**BEYOND THE WORKSHOP: UNDERSTANDING HOW NEW WORKER TRAINING INFLUENCES THE APPLICATION OF NEGLECT BY FRONTLINE C.A.S. WORKERS**

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**Abstract**

Little attention has been paid in Canadian Child Welfare research to the role that training plays in engaging new workers as they enter the complex role of child protection. Focusing on learning principles such as child neglect and working with an ethno-racial Other, it was important to understand what workers took away from their engagement in training and how this was implemented in practice. A mixed methods approach using critical analysis of the OACAS Handouts was used to inform the Semi Structured Interviews conducted with frontline C.A.S. workers. Critical Race Analysis provides theoretical foundation to understand how the ethno-racial other is perceived and enacted in discourse that workers take away into practice.

Findings suggest that C.A.S. workers have a conflicted view of training due to the nature and context in which they practice. Aside from the benefits of training, workers have a lot to say about how it could be structured in order to benefit practice. Workers also have complex and conflicting views on neglect, some of which are learned through training and then exacerbated through practice. Workers practice principles on engaging with an ethno-racial other was not influenced through training, but through their own learning processes as influenced by practice and earlier education. These factors relating to child welfare workers can help influence future training within C.A.S. organizations across Canada.

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**Chapter 1. Introduction**

I was in Grade 4 when it happened. I could not remember why she was there and recall feeling confused. Did we know her? Mom and Dad do not know any Chinese people, I thought. She was invited in and sitting on the couch; I remember Dad being so nervous that he could not sit down. I hovered behind their bodies and voices, trying to understand. After she left, my parents strictly told me not to write about the family in my school journal.

It was not until I was a young adult that I recall my memory being told as a story by my parents. We were at a family friend’s house and talking about Canadian social services. Their description, as vivid as I described earlier, had much more detail than mine. The woman, a social worker, had been sent to my home because my school teacher was nervous about something I had written in my school journal about arguing with my sister. As they told the story, my parents spoke about their anxiety, the unexpected surveillance in a school activity, and how grateful they were for having an “Asian” worker. She had assured them of her understanding, of how she had seen similar scenarios with newly immigrant families, and how to prevent the same scenario from happening again. As they told their story, they spoke with the same undertone of fear that was present on that day.

The knowledge underpinning my justification for research comes primarily from my lived experience as a person of colour and as a social worker; from the values I uphold as a woman, immigrant, person of my age and social class, a person who is able bodied and heterosexual. Inherent within the previous sentence is a critical refection on personal and professional power and situating myself within the analysis of power. My understanding of and focus on race comes from experiences like the story above, where the dominant story is of what it means to be a normal Canadian family. It is an experience of the dominant story of Whiteness that is unlabelled, unnamed, and goes unnoticed.

Being a former practicum student and employee within child welfare frame the lens, and experience, from which I approach research, critical thought, and critical questioning of social work practice. Before employment, I was a 4th year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) practicum student within the same agency. Unlike some peers who had practicum placements with the British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Services (MCFD) I did not receive any structured, formal training to introduce myself to child welfare practice. I often questioned whether I had been left out of receiving knowledge that would be vital to working with children and families. I questioned the differences in training and I wondered if our perspectives on practice, coming out of training, had changed us and how we worked in any way.

The research questions were formed out of an accumulation of ideas and experiences. My most recent experience, within an Indigenous Child Welfare Agency helped me situate myself within an existing passion for the rights of parents, families, and children in care. The underpinnings of this passion include a deep, personal value-based, belief that children belong with families and that society has created structures which sometimes prevent this from taking place. This belief has then been corroborated by the many experiences which I have been privileged to witness; of parents, of families, of youth in care. Their voices, often distorted or unheard, within the larger child welfare system provide the foundation for my theoretical approach to research. Even the word “research” has implications in reference to power dynamics that I am uncomfortable with. However, research, in my opinion, provides critical insight to pursue social action and change.

When I started reading and speaking to people about my research interests, it became clear that there was limited information in the existing research in regards to training, race, and neglect in Canadian child welfare. I became curious about how new frontline child protection workers experienced the training they received. That curiosity was paralleled with questions on how training informed new child protection workers’ practices as they engaged with children and families of different racial backgrounds and how neglect, one of the highest forms of maltreatment, was understood in practice (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).

