticizes their work and, from anti-racist, decolonizing, and equity-seeking perspectives, renders any good and progressive stated intentions entirely “non-performative” (Ahmed, 2004a). The findings present some of the ways that the child welfare system has proclaimed progressive change while also maintaining many longstanding oppressive practices.

An examination of the cycles of reform in Ontario, show a pattern of a deepening and re-entrenchment of many of the oppressive ideologies and discourses that are foundational and intrinsic to social work and child welfare. I argue that CPIN is only the most recent change in a series of sweeping changes that continues to maintain the “ruling relations” (Smith, 1987, p. 3) of child protection social work. Changes to the structures, policies, procedures, and technical tools used in child protection work creates the conditions where CPWs have few choices but to engage in routine and familiar but objectively oppressive practices. The changes reduce options for the CPWs, steering them towards the only available option, compliance. Through repetitive cycles of reform, the system has removed opportunities for meaningful change, obscured complicity in oppressive practices and allowed larger structural inequities remain intact.

## ***1.2 Organization of the Thesis***

Chapter 2 is a review of theoretical frameworks, methodology and methods. Child protection is a complex and highly contested space, so this research required a flexible approach that considered a wide range of theoretical lenses. This chapter engages with key literature that explicates theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and critical race feminism, critical whiteness, and temporalities, while also considering neoliberalism and feminist political economy. This research methodology was strongly guided by institutional ethnography (IE) and autoethnography.

Chapter 3 provides a wide historical overview of child welfare in Ontario, with a deeper focus on the cycles of reform that were most notable in the 1990s and 2000s. This section

examines various changes to legislation, policy and work processes spanning the last three decades.

Because textual analysis is an important component of IE, Chapter 4 examines segments of selected governing or boss texts; key sections of child welfare legislation, The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA, 1984), the revised Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA, 2017), and the accompanying regulatory document, the Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016). This chapter also delves into a different form of boss text – inquests. Inquests are a less centralized but extremely influential regulatory text within child welfare institutions. Using sections of Child Mortality Task Force Report, annual reports from the Pediatric Death Review Committee, and texts related to the Baldwin Inquest, this section demonstrates the role of child welfare texts in maintaining oppressive practices.

Chapter 5 uses autoethnography to examine my own experiences as a CPW. This section is an opportunity to unpack and reflect upon some of the moments where I observed and/or was complicit in oppressive practices. This chapter considers the ways that professional identity, working conditions, and dehumanizing discourses help set the stage for oppressive practices. This chapter also considers the ways that CPWs engage with valorizing discourse and become drawn into dynamics of “hyper exaltation.” I contextualize these discourses with a discussion of the “Big Case,” which serves to validate CPWs and justify the need for oppressive practices. Further, this chapter provides examples of some ways that CPWs experience organizational discipline for expressions of resistance.

Chapter 6 is a look at the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), a recent Ontario wide child welfare reform promoted as a way to ‘modernize’ child welfare and improve services

to children and families. This chapter examines some of the consequences for CPWs who describe their 'work' (in an IE sense) to adapt to dramatically new forms of child welfare interventions and increased administrative demands. Participants shared some of the ways that they found "workarounds" within a system that is increasingly focused on compliance and accountability. Participants shared their experiences of navigating these new work processes that challenge their attempts to do meaningful, caring work with child welfare service recipients. Chapter 7 includes a summation of this dissertation and some closing thoughts.

### ***1.3 Some Thoughts about Terminology***

To begin, I wish to establish terminology consistent with my theoretical framework and changing understandings about the nature of child welfare work. I begin my work here by troubling several terms, which indeed need to be troubled because their implications are themselves troubling. I want my use of these terms to be thoughtful. First, the term *child protection workers* (CPW) will be used interchangeably with the term *child welfare workers* (CWW) throughout this document. Child Protection Workers or Child Welfare Workers are often, but not always, formally trained as Social Workers. This is troubling to me because in the larger view of child protection, it is not clear that this work is in fact aligned with the values and ideals proclaimed by the profession of social work in much of the western world. It is an important conversation to have, especially in light of recent scholarship that is challenging the ways we conceptualize social work, social workers, and the historical ways that social work has been complicit in racism, colonialism, sexism and other ruling regimes such as (dis)ablism, sanism, and cisheteronormativity (Badwall, 2014; Chapman, 2014; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Derezotes et al., 2005; Fournier & Wong, 2019; LeFrançois, 2013b; Margolin, 1997; McKenzie et

al., 2016; Mohamud et al., 2021; Pon, 2009; Pon et al., 2016; Pon et al., 2011; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003).

Are child protection workers or child welfare workers the same as social workers? Many writers, such as Margolin (1997), do not frame their discussions about social work to isolate specific specialties within social work, therefore presenting social work and child protection work as monolithic and the terms as interchangeable.

Can we use these terms, child protection workers and social workers, interchangeably? The answer to that, for me, is inconclusive, and I suspect I will delve into this more deeply in my future work beyond this dissertation. The issues of power imbalance, histories of racism and colonialism, and the relationship to ruling regimes in child protection contribute to my sense that these terms need further interrogation. Due to the generalizable involuntary nature of child protection with its overt focus on social control, the disproportionate impact for marginalized peoples, along with the lack of advocacy for structural change, an argument can be made that child protection work is not consistent with the values claimed in various codes of ethics for social work (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2005; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021; International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2016, 2018). Therefore, child protection work may be considered different and separate from social work.

Power imbalance and issues of systemic oppression can be found in many areas of social work and so therefore are not exclusive to child protection work. An argument could be made that child protection work is the 'cradle' of social work, being one of the first social work locales to be organized and professionalised. In some ways, child welfare feels like the quintessential

form of social work. Having said this, many writers in Canada, the US, and the UK use the term social worker as an equivalent to and used interchangeably with the term child protection worker (de Montigny, 1995; Margolin, 1997; Parton, 1999).

In the province of Ontario, those in child protection roles have been often (although not always) filled by persons with a 3-year or 4-year university degree, usually in Social Work but sometimes from other disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, or Nursing. In the last decade, with the encroachment of neoliberal ideologies in the post-secondary education system, there has been a shift towards accepting a 2-year college diploma from the Social Service Worker (SSW) program. Similarly, at the same time as this shift in child welfare practice, there has also been a neoliberal shift in both college and university-level courses, where many programs increasingly emphasize professional credentials, increased earnings potentials and a focus on 'job readiness.' College programs for social services or university programs for social work have also shifted their recruitment and curricula strategies. This shift towards a more applied approach to education discourages students from engaging in thoughtful and critical analyses of the work. It is plausible to consider that this shift in education functions to guide CPWs towards work that is compliant with current regulations, rather than adopting the role of being more critical of existing structures or actively seeking to advocate for less oppressive approaches.

There is a significant body of scholarly work that examines the pressures to de-skill the social work profession and to shift the nature of caring work towards becoming more bureaucratic, administrative, and technical with a reduced focus on social justice and the emancipatory or therapeutic aspects of the work (Baines, 2004; Baines & van den Broek, 2017;

Rossiter & Heron, 2011). The effect of this de-skilling and depoliticizing can be seen more clearly in locations outside large population centres, especially in remote communities where people working in child protection often have only college training with limited and superficial training in social work.

At the time of this writing, Child Protection Workers/Child Welfare Workers are not regulated by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW). However, there is advocacy, primarily from the regulatory college itself, to include CPWs in the regulatory mandate in the future. If/when this happens, all CPWs would be required to have specific credentials such as a Social Service Worker (SSW) diploma, Bachelor of Social Work (BSW or HBSW) degree, or Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, and would be subject to regulation by the OCSWSSW. There is much discussion about making the admission to the regulatory colleges based upon successfully passing a standardized exam, despite research that the standardized exams appear to contribute to racial disparities within social work (Nienow et al., 2023). There are some who argue that if CPWs were regulated by professional college bodies, the transparency of child welfare work would be improved, and ultimately would make child protection work accountable to the public in different ways (A. Koster, personal communication, 2023). This is an important discussion but outside the scope of this research.

The shifts within child welfare, and arguably a shift more broadly across other areas of social work, towards deskilling and more technical/universalized and standardized approaches are part of a larger trends that align with neoliberal ideology. Later in this thesis, the discussion will present some of the ways that whiteness and white supremacy function in child welfare, of which the shift towards a depoliticized, technocratic, and bureaucratic workforce is just one.

All of this being said, it is simplest to use child protection worker and child welfare worker interchangeably, with CPW as the standard term within this document. For the purpose of this research, CPW can include registered social workers and social service workers, as well as others who occupy the roles in child protection or child welfare who might or might not be registered with a professional regulatory body or college. This can and often does include people with psychology, sociology, and nursing degrees or training.

Another term that I would like to clarify is *client*, sometimes referred to as *consumer* or *service user* (Heffernan, 2006; Wilson & Beresford, 2000). Language adopted by the social work profession is strongly influenced by the political and economic environment; the choice of terminology, then, is a political moment where word choice denotes the speaker's authority and social definition (Heffernan, 2006). The term *client* was historically accepted as the term to denote those who were involved with social work services. However, in the 1990s shifts that overtly embraced ideas of neoliberalism, there were moves to adopt terms such as *consumer* and *service user*.

Wilson and Beresford (2000) use *service user* as an umbrella term to encompass a wide variety of people who receive or are eligible to receive services, despite the concern that this language reduces individuals to a definition of their use of services regardless of how these individuals may define themselves. Heffernan (2006) argues that the terms such as *consumer* and *service user* may actually be more oppressive than previous terms, working to perpetuate negative associations for those who are 'in need' of supports are inherently a drain on society. There have been some moments in time where those who access services are referred to as "guests" (Galloway, 2022) and other agencies refer to service users as "the people we walk

with” (M. Brown, personal communication, 2022). While there has been very little research in this area, Heffernan (2006) suggested that some individuals prefer *consumers*, and some prefer *service users*. I have yet to hear of a term that encompasses the helper/helpee relationship that does anything to acknowledge or dismantle the relationship power differential embedded within. Even the concept of the *helper/helpee* is troubling when one considers the endless ways that service is *not* helpful. I have never been comfortable with any of these terms, and in recent years have come to use the term *service recipients*. This term, to my mind at least, gives some recognition of the imposition of services upon a person; it recognizes, in some small way, the usually involuntary nature of the relationship between the child protection worker/agency and the person or family who is on the receiving end of the intervention. Fully acknowledging that this term is not ideal, I prefer the term *service recipients* over *client*, *service user* or *consumer*.

Finally, in this work, I will use the term Indigenous rather than Aboriginal and I capitalize umbrella terms such as “Indigenous”, “Black”, and “Queer” unless in a direct quote. In this situation, my use of capital letters is intended to recognize and show respect. In several places, I use the term cisheteronormativity or cisheteropatriarchy to capture the various ways of privileging or “exalting” cisgender and straight people (Chapman & Withers, 2019, p. 7) in hopes to recognize the broader ways that heteronormativity is centered and privileged.

#### **1.4 A Statement of Intentions**

I want to convey to the readers of this work my intentions for this work, the where and how of its origins, my inspirations and, to some extent, some of the struggles in bringing this work forward. My intention is to present my insights in an authentic, transparent way without trying to claim a static location of an all-encompassing ‘expert.’ Rather, I endeavour to be able

to look at my experiences and those of other people involved in child protection as credible, meaningful data. This work took much longer to complete than I originally expected in part because of the vast unlearning that I needed to do throughout this journey. This work required that I spend time being deeply reflexive and interrogating myself, my actions, my motivations, and my learned worldview. This reflexive work required me to question so many things that I had taken for granted: ideas, 'knowledge,' and an identity as a child protection worker/social worker that had previously been a safe place for me and for many who look like me. I do not want this work to be taken up as self-flagellation, mewling apologies, empty mentions (Zerafa, 2020), or 'non-performative' gestures (Ahmed, 2004a), but instead as a raw honest look at some of the reasons that child protection, as we know it at this point in time, has been and remains mired in complicated power structures that can cause more harm than good in many situations.

My intention in this work is not to point fingers of blame at anyone other than myself. I believe that everyone that I know who is involved in the field of child protection – including many people who I disagree with, those I have been in conflict with, and those who have acted in ways that were clearly very oppressive – have come to this work with what I recognize to be authentic intentions to “help people,” to “do the right thing,” to “make the world a better place,” and most of all to intervene to protect vulnerable children. All my contacts within child welfare, my participants, as well as my colleagues past and present, believe they are doing the best they can in the current system. I have encountered many colleagues who share my view that child protection is a deeply flawed system, and many have shared their concerns that in their role as a child protection worker, they can and have at times, caused more harm than

good. My intention with this research is to make a space to ask ourselves, “What are we *really* doing?” I want to make a safer space for all of us involved in child protection work to look at the issues without being fragile, guarded, or defensive. My intent is to make space that holds that none of us are above reproach, and that we must be open to the possibility that in some ways, we are not actually helping the people we claim to and strive to help. In the spirit of Rossiter (2001, 2011, p. 990), I am proposing that we challenge our professional status and knowledge claims, that we vociferously acknowledge the tensions in child protection work and embrace the very uncomfortable place that is “unsettled social work.” I strive to demonstrate what unsettled social worker looks like. In the spirit of Chapman (2014) and LeFrançois (2013a), I am examining the ways I have perpetrated harms on the people I worked with, with a particular focus on the ways that I got to that place. My hope above all is to support the conversation and demonstrate what it might look like if we open ourselves to the possibility that we are not doing the right thing, that *we* (CPWs) are the problem. What happens when we open the door, even if just a smidge, to the notion that current practices are not the right ways, not the best ways, or even adequate ways to advocate for children and their families? Ultimately, I am hopeful that this kind of work can be a step towards the work of decolonization (Laenui, 2000), perhaps as a pathway to (re)conciliation that is first and foremost, deeply truthful. Without truth, there is no possibility of reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). I hope that by asking these questions, we can begin to develop a repertoire for being more deeply truthful as we aim to dismantle structures that cause harm. I believe that it is crucial that we develop ways of truth-telling. Equally or more important is intentionally developing the ways we can engage in truth-*hearing*; we need to learn how to take in these

truths, to sit with them, deeply and acknowledge the gravity of these moments. To start this journey towards a better approach, there does need to be a more compassionate way to support CPWs as we become more authentically reflective about our work. Consistent with the work of the Child Welfare Truth Telling Collective (CWTTTC)<sup>1</sup> (personal communications, 2022), my hope is to help create a safer space for these reflections to be considered and unpacked, and for us to challenge ourselves to look for ways to do our work more compassionately.

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<sup>1</sup> The CWTTTC is a group of academics, retired administrators, and child welfare workers (some current, some past) who have come together to consider, among other things, the ways that child welfare systems are steeped in discourses and codes that regulate worker behaviours and prevent or hamper open discussion of the enduring racist and oppressive elements of child protection practices. The CWTTTC (2022) have identified two important concepts that, though still in development, are highly relevant to consider in this discussion. First is the concept of *silencing norms*; ways that those working within child welfare are subtly and overtly silenced and prevented from speaking truths about the work and the effects of the work in child welfare on both CPWs and service recipients. As demonstrated by Kikulwe (2014), these silencing norms are experienced differently by racialized CPWs. Similarly, white CPWs experience forms of regulation and discipline, although these experiences are mediated by their whiteness. Secondly, the concept of *colonizing codes*; the ways that the work is conducted that function to replicate and maintain the colonizing functions of child protection interventions. Within this emerging conceptualization is the observation that the concept of “safety” has become equated and interchangeable with separation. This conceptualization has deep connections to the child rescue movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter 3). “Separation equals safety” is a profoundly colonizing discourse and is so deeply entrenched within child welfare discourses that it is a taken-for-granted assumption (CWTTTC, personal communications, 2022).

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks, Methodology, Method

### 2.1 Introduction

*Institutional ethnography isn't about studying institutions as such. Rather it proposes a sociology that does not begin with a theory but in people's experience. (Smith, 2006, p. 2)*

While institutional ethnography (IE) does not start with the theoretical, it is not atheoretical. IE has been described as a method of inquiry that starts with an examination of the material conditions, lived experiences, and concrete features of the activities of people (Smith, 2005; Campbell, 1998). Campbell (1998) centres the personal experience as a crucial starting point for “trustworthy analysis” (p. 56). IE prioritizes the experiences of people over the theoretical or symbolic understandings of society and social practices (Ng et al., 2017)

This research did not begin with a particular theoretical framework and is not beholden to a narrow theoretical focus. Instead, using IE as a starting place, my review of literature casts a wide net, maintaining an open and receptive approach that considers a variety of lenses. Child protection is a complex and highly contested space, so this research required a flexible approach. I let the research guide me towards frameworks that I had not engaged with previously. This research, then, became a process of unlearning informed by participants who work in the frontlines of child protection, my own experiences of frontline child protection work, and ‘following my nose’ into a variety of helpful theoretical conceptualizations.

This chapter reflects the way that I engaged with key literature that explicated such theoretical frameworks as postmodernism and critical race feminism, critical whiteness, and temporalities, as well as a look at neoliberalism and feminist political economy. I accepted guidance from theorists such as Michel Foucault, Sara Ahmed, Sunera Thobani, and Ruth Frankenberg, as well as looking towards Harjeet Badwall's (2014) and Donna Jeffrey's (2005)

theorizing around “scripts of Whiteness” within social work. I examined the work of Donna Baines and Diane van den Broek (2017), Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith (2014), and Sanford Schram (2015) to help me understand a variety of ways that political economy theorizes the encroachment of neoliberal rationalities and the *New Public Management* (NPM) in helping professions. While I did not start with a specific approach to understanding this system, I sought out a variety of frameworks to help me to conceptualize some of the complex mechanisms that maintain oppressive child protection practices in hopes that I would be able to better understand the ways that systemic inequities and oppressive practices continue to endure in child welfare despite repeated claims and declarations of reforms. The works reviewed in this chapter therefore contribute to my understanding of the complex power dynamics that reside deep in the DNA of child protection practices.

## **2.2 Review of Theoretical Frameworks**

### **2.2.1 Postmodernism and Foucauldian Framework**

Chambon and colleagues (1999) describe the work of Foucault as “intriguingly relevant” to the discipline of social work (p. 52). I argue that Foucauldian ideas, as well as much of the postmodern work that has built upon them, are especially helpful in the endeavour to grapple with the complexities of current child welfare practices. Foucault’s work is best known for examining moments in history, often focused on ways that shifts in language shapes actions, particularly through discourses and discursive formations (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault uses the term *discourse* to refer to a series of statements or groupings of texts and statements. From there, the idea of discursive formation emerges as a way to understand

how the collection of texts are organized with respect to each other, as well as how this organization shapes our thinking and informs our actions. Foucault (1972) writes:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation (p. 38).

Using some of these ideas, Chambon and colleagues (1999) identify an approach that cuts across domains of social work practice and reveals ways that different systems share methods for regulating behaviours. They argue that this raises important existential questions for social work, as systems proposed to be caring or beneficent seem to employ many of the same “features of technology” that Foucault identifies as measures to exert control (Chambon et al., 1999, p. 64). In this way, we can better understand that the “domains of practice in social work that intend to or proclaim to provide care and those practices which function to exert social control can exist simultaneously” (Chambon et al., 1999, p. 64). This is an important perspective for my research as I delve into the contradictions between care and surveillance, as well as the claims of help that relate to many various forms of discipline, which both are rooted deep within child protection practice. Further, this research also shows how nuanced changes to terminology, language, and how we use these things functions to guide and shift practices and actions within the field of child protection.

Particularly important for this research are the ideas related to power, particularly Foucault’s ideas around biopower, or the technology that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to manage populations, including the management of births, deaths, and illnesses, by way of certain forms of disciplinary power (O’Farrell, 2005). O’Farrell (2005) explains that Foucault

conceptualizes power not as something that can be owned, but rather as a relationship between individuals and groups. Using these ideas, one can see the emergence of child protection in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a method of controlling populations, applying certain discourses of citizenship to the manner in which children are conceptualized as emerging citizens, and the importance of their upbringing as focused upon their becoming productively contributing citizens. Chen (2001) argues in her research that early child protection discourses constructed the care and protection of children in terms of protection and well-being of the larger society, as a form of protection from the production of future criminals and miscreants.

Foucault (1977) describes the rise of certain disciplinary mechanisms from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in militaristic, manufacturing, correctional, and educational settings, each that saw the development of highly organized forms of surveillance applied in conjunction with strict forms of punishment for the smallest of transgressions. Foucault (1977) describes this enforcement in relation to military training and early educational systems, arguing that these mechanisms were used to control behaviours, ensure conformity, and establish certain rewards for compliance. Foucault (1977) writes of the double system of gratification-punishment that includes a mechanism for providing privileges and rewards to those who possess the correct qualities, skills, or aptitudes.

Foucault (1977) describes the use of ranks, privileges, or rewards made observable in a variety of ways, such as the colour of epaulets on a uniform. He also illustrates consequences to one's rank if they fail to demonstrate merit or worthiness, specifically in terms of where one is situated within the hierarchy. These are helpful to understand ideas presented later in this research as applied to my observations of how interpretations of merit, worthiness, or simple

conformity are often rewarded within the child protection workplace. I surmise this to be a way to understand how CPWs are shepherded into compliance and complicity with complex regulatory mechanisms. Foucault (1977) argues that these disciplinary mechanisms have little to do with engaging a formal legal apparatus, but work to normalize behaviours:

Like surveillance and with it, normalisation becomes one of the greatest instruments of power... For the marks that once indicated status, privilege and affiliation were increasingly replaced... by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership... playing a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank (p. 184).

Foucault (1977) describes how those who show merit or worthiness could move up the ranks, while those who “became slack” could fall from the higher ranks. Those who found themselves within the lower levels of the hierarchy would be subject to a variety of punishments, including the designation of “shameful class,” or even separation from others and solitary confinement. This is helpful in the interpretation of my data, from both the institutional ethnography and the autoethnography, which shows similar dynamics within the ranks of child protection workers, where CPWs do the ‘work’ of compliance, and the ways that their compliance is rewarded. My research examines the ways that discourses valorize the work, while simultaneously reaffirming constructions of service recipients as dysfunctional and pathological. Importantly, when CPWs demonstrate hesitancy or dissent and therefore fail to demonstrate compliance – regardless of the context or reasons, and sometimes in ways that are quite similar to service recipients – workers are subjected to discipline. These disciplinary responses are sometimes quite nuanced, while other times the discipline can be harsh or even overtly violent.

Using a Foucauldian perspective and looking primarily at the British context, Parton (1999) summarizes the history of welfarism, the emergences of discursive and disciplinary

regimes, the coming together of institutional procedures, analyses, calculations, and tactics that form power relations broadly summarized under the term *governmentality*. Parton (1999) articulates that social work and specifically child protection social work, are prime examples of new disciplinary mechanisms, the legitimizing of certain knowledge claims, and new forms of social regulation. Parton (1999) maps out shifts in the practice of child protection in Britain that are similar to shifts seen in Canada. I noticed this emergence of discourses around child welfare competencies in the ways that child abuse inquiries and inquests emerged in the 1970s and onward. The emergence of the formal inquest process, combined with other forms of discipline and scrutiny in Ontario which will be discussed in detail later, contributed to a work environment that is persistently steeped in fear. Child welfare workers have been forced to shift the focus of their work towards adapting to the increased scrutiny and the ever-intensifying focus on accountability.

Of particular note are the shifts in child protection practice in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as risk assessment was gaining ascendancy. Parton (1999) argues that the new strategies that emerged in child protection shifted the focus from meeting the needs of children or responding to child abuse, to the focus of “assessing and managing risk” (p. 101). Parton (1999) argues that child protection social work is no longer predicated on the face-to-face relationship with families, but instead on monitoring an array of abstract factors seen to be the causes of harm and ‘evidence’ of risks. The emphasis shifts towards ways to document, calculate, and interpret the abstracted concept of both present and future risk (Parton, 1999). This shift towards intensified use of textual documentation and away from relational interactions, first noted in the 1990s, becomes further and further embedded with the changes to contemporary

child protection practices. These are accentuated more deeply by new forms of data management such as CPIN, which will be discussed in more detail later in this work.

Conceptualizations of risk and interpretations of the obligations and responsibilities of child protection workers thereby become central to how they think about and organize themselves and their work. The focus of work shifts towards ways to demonstrate accountability, altering the main tasks of CPWs from that of helpers to evaluators seeking to identify, manage, and eliminate risk. Parton (1999) argues that audits and other mechanisms have taken the place of confidence in professional decision-making. What is most observable in current child protection practices, multiple decades after Parton's work published, is the ways that these processes have increased and intensified, to the point that relational interactions are over-ruled by administrative and technical actions. As Parton (1999) notes;

Risk is rendered manageable by new relations of regulation.... Where the key concern is risk, the focus becomes not making the right decision but making a defensible decision. (p. 124)

These bureaucratic regimes serve to constrain the work of CPWs, pulling them away from the work of help and care towards that of documenting rationale and process of decision-making.

These regulatory structures do not work in isolation, however; they are only one facet of the regimes of ruling that enforce a particular approach to child welfare work. Another important facet includes an analysis of the ways that racist discourses and constructions of whiteness operate and are re-entrenched in both policy and practice. Gosine and Pon (2011) explore the experiences of racialized CPWs, with their participants describing limited opportunities for advancement, tokenism, and social exclusion. They identify that this was all related to a "White-normed culture" that was enforced through a variety of disciplinary means

(Gosine & Pon, 2011, p. 145). Participants in this research described being treated disrespectfully and “feeling silenced” (Gosine & Pon, 2011, p. 146) as well as having their competencies and professionalism intensely scrutinized. Using a Foucauldian framework, Kikulwe (2014) examines the forms and uses of power within the child protection context as a way to make observable the “technologies of governance from the perspective of racialized workers” (p. 8). Kikulwe (2014) notes that while there has been significant scholarship related to child protection, there is a dearth of research that examines how racialized CPWs navigate the authority and power of working within this system given that racialized workers too are subject to racism and the bounds of whiteness as both people and professionals.

Kikulwe (2014) engages with Foucault’s (1982) idea of analyzing power while focusing on how ideas of difference are created through laws, traditions, status, and privilege, as well as by examining how power relations and hierarchical structures are called into being through various systems of surveillance and rules that are not explicit. Kikulwe’s (2014) research identifies apparatuses of power within child protection that emerge from experiences described by his participants, including experiences of “silent discourses” from within these institutional hierarchies.

Participants in Kikulwe’s (2014) research described complex ways that they negotiated, responded to, and resisted complex power dynamics in their child protection work. Racialized CPWs described ways they approached their workplace that included being respectful, diplomatic, and “biting your tongue” in situations where they might have preferred to speak up and call out issues related to race, class, and gender within the institution (Kikulwe, 2014, p. 99). Kikulwe’s (2014) research made observable some of the ways that the issues of race were

“erased through institutional silence” (p. 99). His research provided insights into the ways that his participants felt silenced, sometimes by the institutional hierarchy and yet others by their racialized colleagues who warned that speaking out and potentially being seen as “too forceful” could work against them in this professional workplace (Kikulwe, 2014, p. 100). Self-surveillance was clearly taking place in terms of what could be said and not said, with racialized CPWs being regulated by racialized colleagues so as not to ‘rock the boat,’ to not challenge the hierarchy of the organization too forcefully.

In the child protection social work context, there are complicated dynamics of power and oppression wherein regulatory and disciplinary discourses that are accentuated and intensified by issues of race, gender, and other identities and locations. Some of the participants in Kikulwe’s (2014) research expressed regret that they stayed silent in certain situations and, in so doing, failed to challenge issues of inequity. These workers mourned the lost opportunities to challenge issues of inequity, feeling instead that they were implicated in maintaining the status quo (Kikulwe, 2014).

Kikulwe’s (2014) work provides an important landmark and entry portal for some of the work currently in progress by the Child Welfare Truth Telling Collective (CWTTTC, 2022, see footnote on p. 16). The CWTTTC considers, among other things, the ways that child welfare systems are steeped in discourses and codes that regulate worker behaviours and prevent or hamper open discussion of the enduring racist and oppressive elements of child protection practices. The CWTTTC (2022) have identified two important concepts that, though still in development, are highly relevant to consider in this discussion. First is the concept of *silencing norms*; ways that those working within child welfare are subtly and overtly silenced and

prevented from speaking truths about the work and the effects of the work in child welfare on both CPWs and service recipients. As demonstrated by Kikulwe (2014), these silencing norms are experienced differently by racialized CPWs. Similarly, white CPWs experience forms of regulation and discipline, although these experiences are mediated by their whiteness.

Secondly, the concept of *colonizing codes*; the ways that the work is conducted that function to replicate and maintain the colonizing functions of child protection interventions. Within this emerging conceptualization is the observation that the concept of “safety” has become equated and interchangeable with separation. This conceptualization has deep connections to the child rescue movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter 3). “Separation equals safety” is a profoundly colonizing discourse and is so deeply entrenched within child welfare discourses that it is a taken-for-granted assumption (CWTTTC, 2022).

Foucault’s writings are helpful here, contributing to an emerging sense of courage to challenge accepted knowledges within social work, and to engage in what Epstein (1996) termed “philosophical explorations [...] long overdue in social work, which has historically fitted itself to prevailing views with little if any questioning” (as cited in Chambon et al. 1999, p. xiv). Foucault’s ideas enable social work scholars to understand how the field of social work exists within a system of discourses, and further, how social work can be understood as a work of social construction. The Foucauldian lens helps us understand the ways that social work employs dominant and subjugated knowledges, as well as the ways that identities and roles of service recipients and the CPW are formed and engaged. Social work itself is a form of discourse, assembled with dominant and subjugated knowledges, social constructions, and identity formations. These, then, all provide social workers the ways to understand “the rules

for how they are to interact” (Pease & Fook, 1999, p. 14). Later in this work, I draw on these theorizations to unwrap the discourses embedded and re-entrenched with each iteration of child welfare reform, as well as how these discourses thereby become concretized within CPIN.

### *2.2.2 Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism*

This research drew my attention towards my need to better understand the concepts within critical anti-racist feminism. Like many of my white peers and colleagues in social work, I have been able engage in discussions of racism that remained superficial. Prior to this research, an enactment of my white privilege afforded me the pathways to avoid deep discussions of critical race theory. While discussions about the racism embedded within systems of child welfare are emerging and becoming more widely recognized in mainstream discussions, my positionality also allowed me to evade a deep examination of about systemic racism within child welfare and my complicity within these systems. Early on in this research, a mentor advised me that if I did not consider the issues of racism within child welfare, this research would be effectively meaningless. Heeding that advice and aspiring to conduct research in a respectful and meaningful manner required that I delve into these frameworks to deepen my understanding of the issues of racism and white supremacy in child welfare.

I looked to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), who define critical race theory (CRT) as a movement that builds on the work of activists and scholars seeking to understand and transform the relationship among race, racism, and power while also considering broader structures such as political climate, economics, and other large social organizations. CRT challenges those foundational ideas – both that which are embedded in mainstream liberal philosophy as well as taken-for-granted ideas that scaffold policy structures, legal reasoning,

and legislative processes – could be, in any way, neutral (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT draws from multiple sources, including post-structural thinkers like Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault and more radical figures such as Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, César Chávez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements. In addition to these schools of critical thought, CRT also aligns with many ideas from feminism, recognizing that there are important and crucially defining relationships between power and the social construction of identities such as race, gender, and other social roles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contend that like feminism, CRT examines social patterns that work to scaffold, support, and maintain dominance for certain groups and, most importantly, how structures and patterns become obscured.

Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT) emerges from CRT, building on the emancipatory and liberatory work of Black and Indigenous activists and scholars who were excluded or marginalized within the mainstream (white-centred) feminism and (male-dominated) critical race activism. CRFT centres the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized women as an alternate to theorizing frameworks within mainstream feminist movements that privileged the experiences of white women. Mainstream feminist scholarship of the 1960s to 2000s has been criticized for the ways that the perspectives of Black and Indigenous women are minimized, devalued, or outright excluded. CRFT also emerged as a response to some of the anti-racist theorizing which applied a kind of broad, essentializing interpretation of the experiences of all minorities, rejecting the conceptualizing of identities as cumulative or additive (Wing, 2000, as cited in Few, 2007, p. 456). CRFT holds that racial/ethnic identities are socially constructed and not fixed; rather, identities are complex, intersecting, and overlapping, which require

individuals to engage in multiple, shifting ways of navigation. CRFT also privileges the voice or experiences of those designated as racial 'others' (Pon, 2009), accepting that those who live with these experiences hold knowledge and expertise about their experiences of multiple oppressions. Using a CRFT lens, we accept that the ways that 'race' is understood are socially constructed but become concretized as a result of political processes (Roberts, 2011), so there are no neutral or stable categories. In other words, how we understand concepts of race shift over time. These socially constructed ideas of race, like those of gender, ability, wellness, or normalcy, are incorporated into broader social discourses and can be manipulated, changed, or even abandoned as needed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Therefore, CRFT provides important guidance for this research as I try to comprehend the critiques of child welfare as a realm which is both highly gendered (Archer-Kuhn & de Villiers, 2019; Strega et al., 2013; Swift, 2010; Swift & Callahan, 2009) and also significantly and disproportionately racialized (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2020; Mohamud et al., 2021; Roberts, 2002, 2011, 2014, 2022).

A crucial concept within CRFT is the understanding that racism endures despite claims made by some that we are in a post-race world (Lentin, 2016; Mills, 2014; Schorr, 2008). Lentin (2016) argues that a defining feature of the erroneous but widespread idea of post-raciality is that racism belongs to a bygone era, rendering remaining racist attitudes and behaviours the preserve of unbalanced or uneducated individual. Critical race theorizing contends that racism is in fact quite routine, not unusual, but remains largely obscured and unacknowledged. Racism is ubiquitous and deeply embedded in structures and systems, which makes it more difficult to identify and address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contend that, due to the “reason of its structure and vocabulary,” deeply embedded racial and structural injustices are challenging to acknowledge and address unless a conceptualization of these wrongs is developed (p. 31). Broadly, people generally can accept that overt racism and genocide are wrong. However, systemic injustices like racism often dwell within taken-for-granted assumptions, embedded within social constructions of difference that are often outside of perception. Left unchallenged, these can be places where micro and mezzo racial aggressions and oppressions are most resilient. This means, then, change will come very slowly if there is not a clearly articulated and intentional approach towards identification of these more subtle forms of racial injustice, especially in the realm of legislative reforms where change is already much slower.

Some forms of racism are embedded, difficult to perceive, and masked by concepts of ‘common sense’ or other ways of being rationalized. Racism resides in texts, “scripts of Whiteness” (Badwall, 2014), and administrative assumptions, which can be exceptionally difficult to perceive and therefore difficult to address. In Chapter 4, I examine governing or “boss” texts (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 610) of the child welfare system as examples of textual structures that provide a space for white supremacy to reside, as well as how they function to obscure the consequences of current approaches to child welfare.

Sara Ahmed’s (2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007) ideas of the *non-performativity* of anti-racism in a series of papers explores the ways that certain concepts that sound inclusive and progressive can fail to “perform” or enact anti-racism, instead replicating discrimination and oppression. Ahmed (2004b) explores the concepts of a *politics of admission*, a practice whereby institutions ‘admit’ to racist practices and, in so doing, are able to define what institutional

racism is. Similarly, she develops the concept of a *politics of recognition* (Ahmed, 2004b) as a way to explain how institutions are able to define the problem of racism as a collective problem rather than any individual form of racism.

Ahmed (2004b) argues that in this process, where the institution is able to define ‘the problem’ of systemic racism, it is then able to define the solution. The institution is then able to transactionally present as a collective; the institution becomes the individual, and in so doing, dissolves any individual responsibility for behaviours or actions that causes harm to individuals. In this action, the institution then becomes the ‘bad person’ rather than finding responsibility within any specific individual person, thereby permitting individuals within the institution to evade personal responsibility for harm. Within this process, organizations and individuals are granted a kind of absolution, claiming anti-racism is achieved without having to make substantive changes to behaviours, actions, or processes. Ahmed (2004a) provides this as a way to examine the non-performativity of anti-racism, for it is in this process of ‘becoming’ anti-racist that the racism within an organization becomes obscured or erased, and members of the institution are absolved of complicity and responsibility to reflect, or change.

Ahmed (2007) broadens this discussion to consider other forms of institutional language, such as institutional claims of “diversity” and how these terms are adopted strategically to detach current actions from historical inequities and struggles. Terms like “diversity” can be problematic for the things they erase, obscure, or conceal. Institutional proclamations of their commitment to diversity do not necessarily equate to a commitment to action or redistributive justice. Ahmed (2007) notes that by using the language of institutional racism, there is a kind of ‘taking in’ and ‘taking on’ of institutional racism, which then becomes

part of institutional language. Use of terms such as “multiculturalism” defines difference as something that ‘others’ – read as non-white members – bring to an organization. These terms become a form of commodification and marketing, used to construct the institutional focus on diversity as if it were a human resource. How terms are defined also become salient, as these definitions and their subsequent applications can divert attention, block action, and create a circumstance where “diversity can be defined in ways that reproduce rather than challenge social privilege” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 240). Later in this research as part of the IE method of inquiry, I examine textually mediated mechanisms that function to perform a kind of acknowledgement of racial injustice in child welfare while maintaining established structures that are informed by discourses of white supremacy and colonialization. This concept of saying but not doing, further developed by Zerafa (2020) as *empty mentions*, can help to demonstrate how progressive sounding claims by individuals and organizations not only do not change structures that are racist and oppressive but serve to validate and further entrench these ways of acting.

### *2.2.3 Critical Race Theory in the Canadian Context*

Pon and colleagues (2011) argue that systemic racism is intrinsic to child welfare in Canada, as racism is inexorably connected and foundational to “the very formation of the Canadian settler nation state” itself (p. 387). For us to understand the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous children in Canadian state care, we must understand the history of racism and colonialism in Canada and within the field of social work. Pon and colleagues (2011) critique the presentation of Canada as a fair and tolerant society and problematize the construction of child welfare and social work as benevolent institutions. Fortier and Wong

(2019) agree, noting that the origin stories of social work in Canada gloss over or outright ignore the true origins and connection to the colonizing work of the Christian missionary and the federal government's Indian agent. They argue that from its inception, the profession of social work was practiced from a paternalistic, authoritarian perspective focused on a project to Christianize and civilize Indigenous peoples. Further, Swain and Hillel (2010) describe some of the deeply intertwined ideas of whiteness and citizenship, as well as the ways that eugenics and white supremacy were entangled in the early narratives of the child rescue movement that began in Britain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A cursory glance at early 20<sup>th</sup> century literature in eugenics reveals the many ways that concepts of child welfare aligned with the eugenics movement. For example, Dealey (1914) writes that "child welfare is inseparably bound with the home, the school, and all euthenic reform" (p. 837). These ideas were subsequently adopted by early social reformers including JJ Kelso, the historical figure most associated with the development of the child welfare system in Ontario. These ideas have made their way into contemporary social work as well, in our policy, practice, and their underpinnings. Pon (2009) challenges the enthusiastic adoption of frameworks of cultural competency and anti-oppressive practices (AOP), identifying them as a new form of racism that enable an "ontology of forgetting" in social work's collective consciousness. Ahmed's (2004a) concept of non-performativity is another way to understand how the seemingly progressive and professed critical approaches to child welfare work are adopted without effecting meaningful systemic changes. From the apparatus of the earliest forms of relief to later and more recognizable forms of social service provision, what is now the domain of social work practice has embraced and maintained whiteness in its ideas and action without substantive reform.

Important for my work is the concept of the *exalted subject* (Thobani, 2007). In *Exalted Subjects*, Thobani (2007) writes about the master narrative in Canada, which draws upon a narrative of nationhood infused with mythical characters such as the benevolent (white) Mountie who civilizes the frontier, alongside other myths of the White settler society (Mackey, 2002, as cited in Thobani, 2007, p. 258). Inherent in this narrative is the assumption that Canadian nationals are inherently law-abiding, compassionate, caring, and strongly committed to diversity and multiculturalism. The narrative holds that having braved many challenges, Canadian nationals have ‘overcome adversity’ to form this ‘great’ nation. This narrative exists in conjunction with parallel narratives; those about Indigenous Peoples, foreigners, refugees, and other ‘outsiders’ that present a ‘threat’ to the national’s ‘hard-earned’ prosperity. Exaltation is connected with the ways that colonial violence is obscured, lending to a mythology of the benevolent, caring, compassionate national subject (who is, undoubtedly, white).

Within these narratives are stories that present Indigenous peoples as making unreasonable demands, particularly around the protection of natural resources. Similar narratives construct immigrants as bringing troubling cultural practices, disease, and criminality to Canada, whilst making “unreasonable claims upon the nation and its precious finite resources” (Thobani, 2007, p. 4). Thobani (2007) argues that the construction of the Canadian national identity as an ‘exalted’ subject serves to distinguish nationals from ‘others’ who are strangers to the community. This exaltation elevates and ennobles the Canadian citizen, elevating them above Indigenous and immigrant subjects, naturalizing their essential qualities, and constructing these as reflective of their inherent superiority and intrinsic goodness. As Thobani (2007) writes, “as a technique of power, exaltation thus politicized certain human

qualities, defining the national community as a whole as possessive of these regardless of the actual attributes of individual members” (p. 10).

Thobani (2007) argues that the emergence of the welfare state, which is presented as a mechanism to dismantle socio-economic inequities of class and gender, serves to enhance the legitimacy of the state’s claim to be representing the interests of all members. However, she argues that this ultimately functions to deepen these inequities. The welfare state developed and deepened a gendered division of labour, with “male and female tracks” (Thobani, 2007, p. 106) within social programs, which provide greater resources for male workers and define female roles as primarily wives, mothers, and carers with weak connections to the labour market. Women are shunted into specific gendered roles related to caring and, related to these gendered labour tracks, women are disadvantaged and marginalized in economic and social terms. Thobani (2007) makes the case that the designation of citizenship plays an under-explored role in determining who has access to these state resources, and that the privileged place of citizenship is related to the construction of the ‘worthy recipient.’ Those who fall into the categories of ‘others’ (immigrants, non-enfranchised Indigenous persons) are unworthy, and those who are deemed worthy also claim, by association, “these human characteristics as their own (politicized) traits” (Thobani, 2007, p. 107).

One concept developed by Thobani (2007) that is important for this research relates to the ideas of the exalted subject in the context of social work. Thobani (2007) posits that, with the construction of Canadians as compassionate citizens, some women (white, middle class, well-educated citizens) were granted some opportunities (albeit gendered) for labour market participation. Public sector work was a site of great opportunity for white, Canadian women in

the caring professions, such as nursing, education, and social work. This not only provided an opportunity for the “mass entry” into paid work, but also provided white women with employment that was not only consistent with existing gendered role expectations, but that this more deeply shaped their identities as caring and compassionate people. It is in this context that white women professionals develop their sense of self, deeply interconnected with their ‘elite’ status as important, as valuable, as socially necessary; both for improvements in living conditions for those with whom they work as well as the nation-state itself. Citing research by Roger (2000), Schick (2002), and others, Thobani (2007) suggests that white women in professional roles have been able to reproduce their sense of superiority as “caring white subjects” (p. 126). The concept of *white benevolence* (Gebhard et al., 2022; Zerafa, 2020) especially helpful in the work of problematizing the construction of the ‘good worker’ and the inherent benevolence of social work (Badwall, 2014; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gebhard et al., 2022; Swift & Callahan, 2009)

Thobani (2007) provides details from Schick’s research, in which she found her subjects to have “performed their whiteness as normative, innocent, assertively claiming their place as the ‘rightful occupants’ of the white dominated [...] space” (p. 127). There was a suggestion from that research that Indigenous or racialized women finding a place as service providers (rather than as service recipients) was associated with her white participants’ sense of loss: the loss of belonging, of entitlement.

Later in this research, I draw on this idea of the exalted subject as a way to understand how CPWs hold their sense of their professional self, their sense of the importance of their work, and adjust to the challenges of the child protection work context. Along Thobani’s (2007)

lines of thought, I understand these as intimately interwoven with CPWs belief in their own inherent goodness and the inherent goodness of their work. I call on some of these theorizations to unpack the importance of the valorizing discourses within child protection work, and how this valorization becomes intertwined with identity formation and a sense of hyper-exaltation for child protection workers. I build on these ideas by conceptualizing a form of *hyper-exaltation* in some situations within child protection work.

These ideas help to explain some of the ways that the child protection sector and associated political and administrative actors have been able to stake a claim to being progressive, and the ways that the sector has been able to present as making substantive changes, while in fact maintaining the systematically racist, colonizing, and oppressive status quo.

#### 2.2.4 Critical Whiteness

Whiteness can seem to be a difficult concept to explain, as for those of us who inhabit white bodies, it is mostly invisible. While in some ways difficult to name and identify, whiteness is centred as the way to measure belonging and deviance (Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997).

Ahmed (2004a) writes:

Seeing whiteness is about living its effects, as effects that allow white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which means passing through space by passing as white. (para. 1).

Frankenberg (1993) set out to explore the concept of whiteness in response to an emerging awareness that, despite good intentions and well meaning, she and her white feminist peers were “part of the problem of racism” (p. 3). Frankenberg (1993) argues that the system that

defines race impacts both white people and people of colour, shaping privilege, oppression, and standpoint. Frankenberg (1993), in examining the terrain of whiteness, challenges the idea that white people can see themselves as “non-racial or racially neutral,” arguing that it is imperative that the “racialness” of white experience be examined (p. 1). Further, she identifies whiteness as such:

Whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming “whiteness” displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6).

Jeffrey (2005) argues that the concept of whiteness, “a phenomenon of being unmarked yet racially dominant,” is intricately intertwined with the conceptualization of what it means to be a “good social worker” (p. 411). Jeffrey (2005) draws connections to broad discourses about the ‘white liberal subject’, or the ideology of whiteness as being universal, ‘normal’ qualities and, perhaps most powerfully, linked to innocence and goodness.

Badwall (2013) explores this further, examining the experiences of racialized social workers and how the naming of racism in social work practice challenges the construction of social work practice as a “site of goodness” (p. 129). Calling on the conceptualization of “scripts of whiteness” (p. 56) and how this contributes to the construction of the good and capable worker, Badwall (2013) argues that “[t]he very act of naming racialized violence disturbs the field of social work, and racialized workers’ pay a heavy cost for unsettling the foundations of goodness upon which the profession of social work defines itself” (p. 59). Of particular significance are the ways in which historicized notions of whiteness (including inherent helping and goodness) are reproduced to situate workers as innocent subjects. Badwall (2013) argues

that the re-inscription of innocence through whiteness complicates the ways that social workers of colour come to understand their roles, competencies, and effectiveness as social workers.

Badwall (2013) draws attention to Goldberg's (2009) conceptualization of racial neoliberalism as part of understanding the structures that enable racist encounters to remain unchallenged within social work sites of practice. As she explores how racial neoliberalism renders experiences of racism as individualized, Badwall (2013) explicates the ways that racism is rendered and maintained as invisible within social work institutions.

My research considers the ways that social work is valorized through the exaltation of the Canadian settler subject (Thobani, 2007), and the ways that the contradictions and transgressions of social work can be reframed as benevolence (Badwall, 2013; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gebhard et al., 2022, Margolin, 1997). These ideas contribute to my understandings of how valorizing and benevolence are implicated and deeply intertwined within the formation of the CPW's professional identity. These provide some ways to understand how systemic racism and white supremacy are obscured and the ways that the CPW is drawn into complicity with institutional mechanisms and managerial technologies that maintain oppressive practices.

### *2.2.5 Neoliberalism*

It is important for this research that we unpack the concept of neoliberalism, as this becomes an important part of the discussion and analysis of data later in this dissertation. How is neoliberalism understood in relation to child welfare? It is helpful to start with an examination of the broader concepts of neoliberalism and then draw connections to the

emergence and impact of neoliberalism on helping professions. For this research, I needed to examine how systems of work in the child protection context have been informed by neoliberal ideology as well as how recent changes to work processes are mechanisms that influence CPW practices. Venugopal (2015) explains the concept of neoliberalism as a powerful, pervasive concept, being widely adopted and re-interpreted as well as contested. Described as 'an oft-invoked but ill-defined concept' (Mudge, 2008, as cited in Venugopal, 2015, p. 165), the understanding of neoliberalism seems to be shifting and is often left undefined even when it is centered as a key concept in academic or intellectual work.

One of those canonical texts most often used to describe or define neoliberalism is Harvey's (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, which defines neoliberalism as an economic theory where human well-being is best achieved when individuals' freedom, property rights, free markets and free trade prevail, and when government intervention in the marketplace is kept to the barest minimum. Schram and Pavlovskaya (2017) define neoliberalism as a hegemonic public policy orientation that is more of an implicit orientation that integrates Foucault's ideas of governmentality. An understanding of the ideas can come from canonical texts or an examination of the ways that we can see neoliberal doctrine in action. However, I found it helpful to also consider Venugopal's (2015) examination of neoliberalism as a signifier, part of a conceptual landscape and part of a dynamic debate, a series of comparisons and a developing knowledge base.

When the concept of neoliberalism emerged, it was initially understood as a way to describe a movement that formed in response to Keynesian economics (Venugopal, 2015). The use of the term has evolved to describe the trends of market deregulation, privatization, and

the process of dismantling of the welfare state (Teepel, 2000). Venugopal (2015) and Phelan (2014) agree, both identifying neoliberalism as a political, ideological, and cultural signifier, often used as a form of shorthand to describe a societal and historical turning point. Venugopal (2015) argues that initially, this term was used almost exclusively by economists. However, over time, it has been widely taken up by most other social sciences but seemingly “disappeared” from economics. At the present day, the concepts of neoliberalism are being re-theorized to expand beyond economics to be framed as other descriptors such as regimes, discursive frameworks, ideologies, and subjectivities (Burchell, 1993; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Rose, 1993; Rose & Miller, 1992; Lemke, 2001). To this end, Venugopal (2015) describes the concept of *deep neoliberalism*, which he explains as indicating that neoliberalism operates not as a singular approach, but as a complex, evolving network of governing actions and market rationalities that are present in many different but related discourses. Therefore, neoliberalism is no longer just related to specific arguments about market forces but has come to inform discussions about relationships, class conflicts, and power dynamics.

Phelan (2014) describes neoliberalism as initially a set of principles used to guide economic approaches that have since become part of a larger movement that has brought about a reorganization of capitalism. Strongly influenced by discourses of reduced government, intervention in the market practices is reframed as contrary to the ideals of the free market. Phelan (2014) cites Peck (2010) to argue that the term neoliberalism has become a taken for granted catch-all, a form of “short-hand term for the ideological atmosphere” as if the word itself explains everything and needs no further elaboration (as cited on p. 3).

The concept of neoliberalism or neoliberalization can be helpful when trying to examine the ways that social services and helping professions, including child protection, appear to have shifted in the last several decades. Woolford and Curran (2011) examined neoliberal restructuring related to Manitoba's non-profit field. From that work, they were better able to describe ways that the range of neoliberally informed managerial and bureaucratic technologies were observable in social service settings. Woolford and Curran (2011) conclude that these changes functioned to weaken the connections within human relationships and impair the sense of responsibility towards the wellbeing of others. They use the term *relational distance* to describe this shift in connection to 'Others' that is even further impaired by neoliberal managerialism with the adoption of the focus on numerical and managerial processes to measure performance (Woolford & Curran, 2011). Describing their findings, Woolford and Curran (2011) demonstrate ways that social service workers come to understand their working context and their practices as limited with the neoliberalization of their field and the emergence of relational distance. Where social services were previously given the tasks of addressing issues of social justice and the welfare of those in need, it was clear that that the ascendancy of neoliberalism shifted the focus of service provision, imposing expectations of entrepreneurial and managerial approaches. With the decline of the welfare state as described by Teeple (2000), Woolford and Curran (2011) argue that social inequity and disparities have become more pronounced with the ascendancy of neoliberalism.

As neoliberal ideologies have become integrated and normalized, the conceptualization of social work practice has shifted from helping, relational, and compassionate towards a more intensified form of social regulation of non-ideal, non-compliant, or non-productive people

(Schram, 2015). Social work and helping practices have become infused with discourses of individual service recipient responsibility. Liebenberg and colleagues (2015) present research that helps to understand how neoliberal discourses seeped into social work practices with their discussion of *responsibilisation*. This concept and process is described as the assumption that misfortune, such as unemployment, poverty and inequity are the results of individual shortcomings rather than structural design, and that self-discipline is a moral characteristic (McBride & Mitrea, 2017). Liebenberg and colleagues (2015) found that individuals receiving services are increasingly seen as responsible for situations of risk and need and, through this process of *responsibilisation*, the individual is assumed to take on the self-management of risk (Kelly, 2001, as cited on p. 1008). Further, it was clear that social service providers integrated discourses of *responsibilisation* into service plans and outcome evaluations, with a recurring theme that presumes responsibility for ineffectiveness of services to be the result of service user resistance/irresponsibility, and the framing that any failure of a service intervention is attributed to the individual who has not made 'good choices' (Liebenberg et al., 2015).

Schram (2015) argues that certain disciplinary processes affected a shift of the responsibility of the state, from the function of offering assistance to functions of disciplining the population. The shift also provides discourses that guide the general population to internalize these market logics, and for those who need services to accept personal responsibility for the gaps. That means that the general population comes to accept that they, as individuals, need to locate their own resources and adapt to the changing economy themselves. According to Schram (2015), neoliberalism is most fundamentally about imposing this market rationality on individuals as part of the basic ethic for everyday life, in all areas of

living. Government programs for assistance have been centred on inculcating this neoliberal ethos, which is the “ultimate form of privatization” (Schram, 2015, p. 26). Of particular interest to my research are Schram’s (2015) observations about changes to welfare programs in the US including the ways services were restructured, which provided marketized incentives to social workers to conduct their work in particular ways.

Also important for this research is the concept of social work and CPW responsabilisation. Schram’s (2015) research found that social service workers were being disciplined by neoliberal ruling regimes to impose behavioural standards that enforced compliance on “disposable” people with the narrative of reducing the “burden on society” (p. 27). Schram (2015) further argues that disciplinary regimes are the core of neoliberalism, not the periphery, and that social work has been neoliberalized to focus on managing marginalized people in seemingly depoliticised ways. Social work, according to Schram (2015) has become fully assimilated and complicit in these disciplinary regimes, shifting technologies of the state to impose ideas of personal responsibility and self-discipline onto vulnerable populations. Schram’s (2015) research focused on services related to financial and welfare support, but his findings suggest that the use of organizational reforms such as devolution, privatization, and performance management, combined with paternalistic policy tools, fostered a disciplinary approach to managing populations being served/regulated.

While Schram’s (2015) work does not look specifically at child protection, he argues that the policies re-entrench the moralizing roots of social welfare institutions and the disciplinary functions that have long worked towards “regulating the poor” (p. 112). Specifically of interest

to my research, Schram (2015) argues that social service staff were also 'disciplined' into working in ways that were inconsistent with altruistic ideals of helping professions.

Schram (2015) notes that social services are being actively depoliticized as part of the ascendancy of neoliberal rationalities, and with that, social workers are being shifted towards deskilled work that functions to discipline social workers as well as service users. Social workers in Schram's (2015) research were observed to become integrated into a system of work that is not consistent with the ideals taught in social work programs; instead, they were being transformed by organizational settings to embrace paternalistic ruling regimes. Baines and van den Broek (2017) also discuss the observable shift in practices because of different forms of coercion: "workers become part of the austerity agenda, injecting neo-liberalism into the lives of the service users and communities" (p. 126).

Lees and colleagues (2013) looked at the issue of managerialism in both nursing (Menzies Lyth, 1988) and child protection (Munro, 2010a), concluding that there are serious unintended consequences of implementing purely managerial solutions in health and social care contexts where risk and uncertainty are high. Lees and colleagues (2013) noted that the shift towards highly prescriptive and rigidly defined work processes and strict performance management strategies, implemented as a means to protect the organization from political fallout and public scrutiny. In this research, Lees and colleagues (2013) noted increased levels of anxiety felt by nurses and social workers as their work processes were reduced to discrete, depersonalized tasks. Menzies Lyth (1988) noted that the work became more depersonalized as service recipients were reduced to numerical or categorical identifiers. As I will explain later in this work, this reduction serves to legitimize dehumanizing discourses and practices all the

more. The issues related to the absorption of neoliberal rationalities within the provision of social services is of interest to this research – specifically in the ways that social service workers generally, and CPWs more specifically, are expected to reduce state liability and maintain the focus of service on risk management, while also functioning to shift the focus of responsibility away from the state (Garrett, 2010; Lees et al., 2013; Schram, 2015).

### *2.2.6 Temporalities*

From the beginning of this research project, I have been aware of the importance and intensive focus on the use of time as form of measurement in the context of child protection processes. The references to the concepts of urgency, unpredictability, and timeliness are innumerable within child protection discourses but seldom interrogated (White, 1998). The use of time as a measure of the CPW competency and effectiveness is ubiquitous and has rarely been problematized. It is essentially taken for granted. The ways that child protection work is conceptualized and framed in terms of time measurements provides an important entry to understanding some of the ways that child welfare work is subject to external, translocal ruling relations (Smith, 1999).

In the child welfare context, the timeliness, and expediency of interventions are conflated with competence, ‘best practices,’ and clinical validity. Without interrogation, timeliness has come to be assumed to be the best method of ensuring child safety. Temporalities observable within child welfare systems align with broader social discourses, particularly around concepts related to capitalism and neoliberal ideologies. Timeliness, efficiencies, and expediency are reified and centered in many places as well as within the realm of child welfare. In an environment steeped in discourses of urgency, time constraints, and

expectations of promptness, these temporalities function to maintain structural inequities and oppressive practices. CPWs who strive to take time to practice in a reflective or thoughtful manner face a range of institutional responses from lack of support to outright discipline.

What is meant by 'temporality'? I come to an introduction of the concept of temporality via West-Pavlov (2013), who writes that the idea that "time is both eminently common-sensical and highly abstract at once" (p. 4); a mix of the obvious, and the inscrutable, highly complex, highly concrete and "anything but self-evident" (p. 5). West-Pavlov (2013) argues that concepts of temporal calibrations are very important in an analysis of social relations of power. Citing Freeman (2007), West-Pavlov (2013) argues that temporality is a mode of implantation through which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts:

Schedules, calendars, time zones, even wristwatches are ways to inculcate forms of temporal experience ... that seem natural to those they privilege. Time's attributes of linearity ('what is past is past'), universality, quantifiability and commodifiability ('time is money'), and finally contemporaneity and modernity ('newer is better') all work to structure human existence according to the restrictive but profitable mechanisms of late capitalism. (p. 5)

The banality of the concepts of time, mediated through technology, is one of the ways that institutional forces become concretized and conceptualized as irrefutable facts. It is helpful to this project to consider the ways that time keeping devices and methods maintain the Euro-centric perceptions of reality, including the abstract concept of time (West-Pavlov, 2013). The ways that time is conceptualized contributes to disciplinary regimes, with notions about calibrated time and the associations with virtuous behaviours such as punctuality and productivity. Clocks and schedules emerged in medieval Europe and were used to regulate many aspects of social life, functioning to moderate and discipline the population, organize

work patterns and ultimately becoming a powerful tool of colonization, used to define who is 'civilized' (Foucault, 1977; Nanni, 2012; West-Pavlov, 2013).

In *the Colonisation of Time*, Nanni (2012) explores the ways that the imposition of European conceptualizations of time, including a global standardized time, as well as the use of hourly, daily, and weekly consciousness of time, was used by European colonizers and missionaries to "bring about a sense of world-wide order" (p. 3). These things, therefore, provided a means to incorporate colonized subjects into the colonizer's master narratives. Not only did these conceptualizations of time function to control how colonized peoples were allowed to work, rest, and play, they also disconnected Indigenous peoples from their own knowledges of their lands, as well as their own conceptualizations of time – including natural and seasonal rhythms. Nanni (2012) argues that the imposition of these timeways was a process of imposing "cultural curfews" and reorienting people, on a wide scale, towards altered understandings of sanctioned and permissible activities. Ultimately, these imposed conceptualizations of time functioned to conscript human subjects into "the matrix of the capitalist economy" (Nanni, 2012, p. 4). In a child welfare context, time measurements are used to regulate CPWs and service recipients, and have become a *de facto* measurement of performance, competency, and compliance. This has been a longstanding framework within child welfare (White, 1998); however, these temporal measurements have become intensified with the implementation of CPIN discussed later in this research.

In the article *White Time*, Mills (2014) explores the connections between conceptualizations of time and systemic racism, considering the ways in which time can be understood as racialized. Beginning with Rawls' (1971) dominant discourse on justice in political

philosophy that ignores actualities of racism in society, Mills (2014) notes that this body of scholarship dismisses the need for rectifying racial justice. Mills (2014) argues that this approach to social justice obscures the ways that Eurocentric constructions of time and history excludes the experiences of racialized peoples and serves to protect white racial privilege from the threatening encroachments of racial justice.

Mills (2014) uses the concept of “White time” (p. 30) to understand the ways that temporal topographies and chronological colonisations were imposed on inhabitants of Africa and the Americas, setting the start date of history as the time of European arrival, and in so doing, asserting a presumption that no history happened before this. Mills (2014) argues that a colonizing perspective holds that prior to the arrival of European colonizers, there was no acknowledged passage of time, implying that non-Europeans were unable to make history. These discourses that deny non-European history make it easier to deny humanity to racialized diaspora and Indigenous Peoples. ‘White time’ becomes a way to define the ‘appropriate’ use of time, including conceptualisation of daily rhythms, work, leisure, productivity, and wastefulness of time to non-Europeans. ‘White time’ is used to define those who do or do not use time appropriately, those who do or do not have a past, do or do not have a future. Mills (2014) explains that those who do not demonstrate time management skills are constituted as being backward and uncivilized. Terms such as “Colored People’s Time (CPT)” or “Black Time” describe those who squander or waste time, demonstrating an immaturity, mental deficiency, or childishness (Mills, 2014, p. 31).

In his argument, Mills (2014) draws on the work of Michael Hanchard (1999) to describe the phenomenon of “racial time,” or “the inequalities of temporality that result from power

relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups... produc[ing] unequal temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power, and knowledge” (p. 28). Arguing that allocations of time are differentiated by race, Mills (2014) shows the ways that time is experienced differently by race – “working times, eating, and sleeping times, free times, commuting times, waiting times, and ultimately, of course, living and dying times” (p. 28). Mills (2014) describes how time is racialized, describing the impact of “White time” through which “alternate histories” are erased, where all history is merged into a “colorlessness” (p. 32).

Mills’ (2014) work is of particular relevance in considering the ways that child protection services are imposed with the strict adherence to often arbitrary timelines. Child protection interventions are imposed in specific linear and timed ways, which work to enforce specific expectations of work processes, compliance to regulations, and attendance to specific standards of actions, regardless of service recipients’ realities and situated experiences. This will be unpacked further in Chapter 5; however, for now, let’s consider the ways that CPWs must conduct investigations within specified time frames that steadfastly ignore the daily experiences of families that come to the attention of child welfare systems. Service recipients who, for example, work nights and cannot meet with a CPW in a specified time frame, are often constructed as unskilled, disorganized, and, worse still, non-compliant and resistant. This approach to temporalities in the context of child welfare is often the underlying rationale for defining parents as deficient. Parents who are unable to align with the nine-to-five scheduling of child welfare institutional processes are often subject to searing critique. These constructions of timeliness are applied as a means to assess individuals and become ‘evidence’ of poor attachment, deficient coping skills, mental illness, or other moralistic, depoliticizing, and

psychologizing interpretations. The concept of 'White time' can help demonstrate the ways that temporalities interact with and are accentuated by other forms of structural racism, reinforced by neoliberal ideology.

Cosenza (2014) also argues that temporalities function to maintain a variety of disparities, and in their use of the term *chrononormativity*, they describe the process of naturalizing dominant notions of time towards maximum productivity. Cosenza (2014) examines the intersections of disability and queerness to create a space for different approaches and different understandings of time. Using the concept of chrononormativity, Cosenza (2014) considers a variety of ways that conceptualizations of time work to maintain systemic inequalities. "Time masks the hidden rhythms of privilege" and maintains connections, physical, emotional, and philosophical connections to schedules of capitalism (Cosenza, 2014, p. 156). Cosenza (2014) continues, noting that "time is another lens through which to see the ways regulatory regimes compel bodies toward the impossible accomplishment of normativity" (p. 162).

From the work of Nanni (2012), Mills (2014), and Cosenza (2014), we can understand that in many different realms, time can be a mechanism to inculcate, regulate, and discipline. Within child welfare there is a very intense relationship with temporality. White (1998) writes about temporality in child welfare, through their discussion of data from an ethnographic study conducted in a British social services agency between 1993 and 1995. White (1998) argues that while concepts of time can seem abstract, there is a notable material impact for the "situated activity" of social workers, functioning to order and constrain social work activities in complex ways (p. 57). Child protection work is constructed in paradoxical ways – as being urgent, often

perceived as a crucial, pressing service on par with first responders such as paramedics, firefighters, and police – and yet constrained within a mainstream, ‘white collar’ nine-to-five business structure. The need for services beyond the standardized business day is addressed through a “Night Duty Team” (White, 1998, p. 62) or what is referred to in Ontario as an After Hours (AH) Service; a need rationalized as imperative but different from regular child welfare service. White (1998) notes that “the spatial and temporal dimensions of service provision are thrown into sharp relief when events in the lives of clients obstinately continue to unfold when social workers are absent from work for any period of time” (p. 63). These conceptualizations contribute to the prevailing perception of child protection work as unpredictable and inherently risky. Along with this sometimes-incongruous approach to time, White (1998) notes that within child protection, there exists a characteristic approach to temporality, one that uses “bureaucratic time in the construction of various types of account, particularly those of an ‘exonerative’ nature” (p. 56). White’s (1998) research suggests that child protection referrals are coded and categorized, and through that process and discussions of risk, danger, and deviance, they achieve a “caseness” that is mediated by concepts of time and urgency. Further, White (1998) notes that “the classification of cases as ‘urgent’ or ‘routine’ is an essentially temporal act, imposing lesser or greater amounts of ‘waiting time’ ... on the referred person” (p. 64).

White (1998) argues that the ways that child protection work is approached serves to maintain institutional realities, allowing CPWs (and I would add their agencies as well) to hold to their moral accounts. In other words, to maintain their attachments to their altruistic and benevolent professional identities while being compliant with political and bureaucratic

impositions of rationing resources. White (1998) writes that “for social workers, time is experienced as a constraint, as something imposed, in the form of deadlines for example” (p. 61). This results in a dialectical relationship; as CPWs navigate, interpret, and respond to imposed time constraints. White (1998) argues that this is not entirely a rhetorical creation of the CPW but is better understood as something that is selectively utilized by the CPW. For example, events can be interpreted as ‘urgent’ but within a 9 to 5, white collar workday paradigm. The CPW draws on their understandings of risk, danger, and harm, which serves to obscure their complicity in the decisions to ration resources (including the resource of time) to service users. The constructions of risk, urgency, and danger function to reproduce and re-entrench current, oppressive practices by prioritizing ‘urgent’ cases for investigations and ‘interventions’ over the work of prevention, caring, support or helping. Consistent with encroaching neoliberal ideologies, the way that urgency is constructed and replicated in child protection work ultimately serves to justify the lack of time given to other forms of care, help, or work. The ways time is rationed with service users – risk does not cause shortness of time, but the shortness of time, related to political strategies such as organizational abandonment (Gilmore, 2015) – functions to define risk and the responses to these defined risks. The time that is required to do preventative work is dismissed as “mandate drift” (A. Koster, personal communication, 2022) and devalued, and the time that is spent to conduct intrusive investigations, surveillance, and regulation is clearly prioritized. Later in this research (see Chapters 4 and 5) the data demonstrates that temporality is often a pernicious factor in decisions made about child protection cases. The factors that hold sway are often obscured politically informed structures that map out policies, standards, and processes. In many

instances, the policies and procedures serve the agency and government, but seldom serve the interests of children and their families. We see practices and associated narratives such as “*we better apprehend just to be sure,*” without a clear picture of who is being protected. Later in this work, I examine some of the ways that child protection work is held to increasingly stringent time expectations and the ways that CPWs who resist rigid performance measures must navigate and contend with a variety of disciplinary responses. With the insights gained from Cosenza’s (2014) work, it becomes apparent that there is a different way to understand how fatigue within social work is often pathologized, framed as “burnout” or the waning ability to work to one’s expected level of productivity, filtered through the lens of neoliberal ideology. Unwillingness or inability to maintain compliance with rigid time expectations becomes a psychiatrizable offence that requires CPW be subjected to focused and intentional disciplinary measures.

## **2.3 Methodology and Method**

### **2.3.1 Institutional Ethnography**

IE is conducted within assumptions about the social world and people’s lives that guide an examination of what is happening. Theory and method are combined into an inquiry that makes explicable everyday happenings that otherwise remain mysterious or misrepresented. The expressed purpose of IE is to generate potentially useful knowledge for people *whose everyday activities are being organized against their own interests* (Rankin, 2017b, p. 1, original emphasis ).

Institutional ethnography (IE), from the work of Dorothy E. Smith (2005), is described as a “method of inquiry” intentionally to differentiate this approach to research from other sociological research methodologies in a way that can “enlarge the scope of what becomes visible” by looking at social relations that connect one local site to others (p. 29). Smith (2005)

explains that IE differs from other more typical sociological research and thus generally employs a framework that originates in academic discourses and theories, which displaces people, activities, social relations, and organizations, making them abstracted objects of study, disconnected from lived realities. Smith (2005) argues that in this way, sociological research creates categories and those categories become the subjects of the study. Smith (2005) posits that institutional ethnography proceeds very differently, beginning first and foremost with the “actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process and focus[ing] on how those actualities were imbedded in social relations, both those of ruling and those of the economy” (p. 31).

IE starts with direct observations and, as DeVault and McCoy (2004) explain, IE uses “empirical investigation of linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations and translocal processes of administration and governance” (p. 191). The IE method of inquiry then looks to understand how activities are organized by the “ruling relations,” of what Smith (2005) calls the “extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives” (p. 10). There have been other scholarly works that looked at child welfare in Ontario, that also use institutional ethnography (de Montigny, 1995; Parada, 2002). In those research projects, however, issues of race and gender were not centred. This research while using an IE approach, strives to centre the issues of various forms of structural oppressions, including heteropatriarchy and systemic racism, with a specific examination of the ways that whiteness operates within child welfare. In the next few sections (2.3.2 – 2.3.7), I present some of the IE-informed concepts most salient to

this research such as the concepts of disjuncture, work (as conceptualized through IE), boss texts, and bifurcated consciousness.

### 2.3.1.1 *Disjuncture*

Disjuncture is a key concept for this research, as it was my attempts to make sense of my experience of disjuncture that led me to the doctoral program. Dorothy Smith (1990b) first conceptualized *disjuncture* as she tried to describe the contractions she experienced between her work as an activist - and what she understood in her working world within the academy. Her scholarship focused on “the world of institutions and of discourse—theory, concepts, ideology, beliefs, and knowledges—examinable as people’s doings in the everyday world” (Smith, 2003, p. 244). Disjuncture is a way of framing the disconnections between claims made within the discourses and ‘talk’ of child welfare versus what we actually see in the work and ‘doing’ of child welfare.

Bisaillon (2012) provides a helpful description of disjuncture, referring to the “disconnections between people’s experience and knowledge of the world and the official or authoritative representations of these” (p. 611). Smith’s concept of “disjuncture, dissonance, or ‘split’ or rupture in consciousness commonly provides the analytical impetus and starting point for an institutional and political activist ethnography” (Bisaillon, 2012 p. 611). Sometimes described as a “line of fault” (G. Smith, 1990, cited in Bisaillon, 2012, p. 611), a disjuncture represents a sudden fissure, or fracture between what is known versus what is experienced.

### 2.3.1.2 Work

Of particular interest in institutional ethnography is the concept of 'work'. IE uses an expanded or "generous" understanding of the concept of work to include any actions that people engage in that is "intentional, takes time and effort and is getting done at a particular time and in a particular place" (Griffith & Smith, 2014, p. 10). Work is often conceptualized as those specific activities that fit into a narrow lane of paid employment. Smith and Griffith (2022) explain that related to some Marxist-feminist theorizing around unpaid care work, IE has come to embrace the conceptualization of "what people are actually doing," the often missed or unrecognized activities as best understood to be forms of work (p. 40). Work in an IE framework can be used to describe, for example, the kinds of activities that parents do when they decide, plan for, and prepare meals for their children. This includes ways that parents may or may not accommodate children's eating preferences (DeVault, 1991, as cited in Smith & Griffith, 2022, p. 41). Work can also be how patients referred to a wound-care clinic make and keep their appointments, travel to, and wait for appointments, and how they present themselves to the nurse offering wound care (Waters, 2016).

As I began my research and was looking for a way to explain the incompatibility between what the child welfare system claims to do and what is actually done, I surmised that institutional ethnography would help to explain the 'work' of child welfare and these complicated relationships. Later in this work, I will highlight the ways that CPWs 'work' to accommodate the changes associated with the implementation of wide scale policy and practice changes, such as those brought about by the implementation of CPIN.

### 2.3.1.3 Boss or governing text

The examination of text is an important component of IE, as this provides an excellent opportunity to see how a system is organized, specifically around how those active within and around the system are positioned and what instructions are given through texts (Waters, 2016). The term *boss text* refers to any text – not just hardcopy, written texts – that sets out specific tasks, procedures, and practices. These texts, in whatever form they appear, are influential in the coordination of organizational relations. It is through these organizing texts that the work is controlled, where members of the organization are shepherded towards conformity with the selective requirements of the text (Bisaillon, 2012). Boss texts can include other forms of text such as online text, media, legislation, judicial decisions, and so on. Texts such as theories, laws, procedures, policies, rules, regulations, and so on, provide guidance for how those who are engaged within the institution select which ‘actualities’ to attend to. The ways these textually selected actualities are represented in text and the ways that certain actualities are recognized or not, guide the concrete ways of doing the work, and of maintaining or organizing social ruling relations (Smith & Griffith, 2022). The ways that sequences of institutional action occur can help to recognize the ways that discourses are organizing the social relations (de Montigny, 1995; Smith & Griffith, 2022). Multiple documents within an organization can and often do combine, interact and compound; however, there are certain texts that are positioned as more influential or authoritative and are subsequently given priority within the organization. In this research, texts related to the Child Protection Standards in Ontario (“The Standards”) are coordinated with the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017) and so, as boss texts, these two documents

demonstrate and help us to understand some of the social relations within child welfare in Ontario.

This review also includes an analysis of a series of texts, related to the process most commonly referred to as an inquest. I use the term Inquest as an umbrella term which for the purposes of this discussion can include a wide range of events such as a commission, a judicial inquiry or a coroner's inquest. For some, these different events may seem at times disconnected however, I argue they can be well understood as a boss text. The Inquest is a boss text that is less confined and not limited to one specific case, but rather is a series of events, activities, formal reports, Coroner's jury recommendations, as well as the media coverage and public narratives that are part of child welfare inquiries and inquests. All of these textual and narrative forms have become influential discourses in the child welfare environment. These are boss texts because of their pervasive influence and regulatory role.

#### *2.3.1.4 Institutional circuits*

Research that uses IE carefully considers the ways that institutional texts and language weave together a variety of complex social relations whereby institutional language becomes coordinated as sequences of actions (Smith & Griffith, 2022). Smith and Griffith (2022) explain the development of this concepts of "circularities" or "ideological circles" (p. 90) - a process whereby an "observable actuality" is described, becomes an abstract idea, a textual account, or a "textual reality" (p. 93). In other words, they refer to how an abstracted idea is identified and understood to explain and confirm the abstracted account of the activity in a textual, tangible way. Smith and Griffith (2022) write:

The notion of an ideological circle locates a sequence of action going from the concepts or theories of a discourse to picking out those aspects of what is or has been going on to develop an account to be understood in terms of the concept or theory used to organize it (p. 91).

Institutional circuits refer to the ways that texts are incorporated, attending to the ways “work that is done to produce texts from selected actualities in order to build textual representations that fit into an authoritative (boss) text in such a way that an institutional course of action can follow” (Griffith & Smith, 2014, p. 12). The ways that child protection work is informed by these boss texts and the ways that CPWs interact with child welfare discourses illuminates the ways that child welfare work ‘circles back’- the ways that textual accounts that function to confirm textual realities that are narrowly prescribed by boss texts.

#### *2.3.1.5 Bifurcated and multifaceted consciousness*

When Dorothy Smith writes about the emergence of Institutional Ethnography (IE), she describes coming to understand the dissonance between her lived experience as a wife and mother and the abstracted concepts she encountered in the university setting where she worked as a sociologist, teacher, and researcher. In her early work, Smith (1974) describes the idea of *bifurcated consciousness* as the ways that she observed the lived, embodied experiences of women and how those experiences were being interpreted through abstract theoretical frameworks that were defined by men in academic settings. Smith (1987) critiques the notion, which was commonly accepted at that time, that academic inquiry was neutral and rational, and challenges the ways that women were excluded from practices of power and ruling relations. Smith (1987) argued instead that women were subjected to an insidious form of

discrimination in the ways that access to positions that related to policymaking and educational processes were held as the “prerogatives of men” (p. 29).

Bifurcated consciousness is a concept that has also been used to understand experiences of people who are living a “duality of experiences among oppressed groups” (Cannon, 2016, p. 1). Cannon (2016) draws on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois to identify similarities between bifurcated consciousness and the concept of double consciousness, used to help describe the experiences of African Americans in post-Civil War U.S. when they were legally free but living under laws and societal practices that “imprisoned almost as surely as slavery did” (p. 1). The concept of bifurcated consciousness can also be helpful to understand the experiences of Black feminists who were erased, ignored, and silenced by white feminists who wholeheartedly embraced the work of such writers as Betty Friedan without recognizing the limits of that perspective. For Black feminists, experiences of oppression were very different than the experiences of oppression for white women, yet the concept of *women’s consciousness* emerged as a way to explain the totality of gendered oppression. Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks bring forward the experiences of marginalized women who are the most egregiously victimized by gendered oppression, in part because of the erasure of the intertwined experiences of oppression related to other locations such as race and class (Cannon, 2016).

An important aspect of bifurcated consciousness that assists in this analysis is the associated concept of *outsider-within* (Collins, 1986) and the importance of considering the ways that whiteness is part of ruling relations (Cannon, 2016). Smith (1974) writes about the ways that women are both outside and subservient to structures. In her example, the world of

academe and how women are constrained and beholden to conceptualizations of their work bear little resemblance to what they are actually doing. While Smith (1974) wrote about women's involvement in academic activities within sociology as well as being objects of sociological research, I am using some of her ideas to delve into some of the ruling relations, particularly related to the intersections of race and gender, applied to the child welfare realm.

I want to consider the experiences of CPWs and how they understand and work within a large system that is not only oppressive to service recipients but also oppressive in a variety of ways to those who are employed within these structures. I am cautious about presenting child welfare workers solely as an oppressed group, recognizing that in many interactions, these workers hold profound power. The idea of bifurcated consciousness, or perhaps a multifaceted consciousness, is helpful to unpack the complicated and intertwined gendered and racialized ruling regimes within child welfare. By this, I refer to this context where caring labour is historically designated as the realm of women's work. It is also constructed as being of little or no importance (Baines et al., 1991; Swift, 1991), while simultaneously functioning as a site of whiteness and colonization (Fortier & Wong, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014; Pon et al., 2011). Within these gendered and raced processes, child welfare work is valued for the ways that deviance and pathology are managed and regulated. Considering the concept of bifurcated or multifaceted consciousness might be able to help as this research grapples with the conflicting constructions of social work and CPWs' professional identities as entirely benevolent enterprises, obscuring and erasing past and present transgressions and harms. Those within social work and child protection work must find some way to come to terms with their complicated and intertwined identities; CPWs must contend with the various ways that child

protection work is valorized and conceptualized as benevolent, helping work (Badwall, 2014; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Fellows & Razack, 1998). It is important to keep in mind the ways that CPWs hold enormous privilege, power, and authority over the most profoundly excluded people, while they themselves are also exploited and devalued. CPWs experience disciplinary regimes that limit their sense of agency and constrain their work within narrowly and increasingly scripted tasks.

Considering some of specific issues of gender in child welfare, there has been helpful scholarship that explicates the variety of ways that child welfare focuses disciplinary regimes on women. For example, scholarship that critiques the focus of interventions on those who do not fit cis-heteropatriarchal social norms and others who do not fit strict definitions of 'protective' and 'fit' parents (Callahan & Lumb, 1995; Strega et al., 2013). Swift (1991) describes how the use of gender-neutral language, such as the use of the term 'parent', functions to mask the gendered oppression by suggesting an unbiased neutrality, thereby masking systemic sexism. Important also to consider is the gendered nature of societal assumptions embedded within child welfare practices, which hold that care and nurturing is the purview of women while men are unsuited and suspect in the realm of care work, and where fathers are only assessed if present (Swift, 1991; Walmsley et al., 2015).

I apply the concept of multifaceted consciousness to help in my analysis of the ways that, within child welfare work, there is tension between women's paid care work (child welfare, social work) and the role of regulating and disciplining women's unpaid care work (mothering). This multifaceted consciousness is complicated further by the ways that white supremacy and scripts of whiteness (Badwall, 2014; Jeffrey, 2005; Lee & Ferrer, 2014) scaffold

the work in child welfare, where predominantly white men are positioned to regulate the work of predominantly white women CPWs, who are then regulating predominantly racialized and impoverished women. There is a complicated tension embedded within child welfare work where upper- and middle-class women who are mostly white function to monitor, regulate, and police the work of mothers, who are mostly lower paid working class, racialized, psychiatrized, and otherwise marginalized women (Callahan & Lumb, 1995; Koncikowski & Chambers, 2016; Roberts, 2002, 2014). Child welfare structures the work such that women are regulating women within a regulated hierarchical structure that is dominated and informed by a male, white perspective-what Callahan and Lumb (1995) described as “a different but linked subjugation” (p. 797). Child welfare practices profess to provide help to families but, in actuality, function as surveillance and regulation to those who have committed the transgression of needing support or assistance. Swift (1991) recognized the inherent sexism of focusing the regulatory interventions on mothers, with a disproportionate effect on single mothers. However, a closer examination is needed to consider the contradictory, complicated relationships of women engaged in the process of regulating other women who are disproportionately racialized, constructed as (dis)abled, psychiatrized, and live in other marginalized positions, while embedded within structures that continue to be dominated by masculinized perspectives.

Where Smith (1974) considered the idea of bifurcated consciousness, I am considering a concept of multifaceted consciousness as a way to imagine the complex relationships for those who are drawn into this “social superstructure” (Martinez, 2015, p. 156) and how the various experiences and locations coalesce. How can we understand the ways that people navigate these complex systems of norms, inequality, power, and privilege and how does this help us to

understand the contradictions in child welfare? Ruling relations within child welfare are steeped in white supremacy and scripts of whiteness but are also rife with tensions that relate to issues of gendered norms. As argued earlier (see Section 2.2.4), systems of whiteness are normalized and, for many, invisible. Before there can be even claims of a shift in child welfare practice towards less oppressive methods, there must be clearer understanding of the ways that whiteness and gender interact and inform child protection policies and practices.

As highlighted by the work of Kikulwe (2014, 2016) and Gosine and Pon (2011), racialized CPWs must navigate ruling relations in ways that are further complicated by the expectations that they adapt to the white space of child welfare. Racialized CPWs work to find ways to engage with a system that tokenizes their work -a system that dismissed and devalues their knowledges and their lived experiences of racism. Racialized CPWs who participated in the research projects by Kikulwe (2014) and Gosine and Pon (2011) described the ways they are called upon to broker relations and negotiate white informed services from the white space of child welfare upon racialized service recipients. Furthermore, child welfare work is focused upon the caring work of marginalized women, and within the structures of child welfare, professional caring work predominately done by women is supervised and monitored by disproportionately male-identified management. These structures are governed by a pattern - that becomes progressively whiter and male-identified as you move up the hierarchy. As one looks at the locations of supervisors, directors, policy makers and others in the higher echelons in these structures, positions are populated by those who have progressively less and less lived experience with the direct work of child welfare or of lived experiences of racial and gendered inequality. Bifurcated consciousness may not fully capture the multiple sites of consciousness

that are involved; however, the conceptualization of multifaceted consciousness helps to frame the multiple, complicated, and intersecting ways that CPW workers are themselves oppressed at the same time as they are also complicit with oppressive practices.

#### 2.3.1.6 Epistemological and Ontological Shifts Within Institutional Ethnography

Scholars of institutional ethnography contend that students who embark upon research using IE need to engage with the core epistemological perspective – that “all knowledge is socially organized”, and knowledge is never neutral (Rankin 2017, p. 2). Researchers who use the IE approach need to experience and embrace a “distinctive ‘ontological shift’ that is the hallmark of IE research” (Rankin, 2017a, p. 1). Deveau (2009) provides an example that explains this shift, as a way to shift how we understand the problem. For Deveau (2009), a disability rights scholar, this meant understanding that “the problem” was not with him, not a biological problem that resided with him and his disability, but a social problem that resided with his employer, his physician, and the way *they* understood “the problem.” In this way, Deveau (2009) is able to see the “problem” as external to him and not as an integral part of his identity (p. 4). When institutional ethnographers are able to shift their understanding away from *why* things happen towards *how* things happen the way they do, this is referred to as an ontological shift (Deveau, 2009).

As Institutional ethnography seeks to make observable and map out the relations that link those in one site to others that are connected, Smith (2005) uses the term *standpoint* to create;

a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy. It is a method

of inquiry that works from the actualities of people's lives and experiences to discover the social as it extends beyond experience. (p. 10)

Rankin (2017a) implores the IE researcher to locate themselves within an institution, while staying grounded in an empirical observation and description of the activities within. Rather than activating prior theoretical frameworks, the researcher engages with the standpoint information, examining this knowledge in context of the discourses, social constructions, and embedded contradictions. The adoption of a standpoint, where the lived experience is often politicized, is a crucial aspect of the IE process. This research, especially the data that is examined in Chapters 5 and 6, looks at the standpoint of those who work in child welfare as a means to gain a deeper understanding of the complex ruling relations that construct 'the problem' of child abuse and neglect, and where the politicization of certain knowledges, functions to maintain this oppressive institution.

#### ***2.4 Autoethnography***

There was a point in this research when I became aware that my own experiences as a CPW provided important insights and needed to be included. In addition to my other identities, my location as a CPW concurrently with my location student-researcher is complicated and messy. The decision to include autoethnographic data was made later in the research process as I was working to analyze the data from participant interviews.

Taber (2012) examines the use of autoethnography "as a theory, and a method, as an (iterative) starting point to interrogate social ruling relations" (p. 73), arguing that her research centred her own experiences, connecting her lived experiences and the parts of her life that set the stage for her research. Taber (2012) discusses researchers who explicitly examine their own

location and how this impacts their research. From her own experience, her own “circuitous route” (p. 74), Taber (2012) argues that it is impossible to separate the researcher from their life experiences, and that those life experiences inform the research. She writes,

The ways in which I view the world, in my everyday life outside academia are very similar to the ways in which I view it in academia... I have recognized that I am a whole being who cannot separate one aspect of her life from another. (Taber, 2012, p. 76)

The antecedents of (auto)ethnography are associated with 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropology, infused with subtexts of “otherness, subordination and marginality” as well as colonialism and imperialism (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995, p. 391). Some have argued that modern anthropology<sup>2</sup> continues to be implicated within the historical web of colonial-imperial frameworks. This is important as this informs the theoretical and conceptual frameworks particularly with respect to researcher epistemological position and their relationships to/with the lived realities of the subjects of study (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). Jordan and Yeomans (1995) argue that it is through the use of reflexivity that there may be a pathway to reconcile some of the “dualisms of contemporary social theory i.e. object/subject, theory/practice, action/structure and so on” (p. 394). Reflexivity, they claim, “therefore operates on the basis of a dialectic, between the researcher, research process and its product” (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995, p. 394).

My experiences working in the field of child welfare in Ontario span over three decades and encompass periods of time when there were significant changes to policy and practices. It is through deep reflections on my own trajectory and lived experiences that I have been able to begin the work of unmasking some of the insidious power relationships that are profoundly informed by racism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. It is through this process of

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<sup>2</sup> Some writers have used anthropology and ethnography interchangeably (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995).

deep reflection that I came to understand how important it is for me to share my personal insights as I articulate my findings. While my guiding method of inquiry for this research is institutional ethnography (IE), I have come to understand that my own lived experience is in fact a key source of information.

However, like Rina Miller (2005), I struggled to conceptualize my personal experiences as 'valid' research data; I struggled with the fear that my experiences would be dismissed as the ramblings of a 'disgruntled ex-employee' or the sad reflections of a worker who succumbed to 'burnout.' I was reluctant to include these personal reflections for fear that they would be seen as a lesser kind of scholarship that lacked rigor or was less valid (Bochner, 2000). However, over time, I kept coming back to reflect on those earliest thoughts and the awareness that my experiences, particularly in the moments where I experienced disjunctures (Smith, 1990a, 2003), and my reflections of those experiences over the past three decades represent the foundations of this research. I considered the use of reflexivity as a way to engage in an iterative exchange where I, as the researcher, have the opportunity to work through some of the complexities of my social positioning. I was able to delve into the themes and ideas of this study, particularly with respect to power relationships. Using a form of autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997) throughout this research helps me to articulate some of the meanings of my observations and ultimately helps me to make connections between experiences and theoretical frameworks.

Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that autoethnography is a postmodern, postcolonial approach, one that makes space for ways to conceptualize locations and multiple, shifting identities. More importantly for this research, beyond simple location or identities, I use

autoethnography as an opportunity to explore concepts of engagement, complicity, and resistance in oppressive practices.

Reed-Danahay (1997) brings forth and examines different ideas about group membership, or more specifically, in relation to autoethnographic research, the question about who can declare themselves members of the group of people who are being studied. In using the concept of autoethnography, one is making a declaration of membership as someone who “possesses the qualities of often permanent self-identification with a group and full internal membership as recognized both by themselves and the people of whom they are a part” (Hayano, 1979, as cited by Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, Reed-Danahay (1997) describes the autoethnographer as a “boundary-crosser” (p. 3) and, drawing on Denzin (1989), argues that the autoethnographer incorporates elements of their own life experiences when writing about others. Reed-Danahay (1997) defines autoethnography as a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context and challenges the positivist conventions that present a binary split between self/society.

While autoethnography is important and valuable to this research, it also presents with some troubling ideas, that of the “voice of authenticity” and how we define membership. I make the assumption that my many years of work within this field means that I am a member and as such I am also a “knower” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 11), and that my interpretations of my data will be accepted as coming from a place of and with that voice of authenticity and veracity. I further assume that being a member of this community allowed me to have access to data that would be difficult for an “outsider” to obtain. Does my experience as a person who worked in the field past and present, mean that I speak with a voice of authority? Am I able to

speak for this group by virtue of having worked in this sector for many years? Does the number of years in this field render my insights more valid? This is where autoethnography provides me with a particular perspective on knowledge and scholarship, helping me to navigate the tension between analysis of data and personal experience (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011). Crawley (2012) conceptualizes autoethnography as a form of “self-interview... a balancing act between modernist empirical science, postmodern deconstructions of science and subjectivity and the activist pursuit of recording marginalized ideas and voices” (p. 144). I use my experience of being within the child welfare community, at first beloved then later rejected – belonging while simultaneously not belonging – and grieving these losses.

Autoethnography is a way for me to look at child welfare in Ontario as both an insider and an outsider. In some ways I am still an ‘insider’; my training and skillset is still very much in demand, so I can navigate these spaces with ease, I am able to find work again in this field with little effort, and I can interpret the social landscape with skill (Bourdieu, 1989). At the very same time, I struggle to feel that I belong. Like Crawley (2012), I do not hold autoethnography as a ‘pure’ or most accurate form of inquiry, but as one tool in a larger tool kit of methods.

## **2.5 Method**

From the onset of my doctoral research, I have been determined to conduct research within the child welfare realm of social work. Also from the onset, I had set my sights on conducting research that would explicate the lived experiences of front-line CPWs in the context of large-scale legislative and policy changes. Despite the intensity of the doctoral program and the demands on my time, I chose very intentionally to maintain my position as an employee within a child welfare agency in Ontario. I chose to maintain this position in large part

because I had a strong, visceral understanding that child welfare is a defensive, guarded community that responds in suspicious, even guarded ways to any form of outside scrutiny. I believe that gathering data when one is fully an 'outsider' to child welfare would be extremely difficult and would have been a barrier to my research.

When I was ready to begin my field research, I initiated contact with the Executive Director for the child welfare agency in Ontario that I worked for at that time. I had worked for this particular agency since 2010, for a time as a full-time frontline CPW. Later, upon commencement of my doctoral studies, I shifted my work for this agency to be a Casual Relief CPW. In this amended role, my work was infrequent, usually covering staff holidays as an 'on-call' After Hours Worker. As an After-Hours Worker, I responded to calls and inquiries and infrequently intervened on referrals to child welfare that occurred after regular business hours, but I did not carry a caseload. The infrequency of my work afforded me an opportunity to spend long spans of time away from that community, popping in and out almost as a form of 'checking in'. Even as a causal relief staff, working as infrequently as I did, I still was expected and enabled to be current in my practice knowledge and training. I had the extraordinary opportunity as a researcher to attend the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) training for child welfare workers in 2016. To examine the impact of large-scale policy and practice changes for CPWs and their work, this research uses the example of the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) from 2015 to 2019 as a case study. In addition to participant interviews, I drew upon training manuals from my own training in the use of CPIN from the training I attended in 2016.

This IE research draws upon a variety of text resources such as child welfare legislation, including The Child and Family Services Act (1984) or CFSA, and the more recent version of legislation proclaimed in 2018, The Child Youth and Family Services Act (2017) or the CYFSA. One important document that handily owned the title of *boss text* (Bisaillon, 2012) is the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016), or more simply and more oft referenced as “the Standards”. Additionally, I examined a variety of publicly available documents including historical documents from the time I was a frontline CPW, such as Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) training manuals, and other publications from the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) such as the Eligibility Spectrum (OACAS, 2021). Also included in my research are training documents gathered from the participant agencies that agreed to assist with this research. I have also examined sections of the reports from the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW).

In November 2018, I approached my employer for permission to conduct this research with their staff. Initially the Executive Director was very interested, stating to me that she felt research to be a very important endeavor in child welfare that should be given more attention. However, a short time later when I was writing up the Research Ethics Protocol forms, I was informed by that Executive Director that her executive team declined the request to allow me to do the research with their staff. It was explained to me that their executive team felt they could not manage any extra tasks or projects, as they collectively felt completely overwhelmed in the aftermath of their CPIN Go-Live date.

The decision to opt out of this research was very interesting, as at the time of this request, this agency had been fully ‘onboarded’ to CPIN for over 18 months. By declining to

participate in this research, this agency suggested that the impact of the transition to CPIN was perhaps more significant and had longer lasting negative consequences than anticipated. The possibility that CPIN might have had a significant impact on an agency, and that it would have drawn resources away from other kinds of child welfare work, was considered when the questions for the semi-structured interviews were drafted (see Appendix C).

In an attempt to draw out some of those possible unintended consequences, and to try to gather some information about the impact of agencies being 'on-boarded' to CPIN, some of the questions in my participant interviews asked about the kinds of training they participated in and the kinds of professional activities they were directed to focus upon. For example, question #4 (*What training have you taken in the last 2 years? Please describe training related to CPIN but also any training that was not CPIN focused.*), and question #11 (*Has the implementation of CPIN changed how you do your work? What do you do now that you did not do before? Are there tasks, roles, practices, or projects that you no longer do, no longer need to do or are unable to do since CPIN was implemented?*) were intended to delve into the experiences of being 'on-boarded' and what shifts in work this might represent. These questions were an attempt to gain insight from frontline workers about if and how they saw changes to their indirect and direct service provision as the agency moved to adapt to CPIN.

Through networks of acquaintances, I approached a different agency in southern Ontario to ask permission to conduct research interviews with their staff. There was a delay in the response from this agency (which I call Agency B), so I approached another child welfare agency in northern Ontario. This second agency (which I call Agency A) answered immediately that they would support the research to be conducted on site, with their frontline, supervisory,

and executive staff. A short time later, Agency B responded, also enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in this research. Ultimately, both agencies that I approached agreed to participate. Later in the research process, there were several individuals who worked at other agencies who requested to be part of this research.

Altogether, the participants of this research come from 1 of 5 different child welfare agencies: 4 in southern Ontario, 1 in northern Ontario; 2 from major population centers, 3 rural.

Role	Agency A	Agency B	Other
Directors/Executives	2	3	
Supervisors	4	2	
QA/researchers	1	1	1
Screeners	2	2	1
Intake	2	0	1
FSW/generic	7	1	
CSW	2	1	
Kinship	1	2	
Speciality			1
Adoption	0	1	
Adolescent team	0	1	
IT/Data Migration	2	0	
	23	14	
Total	37		4

**Figure 1: Participant roles per affiliation**

Participants were chosen from those who responded to recruitment invitations that were circulated within each agency's inter-office email system, as well as from those who responded to recruitment posters displayed in the office spaces. Three participants were recruited through my personal networks. Participants were accepted on a first come-first served basis. Only those who responded late to the email and poster invitations after data collection was concluded in the summer of 2019 were excluded.

Beginning in April 2019 through to December 2019, I interviewed 41 participants in 31 separate sessions. Of all the participants who assisted with this research, only one identified as Black and only one identified as Biracial. There were no participants who identified as Indigenous. All others identified as white. When I noticed this disparity, I reached out to several racialized child welfare workers through my personal networks to ask if they would participate. However, no other racialized workers accepted this invitation. Within this group, there were 5 men; 4 of whom were in management or executive roles. One of these men identified as Black. Of the 36 women participants, 8 were in management or executive roles. One woman, not in either a management or executive role, identified as Biracial.

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the participants in this research identified as white, and significant number identified as women. This is consistent with the current race and gender dynamics of child welfare organizations (Fallon et al., 2011), that the majority of CPWs identify as white women. It is also not lost on me that racialized CPWs may be reluctant, rightfully so, to participate in research that asks them to critique a system within which they already face increased scrutiny and discipline. Further, that this research did not specify an anti-racist approach and/or specifically invite Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour to share may have been another factor. The absence of this invitation is something I became aware of only after the field research was completed and represents my own lack of insight in the early stages of this project. Over the course of this research, I came to understand not only are child welfare systems steeped in whiteness, but that this is one glaring example of my own oblivious whiteness; one that demonstrates clearly how steeped in whiteness my understanding of child

welfare has been. As in so many instances of research, my attempt to comprehend the impact of whiteness came as an afterthought.

Most of the interviews were conducted 1-on-1, while 5 sessions had 2 participants and 2 sessions had 3 participants. All participants agreed to the sessions being audio-recorded only, and I took handwritten notes of my observations throughout. One session was not recorded by audio, due to a technical issue with the recording device. Three interviews were conducted by Skype, with recorded audio but not video. Two in-person interviews were conducted, one at a public library and one in the participant's home. Each recording was transcribed using a combined method of 'talk-to-text' transcription through online transcription engines *Trint* and *Otter*. These were then corrected and coded using MaxQDA.

In addition to insights from these 41 interviews as well as reviews of relevant regulatory and legislative documents as listed above, this research also includes components of auto ethnographical reflections of my experiences as a white, middle-class, cisgender woman who worked as a frontline child protection worker between 1990 and 2019. I was well into transcribing my participant interviews when it became apparent to me that my prior knowledge and experiences as a frontline child protection worker, while not universal or all-encompassing, are nonetheless important data to understand the very issues that I sought to investigate. The research then turns to examining some of my direct lived experiences, considering the ways that I have been complicit in oppressive child welfare practices. I now see this as helpful guidance towards understanding some of the complex social relations within child welfare work.

## **Chapter 3: Child Welfare Structures & Cycles of 'Reform' in Ontario**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

This chapter provides a review of literature that examines the history of child welfare, with a focus on events in Ontario. Child Welfare in North America and in other parts of the world have undergone similar tumultuous 'reform' cycles that can be argued are similar and analogous to the situation in Ontario. However, an important part of this research delves into the experiences and daily 'doings' of CPWs and I will be using my direct experiences and observations of the Ontario context in my analysis (see Chapter 5). For this reason, and in the interests of containing this research, the focus will be on the Ontario context where possible.

This chapter provides a concise overview of history and a review of literature related to the early history of child welfare in Ontario, such as from the work of Richard Barnhorst (1986), Xiao Bei Chen (2001), Karen Swift (1995a), and Craig Fortier and Edward Hon-Sing Wong (2019). Looking also at literature that provides analysis of child welfare reform events in Ontario, especially since 1998, this chapter includes a review of more recent scholarship to consider the discourses and presumably unintended consequences of many of the most notable legislative and policy changes in the past three decades.

This section examines the ways that early legislative developments and early policy approaches embraced discourses of individualism, informed by colonial and racist ideologies that are connected to nation building (Fortier & Wong, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014; Swain & Hillel, 2010). The earliest traditions of child welfare service approaches were moralistic, punitive, and stigmatizing. I argue that these early approaches set the stage for some of the concerning issues that endure within current child welfare practice.

This chapter will look at the ways policy and legislation shifted, such as with the proclamation of the CFSA in 1984, which ushered in new, intensified bureaucratic and litigious approaches; and later in the 1990s with the ascendance of neoliberal managerialism, the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model, the Child Welfare Transformation Agenda, and the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW), including the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN).

Historical discourses around child welfare, steeped in the philosophy of liberalism, though transformed through the more recent adoption of neoliberal managerialism or *New Public Management* (Griffith & Smith, 2014), remained much the same as the underlying issues of oppressive, colonizing practices, and systemic racism remain largely unchanged. The intention in this chapter is to provide an overview of foundational ideologies and discourses, particularly of colonization, racism, cisheteropatriarchy, and classism that were present from early on and continue to inform child welfare practice in Ontario today. I argue that despite repeated claims of 'reform' in child welfare in Ontario, the changes to legislation and policies over the last three decades have not significantly changed the spirit or the direction of child welfare. I argue instead that cycles of reform have actually functioned to deepen and re-entrench many of the foundational and oppressive ideologies and discourses intrinsic to social work and child welfare.

This chapter provides this information in two ways. First, I review scholarship related to child welfare, considering the ways that ideologies exist in relationship with discourses and bearing in mind how these ideologies have informed legislation, policy, and practices. This

section also reviews some of the existing scholarship that examines past efforts to reform child welfare in Ontario.

This chapter also provides a brief description of the cycles of child welfare reform that have swept through Ontario. The intention is to provide some context to better understand the significance of the more current cycles of 'reform', specifically the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), which features prominently in Chapter 6.

### ***3.2 Foundational Structures and Discourses of Child Protection***

This section is not intended to present a comprehensive history of child protection in Ontario, but rather an overview of the shape and shifts of discourses within this field. The history of social work and child protection<sup>3</sup> is most often presented, particularly in social work textbooks, as a response to the negative impacts of the Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the vast numbers of economic migrants who suffered low wages and deplorable living/working conditions in urban centers (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011; Jones & Rutman, 1980). While this is not untrue, it is incomplete and masks many subtexts of racism, colonialism, classism, and sexism that are deeply embedded within child welfare (Barnhorst & Johnson, 1991; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Fortier & Wong, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014; Pon et al., 2011; Swain & Hillel, 2010; Swift, 1995a).

It is important to examine some of the ways that foundational discourses and oppressive practices became established and continue to reside within social work and child

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<sup>3</sup> Many writers, such as Margolin (1997), do not articulate their discussions about social work specific to certain specialties within social work, therefore presenting social work and child welfare/protection as interchangeable. Please see Section 1.3 of Chapter 1.

welfare. In *Under the Cover of Kindness*, Margolin (1997) argues that discourses embedded within social work practices demonstrate a shift of political surveillance from the public realm into private realms. Margolin (1997) argues that social work employs an individualistic approach, functioning to maintain the status quo, to maintain the current inequitable social structures under the proclaimed goal to “promote the common good” (p. 5). Margolin (1997) demonstrated the incongruities (what I understand as ‘disjunctures’) of social work – the ways that social work narratives and discourses present a specific and limited version of reality and, in so doing, work to block, silence, and deny other realities. Margolin (1997) described how social work discourses first emerged as a response to ‘foreigners’ and ‘the problem of the poor’ and as a profession, social work developed these concepts into a “language of helping” (p. 97). Adopting this “language of helping” functions as a way to present social workers as benevolent, ultimately masking the ways that social work maintains a “self-serving power” (Margolin, 1997, p. 101).

In the earliest days, child protection was a response to the sudden burgeoning of poor working-class populations, and the emergence of densely populated, squalid slums. Initially intended to be a way to regulate parents, to ensure that they raised their children to become pro-social citizens, this soon-to-be profession evolved, embracing classist, racist, xenophobic, and eugenic ideologies as a means to ‘protect’ the public from the ‘risk’ of future criminals and reprobates (Chen, 2001; Fortier & Wong, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014; Margolin, 1997; Swain & Hillel, 2010; Swift, 1995b). Since this ‘service’ was intended to be protective of the public, there was also a strong theme of public accountability for public monies to be spent wisely (Jones & Rutman, 1980; Margolin, 1997).

There are records of the very earliest child welfare efforts in Toronto, which did provide support services to parents in the form of care services for those who could not care for their children due to work or illness. This kind of service, however, did not endure for long; child protection interventions shifted from supportive functions to more overtly regulatory or governmental functions (Chen, 2001). Chen (2001) argues that there is a shift in child welfare services where the primary objective was to regulate parents, to direct them in turn to regulate their children, ensuring that their children grew up as “good citizens, to be self-regulating pro-social adults rather than criminals, beggars, prostitutes, and so on” (p. 20). She writes:

Child protection work emerged in the late nineteenth century, at the threshold of an era of Western liberal democracies which was characterized by an unabashed philosophy of interventionism and accompanying expansion of governmental and societal intervention into the private sphere of the family and life in general (Chen, 2001, p. 19).

Chen (2001) uses a Foucauldian genealogical approach to develop a critical understanding of early child welfare discourses. Her examination of early child protection discourses in Toronto found that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, child abuse was conceptualized as forms of cruelty perpetrated by immoral/amoral parents, so child protection interventions were constructed as a means to protect the larger society by preventing neglected or abused children from growing into deviant criminals. Separation of children from abusive caregivers is constructed as a benign, politically neutral, or even progressive form of intervention. Early reformers such as JJ Kelso advocated strongly that separation was the best way to ensure safety (Jones & Rutman, 1980). It was not until later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when child abuse came to be understood as an issue related to the rights of the child, considering the child’s personal safety (Cameron et al., 2007; Chen, 2001). The concept of separation being equated with safety remains an enduring discourse even as organizing discourses shift over the years.