In order for the research questions to come to light, a deeper reflection needed to take place; an intertwined analysis that took into account being the subject of a child welfare investigation, becoming a social worker, and being trained as a child welfare worker. My personal experience of training led me down a path of inquisitive interrogation, one that questioned whether New Worker Training principles were reaching their potential when implemented in practice. This process of interrogation led to the following research questions:

1. How do Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts influence child protection workers’ understanding and application of child neglect?
2. How do Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts inform frontline C.A.S. workers’ practice in engaging and working with racialized families?
3. How do Ontario Children’s Aid workers understand the themes emerging from Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts in their encounters with racialized families? Are they effective? How do they mitigate their understandings of neglect?

**Epistemology**

I am driven by an understanding of the world through the eyes of a person of race and colour. I understand the concepts of ‘race’ to be a social construction and ‘whiteness’ as societal organizations that are in place to uphold this construction (Yee, 2005). Through my academic experiences, I have been drawn to and implicated by Critical Race Theory (CRT), a subsection of Critical Social Science that focuses on the individual, community, and nationwide implications of race and racism as a pervasive societal feature (Ahmed, 2007; Dei, 2003; Yee, 2005). This lens informs the approach, understanding, analysis, and discussion of the research assignment.

My understanding and application of CRT rests on three main concepts: Whiteness, ‘Race’, and ‘Other’. Seidman (2013) draws on two concrete ways in which the term Other is presented within an analysis of the politics of difference. The first is the Other as a non-normative status, one that occupies a different, subordinate position (Seidman, 2013). Here, Seidman (2013) uses the comparative examples of women as other to men, and the Arab Muslim as other to the European Christian. The second is the Other as a unique cultural status, one of an outsider or a social threat (Seidman, 2013). This second analysis of the Other is indicative of a psycho-social and cultural embodiment of danger (Seidman, 2013). My analysis of the term is also related to the experiences and orientations created by colonialism which perpetuates a white gaze onto a colonized, racial other (Ahmed, 2007). Seidman (2013) does not explicitly correlate the term Other to signify racial difference but cites race as being a particular type of othering that can take place. This term will henceforth be used as a signifier of cultural difference.

CRT challenges the modes, structures, behaviours, and institutional reproduction of privilege as presented through Whiteness by attempting to make aware and make present the same privilege that is taken for granted (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003; Yee, 2005). Those who study Whiteness as an operative term explain how it is not solely attributed to the colour of one’s skin, but “…a form of hegemony that allows one group to use its power to dominate a group in a position of less power” (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003, p.102). Power is inherent in silence as people’s ability to be aware of, notice, and then start to question status quo and privilege is limited (Yee, 2005). Through the use of presumptive language, White as being the referential norm, and White as being the dominant vantage point, the individual mechanisms of Whiteness work together in order to maintain the status quo (Barn, 2007; Dei, 2003; Yee, 2005). In hopes of understanding privilege where it operates, one must name Whiteness as a functional term (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003; Yee, 2005).

Ahmed describes Whiteness as “…an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they take up space” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 150). Her analysis suggests that Whiteness assumes dominance on its own, an effect of being made concrete or ‘reified’ which it allows to happen over time (Ahmed, 2007). Ahmed (2007) suggests that orienting Whiteness as a phenomenon allows us to look at how Whiteness is experienced without assuming that it is an ontological given. She argues that, through this lens, Whiteness can be an orientation where human bodies are the medium for transmission (Ahmed, 2007). In this regard, the body itself does not need to be white for Whiteness to be inherited in history, and “…reproduced by being seen as a form of positive residence: as if it were a property of persons, cultures, and places” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 154).

Within CRT and studies of Whiteness, there is shared understanding that race does not have an ontological meaning (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). However, race does have epistemological ground as something which has been created for the purpose of science and to enact a social location (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Therefore, race does exist but only because it has been created. In Canada, the Multicultural Policy of 1971 took an alternative approach by recognizing diversity, in comparison to assimilationist style policies of other Western nations that had high rates of immigration. This contributed to a shift from race relations to understanding the ethno-racial neighbour and integrating personal knowledge of cultural practices and ways of being into one’s professional qualifications (Calliste, Dei & Belkhir, 1995; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Although racial inequity remained the same, the term race was substituted in Canadian rhetoric by discourses of ethno-racial, ethnicity, and culture (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). This critical perspective of race in Canada is important to consider because of the manner in which it presents the Other. Although the language behind multiculturalism offers an equal slate, it simultaneously asserts dominance through a White understanding of the Other (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003).

The discourse around the ‘Other’, legitimized through policies and legislation, is prevalent in social work organizations on an individual, communities, and national scale (Yee, 2005). The concept of the Other is crucial as it is the product of Whiteness. As Whiteness is presented as the norm, then anything deviant from the norm is the Other (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Drawing from Fanon, Ahmed (2007) describes this process as ‘being not’; an equation of humanity to being white where to be not white is ‘being not’. In being not, the racialized body is oriented in a way that places certain things out of its inherent, historical reach, making bodily movement harder to achieve (Ahmed, 2007). Ahmed (2007) highlights how the Other is constructed and renewed as such within movement by nature of being stopped and questioned. “Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing?” (Ahmed, 2007, p.161). It does not matter who is doing the questioning, but the act of questioning itself asserts that there is a precedent of norm that the Other has interrupted, disrupted, and that must be made aware (Ahmed, 2007). The questioning of the Other is okay as long as the norm, the mainstream, the Whiteness is never questioned (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003).

Critical to CRT is its applicability within institutional settings (Ahmed, 2007; Barn, 2007; Dei, 2003; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Ahmed talks about institutions as being defined by the relation to some bodies and not others; taking “…the shape of ‘what’ resides within them” (Ahmed, 2008, p.157). She explains how organizations embody Whiteness as a product of repetitive decision making over a consistent period of time, including strategic placement of resources and recruitment of persons (Ahmed, 2007). Ahmed’s analysis of recruitment, influenced by Althusser, is suggestive of a renewal within an institution, where individuals come together to work as one ‘body’ and to inhabit that body (Ahmed, 2007). Therefore, the institution recruits in its own image. This reflects a ‘good likeness’ where individuals, whether white or not, eventually have to inhabit Whiteness in order to be effectively recruited (Ahmed, 2007). Yee and Dumbrill (2003) suggest that a consequence of institutional Whiteness can be race evasion, where institutions fail to recognize race in service delivery, but also within their own organizational structure.

It is my opinion that a critical understanding of the implications of race has been dismantled under the existing dominance of ‘Whiteness’ as a political and policy based entity within the child welfare system. The purpose to viewing the research questions within this particular critical theoretical lens is due to the existing and growing diverse body of racialized (non-Indigenous and non-Caucasian) communities within Canada and the significant gap in research to address how training has larger implications on the Child Welfare system as a whole. I argue that the manner in which the Other is constructed in child welfare has inherent assumptions of norms, standards, and appropriate practices in caring for children. A review of existing literature is crucial as race, neglect, and training have been separately evaluated and questioned in an array of child welfare research.

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

**Introduction**

Child welfare research and writings have consistently focused on the issue of abuse and neglect in recent history. Although the terms “abuse and neglect” are often paired together, such as in the Canadian Incidence Studies of Abuse and Neglect (CIS), they are two very different terms in definition and application in child welfare. Neglect is one of the highest substantiated causes for child maltreatment in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). The CIS study differentiates between Canadian substantiated cases and Indigenous substantiated cases for all child maltreatment, including neglect. This differentiation between Canadian and Indigenous cases in Canada is due to the existence of Indigenous child welfare agencies and the contentious history between the Canadian nation state and Indigenous peoples of Canada in relation to children and child welfare. The ethno-racial other is arguably melded into the larger rhetoric of ‘Canadian’ maltreatment cases. With little to no literature on the effects of child welfare education and training in Canadian child welfare context, the focus of existing research has focused on how the ethno-racial experiences interaction with child welfare professionals (Maiter & Stalker, 2011; Maiter, Allagia & Trocme, 2004; Stalker, Maiter & Allagia, 2009).

A review of the literature suggests that ‘race’, child neglect, and child welfare worker training have not been analyzed together within social work, but also across disciplines. Therefore, an analysis of the literature had to be separated according to the three themes in order to produce a synthesis of knowledge to act as the foundation for the current work. The literature review produced three major themes. The first is the understanding of race within Canadian child welfare is limited in comparison to research from the US and UK, leaving restricted analysis of the racialized Other within the Canadian context (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003, & Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008; Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Daciuk, Billingsley, Tourigny, Mayer, Wright, Barter, Burford, Hornick, Sullivan, & McKenzie, 2001). Second, child neglect is pervasive, but it is viewed and applied in a very subjective manner within the context of Canadian child welfare (White & Hoskins, 2011). Lastly, the racialized Other is presented to new child welfare workers under the guise of cultural competency, anti-racism and more recently, anti-oppressive training (OACAS, 2008; OACAS 2010).