Child welfare was one of the first areas of social work to be organized and legislated. Overlapping with the bureaucratic organization of charity giving, it was one of the first places of employment into which upper- and middle-class white women were recruited, first as volunteer “friendly visitors” and later as part of an emerging ‘legitimate’ professional occupation (Franklin, 1986; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011; Margolin, 1997; Thobani, 2007).

Chen (2001) writes about shifts in discourses towards seeing children as the “ideal citizen, with the most legitimate ethical and political claims” (p. 31). This happened alongside a shift towards conceptualizing poor parents as ‘menacing’, as perpetrators, as opponents rather than individuals worthy of support. Swift (1995a) interrogated the concept of child neglect in academic literature and found the category to be poorly defined and inadequately researched, with the available material lacking in critical analysis. Swift (1995a) found that the ‘knowledge’ of neglect and understandings of the various intervention strategies assumed the cause to be individual parental pathology. With a focus on the ways that discourses of neglect are focused around ‘bad motherhood’ without explicitly naming mothers, they are able to mask the structural and largely gendered and classed nature of the issues. The concept of neglect in a child welfare context is a vaguely defined but enduring construct that functions to reproduce and maintain gendered, raced, and class-based oppression (Swift, 1995a). These foundational ideas maintain that child welfare issues stem from individual parental pathology, and are separate from structural contexts of wealth inequality, systemic marginalization, poverty, or hardships. With this approach, parental pathologies are understood to be the result of individual deviance, immorality, or perversions. These ideas persist in current child welfare discourse, as I discuss in later chapters.

While Chen (2001) addresses the origins of discourses steeped in classism, sexism, and racism, Fortier and Wong (2019) expand the analysis, noting that social work in North America was, from its origins, a mechanism to provide or deny resources to Indigenous people who had been rendered dependent through occupation and displacement as an adjunct to colonialism. Numerous scholars have identified the ways that the child welfare system has imposed colonial and genocidal intrusions into Indigenous communities across Canada and in Ontario (Baskin, 2011; Blackstock, 2009; Landertinger, 2021; LeFrançois, 2013a; Sinclair, 2007; Sinclair et al., 2004; Sinha et al., 2011). From the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to present, the child welfare system perpetrated the “Sixties Scoop;” an organized, bureaucratized destruction (Neu & Therrien, 2003) that saw countless Indigenous children across Canada forcefully removed from their families and placed in residential schools, later into formal state care, and subjected to mass transracial adoptions. Sinclair (2007) and others (Baskin, 2011; Blackstock, 2009; Landertinger, 2021) have argued that the Sixties Scoop never really ended, as vast numbers of Indigenous families continue to be disproportionately subjected to child welfare interventions, in fact higher in number than at the height of residential schools. Sinclair (2007) refers to this continuing harm as the “Millennial Scoop” (a term attributed to Gilchrist in 1995, according to Sinclair, 2007.p. 67).

Fortier and Wong (2019) argue that social work stepped in to assume the tasks of the Indian agent and the Christian missionary regime, simultaneously creating dependence among Indigenous peoples while promoting ideals of virtuous self-reliance and industry and engagement in the capitalist marketplace. They write:

Not coincidentally, charitable organization societies and settlement houses also preached self-reliance and used social welfare as a mechanism of control in a parallel

fashion to manage and assimilate new immigrant settler populations, particularly those coming from non-Anglo-Saxon countries... While these social service movements purported to deal with the social implications of poverty, they were operationalized in Canada (and the United States) for the purpose of settlement and colonization (Fortier & Wong, 2019, p. 440).

In the early 1900s, the emerging profession of social work became one avenue that helped to legitimate the state's goal of assimilation under the guise of helping, in that the social worker was positioned as the logical replacement for the Indian Agent. Fortier and Wong (2019) argue that the transition from Indian Agent to social worker was "seamless" (p. 441). As the profession of social work emerged in the Canadian context, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) lobbied for and achieved positioning within the Indian Residential School (IRS) system, locating social workers as administrators of provincial child welfare legislation that gained jurisdiction over reserve communities that were otherwise legislated federally. It is by these means that social work is positioned to play a key role in the colonial and assimilationist projects (Fortier & Wong, 2019).

As early as 1964, there was data emerging in child welfare spaces that Indigenous families were being subjected to services that were not only not helpful, but in fact were very harmful. As the residential school system was being dismantled, the child welfare system was ramping up, to the clear detriment of Indigenous communities, while maintaining systems of colonial oppression (Mandell et al., 2007).

### ***3.3 The Evolution of Child Welfare Legislation***

#### ***3.3.1 Early Legislation***

King and colleagues (2013) provide a summary of child welfare legislation in Ontario in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and show that prior to specific child welfare legislation, the issues

relating to orphaned or abandoned children were addressed by a combination of The Orphan's Act (1799) and the Ontario Municipal Act (1849). The first legislative act to address the issues of child protection was the Children's Protection Act (1893), which established the Children's Aid Society as a quasi-public institution. Children's Aid Societies in Ontario were tasked with intervening on behalf of children who were victims of severe abuse or neglect and later were given the legislated authority to remove children and make them wards of the province (King et al., 2013). With this legislation municipalities and the provincial government became responsible for the costs of these interventions and gained the ability to punish negligent or abusive parents. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was an additional trifecta of anti-women legislation in Ontario: The Legitimation Act, which allowed for the retrospective legitimization of children born to parents before they were married; The Adoption Act, which made adoption inexpensive and accessible; and the Act for the Protection of Children of Unmarried Parents (Chambers, 2007, p. 3). *Prima facie*, these various legislations were intended to mitigate the worst social and economic consequences for children born out of sanctioned wedlock. However, these 'reforms' also functioned to punish and marginalize women who became pregnant outside of legal marriage. These legislative acts served as a stern warning to other women and functioned to maintain societal norms for gender roles embedded within heterosexual, two-parent family structures (Chambers, 2007). Case files from this period, approximately 1920 to the mid-1950s, showed the ways that the workers from the Children's Aid Societies across Ontario gathered detailed information about unwed mothers' backgrounds, social behaviours, and sexual histories. Women were subjected to processes that constructed and reconstructed them through the eyes of actors within the child welfare system, primarily

social workers, and judges. The case records show that women were interrogated on every detail of their lives, but their stories of hardship, and violence were dismissed and disbelieved. Mothers were subsequently subjected to strict regulatory regimes as they tried to access resources to care for their children (Chambers, 2007).

The Child Protection Act of 1893 remained largely unchanged until the mid-1950s when the Child Protection Act, The Children of Unmarried Parents Act, and the Adoption Act were consolidated into the Child Welfare Act of Ontario in 1954 (Manson, 1967). In the 1930s, the provincial government set standards for child welfare services and later with the Child Welfare Act (1954), there emerged standardized mechanisms for the agencies to be held accountable to donors and funders (Barnhorst & Johnson, 1991). While the Child Welfare Act (CWA) promoted the use of prevention services, these were not strictly mandated. In other words, for as long as there has been formal child welfare legislation, there has been no strict legal imperative to offer prevention services (King et al., 2013).

### *3.3.2 Legislation for Indigenous Communities, the Sixties Scoop, and Beyond*

Child welfare has been the site of oppression and violence for racialized and Indigenous Peoples since its inception. However, Chapman and Withers (2019), Margolin (1997), Pon and colleagues (2011), and Thobani (2007) argue that this violence and the ways child welfare performs carceral duties, have been masked and obscured by social constructions and valorizing discourses.

The Indian Act (1986) is a paternalistic act that imposed the designation upon Indigenous peoples as requiring custodial protection from the Federal government (Joseph, 2015; Leslie, 2002). The Indian Act of 1876, founded on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which

remained largely unchanged since its beginning, is legislation intended to assimilate Indigenous peoples and dispossess them of the lands that Indigenous peoples have inhabited and been stewards of prior to European settlement (Leslie, 2002). Since 1876, there have been amendments to the Indian Act, but the foundational intentions of assimilation and land repossession have not changed. In 1951, there were amendments made to the Indian Act, changes that have been described by Leslie (2002) as “not a radical departure from earlier versions”, but rather “an exercise in legislative housekeeping” (p. 26). One of the amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 made a change to Section 88, such that provincial legislation which addressed matters not included in the Indian Act would now be applicable. Since the Indian Act did not specifically speak to child welfare, this change meant that Indigenous families were from this point subject to regulation from provincial child welfare legislation.

What Leslie (2002) and many other scholars did not seem to recognize or acknowledge at that time, but has been identified by other scholars since, was how the 1951 amendment set the stage for wide scale removals of Indigenous children from their communities when the amended act made Indigenous peoples subject to provincial child welfare legislation (McKenzie et al., 2016; Sinclair et al., 2004). This shift in the relationship from Indigenous people’s ‘protection’ as exclusively a federal jurisdiction to also include ‘protection’ from provincial legislation created the conditions for the Sixties Scoop, and ultimately ushered in the era of the “Millenium Scoop” (Sinclair, 2007). Trocmé and colleagues (2004) explain this as the reality that more Indigenous children are in state care at this time than even at the height of the residential school system. While this is a complicated issue with many elements to be considered, ultimately this was form of jurisdictional incursion. Where previously Indigenous families had

been restricted to living on reserves that were controlled by the federal government in conditions intended to force Indigenous peoples to seek enfranchisement (assimilation into European cultural identity, loss of recognized Indigenous 'status'), these families and their ability to care for their children were abruptly subject to compounded scrutiny by provincial authorities. Indigenous families were held to account for the very living conditions induced by colonial forces that were intended to eradicate them. As this shift in legislation became realized, there is a steep increase in the rates of Indigenous children being removed by apprehension, transnational adoption, and the residential School system (Sinclair, 2007).

In 1965, the province of Ontario entered into an agreement with the federal government. Referred to as the '1965 Agreement,' this agreement required the federal government to provide funding to the province of Ontario for any Indigenous children that were being 'serviced' by provincial child welfare authorities, but only if these children had been placed in state care arrangements (Chiefs of Ontario, 2017). Up to that point, Indigenous families in Ontario who lived on reserves but did not have "status" under the federal government regulations, or who lived off reserve in urban spaces, were not eligible for any form of social assistance because the municipal and provincial governments deferred to the federal authorities for their 'care'. As early as 1966, the province of Ontario was tracking the numbers of children admitted to state care, based on racial or ethnic identifiers. This data was gathered to track the numbers of Indigenous children in care, so that the Ontario government could seek reimbursement from the federal government of Canada. This was a scenario where bringing Indigenous children into provincial care had a clear financial incentive, and as early as 1966, data showed a clear disproportionality of Indigenous children being placed in state care.

Sinclair and colleagues (2004) describe that in the early 1980s, there were efforts to bring Indigenous child welfare under the direct control of First Nations, transferring responsibility for Indigenous child welfare to the authority of Indigenous social workers within Indigenous child welfare agencies. It is important, however, to acknowledge that despite the efforts to form Indigenous specific child welfare agencies, child welfare for Indigenous communities remains under the jurisdiction of the same provincial legislation that regulates non-Indigenous agencies. Despite the *prima facie* commitment to transfer the authority of Indigenous child welfare to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, Indigenous child welfare agencies would still need to conform to provincial legislation and regulations in order to obtain their mandate (Sinclair et al., 2004). This is arguably yet another way to mask efforts of assimilation, by granting Indigenous communities the ‘option’ to form their own child welfare system but insisting that these child welfare agencies function in the same (colonizing) ways that non-Indigenous agencies do.

In 2019, the Federal government passed Bill C-92, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children, Youth and Families*, that came into force on January 1, 2020. At the time of this writing, it is too early to have a full picture of the impact of this new federal legislation, although there were serious concerns voiced immediately after the legislation was proposed. Palmater (2020) expressed serious concerns such as, its “pan-Indigenous” approach, its approach to “substantive inequality,” its lack of clarity related to jurisdiction, its imposition of severe limits First Nations self-determination, and its lack of judicable commitment or clarity related to funding (p. 159).

For example, the pan-Indigenous approach of this legislation attempts to regulate different groups of people, in different geographical areas, with vastly different needs, all in the same way. This pan-Indigenous approach treats all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples as a homogeneous group with the same needs. Notable in the absence is a commitment from the federal government to ensure “predictable, stable, sustainable, needs-based and substantively equal funding for child and family services in Indigenous communities” (Canadian Bar Association [CBA], 2019, p. 3; Palmater, 2020). The Canadian Bar Association (CBA), which was very vocal about the concerns they had, warned the government that without amendments to promote such commitments, Bill C-92 was at risk of being “at best little more than another hollow promise, and at worst an instrument for perpetuating further harm to another generation of Indigenous children” (CBA, 2019, p. 2).

Bill C-92 was passed at the beginning of 2020 with minor amendments that did not address concerns that were raised in a meaningful way. This legislation does nothing to address the issues with provincial legislations that have set the stage for, and which continues to result in wide scale removals of Indigenous children. Palmater (2020) argues that this legislation does not clarify jurisdiction, but in fact muddies the waters in this regard with vague language and only serves to place significant barriers to any First Nations Peoples who try to assert their jurisdiction for their children. Despite clear and coherent arguments for ‘predictable, stable, and sufficient funding,’ this legislation fails to include clear, directive, statutory, judiciable commitments for funding. Without these commitments in legislation, the “humanitarian crisis” (Philpott, 2017, para. 13) of disproportionate child welfare intrusions into First Nations families will continue.

Palmater (2020) argues that the claims by the federal government that Indigenous Peoples were involved in the drafting of this legislation is false, and that this new legislation is yet another example of top-down initiative that excluded First Peoples' voices. She warns that the legislation with these deeply embedded flaws maintains many of the most egregious issues in child welfare, such as intrusive practices at the frontline and insufficient funding to provide meaningful help for families and children (Palmater, 2020). Palmater (2020) predicts that this Act will cause more harm than good; the reality is that Indigenous children continue to be apprehended by provincial child welfare authorities at "alarming rates" (p. 163).

### 3.3.3 *The Child Welfare Act (CWA) & Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*

Barnhorst and Johnson (1991) argue that some of the most significant legislative changes in the 1980s and 1990s were precipitated by controversies related to child deaths, public outcry, and politicized governmental responses. Barnhorst and Johnson (1991) explain that in the 1970s, the child welfare system in Ontario came under closer public scrutiny related to a number of Coroner's Inquests related to deaths of children. In their article *Identifying Victims: Child Abuse and Death in Canadian Families*, Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) examine the topic of murder and abuse of children in Canada, with a focus on the murders of Kim Anne Popen (1975-1976), Matthew John Vaudreuil (1986-1992), and Sophia Lynn Schmidt (1995-1996). There is a passing mention of the deaths of Loretta Antone (d. 18 December 1975, age 6), Adrienne Paquette (d. 5 June 1976, age 5), Norma Dean (d. 20 August 1976, age 14), Vicki Ellis (d. 2 March 1977, age 13 mos.), Keri Lynn D'Eri (d. 6 May 1977, age 22 mos.), and Jennifer McGill (d. 3 August 1977, age 17 mos.). Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) explain that these cases "received unprecedented press coverage, bringing local Children's Aid Societies, the Ontario

Association of Children's Aid Societies, and the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services into the public eye" (p. 332).

In the 1970s, Children's Aid Societies in Ontario came under scrutiny for some of the consequences for children who were in substitute care, or concerns about children being removed unnecessarily and then languishing in foster care. There were criticisms that CAS was possibly doing more harm than good. The Ministry of Community and Social Services responded by enacting amendments to the Child Welfare Act (1978) intended to bring reform to the child welfare system, imposing a stronger accountability for agencies to focus on permanency planning for children in provincial care. A few years later, still reeling from that spate of child deaths and a wave of public criticisms in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the provincial government brought in revamped legislation in the form of the Child and Family Services Act (1984).

The drafting of the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) was an example of public pressure to 'do something' in the face of public criticism of child welfare in general. Barnhorst (1986) argues that this legislation was not really necessary as the Child Welfare Act (CWA) had just been amended. The CFSA, then, was an example of the provincial government bowing to pressure stemming from public outcry. Thus, "clearly 'something had to be done' but no one inside or outside of government had a clear idea as to what the legislation should provide" (Barnhorst, 1986, p. 282). The CFSA represented a major policy shift and has been described as coming from a legalistic, non-interventionist approach (Barnhorst, 1986). The new CFSA put a strong focus on balancing the child's "best interests" with the integrity of the family, setting out

clearer definitions for justifiable interventions as well as clearer limits to the ability of the state to intervene.

Barnhorst and Johnson (1991) explain that child welfare interventions were primarily seen as inappropriate for the criminal court system, using the family court system to determine the “best interests” of the child with the “least restrictive” interventions on the part of the state (p. 65). An important focus of the CFSA was to provide clear language around when intervention was appropriate, in order to provide ‘due process’ to families. However, with this new legislation, processes associated with child welfare interventions quickly became significantly more litigious. This was a shift away from the historical roots of the philanthropy commonly associated with J.J. Kelso and his contemporaries towards a complex, extensive, litigious, highly professionalized system (Barnhorst & Johnson, 1991).

Bala (2004) argues that these shifts, such as the shift away from a focus on family preservation and parental rights, moved child welfare work processes away from conceptualizing families and parents as recipients of care and assistance, towards interventions that focus on children’s rights and protection. There were legislative references to providing families with support to prevent more intrusive measures such as removal of children. However, these were presented as a lower priority than the interventions that focus on protection. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, but it’s important to note that this new legislation brought a focus on surveillance and investigation, and a notable lack of legislative attention to implementing preventative measures and therapeutic interventions (Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004).

Bala (2004) explains that in response to the sweeping powers and lack of transparency of child welfare prior to the 1980s, the CFSA implemented the legislative concept of “due process” into child welfare proceedings (p. 7). This shift made the work of child welfare more complex, time consuming and adversarial. Cameron and colleagues (2007) cite Besharov and colleagues (1998), Chen (2001), and Swift (1995a) to make the argument that there has been a shift towards seeing parents and children as opponents - to seeing parents first and foremost as villains and children as victims, instead of seeing them all as in a relationship with interconnecting needs and shared goals. Swift and Callahan (2009) agree:

The child protection system has embedded in it a number of contradictions that remain powerful and often problematic. It rests on tensions between helping and punishing parents and between its focus on parents and on children. These tensions lead to constantly changing thresholds of intervention, guided at least as much by ideological and political interests as by any evidence of what works (p. 131).

#### *3.3.4 Child Welfare Reform in Ontario*

Between 1984 and 1998, there were no significant amendments to the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA), nor were there any significant shifts to frontline child welfare practices. The mid-1990s saw another spate of high-profile public inquests of child deaths. The inquests received intensive media attention and brought forward many recommendations that were excoriating to child welfare agencies and CPWs. Most recommendations seemed to interpret and characterize the issues in child welfare, as “mistakes, misjudgments, oversights, and uninformed practices by social workers, point to lax, vague, or misguided legislation and identify communications problems within organizations as contributing factors leading to tragic outcomes” (Swift & Parada, 2004, p. 3). These inquests and the associated public outcry came at a time when the political winds in Ontario were blowing sharply to the conservative right.

In 1995, the Ontario Child Mortality Task Force (OCMTF), a joint project between the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (OCCO), was commissioned to examine a selection of child deaths in families that had been the subject of child welfare interventions. While the OCMTF cautioned against overreaction to these specific deaths, the final report made recommendations for some significant changes to practice and policy, such as the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) and several significant changes to the child welfare legislation (Dumbrill, 2006; Swift & Parada, 2004).

Ontario, like many other jurisdictions in the post Reagan/Thatcher/Mulroney era, made a sharp shift towards a neo-liberal and neo-conservative government with the 1995 election of Mike Harris and the ushering in of the 'Common Sense Revolution' in Ontario. The Harris government was elected in 1995, and by 1997, it was using "innocuous sounding language, which is in fact a system of coded, symbolic, culture-specific representations which silently polarize groups into regressive them-and-us scenarios" (Trickey, 1997, p. 114). The Harris government campaigned on and later governed by the promise of drastic, draconian cuts to social services. At this time, the economic situation in Ontario created an opportunity for the Ontario Conservative Party to capitalize on the wide-ranging feelings of fear and confusion, with the impact of free trade agreements and globalization, the dramatic losses in manufacturing jobs, ballooning provincial deficits, reduced federal transfer payments and high interest rates (Ralph, 1997). Child welfare trends pulled on these same threads, with the public outrage and moral panic related to the child death inquests the mid-1990s providing the Harris

government an opportunity to amplify their ‘tough on crime-common sense’ messages by targeting social service recipients in general and ‘abusive parents’ specifically.

Chen (2000) argues that the shifts in Ontario could be interpreted as a more neo-conservative ideology rather than neoliberal in that there was ideological justification for a massive infusion of Ontario government funding applied to assert the state’s authority over “deviant groups” (p. 240). For example, Chen (2000) notes that under the guise of a “child focused approach,” the government of the day imposed intensely punitive measures that primarily impacted disadvantaged women. While the accompanying discourses espousing ideas about rescuing and saving children, services for supporting parents were “explicitly disentitled” from forms of assistance (Chen, 2000, p. 240).

As the final report of the OCMTF (1997) was released, their recommendations were conspicuously in sync with the neo-conservative and neoliberal discourses that were espoused by the government of the day. For example, the OCMTF report cites research by Margolin (1990) that provides statistical data on child deaths related to neglect, but fails to include a key conclusion made by Margolin (1990):

“[A] measure that was designed to identify those neglectful families at greatest risk of allowing a child to die would have doubtful utility, because it would depend on the premise that most neglect fatalities occur in families already known to a child protection agency” (p. 318).

Moreover, what was also absent from this report is the further recommendation by Margolin (1990) that the best approach to addressing risk of fatality by neglect would be to expand *prevention* services, rather than reactive ones that remain common in child welfare. The OCMTF final report used the jury’s recommendations from the inquests, such as calls for improved training for child welfare workers, the implementation of a comprehensive risk

assessment system, and more clearly defined standards for cases that involve allegations of neglect (Swift & Parada, 2004).

The OCMTF final report provided recommendations that maintained a focus on individual parents and workers rather than considering systemic issues such as poverty. For example, the report advocated for the creation of a “provincial interactive database of information about families and children receiving child protection services that can be accessible to all children’s aid societies” (OCMTF, 1997, p. 29). The recommendations further suggest the “introduction of a comprehensive risk assessment tool across the child welfare sector,” including a program of “comprehensive training” on the use of this tool, as well as the ongoing collection and analysis of data gathered from the use of this tool (OCMTF, 1997, p. 29). Also recommended was the development of “comprehensive paediatric screening mechanism for high-risk infants at birth” (OCMTF, 1997, p. 29).

Chen (2000) challenges the use of data in the report and found that the statistics of child deaths by accident were misrepresented as being disproportionately higher for children who were known to child welfare, where deaths by suicide and homicide were seen in greater numbers. Chen (2000) argues that the methods of aggregation created an impression that children involved with child welfare services were at higher risk of accidental deaths, which was used as a rationale to support the major policy and practice restructuring in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chen (2000) argues that this report skirts around the statistics to infer that while the rates of death were not statistically significant, different rates of death for children known to child welfare “*should be expected*” because of the special characteristics of these families (p. 241, emphasis in original source).

The narrative presented in the final report of the OCMTF constructs and supports a moral panic about the dangers of children falling victim to child abuse and of negligent families being solely to blame. Chen (2000) argues that this misrepresentation of statistics was used as a rationale to justify the sharp shift in legislation that focused on the issue of child neglect. The construction of the concept of neglect is a category that “continues to be reserved primarily for poor, marginalized and usually mother-led families” (Swift, 1995a, p. 12).

Child welfare reform brought an onslaught of legislative and practice changes, as part of the shift towards embracing the risk-based perspective (Swift & Callahan, 2009). The risk assessment tool endorsed by the OCMTF was not the only change that was implemented; there was also a legislative amendment in 1999 that made the findings of “a child in need of protection” an easier legal test to achieve. The section of the CFSA that defines when a child would be defined as a child in need of protection, Section 37, was given several wording tweaks that had significant implications. Under the first section, 37(2), there was newly added legal language that explicitly defined the concept of “pattern of neglect.” In several sections of CFSA, the wording was changed from a legal finding of “substantial risk” to simply a finding of “risk,” meaning that the legal test for state interventions was dramatically lowered.

### ***3.4 The Ascendency of Risk Discourses, ORAM, and Unintended Consequences***

These significant changes to legislation and policies are aligned with the ascension of neoliberal rationalities and risk discourses. The lowering of the legal test for intervention contributed to a sudden and sharp increase in the numbers of children admitted to state care in Ontario between 2000 and 2004 (Fallon et al., 2010). The experience of working in this field at that time can best be described as intensely chaotic. I recall a tongue-in-cheek saying from a

supervisor that in child protection, “*the only thing that stays the same is that everything changes.*” This sentiment is similarly captured by Swift and Callahan (2009), where an Indigenous social worker participant asked, “what have they thought of now?” as a cautionary note to social workers, urging an approach to the promises of ‘progress’ that includes a critical analysis (p. 234).

The cycle of reform that was formally referred to as “child welfare reform” (Dumbrill, 2006; Swift & Parada, 2004) began in the mid-1990s, leading to the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) in 1998 and bringing about important changes to the ways that child welfare is practiced in Ontario. These changes resulted in the sharp rise in rates of referrals to child welfare agencies, and an associated increase in the rates of children who were admitted to care outside of their families. The dramatic increase stem from the lowered legal test for eligibility, new language that intensified the “Duty to Report,” the implementation of a standardized risk assessment tool, and a shift towards a broader interpretation of what constitutes risk for children.

With the new wording in the legislation that lowered the legal test for service eligibility, suddenly CPWs were getting more referrals from the community. This was further compounded by new language related to the Duty to Report that required community professionals to make referrals to child welfare for any concerns or face legal penalty. Further, there were new expectations and new protocols directing police forces to routinely make referrals to child welfare agencies any time police responded to alleged intimate partner violence. As well, there was a shift in standard procedures that required all child protection investigations to include interviews of all children under the age of 16 in each family, regardless of the reason for

referral (Fallon et al., 2010). These new requirements, along with the shift towards the use of a standardized risk assessment tool, resulted in a shift towards increased rates of substantiation of allegations (Fallon et al., 2010, p. 20). The rates of child welfare investigations more than doubled between 1993 and 2003, levelling off between 2003 and 2008. These changes reflect the dramatic shift towards management of perceived risks, which also dramatically changed the ways that decisions in child welfare cases were made.

Parada (2002) identified a significant shift in the reduction of social work autonomy, with a decrease in the ability for CPWs and their supervisors to make autonomous clinical decisions. Child welfare reform changed frontline child welfare practice into a much more rigidly intrusive work process, applying a 'bureau-professional' organizational model and ushering in forms of organization that embrace managerialism (Chen, 2000; Parada, 2002; Swift & Callahan, 2009). The implementation of ORAM brought significant technical changes to the ways child welfare work is done in Ontario, shifting the focus of the work towards managing and rationalizing risk in decision-making. The impact of these shifts has been interrogated more deeply by other scholars (Parada, 2002; Parada et al., 2007; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004).

The ascendancy of risk discourses was not limited to the child welfare arena. Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) explain the ascendancy of risk discourses. They reference ideas from Giddens (1991), who argued that there is a broad sociological shift in the era of 'late modernity' in the growing focus on ways to see, understand, and control risk in many arenas, including social work and child welfare. From this broad shift, there comes intensified bureaucratic

systems and new forms of managerialism, often referred to as New Public Management (see Griffith & Smith, 2014; Hood, 1991, 1995).

With the ascendancy of risk discourses, social work practices generally shifted towards more depersonalised and defensive approaches. Social services mandates shift to adopt market rationalities, service philosophies shift as clients become 'service users' rather than people with difficulties who need support (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016). In the context of austerity-informed policies, those who need support or services are understood to be 'making bad choices' and are deserving of governmental controlling and disciplining policies (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016).

Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) make the connection around how social workers become caught up in the discourses and constructions of services users' involvement as a personal failure without connecting the issues to structural oppressions. Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) use the term *relational austerity* to describe the process where preventative measures are devalued, placing the focus on risk aversion, punitive interventions, and 'rescuing' children from 'harmful' families. Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) argue that the context of these discourses, along the reduction of preventative practices and the centering of risk averse interventions such as immediate apprehension, are justified as prudent. In a financially austere climate, practice shifts to become increasingly authoritarian and combative rather than compassionate (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016).

With the implementation of ORAM, the workload in child welfare also shifted dramatically and, with the new computer systems, supervisors gained the ability to monitor workers' compliance with the newly updated Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016) ("The

Standards”). This also provided the provincial government a mechanism to audit child welfare agencies and alter funding decisions based on ministerial compliance. Dumbrill (2006) describes this as the “panoptic ability to regulate families,” as well as monitoring CPWs for compliance (p. 9). With the focus for frontline workers shifted to timeliness and paperwork compliance, as described by Parada (2002), the child welfare sector was subjected to an intensified form of managerialism or New Public Management (Griffith & Smith, 2014; Hood, 1991; Schram, 2015; Woolford & Curran, 2011). This intensified emphasis on social workers’ accountability comes at the expense of their attention to service recipients’ needs. Administrative compliance became essential, as compliance was integrated into to the funding formula. Completed paperwork had direct implications for child welfare agencies’ funding and overall security.

Those who worked in child welfare in Ontario at this time were not oblivious to these changes and these impacts. Workers were profoundly and personally affected; many workers struggled with the changes and struggled philosophically with the consequences of the changes in practice that came with large scale ‘reforms’ (Smith, 2011). Within the first two years of its implementation, there was recognition that ORAM brought unintended consequences, such as the dramatic increase in workload, intensified focus on accountability measurements such as data collection and documentation, and a corollary reduction in contact with service recipients (Provincial Directors of Service, 2001). Most notable was the dramatic increases in the numbers of children coming into state care and the associated increases in costs, as Dumbrill (2006)

notes:

The outcomes of reform were entirely predictable. As services that help prevent child abuse and neglect were reduced and the capacity of protection workers to offer casework support was diminished, removal of children from their families became the primary means of protection. In the period from 1998-1999 to 2003-2004, the number

of children brought into care increased by 65 per cent ... and the cost of Ontario's child welfare system escalated by 100 per cent (p. 12).

ORAM was implemented without a rigorous critique, and only after its implementation were some of the unintended consequences noted by child welfare scholars (Swift & Parada, 2004; Swift & Callahan, 2009) and service directors in the child welfare sector in Ontario (Provincial Directors of Service, 2001). With the sharpened focus on individual worker accountability, data shows the dramatic increases in the numbers of children being removed from their families. ORAM brought dramatically increased costs with little evidence of increased efficacy (Barber et al., 2008; Dumbrill, 2006; Stoddart, 2017).

Furthermore, with the implementation of ORAM and the consequent spike in admissions to care, the impact on Black and Indigenous families was significant and disproportionate. ORAM was later quietly replaced with The Ontario Family Risk Assessment tool. The look of the tool changed from a lengthy document that required the child protection worker to describe their observations in a narrative format to a much simpler check box form. The revised Ontario Family Risk Assessment tool (OFRA) is described as an actuarial tool that considers two indices: a Neglect Index and an Abuse Index. The Ontario Child Protection Tools Manual (2016) advised that these two areas examine and “capture dynamics associated with either abuse or neglect” (p. 31). The use of OFRA became less of a focus for the investigation and the provision of ongoing services as the province of Ontario rolled out the Child Welfare

Transformation project. The “Transformation Agenda” (OACAS, n.d.)<sup>4</sup> proclaimed that there would be shift towards more balanced, flexible approaches to frontline practice.

### ***3.5 Transformation, ‘The Commission’, and CPIN***

#### ***3.5.1 Transformation Agenda***

Responding to massively increased costs and a historically high number of children in care, the government in Ontario (which was at that time Liberal) embarked on a project of ‘transformation’ designed and intended to right the wrongs of the previous child welfare reform (Dumbrill, 2006). Transformation was described as a shift that would build on previous changes from the Child Welfare Reform project, but introduced new processes that, they claimed, would centre the child and family. The claim was that the Transformation Agenda would shift child welfare in Ontario from a “child safety focus model” towards a “child focus and family-centred model” of child welfare (OACAS, 2011, p. 17). The training literature claimed that these new approaches would be a kinder, gentler, and more respectful approach to practice (OACAS, 2011; OACAS, n.d.).

When Dumbrill (2006) wrote about Transformation, this project was still in its early days. Dumbrill (2006) argued that the Child Welfare Transformation Agenda represented a shift towards a more balanced approach to child welfare, but he also noted that there were weaknesses within this new approach that presented a significant risk of failure. Dumbrill (2006) postulated that the child welfare system, responding to public outrage and crisis, tends

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<sup>4</sup> The OACAS website has been updated and this material is no longer available on the website. The information available previously has been saved by the researcher in a Word document.

to embrace oversimplified understanding of issues and will focus attention on the outlier families, and as a result may miss meeting the needs of the majority of families who need services. Although this new initiative, this “Transformation,” had the potential to create balance, Dumbrill (2006) forewarned that it contained weaknesses that may cause it to fail. If failure occurs, Dumbrill (2006) suggested, rather than balance the child welfare system, Transformation will set the stage for another iteration of practice and policy extremes.

The Transformation Agenda was touted by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) as a significant shift in the ways child welfare services would be delivered, including options for interventions other than a strictly forensic investigative approach, referred to as “Differential Response” (DR). Referred to as sometimes as the “Evidenced Based Differential Response Model” (OACAS, 2006a, Sec. 4), this was presented a shift in practice towards a more customized response, with a broader clinical focus and an emphasis on child and family strengths. It was heralded as a collaborative approach that drew on informal supports in service planning and delivery. Transformation introduced the ‘next generation’ research-based clinical tools, referring to a reworked actuarial risk assessment tool; short and designed for specific decisions, with very little narrative required (OACAS, 2006a). The Transformation Agenda included a plan to reduce court delays and encourage alternatives to court through the use of alternative dispute resolution strategies (ADR) such as mediation, family group conferencing (FGC), “Talking Circles/First Nation Circles,” or other forms of restorative justice (OACAS, 2006a, Sec. 5, Handout #2).

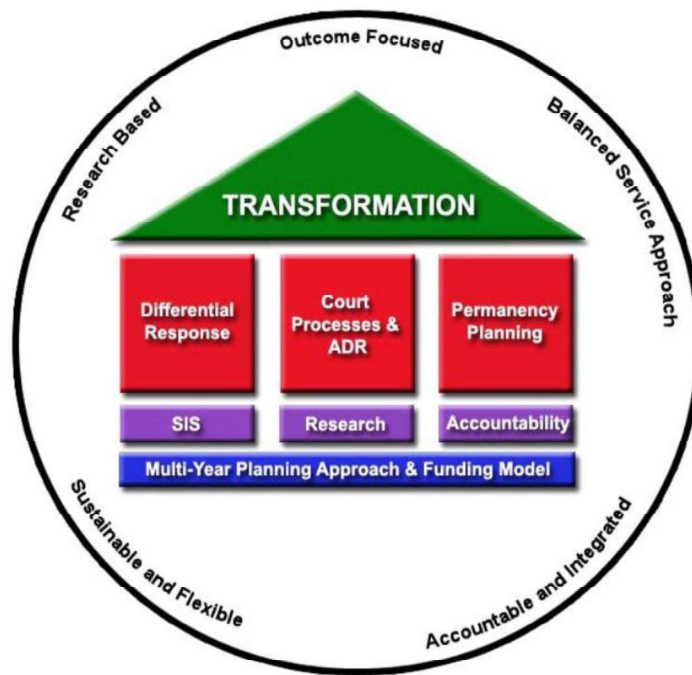
The materials used in the child protection worker training for the Transformation Agenda signalled the shift towards strengths-based, inclusive, and collaborative approaches intended to resolve child protection disputes and encourage family involvement in decision making and planning for children. Transformation also boasted a broader range of placement options intended to support more permanency options for children who were deemed to require safety interventions such as removal. When removal could not be prevented, Transformation now allowed a greater range of options for children to be placed with kin or with other important people in their communities (sometimes referred to as *Kith* placement). In situations where Indigenous children required placement, a process known as customary care would mean placement within their cultural community. There were also changes to adoption rules to allow for varied levels of openness between the birth and adoptive families to expedite the permanency process (OACAS, 2006).

The Transformation Agenda somewhat ominously proclaimed a new plan to streamline the work of accountability, with a shift towards evaluating service effectiveness of child welfare services. Part of the Transformation Agenda was to place a greater emphasis on “sound strategic prioritizing, governance and measurable service deliverables in order to shape child welfare policy and improve performance and service” (OACAS, n.d) (see Footnote 4). The Transformation Agenda introduced the concept of a Single Information System (SIS), touted as a way to “build capacity to support core case management recording requirements and to track and report child, family and broader systems outcome data” (OACAS, 2006, Sec. 3, Handout #3). The SIS, what would eventually become CPIN, was conceptualized as a key step to effective transformation, as it would allow for a focus on tracking the effectiveness of services and

outcomes for children. Highlighted in the training material was the bold claim that “common business processes and best practices with more worker time in direct contact,” and most interesting of all was that this would mean “less time spent on paperwork [which] will result in increased client contact” (OACAS, 2006, Sec. 3, Handout #3).

Transformation training material indicated eight ‘tools’ that were integral to the child protection process (Figure 2):

- 1) Eligibility Spectrum (unchanged from Child Welfare Reform/ORAM period);
- 2) Safety Assessment (essentially the same as was used during Reform/ORAM);
- 3) Safety Plan;
- 4) Actuarial Risk Assessment (a much-shortened form, tick-box format without the requirement for a narrative);
- 5) Family Strengths and Needs form;
- 6) A Plan of Service;
- 7) A Risk Re-assessment form to identify if services have resulted in meaningful change;
- 8) A Reunification Assessment in cases where a child has been removed and decisions about reunification or permanency need to be determined.



**Figure 2: The “Transformation House” that represents the tools integral to child welfare work**

The Transformation training material touts infrastructure savings, greater transparency and accountability, and improved research capacity (OACAS, 2006). Additionally, the concepts of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) were introduced as an alternative to court processes, 'where appropriate' (OACAS, 2006).

While Child Welfare Transformation looks *prima facie* to be progressive and more service user friendly, closer examination reveals discourses associated with New Public Management (Griffith & Smith, 2014), with their increased emphasis on performance management, accountability, and transparency (OACAS, 2006). Transformation training materials proclaimed an intention to shift how child protection intakes and assessments would be completed, towards a less litigious approach to cases that required interventions. This new approach directed practitioners to shift towards reduction in admissions to state care by making options for informal (kin and kith) placements part of regular practice. This marked a shift away from the reliance on out-of-family foster care, emphasizing and implementing a "streamlined and rationalized accountability framework" and a "greater emphasis on sound strategic prioritizing, governance, and measurable service deliverables" (OACAS, n.d.).

The Transformation Agenda was developed in response to some of the extreme consequences of child welfare reform and the implementation of ORAM. At its inception, this agenda did ostensibly bring forward some progressive ideas, such as the development and use of Alternate Dispute Resolution, more open adoption structures, and more flexibility in approaches to child protection investigations. While these were and remain some good ideas, the supposed benefits of Transformation failed to materialize. Those working within child welfare report that the funding never materialized, nor did the value of these proposed

changes; further, frontline practitioners were never given the resources to fully utilize these different approaches (A. Koster, personal communication, 2022). Take, for example, the proposed changes to reduce the numbers of children in state care by embracing the concept of Kin and Kith care. While clearly this is a better, lesser intrusive approach to intervention, it is important to note that this change also functions as a significant cost saving measure for the provincial government. Funding for prevention services were never allocated, so supports to prevent admission to care were not supported or developed. As noted earlier, the admissions to care for Black and Indigenous children remain disproportionate. While children are now more often placed in Kin or Kith care, those families are not provided with sufficient economic supports in the ways that formalized foster families are. Families that face structural obstacles such as poverty, precarious housing, or lack of access to support services, did not fare better with Transformation. Despite the value of the sentiments towards being a more flexible, respectful, and collaborative approach to child welfare, the Child Welfare Transformation project was, unable to deliver on these sentiments. This is due to being so deeply informed by neoliberal market rationalities, specifically related to re-centering the responsibilities away from government, and downloading of burdens and costs to individuals such as workers and service recipients.

### *3.5.2 The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW)*

The cost savings that were sought via Transformation were not deep enough or fast enough to bely the fears of continued budget increases going forward. Ontario's Children's Aid Societies were predicted to spend more than \$1.4 billion in the fiscal year 2010/2011, and the increases in spending were predicted to be increasing at a far greater rate than other services

to children (CPSCW, 2010c). There was concern that in light of the significant costs of child welfare, that the information about outcomes for those receiving service from child welfare agencies in Ontario was very limited (CPSCW, 2010c). In response to this, the Ontario government of the day under the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty announced in November 2009 the formation of the *Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare* (CPSCW; “The Commission”).

The Commission was given a “three-year mandate to develop and implement changes that will ensure a sustainable child welfare system for the province’s vulnerable children, youth and families” (CPSCW, 2010c, p. 1). The Commission, a project infused with neoliberal ideology, was tasked with answering concerns about “getting maximum value for the money spent on child welfare” (CPSCW, 2010c, p. 1) and examining the existing system of providing services in a decentralized format via 53 independent Children Aid Societies. Part of the Commission’s mandate was to look for efficiencies and ways to cut costs, including the ways that services or even individual agencies could be merged. These concerns were raised in the context of the global economic crisis that was just unfolding in the autumn of 2009, and so the provincial government was looking for the “right balance in spending on child welfare through the children’s aid societies versus funding for other services for vulnerable children, youth and families” (CPSCW, 2010c, p. 1).

The Commission conducted a tour of the province of Ontario in early 2010 and soon published a series of early documents and working papers. *Working Paper #1* identified the issue of administrative burden as a prominent theme from consultations (CPSCW, 2010a). It is not clear from this document, however, who participated in the tour and who was included in

the discussions and consultations, so no conclusions can be made around representation of diverse stakeholders, such as frontline child welfare workers or members of equity-seeking groups. Participants in these CPSCW discussions expressed the concern that the MCYS had placed “unrealistic and ineffective compliance and administrative burden” on agencies in Ontario (CPSCW, 2010a, p. 4). The paper argued that, with the administrative processes in place at the time, “it is estimated that only 15% to 30% of staff time is spent on direct service to clients” (CPSCW, 2010a, p. 5). Based on their experience from other work, the Commissioners argued that that a shift away from the administrative intensity would not present “undue risk or weakening of accountability” (CPSCW, 2010a, p. 2).

Working Paper #1 goes on to provide a list of examples from Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and some international contexts of governmental ministry audits of existing regulatory and reporting requirements that were able to reduce administrative time in some cases by as much as 43% (CPSCW, 2010a, p. 11). It made recommendations for a target reduction of between 10% and 20% in administrative and non-direct client activities and estimated that this could increase direct service time with child welfare clients by 35% to 50% while also significantly reducing costs (CPSCW, 2010a, p. 16). To do this, they recommended the reduction of certain activities such as new forms of case file reviews, duplicate methods for tracking high risk protection cases, streamlining the process to report and track Serious Occurrences in Child Welfare Cases, as well as the coordination of Crown Ward file reviews.

The exact moment of CPIN’s conception is difficult to pinpoint, as there were references to the concept of a Single Information System (SIS) within the training material from Transformation (OACAS, 2006). Where the idea of a central database had been presented in the

past without fruition, a review of documents from the CPSCW shows that the concept of CPIN as a province wide database of child protection appears to gain traction in the early days of the Commission in 2010. From conversations with a child welfare expert informant, the dream of a centralized database that would service all child welfare agencies in the province had been the subject of discussions for many years prior to 2010.

It is noteworthy that the term *Child Protection Information Network* or *CPIN* was not used within the Commission's Working Paper #1, in either concept or terminology. CPIN was subsequently identified in the following Working Paper #2, titled *Jurisdictional Comparisons of Child Welfare System Design* (CPSCW, 2010d). There was an associated document titled *Recommendations: Reducing Administrative Burden in Child Welfare* (CPSCW, 2010b), which included the issues discussed in the first Working Paper, but also included the following without rationale or foundation: "That the Ministry proceed to act on the Commission's specific recommendations on reducing administrative burden including those addressing Implementing CPIN, Modernizing the Tracking of High Risk Protection Cases and streamlining and Simplifying Serious Occurrence Reporting" (p. 1). All of this suggests that a careful, critical analysis of the costs, benefits, and possible unintended consequences of CPIN was not conducted. If it was, I have found no evidence of this. What is more obvious was, similar to the implementation of ORAM, a sudden, full-throated, *carte blanche* approach to CPIN's implementation.

### *3.5.3 Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)*

Like ORAM in 1998, CPIN was presented as a solution to many of the longstanding issues endemic to child welfare, while simultaneously being implemented on a large scale with little critical analysis. Both ORAM and CPIN were proposed and accepted enthusiastically, touted as

mechanisms or tools that would certainly improve service to families and improve child safety. From the experiences of these two initiatives, ORAM and now CPIN, proponents have made claims of efficacy and efficiency that cannot be accepted without careful examination. In so many ways, CPIN carries on this tradition of child welfare reform in Ontario in that it has been widely adopted without critical reflection about the possible unintended consequences.

The proclaimed purpose of CPIN was to be a province wide database that would “enable timely sharing of critical child protection information among Societies, simplify administrative processes, and facilitate oversight through more timely, accurate, and comparable service and expenditure data” (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario [OAGO], 2015, p. 145). CPIN was heralded as an initiative that would “modernize” the information systems of child welfare agencies across Ontario, allowing “Children’s Aid Societies and other child welfare agencies to securely share confidential child protection information, as well as to better manage case files and finances” (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services [MCCSS], 2021, Sec. 13).

Prior to the implementation of CPIN, child welfare agencies across Ontario used a variety of computer-based database tools along with hardcopy storage mechanisms to manage current and historical records. Some agencies have also used alternate storage methods that include the use of micro fiche or laser fiche to store historical records. The push to ‘modernize’ child protection services in Ontario was proclaimed to be a way to ensure “vulnerable kids and their families can continue to get the services they need” (MCCSS, 2021, Sec. 13). More often, however, CPIN was touted to be an important step to improve government oversight of costs, performance measurements, and outcomes. Heralded to be modern and customized system,

CPIN was described as a tool that would ensure that child welfare services were delivered in a consistent way across Ontario. The stated intention was to ensure that CPWs across the province would be collecting information and accessing said information consistently across the province. This access to and consistent use of information was described as a way to ensure that CPWs did their jobs well (OACAS, 2016).

### *3.5.3.1 Structure of CPIN*

CPIN represents a significant change to the work of frontline child welfare for numerous reasons. One of the most profound changes, however, is the structure of the database itself. CPIN has embedded within it three subset applications: Cúram, a “Social Program Management Platform” understood to be the “case management side” of the work; Cognos, a web-based reporting and analytics application or “the reporting side”; and a platform known as Oracle, to manage information related to finances (Participant 1). These three subset applications are closely intertwined, inextricably linking finances to clinical case management measures for the very first time. This change, carrying forth many of the neoliberal rationalities present in child welfare and social services, represents a significant shift in how child welfare work is done.

Prior to CPIN, the financial side and the clinical side were very separate functions; they were distinct work conducted by different people in different departments. CPIN functionality is strongly informed by audit mechanisms. With these changes, the responsibility of monitoring and managing finances has crept into the clinical side of frontline child welfare work, becoming the direct responsibility of the frontline child protection worker. Prior to the implementation of CPIN, a majority of the work by CPWs would be to advocate for resources for the children and families they worked with. While processes might differ from agency to agency, or even

between departments of an agency, it was not uncommon for CPWs to verify or authorize invoices related to certain services provided. With CPIN and the integration of these administrative processes, the clinical work of the CPW has been eclipsed by the technical and bureaucratic work of ensuring financial and auditory compliance. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ability of the CPWs to conduct their work in authentic, connected, and meaningful ways is hampered by the intensified focus on numerical and managerial processes; just one way that neoliberal managerialism seeps into child welfare (Woolford & Curran, 2011). With CPIN, CPWs must shift the focus of their practice to deskilled labour, where they are disciplined towards working not to support, but rather on documentation and service user regulation (Schram, 2015). Further, it embraces prevailing neoliberal rationalities that prioritize downloading of responsibilities to the individual CPW and client, along with intensified scrutiny and accountability. This is further explored in Chapter 6.

### ***3.6 Conclusion***

This review maps out many of the major shifts in discourses within child welfare policy and the ways that these have changed child welfare practices. It is important to have a view of this landscape to understand the recurring, cyclical nature of child welfare reforms. It helps to show not only the shifts in approaches, but also to show some of the foundational ideas that have remained unchanged over time amidst numerous and ostensible transformative reforms. These are helpful for understanding the context of the implementation CPIN, which is the focus of my case study in Chapter 6.

In spite of these repeated cycles of reform and the claims of new approaches, I argue that these changes to the tools and practices, especially those including technical innovations

(such as cell phones, new risk analysis forms, computer databases and so on) have not disrupted the discourses of individual parental pathology or the valorizing of child welfare work. These reforms did not seek to address or alter any of the structural inequities such as racism or wealth inequality. However, these reforms have intensified, proceduralized, and mechanized the monitoring and policing of child welfare service recipients while simultaneously intensifying the individual responsibility and accountability of individual child welfare workers.

## Chapter 4: Analysis of Texts

### 4.1 Introduction

This section examines the ways that key texts, also referred to as *governing* or *boss texts* (Bisaillon, 2012), function in ways that guide and regulate child welfare work in Ontario. A close examination of texts that function to organize the work within an institution is an important component of IE.

In this section, I chose to examine segments of selected texts: key sections of child welfare legislation including The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA, 1984), the revised Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA, 2017), and the Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016). These texts function as boss texts as defined by IE scholarship, notably for the ways that they coordinate organizational relations, the ways ‘work’ is conducted, and the ways that people engaged in this system are shepherded towards conformity (Bisaillon, 2012). This analysis is focused on the ways that ideologies of whiteness remain embedded within these key texts and how this then functions to regulate the ways that child welfare in Ontario is practiced. Of particular note are the ways that progressive ideas and attempts at anti-racist or anti-oppressive policies are proclaimed but not effectively actioned. These proclaimed commitments to progressive ideals ultimately appear to be “empty mentions” (Zerafa, 2020), or the ways that texts claiming a commitment to anti-racism, decolonization, and actions against other oppressive forces rarely engage with the issues in an authentic or meaningful way. An example of this is the act of empty mentioning of a laundry list of different recognized forms of oppression, but without connecting these to any deeper analysis or connecting the forms of intersecting oppressions to structures. Using this idea to examine the ways child welfare texts

fail to engage in meaningful ways with racism and oppression provides a deeper understanding of the tangible ways that whiteness operates and endures despite claims of progress towards or adoption of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.

Also included in this section is an analysis of another form of boss text related to the exercise of inquiries and inquests. This boss text, which I refer to in general terms as Inquests, is less centralized but remains extremely influential within child welfare institutions. The analysis of texts related to the process of child death inquests in Ontario includes a review of the Child Mortality Task Force (OCMTF) report, reports from the Pediatric Death Review Committee (PDRC), and a review of the inquest recommendations that are taken up by the OACAS, which forms the focus of mandatory CPW training in Ontario in response to the Baldwin Inquest.

#### ***4.2 Whiteness Embedded in Child Welfare Legislation***

Clarke and colleagues (2021) argue that child welfare legislation, including both the CFSA (1984) and the current legislation CYFSA (2017), is steeped in discourses of colour-blindness. These discourses ignore anti-Black racism and other historical injustices and, in so doing, act to perpetuate the systems that support institutionalized assimilation (Pon et al., 2011). The experiences of participants in Kikulwe's (2016) research also named this colour-blindness and identified it as being a way to mask race-based power imbalances and silence those who identified institutional practices that provide a scaffold for racial discrimination. Their experiences provide a glimpse into the fallout of entrenched racist ideology.

As part of an IE analysis that considers the everyday activities and doings of an organization, there is an abundance of clear directions for the doings of child welfare, or the procedures and regulations that articulate the innumerable daily practices and bureaucratic

accountabilities. The regulation and monitoring of these routine, mundane activities is one of the primary functions of various regulatory systems in child welfare, including CPIN. However, in everyday child welfare practices and systems, there is little to no attention paid to the practical repertoire for examining, noticing, or questioning the gaps, absences, or other systems of whiteness (Albrecht & Keen, 2009). There is a dearth of scholarship that specifically examines whiteness in child welfare, including the ways that whiteness is re-entrenched and replicated in the everyday doings of child welfare and thereby rendered invisible, technical, and commonsensical (Albrecht & Keen, 2009; Freymond et al., 2022; Pon et al., 2011).

The changes to child welfare legislation in Ontario in the 1980s and 1990s brought forth new language that appeared to give some formal, textual recognition of the history of colonial and genocidal transgressions, with the acknowledgement of “Aboriginal” rights enshrined within some of the sections of the Child and Family Services Act 1984 (CFSA). Sec 2.5 of the CFSA (1984) states one of the purposes of the legislation:

“To recognize that Indian and native people should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and that all services to Indian and native children and families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family.”

However, this superficial acknowledgment of the need to recognize Indigenous communities and families was not met with clear guidelines for how to take action to provide this kind of service. Accordingly, there were few formal, government-led initiatives to implement and action these stated ideals in any meaningful way. In a similar pattern of “empty mentions” (Zerafa, 2020), changes to the child welfare legislation in Ontario in 2017 saw the insertion of new wording in the form of a newly added and stand-alone preamble:

“The Government of Ontario acknowledges that children are individuals with rights to be respected and voices to be heard.

The Government of Ontario is committed to the following principles:

Services provided to children and families should be child-centred.

Children and families have better outcomes when services build on their strengths. Prevention services, early intervention services and community support services build on a family’s strengths and are invaluable in reducing the need for more disruptive services and interventions.

Services provided to children and families should respect their diversity and the principle of inclusion, consistent with the *Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Systemic racism and the barriers it creates for children and families receiving services must continue to be addressed. All children should have the opportunity to meet their full potential. Awareness of systemic biases and racism and the need to address these barriers should inform the delivery of all services for children and families.

Services to children and families should, wherever possible, help maintain connections to their communities.” (CYFSA, 2017)

This newly added section of the legislation appears to be progressive and inclusive, but there are no clear textual or tangible commitments to acting on these ideas. The Preamble states that systemic racism “must” be addressed but does not acknowledge the role of child welfare practices, past or present, that create or maintain these racial injustices. Further, it offers no commitment on the part of child welfare structures to ensure that the work of addressing racism actually happens within child welfare spaces or practices. The Preamble states that an “awareness of systemic biases and racism” will inform the delivery of services, implying that ‘awareness’ is all that is required to address systemic issues.

Where the legislation states that children’s voices are to be “heard,” it lacks clarity about what this means in practice. There is no specific commitment as to *how* this is to happen, how it will be made clear that this has happened and what the consequences would be in situations where this directive is not followed accordingly. Recent review of a child’s right to be

heard suggests that in many child welfare contexts, children are not able to form trusting relationships with their social workers and are rarely included in decision-making processes (Toros, 2021). The Preamble in the CYFSA implies that the simple mention of being 'heard' is sufficient, and as such, there is no articulated expectation to respond to the children who express their wishes, nor is there any weight to expressed views or needs. What would happen if a child expressed their objection to child welfare interventions? How is this objection 'heard'? Without this clarity, this is another example of an "empty mention" (Zerafa, 2020), as there is no commitment to responding to, placing emphasis on, or giving power to concerns or wishes expressed by children directly.

The legislation, the CYFSA, sets out its purpose in a hierarchical manner, which establishes the priority of actions:

"Paramount purpose

1 (1) The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children." (CYFSA, 2017)

The Paramount Purpose is presented as separate from the Preamble and above all other purposes presented in this text. It is a wide, broad, vague statement which lacks a clear definition of what "well-being" means or what it looks like, and in so doing, assumes a sort of universal understanding (Barraclough et al., 2019). I argue that this is a moment where whiteness operates. The definition and interpretation of 'well-being' is presided over by authoritative structures such as child welfare agencies and legal structures such as law enforcement and the court system; decision makers in these settings are given great latitude in their interpretation of this concept (Bala, 2004; MacLaurin & Bala, 2004).

The very structure of the legislation, which sets a paramount purpose as separate from all others, puts in place a set hierarchy of importance for these ideas. Within this framework, it is inferred that the protection of a child is prioritized over all other purposes - over that child's relationship to their family members, to community, or cultural/ethno/racial location or identity. The assumption that a child's safety is separate in some way from the safety of each of these wider reaching groups conflates child safety with removal. This taken-for-granted assumption holds that the child's interests are separate from their context while simultaneously implying that their safety is not possible there. It further treats all families and children as if their needs are monolithic and universal, and in so doing, contributes to institutionalized assimilation (Pon et al., 2011).

This way of structuring the legislation furthers the discourses identified by Chen (2001) where children are constructed as the ideal citizen, and within the context of child welfare processes, are seen as having opposing needs or interests to their families and caregivers (Barnhorst & Johnson, 1991; Cameron et al., 2007). These phrasings function to re-affirm the assumptions that parents involved with child welfare are best understood as opponents, offenders, perpetrators, and otherwise dysfunctional, while simultaneously aligning with liberal and neoliberal world views which centre the goals of individual rights and independence over an interconnected community approach to care. The phrasing distinctly sets the goal of prioritizing the child's opportunity to "meet their full potential;" in which is also embedded an assumption that their "full potential" is solely an individual aspiration, separate from family and community. The construction of the individual child as a responsible, self-governing subject,

where individual rights and freedoms become prioritized, aligns well with broader (neo)liberal discourses and rationalities within child welfare (Cradock, 2007).

This firmly defines the focus of child welfare towards the individual child, sieving the child out of the context of their family and community. Inherent in this approach is the embrace of the Euro-Western ideology that a child can be, and indeed should be, seen as an individual who is separate and independent. This steers child protection social work away from collaborative community approaches that acknowledge parental struggles as a community need. Rather, it maintains assumptions that threats to children's safety primarily come from pathological parents - individual aberrations constructed as risky and dangerous (Swift & Callahan, 2009; Vandenbeld Giles, 2012). I argue that this is an example of embedded whiteness, where the hegemonic political and economic lens of neoliberalism functions to displace a view of the child as integral to not just their family but within their community. It makes a space for state intervention to focus on individual need or dysfunction, erases history and culture, and absolves the state from responsibility to the community.

Within many Indigenous and racialized communities, there are a variety of ways that children are understood to be located within their families and their communities, where children have rights as well as responsibilities to their communities (Barker, 2020; Makokis et al., 2020; Mandell et al., 2007). These rights and responsibilities that come from belonging to their communities have become erased and dismissed in favour of the dominant (white, neoliberal) ideology that places children outside of their family and community, situating them instead primarily as individuals who need to meet their 'full potential' within a market economy. In the absence of a definition, the concept of 'full potential' can be interpreted as

related to education and employment, with no specified commitment to, or even to the exclusion of, spiritual, cultural, or emotional facets that are crucial to wholistic well-being.

Evidence of these assumptions and the ideology of whiteness is further supported and entrenched with other needs being assigned lower echelons and lower legal obligations.

Located within the legislation, Other Purposes are subordinate to the clearly identified

Paramount Purpose discussed above:

“Other purposes:

1(2) The additional purposes of this Act, so long as they are consistent with the best interests, protection and well-being of children, are to recognize the following:

1. While parents may need help in caring for their children, that help should give support to the autonomy and integrity of the family unit and, wherever possible, be provided on the basis of mutual consent.
2. The least disruptive course of action that is available and is appropriate in a particular case to help a child, including the provision of prevention services, early intervention services and community support services, should be considered.
3. Services to children and young persons should be provided in a manner that,
  - i. respects a child’s or young person’s need for continuity of care and for stable relationships within a family and cultural environment,
  - ii. takes into account physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs and differences among children and young persons,
  - iii. takes into account a child’s or young person’s race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, disability, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression,
  - iv. takes into account a child’s or young person’s cultural and linguistic needs,
  - v. provides early assessment, planning and decision-making to achieve permanent plans for children and young persons in accordance with their best interests, and
  - vi. includes the participation of a child or young person, the child’s or young person’s parents and relatives and the members of the child’s or young person’s extended family and community, where appropriate.
4. Services to children and young persons and their families should be provided in a manner that respects regional differences, wherever possible.

5. Services to children and young persons and their families should be provided in a manner that builds on the strengths of the families, wherever possible.
6. First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and all services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and young persons and their families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their cultures, heritages, traditions, connection to their communities, and the concept of the extended family.
7. Appropriate sharing of information, including personal information, in order to plan for and provide services is essential for creating successful outcomes for children and families.” (CYFSA, 2017)

Within this articulated hierarchy of purposes is the use of language that allows for a further devaluing of the child and their family’s locations. Terms such as “should” instead of *shall* or *must*, or words like “consider”, “takes into account”, and “wherever possible”, are all vague, equivocal, and non-directive. The use of these terms in legislation establishes that these approaches or actions are discretionary, rather than as a legal or ethical obligation for which an agency would be accountable. Section 2(5) illustrates this accordingly:

“[Providing services to] First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and young persons and their families *should* be provided in a manner *that recognizes* their cultures, heritages, traditions, connection to their communities, and the concept of the extended family.” (CYFSA, 2017, emphasis added)

The phrase “that recognizes” is vague, and the resultant lack of clarity allows actors within this system to pick and choose what actions can be taken or not taken. None of the language in the legislation addresses the issue of accountability for the interpretation of the Paramount Purpose, wherein protection for the child has been sought at the expense of cultural/ethno/racial identity and connectedness. A worker can *recognize* the culture or heritage of a family but conduct their work in a way that clearly prioritizes work of ‘protection’ at the cost of the family’s or the community’s cultural/ethno/racial identity, potentially silencing, erasing, or dismissing these important connections. The assumption that separation prioritizes the

individual child presents separation as the only real avenue to safety. This perspective inherently denies the experience of trauma for a child who is removed (Freymond et al., 2021), as well as the community trauma that comes from genocidal practices. Accountability in this realm is to the Ministry, not to the community, not to the child, not to the family.

There is a long history within child welfare legislation in Ontario, including in the Child Welfare Act (1965), the CFSA (1984), and the CYFSA (2017), that clearly indicates children and families benefit from preventative approaches and early intervention services (Bala, 2004). However, there is no clear direction or legislative commitment to ensure that those preventative services are prioritized through dedicated funding and supported structures. Consistent with Gilmore's (2015) theorizing around *organized abandonment*, this is a tangible example of how organizations can rationalize inaction on social justice issues. Without clear, reliable, and legislated funding, these preventative services become discretionary, at the will of political and bureaucratic decision makers. Preventative approaches then are perpetually in peril, the existence of prevention services becomes optional, and the disbursement of these prevention services is at the discretion of the various levels of each agency, including decision makers and service providers. Later in this work, I make the connections to how workers attempt to navigate these vagaries in their everyday practices, within a system that is focused on bureaucratic compliance over relational or preventative work by CPWs. Also absent is a clear commitment to ensure that appropriate preventative services are available to all in the province who need it, regardless of where they live in the province. In very tangible ways, through a variety of neoliberal rationalizations about "value for money" and austerity, barriers

are created for families and children who live in remote areas, who live on reserves, and who live in sparsely populated parts of the province.

#### **4.3 Whiteness Embedded in Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016)**

In addition to the ways that whiteness is centred in the texts of child welfare legislation, it can also be found in supporting documents such as the Ontario Child Protection Standards (MCYS, 2016, referred to as “the Standards”). This document states explicitly that the purpose is to ensure high quality, responsive services that are focused on producing positive outcomes for children related to their safety, permanency, and well-being, while concurrently being accountable to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The purpose of the Standards is to regulate and monitor child welfare processes, to ensure that specific actions are taken, and that child protection work is completed within set timelines. They direct child protection services within Ontario to provide services in a consistent way and within specific accountability frameworks. The child welfare legislation detailed in the previous sections and the Standards are understood to be aligned, where the latter is explicitly applied to the Paramount and Other Purposes of the CYFSA. The Standards were also written with a strategy in mind to “balance the need for more effective and integrated accountability processes to keep children and youth safe with more efficient and effective ways of doing business” (MCYS, 2016, p. 4).

The Standards articulate a commitment to the use of the Differential Response (DR) Model as the mandated practice approach with the goal of providing “more case-sensitive, customized responses for referrals of *non-severe situations*” (MCYS, 2016, p. 7, emphasis added). While the description of the DR approach to child protection work seems more inclusive, collaborative, and respectful of families, it is subject to the proviso of “non-severe

situations.” In ways similar to the structure of the CYFSA’s Other Purposes, DR is presented in the Standards as discretionary, allowing practitioners and agencies to engage in collaborative or inclusive practices at their discretion. DR practice proclaims to build on the family’s existing strengths, to engage in wider range of informal and formal supports and services, but with the stipulation that services are directed towards “non-severe” cases (MCYS, 2016, p. 7). This allows for workers, their management team, and the Ministry to be selective in the application or use of strength-based approaches in child protection work. The decision either to apply or not apply the DR approach is not included in discussions about accountability. In a context of helping services that are intensely scrutinized within a realm deeply steeped in risk discourses, the DR approach can be easily rationalized as insufficient to achieve the prioritized, Paramount Purpose of the legislation.

The child welfare field has for a long time seen the tasks of protecting children and supporting families as conflicting tasks and competing goals, as detailed in Chapter 3 of this work (Bala, 2004; Barnhorst, 1986; Cameron et al., 2007; Chen, 2001; Dumbrill, 2006). Despite the introduction and proclaiming of a DR approach as promoting a “strengths-based approach to service delivery [that] encourages engagement of the child, family and their support system in decision making and service planning” (MCYS, 2016, p. 7), the most important decision that is made is that of eligibility for DR, which is a decision made at the point of initial referral. It is the CPW and their supervisor who make this decision at the point of referral based on a subjective assessment of risk, often in the absence of full information.

The Standards proclaims a strong focus on child safety, well-being, and permanence (MCYS, 2016). These statements function as a type of coded language, a proviso that effectively

dissuades CPWs and supervisors from choosing this DR approach if there are any questions or unknowns about the child's immediate safety. The perception of immediate safety is subjective and strongly influenced by the agency and Ministry's intolerance for managing unknowns. Decisions made at the time of referral to use or forgo DR are shaped by the widely accepted concepts of the risk assessment model, and other broader risk discourses. Historically, CPWs and their supervisors have been guided to interpret parents/family as inherently risky (Pollack, 2010; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004; Vandenbeld Giles, 2012) and the Standards, and the approach to DR provides a deterrent to shifting that approach.

When considering the option of DR, there are significant barriers to its implementation. For the purposes of this discussion, I examine some issues with the decision making at the referral stage. In the earliest stages of child welfare intervention, the decision-making processes related to the use or non-use of the DR option, there is no option for service recipients to be included. The decision is made by child welfare staff and is informed by how the referral is coded using the Eligibility Spectrum, the most current version of which provides this guidance to CPWs who need to make the determination of the approach to a child welfare intervention; "When in doubt as to severity, err on the side of greater severity" (OACAS, 2021, p. 11). Ultimately, with the ways that information is captured within the referral information that construct individual risk or caregiver failure in particular ways, there is little or no support for the individual child protection worker to afford the referred child and family any benefit of the doubt. Further, there are no formal mechanisms in place to hold practitioners and agencies to account for those decisions to use more intrusive rather than less intrusive approaches. The more intrusive options are supported and enabled by risk discourses and concepts of safety

embedded within the legislation and the accompanying Standards document. With the lexical choices within the legislation, approaches that are more intrusive are more easily defensible. All of these things make it less and less likely for child welfare workers to choose to implement DR. Moreover, within the practice framework that is intensely regulated by these defining Standards, decisions made in a risk management/averse way tend to support and encourage child protection interventions that supersede any stated commitment to strengths-based, anti-oppressive, or collaborative approaches. Risks to children from other structural issues, such as systemic racism and wealth disparity, are seen as outside the mandate of child welfare. Trauma that a child may experience from separation is understood to be an unfortunate and unavoidable side effect of intervention required to ensure child safety.

Within this 140-page document, the Standards (MCYS, 2016) do not include the words 'Black', 'Caribbean', or 'African-Canadian', nor is the term 'racism' used. The word 'race' is used 3 times, 'Indigenous' once, while the term 'First Nations' is used in 22 instances, and both 'Inuit' and 'Métis' are used 5 times. This is by no means an in-depth critical text analysis, nor is this analysis one that fully accounts for the discourses hidden within the words of this and other child welfare documents. However, if one is searching for text that speaks to the ways that child welfare has compounded or been complicit in systemic racism, including issues of racial disproportionality or systemic anti-Black racism, one can surmise that these issues were not deeply considered, if at all, in the drafting of this key organizing text.

The Standards prescribe to child welfare agencies and workers that they must notify the "Band or Native community" in the case of an investigation or of the commencement of court proceedings related to a child's removal (MCYS, p. 11). The terminology is of "consultation" and

“notification”, but the mandate that grants the authority/power to *make a decision* continues to reside with the child welfare agency and the official court system. It is also important to reiterate that even child welfare agencies that are by and for Indigenous communities must adhere to these Standards and, in so doing, are regulated to practice child welfare within the same Euro-Western framework as non-Indigenous agencies.

There are references related to the need to provide “culturally appropriate” services to Indigenous Peoples, including a reference in the Practice Notes section (MCYS, 2016, p. 13) that advises the following:

It is important for child protection workers to engage with and support Aboriginal communities (including First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities) in a culturally respectful manner. This includes both having appropriate knowledge of the unique cultures of which families are a part, the history of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario and respect for diversity within Aboriginal populations. It also involves having an understanding of one’s own world view and potential biases, and continually reflecting on how this can impact interactions with clients.

This section further advises child welfare workers to have an “overall awareness” of the diverse backgrounds of families, and to recognize that their lived experiences have an impact on parenting. The assumption embedded within is that a child welfare worker is not from these communities; that they are not Indigenous, Black, or ‘Other’. More importantly, the assumption embedded in this text is that the worker who is a member of the dominant group can learn all they need to know about all cultures that they interact with. By applying this knowledge through a lens of ‘cultural sensitivity’ and ‘overall awareness’, child welfare workers can turn their colonizing gaze to all racialized or marginalized peoples and appropriately serve them. Pon (2009) problematizes this approach, naming this as a new form of racism; one that entrenches the hegemony of whiteness without ever having to use overtly racist terminology. Pon (2009)

names this as an “ontology of forgetting” (p. 66), or a process whereby to concepts of culture, ethnicity and race are depoliticized and separated from the context of Canada’s colonialist and racist history. Maiter (2015) agrees, arguing that the concept of cultural competency in child welfare work is overly simplistic, and these perspectives guide child welfare workers to favour an assimilationist approach over one that genuinely embraces diversities. The concept of applying an anti-oppression (AO) approach is presented in the Practice Notes section as an option for practice: “In order to address power imbalances, child welfare professionals *should* continuously reflect on their own social location so as to not *inadvertently* act in ways that recreate patterns of systemic oppression during their interactions with families” (p. 14, emphasis added). However, in the absence of a clear recognition of past child welfare transgressions and clear legislated directions, anti-oppression becomes just another aspirational and highly discretionary choice, much like anti-racism and DR have become.

As noted by Maiter (2015) and Pon (2009), these approaches are reductive, allowing for the over-simplification of complex and fluid communities that have their own knowledge systems and structures. This is clear from the following sections in The Standards (MCYS, 2016, p. 14, emphasis added):

**Practice Notes: Diversity**

Ontario has significant diversity with respect to cultures and religions and also contains vast regional differences. It is important for child welfare professionals to have an *overall awareness* of the diverse backgrounds of the families served in each community and in particular, to engage families in dialogue about their backgrounds. Families’ lived experiences can have an impact on their world views and in particular how they raise their children.

Working and developing partnerships with community agencies serving specific cultural or religious groups can also enhance understanding and awareness of the backgrounds of the client populations CASs serve in their communities. It can also assist CASs in providing culturally appropriate supports to families.

### **Practice Notes: Anti-Oppression Approach**

An Anti-oppression (AO) approach includes an analysis of power imbalances based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, class, geographic location and other social factors. These factors can affect one's social location, and in particular their access to power, privilege and resources. Those from marginalized social locations may not have the same access to power and resources as more dominant groups, and they can often be overrepresented in child welfare and other social service systems (OACAS, August 2010).

In order to address power imbalances, child welfare professionals should continuously reflect on their own social location so as to not *inadvertently* act in ways that recreate patterns of systemic oppression during their interactions with families. Some key strategies for working from an AO approach are to *take into consideration* the impact of historical and systemic oppression on marginalized groups, authentically listen to families' identified needs, and to not take the position of "expert" when working with families (ibid.). Furthermore, "AO work also involves those who have privilege becoming allies of those who do not, by sharing power and creating authentic collaboration" (ibid, p. 9).

The above segments present a facile analysis of systemic oppression and suggest that these deeply harmful issues can be easily understood and easily addressed by the individual CPW. The reference to the possibility that CPWs might "inadvertently" recreate patterns of systemic oppression needs to be problematized. Dyer (2015) argues that "white power nonetheless reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal" (p. 12). Framing issues of systemic oppression as 'inadvertent' supports the previously discussed constructions of the social worker as inherently benevolent and innocent, or, as Blackstock (2009) words it, "the occasional evil of angels" (p. 28). The passage from the Standards implies that the issues related to systemic oppression in child welfare are easily addressed and solvable when the individual CPW 'takes into consideration' the impact of historical oppression and listens respectfully. While these are not necessarily wrong, as a training document, this is misleading to CPWs and does not fully represent the complexity of the issues. Consistent with (neo)liberal rationalities, this

perspective also downloads the responsibility for change to systemic oppression onto the individual CPW and away from the institution.

The legislation and the supporting Standards document scaffold the mechanisms of whiteness in child welfare, framing how we think and 'do' child welfare work. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argue that systemic racism can be difficult to address due to the "reason of its structure and vocabulary" (p. 31). Bonnie and Pon (2015) agree, contending that racist and discriminatory discourses pervade child welfare processes in ways that appear commonsensical. Both the CFSA and CYFSA demand that the concepts of protection, safety, and well-being of children are prioritized over all 'other purposes,' in conjunction with the Standards that direct practice in child welfare work to focus largely on the timeliness and accountability of tasks. The Standards align with the legislated structures that subordinate 'culturally appropriate' services and, in so doing, locate the tasks of addressing systemic and structural racism as a lower priority and therefore discretionary. The neoliberal shift in child welfare that has been an ongoing, long-term project directing our collective focus to efficiencies, tasks, and measurable outcomes. With the neoliberal lens, a focus on timeliness and on concrete, evidence-based outcomes seem to be an instance of irrefutable, common sense. The onus to address issues of systemic racism is relegated to individual workers, who are directed to apply strategies of self-reflection and awareness. While self-reflection and critical reflexivity are certainly an important part of addressing deeply engrained racist and colonial belief systems, individual actions alone are simply insufficient to address systemic issues. In all of this, whiteness remains centered; Indigenous and racialized families are 'Others', while

issues of racism that are undeniably systemic and enduring, become translated, reinterpreted, and understood as “inadvertent”, unintentional, and superficial.

#### **4.4 Inquests as Governing or Boss Text**

*The present climate of child welfare is remarkably frenetic with exhausted workers managing extraordinarily high caseloads, all the while trying to keep up on increasing administrative demands with dwindling resources. The day-to-day pressures on child welfare workers are immense. It is often thankless work on a good day, and on a bad day, mistakes may contribute to a child being harmed or killed, which may lead to workers experiencing public outrage, media persecution, and being obliged to participate in an inquest. (Barton, 2020, p. 8)*

Examining texts using an IE approach is a significant component of this research approach, offering insights into the ways that through texts, subjects are instructed, their work organized, and their actions shepherded towards conformity (Bisaillon, 2012). In this section, I use the term *Inquest* as an umbrella term that includes a wide range of texts, including events such as public discourses in the media, a judicial inquiry, coroner’s inquest, or commissions, as well as related texts such as CPW training materials and policy directives that come into practice in their aftermath.

For the practicing CPW, the Inquest is an amorphous entity; not a singular, specific, or isolated text but a collection of texts that provide a series of discourses that transmit a variety of reactions to incidents. Regehr and colleagues (2002) note that inquests have become powerful socio-political institutions, functioning not only to ‘deal with’ prevailing social/moral panic but also providing the government an opportunity to present as actively responsive to social issues and to appease the public (Hill, 1990, as cited in Regehr et al., 2002, p. 887). The increased public concern has not been the result of an actual surge in child deaths, but in response to the dramatic increase in public attention towards those deaths.

The Inquest includes a wide range of interpretations of events. Most importantly for this conversation, it serves to precipitate, inform, and in some cases, rationalize the implementation of wide-ranging legislative amendments, policies, and regulatory texts, such as the Standards, ORAM, and CPIN. While Inquests and their effects may not always be specifically spoken of, easily itemized, or immediately recognized in the day-to-day 'work' of child welfare, they exert an observable regulatory influence upon CPWs, guiding their comportment and professional actions. The inquest is therefore a boss text because of its pervasive influence and governing role.

The topic of child death inquiries, inquests, and other forms of public inquiry is vast. In fact, these could easily be the subject of an entirely separate doctoral dissertation. In an attempt to narrow the focus, this section will be a brief review of specific documents, including the Child Mortality Task Force Report (OCMTF), excerpts from a small selection of The Pediatric Death Review Committee Reports (PDRC), and the Jury's Verdicts and Recommendations from the Baldwin Inquest (2014). This section will conclude with a brief examination of the OACAS training material related to the Baldwin Inquest.

There has been significant scholarship on various child welfare inquest proceedings (Choate, 2016, 2017; Longlade, 1999; Mennill & Strong-Boag, 2008; Munro, 2005, 2010a; Swift & Parada, 2004; Whittaker & Harvard, 2016), as well as numerous volumes of judicial and/or governmental analysis produced (Ward, 1982, re: the Poppen Inquiry; Hughes, 2014, re: the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry; Gove, 1995, re: the Matthew John Vaudreuil Inquiry). This list is a small selection of Canadian public inquiries that yielded massive tomes of analysis and are understood to be strongly correlated with significant legislative and policy changes in child

welfare. Choate (2016) notes that some forms of public inquiry can provide to the larger public spaces outside the system a sense that the child welfare system has checks and balances. They also note the extensive use of resources, large numbers of witnesses, and lengthy reports with extensive lists of recommendations. In addition, they identify some of the ways that public inquiries and inquests most often take an approach that is focused, either marginally or entirely, on placing blame and exposing deficits. Choate (2016) argues that this form of inquiry deeply erodes the confidence in the child welfare system. I agree and argue additionally that these texts and discourses function as a form of remote or 'extra local' regulation for CPWs.

It is important to note that while inquests have the outward appearance of authority, in Ontario, the Coroner's Inquest does not have the authority to find guilt or to impose legislative or policy changes. The Officer of the Chief Coroner of Ontario (OCCO, 2023) notes that "Inquests are held to inform the public about the circumstances of a death. Although the jury's conclusions are not binding, it is hoped that any recommendations suggested, if implemented, will prevent further deaths" (para. 1). The findings of Coroner's Inquests are recommendations only, the jury in an Inquest proceeding does not have the authority to assign or free someone of blame, cannot make any finding of legal responsibility or make any conclusions in law (OCCO, 2023).

The inquest process in Ontario is not a neutral, fact-finding exercise. In reality, the process is more of a political exercise shaped by the orientations of the bureaucratic entities that are involved. When a coroner's inquest is called in Ontario, there are arrangements agreed upon in advance, including who will be considered to have 'standing' in the process, and what the various included parties can agree to in advance. Those parties who are granted

standing in the process – such as the Ministry, representatives for family members, legal representatives who speak for the child welfare agencies, various implicated social service agencies, and the CPWs’ labour union – will all meet in advance of the public procedures to discuss their positions. Inquest recommendations are prepared in advance and the jury can decide to accept them or issue their own. Longlade (1999) notes that the bureaucratic entities such as the coroner’s office, the Ministry, and OACAS shape the ways the inquest unfolds, providing their organization perspectives that determine how the inquest process frames the solutions that are then presented to the public. Longlade (1999) noted that recommendations produced by the jury tended to focus on changes to formal systems, such as the adoption of practice tools, new training for CPWs, and new computer databases. Longlade (1999) noted that while a few of the recommendations aimed at making changes to practice or improve resources, most advocated generally for increased surveillance and policing of child welfare service recipients. Longlade (1999) argues that examination of the recommendations from an inquest reveals the “belief that problems can be resolved through vertical communications procedures and the application of technology” (p. 303), while other important perspectives, such as those that advocate for systemic changes like improved preventative community resources, are often left out.

Whittaker and Harvard (2016) describe the fall out of high-profile child-death inquiries, and the associated scathing criticisms from media and, on occasion, the public vilification of individual CPWs. Whittaker and Harvard (2016) argue that these events have created a working context where CPWs gravitate towards or feel the need to engage in “fear-based practices” (p. 1166). In reviewing literature focused on the wider social policy and organizational context,

Whittaker and Harvard (2016) describe the shift towards intensified neoliberal administrative accountabilities and increased regulatory scrutiny. The context of high-profile public inquiries and inquests enable this regulatory scrutiny on a broad scale and function as the rationale for widescale reform projects along with the necessity of fear-based practices (Whittaker & Harvard, 2016) or defensive social work practices (Smith, 2011). Barton (2020) describes the backdrop of defensive child welfare practices that contribute to an organizational climate of fear, blame, silence and intense “cover your rear end” accountability (p. 8). The concept of fear-based or defensive practices are one way to understand how CPWs are shepherded into practices that are ultimately working in collusion with oppressive structures, acting in ways that are arguably more protective of the organization than to the children they purport to serve.

Robson (2005) argues that the inquest and media discourses, such as those related to the death of baby Jordan Heikamp,<sup>5</sup> focus on the deficits of the parent and worker, providing an opportunity to deflect public attention away from the failings of the state and the inadequate social welfare system. Rather than attending to the impact of systemic disparities in the death of Jordan Heikamp, media attention focused on his mother and her ‘failings’ to provide. She became ‘the problem’ of focus within the inquest rather than the context of poverty and deprivation that she was trying to parent within. She was thereby used as a

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<sup>5</sup> Jordan Heikamp was born May 19, 1997 to Renee Heikamp, described as a “troubled youth” (Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, 2001, p. 1) who was homeless and accessing the shelter system in Toronto. Ms. Heikamp was admitted to a shelter with newborn Jordan. Jordan died of starvation on June 26, 1997, in part due to Ms. Heikamp incorrectly diluting infant formula. Ms. Heikamp and her CPW Angie Martin were charged with criminal negligence causing death, but the charges were later dropped due to lack of evidence. The Office of the Chief Coroner called an inquest into this death, held in Toronto from January 9 to April 11, 2001. See Section 5.4 and 5.5.3 of this research.

scapegoat by the media in a way that “serves a powerful teaching function for other women/mothers” (Robson, 2005, p. 221). In the Heikamp Inquest, the individual focus on mother and CPW allowed for the reality of intensifying structural inequalities to be erased, ignored, and overall denied. Robson (2005) agrees, noting that governments seeking ideological and political support have often seized upon these kinds of events, stoking neo-liberal discourses of individual responsibility and weaponizing public outrage to justify the shift towards/intensification of regulatory forms of child welfare interventions.

Vandenbeld Giles (2012) examined the adoption of risk discourses in child welfare in Ontario in the 1990s, and in her discussion that also looked at the death of Jordan Heikamp, she notes that when criminal charges of neglect were laid against Renee Heikamp (Jordan’s mother) and Angela Martin (Jordan’s assigned CPW) this fundamentally altered the realm of child welfare in Ontario. Vandenbeld Giles (2012) argues that this action contributed to a significant increase in already overly stringent regulatory and risk assessment measures that intensified the focus of interventions on the parenting capacities of mothers.

In their article *Identifying Victims: Child Abuse and Death in Canadian Families*, Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) conducted a broad examination of the topic of murder and abuse of children in Canada. Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) argue that violence and brutality towards children is a known and longstanding phenomenon; however, public outrage related to child deaths and the evolution of public inquiries into these deaths are a more recent trend.

It is difficult to compile a comprehensive analysis of child welfare inquiries and inquests in Ontario. At the time when these various events were unfolding, they garnered intense public attention, and heated political debate but then seemed to fade from public awareness. Mennill

and Strong-Boag (2008) refer to numerous child deaths that have since faded from public view and, as such, details are now almost non-existent. Decade after decade, these inquests re-emerge and seem to repeat the process with little evidence of awareness of previous events. Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) examined three specific cases from the 1970s and the 1980s and found that these inquest documents chronicled the “recurring unwillingness to address disadvantage, both of the children themselves and of the women, often mothers, who have frequently been both victims and perpetrators” (p. 312).

Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) explain that while overall child and youth mortality rates dropped dramatically over the 20th century, cases where child deaths occurred are still disproportionately from racialized and economically disadvantaged children, with a notable overrepresentation in children from Indigenous communities. Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) are not arguing that marginalized parents are more dangerous or abusive, but instead argue that there has been an awareness for many decades of the connections between parental acts of abuse or neglect and the context of experiences of deprivation. Experiences of poverty and lack of social supports, particularly for women who survived abuse, violence, neglect, and poverty in their own childhoods, are associated with various forms of parental difficulties. Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) found that maternal disadvantage was central to the circumstances that resulted in each of the child deaths in the inquiries they reviewed.

While poverty was central to these mothers who caused the deaths of their children, Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) note that this central issue goes largely unmentioned by the inquiries. Seen as “background noise” (Mennill & Strong-Boag, 2008), the stories told about these families focused on the violence and pain inflicted on the children rather than fully

recognizing the contexts that their parents had to endure themselves. I would add that issues of structural racism and systemic discrimination are conspicuously absent from discourses present in and related to inquests. The lack of appropriate housing, supportive programs, and other crucial contextual factors were ignored, as the judges in these inquiries concentrated their attention on the failings of the child welfare system and the parents themselves (Mennill & Strong-Boag, 2008). We see this pattern replicated over and over again, and, as I will demonstrate later, it is seen yet again embedded within the discourses related to a more recent high-profile inquest related to the death of Jeffrey Baldwin.

#### *4.4.1 The Paediatric Death Review Committee & the Ontario Child Mortality Task Force (OCMTF)*

The Paediatric Death Review Committee (PDRC) formed in 1991 within the Office of the Chief Coroner in Ontario (OCCO), as a means to examine complex medical cases where the coroner was called to investigate child deaths. Between 1991 and 1995, this PDRC developed a protocol for coroners' investigation of child deaths. Resulting from this process, the OCCO observed that "certain death patterns started to appear and by 1996, issues were arising regarding the deaths of children who were being monitored by Children's Aid Societies (CAS)" (OCCO, 2004, p. 2). The Ontario Child Mortality Task Force (OCMTF) originated out of the same concerns as the PDRC in April 1996 in response to a spate of high-profile child deaths both within and outside Ontario, including across North America, Europe, England, and Austria. There was a broad public outcry and demands for answers from the child protection system (OCMTF, 1997). The OCMTF (1997) report explained that there was a "significant information and knowledge gap" (p. 2) in Ontario that prevented the tracking of reliable, consistent data on the numbers of children who died while receiving, or soon after receiving, child welfare

services. The OCMTF was composed of representatives from the OCCO and OACAS, with support from the Ministry. The OCMTF conducted a review of children who died while receiving child welfare services between January 1, 1994 and December 31, 1995. The OCMTF produced one final report in 1997 and then was dissolved, while the PDRC remained and produced reports between 2004 and 2019.

Scholarship examined the work of the OCMTF and noted that the recommendations from this report were conspicuously aligned with other initiatives endorsed by the newly elected, staunchly conservative provincial government led by Mike Harris that came to power in June 1995 (Chen, 2009; Robson, 2005; Vandebeld Giles, 2012). In a demonstration of what IE scholars describe as ‘institutional circuits’ (Smith & Griffith, 2022), the OCMTF (1997) report noted that children who died while receiving child welfare service were reported to child welfare agencies for many of the same reasons as were included in the OCMTF’s newly broadened re-interpretation of child neglect. The report drew upon research such as Squires and Busuttil (1995), who concluded that accidental deaths could be attributed to parental neglect, related to behaviours including alcohol use and lack of supervision. Along with this research and the lack of a consistent definition of neglect, the task force developed an expanded definition of neglect that was “broadened to include failure to protect the child; inappropriate childcare arrangements; lack of medical care; inappropriate discipline; unfit home; poor general care; lack of supervision and abandonment” (OCMTF, 1997, p. 16).

This circular argument provided a rationale for the recommended changes to child welfare legislation in Ontario. There were numerous changes to the CFSA that came into effect shortly after the OCMTF (1997) report, most notably the expansion of legislated grounds for

child welfare interventions with the addition of new language in the child welfare legislation identifying the 'pattern of neglect' (see Section 3.3.4) and the legislative ability to include client history within child welfare proceedings (Legislative Assembly of Ontario [LAO], 1998). Chen (2009) argues that since the statistics related to child death as an act of commission (such as homicide) or an act of omission (such as neglect) are so small, the changes to the legislation in 1999 would not do much to prevent the majority of deaths among children. Rather, Chen (2009) identifies that the majority of child deaths are related to motor vehicle accidents and suicide, which would render these changes virtually unnecessary. Chen (2009) reasoned that the statistics around child deaths while receiving services presented within the report were misrepresented, due in part to the OCMTF's decision to use statistics from different groups of child deaths combined into a singular category. The manner in which data was presented in the OCMTF report, Chen (2009) argues, gives the impression that children known to the child protection system have a higher probability of dying from abuse and neglect, shifting the focus towards the construction of child welfare service recipients as "dangerous parents" (p. 214). Chen (2009) further argues that if the intent was to truly improve the child welfare system, there must be a shift to look instead at the effects of widespread poverty and marginalization that are experienced by mothers and children. For Chen (2009), as with Robson (2008) and Vandenberg Giles (2012) the focus on these deaths serves to direct blame and responsibility away from the state; to distract attention from structural causes of deprivation, marginalization, and other complex and chronic resource inequities.

The first report of the PDRC was published in 2004, as the Inquest dust was settling in Ontario. The first report provided the description of the PDRC mandate; to review cases of

medically complex deaths, examine the standards of medical care (deaths not related to child welfare interventions) as well as to review all cases where the deceased child had an open file with child welfare at the time of death (PDRC, 2004). After the final released report of the OCMTF (1997), the first PDRC report released in 2004. Though different in structure and appearance, the PDRC report maintained many of the same perspectives as the OCMTF. While this committee did examine other causes of death for children, including errors in medical care, the majority of the report published in 2004 focused on cases where children were in receipt of child welfare services at the time of their deaths. In their review of child welfare cases, the 2004 PDRC identified some “recurring themes” such as “gaps in service” related to CPW absence, limits to the coverage outside of business hours, problems with file transfers within and between agencies, files being closed too soon, and what the PDRC calls the “pattern of neglect” (p. 14). From case reviews, the PDRC argued there were prevalent contributing factors, such as CPWs minimizing or failing to consider the family’s past child welfare history. Further, the report noted CPWs failed to verify the information provided by child welfare service recipients. Not only were CPWs falling for the deceptions of their clients, the PDRC noted that CPWs demonstrated a limited knowledge of signs, effects, and dynamics of neglect. Also noted was the over-representation of Indigenous children presented in relation to the statistically significant rate of Indigenous youth suicide without providing context or further analysis. There was also a discussion about the lethal outcomes connected to the use of restraints in residential care settings.

The PDRC did not publish another report until 2007. In each year following until 2019, with the exception of 2018, they provided a follow up report each following year. Noted in each

report was the intention to avoid the determination of blame, “[w]hile the PDRC does not assign blame in the death of a child, it does review cases with a viewpoint of prevention” (PDRC, 2007, p. 21). The tone of the reports subsequent to 2004 shifted to become more collegial, advocating for “the creation and propagation of a ‘blame free’ culture to encourage an environment which seeks to openly identify and reduce errors and omission” (PDRC, 2007, p. 26). While the PDRC reports maintained a similar format each year, the reports became progressively more elaborate and detailed. The reports continued to provide a review of issues related to medical responses, errors, or omissions that contributed in some way to a child’s death, such as a misdiagnosis or failure to comprehend the presenting medical issues appropriately. For each of the PDRC reports, the examination of deaths of children who were involved with child welfare makes up at least half of the report.

The PDRC reports dedicated significant attention to the issues related to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Sudden Unexplained Deaths in Infancy (SUDI), presenting statistics, charting patterns, and noting issues over many years related to the issues of unsafe sleeping conditions for infants. There were examples of situations where an infant’s death was categorized as a SUDI, but where the PDRC felt it necessary to include comments about the family’s various failings such as having a cluttered home, a history with child welfare services, or a history of concerns for sexual abuse (PDRC, 2009, 2011). Despite the claim that the PDRC strives for a ‘blame free’ approach, there is clear examples of discourses that could have been pulled from a report penned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 2009 report went so far as to recommend that all children be removed from this family because;

the prognosis for improvement in the mother’s parenting capacity after 20 years of intervention is very bleak. The children are at considerable risk of repeating the pattern

of behavioural and emotional problems exhibited by their older siblings. Although the availability of suitable homes for the children is likely to be a challenge, it appears that all other interventions have been tried and shown to be unsuccessful (p. 71).

This comment reflects an assumption that separation equates to safety (CWTTTC, 2022), without deeper consideration for the structural context or the long-term consequences of separation.

The 2011 report, focused on a SUDI death, ultimately suggests that the changes were needed in CPW training and agency policies, suggesting that the death is attributable to lapse in CPW judgement. The case example in this 2011 report skips past the realities of the family of the deceased infant, who were a family of 10 who lived in a two-bedroom home in a First Nations community. Comments in this PDRC report noted that the home was not 'maintained' despite efforts from the community. Interesting to note, the 2011 PDRC report also included a separate subsection that examined the significant numbers of Indigenous youth who were dying by suicide. This subsection, in a different area of the report, provided a deeper analysis of the desperate social conditions for youth living on Pikangikum First Nation reserve and, in so doing, demonstrated some emerging insights into the challenges for remote Indigenous communities in Ontario. However, seemingly uninformed by these insights, the section of the report that looks at deaths related to child welfare files castigates the family who lost an infant to SUDI without any mention of the context provided in the section related to youth suicides. The large majority of the report leaves out any understanding of the well-known consequences of colonization and racism for Indigenous peoples. The family who suffered the loss of their infant may indeed have been struggling significantly; however, the way that this section of the report is written not only ignores the wider social context for this family but suggest that a messy

home and other conditions contributed to the death of that infant. In other words, parental pathologies caused this child's death.

By the PDRC (2011) definition of SUDI, the death is "undetermined" (p. 61). Without regard for the "undetermined" aspect of this death, the PDRC makes those connections; to blame the parents of the deceased child, and to blame the CPW. These moments are reminiscent of the critique offered by Chen (2009), showing a kind of "slippage" (p. 219) and muddling of the issues. It is through this, the PDRC reveal an approach that functions to maintain the existing oppressive practices and systems. The PDRC draws upon familiar tropes of 'unfit parents,' parental pathologies that erase or decontextualize the material realities and lived experiences for those Indigenous communities.

A common refrain in these reports is the need for more training for CPWs particularly around cases of suspected Failure to Thrive (FTT) and chronic neglect. The PDRC reports offered repeated recommendations for enhanced training for CPWs to educate families about safe sleeping recommendations, to better identify parental substance use and mental illness. The PDRC also frequently advocated for the increased use of parenting capacity assessments and intrusive court ordered involvement. While these concepts could be argued as 'evidence based' or factually correct, there is an absence of advocacy for collaborative or community- based solutions. The PDRC approach does not challenge the status quo, functioning to maintain the erasure of context and structural inequities. In addition, these reports did acknowledge that some of the case reviews demonstrated many examples of exemplary practice, such as the use of frequent conferencing, clear communication with community collaterals, and comprehensive record keeping. However, those brief moments of acknowledgment are overshadowed by the

long lists of “gaps in services” (PDRC, 2007, p. 14), or areas where PDRC determined that the service was below standards and lengthy and repetitive lists of recommendations.

Despite the claim that this work strives for a ‘blame free culture’ and is intended to foster learning, these PDRC reports maintain the CPW and parents of deceased children as their focus of scrutiny. What is transmitted to the broader child welfare sector in Ontario is a distorted sense of culpability, that if they as CPWs just follow the Standards and its set timelines and processes, these deaths will be avoided. This approach to analysis of death events maintains an enduring legacy of surveillance, and administrative accountability, which in turn fosters defensive or fear-based child welfare practices (Whittaker & Harvard, 2016, p. 1166).

#### *4.4.2 Review of Jeffrey Baldwin’s death, inquest recommendations, and impacts*

CPWs who participated in this research spoke of the Baldwin inquest as being a precipitating factor in the development and implementation of CPIN (see Chapter 6). The parameters of this research do not allow for a truly fulsome discourse or textual analysis of the Baldwin inquest, nor does my analysis here intend in any way to entirely summarize this much larger socio-political picture or minimize the seriousness of Jeffrey Baldwin’s tragic death. Following the examples of Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008), Robson (2008), and Vandenbeld Giles (2012), the intention in this section is to consider what information is left out of discussions: what ideas are dismissed, glossed over, or erased in the midst of fore-fronted discourses.

Jeffrey Baldwin died on November 30, 2002 while in the care of his grandparents, Elva Bottineau and Norman Kidman. Reports in early December 2002 described a horrific scene, one that has haunted paramedics and police officers since (Caloz & Anderson, 2006). Jeffrey was

born in 1997, full term and healthy by all accounts. His growth and development in the first year while in the care of his parents, Yvonne Kidman and Richard Baldwin, appeared unremarkable (Choate, 2017). Jeffrey and his siblings were removed from their parents' care due to concerns for their parenting capacity, possible substance use, mental health, and concerns about marital conflict (Caloz & Anderson, 2006). The child welfare agency decided to place Jeffrey and his siblings with their grandparents. Once placed, however, the children "faded from view" (Choate, 2017, p. 24). There were child welfare referrals made before Jeffrey died. However, the inquest revealed that the agency staff did not follow up on common indicators of neglect such as the lack of contact with their family doctor, nor was there an inspection of the children's sleeping quarters.

There is a significant span of time from when the news broke of Jeffrey's death, to the news that his grandparents had been charged with first degree murder in March 2003, to the start of the criminal trial, the criminal appeals process and then ultimately the delivery of the jury's recommendations from the Coroner's Inquest published on February 14, 2014. When the news of his death first broke, there was little information about Jeffrey and his family. However, from February 2003, as the matter wandered through the criminal justice system and then through the course of the coroner's inquest, media coverage was sustained and intense.

In ways that were very similar to past high-profile child deaths in Ontario, like Renee Heikamp (Robson, 2008) and many other women caregivers, Elva Bottineau was described in the media with revulsion and contempt. She was labelled tyrannical, sinister, and "monstrous" (DiManno, 2013, para. 26). Like many of the other women identified as the cause of these children's deaths (Mennill & Strong-Boag, 2008), Elva Bottineau is constructed and becomes

'known' as the epitome of evil with little consideration for the background and context that found them in the situation where the death had occurred. Without a doubt, what happened to Jeffrey was horrific, so it is easy to understand the feelings of outrage, disgust, and revulsion.

The inquest process is intended to provide the public with a clearer understanding of deaths believed to be preventable. The appearance of holding public institutions accountable is central to this process so, in that way, the inquest process has become a political entity (Regehr et al., 2002). In many ways, it provides a sort of public spectacle, but not an especially deep or nuanced analysis. The structure of the coroner's inquest and the ways that this process probes the child deaths associated with child welfare agencies functions to control the conversation and direct larger public discourses in a particular direction. The inquest process strives to shine a light on 'the causes' but, as noted by Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008) and Vandenberg Giles (2012), this process also functions to direct public attention from other issues, such as structural inequity and parental deprivations.

Choate (2017) presents a compelling thematic analysis of the Baldwin matter, bringing forward a very important issue that often gets little recognition; the dysfunctional behaviours observed over this family's history and how these relate to the much more complex context of anti-Indigenous racism and long-term impacts of colonialism. Lost in the mists of organizational histories is the information that Elva Bottineau's family is Indigenous and what little is known of her childhood includes deprivation, alcoholism, horrible abuse, and trauma (Choate, 2017). Little is known of Norman Kidman, his history, or his direct actions. As is common in child welfare discourses, male partners/offenders are often not the focus of attention, are rarely the focus of intervention, and rarely are these men held to account for their actions in the ways

that women caregivers are (Walmsley et al., 2015). Elva Bottineau, like Renee Heikamp (Robson, 2008), Jennifer Popen, and others (Mennill & Strong-Boag, 2008), are known only for their heinous crimes with all other aspects of their humanity erased, including their experiences of trauma. For reasons that are unclear, Ms. Bottineau was granted standing at the Inquest, her presence and comportment the subject of much public outrage. One journalist wrote about her with great detail to describe her “wickedness” (DiManno, 2013, para. 19). There is mention her trauma in article, but this is dismissed as a relevant contributing factor. “[T]he pattern of severe neglect and worse had been set, a malice bred in the bone” (DiManno, 2013, para. 25); this comment by a journalist is a moment that demonstrates the resilience of those long-standing themes of parental/caregiver pathologies, of eugenics, of ideas that harken back to concepts of the worthy and unworthy. It reaffirms a common trope, contending that some people are simply and irredeemably bad and therefore should not be allowed to have children. The ways that Ms. Bottineau was depicted is an extreme example to demonstrate the extent to which those who are involved with child welfare are sometimes presented as incurable, stripped of their humanity, history, and context. Including Ms. Bottineau gave the inquest an added quality of public spectacle without meaningfully contributing to the overall professed agenda of fact-finding and learning.

With the passage of time, it is difficult but important to examine Jeffrey’s death and the subsequent inquest within the political and social context. In the years leading up to Jeffrey’s tragic death, there were significant political events that helped to set the stage. In 1995, the election of a staunchly right-wing and aggressively neoliberal government saw massive cuts to social welfare supports. While none of these are *the* cause, cuts to social assistance, public

education, public health care, public legal aid and so on, all contributed to setting the stage. When Jeffrey died in 2002, many of the long-standing social service institutions were still reeling from the sudden “hit ‘em hard, hit ‘em hard, don’t blink” (Ralph, 1997, p. 17) approach that was employed by the Harris government from 1995 to 2004. At the time of Jeffrey’s death, child welfare agencies across Ontario were still struggling to adapt to the drastic increase in workload that came from the implementation of ORAM.

In 2000, at the time of the last home visit to the Bottineau home before Jeffrey died, the last professional person that had a chance to see Jeffrey alive was a supervisor. This supervisor was tasked with conducting the home visit because the CPWs for that agency were on strike. The labour action was taken to fight for better working conditions, principally to challenge the impossible workload (La Rose, 2009). The dramatic increase in child welfare workload meant that the CPWs did not have time to offer meaningful help, did not have the time to form meaningful relationships with families and, crucially for Jeffrey, did not have time to check the historical records for warnings that this family had a history of causing harm to children.

It is important to note that at the time of Jeffrey’s death, the records that needed to be checked were primarily in paper form. There were various forms of databases at that time but records that pre-dated 1990 had not yet been converted to digital forms. What this means in practical terms is that ‘doing a record check’ meant reviewing vast files filled with enormous documents, many in a handwritten format. A CPW would have needed to sift through a staggering amount of paper to be able to ‘connect the dots’ and discover the history for this family from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Bottineau/Kidman/Baldwin files were most certainly large folders containing hard copy documents that would have required dedicated

time to sift through. Without a doubt, that information would have changed the course of the intervention for Jeffrey's family. However, few outside of the organization can truly appreciate the difficult and time-consuming task that this 'record check' represented in the 1990s and 2000s.

In what seemed like expedient and good practice, Jeffrey and his siblings came into the care of their grandparents following concerns around parental mental health issues, alleged substance use, and an implicit lack of parenting capacity (Choate, 2017). Cuts to social services meant that publicly funded counselling for partner violence, drug use, and other issues related to mental wellness, were simply too difficult to access. The focus of media and inquest discourse falls on the failings of the CPWs; the failure to check records, to verify the spelling of the names, to know about or meet the other adults who lived in the home, and so on. There is no denying that all of these critiques are valid, but what is glaringly absent from the texts related to the inquest is the recognition that if Jeffrey's parents had been given compassionate and meaningful support through authentically caring interventions, they might never have had their children apprehended in the first place. Jeffrey's parents did not know their rights and did not have access to legal counsel, enabled by service cuts to publicly funded legal aid. They did not know they could demand access, that they could maintain contact with their children. Even if they had known their legal rights, Jeffrey's parents did not have the resources to challenge the decisions made by the child welfare agency in a profoundly litigious system. From accounts of this situation, it appears that Jeffrey's parents, Yvonne Kidman and Richard Baldwin, were dismissed, excluded, and erased from the child welfare interventions. Once they were deemed 'unfit,' the focus of the intervention remained on separation as the path to safety for the

Baldwin children. If Jeffrey's parents had been helped, or more aptly, if the child welfare system had provided CPWs with the tools and mandate to provide preventative services, Jeffrey might not have needed to be removed in the first place.

There were other adults living in the home who claimed that they were too afraid to report the abuse of the children for fear they would lose their housing. Acknowledging that many would see this as a poor excuse for failing to intervene in actions that were clearly abusive, their perspective warrants consideration. It is easy to look at this with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight and suggest that the adults in the home were culpable; they should have known how dire the situation was for the children. However, I would argue that a blame-free approach would be helpful for this aspect of factors that contributed to Jeffrey's death. If there was an authentically blame-free, learning approach taken to this situation, we would recognize how difficult it is to be brave when one is under threat, when those who need to be brave are struggling with their own deprivations and marginalization. I argue that the totality of the cuts to social services was a significant factor. The anti-poor rhetoric that was especially prolific at the time made help seeking much more difficult; accessing alternative social services or affordable housing was near impossible and would make any challenge to a behemoth system like child welfare extraordinarily difficult. It is quite plausible that the cuts to subsidized housing made in between 1995 and 2002 contributed, possibly preventing the precariously housed adults from feeling safe enough to speak up or intervene on behalf of those children. These circumstances need to be considered if we hope to learn from this terrible death and prevent similar deaths in the future.