**The Other in Canadian Child Welfare**

Child welfare history in Canada is a bleak and oppressive analysis of politics, religion, and human rights. The construction of identity and the Other within Canadian child welfare is limited due to the history of Residential schools and the Sixties Scoop which shape an understanding of race in child welfare (Trocme, Knocke, & Blackstock, 2004; Swift, 1995). This violent history of abuse and neglect issued by the Canadian state onto Indigenous youths across Canada has set a precedent of the Indigenous Other in child welfare legislation and application. The need for Indigenous peoples to control and govern their own standards of child welfare within their communities is rooted in this history of dominance as imposed through state legislation, social workers, and people in caring roles.

The Canadian Incidence Report of abuse and neglect in 2001, 2003, and 2008 makes the distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups when it came to substantiated child welfare cases (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003, & Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008; Trocme et al, 2001). However, this distinction, places the nationalities of other ethno-racial categories that are included in the official assessment within the larger category of non-Indigenous (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p.55). The CIS report is the largest statistical analysis in Canada of substantiated child welfare cases, including the largest sample size across Canada. This distinction is made apparent in several sections of the report. The executive summary specifically mentions ‘Aboriginal’ heritage, followed by an understanding of the classification of statistics between ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’ (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). Information on substantiated cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence was followed by a distinctive understanding in Indigenous substantiated cases through statistical analysis. This manner of presenting information synthesizes cases in child welfare into two separate groups: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). It is important to consider how the ethno-racial Other is subdued within this particular analysis and the impact that this has on future analysis of maltreatment in Canada. Research done on the

The CIS reports explore how Indigenous children are systematically overrepresented within the Canadian child welfare system. However, in this process, the report assimilates the ethno-racial child and family into the broader category of non-Indigenous. The effects of this type of analysis on a broader understanding between child welfare workers’ encounters with racial Others cannot be fulfilled unless appropriate distinctions are made. Swift (1995) acknowledges the impact of this distinction in her analysis of child neglect, citing how disproportionate numbers of neglect apply to other non-White groups as well. However, the remainder of her focus on ‘The Colour of Neglect’ is on Indigenous groups in Canada, a significant comment on an understanding of the Other in Canadian child welfare (Swift, 1995).

Although Swift’s (1995) analysis dates back almost two decades, it is seen as a foundational critique of child welfare practice and neglect as maltreatment from a critical theoretical lens. It also lends itself as one of the limited texts of Canadian origin that critically reflect on a combination of neglect and the Other in child welfare practice.

The Canadian Incidence Report from 2003 reports on the disproportionate number of children from visible minority groups within the Canadian child protection system (Lavergne, C., Dufor, Trocme, & Larrivee, 2008). This report, less than a decade old, shows the shift of attention between Indigenous and non-Indigenous lines to become more inclusive of the Canadian population that interacts with child protection services. The groups documented within the report were Caucasian, Aboriginal, Black, Asian, Latin-American, and Arab. The objectives were to compare data, examine the different forms of maltreatment (including neglect), and then compare the type of maltreatment in relation to the ethno-racial profile of the child (Lavergne et al., 2008).

The results show the overrepresentation of children belonging to visible minority groups within the child protection system in Canada; Aboriginals first then Blacks and Latin Americans (Lavergne et al., 2008). Minority groups were also overrepresented in reporting and substantiated neglect, with Aboriginal and Black citizens having the highest numbers (Lavergne et al., 2008). Although Aboriginal children had higher reports of neglect during assessment, the numbers of substantiated neglect was almost the same between ethno-racial ‘minority’ groups (Lavergne et al., 2008). The concluding analysis suggests the importance in assessing ‘cultural background’ when understanding reports of maltreatment in order to have a holistic and contextual understanding of the diversity of family needs (Lavergne et al., 2008). The findings also suggest racial bias in both reporting and responses to child protection concerns (Lavergne et al., 2008).

There is also added pressure to understand why minority groups are overrepresented in the Canadian child welfare context, including social causes such as poverty, and what can be done to support both children and families as their encounter child welfare (Lavergne et al., 2008; Maiter, Allagia, & Trocme, 2004).