At the conclusion of the Baldwin Inquest, the jury issued 103 recommendations. Many of the recommendations appear non-performative (Ahmed 2006), presenting the appearance of being directive and oriented towards systemic change but falling short in many ways. For example, the first jury recommendation speaks to the implementation of CPIN. At the time, these recommendations were published, however, the work to implement CPIN was already well developed and underway. This recommendation therefore functioned more as a confirmation of a direction that was already chosen many years before the inquest.

Of the 103 jury recommendations, there were several that seem jarringly out of place, addressing issues that are important but would be difficult to argue have any role in the prevention of future child deaths. For example, Recommendation 24 stated that, “The Ministry of Children and Youth Services must continually work to recruit new Foster Parents through a variety of traditional and newer media formats including social media” (OCCO, 2014, p. 6).

Similarly, Recommendation 27 stated;

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services shall, in consultation with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and Quality Network (QNET), consider the Quality Assurance data and reports or summary reports collected by Ontario's children's aid societies and determine what data should be shared throughout the province and what data should be shared with the public for the purpose of meaningful education and awareness (OCCO, 2014, p. 7).

In this case, the issue of quality assurance data collection, and the connection to the circumstances that led to Jeffrey’s death is, at best, tenuous. Similarly, Recommendation 54, “Children's aid societies must ensure that all Alternate Caregivers receive adequate training in documenting any disclosure from children removed from traumatic environments” (OCCO, 2014, p. 10), seems out of place. While this recommendation, if implemented, might provide for more responsive services for children once placed in state care, the concern for processes of

documenting disclosures from children once they are in care does not logically contribute to the prevention of abuse. This recommendation contributes to the narratives that child welfare involved families need further scrutiny and the process of criminal investigation is prioritized.

Recommendation #9 advocates that the Ministry develop written material to advise service recipients that they have rights to seek independent legal advice (OCCO, 2014, p. 5). This acknowledges that Jeffrey's parents were not made adequately aware of their rights within the very litigious child welfare system but falls short of recommending that legal counsel be adequately funded, as the cost to access legal counsel is prohibitive to most child welfare service recipients. Access to publicly funded legal services would have been crucial for Jeffrey's parents, and if they had that support, the outcome for Jeffrey likely would have been very different.

The OACAS collaborated with the child welfare agency at the centre of the Baldwin Inquest to develop training that sought to disseminate the resulting learnings. In 2016, an online training module was rolled out to all child welfare agencies across Ontario and was mandatory for all CPWs. The training was a disconcerting melange, shifting between a pleasant "Gentle Presenter" narrator voice and an inexplicably unhuman, auto-generated voice. The "Scary RoboVoice"<sup>6</sup> was used to provide the detailed description of the family's history from the 1960s, creating a jarring, disembodied, and Orwellian quality to this mandatory training.

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<sup>6</sup> In the process of conducting an IE informed analysis of this OACAS training, I used an online program Otter.ai to auto-transcribe what was said. The Otter.ai program independently assigned names to the different voices in this training, the first being "Gentle Presentor" and "Scary RoboVoice". These two descriptors provide an interesting description of what trainees may have experienced in this mandatory training.

The OACAS training module and their published summary of the recommendations from the inquest focused on 13 of the 103 recommendations (OACAS, 2016). The focus of the training was narrow, concentrating on a small selection of identified issues such as the need to verify the identity and correct spelling of names of service recipients, the perceived need for CPWs to have quick access to child welfare and police record checks, the issues of repeated and subsequent referrals and identified need for follow up investigations to be conducted using the newly amended Ministry Standards. The OACAS training module also focused attention on the jury recommendations that addressed service provision to families and children following admission to state care. While this is an important consideration for the overall experience of children who are removed from their families, the attention to these 'best practices' does not speak in any way to a preventative approach to the removal of children from their families. This ultimately does nothing to improve services to families with complex trauma, who have long histories of child welfare, or who are living in enduring poverty.

Across inquests, media coverage, and numerous reports, there is a glaring discursive absence of any attempt to shine a light on the issues that relate to parenting in poverty or dealing with any other more structural issues. The issues identified by Mennill and Strong-Boag (2008), Robson (2008), and Vandenbeld Giles (2012) among others, remain unresolved. Indeed, public statements and training resulting from this inquiry focuses only on the recommendations that are quite disconnected from the contextual and background issues that set the stage for Jeffrey's life and death. The facile and superficial approach maintains the focus on the CPWs and pathological parents, moderating broader conversations away from seeing families such as the Bottineaus/Kidmans/Baldwins as fully human with needs for community support.

Many participants explained their understanding of the origins of CPIN as coming from the inquest into Baldwin's death (see Chapter 6 for more detail). Participants interpreted the findings and jury recommendations as an indictment of CPWs; this death was the result of CPW errors. The OACAS training focused on very specific issues and, true to form, mutes or erases other crucial aspects of the situation that contributed to Jeffrey's death. In the Baldwin case, as with others in the past, the inquest process missed a perfect opportunity to look critically at a situation and glean real, meaningful learning that could be used as evidence for necessary changes to the way families are met by the child welfare system. Instead, this opportunity is intercepted by and absorbed into an existing system that is non-performative and profoundly political. The inquest is a resiliently political entity that functions to erase context, maintain dehumanizing discourses of service recipients, and align with other discourses that impugn and regulate CPWs. The inquest process is part of a wider system that functions to give the perception of accountability without the necessity of making significant systemic changes.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This section considers a small selection of texts to demonstrate the functions of *governing or boss texts* (Bisaillon, 2012), to bring forward some of the ways that texts guide and regulate child welfare work in Ontario. The impacts of these texts are twofold. The first includes the ways that ideologies of whiteness remain embedded within these key texts and how this then functions to regulate the ways that child welfare in Ontario is practiced. Of particular note are the ways that progressive ideas and attempts at anti-racist or anti-oppressive policies are proclaimed but not effectively actioned, ultimately appearing to be "empty mentions" (Zerafa, 2020). This analysis is useful towards identifying systemic racism and oppressive practice, as

well as the ways that whiteness operates and perseverates despite claims of progress towards or adoption of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.

Also included in this section is an analysis of another form of Boss Text, related to the exercise of inquiries and inquests. Through the examples presented here, it is clear that the professed intention to create a 'learning environment' through inquests and inquiries, where the learning is sidelined by this resiliently political entity. The net outcome is the erasure of lived realities, including the context of structural disparities. This erasure contributes to the maintenance of long-standing dehumanizing discourses of child welfare service recipients as well as the furthering of discourses that impugn and regulate CPWs. The inquest process is only one part of a wider system, which contributes in some ways to the maintenance of the current trajectory of child welfare practices in Ontario.

## **Chapter 5: Manufacturing Bad Workers – An Autoethnography**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

An important aspect of an institutional ethnography is the examination of the activities that comprise the daily ‘doings’ of those within the institution being studied. This research is especially interested in those moments of disjuncture, or the incongruities between formal organizational claims of what is being done and the daily activities of those who do the work. These disjunctures are clear when looking at the differences between what is being formally claimed as being done by the institutions of child welfare, particularly with regard to claims of reforms, and the actual doings of those who work in this field. This research is particularly interested in the mechanisms that function to maintain oppressive practices despite the repeated efforts by the institutions of child welfare engage in ‘reforms’.

There was a point in this project when I found it increasingly difficult to explain what I was finding in the data from my field research and participant interviews without also drawing upon my own experiences – what I ‘know’ from my years as a child welfare worker (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Kikulwe, 2014). I worked in the child welfare field in Ontario between 1990 and 2019 for several different child protection agencies in jurisdictions that covered urban, suburban, and rural areas of southern Ontario, Canada. The time period that is the focus of this section coincides with the time period where the field of child welfare was subjected repeatedly to large scale reform projects that brought significant changes to policy and practices, such as the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM), the Child Welfare Transformation Agenda, and the implementation of Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) as discussed in Chapter 3. Drawing on my lived experiences, this chapter

describes some of the ways that I witnessed and, in many situations, engaged in practices and interactions that supported systemic racism and were oppressive in a variety of ways. It is through a process of deep reflection that I came to understand how important it is for me to share my personal insights as I articulate my findings. Using institutional ethnography (IE) as my central method of inquiry, lived experience is understood to be a key source of information.

Like Miller (2005), I felt the need to examine the inclination to dismiss the importance of my experiences. In the face of a system that depersonalizes and dehumanizes not only service recipients, but also those who work on the frontlines, I realized that I had become a subject to *testimonial injustice*, as theorized by Fricker (2007). Through Fricker's (2007) conceptualization of testimonial injustice, I have come to understand the ways that some knowledges become disadvantaged and discredited as they interact with some forms of social power. Despite those misgivings, I kept coming back over time to reflect on those experiences and the importance of those moments of disjuncture (Smith, 1990b, 2003) that have helped to develop my awareness of ruling relations. Ultimately, I must acknowledge that my reflections of those experiences allowed me to recognize my complicity in oppressive practices as part of my circuitous journey towards comprehending what Chapman (2013) describes as a *troubled consciousness*. I understand Chapman's (2013) concept of the "troubled consciousness" as a way to describe the process of "unsettling of one's stable identity" (p. 195) that comes from engaging with the knowledge that one has been complicit in oppressive acts. It is in those moments where one sits with those feelings of uncertainty and accepts the sense of "unreason," experiencing a range of emotions, that process of recognizing one's implication in oppression is possible (Chapman, 2013, p. 195). I come to hold a space for and sit with these disquiets, these

unfamiliar ways of acknowledging my non-innocence; this represents the genesis and the motivation for this research.

It is important to share at this point a disclosure, a 'confession' if you will. In 2010, I was terminated from my job as a CPW. That experience was jarring, seismic, and profoundly existential. I continue to hold my belief that the action taken by those in positions of power at the time was unjustified. At the time and for years afterward, I perceived these events as emotionally abusive, vindictive, arbitrary, and punitive. This document, however, is not seeking restitution for that event, nor is it intended to plead a case that I was mistreated or to seek justice for those wrongs against me. Instead, I focus on the recollections of the events leading up to that termination and my personal work to process the fallout of those events, drawing on my deep reflections after the fact as "doors into the institution" (Waters, 2016, 19:15).

I struggled to come to somehow understand the reasons for the ways I was treated. In child welfare spaces, I was considered a good worker; I was competent and held in some esteem by colleagues and supervisors for many years. Then, quite suddenly, I wasn't. I needed to try to understand why the people in my workplace, people who I considered friends and with whom I had strong collegial bonds, would shift their behaviour, and contribute, in a variety of administrative ways, to my discredit and departure. I asked myself many times, "*Why are they doing this? Aren't social workers supposed to be good at resolving conflict? Aren't social workers supposed to be good at building positive, respectful relationships?*" The experience was deeply unsettling as until that moment in time I had never questioned the assumptions of the inherent 'good' in social work, especially in child welfare spheres (Badwall, 2014; Jeffrey, 2005; Rossiter, 2011).

For many years after my (wrongful) dismissal and after the incredulity of being disciplined waned, I continued to feel a deep and lingering sense of grief and loss. Very important for the trajectory of this research is the question I kept asking myself: “*Why am I sad about this loss?*” It was, in all honesty, a crappy job suffused with chaos, rife with stress, and dominated by a few people who used their power abusively. Leaving, voluntary or not, should have been a relief. However, the sense of deep loss lingered. A flash insight came to me about 2 years later, a dramatic moment for me; I was grieving a loss of power and prestige, a loss of my assumed moral ranking as an ethical actor in the field of social work. The fact that this was such an insight for me may seem silly now, but at that moment, this represented a dramatic shift in my thinking. I was grieving the loss of my identity as a *child rescuer*, as a *hero*. I felt a loss of power and influence. Not only was I grieving the loss of my ability to claim professional expertise and knowledge, but I also lost my claim to the ‘goodness’ (Badwall, 2014) that I was presumed to hold while in that role. This flash of insight was the first step in this journey to unpack some of the ruling relations within child welfare that I have since come to understand remain deeply infused with and intertwined with whiteness and white supremacy.

## ***5.2 Professional Identity (De)Formation***

In our broader world, our lives are steeped in the hegemonic discourses of capitalism, and for many, our economic location, occupations, and employment status become a way that we define ourselves. In my experiences, it is common for most people to introduce themselves and to define themselves by what they ‘do.’ Some who previously or currently work in child welfare describe their experience as being a significant part of their identity. There has been some scholarship (de Montigny, 1995; Leigh, 2014) that has examined the ways that the

context and prevailing social discourses influence how CPWs construct their identity. Blurring the lines between personal and professional identity, child welfare work comes to define us in many ways. Being a CPW can be deeply connected, for some inextricably, to one's identity; it becomes who we *are*. De Montigny (1995) describes the valorization of the professional social work identity, arguing that for some social workers, developing their 'professional voices', is interconnected with the act of claiming an elite social location. De Montigny (1995) argues that social workers use this constructed social and professional identity to justify and rationalize the use of pathologizing discourses aimed at service users. The ways that service users are constructed functions to erase and deny the realities of economic and structural obstacles faced by 'clients' while also elevating professionals to the position of helping experts. De Montigny (1995) theorizes that important in this process is the denial and obfuscation of the "fissures" in child welfare, which construct professional social work knowledge as a dominant source of "truth, reason, and understanding" (p. 13). De Montigny's (1995) conceptualizations align in some ways with some of the other scholarship that I have included in this work, such as the work of Badwall (2014), who frames these dominant discourses as "scripts of whiteness" that function to maintain social workers' ability to hold on to their constructed identities that are suffused with notions of innocence and goodness.

Over the course of this research project, I have been drawn into innumerable conversations with people who have left this profession but who felt a long-term sense of connectedness to the work, describing feelings that they never really, *fully* left. A common theme in these conversations is the ways that people articulated that their time working in this area, be it long term or not, regardless of the ways and whys that people left the profession: or

many people, the experience was deeply and personally impactful, and it changed them irrevocably (Freymond et al., 2021).

While being an accepted member of this world is deeply meaningful for me, so was the experience of being terminated, being unemployed, and being rejected by this community. This was not just the termination of a job, but of an identity. It is unlikely that my colleagues were fully aware of what I was experiencing. However, my experience of being disciplined and cast out felt like a very public form of humiliation and professional dishonor. Over the course of this research, I have come to wonder if those aspects of my discipline and ultimate banishment that were visible to my workplace peers functioned to serve other organizational purposes. While the organization might argue that their actions to remove unsatisfactory CPWs was a way for the agency to uphold the highest standards of service excellence, the quality of my work was not the reason for the dismissal.

Why did this agency decide to impose the most dramatic form of punishment possible? I believe that it was a response to my growing opposition and vocal challenges related to specific case decisions. Later in this chapter, I demonstrate that for much of my career in child protection, I did not challenge oppressive structures in the child welfare work environment. For much of my time as a CPW, I was a true believer, fully engaged in the work and proud of my role as a benevolent actor. Later in this chapter, I share a few examples of my CPW work where I followed the rules, did as I was instructed and was complicit in racist, oppressive practices. However, when I later started to ask questions and offered some challenges to those case decisions that were clearly unhelpful to service recipients, I was then met with hostility and punishment.

I believe that the decision to terminate my employment was not related to my competence as a CPW, but was reprisal for 'being difficult,' for challenging my supervisor who made case decisions that I disagreed with. Through these actions, the organization demonstrated what happens to CPWs who step out of line, the consequences for any challenge to authority or any attention drawn to the ways that the organization maintained or deepened oppressive practices. Workers who presented challenge would need to be kept 'in check,' and that would need to be a visible reminder.

Recognizing that it is impossible for me to be unbiased or dispassionate about this, I have tried to unpack the experience from a distance. I continue to believe that the issues at the heart of the conflict in my workplace could have been much more easily resolved without the drastic and personalized option of termination. For example, without getting mired down in the granular details of my specific case, I will say that rather than summarily terminating my employment, there was a wide variety of simple solutions to resolve the concerns. Since there were many points along the way where many other simpler, inexpensive options that could have been attempted well before opting for my termination, one could infer that my employer was not truly interested in resolving the issues between us. Instead of engaging in genuine attempts at conflict resolution and moving forward together, the agency hired a very expensive law firm and engaged in a complicated litigation process that took over five years. At the time that I was engaged in this process, I was aware of numerous other peers who were also facing similarly harsh forms of discipline, including termination and labour arbitration.

A significant part of this process included gaining court-ordered access to my medical records and then using the information to discredit my professional reputation. Knowing that

they had full access to every conversation I ever had with every medical practitioner I ever had contact with, for my entire adult life, was an eye-opening and intensely disturbing experience. There were many, many moments when I wondered, “Why are they doing this?” Experiencing this despair and confusion provided me a sobering insight; a small glimpse of the experience of service recipients who were similarly subjected to this intensely intrusive form of inspection. While this form of intrusion is routine for child welfare service recipients, it is not common for CPWs to be inspected in this way. Until this moment, I had little insight into the emotional impact of this kind of intrusion.

In child welfare proceedings, accessing the personal medical records of service recipients is a routine task. The impact of this for the service user is not something that CPWs are encouraged to consider, nor are they given time to reflect upon. With service recipients, institutional surveillance associated with consent to release medical records was casually rationalized as being a method to gather evidence needed to ensure safety for children. In this case, I was aware that the rationale for the inspection of my records was to gather medical evidence that would be used to discredit me. This was an act of sanism (Perlin, 1992), to gather ‘evidence’ of my ‘deficiency’ that would enable these lawyers to discredit me professionally as part of the process of casting me out of this community.

Recognizing that I will never really know the answer, as there is no way I can speculate on the true intentions, I am left to wonder if the choice to respond to my ‘dissent’ in the most dramatic manner may have served other strategic political or ideological objectives. Thinking back now, I speculate that the goal of imposing a devastating penalty and silencing my dissent could prove helpful in the efforts to maintain a compliant workforce. Later in this chapter, I

present ideas about the roles of disciplinary discourses and practices and connect these to some of the ways I have observed CPWs being regulated. CPWs are not just regulated by legislation or procedural processes and Standards, but also by the ways that people are inculcated into the system, the morally coded crafting of identities, and various mechanisms through which the organization maintains 'colonizing codes' and 'silencing norms' (Freymond et al., 2021). I have come to understand that these are part of what keeps systems of child welfare from shifting away from oppressive practices. The deeply personal attachment to the valorized image of oneself as a child rescuer, as an agent of benevolent aide, is a powerful mechanism to guide CPWs like myself to pay less attention to the evidence of our own complicity in oppressive practices. CPWs are guided in numerous ways to adopt and embrace a professional identity that is steeped in narratives of goodness, benevolence, and even valor (Badwall, 2014; Margolin, 1997).

Being inculcated into this professional identity is important as this functions to obscure complicity in oppressive practices. In my experience, when I began to ask questions about decisions and directions to practice in ways that were oppressive, it was then that my membership in this community was summarily revoked. Being granted membership into this community is a powerful experience, where conventions and routines maintain the discourses of benevolence and valor. Correspondingly, the removal of membership is also a significant experience. The public display of discipline of those who are not compliant serves as an effective warning for others and would effectively dissuade dissent for those who remain.

### **5.3 Working Conditions: Training, Burnout, and Turnover**

My first position in child welfare came at a time when the field was in ostensible crisis due to dramatic staff turnover. The agency that hired me, like so many in North America at this time, was struggling with 30% to 60% staff turnover (Anderson, 2000; Barth et al., 2008; Harrison, 1980; Harvey & Stalker, 2007; Jayaratne, 1984; Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Travis et al., 2016). The so-called crisis of staff turnover in child welfare is cyclical in nature, longstanding, and arguably quite predictable. Much scholarly research has determined that issues related to social worker retention are strongly correlated with conceptualizations of worker experiences of job (dis)satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and ‘burnout’ (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Harvey & Stalker, 2007; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Wilson, 2016).

I was hired as part of a pilot project, colloquially referred to as “the training team,” which was conceptualized as a new approach to hiring intended to mitigate the risk of worker burnout as well as to enhance retention rates for CPWs for this agency. As part of a special project, a small group of other newly hired workers and I, were provided with a unique opportunity to have training that would be viewed as the equivalent to an “in-house BSW.” My experience of this lauded training was that the work of child welfare was taught out of context of any critical analysis, focused on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ but not the ‘why’ or ‘why not’ that often is included in critical social work programs.

When I entered this work, I had a 3-year general bachelor’s degree in humanities, meaning I did not have specific social work experience or credentials. I reflect on the circumstances of this event, the ways that I was placed in a position of significant power and legislated authority based on... Well, nothing really. While I was attending a part-time university

social work program (and would ultimately graduate with a Bachelor of Social Work several years later), it is important to reflect that I got my start in this field and was hired for this position largely because I was in the right place at a time of crisis, while occupying the position of white, middle-class privilege. In this way, my whiteness, my exalted location (Thobani, 2007) coincides and colludes with that current crisis. It is important to note the child welfare field is always 'in crisis', particularly around staffing.

There is a significant body of scholarly work that has examined the chronically high levels of staff turnover in child welfare in the UK, United States, and Canada (Benton, 2016; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Ellet et al., 2009; Lwin et al., 2018; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). Clearly, this is a significant and long-standing issue throughout the sector, not just limited to this one agency that I worked for. The issue of high staff turnover in child welfare is a perennial problem and has been examined by scholars in a largely facile manner. There is an equally vast body of work that examines the concepts of burnout (Lloyd et al., 2002; Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Travis et al., 2016) and compassion fatigue (Geoffrion et al., 2015; Wagaman et al., 2015). There is also an examination of the consequences for the individual child welfare worker and impacts for the sector due to staff shortages (McFadden et al., 2014; Regehr et al., 2004). This body of research has most often interpreted the issues of burnout and compassion fatigue as related to the individual worker's personality or individual characteristics, asking workers to seek support, practice self-care, and be reflective in their practice (Anderson, 2000; Wilson, 2016). This translates to perennially recurring mandatory training on time management and self-care strategies. CPWs

are often given facile directions and advised essentially that they need to manage their time better. When they feel stressed, they should practice self-care and go take a bubble bath.

Burnout and compassion fatigue are often conceptualized in ways that reinforce an individualizing view of staff turnover, which also functions to deflect away from a deeper conversation about the broader, troubling issues in child welfare. Weinberg (2009) argues that burnout may be better understood as connected to experiences of moral distress, noting that “historically, in social work publications, burnout has been viewed as an individual problem, and the social causes have been missing in debate” (p. 141). The discursive practices that keep our understandings of burnout to be an individual response maintains that interpretation of burnout as an individual pathology. These discourses support the approach to understanding the work of child welfare as individualistic and help to keep CPWs from taking a wider view of the structural issues that are intrinsic to the context of child welfare work. CPWs are encouraged to keep themselves at a distance, to strive to maintain an objective professional boundary between themselves and their service recipients. To seek a deeper connection, an empathetic connection to service recipients risks the CPW gaining some deeper insights into the profound inequities of the current practice modalities. Understanding our own responses to the oppressiveness of current practices can potentially create a kind of distress, or a troubled consciousness (Chapman, 2013).

Stalker and colleagues (2007) observed child welfare worker participants in their research who reported high levels of Emotional Exhaustion (EE). Though high EE is often correlated with experiences of burnout, it was surprisingly found to be correlated with high levels of Job Satisfaction (JS). Stalker and colleagues (2007) commented that several studies

note that child welfare workers report a “sense of mission or commitment” (p. 187). Upon review of other studies, they determined that that strong sense of ‘mission’ or ‘commitment’ was an important component of staff retention, and indeed many workers “seem willing to accept the fatigue and exhaustion that often accompany this work as long as they believe they are helping others, or that their labour makes a positive difference in their clients’ lives” (Stalker et al., 2007, p. 187). From looking at the research, Stalker and colleagues (2007) surmise that gender differences show that women may have a stronger attachment to the ethic of care and the ideal of “making a difference,” which balances out the relatively lower pay, long hours, and other ways that the work is devalued.

Child welfare work is often conceptualized as the work of caring for and ‘making a difference’ in the lives of children. When looking at factors related to burnout, emotional exhaustion, intention to leave, and staff turnover, research showed that the sense of ‘mission’ and/or ‘commitment’ appears to make the depletion of personal resources acceptable or at least tolerable. In this way, we see some of the complex interactions - the tension between the discourses that valorize CPW work and the intertwined discourses of work that is socially constructed as normatively gendered work. Stalker and colleagues (2007) argue that to find satisfaction in child welfare work, one must truly believe they are helping others. This argument is problematic in that the experience of EE, attributed to the tendency to depersonalize interactions with clients, does not allow for recognition of those aspects of the system that direct workers towards practices that depersonalize or dehumanize clients.

Stalker and colleagues (2007) argue that CPWs who defend against EE by depersonalizing clients risk harm to service recipients by embracing a distant or de-humanizing

stances. CPWs are directed and guided towards a disconnected kind of practice, towards a “relational distance” (Woolford & Curran, 2011) that separates them from the drive and ability to do the work humanely. However, my research shows that with the recurrent, cyclical changes in the child welfare systems, CPWs have few options to broach this ever-increasing distance.

Heron (2007) contributes to this discussion by arguing that the ways that women engage in helping work is better understood as an expression of colonial, racist power dynamics deeply implicated in the construction of white, bourgeois femininity. Heron (2007) further theorizes that implication in racist structures cannot be easily acknowledged or identified by white women. Part of the need to present as innocent, benevolent, and associated with ‘goodness’ is intertwined with this “internalized socialization as good women” (Allen, 2022, p. 155). As described by Allen (2022), white women engage in various kinds of heroic responses, and in so doing, often rush to the rescue and are able to avoid being implicated in forms of colonization and oppression.

In looking at the some of the harmful patterns of ‘helping’ associated with white women, Allen (2022) traces historical lineages of innocence and benevolence as part of settler women’s socialized identities. Allen (2022) argues that while women have historically been constrained by rigidly defined gender roles, *white* women have also been elevated by virtue of their whiteness. White women have been implicated in imperial and settler-colonial projects and while occupying the space of innocent and virtuous womanhood. They are tasked not only with the responsibility of passing along these perspectives to the next generation, but also to shape and regulate the relations with those designated as ‘Others’, such as Indigenous, Black,

and People of Colour. Indeed, Allen (2022) writes, “White women have been actively complicit in colonial processes through benevolent “civilizing” and “saving” roles in schools, churches, hospitals, social services and more” (p. 90).

I believe the socialized role of benevolent civilizing helper relates to burnout and compassion fatigue, or at least their common constructions. For example, Anderson (2000) looks at factors such as coping strategies and measurements of emotional exhaustion, arguing that CPWs should be more engaged in emotionally-focused coping strategies to moderate the emotionally-charged environment in which they work. The ways that Anderson (2000) and others understand burnout is as a response to the difficult nature of the work, or more pointedly, the difficulty of working with service recipients. This interpretation of burnout reaffirms the narratives of parental pathology and the dehumanizing discourses endemic to child welfare, which are discussed in more detail in Section 5.5. This understanding of burnout also functions to obscure the tensions inherent to this work, within these structures that limit the ability to actually provide meaningful, authentic assistance to service recipients. These gaps in insight are inter-related with dehumanizing discourses and practices, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Upon the broad examination of literature about emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, burnout and so on, I cannot say that those studies resonate with my own experience of managing the highly emotional environment of the child protection workplace. In my own experience, working with service recipients were more often deeply enriching and life-affirming for me. I hold that truth while simultaneously acknowledging that this still fosters the valorizing discourses and identity formation in child welfare work, and that I cannot possibly know how

my service recipients experienced their interactions with me. I experienced these interactions as opportunities for human(e) connections, bonding, and shared learning. These were not the primary source of stressful moments for me; not the source of my 'burnout' or fatigue.

What I did experience as exhausting was the relentless, arbitrary bureaucracy and seemingly random managerial decisions I had to contend with when I returned to the office from contact with service recipients. In my experience, those times when I could not access resources for people who needed material aid desperately, my experiences of relentlessly repetitive moments of being called upon to act as the gatekeeper of woefully inadequate resources; those times when I was called upon to make decisions about which family would get the grocery money and which family did not – indeed, *those* seemed like endless, innumerable, and unlivable moments. I think about the three kinds of paperwork that needed to be completed before I could give someone bus tickets, the annual filling out of applications to determine which five children on my caseload 'deserved' to go to summer camp, and so on. My experience of feeling burnt out came from those ceaselessly recurring moments when I could see how terribly unfair this system was. There was no place to go with these observations, nor was there any time to process these thoughts, insights, or experiences. What is routinely framed as individual weakness, pathology, or even 'boundary issues' (which I discuss further in this chapter) was for me, a recurring series of thoughts that interrupted my work, that kept popping up for me as a conundrum. In learning about IE as I did methodological research, I came to equate this with disjunctures, as Smith (1990, 2003) frames it. What is constructed as professional burnout did not feel like burnout, but it did feel exhausting. It was most certainly

exhausting to be on a metaphorical treadmill of doing repetitive work that does not help people the way I thought we were supposed to help people.

#### ***5.4 Labour Activism and its Null Effects***

Very early in my social work career in 1991, I found myself drawn into labour activism when the agency I worked for went on strike. This labour activism shaped and influenced my understanding of some of the serious workplace issues that frontline CPWs were subjected to between 1990 and 2019. It has also illuminated the ways that the labour movement has been unable to meaningfully challenge the long-standing issues related to the child welfare workplace.

In the lead up to the 1991 strike, there was significant debate between members of our local bargaining unit, with concern for the ethical implications of taking labour actions. In so doing, some member felt our local was using child welfare service recipients as ‘pawns,’ and that we would be putting our own needs ahead of the needs of children who needed protection. The perceived need to advocate for improved working conditions guided the group, as we (a group of white workers) marched out of our workplace to Aretha Franklin’s *Respect*. We felt empowered; we felt that we were demanding better working conditions and tangentially advocating for better services for the child welfare service recipients. Upon settling this strike, we saw that the management bargaining team negotiated salary gains that were precisely equal to the wages lost over the time of the strike. The union members paid the cost of that strike and, at best, ‘broke even’ economically. When the strike of 1991 ended, on the day we returned to the worksite, we were greeted with overt hostility from members of the management team. Some supervisors were heard to mumble things like, “*You’re lucky you have*

*a job.*" We were instructed not to reference the strike in any of our professional documentation. We were instructed to ensure our case documentation was brought up to date (to cover the time of our absence), and that there would be no authorized overtime to do this work. Other than lingering bad feelings, any perception of gains was erased and very little of the work setting actually changed.

Many years later, working for a different agency, I was again a member of my union executive committee when a sister union local went out on strike in the spring of 2000. That labour action was notable, as it changed the practice of child welfare in Ontario by winning precedent-setting contract language that established case caps and a mechanism to challenge workload disputes (La Rose, 2009). This was ground-breaking, as it was the first time in Ontario where child welfare workers gained collective bargaining language that constrained workload, where formal limits were placed on the amount of work that could be assigned to individual workers. Child welfare workers have always identified workload as a serious issue, yet this persistent concern is rarely addressed in meaningful and formalized ways. Within the inquest process in Ontario, over numerous different inquest reports, the issue of CPW workload has been broadly ignored by Coroners' juries. Issues that led to a child death generally have not included an acknowledgement of CPW workload, and instead, speak to issues of perceived lapses in CPW judgement, or a lack of knowledge, training, and compliance with practice standards (OCCO, 2001, 2014, 2016). In the inquest report pertaining to the death of Katelynn Sampson, there was a recommendation that the Ministry should conduct a workload analysis to determine if child welfare agencies are properly resourced (Office of Chief Coroner, 2016). However, there is no publicly accessible report or text that could be found to demonstrate that

an audit of this kind has been conducted. Despite the lack of acknowledgement within the inquest process, it is clear to the people who worked in this field that workload issues contributed to the circumstances of many of the high-profile child deaths such as with Jordan Heikamp, Jeffrey Baldwin, and Katelynn Sampson.

At the time of this writing, very few child welfare agencies have formalized collective bargaining language that constrain workload limits. Most agencies follow a less formal approach - that of negotiating workload issues with individual workers on an as-needed basis. Average caseloads range between 15 to 25, with 15 cases per month being a general average for intake child welfare workers. By comparison, there was a point in 2000 when I had a caseload of 65 as an intake worker. At that time, which was prior to the case cap workload language bargained by the Toronto CCAS in 2001, it was routine to be assigned 12 to 14 cases per week. There were many times when I was assigned that many cases in *one day*.

In my experience, asking a supervisor for help with extreme workload issues is rarely helpful. In my experiences, I asked supervisors questions like, *“How am I expected to do this? How could I possibly do this work? How can I fit it all in? Which cases should I prioritize?”* The response I was given most often was: *“It all has to be done,”* with advice such as, *“Come in early to get a jump on paperwork before the office opens,”* or, *“Just pop in on your way home.”* Embedded within these tidbits of advice is the assumption that CPWs will and must do extra work unpaid, that they will and must ‘go the extra mile’ as part of their professional identity formation (Baines et al., 2009; Stalker et al., 2007).

Research by Baines and colleagues (2009) identify the neoliberal ideological shift in social work whereby agencies must rely on the “flexible boundaries” of workers to fill in the

gaps created by workload demands and lack of resources. These expectations are now an assumed part of being a professional social worker. The responses given to me were unhelpful and did nothing to address the relentless cycle of new referrals, or the sense that the work was an endless, dehumanizing assembly line. When my colleagues or I asked for any kind of reprieve or accommodations, we were made to feel as if we were weak, disorganized, and selfish.

Circling back to the theorizing of temporalities, these ways of structuring the child welfare workplace aligns with Cosenza's (2014) explorations of the ways that time is conceptualized and how these conceptualizations function to maintain systemic inequalities. The sense of urgency and inadequate time induce the persistent stretching that is demanded of CPWs, or the pressure that is applied to direct CPWs to accommodate unrealistic and dehumanizing expectations. These temporalities demand that the work of child welfare be organized, compartmentalized, and constrained in complex ways (White, 1998).

With each new case added to the pile came profound fear: *What if I miss something?* This was magnified particularly after a colleague was charged criminally in relation to an infant death: *If I do miss something, will I face criminal charges?* We workers lived in a culture of profound fear. For me, there were times when it was often overwhelming and demoralizing. The way that most workers cope with this is to put cases into categories and approach the work in a methodical and often dehumanized manner. CPWs talk in codes and categories, identifying

people as their presenting problem rather than multifaceted human beings: *“I have three 11Fs<sup>7</sup> to do this afternoon,” “I have a [case with a] dirty house”, “Just another 42B<sup>8</sup>.”*

In the next round of union negotiations, our union local went on a campaign to get caps on our caseload. They even distributed baseball caps with the words “case caps” embroidered on them. Our local did not go on strike that year. With the precedent set by our sister union and the threat of labour action, we too were able to get new workload language added to our collective contract. This new workload language profoundly changed the nature of child welfare work in our agency and for other agencies across Ontario. For a short time, it felt that this change in workload language in the collective agreement would finally shift the work and ease the burden of the crushing responsibility for the frontline CPWs. Suddenly, there was a shift of responsibility from being entirely on a frontline CPW to being shared with the supervisor and management team, even if only in some small way. This change truly felt momentous. Initially,

In very short order, it became clear that these changes towards moderating the way that work was assigned also set the stage for and supported the changes towards a further increased institutional focus on ‘accountability.’ The new approach to workload management gave way to an increase in the ways that the work in child welfare was tracked and monitored. The shift then intensified the ways of monitoring the timing or temporalities of the work. Each task was now time stamped; all input and output of each worker and the timeframes of every

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<sup>7</sup> The code 11F refers to the coding of the Eligibility Spectrum, the document that is used to determine which referrals to a child welfare agency are accepted as being ‘eligible’ for service and what timelines would be assigned to cases deemed eligible for interventions. Within this framework, referrals are determined to be “above or below” the eligibility line and are assigned response times within which the CPW must observe and interview the children. Cases designated as an 11F would be seen as above the eligibility line but not urgent, affording a 7-day response. The response times are part of the Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016) discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> Like the 11F, 42B refers to a coding in the Eligibility Spectrum, that of a Caregiver-Child Conflict with risk of separation. Translated into common parlance, this is most often referring to a parent-teen conflict.

task now tracked and monitored; each worker scrutinized for compliance down to the smallest task. Their daily activities were monitored to track each step in the work process and to quickly ascertain when someone is not compliant. Cases that were not completed within the 30-day limit for new assignments would 'fall off' your case cap, and the next batch of investigations would be assigned. Visually, the CPW can see on the computer screen all the cases that have gone from 'new' to 'overdue'. At the time our caseloads were visible on the computer in rows, where there were designated by N (new), W (waiting for approval), or O (overdue). The cases marked 'O' did not disappear nor were they substantively removed from caseloads; they were just no longer counted towards the monthly number of assigned cases. However, like interest on a credit card, they would simply accrue; a worker who was not keeping up and not complying to the strict timelines could be easily spotted.

What felt initially like a victory for the frontline worker quickly became a tool to intensify surveillance and quickly target non-compliance. This new mechanism, neatly packaged as gains made through labour activism, significantly increased the ways that workers would face discipline. Any variance, any observable straying, or any differences in adherence to standards could be identified immediately and translated into an assessment of compliance. The outcome of labour activism was intended to provide some measure of worker control, to moderate intensity of the workload. However, what this meant ultimately was new forms of intensified surveillance of CPWs, shifting processes towards much more mechanized, 'efficient' forms of work. It supported, albeit inadvertently, the argument that the issues in the child welfare workplace related most often to individuals not competent enough to meet their administrative obligations. Instead of supporting the workers, this combined with many of the

neoliberal rationalities that were being imposed on social service work and intensified the ways that CPWs are monitored and regulated (Baines, 2004, 2010; Baines et al., 2012; Baines & van den Broek, 2017; Woolford & Curran, 2011).

## **5.5 Dehumanizing Discourses**

### *5.5.1 Dehumanizing Discourses: Early experiences*

Early on in my child welfare career, an older woman who served as a mentor to me and had been in child welfare for many years, told me that child welfare work was ‘impossible’ work. She explained it was impossible to do well because the service recipients were most often too ‘damaged’. This mentor advised me that child welfare work was relatively easy to do ‘well’ in part because expectations for ‘success’ were generally so low. Child welfare clients are routinely dehumanized, conceptualized most often as individuals who are pathological, ‘damaged’, and irreparable. This construction of service recipients was normalized from the earliest days of my work within this field.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the child welfare system struggles with the contradictions between the claim of benevolence with its stated primary objective to bring about positive and therapeutic change for families, coexisting with the deeply held belief that families who come to the attention of child welfare services are individually pathological (Chen, 2001, 2009; Margolin, 1997). Child welfare systems are a form of law enforcement that contributes to the work of governmentality and of social control (Chen, 2001; Swift & Parada, 2004). Swift and Callahan (2009) agree, highlighting these tensions in the work:

The child protection system has embedded in it a number of contradictions that remain powerful and often problematic. It rests on tensions between helping and punishing parents and between its focus on parents and on children. These tensions lead to

constantly changing thresholds of intervention, guided at least as much by ideological and political interests as by any evidence of what works (p. 131).

Many of my reflections on moments of disjuncture (D. Smith, 1990b; G. Smith, 1990) were moments where I found myself pondering the actual purpose of my work, since the tasks assigned to me often seemed incongruent or disconnected from the agency's stated purpose of protecting children from harm.

One of my early recollections of experiencing disorientation about the purpose of my work was from a conversation with "Eleanor,"<sup>9</sup> who was my first supervisor. In my eyes, Eleanor was a wise and kind woman. She had worked her way through the ranks within child welfare, over many decades, having started in the profession as a UM worker.<sup>10</sup> Because of this extensive experience, she seemed to have such a vast knowledge, particularly about historical events within the agency. Eleanor was fiercely protective of the people she supervised, and she was unreservedly supportive, especially to new staff like me at the time.

I was very new to child welfare, this was very early in my career, when I noted a large proportion of my assigned cases stemmed from allegations of a "lack of supervision"<sup>11</sup>. I was

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<sup>9</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy.

<sup>10</sup> This was a role from decades earlier of working solely with women whose primary reason for intervention was due to their status as "Unmarried Mothers" (UM).

<sup>11</sup> The term "lack of supervision" is not specifically defined in Ontario's the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) nor in the current legislation the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA). The language of the legislation refers specifically to the designation of a child in need of protection (CFSA 37(2)(a)(b) (i) and (ii) or CYFSA 74(2)(a)(i) and (ii), where (i) is "*failure to adequately care for, provide for, supervise or protect the child*," or where (ii) is "*pattern of neglect in caring for, providing for, supervising or protecting the child*;" What lack of supervision means is subject to interpretation. The legislation states that "*No person having charge of a child younger than 16 shall leave the child without making provision for the child's supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances.*" There is room for interpretation since the legislation does not clearly define an age when children can be left unattended, what is "reasonable in the circumstances" or precisely what 'unattended' means. Some interpret leaving a child in their crib/bed with a baby monitor, while the parent is outside in the garden as "unattended". I have responded to calls to the agency from the public who expressed concern for children walking to school alone as "unattended". While I do not support the use of rigid, inflexible "one size fits all" interpretations, it is important to note that the

struck by how many cases related to this same issue - the lack of safe and/or affordable childcare. At this particular moment, all of the cases on my caseload by reason of a lack of supervision were involved with the agency in a non-voluntary way (including regulatory, legalistic, punitive, and intrusive). The term itself is subject to interpretation and therefore is not always applied consistently from family to family, from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. This was the first time I noticed the issues of disproportionate involvement related to race and class.

The families I was working with at that time all lived in modest housing that was near, but not among, affluent and mostly white families. These suburban communities had observable but unspoken divisions; the modest houses on major throughways and busy (noisy) roads with tiny lots and few green spaces were in stark contrast to the more affluent houses on *cul-du-sacs* or 'exclusive enclaves' that overlooked parks and ravines. The families that I was working with were all racialized and all struggling financially. For them, buying or even renting a modest house stretched them to their limit; these families were living on a financial precipice.

One case I remember vividly was that of the "A" Family, who had 3 children ages 7, 5, and 2. These children were taken into state care because they were found unattended while their parents went to work. This family was a two-parent family; the parents had migrated from the Caribbean and struggled to find stable employment and safe childcare. Each of the parents was working two jobs: both held multiple part time, precarious positions in low-wage settings (janitorial, primarily), and both were working shifts that were both night and day. This family had recently purchased a small home in this suburb just outside of a large population centre in

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lack of precision creates a space for disproportionate responses particularly when responding to families from otherwise already marginalized groups.

southern Ontario. Their decisions to leave the children unattended while at work emerged from a combination of factors: the lack of a network of extended family or community, the dearth of safe affordable childcare, and the lack of available caregiver options to look after children outside 'regular business hours' of 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and amidst frequent changes to their working hours.

This family stands out in my memory in part because their decisions to buy a home and work excruciatingly long hours at relatively low waged jobs positioned them in my mind as a clichéd example of the myth of meritocracy (Littler, 2017). This family embraced the ideological promise that if one works hard, one will be rewarded. These were modest people who clung to the expressed intention to "give their children a better life." Child welfare authorities became closely involved when the parents were unable to juggle their shifts and there was a gap in time where neither parent was home. Acknowledging that the lack of supervision even for brief periods does actually present a risk of harm to the children, I questioned at the time, as I do now, if having the children admitted to state (foster) care for 6 months might also present a risk to the children's well-being and safety. I questioned the assumptions that foster parents were inherently better caregivers for these children. I considered this intervention to be more intrusive than necessary to address an issue directly related to disparities in availability and access to resources, with nothing to do with the parents' ability to care for their children. At the time the file was assigned to me, the children were still in care. My job was to supervise the gradual return to their family.

I inherited the "A" family case from an intake (investigative) worker who described this family in her records with such overt racism that I still feel disturbed when I think of her

descriptions of them decades later. This was my first experience of directly observing the ways that service recipients are dehumanized within the processes and activities of child welfare. The worker who had been assigned to this family at the time of the intake talked at length about how “*appalled*” she was by these parents. She expressed disgust (she used this term explicitly and often) at these parents for being late to the child welfare office for the supervised access appointment. To that worker, it was clear ‘evidence’ that they were substandard parents who were selfish and poorly attached to the children. I recall her saying with moral indignation, “*If my kids were in care, I would be there waiting at the door for the office to open, you would not be able to stop me from seeing my kids.*”

However, my contact with the “A” family left no question about their love for their children. They were devastated by the removal of the children; the children were likewise devastated by the separation from their parents. These parents had significant demonstrable caregiving skills and clear care for their children. They showed me pictures of their children as newborns, at their birthday parties and family events. They stated repeatedly that they wanted the best for their kids. Mrs. A described her dream job, that someday she could work in the medical field as a receptionist. Mr. A. talked about being able to take the children to meet their extended family back in the Caribbean someday. Neither of these parents had paid vacation days, paid sick days, or any other benefits that come from stable, full-time work. At the time, I felt heartbroken for these parents and found myself wondering if there was any other way that safety concerns could be addressed. I tried to advocate for them, though the best I could do was help them access counselling through my own personal networks. What they needed was affordable daycare; what they got was counselling. What they needed was attention to

structural factors impacting their lives and time; what they got was an individual solution that focused on their capacity as individuals.

Various mechanisms of structural racism and class inequality relegated this family to precarious, low wage, and unpredictable jobs. I also believe now that it was racist beliefs that justified the use of the most intrusive response from the agency - not just that the children were placed in care, but that they remained in state care so long (Clarke, 2011, 2012; Clarke et al., 2021). At that time, concerns for systemic anti-Black racism embedded within practice and processes were known in particular spaces, but not widely acknowledged much less discussed. More recently, these issues have been the focus of research (Clarke, 2011, 2012; Clarke et al., 2021; Mohamud et al., 2021; Roberts, 2002, 2014). The “A” family was only one of many families struggling with the same issues and barriers that I had on my caseload at that time.

The obstacles to accessing formal childcare arrangements for this family and several other families on my caseload was at the time (and continues to be) a widespread issue across the province and across the country. Over the decades of time since I worked with these families to the time of this writing, universal childcare has been a recurring and hotly debated political issue. In Ontario, the issue of universal affordable childcare system remains unresolved. While there are some subsidized childcare supports, those spots are limited and means-tested. These families were ‘working poor’, meaning they would not be eligible for subsidy. Childcare costs were then and continue to be prohibitive, with spaces limited and hours incompatible with night shift work or precarious labour with inconsistent shift times. All these many years later, accessible daycare is still a contested political issue and universal daycare is still a long way from being universal.

The disjunctures embedded in child welfare services was revealed in a conversation with my supervisor that continues to weigh on my mind. In my youthful naïveté, I devised a plan to make a program proposal. In my proposal, I suggested to my supervisor that the agency, through me, could act as a conduit to introduce these numerous (3+) families to each other in order to create a sort of childcare cooperative. I excitedly suggested that I could focus my work towards helping help them navigate a way to share childcare responsibilities, for a way for these families to pool their resources to share a nanny, or perhaps to barter childcare amongst themselves as a way to save money. I excitedly suggested that this could be a way for these isolated families to build community connections and address their immediate childcare needs, but also a way to model childcare solutions for other families. I enthusiastically proposed this as a pilot project, an innovative way to support these families through community care and solve this serious gap in services.

I was energized by the idea that we could work collaboratively with these families, empowering them to fashion a shared solution and connect with others in the community. Our agency would play a key part as well, acting to facilitate the building of community strengths and so on. I suggested that our agency could take a role to advocate for some more formalized, structured, and subsidized childcare through the agency. My hope was that service recipients could have their children returned to their care, and that new cases of 'lack of supervision' would have quick access to a safe childcare resource to avoid the drastic step of removal in the first place. Surely, I reasoned, it would be cheaper for the agency to offer daycare than to remove children to foster care through force and litigation?

While my supervisor thought it a good idea that she described as “*creative and responsive to a community need,*” she declared that it could never be done. Yes, it could work, but “*there is no way the agency would do this, it’s too risky.*” This idea represented too much liability for the agency; it was “*not part of our mandate*” and would therefore never be approved. She advised me that this was not worth my time and energy and would indeed never move forward.

The discussion ended there. I was too new to the profession to have confidence to bring it forward or to lobby further for this kind of program. Advocacy for change on this scale was not something I felt I could take on, and it was not ever discussed in any of my ‘in-house BSW’ training, nor my actual BSW education that I sought later. What these families needed was a supportive community, but what they got was individual counselling. This moment germinated a way of thinking for me that held this question: *If we do not provide support services and help families find resources they actually need, then what do we, in child welfare, actually do?*

This was not the only time I would ask this question but rather the first of many rupturing moments. I think of Chapman (2014), who described their first two experiences with using restraints on children they worked with and the visceral response that followed, related to a sense of one’s conscience kicking in and functioning the way it is supposed to. My feelings were similar; this first experience of seeing the glaring gaps between the child welfare rhetoric and the lived realities stood out for me unlike other experiences that would follow in the years since this experience.

This conversation with my supervisor happened at a time when scholarship of risk discourses discussed in Chapter 3 were only just emerging. Beck and Giddens published

*Risikogesellschaft* in 1986, which was translated as *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* and subsequently published in 1992. However, at that moment in time, the concept of the social construction of 'risk' had not yet been taken up widely by social work scholars, nor had these ideas yet found their way into academic social work discourses.

Critiques of risk discourses would not become part of the mainstream scholarly analysis for many years after this conversation. However, the concept of managing risk was clearly an indelible part of child welfare practice before Beck and Giddens' work emerged in academe. In a few short years, analysis of risk discourses in social work would emerge as scholars like Bessant and colleagues (2003), Dumbrill (2006), and Swift and Callahan (2009) began to see how central the concept of risk assessment would become to the ways decisions were being made in social work and particularly in child welfare.

#### *5.5.2 Dehumanizing Discourses: My First Apprehension*

The very first case assigned to me was initially deemed a 'lower risk' case of alleged parental (maternal) neglect. This first case also became my first apprehension of a sibling group of four children. This first apprehension was similar to limbic imprinting of a duckling; I was energized by the experience of 'rescuing' these children. Following my heroism, I was given accolades and acknowledgement for having done "*such a great job with such a terrible situation.*"

This family was known to the agency for a full year before it was assigned to me, with multiple referrals on file. There were calls that alleged that this mother and her four children were seen wandering the streets, rummaging through garbage cans looking for cigarette butts. This mother was reported to access clothing donations from the local church on a weekly basis

in lieu of doing laundry. The children were reported to be involved with petty theft of bread from the corner store. Later when their mother tried to take the children across the Canada-USA border, the situation was then deemed to be high-risk, and the children were apprehended. Their mother later explained that she wanted to emigrate to Florida where they would not need winter coats.

Within this first case, the quintessential child welfare case, were the elements of a great story, with some moments that were funny, gross, and heartwarming. The mother was described as ‘severely psychotic’ and was represented as simply a pathological parent. The children were noted to be ‘resilient and adorable’; the foster parents were ‘lovely’; their biological father described as a very ‘sweet’, very ‘grateful’ client. My agency and I had ‘saved’ these children, ‘rescued’ them, returned them to their father, and the kids lived happily ever after. No further analysis was needed.

The mother of these children had been constructed as dangerously unstable, psychotic, irreparably broken, and unsalvageable. All professionals who were involved in this case accepted this construction of her without debate. This mother was deemed irredeemably neglectful – *a bad mother* (Swift, 1995a). There was no discussion of how to enable her to better support herself and her children, the focus only on the children being returned to their father. As described by de Montigny (1995), my tasks in this case were to assemble, document, and present the evidence to the court, to “construct an institutional reality” (p. 27), one that supports the institutional apparatus. There were no further tasks required within this institutional apparatus once this mother was deemed to be neglectful. I was given accolades for demonstrating exceptional work; in an era before databases, I was able to find their father who

lived in another province. Absent from discussion was any consideration for ways to assist this mother once the children were removed. Once she was no longer a custodial parent, she no longer fit the child welfare mandate and therefore ceased to be a client of ours.

Days later, this mother later came to the child welfare office asking about her children, suggesting that despite having been at the court when decisions were made for her children, she apparently had no understanding of the outcome of the court process or the decision to send the children back to live with their father, who lived a significant distance away. Without her children, there was no further work to be done for this woman. Despite her clear distress, I was not allowed to offer any assistance to her. It was simply not our mandate. This mother was seen to wander the streets for years after her children left the province. While I felt disturbed by this outcome, it never occurred to me to challenge the direction to close the case. She no longer had children, so she no longer existed within the child welfare system. I was aware that the court process had skirted around her parental rights, in the belief that this was a way to protect these children. That she was afforded no agency in the decisions made for her children was a clear message to me that was all that needed to be done. The ways that she was so completely dehumanized and discarded was normalized and, in some ways, celebrated. The children were “safe” and that was the only mandate.

Part of what is jarring in this instance is the way that my concern for this woman was dismissed and discouraged. This is just one way that child welfare workers experience their own dehumanization. Freire (2009) wrote about the ways that in dehumanizing others, the perpetrator is also dehumanized. Child welfare workers are kept too busy to be concerned about the people caught in the path of this institutional juggernaut. Parents who have had their

parental rights terminated have little influence and are not important to the system once the children are defined as 'safe' by the institutional processes. As each task is completed within the mandate, workers are encouraged, guided, instructed, and themselves mandated to move on to the next, with little or no opportunity or institutional guidance to reflect upon what might have been missed or what could have been done differently. There are no mechanisms to support workers to ask questions such as, *"Was this the only way to keep the children safe?"*, *"Was this actually the best way to keep the children safe?"*, *"Is there anything else we should be doing?"*, or, *"Did it have to end this way?"* This case has haunted me, but it was difficult to articulate precisely why. I felt a lingering, haunting regret for the ways the family needs were neglected by the system until a crisis occurred, the ways this mother was constructed as pathological instead of noticing her resilience and ingenuity. The dehumanizing discourses – in this case, the sanism in particular (Perlin, 1992, 1999) intersecting with misogynistic assumptions about being a 'good mother' – are so normalized as to reside outside of our awareness. I was aware that harm was caused, but unaware of what to do differently.