Unlike other nations with longstanding child welfare histories, literature coming out of Canada has been limited in assessing and understanding the role of child welfare with racial children and families (Kwok and Tam, 2005; Lavergne et al, 2004; Maiter et al., 2004). Studies from the USA show a correlation between background characteristics and case outcome decisions, with African American youth having higher representation in their length of stay in the foster care system and the length of time it takes for family reunification (Drake, Lee, & Jonson-Reid, 2009; Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, &Curtis, 2003; Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-Macleod, Newton, Ganger, &Johnson, 2004). Additionally, similar studies look at variables which lead to the large numbers of racialized children involved in the child welfare system in the US (Fluke et al, 2003; Hines, Lemon, Wyatt, & Merdinger, 2004; Lu et al, 2004). These factors include an interrelation of parent and family risk factors, previous child welfare involvement, socio-economic factors such as poverty, race and class biases, and the impact of policy initiatives on children of colour (Hines et al., 2004; Jones, 1998).

Research from the UK shows similar initiative to understanding the overrepresentation of children of colour within their child welfare system (Barn, 2007; Chand, 2000). An analysis of the Eurocentric tools used in child welfare, understanding diversity within child rearing, addressing practical needs, and using prevention and partnership as tools are factors which need to be addressed within the UK child welfare community (Barn, 2007; Chand, 2000). Although there are similarities shared between USA, UK, and Canadian societies, the same precursors to overrepresentation cannot be presumed. This is due to the historical, political, and policy variances in child welfare between the nations.

Many Canadian researchers have acknowledged this gap within existing research and literature, and draw from USA and UK literature to assist their analysis within the Canadian context (Kwok & Tam, 2005; Lavergne et al, 2008; Maiter et al, 2004; Swift, 1995; Trocme et al., 2004). The existing literature focuses on the diversity of cultures in Canada and how to understand *their* experiences of child protection, *their* understanding of child maltreatment, and appropriate responses that would be suitable to *their* needs (Kwok & Tam, 2005; Lavergne et al, 2008; Maiter & George, 2003; Maiter et al, 2004). Within this literature, changing immigration legislation has led to higher levels of immigration by people from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds to Canada (Kwok &Tam, 2005; Maiter & George, 2003; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). This distinction is then made between ‘North American’, ‘American’ or ‘Western’ standards of parenting and *their* styles of parenting, suggesting a normative or neutral stance that goes unquestioned (Kwok & Tam, 2005; Maiter & George, 2003; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Additionally, the compounding impact of immigration and ethno-racial values within parenting styles risks the effect of being stereotyped as characteristic of all members within particular ethno-racial groups.

The focus has been on practitioners’ understanding of the racialized Other, and how being a ‘minority’ impacts risk factors that are understood by child welfare workers (Kwok & Tam, 2005; Lavergne et al, 2008; Maiter et al, 2004; Maiter & George, 2003; Stalker et al., 2009). Due to this lens, the question of how concepts of race, culture, and the Other are known, learned, and applied in practice by child welfare professionals has yet to be understood. Maiter et al. (2004) explains how this lack of understanding contributes to a larger struggle within workers between reducing risks for children while being ‘culturally sensitive’. While this is the case, Swift (1995) presents how overrepresentation in substantiated maltreatment cases engages other ‘minority’ groups in dialogue about child welfare in a way that Indigenous groups are doing. However, this conversation is still small and understated in social work rhetoric and research. The literature is indicative of a gap of knowledge, both statistically and theoretically, of critical analysis as it applies to the Other in Canadian child welfare practice.

**Understanding and Identifying Child Neglect**

Child neglect is one of the two highest causes for substantiated child maltreatment in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). Neglect is classified into eight major forms in which maltreatment can present itself (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). These include failure to supervise leading to physical harm, failure to supervise leading to sexual abuse, permitting criminal behaviour, physical neglect, medical neglect (including dental), failure to provide psychiatric or psychological treatment, abandonment, and educational neglect (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p.35). Under child welfare legislation, this categorization of neglect is the foundational definition under which workers have legislative authority to investigate a family. Neglect is also not a form of standalone maltreatment and often correlated with intimate partner violence and emotional maltreatment (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). Additionally, substantiated cases of neglect also had the highest number of individuals needing medical treatment out of any category of maltreatment (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). This Canadian study and its findings are indicative of a substantive concern in child welfare, where exposure to neglect is one of the dominant causes for case worker involvement.

Seminal work conducted by Swift (1995) suggests that legal, professional, and organizational processes become factors in how neglect is structured and maintained. Although her analysis precedes the 2008 CIS study by more than a decade, it is beneficial as a foundational and critical understanding for how neglect is conceptualized within Canadian child protection practice (Swift, 1995). Taken from English common law, neglect was transported to North America under the concept of *parens patriae* whereby children’s welfare was and is protected under state sanction (Swift, 1995). Due to its legislative stronghold, there is a legal mandate for child protection workers to consider child neglect. However, as Swift notes, this is often done within the constructs of ‘less eligibility’ and ‘perception of need’ (Swift, 1995). Perception of need varies with people’s understanding of individualism, the extent to which a parent can care and provide for themselves and their child, and whether need is based on being ‘worthy’ of services versus being ‘unworthy’ (Swift, 1995). Swift (1995) suggests that moving the conversation away from parental behaviours and deficiencies to the needs of the child would elicit a change in the conversation and permit more focus on the daily decision making process of workers.