### *5.5.3 Dehumanizing Discourses That Mask Systemic Racism*

In 1998, after the death of Jordan Heikamp from chronic starvation, the child's mother Renee Heikamp and the assigned child welfare worker, Angie Martin, were charged with criminal negligence causing death. Both Ms. Heikamp and Ms. Martin were later acquitted of these criminal charges; however, the events that lead to the criminal charges and the subsequent Coroner's Inquest had profound and lasting impacts on those who worked in child welfare in Ontario for decades to come (La Rose, 2009; Regehr, et al., 2002, 2004). Officials recognized the anxiety that workers felt: "Every social worker in child welfare across the

country watched this inquiry very carefully and felt that they could be walking in Angie's shoes" (Black, 1999, para. 5).

Not long after the acquittals in the Heikamp matter, a case with a newborn child was assigned to me. The referral originated from a public health nurse (PHN) who was concerned for a young couple who had recently delivered their first baby. As per protocol at the time, the nurses at the hospital referred this young family for public health support because they scored high on risk assessment/screening forms completed by the nurses on the maternity ward before discharge. "Sue" and her partner "Tim"<sup>12</sup> politely declined public health services; they refused the PHN entry to their home. While this public health service is voluntary, this refusal was seen as an additional risk factor and became the rationale for the PHN to make a referral to child welfare.

This nurse reported that she believed that both young parents had limited ability to parent and care for their child. The PHN used the term "*developmentally delayed*"<sup>13</sup> – language that is accepted as meaningful in these institutional settings and therefore requires little or no interrogation. It was noted in the records that both of these young adults rejected this diagnosis, but their opinions were not afforded credibility within their file. Amidst the many forms of injustice within this intervention, there is this moment of hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007; Scrutton, 2017), as their perspective was dismissed and did not change the way that this "delay" was equated with risk. The young mother Sue was legally blind and Indigenous. The interpretation of parental pathology attributed to Indigenous families was

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<sup>12</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy.

<sup>13</sup> I use this term only as it was used at the time, intentionally, to convey the depth of the injustice.

simply understood by those involved with this file. The racism was not noticed or interrogated by me or any other professional person who had access to this file. The primary reported concern from the PHN centred on the young mother's physical and cognitive "delays," resulting in the PHN's belief that she would not be able to do important parental tasks like breastfeeding. It was rationalized that without service from the PHN, there was no other information about the baby or how he was doing. Since the Heikamp inquest, referrals related to infants, especially those infants 'not visible to the public' were uniformly treated as high-risk. Intersecting with the perceptions of risk that relate to the child's age and the pathologizing discourses around physical and developmental capacities, this family was also Indigenous. While this connection to Indigeneity was not fore-fronted in the referral, the practice of flagging Indigenous families at birth to child welfare was and continues to be a firmly entrenched practice (Leddy, 2020).

As per standard protocol, I consulted with a supervisor. I wish I were joking, but the supervisor, upon hearing about this case, guffawed and said, "*We better apprehend him just to be sure,*" only based on the resulting professional panic after the death of Jordan Heikamp. The fact that we shared a good laugh at that might be explained by the term "gallows humor" that has been interpreted as a coping mechanism in stressful situations (Rowe & Regehr, 2010). However, I believe that the perception of humour in this instance more accurately reflects the routine, normalized ways that people who come to the attention of child welfare services are dehumanized. In this case, this child and his family were instantly translated into a transaction, into risk factors that needed to be managed.

I was directed then to attend the family home with police. This case was seen as fairly routine and straightforward, as was the use of police escort. Around that time, I never questioned it. After the death of Jordan Heikamp, my colleagues and I were much more nervous about investigations related to children under 2 years of age. Apprehensions of newborns in Ontario became easier to justify, rationalized as just generally prudent. In the absence of compelling 'evidence' that an infant was 'safe', removal was understood to be a valid response, made defensible with the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) and the risk discourses that were embedded within this practice model. This case came to me after the implementation of implementation of ORAM (see Chapter 3, Section 4 for more detail) that saw a significant shift in the ways child welfare cases were approached and how we were making our case-related decisions. As previously discussed, under ORAM, social work interventions become increasingly focused on averting and managing risk. I, like most CPWs at the time, was drawn into practices that are more intrusive, depersonalized, and defensive, taking actions that were more punitive to families who need support and shifting to more often see children as needing to be 'rescued' (Chen, 2000; Dumbrill, 2006; Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016; Parada, 2002; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift & Parada, 2004).

The phrase, "*We better apprehend just to be sure*", was spoken for numerous cases of mine. On a different occasion, the "*just to be sure*" part of this phrase was used in response to a referral that came to the agency on a Friday afternoon before a long weekend. Because the agency would be closed over a holiday weekend, the interpretation of risk stemmed from the idea that the family would not be subject to surveillance for several days. Working on the

weekend was never considered, but removal was seen as an inherently safe and prudent (read as defensible) response on a Friday afternoon.

I met Sue and all the members of her family, including the maternal grandmother, “Ellen.” In a soft-spoken manner, Sue denied the cognitive challenges alleged by the PHN, as well as the extent of the physical challenges on her ability to parent. Sue and Tim objected to the apprehension, saying politely and calmly that they did not need CAS to help, that they were doing just fine. They insisted that they did not need a PHN either. They had Ellen, Sue’s mother who had come to stay with them to help. In spite of this clear and plausible safety plan, I followed the instructions of my supervisor. The baby was apprehended quietly, without loud protest.

I thought it odd at the time that Ellen was so quiet. She did not move or speak in response to this situation. I must acknowledge that I did not look deeper into this lack of reaction by the family in part because of my workload. With all the work I had to do, I was frankly relieved that I could get this task done quickly with few complications or resistances. The baby was seen at the agency’s medical clinic and placed in a foster home that was on my way home. That this job was done without the need to claim for overtime was a way that I demonstrated compliance with the strict child welfare temporalities. It was noted and attributed to my overall competence.

The next day, our agency was contacted by members of the Band and, via teleconference, they accused the agency generally, and me specifically, of perpetrating genocide. A supervisor who was in the room rolled her eyes. It was then that we discovered that Ellen was an Elder, and that members of their Band Council flew to Southern Ontario

overnight. They were prepared to fight this apprehension and support Sue and Tim to regain custody of their son. Despite the fact that Band members arrived in the area the very next day and despite the fact that the legislation allowed for a child to simply be returned before a court hearing, Sue and Tim's son remained in state care for the full span of time allowed in the legislation, until the matter could be heard in court 4 days later. The investigation and apprehension of this child happened urgently, whereas the resolution of the matter and reunification of the family happened much less urgently. Always within allowable, legislated time frames, but never urgently.

It was fortunate that the baby's foster mother happened to be a lactation consultant, and more fortunate still that this foster mother volunteered of her own accord to supervise access between the child and his mother to support breastfeeding and bonding. This was not the norm, nor was it on any part due to my advocacy; it was just a stroke of good luck. This foster mother even arranged to have the child visit with his mother for a Sunday visit, so they could celebrate their first Mother's Day together. This was unheard of as, at that point, supervised visits generally only happened during business hours at the child welfare agency office, and never on a weekend.

As per the legislation, this matter was heard in court on the 5<sup>th</sup> day, and after this first court appearance, the child was returned to his family. The judge made a supervision order that included terms instructing the extended family to supervise Sue and Tim, returning to their home and community. The agency was able to claim that they had provided excellent level of service to this family. In many ways this case would seem to be a success story; the child in question was 'rescued' and rendered 'safe' while the mother received support and the family

was reunited quickly. My supervisor noted this case as an example of my professionalism, efficiency, and competence. There was no discussion about the way this family was treated by the agency or that these decisions were part of the bigger picture, that of significantly disproportionate numbers of Indigenous children in state care. There was no recognition that the court ordered the extended family to supervise these young parents, while failing to recognize the long history of Indigenous families providing strong networks of support to parents and children (Makokis et al., 2020). There was no recognition at that time for the role I played in the ongoing “Millennial Scoop” (Sinclair, 2007, p. 67). Although members of this community expressed concerns that this situation was a clear example of the continuation of genocidal actions, their concerns were summarily dismissed with an eye roll.

Not only did I not question the direction I was given, but there was also no opportunity for case review, for any discussion about what our agency had done to this family. The concerns for the level of intrusion with this action, along with the allegation from the Band member of this being genocidal was dismissed derisively and never spoken of again. There was simply no room, no space, no time to reflect on the concerns brought forward from this family. Concerns expressed by the family and the community were entirely ignored.

As noted in Chapter 2, CPWs must adhere to white temporalities, which function to govern their working conditions and case conceptualizations (White, 1998). The CPW draws on their understandings of risk, danger, and harm, which function to obscure their complicity in the decisions that render services in a dehumanized approach that is most often mechanical or technical. The constructions of risk, urgency, and danger function to reproduce and re-entrench current, oppressive practices by prioritizing ‘urgent’ cases for investigations and ‘interventions’

over the work of prevention, caring, or helping work. Consistent with encroaching neoliberal ideologies, the way that urgency is constructed and replicated in child protection work ultimately serves to justify the lack of time given to other forms of care, help, or work. Similar to White (1998), I argue that risk does not cause shortness of time, but rather shortness of time defines risk. It is the organizational and political structures that function to define risk and the responses to these defined risks. The time that is required to do thoughtful, compassionate, or preventative work is not prioritized. The time that is needed to review and challenge those taken-for-granted assumptions is not provided but the actions of surveillance and regulation most certainly are.

It was not until many years later when I was much more removed from this organization, when I was well into my doctoral studies, that I began to comprehend the connections between how this investigation was conducted and the colonial practices of residential schools and child welfare systems. Only then did I begin to grasp the meaning and impact for this family of my arrival to their home with a police officer, as well as other ways that state violence has been, and continues to be, rationalized. It was not until many years later that I began to understand the hegemonic discourses that conflate separation of children from their families with 'safety', supported by white supremacist and colonial assumptions around parenting fitness and ability. At no time in this case was there any discussion or recognition from the agency of the trauma for the child and this family that were directly the result of child welfare intervention. It was not until many years later that I could begin to recognize the disjunctures that are revealed in this case or the ways that I was complicit in racist, oppressive, and indeed genocidal practices.

Even after all the time that has passed, I still wonder how so many trained professionals (nurses and social workers) as well as myself, were able to conflate Sue's physical 'challenges' with a risk to the safety and care of her child. At no time did it ever occur to me to challenge these racist and disablist ideas around the PHN's perception of Sue's ability to care for her child, nor did it occur to me to challenge these concerns coming from a nurse, who I perceived to be a professional helper with reliable and unbiased medical opinions. It is only many years later when I began to understand the underlying and interconnected discourses of (dis)ableism, colonialism, and racism that these disjunctures became clear. Sue was constructed as a 'bad mother' in in vague, taken-for-granted ways as described by Swift (1995a). Simultaneously, I was constructed as a 'good worker' because I rescued that child, followed the rules, did what I was told, and 'managed' my workload efficiently. I received professional recognition for being able to do all of these things in accordance with the discourses of New Public Management (NPM) (Griffith & Smith, 2014) and within sanctioned time allotments.

My reflections turn now to a different case, an investigation of a different family also with a newborn but who identified as Black. The reported concern came from the community and alleged in vague terms that this newly delivered mother was "*erratic and unpredictable.*" I attended the family home in an apartment building and attempted to engage with "Yvette."<sup>14</sup> She refused to allow me to enter the home or allow me to see her baby. Upon review of the file, it was noted there had been previous but inconsequential child welfare involvement for a different, older child. Despite the fact that the historical involvement was short, and concerns were not substantiated, the ORAM framework dictated that past child welfare involvement

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<sup>14</sup> Name and details altered to protect this family's privacy

renders the current referral designated as a higher risk. Previous child welfare involvement, regardless of whether or not the historical concerns were verified, increased the assessment of risk in any referral. Within the framework of ORAM, there is no such designation as “no risk.” Every family assessed has some form of risk, so the lowest designation would be “low-risk,” with any form of historical contact with child welfare interpreted as cumulative in nature.

In consultation with my supervisor and in light of this historical contact, I was directed to obtain a warrant to apprehend the child. This situation morphed into a stand-off, with tactical police forcefully entering her apartment to insist that Yvette allow the child welfare worker (me) entry to the home. The stand-off lasted for many hours, with this mother steadfastly refusing to allow me into her home and me steadfastly refusing to back down on the request to enter the home and see the child. The police officer relayed to me that in his assessment, the home looked fine, and the child appeared healthy. However, this was not sufficient as he was not a ‘trained child welfare worker’ and therefore did not hold valid knowledge according to the child welfare mandate. Also, it was simply accepted that the client did not have the authority to determine how this interaction would look; she did not get to say “no.” This mother suggested that we meet instead at the office; she would drive to the office to let me see the baby. In consultation with my supervisor, this was interpreted as a situation that would escalate the risk for the child as this mother was now considered a “*flight risk*.” I was instructed by my supervisor to hold to the plan to see the home and to insist that this mother let me in.

Though unspoken but certainly important was this mother’s flagrant lack of compliance and cooperation. Even though in the strictest interpretation of Canadian law, this woman had the right to refuse entry, in practice this right can be overruled by street-level bureaucrats

(Lipsky, 2010). So, once it was determined that there was a question for the child's safety, she did not actually have that right to refuse this 'service.' The situation escalated to the point where the tactical unit of the police attended with protective gear and weapons. Jacobs and colleagues (2021) examined the issues related to what they call "carceral social work" (p. 39), wherein social work practices in a coordinated way with the penal functions of the state. This case example is most certainly a demonstration of carceral social work. Yvette was arrested and later charged with assaulting an officer. This file was then transferred to a Family Service Worker, as the work of the Intake Worker was done when the baby was brought into care of the agency and designated to be 'safe'. This case example proceeded in a specifically penal direction.

The Family Service Worker provided me with some updates in the following months. Yvette had been experienced by the other CPWs a 'difficult client' and later speculated (and documented in the files) to be living with mental health concerns. She was later reported to the Immigration department for having an expired visa. Yvette was subsequently deported due to this violation and the child was ultimately made a permanent 'Crown Ward', remaining in Canada without his mother. I have since read scholarly work that recognizes the patterns where racialized peoples are psychiatrized (Bruce, 2020) within criminal justice and mental health systems, noting the ways that the use of coercive treatment, physical restraint, and practices of deportation are obscured from public scrutiny to create a system that is "impermeable to criticism, where violence continues to prevail" (Joseph, 2014, p. 274). Scholars have noted that Black parents are more often seen to be dangerous and inherently risky, where Black mothers who resist child welfare interventions are perceived to be aggressive and pathological (Clarke,

2012; Clarke et al., 2021). Child welfare actions are statistically more intrusive for Black families, and Black children remain in care for longer than white children (Mohamud et al., 2021; Roberts, 2002, 2011, 2014, 2022).

In the case of Yvette and her baby son, in very practical terms, I observed that her son was not given good care in the foster home. For his first visit with his mother after his admission to state care, I found him in sodden clothing in a diaper that clearly had not been changed for many hours, and the child smelled strongly of cigarette smoke. His mother was appropriately outraged, yet the condition of his clothing and hygiene from the foster home was not viewed as a protection matter, not worthy of investigation. The foster family was quietly spoken to, and the child remained in their care. The conflation of separation as equal to safety, even when this placement was questionable in its safety for this child, was not challenged.

There are many other examples of work that I did where racialized and Indigenous people were treated in oppressive, violent ways. Complaints from service recipients were dismissed, ignored, and often ridiculed behind closed doors. In both case examples presented here, my work was commended and recognized as highly competent and effective. At no time in my child welfare work, over the course of decades, was there time set aside expressly to consider how a case was managed and if we could do the work differently in a more respectful or humane way. It was simply accepted that there just was no time for this kind of reflection. We rationalized that were too busy. Unless there was a death or a lawsuit, there was no need for reviews, no need for reflection.

In a field that is often criticized by public discourses, there is also little room for CPWs to interrogate their own work, for fear of being criticized. Those nagging doubts, or niggling

anxieties, are understood to be unsafe to share. When we participated in anti-racism or anti-oppression trainings, there was no safe place for us to recognize, identify and acknowledge our complicity in racist practices. There were a few occasions when I was subject to case reviews, specifically when I was involved with cases where someone died. These reviews focused on compliance with Standards and procedures. The focus of these case reviews was on the technical aspects of my work, or whether the forms and tasks were completed within set timelines and so on. My work was praised, and I was recognized for being thorough and ‘compliant’ with Ministry Standards.

These dehumanizing discourses function to keep CPWs and their supervisors from taking the time to interrogate the ways that their practices enact colonialism. Decisions that impact racialized service recipients in harmful ways are filtered through the legislative language of “child safety and well-being” and the valorizing language of child rescue. These are then covered in the protective wrap of temporalities that prevent careful reflection and introspection.

#### *5.5.4 Dehumanizing Discourses Directed to Workers*

While reflecting upon my sudden and involuntary departure from my once beloved field of child welfare, I remembered past friends and colleagues who met a similar fate. I observed many people who simply disappeared from the workplace; they simply were not at work one day, with no explanation. They had disappeared without a word, no good-byes, just... *gone*. There was a difference between those who left on good terms and those who just disappeared. Those who left on good terms often were congratulated, an agency-wide email is sent out, the colleague was celebrated; there was cake. An indeterminate number floundered, struggled, and

left surreptitiously, in disgrace, subject to gossip and speculation. Some left spectacularly and were openly disciplined, but many just vanished, leaving behind a cautionary and usually non-verbal warning. For me and many of my colleagues, there was a shame-infused absence of cake and warm good-byes.

I remember one of my colleagues, “Rhonda,”<sup>15</sup> who was an ardent defender of women who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and an outspoken social worker. She was also a single mother who struggled to manage the unrelenting workplace demands. Rhonda, a white woman, had insights into the impact of IPV on children that stemmed from her own experience of leaving a violent relationship. Rhonda was open about her lived experience and the way these informed her practice. She was able to use that experience to advocate for her women service recipients in a strengths-based manner decades before strengths-based social work became a mainstream concept in child welfare.

Reflecting on the last time I saw her; it was clear she was distressed. I will never know what it was that brought her to the breaking point, but in the coffee room, Rhonda ‘lost it.’ She fell apart before my eyes. In spite of my emerging identity as a social worker, as a *helper*, I felt that I had no repertoire to offer her support of any kind. I remember the feeling that I was unable to say anything because I was also at my breaking point, feeling like I had nothing left to give. There was something else at play that day as well, never spoken out loud but present nonetheless; a feeling that she was weak, irrational, and perhaps not deserving of help. The day after this encounter, Rhonda was away from work due to illness. There were rumours,

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<sup>15</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy.

colleagues gossiped, Rhonda was whispered about and pathologized. *“She couldn’t handle it.”* She never returned to work and was quietly erased.

At another time and place, when I was reassigned to a new desk, I found a stray box under that desk with the name “Betty”<sup>16</sup> on it. *“Who was Betty?”* I asked. I was met with unsettled gazes, and a sort of disdain; *“Oh, she left, she couldn’t hack it.”* There was no information about the person Betty is or was, she was only known for what she was not; rendered irrelevant by virtue of being someone who ‘couldn’t hack it.’

There have been others like Rhonda, like Betty. In 2000, I was elected to be the chief steward for our union, and in that role, I was involved with many grievance proceedings. One in particular was filed by a bargaining unit member named “Patricia.”<sup>17</sup> Like Rhonda, Patricia was also a single mother trying to navigate this very difficult workplace. Different from Rhonda, however, Patricia was Black. To this day, I believe her experience of workplace harassment was informed by systemic anti-Black racism.

Patricia made the mistake of (politely) asking her supervisor to avoid assigning her to cases that would take her work past 6 p.m. Being a single mother, Patricia had very limited options if her work prevented her from being able to pick her children up from daycare, much like many of the families we worked with. Koncikowski and Chambers (2016) describe experiences of mothers working in child welfare settings, highlighting the ways that their participants brought important lived experiences to their child welfare work while also noting the ways that child welfare work settings were not “mother-friendly” (p. 169). In response to

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<sup>16</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy

<sup>17</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy.

Patricia's request, her supervisor admonished her, "*Maybe you're not cut out for this kind of work.*" As if a form of retaliation for asking for accommodation, this request started a cascade avalanche of mistreatment that drove Patricia from the profession entirely.

The supervisor continued to schedule her for on-call work, seemingly without regard for the stress that this predictably would cause. Any attempt to avoid working this overtime was interpreted as Patricia being unprofessional, avoidant, non-compliant, and all the other characteristics of a 'bad' child welfare worker. She was frequently given unnecessary tasks, such as driving across the city in rush hour traffic to deliver a package to a foster home. These tasks were not time sensitive; these tasks were not vital to anyone's safety. They could have been performed at other times of the day, by a myriad of other staff members, such as those who were designated as case aides. It certainly appeared that these actions taken by the supervisor were intentional and seemingly punitive, trying to create further stress for Patricia.

These tasks kept Patricia past 6 p.m. several times per week, and unsurprisingly, it was not long before she left work due to illness. While Patricia was on a 'stress leave', the supervisor contacted the child welfare agency in Patricia's jurisdiction and made a report that she was too sick to care for her children safely. Patricia was devastated, humiliated, and overwhelmed. The stress of the harassment combined with the stress of being the subject of a child welfare investigation herself culminated in Patricia leaving the agency, so destroyed emotionally she was unable even to follow through with the union grievance process. Other than a very small number of union representatives who advocated for Patricia, none of her colleagues knew of what she experienced. Like Rhonda, like Betty, Patricia simply disappeared.

These are some of the ways I observed the structures in the workplace that kept individuals isolated and fearful, times when I was physically present but unable to summon the courage or energy to offer help to a colleague because I was afraid or because I too was feeling near a breaking point. Through fear, intimidation, and exhaustion, my colleagues and I were often unaware, unable, or unwilling to offer help to each other.

Amongst my colleagues, I repeatedly heard/said unkind, judgemental, and petty comments about those who took sick ('stress') leaves, suggesting that those who could not 'hack it' and were not 'cut out for this kind of work' cause undue burden on the workers who were able to do their job effectively. Because it was rendered a matter of individual failure, those who requested support were not worthy of help. In tandem with the criticisms of colleagues for being weak was the inference that those who can endure were stronger, smarter, more deserving, and elite. This way of thinking is very similar to some of the moralizing and punitive constructions that deem someone worthy or unworthy of social work supports, similar to those that undergird child welfare and the approach to families who need help. These narratives function to maintain silence through shame and humiliation, discouraging workers from acknowledging that because they are human, they too sometimes need help. These discourses also discourage workers from filing complaints or grievances, seeking accommodations, or advocating for change. These discourses encourage and support workers to dehumanize themselves, deny their experiences, 'go the extra mile', be flexible; 'push through' fear, sadness, and fatigue; and in so doing, foster a disconnected us/them kind of "relational distance" between themselves and service recipients (Woolford & Curran, 2011). CPWs are encouraged in a variety of ways to deny their own humanity and their own natural,

*human* frailties. Systems within this institution foster an approach towards the work, towards those who need support or assistance as being weak and undeserving. This approach is fostered not only towards service recipients, but also towards colleagues.

### **5.6 Valorizing Discourses**

Valorizing discourses coexist in the context of, and work in tandem within, dehumanizing discourses. I think of them often as different sides of the same coin. Valorizing discourses associated with child welfare work are ubiquitous, and deeply embedded within the philosophy that began with child rescue ideologies from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Margolin, 1997; Swain & Hillel, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 3, many of the key organizing concepts present in the child welfare system today have their origins in the earliest social reformers and leaders of the child rescue movement originating in Britain, such as Thomas Bernardo and Thomas Bowman Stephenson, as well as JJ Kelso in Ontario (Swain & Hillel, 2010). These early reformers had very strong associations with the Christian church, weaponizing racism and eugenics to enforce the British empire's whiteness, who saw their advocacy and reform work as part of their expression of their religious callings (Swain & Hillel, 2010).

Valorizing discourses subtly infuse the ways that child welfare is conceptualized. For example, Stalker and colleagues (2007) noted that child welfare workers report a "sense of mission or commitment" as a significant reward, that making a "positive difference in their clients' lives" was sufficient to counteract the difficult and stressful working conditions that are accepted as intrinsic to their working landscape (p. 187). This construct, of workers having an extraordinary sense of commitment that supersedes exhaustion, aligns with the colloquial characterisations that delineate those who can 'hack it' compared to those who cannot. Both of

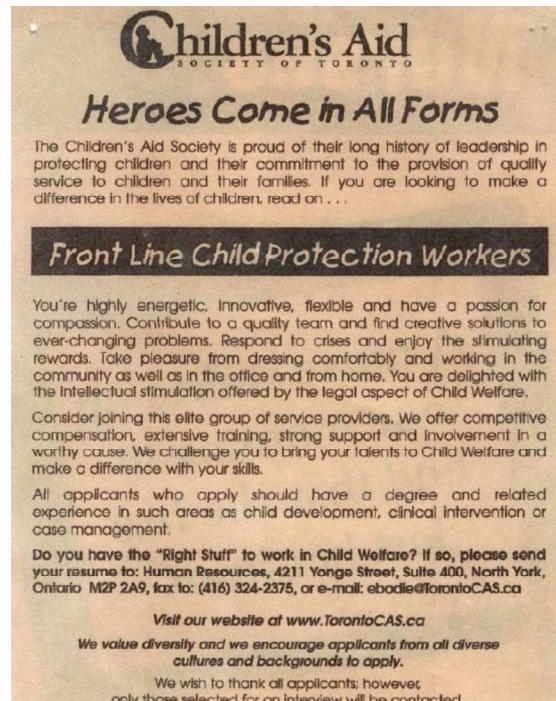
these constructs accept that social work and associated child welfare work is inherently a site of “goodness” (Badwall, 2014).

Where Badwall (2013) examined the moments where racialized workers alert their white colleagues to the presence of racism, and in so doing, workers of colour were dismissed, silenced, and devalued, I am looking at those moments where whiteness is recentred through valorizing discourses in child welfare practice. These discourses return child welfare work to a place of heroic rescue, reaffirming and re-entrenching child welfare work into sites of goodness, whiteness, and innocence. In these exalting moments, there is an erasure of historical colonial and imperial practices (Pon, 2009). In the places where child welfare workers embrace these valorizing discourses, these constructions function to justify the work. In so doing, these work processes effectively omit, erase, and obscure the clear evidence that oppressive practices are happening. These valorizing discourses work to obscure and silence critiques of oppressive practices, drowning out dissention by elevating and centering the moments that justify intrusive ‘child rescue’ approaches.

In thinking about clear examples of these valorizing discourses in practice, I recall a recruitment brochure that was circulated by the agency I worked for. This recruitment campaign included a full-colour, glossy brochure that proclaimed a “*commitment to quality service,*” that “*our dedication makes a real impact to so many, makes it all worthwhile.*” The glossy brochure asks, “*Do you have the ‘Right Stuff’ to work in child welfare?*” (Appendix D). There was an associated newspaper ad that states, “*Heroes Come in All Forms*” (Figure 3).

I would not have been able to explain why I kept these for all these years, except to say that these recruitment advertisements were deeply troubling to me. These were moments of

disjuncture that I felt viscerally. I was deeply troubled (in fact, I was angered) by this advertising, primarily because from my standpoint at that time, it simply did not ring true. I certainly did not feel that we were providing “quality service” or that this was clearly “all worthwhile.” I had real questions and I felt disturbed by the way this work was being presented.



**Figure 3: “Heroes Come in All Forms” advertisement published by the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) in a newspaper (circa 2002)**

This specific campaign described how child welfare was “*about making a positive difference and saving lives*” with a quote from the executive director of the CAS of Toronto saying, “*Child protection work isn’t for the faint of heart. We are looking for individuals who can be resilient in the face of unpredictable circumstances*” (Campbell, 2002, p. 1). I have also observed these valorizing discourses elsewhere. For example, Holly Hartman (2014) wrote a brief editorial titled “*Social Workers Are Everyday Heroes*”, where she describes the social workers in terms of “*compassionate ears*” and “*eyes that see worth, dignity, and beauty*” in

service recipients; they are *“the loving heart that radiates unconditional acceptance, caring and concern”* (para. 2-4). This short piece goes on to say that social workers, *“are the dedicated administrators, managers, supervisors, and workers who ensure that high quality services are delivered to them. We are their heroes”* (para. 12). This valorization can be found in scholarly writing as well, for example from Wilson (2016) who described social workers as working *“tirelessly”* on behalf of and in collaboration with the client, to move them *“from stagnant life situations into positive life situations”* (p. 479). These valorizing discourses are rich with language that describes the social worker in only the most benevolent terms.

These sentiments are the summation of the same discourses embraced by early child rescue advocates, including early ‘Friendly Visitors’ and other social reformers. Margolin (1997) argues that these discourses demonstrate the ways that social workers *“claim Jane Addams as their source of inspiration, but they do Mary Richmond”* (p. 4). In other words, social workers talk social justice but focus on changing individuals, not structures or institutions. Further, Margolin (1997) argues that social work does not strive to alleviate poverty, but functions to stabilize middle class power by creating designated targets for interventions.

Historical and contemporary transgressions become obscured, and even erased, at the intersection of the construction of a homogenous national identity as white (Thobani, 2007; Valverde, 1991) and the connections between whiteness and goodness (Badwall, 2013). This erasure brings to mind what Pon (2009) describes as the *“ontology of forgetting”*, or the ways that erasure of legacies of violence under the guise of benevolence provides the CPW the space to claim the morally superior position (Heron, 1999). The child welfare worker can claim an

identity of hero, one who courageously acts to defend the endangered child, or, as Chen (2001, 2009) describes, the uncomplicated ideal citizen.

Thobani (2007) conceptualized the exalted subject as one who is heralded as “the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation;” one who personifies the values, civility, and mores and is therefore deemed universally entitled to support and care (p. 3). In so doing, those considered exalted are cast in stark opposition to the “outsider”, stranger, or other (Thobani, 2007). Thobani (2007) argues that the Canadian welfare state positioned itself as compassionate and caring and, through that process, defined who was entitled to care and who would be excluded from care. Further, Thobani (2007) argues that the process of exaltation is one of power, which functions ultimately to reproduce social relations that ennoble and elevate nationals over those deemed as the excluded others.

I propose that, building on Thobani’s (2007) concept of the exalted subject, there is a process that I describe as *hyper exaltation* within the child welfare context where members claim a further elevated status or a position that warrants greater admiration. This concept of hyper exaltation is connected to and works in tandem with the valorizing discourses I have discussed throughout. In this research, I make the connection to this enactment of whiteness and how it can be observed in frontline CPW practices. Valorizing discourses have meaning, existing in concert with and in support to dehumanizing discourses. The work that is elevated and reified exists in context of those who inhabit the devalued spaces and will be examined further in the next section.

### 5.6.1 The 'Big Case'

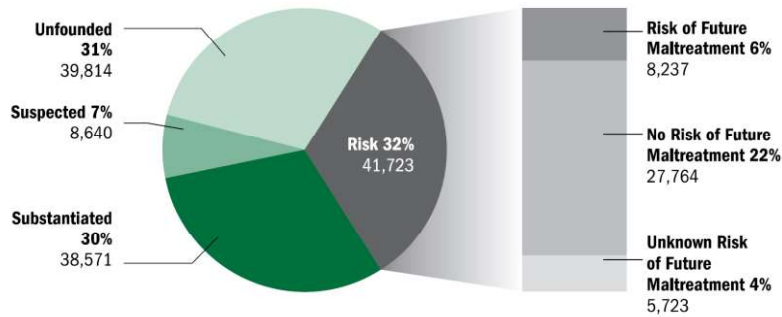
My perceptions of the hyper exaltation stem from my observations of child welfare workers, including me, when assigned to or responding to the 'Big Case'. This section delves into some of the ways I observed those valorizing discourses and hyper exaltation in action. Acknowledging that CPWs engage in these valorizing discourses and also how these discourses work in close partnerships with the variety of dehumanizing discourses discussed earlier, the interaction of these two kinds of discourses can be thought of as complementary sides of the same coin.

For example, a time that I recall vividly when there was a high-profile intake referral, I could hear my colleague in the next office talking on the phone and taking the referral information. When she hung up the phone, she shouted for all to hear, "*We have a dead kid!*" The call reported the death of a child who had been killed by his parents. This case would later be a subject of news coverage for months afterward, replete with grisly details about this boy's excruciating life and horrifying death. This was the quintessential Big Case.

The Big Case is a situation where there is a referral that reflects what the general public thinks all child welfare cases are. From my experiences of discussing my job as a CPW with friends, acquaintances, and newly met people, most responded with questions that demonstrated a distorted conceptualization of what child welfare work actually looks like. In countless social situations, upon revealing that I worked in this field, people would respond, often in wide-eyed wonder, "*Wow, that is difficult work, how do you do it?*" or the even more telling, "*That must be so difficult to see all those abused children.*" The Big Case is that statistically infrequent occurrence but one that more resembles what the general public has

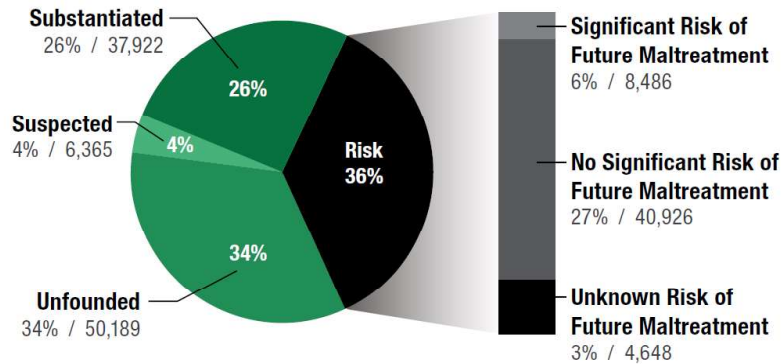
come to understand what child welfare work looks like. These are cases where a child has been severely injured, such as a shaken baby, or a case where a child has died from extreme neglect, such as when a child has died from being left in a hot car or from physical violence of a caregiver. To be clear, this is not the vast majority of child welfare work. These cases are very uncommon. The vast majority of child protection work involves mundane intrusions that function as wide scale surveillance of groups defined as 'risky', and a significant majority of referrals are not validated beyond the construction of a vague 'future risk' (see Figure 4 & 5). The Big Case is the counter narrative to those statistics.

**FIGURE 1: Type of Investigation and Level of Substantiation in Ontario in 2008**



**Figure 4: Investigated Cases compared to Substantiated Cases in Ontario in 2008 (Fallon et al., 2010, p. 10)**

**FIGURE 1: Type of Investigation and Level of Substantiation in Ontario in 2018**



**Figure 5: Investigated Cases compared to Substantiated Cases in Ontario in 2018 (Fallon et al., 2020, p. 7)**

I remember many things about this example of the Big Case, such as the fact that there were neighbours who lived next door who heard the boy crying in pain but did not report to the police. I remember that there was a report to the child welfare agency that was not fully investigated as it was deemed a police matter. Later, when the police did respond, the detective spoke only briefly with one person who was later determined to have assaulted and murdered this boy. The people who were later convicted in this homicide provided a thin explanation for the injuries that this child suffered, and the Ontario Coroner's Office later quietly determined that the police officer erroneously determined that no other investigation was required. The police officer did not speak to the boy directly, the officer did not fully investigate the allegations, and the reasons for these decisions were not interrogated further.

While I remember many things about this tragic case, something that stands out in my memory as I think about this research was how this worker and her supervisor responded to being assigned to this high-profile case. The worker who was assigned to this case had been with the child welfare agency for 4 years, and given the frequent turnover of staff, they were the most senior and capable worker on the team at the time. In the following days and weeks, this worker talked often about the details of the case, the investigation, the funeral, and the criminal proceedings. I observed this worker to appear to claim a position of high status when she talked about this Big Case; disturbing details were shared, such as showing everyone the suit that was purchased for the child to be buried in, while the preparations for his funeral were topics of water-cooler discussions. I saw this worker and her supervisor present behaviours that suggested a mixture of excitement, pride, and status as they were associated with a case such

as this. I observed that being assigned to the Big Case garnered a kind of prestige and, for lack of a better term, a sort of honour.

Throughout my career, I can recall watching many others who were assigned the Big Case (sometimes child welfare agencies use the term ‘The Special Case’). One such case I was aware of included allegations that were similar to the infamous McMartin Case (deYoung, 2007; Furedi, 2016), including an allegation of satanic abuse (which was ultimately unsubstantiated). There was another Special Case of alleged sexual abuse by a local religious leader, and another that was a case of alleged Munchausen by Proxy.<sup>18</sup> Some of these Big Cases were the subject of media attention, and some were associated with a public outcry or moral panic in a sort of faddish kind of way (deYoung, 2007; Furedi, 2016).

For the worker assigned to the Big Case, there comes an unspoken kind of special status and prestige. These cases tend to be assigned to the workers who are most highly regarded by the supervisors and directors and are, among other things, opportunities for the workers to develop a strong professional reputation, supporting their claims to expertise. The kind of rewards associated with the Big Case are difficult to quantify, difficult to name, but are substantial nonetheless. I argue that while few would admit to it, there is an elevated status that comes from being assigned to these cases. I am not suggesting that I, or anyone I know of or worked with, was *happy* to know a child has been injured, threatened, or killed, nor would we be happy or glad about the events that led up to the Big Case. I am suggesting, however, that the Big Case serves to elevate and scaffold the already existing valorizing discourses.

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<sup>18</sup> Munchausen syndrome by proxy (MSBP) is described as a mental health problem in which a caregiver makes up or causes an illness or injury in a person under his or her care, such as a child, an elderly adult, or a person who has a disability.

For many CPWs, there is a kind of individual validation that comes from being selected to be involved with these cases, where one is recognized as capable to work with cases considered *truly* important. It is in these moments when certain kinds of power dynamics become clear and unmasked, even if just for a glimpse or a few moments of notable importance - a confident stride, a renewed sense of purpose. Being assigned the Big Case is treated as a perk or even a reward. As already discussed, a great deal of scholarship has established that child welfare workers have a certain kind of power (Dumbrill, 2010; Swift, 1995a). However, the moment of status or power that comes along with a Big Case is rarely discussed and, to my knowledge, has not been reflected upon in scholarship.

These rare Big Cases are really the *raison d'être* for the wider child welfare system. In many ways, it is the Big Case that provides the justification for the agency's existence and validates the countless other, less urgent cases. Though indeed the Big Case requires a 'big' response, of the vast majority of investigations that are conducted, the majority are not verified or are categorized through the subjective and fluid conceptualization of 'future risk' (Fallon et al., 2010, 2020). The non-urgent case is often seen as mundane, repetitive, even tedious. Arguably, a significant number of these referrals are an unnecessary intrusion into the lives of families. Instead of being seen as form of excessive state surveillance, these mundane cases are interpreted to be a necessary form of due diligence and a component of the overall benevolent work of being proactively protective of children. The vast majority of referrals to child welfare systems relate to poverty and other forms of social marginalization, and the investigative focus on child welfare interventions comes at the expense of the ability to provide practical and meaningful preventative supports.

These vast numbers of investigations and interventions represent an enormous, complex economy. This child welfare system has evolved into a massive system of bureaucracy, encompassing a wide range of activities related to regulation, managerialism, and surveillance. This system represents a large workforce of frontline CPWs, admin staff, student placements, volunteers, foster parents, managers, directors, police, lawyers, judges, Ministry staff, OACAS staff, and so on. This vast system functions to direct significant resources to the surveillance and policing disproportionately focused on racialized and marginalized families. Most child protection interventions are administratively insignificant. The occasional Big Case provides the social and political rationale to justify this vast, broadly regulatory enterprise. The power of this is seen in fuller ways when the Big Case is connected to the inquest process. As noted in section 4.4 of this research, the Inquest is a boss text that functions to govern and regulate those within the system. Cases that are high profile, noteworthy, or otherwise 'big' provide the justification for the vast organizational activities and daily doings of child welfare.

As an experienced child protection worker, and prior to my fall from grace, I was often assigned to the Big Case. Indeed, those cases were interesting, challenging, energizing, and rewarding. Being assigned the Big Case was a form of validation, a point of pride or prestige, a reward, a perk. It also held a kind of social currency. The Big Case becomes the subject of "war stories" that workers share in their own social networks; the funny, scandalous, or salacious story told at the next cocktail party. It is also the reward for following orders and doing what you are told, acting as a confirmation that one is competent and professional. When workers fall out of favour, being seen as worthy of the Big Case is the first thing to be taken away. Being

designated as unworthy of the Big Case then becomes a form of discipline, confirming to the worker in question, as well as their colleagues and managers, that they are not worthy.

The Big Case requires a Big Case response, often requiring that the worker, the supervisor, and the department director to engage in high level activities: meetings with the senior executive team, discussions about updates and strategies, sending Serious Occurrence Reports to the Ministry, and a variety of consultations with police executives, Coroners' Office staff, and any number of legal teams. The communications department is brought in to manage the information shared with the public and requests for comments from the media. The Bigness of the case indelibly changes how the case is treated. Decisions are sometimes made that have very little to do with what the children or the family needs at that moment, morphing instead to a kind of performance that suits the Bigness of the case.

I witnessed this in a variety of ways over the years. In one particular Big Case, I was complicit in oppressive practice despite my objections and reservations. I was assigned to a high-profile Big Case, a referral from the *Toronto Police Guns & Gangs Taskforce*. This referral came several months *after* there was a large raid in the northwest part of Toronto, in a neighbourhood often identified in the media as a high crime area. This raid was highlighted in the news, replete with the footage of all the seized contraband narcotics and weapons.

The referral to child welfare pertained to a mother who had been arrested and accused of involvement in gang-related drug trafficking. The police called the child welfare agency, but not months before the raid when surveillance wire taps overheard the children being assaulted by adults in the home, and not on the night of the raid when their mother was arrested. The referral to child welfare came many *months* later when this mother was being granted bail from

pre-trial custody. The police officers openly and vociferously disagreed with the judge's decision to grant the accused mother bail; she was spoken of and constructed as the worst kind of bad mother, neglectful, and worthy of scorn (Swift, 1995a). Though the mother herself was not Black, anti-Black racism was present in the court room and our meeting rooms. The police officers' openly expressed hostility towards this mother, particularly when they referenced her biracial children and voiced their disapproval that her romantic involvements with Black men. Skinner and Hudac (2017) delve into this complicated topic, examining beliefs and attitudes regarding interracial sexual relationships, regarded by some as "morally wrong" and considered "a form of violation of racial and sexual purity" (p. 69). The police officers' hostility is more accurately described as an expression of thinly disguised white supremacist discourse, which subsequently influenced their decision-making in this case.

The police officers made two calls: one to the Welfare Fraud Report line, to prevent this mother from accessing financial supports upon her release, and the other to the child welfare agency. It is in this moment that the use of imposed poverty and regulation on this mother via child welfare becomes very apparent. The call to the child welfare agency appears to have been a vindictive afterthought because it was completely unnecessary. At that point, many months post-raid, the children were settled and demonstrably safe, living with extended family.

The granular details of this case are not required for discussion. However, what is important in this experience was how I came to see the actions of my supervisor and our collective fascination for the Big Case. This was a moment where I could see clearly that the Bigness of the case impacted how the agency responded to this family, to these children. Very quickly, the thrill of the Big Case motivated my supervisor to advocate for extremely intrusive

approaches to this family. From my perspective, very intrusive actions were not required as the extended family had made appropriate and verifiably safe arrangements for the children long before the referral in the period of time between their mother's arrest and her release.

It is important to be clear that this extended family had, in fact, done everything correctly according to our mandate; they responded in a very child-centred and safe manner, with a long-term plan for the children's physical and emotional care. There was absolutely no evidence that any member of the extended family (grandmother, aunts, cousins, or others) had any involvement with the drug trafficking that this mother had been accused of. It was clear that the children were not going to return to their mother's sole care and that the extended family had put in place a definitively long term and verifiably safe plan. The family had done everything right without the need of child welfare intervention. While there had been a significant financial consequence for the extended family, they had access to the necessary resources. Though they had incurred significant financial expense to relocate and settle the children, at no time did this family ask for any financial support from the state. In a neoliberal responsabilization framework, this family did everything correctly. Consistent with neoliberal ideals, this family took care of their own issues without being a 'burden,' without relying on any form of support from the state. Separate from the economic considerations, child welfare involvement is intended to be a response when a family fails to act in a protective way for their children. In this situation, the family had done everything correctly, and with a very brief investigation to verify the safety, there was no need for any service from child welfare. The file should never have gone beyond the intake phase.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this is not what happened. This is one of those cases where child welfare agencies sometimes betray their oft (poorly) hidden punitive and moralizing roots. The Bigness of the case warranted and justified full use of all legislated powers and intrusive tools, despite the reality that these actions are costly to the state and fundamentally were not needed to ensure the safety of the children. The punitive nature of the system scaffolded by white supremacy was in full view.

It appeared, in my observations, that my supervisor could not see past the notoriety and excitement of this case. He insisted that we pursue a very intrusive family court order, which would in effect prevent the children from being able to see important and beloved members of their family due to the finer points of their mother's bail conditions. The agency had accepted the very negative and ostensibly racist view of this mother from the police without any independent assessment. While part of my investigation was to meet with the members of the family, I was never directed to meet with this mother. Based on this superficial and essentializing assessment from the police, the child welfare agency took a position that the children were to have absolutely no contact with their mother in perpetuity. This approach is consistent with the dehumanizing and harmful view that parents are perpetrators or opponents, and that children's best interests are best served by separation.

In my observations, these children benefitted from contact with their mother, even if it was while she was in custody. The children required reassurance that their mother was safe, that she did not disappear, and that she had not been killed. Regardless of what their mother had been accused of, there was clear evidence that these children had an important bond with their mother, so contact that had been supervised by extended family prior to the referral to

the child welfare system was not only appropriate but necessary for their well-being. There were multiple cost factors to this agency-supervised contact for the longer term: it was costly financially to the institution, involving long hours of legal and CPW work time. It was also costly emotionally for the children due to the severely restricted access to family members. These children were present when the police used a battering ram to enter their home, they witnessed their mother's arrest. They experienced significant trauma, upheaval, and displacement. Imposing of a state-supervised Christmas was just one more loss, one more moment of grief and violence. Under the current child welfare structures, there are times when the separation of children from their caregivers can be justified, but this is done with the authority of the legislation that stipulates 'least restrictive course of action' (Barnhorst & Johnson, 1991). In other words, separations should only be implemented when there is no other option.

In my view, the children in this family were impacted needlessly, as it was clear that the decisions and actions on the part of the child welfare agency had nothing to do with child safety, their emotional well-being, or therapeutic interventions to assist the children. These case decisions had nothing to do even with meeting Ministry standards or any other kind of defensible administrivia. The discourses that pervaded this debate was that the Big Case needed a Big Intervention, and that this 'very bad mother' needed to be punished. This response by the child welfare agency was uncritically supportive of the police actions, infused with racism and deeply punitive.

I was directed to advocate for this intrusive approach in the family court in the few weeks before Christmas. While I debated this plan of action and advocated vigorously for

respectful and collaborative supports for the family, no amount of discussion would dissuade my supervisor from his preferred intrusive course of action. Based on my reputation with the family court judges as a credible professional, this very intrusive court order was granted. I was complicit in this moment of very oppressive practice. I felt deeply in the core of my being that this was wrong, but I also felt powerless to change the course of this intervention. Clear in my view were the ways that decisions presented as 'clinical' are often a mask for a moralizing approach. These punitive and harmful decisions were made based on emotional responses to sensationalized circumstances.

As I tried to advocate for the family I was working with, I posed the uncomfortable questions: "*Why are we doing this? How is this keeping the children safe? What are we trying to accomplish?*" Important to note as well, is that neither my supervisor nor anyone else within my agency had any formal questions for the police officers who, by any objective measure, left these children in a dangerous situation for weeks prior to their raid. Those police officers informally admitted that they did not call the child welfare agency at the moment when they were aware of incidents of risk and abuse. The officers I spoke to seemed to have no difficulty rationalizing their decision to prioritize their surveillance activities, explaining that they had not finished their work of collecting evidence to support their operation and the planned raid. The officers did not seem troubled when they explained that they did not want a child welfare investigation to interfere with their surveillance of the drug trafficking suspects. In their view, the 'war on drugs', with all its deeply embedded racist and moralizing discourses and practices, was a clear priority over the safety of the children in the home.

My supervisor was an open admirer of the police officers and spoke often of his friendships with them. So when I started to ask questions, the questions were about why the agency was tacitly supporting problematic decisions made by the officers in this case. With this incident and the subsequent exchanges with my supervisor, I observed the relationship between the police and child welfare, a sort of partnership where, at least in this situation, oppressive practices and carceral social work were compounded. This was a demonstration of ways that different but overlapping institutions can form partnerships that contribute to, support, and exacerbate oppressions such as systemic racism and sexism (Joseph, 2014).

I questioned why the agency would not at least try to coach the police officers and explain how the police decisions in favour of the wiretap surveillance put these children at greater risk. Asking these questions about this and other cases seemed to drive a wedge between my supervisor and myself. In my observations, this case was a turning point; this was a situation where I started to ask questions out loud, where I started to challenge the ways that this case was interpreted and approached. There were other moments prior to this where I challenged supervisory directions, but this was the time where my questions were directed at a Big Case and where I became more vocal about my concerns. I believe that when I named the racist overtones in this case, it changed how the management team viewed me, and from this point, I experienced a significant shift in the ways I was treated in my workplace.

### ***5.7 Punitive Managerialism***

Parada (2002) argues that with the implementation of ORAM, these “technologies of government” (Miller & Rose, as cited in Parada, 2002, p. 2) were applied to regulate conduct, thought, and decisions; actions that needed to be shaped, normalized and instrumentalized.

Further, child welfare reform profoundly redefined the nature of social work practices, shifting the practice priorities from looking to improve child well-being to the practice of demonstrating specific actions that were designated forms of protection (Parada, 2002).

Parada (2002) identifies changes to the processes of child welfare work that shifted professional accountability away from attending to service user needs towards accountability for fiscal prudence and accountability to the public purse. This shift can be seen in the implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM), including newly defined Standards of Practices that included the use of strictly prescribed procedures, checklists, and set descriptors for risk factors and case recommendations (Parada, 2002). The concept of “best practices” shifted to focus on the ways that a child protection worker complied with the new regime and how efficiently the worker completed these tasks.

I am recalling a conversation with my supervisor in 2005, as we casually chatted while walking back from lunch. The conversation shifted when he reminded me that there is a specific form of documentation called the “Safety” that I needed to do properly. He instructed me that these forms were to be completed “*in a timely manner,*” and that this was part of keeping children safe. I did fill out the forms, just not within the narrowly prescribed timelines set by the Ministry Standards. I argued that filling out forms was a less important task than the face-to-face contact with service recipients. I argued that completing a “*ticky box form*” in the presence of service recipients was disrespectful, bad practice, and needlessly bureaucratic. I did not recognize at that time how these administrative tasks deeply reflected those entrenched child welfare temporalities.

This conversation occurred at a time when the child welfare sector in Ontario was in between seismic shifts in policy and practice, in the midst of the decline of ORAM and just prior to the provincial government rolling out the next great idea, the “Child Welfare Transformation.” As part of the ORAM model, forms such as the “Safety” were constructed as a tool to assist CPWs to document the process of how decisions around the child’s immediate safety had been made. For me, I saw this form less of a tool to help in the making of the decision and more as a way to document that a decision that *had already been made*. This form was not informative; it was documentary and defensive. The Safety Tool was something that Ministry auditors would look at to verify that documentation was compliant with standards, but it would not actually help the CPW make decisions.

My supervisor reiterated the administrative concern that these forms were not completed and signed within the required 24 hours. The focus was on the timeframe, not the content of the documents. I will admit that I thought at the time that the staunch and unreflective adherence to the administrative timelines was a little silly. I dismissively joked, “*So what you’re saying is it’s not my contact with families that is important, but that this paperwork is what saves lives?*” Shifts in work processes over the many cycles of reforms in the field of child welfare have fostered the belief that the action of completing the required textual documentation *is* the work of protecting children or helping families.

The pressure within the field of child welfare to be more “accountable” and compliant with Ministry Standards has been steadily increasing. In what Lemay (2011) refers to as “perverse reliance” (p. 606) on standardized work processes, there has been a notable insistence on documentary practices, rationalized as a means to demonstrate quality services. I

suspect supervisors like mine were getting pressure from their superiors to become more directive to the workers around documentary compliance with Ministry Standards. As previously discussed, the field of child welfare has demonstrated a predilection towards discourses of compliance, which Munro (2010a) describes as “the potential for pursuing the ‘wrong kind of excellence’” (p. 1144). Swift and Callahan (2009) agree, referencing the “new penology” (p. 97), or ways that managerial practices centre and prioritize organizational control and efficiency. This kind of managerialism sees the professional work of risk assessments as a series of tasks, work that needs to be broken down into sequential steps completed in an orderly, standardized, punctual manner. In this work, temporalities are proceduralized and concretized. It is through these constructions of child welfare temporalities, as discussed in Chapter 2, that contribute to a particular understanding of professional competence and to the construction of a particular interpretation of ‘the good worker.’

Gambrill and Shlonsky (2000) examined the ways that CPWs respond to decision making in times of uncertainty and considered the different elements that influence decision making in child welfare. They acknowledge the ways that “time pressures and distractions” might support a mechanistic, unreflective approach to decision making (Gambrill & Shlonsky, 2000, p. 816). The discussion of my ‘lapse’ in professional competence related to the timeliness of my documentation, left me feeling frustrated and concerned. I came to understand that my routine of prioritizing face-to-face contact with my service recipients was no longer in vogue from this point onward and would be seen as a professional deficit rather than as a clinical or practice strength.

### 5.7.1 “We need to fix you”

As I started to understand that my attachment to relationship-based social work was no longer ‘in vogue’, along with my trend towards asking questions particularly around racist and oppressive case decisions, I sensed a shift in my relationship with my employer. I was no longer viewed as a ‘good’ worker and was increasingly faced with a variety of disciplinary actions. Initially, I was no longer assigned to Big Cases, no longer called upon when experience and expertise were required. Supervisors seemed to dismiss me and look at me differently. Subsequently, I was denied training opportunities and prevented from participating in other activities such as committees or workshops.

Supervisors began to question my work in ways that had not happened before. I remember one situation where I was working with a youth who expressed suicidal thoughts and had spent many hours with them in the hospital emergency room. After an incredibly long day, I was called upon to transport them to a foster home several hours drive away. In the wee hours of the morning, I realized that I did not know where I was going. I did not have a GPS in my car at the time, so I stopped to buy a map at the gas station. The child was very anxious, and we were both exhausted. When I later submitted the expense for reimbursement, my claim was denied because I had not called first to ask permission prior to the purchase. I asked the supervisor, *“It was 2 a.m., I did not want to wake you. If I had called you at 2 a.m., would you have said yes?”* And they said, *“Yes, I would. But you did not call, so this is an unauthorized expense and won’t be reimbursed.”*

I use the term *punitive managerialism* to describe a range of interactions that I, and others who dissented, was subjected to where the supervisors and the director of the

department used the strictest interpretation of the rules, Standards, and policies as a means to impose a form of discipline. I contend that this was not in the interest of children or their safety, nor did the strictest adherence to the rules appear to be in the interest of accountability to the service recipient. I believe that instead this approach was used as a method to discipline, monitor, and regulate me specifically.

To conceptualise this situation, I considered the ideas of *malicious compliance* as a way to describe the behaviours and responses to my work. However, this definition did not quite capture the spirit of these interactions. According to Miller (2014), malicious compliance occurs when employees adhere to the letter of the procedures so rigidly that the practices or work activities can be adopted in an unproductive way. Heflin (2012) understands malicious compliance as the ways employees withhold discretionary behaviour and work to the strictest interpretation to the letter of the contract, with an intent to harm the organization. While there is no unified academic definition of malicious compliance, it is a term that is used to describe a form of grassroots resistance by workers or employees to hierarchical power relationships.

I propose instead the term *punitive managerialism* to define this expression of ruling relations, the ways that people in managerial or leadership roles apply the strictest of interpretation of the existing policies and procedures of an organization. Punitive managerialism is demonstrated by holding to staunch adherence to policy and procedures - not in the interest or the spirit or the intention of these rules, guidelines, or directives but in the interest of asserting power and control. It is used as a manner of enforcement, in the interest of maintaining social control, eliciting compliance and obedience from those in the lower echelons of the organization. Embedded in this expression is a disregard for the intended purpose of the

processes, procedures, and directives in favor of enforcing strict adherence to regulations, enacted in spite of or without consideration of the outcomes. The rigid interpretation and application of rules, directives, policies, and procedures provides a form of protection from critique as this approach can be easily justified as ‘order’ and ‘good governance,’ while simultaneously masking abusive behaviours.

My experience of punitive managerialism became frequent and steadily increased until it was the norm, not the exception. For example, if I made a recommendation that a case should be closed, as a form of punitive managerialism, I would be directed to reinvestigate. The direction to repeat the investigation was imposed regardless of the negative impact for that family. If I recommended a case be referred for longer term Family Services, I would be overruled and criticized. I recall a case of a young Black mother, “Louise,”<sup>19</sup> who was living in a residence for young, single mothers and their babies. Like so many Black women, Louise was originally referred for an investigation due to a vague allegation that she had “anger management issues.” The allegations proved to be unfounded and when I had completed the investigation, I determined that there was no evidence to suggest that she was struggling to care for or presented a risk to her baby. In fact, I noted the opposite, that this young woman was a very attentive mother; her baby was happy, healthy, putting on weight, and so on. Louise had demonstrated competence in all the routine markers that new mothers are measured by.

As part of this regime of punitive managerialism, my supervisor would not accept my assessment, directing me instead to reinvestigate. I was directed to conduct an unannounced home visit early in the morning so that I could catch this young woman “*in the act.*” My

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<sup>19</sup> Name and details changed to protect privacy

supervisor declared that unannounced home visits should happen in the early morning because, in their words, "*Bad guys sleep in.*" I knew this to be an oppressive practice but fearing for my job, I did as I was directed, attending the home at 8 a.m. (I did not claim for the hour overtime). I found this home 'neat as a pin' so to speak, spotless in point of fact. I found the bottles washed and on the drying rack, the baby's crib clean and safe. The chubby baby was cooing happily, and Louise, woken from her sleep, amiably and cooperatively answered all the questions I could dream up. When I reported back to my supervisor and recommended again that this case be closed at intake, my recommendation was over-ruled. Instead, I was directed to refer this case to ongoing Family Services. While I can never be certain of the motivation for this, it was my interpretation that this was intended to be a form of punishment for me - perhaps retribution for challenging my supervisor about the paperwork or pushing back on decisions related to the Big Case. I will never know for certain, but it was my belief then, as it is now, that this was intended to undermine my credibility, to weaken my confidence, to test my loyalty to the institution, and to put me in my rightful place. This was a test of my loyalty and compliance, an opportunity for me to atone for the 'sin' of questioning my supervisor in previous cases and to re-reaffirm the employer's authority over me.

While I cannot be certain of my supervisor's motivations or intentions or what caused him to adopt this approach, I can be and am quite certain of the effect on these choices for Louise. When I met with her to advise that her file would remain open, she was clearly crushed. Whatever the internal logic for this case direction might have been, the outcome was a gut-punch to a young woman who undoubtedly faced racism, discrimination, and marginalization in so many ways. In addition to all of these challenges, she was now facing identification as "risky"

(Swift, 2010), and being told, *incorrectly*, that she was a “bad mother” (Swift, 1995a; Vandenberg Giles, 2012). This young woman had been deemed to be, like so many racialized mothers before her, “unsafe” (Clarke, 2011). Often for new and young mother there are issues of confidence and self-doubt. Young mothers are very often quite vulnerable to social criticism. Adding in issues of racism and discourses about socially acceptable parenting styles and it was clear that this mother was facing immense pressure. In this moment, no matter how well she was actually doing, regardless of how careful or compliant, she was on the receiving end of systemically racist policies, imposed from a distance. This specific case decision, steeped in racist ideologies, was also a means to discipline a white worker. This was an expression of distrust of the white worker who speaks up about or challenges oppressive practices. I was the conduit of this systemic racism, and my lack of courage to refuse this direction renders me complicit within this system. Despite my verbal reassurances, this young mother had to shoulder these constructions that were entirely outside of her control.

Louise’s experience is but one of literally countless examples of systemic, normalized racism that is endemic in child welfare. It is an example of racist ideology enacted from a distance and filtered through many other narratives in that moment of time. It was clearly a confirmation and re-entrenchment of racist constructions of Black mothers, embedded within a common trope of the essential benevolence of child welfare organizations. This is part of a narrative that assumes that interventions are most often benign and there is no harm in being cautious when making assessments of risk. This was a moment, one of thousands of moments that happen every day in child welfare practices, where the final case decision is also a retreat to a professional ‘place of safety’ for the agency. This is a place where the organization can rest

on the discourses of professionalism, risk assessment, and accountability. It seems, however, that the only real safety is for those who make decisions of this kind from a distance.

This was also a moment of complicated power and resistance, as my employer was, as far as I can tell, trying to impose discipline on me for asking difficult questions and expressing dissent with some of the taken for granted child welfare practices. This was only one way that I came to understand that my protests and advocacy, and my challenging questions, were most certainly unwelcome. This became clearer to me when I received a personnel evaluation that was excoriating to me. There were many points within this evaluation that I took issue with, too many to name here. However, the one that I continue to ponder was the accusation that I had “professional boundary issues.” I asked about this, “*What do you mean by this? Where is this coming from?*” I discussed this with numerous members of the supervisory team, and none were able to provide any examples or evidence to support this claim. Despite this, the management team refused to amend the language in this evaluation. *Boundary issues* are a concept in social work practice that are not well defined nor broadly agreed upon (Doel et al., 2010; O’Leary et al., 2013). However, in this instance, this concept acted as a code that represented being emotionally over-invested in the wellbeing of my service recipients, which resulted in the ‘problematic’ behaviour of questioning, pushing back, and not simply complying.

As I started to ask questions, to openly question decisions related to my cases, I was assigned to a new supervisor who started the conversation by saying, “*Joanne, it is my job to fix you.*” For the subsequent 18 months, the supervisory team scrutinized every stroke of my pen, literally reviewing every piece of documentation I produced. The pattern that emerged was one of consistent challenge to every professional decision I tried to make.

For most CPWs, there is a routine supervision where the entire case load is reviewed in general: *“What has happened recently? How have the family members responded? Are the allegations verified or not? What should we do next? Does this need to escalate? What services should be put into place?”* These supervision sessions usually would take an afternoon and would happen relatively regularly, generally every four to six weeks. As the working situation became increasingly tense, my caseload was scrutinized every week for many months. Every decision I put forth was challenged and, more often than not, denied. If I advised that I did not find evidence of a safety concern, I was directed to re-interview all the children in that family again. If I recommended that a family be referred for follow up service, my recommendation would be overruled. When a supervisor disagreed with me, they would sigh heavily, shake their head gravely and say, *“Oh Joanne, with all your years’ experience, I would have expected you to know better than this.”*

The accusation of “boundary issues” that was initially referenced in a personnel evaluation was presented to me as *“a serious concern that would need to be reviewed,”* but how it would be reviewed was never made clear. About a year later, I was informed that the issue of boundaries was once again a great concern; in an email that I had sent to a service recipient, I ended with words that wished the family well and included the phrase, *“Give your daughter a hug for me.”* This was determined to be evidence of my serious professional boundary issues. I was informed that this email presented a grave concern and was advised that there would be a fulsome investigation of me. I was well aware that every move I made was being carefully scrutinized and these issues hung over my head for months.

This scrutiny, referred to by supervisors as “performance management,” continued in full view of all my peers. All of the supervisors’ offices had glass walls, so I was on full display every Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. as I was given ‘supervision’. Every Wednesday, for months. My discipline was observable to everyone in the office. My peers did notice, and they commented to me that this had the effect of fostering fear for my colleagues. If this kind of discipline could happen to someone with all these years of experience, it could happen to anyone. It did not take long for this punitive managerialism to take a toll on me, and within a few months my anxiety and distress became overwhelming. I was directed to continue these weekly, public ‘supervision’ sessions even as I developed serious anxiety responses, having intense panic episodes in their office, again, for all my peers to witness. Breathing rapidly, heart racing, crying, and unable to function; I was not allowed to leave that space, even if only to take a break to compose myself. The supervisor would look at me with open disgust, shake their head, tsk at me, and say, “*Joanne, you have to learn not to be so emotional.*” I was not allowed to leave, “*not until we are finished.*”

Once it became observable, my anxiety, depression, and panic responses became a topic of many office discussions, becoming grounds for even deeper scrutiny. I became the subject of even deeper surveillance, not unlike the responses described by participants in research conducted by Chapman and colleagues (2016). They heard from helping professionals who described being the subject of formal disciplinary proceedings, not as the result of a service recipient complaint, but as a result of having their mental health diagnosis discovered by their employer (Chapman et al., 2016). Similar to stories shared in the course of that research, I experienced a series of events that constructed me as incompetent. When I needed

to take a sick leave, my return to work saw a progression of isolation, discipline, and ultimately termination. Similar to the participants in that study, my need for sick leave and accommodation was met with even more intensified scrutiny, with my competence and integrity being repeatedly challenged. What could be called acts of sanism (Perlin, 1992) or psychiatrization - the colloquial term for this is being “papered out the door”.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

This section of the research examined some of the ways that the ways that workers are inculcated into the profession, including how they come to see their work as compelling and inherently honorable, connected to longstanding discourses of child saving and benevolence (Badwall, 2014; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Chen, 2001; de Montigny, 1995; Margolin, 1997). These valorizing discourses coexist with those that dehumanize: pathologizing discourses that cause harm to both child welfare service recipients and CPWs, albeit in different ways. The ways that the actions in child welfare are valorized can and often do become entwined in workers’ professional identity. This can make it difficult for an individual CPW to step outside of the work to see the ways they might be implicated in oppressive practices. CPWs become attached to the views of themselves as strong, special, and benevolent, which can make it all the more difficult for workers to apply a critical lens to their work. CPWs navigate a working context that is rife with dehumanizing discourses, fear, shame, and humiliation; it becomes a workplace where compassion can be difficult to safely express.

The “silencing norms” (Freymond et al., 2021) present in child welfare spaces become acutely notable when a CPW asks for accommodation, voices dissent, or challenges standard practice approaches. The organization draws upon a wide variety of disciplinary tactics to

undermine a worker's confidence and reputation, as well as discursive practices that function to pathologize that worker who strays from or even questions the routinely oppressive and colonizing practices.

While I experienced the actions of individuals, it is important to note that these were not 'a couple of bad apples.' The actions that were taken by the people I had contact with were performed in the open, with the approval of the upper-level executives and the HR department. Their actions were an open performance that was effective at fostering fear and intimidation in the wider workplace. Part of why these actions felt so deeply hurtful for me is also deeply intertwined with my emerging troubled consciousness (Chapman, 2013). I developed a growing awareness of the inherent malevolence of child welfare ideologies and discourses. I had to contend with the emerging awareness that I was not 'one of the good guys' no matter how I tried to practice in an anti-oppressive way. Being in this machine makes anti-oppressive practice a constant, exhausting battle.

I know that the individuals who acted in ways that felt hurtful to me are all capable of kindness and compassion, even if I did not experience it in those moments. It is most plausible to understand each person – each of my colleagues, supervisors, directors, executives; every single person who works in that field – as one who believes they are working towards and contributing to an honorable, important project of 'keeping kids safe.' It is a personal journey for each of them to navigate the incongruities and experience their own disjunctures. For most, the path of least resistance is the easiest and most rational choice. I want to recognize their humanity and simultaneous struggles, and recognize that for many of my colleagues, engaging in this kind of questioning, the kind of query that disrupts this system, also disrupts their

professional identity and their system-induced understandings of themselves as moral actors (Heron, 2007).

It is also important to recognize that these actions were not isolated incidents directed only towards me, but were replicated in other places at other times, many that I observed as a union activist. While the actions were taken by individuals, they were enacting deeply held longstanding narratives and discourses endemic to child welfare spaces. These narratives and discourses reaffirm the valorizing discourses, the discourses that support hyper exaltation, and ultimately function to provide socially acceptable rationale for the continuation of practices that are oppressive to service recipients.

## Chapter 6: CPIN, A Case Study

### *6.1 Introduction*

The CPIN project was chosen for this research because it was similar in scale to implementation of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) and later the Child Welfare Transformation. I argue that the experiences of disruption, uncertainty, and adaptation with each of these sweeping reforms support and contribute to the continuity of oppressive child welfare practices. As described in Chapter 2, part of this project involved observations and interviews with child welfare workers in a variety of roles from numerous child protection agencies across the province of Ontario. This chapter will review many of the observations of the work as well as some insights shared by participants.

There was an overwhelming response to my recruitment invitations. The research was supported by the management team and there were participants from many levels within child welfare agencies. Participants brought an overwhelming array of observations to our interviews, indeed far too many to cover in the pages of this dissertation. As such, this chapter summarizes these discussions, observations, and findings under several themes. Firstly, many participants described the difficulties with the preparation for and with the implementation of CPIN. Participants provided many examples of difficulties with the training and adjustment phase of CPIN, identifying the many ways this shift presented participants with additional stress in an already stressful and difficult work context. Secondly, participants demonstrated the ways they were actually doing their job-related tasks, and the ways they were engaging in their work processes had shifted with the implementation of CPIN. CPIN imposes rigid, linear structures to work processes in a format that prevents workers from veering off accepted procedural

pathways, thereby making non-compliance quickly observable. With strictly imposed bureaucratic timelines and unrelenting compliance requirements, it became clear that CPIN functions to intensify child welfare temporalities and works to maintain frontline workers and their supervisors within currently accepted and sanctioned child welfare practices. Third, despite formal assurances at the onset of the implementation process that CPIN would function to reduce 'administrative burden', the lived reality of participants showed that the regulatory and audit functions within CPIN have intensified workload in many arenas. The ways that CPIN shifted the work increased the amount of time it takes to do the work. Lastly, within an already strictly regulated service sector, CPIN has intensified focus on compliance with practice standards set by the Ministry.

Participants shared their experiences of trying to navigate and negotiate the newly imposed structures that shift the work towards more strictly regulated processes. Participants shared many examples of the ways that frontline workers and their supervisors are now monitored more closely than ever before. The participants in this study were subject to "institutional circuits" or "accountability circuits", within which care work is broken down into "separately managed 'corporatized' units" (Hood, 1995, cited in Griffith & Smith 2014, p. 14, 15). The focus on accountability has, in numerous instances, meant that workers and supervisors are being held 'accountable' for technical issues that are quite out of their sphere of influence and entirely out of their control.

These observations have been compartmentalized into five sections with a brief description of a case scenario that demonstrates some of the shortcomings of CPIN in practice settings. First, in the section called *Preparation, Implementation and Adjustment*, participants

shared that their understanding that CPIN was developed to address mistakes made by child welfare workers and upon implementation, future child deaths would be avoided. Workers understood the purpose of this database to enable information sharing between agencies. In a process of responsabilisation (Liebenberg et al., 2015; McBride & Mitrea, 2017), participants demonstrated how they integrated this interpretation of culpability and applied this to their understanding of their own work and how they see their own responsibilities. This is key, as it helps us to see how workers are still navigating the work in a context of the ever-present fear of inquest or discipline. Further, it is clear that risk assessment is still a dominant ideology that informs frontline clinical work alongside the blame for tragic case outcomes remaining solely on individual workers.

The mechanics of CPIN maintains the focus on making decisions that are defensible and completing documentation that defends those decisions. The emphasis on ensuring that those decisions are professionally defensible and accountable is front of mind for CPWs and their supervisors. Due to the increased rigidity of timelines and expectations of compliance, the documentation process takes priority over attempting different kinds of interventions that may be less oppressive towards families. This focus on individual workers' roles and responsibilities, and the intensified focus on accountability, continues to distract attention away from systemic issues that contribute to hardship and harm for children and their families.

From this examination of CPIN, the importance of terminology came forward. In the section *New Language and New Processes*, connections are made between the changes to terminology that were imposed as part of the implementation of CPIN and how they altered how child welfare work is conceptualized. For example, the change to the conceptualization of

a 'case' has changed from how we understand a family as a group and how we approach issues for families, towards discrete, linear, sequestered, and designated tasks. The work has been redefined not as intervention with a family, but redefined as mechanized, singular tasks in a series of singular tasks. The concept of the family has also been disintegrated, as CPIN outlines work with "registered participants" rather than families, children, or parents. I will argue that these changes in language terminology and conceptualization further entrench the already existing processes that function to dehumanize the child welfare "participants." It also makes it much easier for child welfare workers to approach their work in a mechanical, disconnected, and unreflective manner; all of which are key components in the process of adaption and acceptance of oppressive practices.

In the section *'Go Live' and Beyond*, there is evidence of the impact of the disruption and uncertainty for workers as they try to adapt to and integrate changes emanating from CPIN. Participants shared their sense of unease, anxiety, and insecurity with their work, even after a full 12 months of using this database. Participants shared that they feel incompetent and anxious with the processes; they described ways that they, as individuals and their agencies, were expected to absorb the burdens and costs of this change to their work. For a sector that has been the subject of so much public criticism, and public outrage following past tragedies, and inquests, the daily experience of anxiety and fear was already a constant presence. With CPIN, the additional sense of fear, anxiety, and incompetence is significant. When individuals feel insecure, they are less likely to speak up, to bring forward concerns, to step out of line, or to challenge oppressive processes or policies.

In the following sections *Bureaucratic Rigidity*, *Increased 'administrative burden'*, and *Workarounds*, participants shared their insights into the ways that they have tried to work within this rigid, linear system, putting their energies into adaption and accommodation. Ultimately, this serves to inculcate workers to the routine of adapting to these changes rather than approaching their work with a critical lens. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, there are already systemic pressures on child welfare workers to fall in line and align with existing processes, along with serious consequences for frontline workers who question or step out of line. With these more trenchant processes, interactions with service recipients become intensely focused on being standardized across the province, with the work becoming mechanized and banal. In managing the technology and the time pressures, the details of service recipients' lives have become terse descriptions, focused much more on meeting Ministry standards than about the substance or quality of human interactions. Contact logs are less detailed, with a focus on 'clean data', properly filled data fields, compliance, and audit trails. However, the concept of accountability in child welfare is not connected to ensuring decisions are accountable to family members' needs and wants but is related entirely to accountability to the Ministry. While accountability to families and communities was previously recognized as a significant gap and contributed to systemic injustices prior to CPIN, this shift towards intensified compliance to Ministry standards means that accountability to the child and family is further marginalized within the mechanized work processes and indeed has no recognized value. In the section called *Departures*, participants shared their experiences with compliance becoming a focus of their work, at the expense of meaningful clinical engagement. The focus on documenting departures creates a circumstance where workers and their

supervisors are spending significant amount of their time and energy documenting the decision-making process at the clear expense of actual interactions with their service recipients. Not only is this “*counterintuitive to what brought people into the helping profession to begin with*” (Participant 21), documentation of compliance with ministry standards has also become the *de facto* measurement of who is a good worker.

From the review of the most recent wide-scale reform for child welfare in Ontario, there is evidence to suggest that the implementation of CPIN does not contribute to a shift away from oppressive practices. With the strict adherence of timelines comes a further entrenchment of restrictive child welfare temporalities, which prevent CPWs and supervisors from having opportunities to reflect on the consequences of their work. With the intensified focus on worker accountabilities brought on with the further embrace of practices informed by neoliberal ideologies, there are fewer opportunities to implement collaborative and humanizing practices. CPIN was conceptualized as a tool to modernize child welfare systems in Ontario and with that is the inference that modern means better. However, with the implementation now complete, there is evidence that the impact of CPIN deepens dehumanizing discourses and practices, further ensconcing oppressive practices and maintaining existing systems of whiteness in Ontario child welfare.

## **6.2 The Experience of CPIN**

### *6.2.1 Preparation, Implementation and Adjustment*

I began by asking each of my participants how they understood CPIN: “*We will be talking most about CPIN and how this has impacted your work processes. Can we start with your understanding of CPIN? What do you know about CPIN? Why was CPIN developed? What are*

*the main objectives of CPIN?”* Most of the participants held a strong association between CPIN and the jury recommendations from the Baldwin Inquest that were released in February 2014. Participants saw a connection between the failures of individual workers as the primary cause of Jeffrey Baldwin’s death, with CPIN functioning as a mechanism to prevent similar deaths in the future. One participant noted:

*Jeffrey Baldwin death equals CPIN... After we got in a lot of trouble and felt responsible for the death of Jeffrey Baldwin and that we as a whole, child protection hadn't done their jobs properly. ... CPIN was the answer... Another child in care death will never happen again. That's my understanding of CPIN. (Participant 16)*

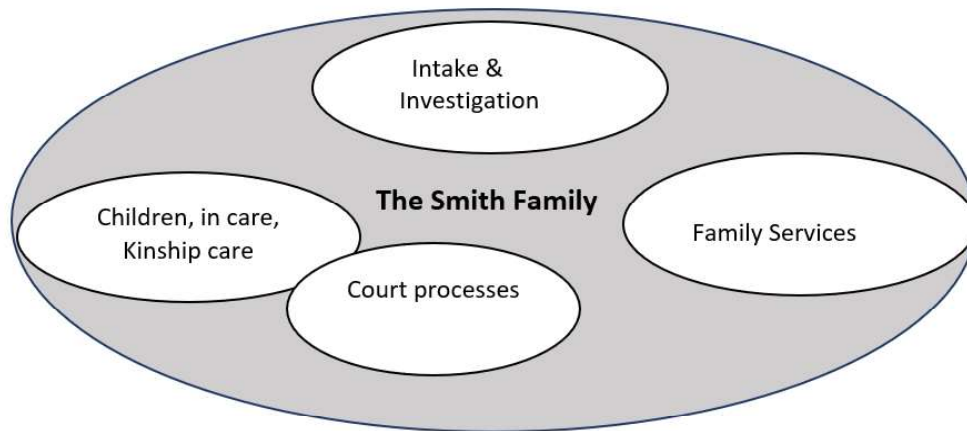
CPIN was implemented in stages across Ontario, with agencies ‘on-boarded’ initially in groups, and then in individual agencies, one at a time between 2014 and 2019. Both of the child welfare agencies that agreed to assist with this research were ‘on-boarded’ in 2017. Interviews for this research were conducted in the spring of 2018, which meant that at the time of these conversations and observations, the majority of my research participants had been using CPIN for approximately 12 months.

Participants indicated that there was intensive training done in advance of the CPIN ‘Go Live’ date, which meant for most of the participants that there was a gap in time between when they had the training and when they were called to put their working knowledge of how to use the system into practice (Participant 5). Participants described this period of preparation as anxious and disruptive. They were expected to attend training for this significant change to their work processes, to shift their thinking to adapt, while navigating the workspace before, during, and after CPIN was implemented. This represents a notable amount of ‘work’ to attend to the change process.

### 6.2.2 New Language and New Processes

The process of adopting CPIN required that user agencies and frontline staff had to make significant changes to how they conceptualized the work and, in some important situations, the ways that terminology is used in this work. There were significant changes to language and terminology required to adopt CPIN, and it would be impossible in this research to examine all changes and their implications. I have thus chosen to focus on a selection of the best examples such as the following terms: *case*, *occurrence*, *tasks* and *milestones*, and *contact logs*. Described as a “significant strength” of CPIN (McConomy, 2017), key pieces of information have been shifted from more generalized narrative spaces, such as case notes and broad contact logs, and are now “stored” in specific and required data fields. The training material instructs CPIN users to adopt consistent terminology and stresses the importance of standardized language (McConomy, 2017).

In past practice, a ‘case’ in child welfare referred to an involvement with child welfare, which would span from the initial opening stage to the time when services were terminated. In this conceptualization, a case would re-open if there were subsequent reports or referrals to child welfare agencies. The case would encompass a family grouping, most often with its name drawn from the name of the biological mother, for example ‘the Smith case’. In cases where the biological mother was deceased or absent, the name of the case would be under the person who was looking after the child(ren).

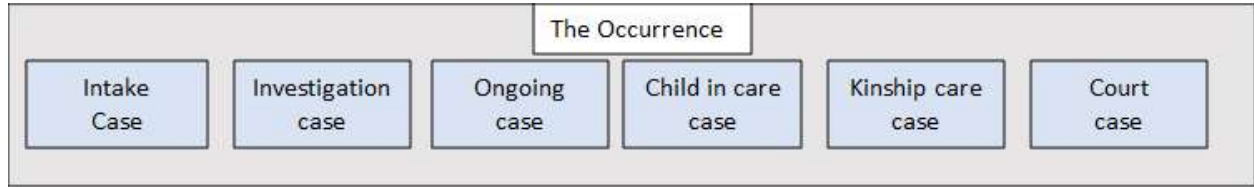


**Figure 6: A visual representation of case prior to CPIN**

In more recent times, the terminology adopted in some agencies was the “Primary Caregiver” according to the Standards (MCYS, 2016), or anecdotally, the “Primary Caring Person,” “Primary Care Provider,” or simply the “PCP.” These changes reflect the complication of family dynamics, with the shift towards equally shared custody orders where children live with more than one parent. In addition, the ‘blended family’ has become more common. In many families, it has become more complicated to determine who is the PCP.

CPIN shifts this conceptualization of the ‘case’ to a way to describe a distinct and discrete task or job related to an “*occurrence*” (McConomy, 2017). In CPIN, a ‘case’ refers to specific stages of an ‘occurrence,’ including an ‘intake case,’ an ‘investigation case,’ and an ‘ongoing case.’ Under this new structured process, each case is closed when the specific tasks related to that stage of work is completed, before the next set of tasks commence, and the next case is opened. All of these cases, when looked at together, are considered an “*occurrence*” (McConomy, 2017). Once all cases have been closed and all services are completed, that occurrence is concluded. In the past, when new concerns were reported to an agency, the case would ‘*reopen*.’ With CPIN, once an occurrence has been completed, any new concerns

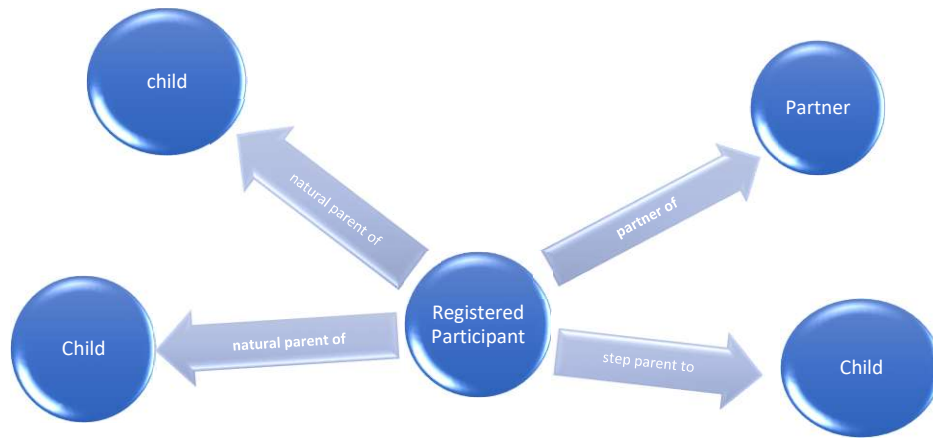
reported to a child welfare agency would be considered a new occurrence and a new intake case, a new investigation case, and so on.



**Figure 7: A visual representation of case conceptualization under CPIN**

Another shift in the ways that child welfare work is conceptualized within CPIN is the ways that individuals are identified and engaged. CPIN is predicated on an aspirational ideal that each individual person who is involved in some way with child welfare services would be clearly and definitively identified. Further, the intention is to have each registered participant clearly connected to any occurrences and interventions regardless of where they might reside, who they reside with, or where they may have previously resided in or outside of Ontario. The intention is to be able to track anyone who is involved or has had any previous child welfare involvement in any part of the province and to know accurately where and when that involvement occurred.

This shift is significant as with the implementation of CPIN, there is no longer a ‘family file’ or a ‘family case’ but a grouping of ‘Registered Participants.’ Veering away from past terms such as ‘clients,’ ‘service users,’ child and caregiver, each person is a Registered Participant with CPIN and is now entered into the database as a separate entity with a distinct identifying number, with their relational connections and roles added separately.



**Figure 8: A visual representation of the shift in case identification under CPIN**

What this looks like is the addition of a person’s name and demographic information to the database, as well as a relationship definition attached to them. For example, Jane Smith is entered into the CPIN database with her gender, age, address, and other demographic information including ethno-racial identification, and then is identified as the biological parent of Timmy Smith. Steve Jones is entered as a registered participant, with his gender, age, address, and other demographic information including ethno-racial and gender identification, and then is identified as the stepparent of Timmy Smith. Jane Smith is then identified as the common law partner of Steve Jones. Each Registered Participant will be assigned various roles, such as ‘Referral source,’ ‘Biological Parent, Involved,’ or ‘Biological Parent, Responsible for Alleged Maltreatment.’ In many situations, it is very difficult to determine which ‘roles’ to assign to a registered participant, as this is predicated on the presumed need to define and compartmentalize the service recipient into concrete and tidy categories. People seldom fit this reductionist and narrow approach, which allows for engagement with people that is fundamentally dehumanizing. This approach reduces the humanity of the person: trying to place them neatly into an essentializing term such as ‘Biological Parent, Responsible for Alleged

Maltreatment' dismisses or ignores the responsibility to hold any other ways of understanding this person and how they came to be in this child welfare moment in time. It also makes it easier to accept the dehumanization of the child welfare service recipient. These database records are entered at the beginning of the interaction, when often times the information about the people is scant and essentializing. Information that is entered into the database becomes *the record*; *the way of knowing* the Registered Participant. While the subject of the record can challenge these designations and request that information in their personal files can be corrected or amended, most people are not aware of the details about them ensconced in child welfare records nor are they aware of the procedures for correcting their records. If the information is challenged, corrections can be added as an addendum, however the original information, regardless of the inaccuracy or dehumanizing portrayals, cannot be erased or removed. This aspect of child welfare record keeping is not new to CPIN, but the goal of having one shared, province wide database that all child welfare agencies would have access to intensifies the ways that these records construct service users and the ways that these dehumanized constructions can cause harm.

In this way, child welfare records and notations about the history of a family or person becomes *the history* of a family or of a person, becomes the prioritized, privileged, and validated knowledge. This is one of the many ways that individuals become reified, objectified, essentialized, and depersonalized. It is a profoundly dehumanizing action, and it occurs, without critical interrogation, thousands of times each day.

One issue that was identified by research participants from 3 different agencies relates to how the database determines the "primary clients." CPIN defaults the "primary clients" to be

the first person entered into the intake case (Highland Shores Children's Aid, 2017). This is significant as historically, all files were opened under the mother's name unless the natural mother was deceased, did not have custody, or if the identity or whereabouts of the natural mother was unknown. With this change came the question and debate as to who our primary client is. Initially in the implementation process, when asked what the Ministry wanted agencies to do, the answer was a directive that each agency would determine their own processes, contrary to the goal of standardizing child welfare agencies across Ontario.

For one of the participant agencies, the ability to define the 'primary service recipients' represented an opportunity to implement a change and shift to a form of practice seen as anti-oppressive. The agency from northern Ontario attempted to shift the way cases have been associated with the PCP (usually the biological mother) to a policy of identifying cases under the name of the alleged offender. This was particularly interesting for cases of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) where historically mothers have been held to account for the violence perpetrated by their most-often male identified partners. The participant explained that this was seen as an opportunity to change the process of investigating allegations of domestic violence that would reduce the burden for women, by labelling the accused perpetrator as the focus of the intervention rather than the default of focusing on mothers. Initially this agency, given the latitude by the Ministry, decided to begin the practice of identifying the primary service recipient as the focus of intervention, however soon after this, in the name of "*business harmonization*," the Ministry directed all agencies to revert to past practice, which identifies the locus of intervention as the PCP, which is most often the biological mother (Participant 4).

CPIN also brought about significant changes to the ways that the work of CPWs is conceptualized. 'Tasks' in the context of CPIN refers to a narrowly defined work step that is assigned to an individual CPW, such as having contact with a registered participant, a care provider, or the completion of a document. A 'milestone' refers to a specific type of task that relate to the completion of documents, where the approvals or departures are completed within legislated and/or Ministry-set standards.

The numerous shifts in the ways work gets done was highlighted by the noteworthy shift in language and terms. For example, I bring attention to the shift from using the term 'case note' to the new term 'contact log.' The practice of keeping case notes has been a longstanding practice and generally recognized as an essential function in child welfare work. With CPIN, the shift in terminology centres the nature of the encounter to more of a transaction, as one of 'contact,' lessening the expectation that this contact would have relational or clinical value. The training material identified that the main change, aside from the name, was the actions of putting key information for a contact log into specific data fields as a way to support the tracking of data (McConomy, 2017). Training material identified the importance of data integrity and using 'clean data' to ensure that the information can be monitored, tracked, and audited with ease.

This shift in work process incorporates a neoliberal approach, defining the work as transactional, and more importantly, auditable. In practice, this change means CPWs no longer look at the notes as a way to recall events or hold a narrative of the family's experiences. These are no longer a way to tell a story of the family, no longer a way to understand the service recipients better, but rather these contacts are data points, that provide for a focus on

auditable accountability. The contact log becomes a way, not to document what a family needs, but to document precisely what tasks have been completed - and when. The contact logs are the measure of CPW compliance with ministry standards.

### 6.2.3 'Go Live' and Beyond

Participants shared in a wide variety of struggles with learning to use and adapt to CPIN. During my observation sessions, some participants felt the need to apologize for or justify their need to still use instruction manuals or desk guides even a year or more since their agency implemented CPIN (Participant 20 & 31). Some participants noted that even after 12 months or more after the 'go live' date, they still need to refer to desk guides to do some tasks, especially if the tasks are not part of their daily routine:

*Like I, I'm being completely honest with you doing it for a year and I still would need to follow either look in the book and follow step by step instructions on how to open an investigation take in a new referral. It's really not that intuitive... And I am not somebody who's like technologically challenged or anything like that... I'm not intimidated or anything like that... I just find it... there are so many steps that are so unnecessary and so complicated that I haven't done it enough even after a year to make it second nature. Like I said, I know what my, I do my role, but to do anything outside of that, forget it.*  
(Participant 6)

As part of this research, I was able to observe the step-by-step process for some of the tasks, as participants shared that they needed the 'desk guide' or 'workflow charts' (Appendix E) to be able to navigate certain tasks in some cases after a year of the CPIN implementation. Many agencies now have developed an extensive library of detailed step by step workflow guides to help workers navigate the system. Participants noted that they would become proficient in their set tasks but found it to be very difficult if called to do tasks outside of their specific role. For example, there was significant consternation for frontline CPWs who were tasked with

covering off the phones so that CPWs who screen the intake calls could have their lunch. The screener workers who participated in this research described how they created a template in a Word document to help their colleagues, as the non-screening CPWs struggled to use CPIN for an unfamiliar task. This highlighted the tendency for CPWs to focus on their narrow job description and narrowly defined roles (a screening worker, an Intake worker, a Family Service worker, a Children's Service worker, a Kinship worker, and so on), in part to manage the steep learning required to adapt to CPIN. While this tendency to keep focus on one's narrow role existed before CPIN, its necessity becomes notably intensified with CPIN. As CPWs did the work to accommodate the intensified time-limited tasks and scrutiny that came from the implementation of CPIN, they found it necessary to focus more narrowly on their own set tasks related to their own roles within child welfare structures. A foreseeable consequence of this is the reduced opportunity for CPWs to see the broader child welfare system as a whole. This limits an individual CPW's ability to see how their own individual actions fit within the larger sequence of events, and for them to imagine possible unintended consequences of their work, or of the broader child welfare system. This is concerning if there is also an expectation from Standards and training documents, as noted in Chapter 4, that CPWs would be aware of and call out racist or oppressive practices. The work that CPWs were doing to accommodate the changes brought on by CPIN would make it even more difficult than ever to 'see the forest for the trees.'

Part of the implementation plan that was originally proposed was that some select frontline staff members be designated as 'super-users,' who would then be able to provide supports to their colleagues as the larger staff group transitioned to the new system. If this had

happened, there would have been at least a few members of the CPW team who could hold a broader view of the interconnectedness of this system and how the separate roles interact together. It seems that the 'super-user' strategy was not entirely successful as there was insufficient recognition for the added workload and time needed to take on this role:

*We talk a little bit about the training of CPIN, the training and support. I think that's a huge issue for [workers in remote areas], people went to [population centre] for a week [of training], to be a 'super-user'... It just wasn't thought out well, it wasn't planned. The time where you go [for help], where do you go [for help].... And then if you're a 'super user', freeing up time, like there wasn't any extra money to hire people... so people aren't super users... So now you're still learning as you go. (Participant 19)*

The impact on the CPW in terms of added time stress is significant. Because these temporalities within child welfare were not recognized in advance, some of the intentions to assist the group in adapting proactively to this large-scale change were not successful.

From the many interviews conducted, it became clear that regardless of how these workers described their experience of adapting to CPIN, the implementation process was very impactful and disruptive for them. For many, the experience of stress and disruption was internalized and understood to signify their own lack of skills. A recurring theme for many of the participants who work frontline child welfare is a feeling that they are incompetent in their jobs since the implementation of CPIN.

I also asked, "In a very general way, do you think the implementation of CPIN has been successful? Have the original goals or objectives been achieved?" In their responses, many participants indicated that they felt incompetent after the implementation of CPIN:

*No... I don't know how to do my job anymore... This is a job I've been doing for 20 years that I'm very confident in. And this job does define me. ... I'm not as good at delivering child welfare now... I don't know how to do my job... And it is only the technical part, ... if you can't do the technical part, which is the ... Ministry's most important part, you're*

*not... we're not doing our job. So, we're pretty much admitting we're not doing our jobs.*  
(Participant 16)

Frontline workers shared feeling incompetent in ways that resonate for me and my own observations of how professional identity formation for CPWs translates to their own sense of self-worth. Some described the experience as traumatic. Echoing my own experiences of grief and loss, for some participants, the shift to CPIN shook their confidence and challenged their identities.

#### *6.2.4 Bureaucratic rigidity*

Explained and constructed as a means to ensure that CPWs and other users of the CPIN platform are compliant with the Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016), this new database is structured to guide the user through the work, step by step, screen by screen. CPIN uses a rigidly delineated process, ensuring that compliance is maintained in a very practical and concrete way. This creates work processes that are informed by compliance with ministry standards, and that appear to be linked with external audit functions.

Participants in this research talked about the ways that their work changed when CPIN was implemented to have a greater, more intensified focus on standards that in some circumstances prevented creative or responsive interventions. Further, they felt that these dynamics interfered with the CPW's ability to develop authentic helping relationships with the families they were working with. One participant spoke of the change to focus on the standard that requires the worker to conduct minimum visits to the family home in order to observe the family home. Standard-driven requirements for monthly contact with the family is strictly interpreted as a visit to the family home. This can impede relationship building with families

where the physical condition of the home is not the focus of the child protection concern. Previously, there were references in policy documents that supported the ability for the child protection worker to “exercise their professional judgement” with regards to assessing risk and making clinical decisions (MCSS, 1999, p. i). However, with the shifts in policy and practice (or more specifically, the development of Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016) and the implementation of CPIN), CPWs are no longer able to make discretionary decisions related to the interpretation of the Standards. For example, a child protection worker is simply not able to omit the required monthly home visit as this is a standard requirement. Any exceptions to the application of Standards requires a process where these decisions are designated as ‘departures’. They are allowed under very limited circumstances (which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter) and must have documented supervisory approvals. This is a stark demonstration that attempts to adopt different approaches to child welfare practice now include additional bureaucratic documentation, and in some cases, forms of discipline when this documentation is not obtained. For CPWs who are already besieged by excessive workload this further disincentivizes them from veering off the CPIN set path.

The same participant spoke about how the focus on inspecting the family home is given priority and therefore preventing the CPW from using other ways of working with the family, such as providing transportation to a food bank or driving a child home after school. Under CPIN, none of these are counted towards the mandated monthly contact workers must have with families. This worker understood that those other supportive activities can still happen, but because of the way the Standards are written or interpreted, these interactions “*don’t count*” as a home visit that meets the Ministry Standard. To do this kind of supportive or

creative work means additional workload. Participants expressed dismay that there is insufficient time to do these kinds of interventions, to have any kind of interactions with families which are now considered 'extra'. This was an issue particularly working with families who live in rural contexts, where the time to travel to the family home was significant. Participants talked about how the focus on meeting the Standards has changed the ways that they now do their work and leaves less time for truly supportive helping:

*Maybe you know the family lives an hour outside of town and they're in town and it's easier for them to come to the office on their way to get groceries, ... more convenient for them rather than having to schedule a home visit with me.*

*So, you have to go the house even if there's no concerns about the house. ... Otherwise, I'm not doing my job properly.... being able to take the mom to the food bank and having the ability to take her out to an appointment doesn't seem to count anymore like, it's that people-time doesn't seem to count. It's, 'You got to go do your monthly private home visit which includes a private interview with the child and an interview with the parents.' That's your job... We used to be able to talk about all the things I need to talk about during the drive, the things I talk about at the home visit, but I could also help her do something. (Participant 6)*

As noted in Chapter 2 while looking at the ways that temporalities function in child welfare spaces, White (1998) draws our attention to the ways CPWs engage with institutionally imposed time constraints. It is important not to 'blame' CPWs for this, as this system is not solely their creation, and CPIN is but one example of the ways that time restrictions are imposed and enforced. CPWs come to understand these temporalities as constraints, thereby informing their risk assessments. The ways that systems of child welfare employ these temporal constraints also maintain and obscure the systemic mechanisms that act as gatekeeper of resources available to service recipients. Constructions of risk and danger are prioritized due to the taken for granted 'urgency' of children understood to be in danger. This combines and is compounded by the chronic institutional neglect of preventive service approaches. The ways

that helping work could mitigate or even avert crisis, has been, for a long time, systematically devalued (Baines, 2004; Baines & van den Broek, 2017; Rossiter & Heron, 2011). Consistent with the encroaching neoliberal ideologies, the way that urgency is constructed and replicated in child protection work ultimately serves to justify the lack of time given to other forms of care, help, or work. The ways time is rationed with service users, as White (1998) argued, is what creates risk. It is not risk that causes the shortness of time, but the shortness of time, exacerbated by political strategies such as organizational abandonment (Gilmore, 2015), that causes risk. The time that is required to do preventative work is dismissed or devalued, while the time that is spent to conduct intrusive investigations, surveillance, and regulation takes priority.

Participants shared that the rigid bureaucratic structures created difficulties when they were working with families that did not fit the standard, cis-heteronormative, legally sanctioned, or married couple families assumed to be normative. Working with families where parents are divorced, separated, or are in conflict is very common in child welfare work. In these situations, in part due to how the structure of CPIN conceptualizes a case and how these structures conceptualize a family, CPWs noted that an open, transparent process that was collaborative with families was essentially impossible. CPIN's rigid work processes created significant issues related to confidentiality, jurisdiction, and procedures that workers had to find various ways to work around:

*And we have a lot of families that are separated. Therefore, we often create two service plans, that's not easy to do in CPIN... You know, in situations where your dad doesn't need to see mom's specific service plan, or outcome plan and vice versa. And so, we've had a lot of, um, difficulties with navigating how we create two service plans for the same family but separate homes... Like, we ran into this issue yesterday. We met with the family, we wanted to do a service plan right away. Before with [the legacy system],*

*we would have you know the printouts from the word [document] online, a hard copy blank form and I could fill it out with the family. ... Now I basically take all the information from the family and say, okay, when I come back next time it's going to be in this formal document that you feel like you had no part of because I didn't have the form in front of you, we couldn't do it together. (Participant 20)*

Participants described a complicated and overly bureaucratic process of discussing a 'contract for voluntary service' with the family: returning to the office to enter the agreed upon elements of the document into the CPIN system, printing off the document, and returning to the home to have the document signed by the family. One participant described how difficult it was to negotiate a voluntary agreement and then return to the family with a very official document that was rife with legalistic terms, with formal Ministry logos on the letterhead. In her experience, families were less trusting and accepting of this 'voluntary' contract when it looked so formal and legalistic. Families found this process intimidating and difficult to trust. In some cases, the participant described how the families backtrack their earlier intentions to work cooperatively with the CPW because of this.

#### *6.2.5 Increased administrative burden*

CPIN was strongly promoted as a way to ease administrative burden; to modernize and streamline bureaucratic work processes (CPSCW, 2010a). The lived reality of the implementation and use of CPIN was different from what was originally envisioned (OACAS, 2017). The notable lack of efficiency of CPIN was prominent in the 2017 annual report from the Office of the Auditor General, recognizing that the first group of child welfare agencies that implemented CPIN incurred significant additional costs of \$5.4 million in their attempt to manage "workload pressures resulting from inefficiencies in CPIN" (OAGO, 2017, p. 48). The topic of the inefficiencies of CPIN, including the increased administrative burden it brought

about, was a strong recurring theme brought forward by the research participants. Participants reported a significant increase in the volume of administrative work, as well as an increase in the time needed to complete the administrative tasks related to case work. For example, participants highlighted one of the most basic, routine, and most common daily functions, the 'contact log,' previously known as the 'case note.' Historically, case notes were handwritten and were often a running narrative of the various interactions with a family and those associated with their situation. In many agencies, prior to the implementation of CPIN, there were efforts to transition case notes from a handwritten format into a typewritten platform. Some agencies had gone 'paperless' within the previous decade and in situations where there were handwritten documents, those would be scanned and added to a digital record.

There were different methods prior to the implementation of CPIN to isolate certain case notes by function. For example, case notes that related to consultations with legal counsel were segregated within paper files as these were considered 'privileged' lawyer/service user discussions and therefore were not included in file disclosures. Case notes that documented when file record checks were done or that documented a private meeting with a child would also be identified. However, the mechanisms were not necessarily routine or consistent in agencies across the province.

The different administrative tasks and functions were done differently across the province, as the systems prior to the implementation of CPIN were inconsistent; in many cases the information was not easily captured and therefore was difficult to track, monitor, and collate. When case files were audited in the past, especially in cases where a service user had died or a when there was a reportable Serious Occurrence (SOR), an auditor would have to

search through handwritten documents to piece together the sequence of events to try to determine where mistakes happened and where fault would be placed.

With the shift to CPIN, 'case notes' are now called 'contact logs,' which must be identified by their purpose and function. Contact logs are now identified and related to every function, task, procedure, and so on, such as making a phone call and leaving a message, checking a database for historical records, attempting a visit to a home, consulting with a supervisor or departing from Standards. Now, with the shift to CPIN, each contact log must identify, in specific data fields, information about who the contact log pertains to, who the people involved are, locations, time, and specific purpose related to Ministry Standards.

Contact logs capture actions such as a private interview with the child, a record check, a visit to (inspection of) the service recipients' home, a legal consult, contact with a referral source, as well as any departure from Standards; each must be clearly identified in specific data fields. Each contact note is defined by its purpose as selected by checkboxes and dropdown menus. At key stages in the work, CPIN may disallow the worker to 'go to the next screen,' to continue with the next stage of the work. In other words, if key steps related to compliance to Standards are not captured within the contact logs, the work cannot progress. For example, the intake case cannot be closed in order to allow for the investigation case to be opened unless there is a contact log entered into the system that confirms that historical records locally and provincially have been checked.

With CPIN, all information is entered in a linear step-by-step fashion as the worker progresses through completing the online documents. If done correctly, all contact logs can now be tracked, tabulated, and monitored making it much easier for the work of frontline staff

and the overall compliance of agencies to be monitored, with minute-to-minute precision if desired. Contact logs are required to be entered into the CPIN database within 24 hours of the contact (The Standards, 2016). Numerous issues created obstacles for workers to get these contact logs entered into the system within the 24-hour Ministry Standard. For workers in remote areas of the province where there is no or unreliable internet access, there are times when access to the CPIN system is limited or entirely unavailable. Workers and supervisors understood that they would be considered 'non-compliant' with Ministry Standards even if the reason for not meeting the 24-hour standard was a lack of internet access. Some of the technical glitches that were most notable and most troubling, described by some as 'traumatic,' related to contact logs:

*Better safe than sorry. I'm just going to save after I make every five clicks. I'd like, hit save... We've also had a number of glitches. I don't know if it's our computers here in this office... but like this week our power went out like three times. ... Because we've had glitches in here where CPIN will we'll just glitch out. And then all of a sudden you're signed out. ... We've been burned too many times that now we've learned we're just going to get a Word doc... I mean cutting and pasting may not be that big of a deal but if I have CPIN, I should just be able to do it in there confidently and not be worried that I'm going to lose my super long contact log. (Participant 20)*

*It's gonna impact or lead to your own trauma cause you're like, 'Where's my work?!' And you get to a point where, like, you're doing the contact log and you do the contact log and you have the information... I'm working in CPIN and because it has deleted, like it shut me out... So, you do the contact log and you do it again, and then ... it's ... gone. And then because it's glitchy today or whatever, the sun didn't come out or something and so you're doing it, and the first one is this, ... then it gets like this, ... and then whatever. I re-wrote this contact log three times, so this is what you're getting this time ... Because I can only do so many times ... I have a lot of other work I have to do and I've not seen my people as much because I'm married to my computer now. (Participant 5)*

*I do it all in Word and I have a bit of a template and then I copy and paste it into CPIN which is kind of redundant if you think about it, but it is saving time for me. (Participant 14)*

*And if you actually make a mistake and it's at the end of the day...and you're putting in the casenote and press close and save and you go back the next day, and you come back and realize, 'Oh wait I had four home visits [yesterday], and I put the wrong casenote in the wrong case,' ... and it's over 24 hours, I need to get it out of there, you can't fix it... You know, there are sometimes when you aren't, ... like, you will make a mistake.*  
(Participant 19)

Where historically frontline workers had the flexibility to take handwritten notes *in situ* and generally unobtrusively, the task has now shifted to be an entry into the database with strict timelines. For many participants, this represented a significant, sometimes insurmountable workload issue. Adding scanned documents presented a complicated technical issue since the attachments were not always visible when one is looking at the case, and particularly for historical files, attachments can be difficult to find (Participants 10, 12, & 13).

Numerous participants mentioned their observations that the shift towards entirely digital work presented technical challenges to complete paperwork, which could have an impact on the working relationship with service recipients:

*Sure, they say... you can go you can take a laptop and sit there and even the ongoing workers are welcome to take a laptop anytime they want, and sign it out, they can do their note right there in the home visit. But I mean most of us feel that that's really inappropriate when you're having a face-to-face interaction with somebody and, you know, when you see a child, or you see a mom who's been struggling with God knows what through the weekend, I'm going to pull up my laptop and sit there and type? That's not going to happen. You know, that's really not what this is about. It feels like it's more for data collection than it is for helping us with our job. So, the other thing is like there's so many options when you go to do a contact log (which is a case note), and if you don't check off the right ones, they don't get the statistic. So that's kind of been drilled into us over and over again... Yeah, so I really think it's more about stats, keeping track of stats than it is about documentation of work and making sure that things are transparent so that kids are safe.* (Participant 6)

The focus on completing the documentation and meeting Ministry Standards has meant that frontline workers have a greater administrative burden (Participants 4 & 21). Participants in this research provided a myriad of examples of the ways this impacted how they did their work and

how they interact with service recipients post-CPIN implementation. One participant shared the ways that CPIN restricted their time for direct support:

*Especially when CPIN first started I had service users coming here [to the office], which is ok, I get that is what a true case manager does, is that you show up here, it was not meeting the service users necessarily where they're at or being available when they called and said, 'Look, I need a ride, I need this.' It gets a little bit better sometimes, but I used to be able to do that for most of my service users. Now I can do it for a select few. So those kinds of things that helped you develop the relationships and the trust with the kid before you can move them on to somebody else who they can trust. That's definitely different... (Participant 14)*

This children's services worker expressed concern for the lack of time, which made it difficult to make herself available to respond to youth service recipients. She explained that the youth who met with her while they were living independently really needed authentic support as they transitioned out of state care. One of the participants who works with youth transitioning to independent living talked about being much less available to those youth, hoping they do not experience a crisis, as she felt she had so little time to respond to them:

*It's definitely just trying to figure out when you can see more kids in a venue that is not so individual... Like, they come in for cheque day, ... so we'll see four kids ... instead of going out and doing four individual appointments, ... you're going to see them, you're going to check in with them... Right now, I'm scheduling three weeks in advance, ... so please, can we not have a crisis for three weeks because I have my next available... That's hard, it's a loss. It's not why I started this job. It was to help people, not to necessarily develop a relationship with my computer screen. (Participant 14)*

Many participants identified a significant increase in administrative burden related to locating child welfare historical records. CPIN requires very precise spelling of names and does not provide a user any sense of possible alternate spellings. For example, the previously used provincial database known as FastTrack had a feature called 'Soundex' which would offer the user some 'hits' that were close in spelling or in phonetics. CPIN does not have a feature like that, so very often a CPW will not find the registered participant they are looking for unless

they have the exact spelling of names. Participants identified serious difficulties when using CPIN to conduct searches especially wading through the vast numbers of duplicate Registered Participants and the difficulty finding a person who may have an unusual spelling of their name:

*I think the only problem is even when you are I would say proficient at it, as [we] are we've kind of focussed exclusively on that just the time it takes to get an intake in. Even when you absolutely know what you're doing and how to do it, the 5000 clicks for every single thing that you want to do. It's just so time consuming that and that's for people who know exactly what they do and when to do it. (Participant 12)*

*I think about searching and I think, I don't know if it's the way it's intended or just the way it's happening but... um, the amount of duplicates... and searching and the amount of information that is in 2 duplicate records emerging... that premise, ... the whole idea of increased child safety, ... the idea of duplicates to me is, like, that kinda compromises child safety. ... It's very big, it's a huge issue... It's massive. As more agencies go on, it will be more of an issue. So, the idea of child safety, the promise of one person record seeing everything, ... I think it's a great idea but the reality of it, I don't think is actually in place unless people are 'born in CPIN,' then there is a risk that people, because search is so finicky, are going to create duplicates. (Participant 11)*

Multiple participants described the difficulty conducting searches and finding a less typical spelling of a name such as Sorah<sup>20</sup> instead of Sarah:

*So, if you were not as, you know, proficient at doing the searches and doing all that and making sure you're doing the searches so many times before you enter somebody so you know I did the [Sarah] and the last name. No, no nothing came up. I tried a few things. And I was trying all of his family members, so I tried every single family member before I... You know, would say no there's no [Sarah], there's no [Sarah], there's no history, this family has doesn't previously exist. I finally got to the fifth family member and got hit. (Participant 13)*

Frontline supervisors who were interviewed highlighted the dramatic increase in time it takes to do regular supervision with their workers. Participants who were in management roles expressed their belief that supervision is a core task in social work and is considered essential to professional clinical competencies. With the focus on compliance with Ministry Standards in all

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<sup>20</sup> The actual name given in this conversation has been changed to protect privacy.

the documentation, the shift in work requires that any departure from Standard is formally and uniformly documented. This change represented a significant shift in the nature of encounters between workers and their supervisors, away from clinical discussions and towards compliance:

*Because that's standard driven. Are we complying with all the different... So, supervision on a case of 18 cases that we could do in front line in three hours or four hours in an afternoon of work is taking 12, ... 15 hours. (Participant 2)*

*We're meeting with workers probably two to three sometimes four times depending on, to get through their caseloads, which then takes them away from their frontline work ... and a good portion of what we're doing is not service driven, at all. At all. (Participant 4)*

Members of the executive management team observed the same issue and felt concerned for the lack of time to address issues in a clinical way:

*[O]ne afternoon, I sent out an email to the managers asking, 'Can I just sit in on one of your supervisions?' Just to see what it's like, because I had heard a lot from them [frontline supervisors] about how like, you're constantly maneuvering from one screen to another and entering a departure here, and then you have to enter it into another place because that is not good enough. And so, I did sit in one day with one manager and one worker who consented for me to sit in, and it was interesting because in a two-and-a-half-hour period we were maybe able to get through 4 cases. ... It has changed the way we do supervision where its between maneuvering CPIN and dealing with QIP [Quality Improvement Project] measurements, certain things that you have to ask, like 'When was the last time you saw the child?' And um... you have to enter it here, but you also have to go into another screen and enter it... I remember when I was a manager, I could very easily get through an entire caseload of 17 cases with a worker in about a three-and-a-half-hour period, about a half a day, sometimes it might take a little longer. But now what we are hearing is that's impossible... It's impossible to get through a caseload as a manager with a worker in half a day... and I think that really saddens me, on a whole lot of levels because not only is it taking more time, but the discussions are less and less clinical and more around the compliance, the administrative stuff. (Participant 21)*

Supervisors talked about the amount of time it was taking simply to enter the information in the database to reflect this new expectation, to document all departures from standards.

Participants reported that just to enter the information from departures into a supervision contact log could take upwards of 10 minutes:

*If you can imagine, there may be three or four departures and that takes at least five or ten minutes per contact log to enter. So, then you're not even at the clinical discussion yet... Now we can start... Oh, time to go... You've got a home visit. OK, bye...*

*Decisions, you know, you have an ongoing protection worker... You've had your supervision, you know they [the worker] know these families, they know what decision they are making, so hypothetically they're going on holidays for six weeks. So, we're literally going to be doing approved departures on some of those cases where they're saying, 'You know what? I saw them last week, there's no reason another worker should be going to see this family while I am gone... I'm going to see them when I get back.' So, we're doing a departure of that. Like, these are some very common-sense things that... I think we used to discuss and make decisions about, we now spend, a whole lotta time putting it in CPIN. (Participant 4)*

#### 6.2.6 Workarounds

Participants presented a variety of ways that they were individually attempting to manage the workload and accountability issues, with many identifying the use of *workarounds*. These represent the ways that CPWs are doing the “work” (in IE parlance) of adapting to this new database and associated work processes, while simultaneously ‘working’ to balance these with their frontline practice commitments. A surprising number of the participants had their own individual ways to manage the increase in compliance tracking demands. For example, one participant who kept a separate word document with a list of all her cases. This running document had the family members names, phone numbers, the address and distance to their house, the date of the last home visit, the deadline for the next home visit - all done separate from CPIN because this worker found it too difficult to find and track this information using the CPIN interface (Participant 7). Other workers noted that the due dates in CPIN for upcoming work-related deadlines were often incorrect and even when the work was done, the incorrect

deadlines were still visible on CPIN (Participant 8). Participants had a variety of ways of tracking the deadlines imposed by the Standards that were often and repeatedly not easy to find or trustworthy within CPIN.

One supervisor described doing clinical supervision while driving with their workers. As the worker drove them from one commitment to another, they discussed cases and he would input the contact logs into the system via his tablet, if they were in a zone where there was connection to the network (Participant 19). Others talked about shifting away from discussions with people on the phone to asking for them to send the information via email, making it easier to cut and paste the information into contact logs:

*Now I, I have less telephone conversations and I get people to email me. So, then the information is just a cut and paste into a case note instead of starting from scratch. ... caregivers, or service providers when we're planning things instead of, you know, having to open a case note... An update, updates, update or medical planning or results of a medical or dental or school meeting... It's faster than having a conversation. So that's one of the ... workarounds that I've kind of figured out. (Participant 14)*

Numerous workers talked about using their cell phones during a home visit to take notes, then emailing those notes to themselves, and then cutting and pasting the emailed notes into a CPIN contact log:

*I started typing on my phone. And what I would say to people is, "Alright, this is what I'm doing. You're more than welcome to look at it after I'm done. If it makes you uncomfortable, I will stop, okay? I can always write my notes out if that's, if you're more comfortable with that." And I've only had one person told me to stop because the ticking was annoying her. (Participant 39)*

One supervisor, with the help of her administrative assistant, developed a spreadsheet to help her keep track of the dates and deadlines for meeting with her workers:

*So, you know I'm an, I'm a standards person, I'm a standards kind of gal, you know? ... I've already bought into the idea about standards and accountability, the need for standards, the need for an authorization process. But the time it takes me away from*

*discussing the service needs of families and the clinical decisions and, you know? Like, it's just, it's sad that, it's very sad... So, I have developed what I call a supervision tracker. In an Excel spreadsheet, ... in order to make sure that I'm meeting compliance as part of my role, ... so I have [the worker] on my team, ... I have all of her cases listed, ... the [date for] six-week review that you must entitle the purpose of the contact log in order for it to be compliant. (Participant 3)*

### 6.2.7 Intensified Focus on Compliance and Accountability

Participants shared their experiences of trying to navigate and negotiate the newly imposed structures that shift the work towards more strictly regulated processes:

*I mean when you're looking at attachments in CPIN to go back and look all of our attachments came over [from the legacy system]. None of them are labeled so you go into an open each single one. You don't know what they are. (Participant 2)*

*I think we covered a lot of feelings about CPIN, but I feel like, well, recently there's been a huge emphasis on our quality and like our deadlines and things like that to our supervisors have been on us more like how often we're seeing the families and things like that and ... getting our outcome plans in on time in our 30-day visit notes and I feel like because it's been such a learning curve with CPIN that a lot of us are really behind on that. And I'm worried that ... people are forgetting about how big of a change this was and thought like the expectation to be at the same level as we were before. CPIN is a little outrageous. ... We're kinda being kicked in the butt for our stats, but I don't think we should be. (Participant 31)*

### 6.2.8 Departures

The term *departure* relates to any situation where in the course of the work, the worker is not able to meet the standards set by the Ministry. The focus on this was amplified in the aftermath of the Ontario Auditor General Report of 2015. In that particular report, the Auditor General noted a concerning lack of compliance with standards across child welfare agencies in Ontario (OAGO, 2015). The new approach was implemented prior to CPIN implementation but has become a technical issue for agencies to track compliance and authorized departures. In the early iterations of CPIN, there were places that lacked specific data fields to track

departures. Subsequently, a data field was added to contact logs, which required a change in practice to ensure that a specific contact log was entered into CPIN for each authorized departure:

*In family services and protection, ... that's not how it was... Our response times to investigations will be something that, you know, if you were going to get the seven days you would always document that you needed the departure. But if you weren't going to ... have supervision at 42 days, people were, you know... Or if you didn't see the family at 30 days, if it was 31 or 32 days, that wasn't, it wasn't a big deal, right? And so now it's this whole new way of thinking and it's created a lot of pressure. (Participant 1)*

Some participants noted that the shift towards using the CPIN database presented a challenge to those who were drawn to the work for the desire to interact and help people:

*I think that, um, I mean the whole, the way CPIN operates is counterintuitive to what brought people into the helping profession to begin with, so all of us want to make meaning of our world, the world, the relationships we share with our service users, um, ... and there's nothing really meaningful about CPIN so, so your supervisions are no longer meaningful, your relationships suffer because of the time constraints. Um... and even the formatting within the system itself, so the way we can write our social histories, and our plans of care, and I am speaking of this from a children's service perspective, you brought meaning to the young person's life the way you wrote your narratives and the way, you know? And it flowed ... in a very meaningful way, too, you know? It's less so with CPIN. I mean, this is a system that's mostly about check boxes and, ... and I like to just pop into a file and read about a young person, just to see how they are and ... I struggle to find it, ... I cannot find it... It's just, they're not capturing what they used to be able to capture. (Participant 22)*

*I think too, the other thing too, the parallel process right, so, what we talked about just a while ago about the, their struggling in supervision with having those clinical discussions and slowing things down, and it's always like, 'I gotta get through this, I gotta get through this,' you know? I'm being ... you know, there is the compliance, and we gotta ask these certain questions. But I feel it too, but I'm feeling it too when I am meeting with my managers. I feel it in supervision, they are so strapped for time, that's always in the back of my head and I think, when I first started in this position, 3.5 years ago, I'd meet for supervision with each of them, and it seemed to be much more relaxed, we'd take our time, and we'd have these discussions. And now I feel like I'm also rushing them because I don't want to take up too much of their time, they don't want to take up too much of my time. (Participant 21)*

A frontline supervisor shared their observation that with CPIN there came a strong emphasis on collecting data, sifting through statistics, and Meeting standards, with strong connections to the agency's reputation in the community, their reputation with the Ministry, and possible implications for funding. This supervisor also suggested that the negative consequence for the agency's reputation has the potential to impact the strength of support in the community for child welfare work and possibly could affect the funding from the Ministry. This manager also expressed concern for the difficulties that workers face as they try to navigate an increase in their work to be done within a finite (and often restrictive) time frame. The impact that comes from workers being continuously pushed to focus on documentation is clear, with less time focused on actually meeting clients:

*Our workers worry every day about meeting standards, about doing case notes, about seeing families. If I'm not, ... if I have to meet all my standards and get all my case notes in and make sure 'Safetys' are done within in 24 hours, everything is in so my manager can see it, and everyone going on duty is going to see it if there is an emergency, but I have a home visit at 2 p.m. on a Friday... What gives? Time with families. And so, if we're not seeing families ... as frequent, that's an issue. (Participant 19)*

A frontline supervisor shared this reflection about child welfare workers striking the right balance between attending to compliance driven documentation and direct contact with service recipients:

*I mean so, here's a good example... I have a protection worker on my team who meets all of our standards, has all of her departures in, and has all of her contacts... But what's the level of service she provides to her families? Then I've got another worker who pretty much does anything and everything for her families, .... will work seven days a week. If a kin caregiver ... texts her on the weekend, needs something, she's [the worker] off to the grocery store running it over so those kids are safe. ... She does amazing service, provides a lot of service. But ... [her paperwork is] something we have to work on every day because that's not her focus. But at the end of the quarter, I've got one worker who looks amazing, and QA (Quality Assurance) is really happy with her, and I've got a worker who looks like the crappiest worker in the world but is actually a better worker at keeping kids safe, ... but that might not be in there [the documentation]. You know, the*

*worker who provides excellent service but doesn't get it all into CPIN, doesn't tick all the boxes, doesn't do all her departures. I mean she... She really does the work, the service.*  
(Participant 3)

Participants from the executive levels expressed concerns that the focus on compliance was forcing a shift to the focus of the work, away from direct service and support to children and families, towards rigid standards and timeframes. There was a sense that the pressure on compliance was making it much more difficult for frontline workers to do the caring work, and they talked about how something has to give:

*There are workers though that, I mean the compliance sits there and they know they are being measured every month, and there's reports being produced ... to them it's the contact with their service users that is priority, but something's got to give... I mean they want to do it, like I ran into a worker the other day who stopped me in the hallway, we were chatting, and she said to me, 'I just came back from spending two and a half hours with a service user and I finally convinced her to go on methadone.' Like, this is a service worker that highly values the work, ... but I know that is going to cause problems for her [the worker] because you have to give up something.* (Participant 21)

### **6.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored some of the lived experiences of research participants who use CPIN in their working lives on a daily basis. CPIN was promoted to be an innovative, efficient, and ultimately necessary step towards 'modernizing' child welfare work. As is clear from the stories shared by participants, however, this was not what happened in practice. A participant in one of the first interviews I conducted concluded that CPIN does not live up to the various promises it has made, maintaining the practices of child welfare in a forward momentum towards an intensified neoliberal approach. One of the first interviews I conducted concluded with this participant comment about her experience of CPIN:

*I will leave you with one... you know if you have ever been to Florida and you have those people who try to sell you the condo, you know? They buy you breakfast and they bring*

*you into the big room, you know, they tell you all these wonderful things to sell you a timeshare and they get you to spend like, I don't know, like, twenty five thousand dollars in 15 minutes over a cheap breakfast. That is exactly what CPIN feels like... but we didn't even get a cheap breakfast. (Participant 2)*

From the stories shared by participants, I was able to gain some insights into the unintended consequences of this new system and the new approaches to child welfare work. For example, participants shared their understanding of the purpose of CPIN that embraced a narrow, decontextualized comprehension of this new approach to their professional work. Participants' understanding of clinical competencies has become intertwined with managerial discourses - akin to Griffith and Smith's (2014) identification of "accountability circuits" in the IE approach (p. 14). Participants in this research shared the ways they were navigating new tools and new processes. Using an IE lens, we can see that participants are describing ways that they are doing the 'work' of adapting to the new processes; they are doing the 'work' of responding to the chaos, changing their practices so that they can do the 'work' of demonstrating accountability to Ministry standards.

With the implementation of CPIN came some significant changes to ways that child welfare work is conceptualized. Changes in terminology brought about significant shifts to the ways that CPWs were asked to adapt their understanding and conceptualizations of the people they provide service to. They came with revised ways of providing these services, focused on compliance and strict standards. The structures within CPIN guide workers towards activities that are divided up into discrete, linear, mechanized, and sequestered tasks. With CPIN, child welfare workers are steered towards engaging with Registered Participants who are assigned numbered identifiers, shifting the CPWs away from thinking of service recipients as being part of larger groups such as families communities. My findings suggest that these changes in

language terminology and subsequent changes to the ways the child welfare work is conceptualized further entrench the previously existing discourses that dehumanize child welfare service recipients. The continuing and deepening of the dehumanization of service recipients makes it much easier for child welfare workers to approach their work in a mechanical, disconnected, and un-reflexive manner. Participants shared their experiences of the disruption and uncertainty of trying to adapt to and integrate the changes from CPIN. They shared their feelings of lacking competencies, of working to manage the massive changes on their own.

Participants shared their insights into their activities within this rigid, linear system, and the ways they put their energies into doing the work of adaption and accommodation. They shared their concerns that their interactions with service recipients have become less detailed, less personal, less meaningful, and much more focused on fulfilling various audit requirements. The ways that CPIN has integrated neoliberal rationalities, carrying forth commitments to cost-saving, efficiency, and documentation through accountability circuits, has become the *de facto* measurement of who is a good worker. With an intensified focus on accountability driven by Ministry standards, the regulatory gaze that has become entrenched into their work further limits their opportunities for meaningful helping interventions.

## Chapter 7: Closing Thoughts

This research sought a deeper understanding of mechanisms that maintain oppressive practices in child welfare in Ontario, examining some of the significant events of wide scale 'reform' and the repeated claims that the child welfare system in Ontario has been improved, the claims that child welfare has been made less oppressive and, as a result of the reforms, now provides increased safety and better services to children and their families. There is of course no singular, simplistic solution to the Gordian knot that is child welfare, and as such, this research project draws on a wide range of information that may at times seem disparate. By examining the foundational discourses and past events of reform as well as the more recent implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), some important insights emerge.

Child welfare is founded on ideas that are steeped in white supremacy, with its intrinsic narratives of child rescue and benevolence finding their roots in classist, racist, and elitist belief structures. Oppressive ideologies are baked into the DNA of child welfare discursive practices and governing texts, and consequently, into the mundane daily doings of child welfare practices. In a variety of ways child welfare practices have maintained the guiding ideas and foundational discourses from original child rescue/social reform projects described by Fortier and Wong (2019), Pon and colleagues (2011), and Swain and Hillel (2010). The ways that child welfare has adopted and carried the assumed role of benevolent helper has effectively obscured the ways that those original ideas of liberal social reform were steeped in colonization, racism, xenophobia, eugenics, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

The attachment to this construction of benevolence in social work (Chapman & Withers, 2019) is important to bear in mind when we consider the ways that child welfare work continues to engage in oppressive practices. I argue that it is this very attachment to the construction of the CPW as a benevolent actor that prevents a deep, authentic interrogation of oppressive practices. This holds for the macro perspective; the larger community of child welfare agencies that are comfortable embracing valorizing discourses to describe the work of child welfare have also been slow to engage in conversations about the ways that child protection practices are steeped in whiteness and as such continue to replicate systemic racism (Freymond et al., 2022). This is also observable at the micro level where many CPWs and other actors in the field are reluctant to acknowledge their attachment to the benevolent constructions, and as individuals, like me, we have difficulty coming to understand how our daily activities are complicit in harmful and oppressive systems (Freymond et al., 2022).

One of the ways this can be better understood is to consider the ways that the longstanding conflation of separation with safety has influenced child welfare discourses and practices; the notion that children are best served and only truly safe when they are removed from their ‘pathologically harmful’ parents, families, or communities. Echoes of this longstanding perspective, heartily embraced by early reformers like J.J. Kelso (Jones & Rutman, 1980), is still detectable in readings of the field’s governing texts, which prioritize attention to the individual child and the Paramount Purpose of child welfare legislation, while relegating support and prevention services to the realm of discretionary interventions or “mandate drift” (A. Koster, personal communication 2023). With some of the narratives of reform, there are declared aspirations of implementing services that would support families and prevent the

need for the removal of children. And yet, a clear commitment to making these kinds of services reliably entrenched in policy and practices have not been prioritized nor realized.

Early social work was seen as being a moral practice - a way to express benevolence, often alongside expressions of religiosity, while maintaining class and race power structures. These ideological underpinnings, strongly influenced by the liberal and positivist Enlightenment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remain widely embraced in child welfare spaces. These foundational constructs have been held as essential for the work of child welfare and have never been meaningfully challenged or dismantled. The emergence of risk discourses did not present an ideological conflict with foundational discourses but rather represented in many ways an intensification of those perspectives. Risk discourses provide support and justification of a social project to monitor and regulate groups of people who were perceived to represent a threat to established social structures based on race and class.

As child welfare legislation emerged and evolved, the underlying assumption that there is a need for 'legal' structures to regulate 'pathological' families has never wavered. While there have been some notable shifts between legislation that embraced "due process" and appeared to have embraced processes intended to protect parental rights, the legislation has always focused the community's attention on the moral and material failures of dysfunctional individuals and families (Bala, 2004; Barnhorst & Johnston, 1991; Chambers, 2007). This fundamentally obscures larger social and structural issues that contribute to inequitable distribution of resources that induce these avenues of marginalization.

The examination of texts currently informing child welfare practice in Ontario, including the Child Youth and Family Services Act (2017) and the Ontario Child Protection Standards

(2016), disputes claims that child welfare systems are working to address systemic racism. In Chapter 4, I argue that these claims of anti-racist or anti-oppressive practices are best understood as 'non-performative' (Ahmed, 2004a) or 'empty mentions' (Zerafa, 2020). In many ways, ideologies of whiteness remain woven throughout the legal and policy discourses inherent in these governing texts. In spite of clear information that the most effective way to ensure children's safety is to provide support and safety to their families, the current legislation continues to hold that kind of support to be a lower priority and ultimately as discretionary. Preventative interventions in the form of family and community support are not part of the child welfare system commitments. Further, policy and legislative documents deign collaborative supportive and preventative services as expendable in times of austerity and not part of primary accountability mechanisms.

Looking at data from my autoethnography, several themes emerge. My lived experience of working in the child welfare system in Ontario is characterized by discursive practices that maintain the dehumanizing constructions of child welfare service recipients. My lived experience is also simultaneously interspersed with valorizing discourses that function to distract attention away from the gaps in this system or the disjunctures, as well as to mask my and other CPW's complicity in practices that cause harm. CPWs work in an environment that rewards the ability to navigate multiple conflicting locations, such as benevolent helpers, as knowledgeable professionals, as strict 'accountable' bureaucrats, as hyper-exalted child rescuers, and as powerful agents of the state. CPWs are given limited resources to carry out their work and are expected to make potentially life altering decisions and work to impose services upon people who are rarely included in decision making. Most notably, CPWs work in a

system that is perennially beset by arbitrary time constructions; a set of restrictive temporalities that ensure there is little time or space to engage in critical reflections. This working environment is rife with chaos and fear, within which CPWs are subjected to a range of regulatory and disciplinary regimes, shepherding CPWs to embrace fear-based practices (Whittaker & Harvard, 2016) or defensive social work practices (Smith, 2011).

The ways that reforms have been imposed, and the demands that CPWs adapt, has exacerbated long-standing workplace issues. Various cycles of reform projects, particularly the shifts towards constructions of risk assessment and the intensified focus on compliance, have constrained the work in child welfare to increasingly narrowed temporalities, contributing to the inevitable adoption of mechanical and detached practices. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on measurement and audit activities, as the emergence of neoliberal discourses around the same time conflate regulatory measures and standardized practices with increased service quality and 'accountability'. With this focus on surveillance and monitoring, defensibility of service decisions has become prioritized over meaningful or practical interactions that families actually find helpful. Responses to working conditions, particularly related to intensity of workload, have not been meaningfully ameliorated by labour activism. These issues set the stage for the ways that CPWs have come to accept the rationalities and discursive practices embedded within CPIN as inevitable.

Participants in this research were very aware of and able to articulate the ways this new CPIN database system impacted their daily activities. From their descriptions, it was clear that this new approach to child protection work required increasingly mechanical and detached practices as a matter of occupational survival. Participants were not unaware of the

consequences, but neither did they describe significant resistance to these changes. I argue that the cyclical nature of imposed reforms in child welfare have made those who exist in those spaces inured and reconciled to policies and practices that are increasingly informed by risk and neoliberal discourses. CPIN was a difficult transition, significantly impactful to the CPWs who had no option but to work with this new system. There was a kind of resignation, an acceptance that this shift in practices was non-negotiable and unavoidable.

Given the complex and conflicting discourses that are also very present in these workspaces as discussed in Chapter 5, this resignation or acquiescence is not difficult to comprehend. CPWs work in an environment that is rife with dehumanizing discourses that function to provide a framework that rationalizes, supports, and justifies a detached, mechanistic, and superficial approach to intervention. Workers who veer away from these established perspectives and try to remain engaged in their work, those who attempt to apply a critical lens to their work, do so at considerable personal and professional risk. CPWs who ask for changes can face ridicule, social isolation, and a wide range of discipline.

The presence of valorizing discourses works in concert with dehumanizing discourses in child welfare spaces, drawing CPWs into these dichotomous engagements. They guide CPWs to remain compliant in spite of the many apparent contradictions, the moments of disjuncture, and disturbing evidence that the work has consequences and ‘inadvertently’ causes harm. The valorizing narratives of child rescue can be very enticing, and the temptation to engage in these discursive practices is difficult to resist.

These ways that child welfare work justifies its interventions can be quite appealing and compelling. I have experienced a strong sense of gratification when I was able to work on a case

where decisive action, such as the need to rush in and protect a child, was deemed necessary; it was profoundly validating. It is also interconnected to a kind of emotional engagement or moral capital, which I have termed *hyper exaltation*, that I witnessed most clearly related to events such as the Big Case. In these moments, many of those who work in child welfare including myself, develop a strong, emotional attachment to the deeply embedded narratives of benevolence and goodness as they become so-called heroes. Through discursive practices of hyper exaltation, workers' attachment to this power and authority is normalized, further deepened, and strengthened. After all, *heroes come in all forms*, and who doesn't want to be a hero?

Within this process, there is power. Once inculcated, CPWs are allowed or even encouraged to remain unaware of, detached, and distant from the consequences of oppressive practices that have been constructed to be a necessary part of child rescue under this guise of benevolence. In those uncommon moments when CPWs may become aware of their complicity in oppressive practice, they are guided and supported to rationalize those actions through the justifications of heroic work for the ideal citizen. The rationale that one is protecting a child is largely impervious to critique. To challenge current practices and interventions is seen as being naïve, or worse, akin to taking a pro-child abuse or pro-neglect stance.

Aside from the mechanisms that encourage detached practices, there is also the lesser known, rarely discussed ways that within the child welfare system, dissent or questioning is managed through various forms of discipline. This discipline can include ways that racialized CPWs are silenced, excluded, or (re)constructed to dissuade critique of the power relationships they endure in child welfare (Freymond et al., 2022; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Kikulwe, 2014).

Racialized CPWs who identify systemic racism, oppressive practices, and tokenizing gestures face questions about their credentials, exclusion from policy and decision-making discussions, and a denial of professional promotions or further employment (Badwall, 2014; Freymond et al., 2022; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Kikulwe, 2014). These disciplinary regimes can also be observed in the ways that CPWs who do speak out about oppressive practices can become pathologized through the various (dis)ableist and sanist (Perlin, 1992, 1999) constructions of burnout, compassion fatigue, professional boundary issues, and other dismissive and discrediting narratives. In some situations, the CPW who asks the wrong questions, one who attempts to engaged in a critical approach, can face discipline in a variety of ways, including the practices of punitive managerialism.

Punitive managerialism is a repertoire of castigatory strategies, commonly rationalized as a means to achieve compliance with a higher level of service standards and institutional quality assurance. These strategies are intimately tied to neoliberal concepts of efficiencies, which ask workers to serve and behave in ways that correspond to specific organizational bureaucracies and interpretations of professional and administrative accountabilities. Punitive managerialism can have pernicious effects as the focus of the discipline is targeted to the CPW but can cause profound harms to service recipients from a distance as these effects trickle down.

As with many emotional relationships, when power is challenged, there is often a strong and visceral emotional response. In my experience of voicing a challenge to the position of authority and goodness, even in the small ways that I did, I was met with perplexing ferocity and merciless discipline. However, upon deeper reflection, the same can be said about the

experiences of families involved with the child welfare system. They too probably wondered why they were being treated with such violence and 'perplexing ferocity'. It is very likely that they too wondered why they were not afforded support and grace. They would likely be left to wonder why they weren't they given the resources they need to succeed. As I tried to process my experiences, it was not enough for this well-oiled system to be rid of me; rather, it was deemed necessary to annihilate me; to destroy my confidence, impugn my reputation, damage my credibility, and eliminate my potential influence. As I ponder my sense of 'being annihilated' I must also look at the many ways that families likely felt destroyed and annihilated by my actions and the actions of my agency. I am left to ponder why it took the work of this research for me to be able to make space to consider these ideas.

From my direct observations, in a work environment suffused with anxiety and fear, punitive managerialism seemed to be one of many effective ways to regulate CPWs who are deemed to be non-complaint. These restrictive surroundings help to foster the unquestioning adherence to established patterns we see so often in these spaces.

The events I described are such a small sample, such a small picture of the daily doings and functionings of this system. The benevolent and heroic façade, the proclamations of the adoption of anti-racist, anti-oppressive approaches mask the ways that whiteness and white supremacy continue to function and inform child welfare practices. The endurance of these practices relates to the deeply held emotional attachments to power, prestige, and goodness believed to be inherent in child welfare work. Doing a deep interrogation of my complicity in violence is difficult and painful. It is so much easier to cling to the construction of our work as

heroic and beneficent. Oppressive practices will change very little if we are not able to admit to and interrogate these relationships.

Chapter 6 is an examination of the implementation of CPIN and how this event is similar to other reform events of the past. When CPIN was introduced and subsequently implemented, issues and difficulties presented almost immediately. However, throughout its initial period of implementation and use, CPIN was implemented without critical analysis and accepted with little evidence of resistance. People within the system accepted the narratives of neoliberal responsabilization and implied worker culpability. Participants accepted that CPWs were to blame for the death of Jeffrey Baldwin, and that CPIN was the answer to the problems that lead to his death. Though the circumstances that contributed to Jeffrey's death were complex, the failure to check historical file records has been accepted by most as the primary reason for that terrible outcome.

What is often muted in the analysis of Jeffrey's death is the stark reality that child welfare interventions have most often focused on removal – separation is equated with safety. The chronic lack of resources including the resource of time to engage with families, ensure that interventions rarely focus on prevention or support services to parents. If the child welfare system had recognized the intergenerational trauma that Jeffrey's family had endured, if their historical hardships and enduring poverty had been addressed in any way, the trajectory of Jeffrey's life likely would have been very different (Choate, 2017). If the CPWs who had been assigned to work with the Baldwin family had the time to engaged in a meaningful relationship with Jeffrey's parents, they would have been better able to comprehend the consequences of colonialism, anti-Indigenous racism, and chronic poverty.

The issues that relate to child welfare temporalities is crucial in the Baldwin matter. The CPWs involved were never given the resource of time to review the family records. Workers are not given the time to come to 'know' their families, especially those families with significant historical contacts such as the Bottineau-Baldwins. It is ironic that CPIN was promoted as the answer to past tragic deaths such as that of Jeffrey Baldwin, but this research has found that CPIN has simply changed the format of files or records, from paper to digital. The attempt to 'modernize' child welfare systems have not changed the obstacles for CPWs to access historical documents; the information about family history is as difficult as ever to access. The very same time-constrained working conditions that were identified as a contributing factor in Jeffrey's death remain and possibly have been worsened with the implementation of CPIN.

Participants in this research brought this forward both as a concern about the intensified workload and the impact on timeliness of work, but also as a concern that details of a family history could easily be lost, even for a family that is "born in CPIN" (or a family where there was no contact prior to CPIN). In in the course of this research, I was able to observe this directly as I watched an agency attempting to manage a complex case that originated in a different jurisdiction. This situation I observed, involved workers from across the agency, including the after-hours team, Kinship workers, supervisors, and CPIN experts from two different agencies working to try to make sense of it. CPIN's bureaucratic rigidity provided numerous 'points of failure', numerous ways that 'mistakes' could be made by CPWs. I observed how CPWs, and supervisors struggled to find the minor errors of data entry, that created cumulative administrative issues in the hours and days following the case opening. These were, in effect, tiny issues, but ones that sidelined documentary work for *days* and were

extremely difficult to identify and resolve. In the situation that I observed, children had been removed 'after hours', placed with kin, moved again, were the subject of a court application, and other occurrences. All of this work, spanning only one full week, were filed in multiple occurrences, under the names of different Registered Participants, with very little information available in the database. It was extremely difficult to make sense of. As with Jeffrey Baldwin's death, it was not only the way the material was collected and stored, but also the lack of time for CPWs to access and make sense of the information.

Despite the original stated intentions of improving safety for children, it is not clear if CPIN has succeeded. With CPIN, the most significant change participants emphasized was the shift from hardcopy files that are difficult to navigate and locate, to digital files that are difficult to navigate and locate. The implementation of CPIN has meant that CPWs have less time to engage with child welfare service recipients, less time to develop helping relationships and less time to make sense of the information CPWs must process. CPIN was seen as a solution to the circumstance that resulted in Jeffrey Baldwin's death. However, with the implementation of CPIN, current CPWs have less time and fewer resources to help complicated, deprived, and traumatized families like the Bottineau/Kidman/Baldwin family. As White (1998) noted, it is not the crisis that leads to a lack of time to do the work in child welfare, but the lack of time that creates a perception of crisis.

Amidst the literature that suggests CPWs defend against burnout and emotional exhaustion by embracing relational distance and a depersonalized view of service recipients (Stalker et al., 2007), I argue that the child welfare system as it is structured at this time, in fact *requires* this detachment of CPWs. They must accept the imposed, neoliberal-informed

temporalities, continue to work in the context of limited resources, intensive scrutiny, cost-effective efficiency, and within temporalities that keep them distant from the families they work with. CPWs are therefore drawn into systems of surveillance, time pressure, dehumanization, moralizing and fear, and so on. I argue that workers cannot do anything other than apply this distant and dehumanized approach in the aftermath of CPIN. Where CPWs are saturated with the threat of inquest, audits, and a variety of professional disciplines, the current working context leaves little room for authentic relational work.

CPWs are drawn into this system with narratives of benevolence that mask many of the most egregious consequences of the work, so that those who are engaged in this project can feel reassured that they continue to occupy a site of goodness. Practitioners, managers, and policy makers who are part of this system can rely on the narratives of good intentions to absolve those in the higher echelons of decision makers from culpability. This system guides and nurtures workers towards compliance, silences frontline workers who may stray from the scripted processes and punishes CPWs who dissent.

I am grateful to the people who participated in my research, they were earnest and forthcoming with their experiences and their perspectives. I have no reason to doubt that they are kind people who genuinely want to do right by their clients. I was once one of them; I heard them, I saw how much they care and how much they want to make a positive difference in the world through their work with children and families.

I have also come to understand that the mechanisms within this system actively prevent frontline workers from being able to do the work they want to do. It fundamentally prevents them from developing relationships, from seeing the full humanity of service recipients, from

seeing the ways that the services are not helpful, from feeling the effects of the oppressiveness of the work processes, and from being able to conceive of different ways to provide service and aid. This system has evolved to regulate service recipients, who are systemically constructed as “risky people” in need of monitor and policing. It has also needed to evolve systems that function to regulate, monitor, and police those who work at the frontlines. This system has evolved in these ways, to carry on this work without meaningful change and to do so, it needs to manufacture ‘bad workers.’

This project emerged from the ashes of my child welfare career and was a way for me to make sense of profoundly troubling experiences. I am hoping that this work provides some insights into this underlying question; if we know this system is not working to keep children and their families safe – why is this system so resistant to meaningful change? What keeps us here? My hope is that this work will provide an example for interrogating these complex power relationships. This is an attempt to demonstrate a process of unpacking our own experiences, to examine the violence that is often deeply infused in our daily activities – those activities that seem so normalized that we often forget to ask questions. This work seeks to contribute to critical social work through the demonstration of one way to examine our own complicity in oppressive systems. This is not the only way, nor am I certain that this is the best way. However, this is but one way to interrogate the ways we are complicit in, and the ways we ultimately maintain violent and oppressive systems and practices.

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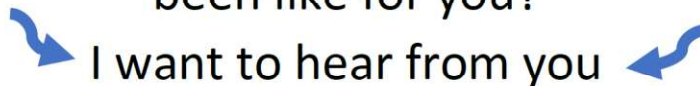
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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Recruitment Poster

# HOW DO YOU WORK WITH CPIN?

What has the change to CPIN  
been like for you?

 I want to hear from you

My name is **Joanne Azevedo**, I am a PhD student who is researching the impact and effects of CPIN on how work gets done in child welfare. I have many years experience on child protection, so I understand how difficult work in child welfare can be. CPIN is a very important policy change and I want to hear about your experiences. What have the changes been like for you since your agency has “gone live” with CPIN?  
Has CPIN changed how child welfare work is done in Ontario?

Your agency has agreed to let us do this research on paid work time. I will be asking you questions about how you have adapted to this new system and how this has changed how you do your work. Your answers will be kept confidential. No matter how you feel about CPIN, this is an opportunity to express your opinions without fear. If you prefer to do this outside of work, we can do that too. Anyone who chooses to participate outside of work time, will be offered a \$50 gift card as a token of thanks.

Questions? Interested? Want to know more? Call me or send me an email, all inquires kept confidential

Send an email to [jazevedo@yorku.ca](mailto:jazevedo@yorku.ca)  
Please put “**Research Study: Working with CPIN**” in the subject heading  
Or call me, **Joanne Azevedo – 416-898-4172**

I will be in Thunder Bay and the district offices over the week of April 30 to May 4<sup>th</sup>

# THANK YOU!

## **Appendix B – Information and Consent Forms**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **Study name:**

*An Institutional Ethnography review of changes to work process for the child welfare field, in Ontario since the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)*

#### **Researcher:**

Joanne Azevedo, Doctoral Candidate, [jazevedo@yorku.ca](mailto:jazevedo@yorku.ca), 416-898-4172

Supervisor: Dr. Wendy McKeen, [wmckeen@yorku.ca](mailto:wmckeen@yorku.ca)

School of Social Work  
Faculty of Liberal Arts  
and Professional Studies  
York University  
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON  
M3J 1P3

#### **Purpose of the research:**

This research seeks to observe the changes in frontline child welfare work processes since the publication of reports from the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW) and the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN). This research seeks to trace and map out how these amended policies and procedures have or have not effected change to front-line child welfare practices.

#### **What you will be asked to do in the research:**

You will be asked to allow the researcher to observe you for several hours (2 to 4 max) as you go through their normal work processes during the course of a normal work day, where you are using CPIN. Observations will be only of you and will not include face to face contacts with CAS clients. Observations are of the work processes and will not include any information about specific child welfare clients.

You will then be invited to participate in an semi-structured interview, approximately 30 to 60 minutes long wherein you will be asked to recall your experiences as CPIN was rolled out, implemented, and in the period since it “went live”.

You will be asked to direct the researcher to documents, such as training manuals, policy memos, discussion papers and so on, that may provide more detailed information about how you experienced of these changes.

### **Risks and discomforts:**

This research will probe the experiences of working with CPIN. It is likely that not all Child Welfare staff have had an entirely positive or pleasant experience with this new work process.

You may feel uncomfortable if you wish to discuss ideas or opinions that are not congruent with current ministry or agency policies or perspectives. You may feel unsure of what you can share within the current professional or political context and you may feel unsafe to share certain information. For your safety and comfort, you can refuse to respond to any question you wish, at any time. You can terminate your involvement and can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you withdraw from the research, any information you have shared to that point will be removed from the dataset and destroyed. There will be no consequence to you, no reprisal from the researcher, your employer or from York University.

If you chose to participate, and if you share sensitive information, you will be fully informed as to the steps that will be taken by the researcher to protect your information and your identity. No identifying information about your participation in this study will be shared with anyone other than the principal researcher. No information about your participation will be shared with your current or future employer except in the anonymous format of the final dissertation or other published works that will ultimately be in publicly accessible document.

*For those participants who are sanctioned by their employer;* this research is being conducted with the support and permission of your child welfare agency. Participation in this research will be done on work time, and your employer has provided a commitment that no information gathered in the course of this research will ever be used for performance appraisal or for disciplinary purposes. There will be no risk of reprisal and no financial expense to you.

In addition to the protections provided by your employer, all responses by participants that are included in the final dissertation, summaries or discussions or other publications will be presented in a manner that is anonymous and non-identifying, unless you have given expressed permission and signed an additional consent to waive your anonymity.

*For those participants who are participating in this research outside of their workplace and not within a formal agency arrangement;* No identifying information about your participation in this study will be shared with anyone other than the principal researcher. No information about your participation will be shared with your current or future employer except in the anonymous format of the final dissertation or other published works that will ultimately be in publicly accessible documents.

### **Benefits of the research and benefits to you:**

This research will give you a chance to voice your opinions, experiences and ideas about the implementation and functions of CPIN. This research will provide policy makers, legislators and educators a better understanding of the consequences and experiences that are related to broad changes to front line work processes. The insights you share in this research may provide a clearer view of what has been successful as well as possibly illuminating situations where change has not been successful.

This research could provide valuable insights about the unintended or unanticipated consequences of changes to policies and workplace processes. Your contributions may provide your employer with some insights into their staff experiences and may possibly provide for some positive changes to your workplace.

**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 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, or with York University. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed and not included in the final research publications.

**Confidentiality:**

The information shared by any participant will be kept in strictest confidence and no information that could identify any participant will be included within the final dissertation or any other publication that comes from this research.

The researcher will ask your permission to audio record your interview. You can decline to be audio recorded and still participate in the study. If you agree to audio recording, any and all communication between you and the researcher that is audio recorded and transcribed will be held in the strictest confidence and safeguarded with encrypted password protection.

If you decline the audio recording, the researcher will take handwritten notes. All hand-written notes will be stored in a locked cabinet that can only be accessed by the primary researcher, Joanne Azevedo.

All digital forms of the data will be held in encrypted files that are password protected and stored on one desktop computer owned by the researcher. The only person who will have access to these hard copy and digital files will be the principal researcher, Joanne Azevedo.

**“Member Check-in”**

To further ensure that no information can be inadvertently connected with any participant, you will have an opportunity to review the data analysis and written description of the data prior to publication. If you feel that confidentiality is not maintained, you can request changes, deletions or amendments up to and including removal from the research, prior to the findings being published in any form.

The data that is gathered in this study will be the sole possession of the researcher. Your employer, and your agency will not have any ownership of this data. Your employer will not have any access to any raw (potentially identifying) data. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the research?**

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the principal researcher Joanne Azevedo either by telephone at (416)898-4172, or by e-mail [jazevedo@yorku.ca](mailto:jazevedo@yorku.ca). You may also contact research supervisor Dr. Wendy McKeen at [wmckeen@yorku.ca](mailto:wmckeen@yorku.ca)

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, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)”

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in ***An Institutional Ethnography review of work process changes in the child welfare field, in Ontario since the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) Study*** conducted by *Joanne Azevedo*. 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.

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

**Optional: Additional consent**

- I consent to use of audio recording,
- I consent to waive anonymity

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

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Appendix C – Interview Guide***

### **Interview Guide**

1. Briefly describe your work experience within child welfare. What is your current role in child welfare? What were other roles you have had in the past?
2. We will be talking most about CPIN and how this has impacted your work processes. Can we start with your understanding of CPIN? What do you know about CPIN? Why was CPIN developed? What are the main objectives of CPIN?
3. In a very general way, do you think the implementation of CPIN has been successful? Have the original goals or objectives been achieved?
4. What training have you taken in the last 2 years? Please describe training related to CPIN but also any training that was not CPIN focused.
5. Briefly describe, without using client names or identifying information, what you were working on during the time I was observing you. When you describe this task, please share with me how this task fits in with other tasks you do in your role.
6. Describe for me why these tasks needed to be done. How does this fit in the larger system? Why are these tasks important? For whom are they important?
7. What are the consequences, formal and informal, if this work is not done? For the service recipients? For the agency? For the Ministry? For you?
8. Describe the moments, in your experience when with working with CPIN where the new system has made your job, your daily tasks or the work of child welfare easier, more efficient or more effective. Can you provide a specific example (without using client names or identifying information)?
9. Describe the moments, in your experience of working with CPIN where it has been difficult, frustrating, inefficient or ineffective. Can you provide a specific example (without using client names or identifying information)?
10. What was the response, from you, the agency or the ministry, to these situations what CPIN was not working as intended? (without using client names or identifying information)

11. Has the implementation of CPIN changed how you do your work? What do you do now that you did not do before? Are there tasks, roles, practices or projects that you no longer do, no longer need to do or are unable to do since CPIN was implemented?
12. What brings you to child welfare work? Within child welfare work, what are the ideals, values or issues that matter most to you?
13. Without using client names or identifying information, can you describe times when you have felt successful, proud of, gratified by or rewarded by your work?
14. Without using client names or identifying information, can you describe times when you have felt unsuccessful, discouraged or disconnected from your work?
15. When you feel these moments of disconnection, what do you do about it?
16. Where does Anti-oppressive practice (AOP), Feminist Practice, Anti-Racist Practice and Decolonizing practices fit in to your work? Can you provide a specific example (without using client names or identifying information)?
17. In your experience, is there institutional support, from the Ministry, from your employer or from your colleagues do to Anti-oppressive, Feminist, Anti-Racist and Decolonizing social work? Can you provide a specific example (without using client names or identifying information)?
18. In your experience, has there been any form of institutional interference, from the Ministry, from your employer or from your colleagues do to Anti-oppressive, Feminist, Anti-Racist and Decolonizing social work? Can you provide a specific example (without using client names or identifying information)?
19. Are there policies, processes or practices that you have observed that encourage or discourage Anti-oppressive, Feminist, Anti-Racist and Decolonizing social work?
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about, anything related to your work processes, CPIN and any social work or child welfare practices that I should consider in this study?

# *Heroes Come in All Forms*

We are proud of our long history of leadership in protecting children. Our

*He who*

commitment to the provision of quality service to protect children and

*helps*

strengthen families is paramount. Knowing that our dedication makes a real

*a child,*

impact to so many makes it all worthwhile. We provide a lively and

*helps*

progressive work environment that enables you to pursue your professional

*humanity.*

goals. If you are looking to make a difference in the lives of children,

read on...



## Sky's the Limit

We have the largest number of child protection workers in North America. Our workers have a vast array of opportunities to develop their skills. It's easy and rewarding to spend an entire career here.

Front line positions are always available in intake, family service and children's service at any of 6 locations throughout the city.

We may also have openings for:

- Residential Child & Youth Workers
- Legal positions
- Management
- Administrative Support

## Getting You Trained

In addition to on-the-job-training, we offer competency training through the provincial Ontario Child Protection Training Program.

Workers can return to school to increase their qualifications and progress through a series of jobs within the Society.

## Dependable and Bendable

Flexible time arrangements are encouraged wherever possible to accommodate client needs, services, office coverage and employee needs. The Society expects workplace practices regarding time management to be family friendly.

We allow our employees the convenience of occasionally working from home and dressing casually at work.

Bend and stretch...the Society also has a job share program where two staff can share a position and benefits equally.

## Employee Assistance Program

The Society, working in conjunction with Warren Shepell, offers a wealth of services including confidential, short-term counseling services to employees and their families. Additionally, they will debrief Society staff in the aftermath of a work related trauma.




- Dental 100% reimbursement
- Extended Health 80% to 100% reimbursement
- Life Insurance
- AD&D
- Vision care
- Para Medical coverage
- Semi-private hospital coverage as well as combination short-term and long-term sick leave plans
- OMERS Pension Plan
- Generous provisions for pregnancy and parental leaves
- 20 days of vacation after one year of service; 3 special leave days; 42 hours for personal needs; and 10 statutory holidays per year



Breath easy...the Society is vitally interested in the health and safety of its employees and makes every effort to provide a safe, healthy work environment that is free from harassment. Seven (7) local Health & Safety Committees work diligently to meet their obligations under the Ontario Health & Safety Act in a manner that respects the unique work environment of child welfare.




CUPE Local 2316 is an equal partner in the negotiation of the terms and conditions of the collective agreement. The Union represents its members, should differences arise, related to the interpretation, application and administration of the Collective Agreement. Joint Union/ Management Committees have addressed issues related to health, safety and workload and have developed processes for working from home along with other alternate dispute resolutions.



Do you have the "Right Stuff"  
to work in child welfare?

If so, please send your resume and cover letter by e-mail, fax or mail, to:



Human Resources  
Children's Aid Society of Toronto  
4211 Yonge Street, Suite 400  
Toronto, Ontario M2P 2A9  
E-mail: [hr@TorontoCAS.ca](mailto:hr@TorontoCAS.ca)  
Tel: (416) 924-4646  
Fax: (416) 324-2375

We thank you for your interest; however,  
only candidates selected for an interview will be contacted.

Check [www.TorontoCAS.ca](http://www.TorontoCAS.ca) for up-to-date information on available jobs  
and more details on the working environment We value diversity and we encourage  
applicants from diverse cultures and backgrounds to apply.

## Appendix E – Workflow Diagram, Desk Guide

Page 1:



Last updated by: CPIN Trainers

Date: Dec 27, 2017

Intake Workflow Continued	
<b>Enter Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go to the Participants tab, Relationships page and choose New.</li><li>• Complete relationships for the participants.</li><li>• Note: If the date of the relationship start date is not known or not obvious (eg. date of birth for parents and children) then choose the date of referral.</li></ul>
<b>Enter Allegations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allegations are entered specific to child and alleged maltreater. You must enter separate allegations for each child at risk of maltreatment.</li><li>• Choose the appropriate Eligibility Spectrum Code (Note: You may choose a code below the line for the purposes of completing a community link.)</li><li>• From the Allegations tab, click New and complete information as needed. In the description comment box, write a brief summary justifying the ES code given to the case. There is no need to retype the referral narrative.</li></ul>
<b>Record Checks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Until all agencies are on CPIN, you must perform both CPIN and Fast Track searches for all participants.</li><li>• Record the results from all searches in a contact log using the record check template. Refer to the record checks tip sheet for more information.</li><li>• Ensure purposes "Child Welfare Check – Provincial and Internal" are selected. A separate contact log with the purpose of CAR check is required for people that require child abuse registry checks.</li></ul>
<b>Capture Referral and Disposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• From the Disposition page, click on the list actions icon and select Capture.</li><li>• Complete disposition, response time, and select a closure reason (documentation complete).</li><li>• Document any domestic violence, worker safety, and CAR sections.</li><li>• Choose Submit when all information is complete.</li><li>• When the intake is approved, the case will close. The exception is a disposition of "Community Link" or "No Direct Client Contact/Information Only." These cases will not close once disposition is approved but will need to be manually closed after approval. (See community link workflow for more details on Community Links).</li><li>• If case is moving to investigation or OCW, the newly created case will remain in the intake worker's case list until reassignment.</li></ul>