Almost a decade later, Swift’s analysis is corroborated by Tanner and Turney (2003) who suggest that although neglect has an operational definition in child welfare work, judgements about neglect are rooted in a practitioners value system. The authors refer to the time span until intervention takes place, citing how workers can hesitate to impose the label of neglect onto a family (Tanner & Turney, 2003). The time it takes to respond to neglect also changes what neglect looks like for a particular family and what potential harm may manifest for the children (Tanner & Turney, 2003). The result is an intuitive understanding of neglect on the behalf of child welfare workers due to the limited nature of research, informational dissemination, and practice principles on this type of maltreatment (Tanner & Turney, 2003). The lack of substantial social work theory on neglect results in practitioners relying on their intuitions and experiential knowledge as opposed to effectively integrating research (Tanner & Turney, 2003). Tanner and Turney (2003) suggest a number of supports be made available to workers who engage with neglect in their practice with families, including the concept of long term supportive involvement and looking at dependency as a positive attribute in working with families.

The social context of neglect is rooted in class struggle. Poverty has to be a factor in the analysis of neglect due to its pervasiveness and its imbedded historical roots. The macro context of poverty and the family context of poverty are brought forth in research conducted by Jonson-Reid, Drake and Zhou (2013) on families in the US. The findings suggest that the resources and wealth of a community have significant impact on child welfare involvement, regardless of an individual family’s income level (Jonson-Reid, Drake, & Zhou, 2013). For that reason, the study showed African American children coming from families with a larger history of poverty and living in neighbourhoods that lacked sufficient community resources as compared to Caucasian children (Jonson-Reid et al., 2013). The study also provided insight on variations in the subtypes of neglect according to race such as lowest rate of cooperation by child welfare professionals dealing with African American children reporting drug ingestion and medication issues (Jonson-Reid et al., 2013). The authors also corroborate Tanner and Turney (2003) in stating that the immediate concern for harm is subdued when it comes to neglect and therefore families do not receive the support that they need in order to prevent future interactions with child welfare (Jonson-Reid et al., 2013). The information on child neglect is vast medically, but is lacking in how it is implemented in practice as child welfare workers come into contact with families.

White and Hoskins (2011) used qualitative interviews with seven child welfare practitioners to understand how neglect was discursively constructed. Through discourse analysis of interviews, White and Hoskins (2011) present the metaphor of “walking the tightrope” to explain the instability, flexibility, balance, and artistry that appeared in practice narratives. White and Hoskins (2011) suggest that practitioners construct their own meanings, adapted from existing discourses, when making sense of neglect. This includes the various ways of accumulating facts, through existing handbooks and observation (White & Hoskins, 2011). It also includes mother blaming, categorization of resources, effects of policies and procedures, and personal ways of understanding the social work profession (White & Hoskins, 2011). The authors propose how, through child welfare workers activating a particular set of discourses in risk assessment forms or by applying legislation, neglect could be seen as a product of human activity (White & Hoskins, 2011).

White and Hoskins (2011) also suggest professional development curricula to be designed around analyzing language patterns and practices, deconstruction, and reflexivity. The authors draw from Rossiter (2005) in hopes that practitioners become more aware of what and how they know in order to construct and maintain categories such as neglect (White & Hoskins, 2011).

Horwath (2007) looked at how community professionals working go through a number of processes in order to judge whether to make a report of neglect to social work services. Horwath (2007) indicates that a professional’s assessment is a technical process and a moral activity; one understood by a combination of the practitioner’s own perception of neglect, a “gut reaction”, and physical evidence. Horwath (2007) also draws connection between the professional’s understandings of their own role, the views of their peers and manager, their perception of social work services, and their own personal feelings about the response of the community in reflection to referral practices. Horwath (2007) stresses practitioner discretion in applying “practice-moral” activity, whereby feelings, experiences, values, and beliefs influence how they practice. This is corroborated by White and Hoskins’ (2011) analysis of practitioner application of neglect.

**Cultural Competency, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppressive Practice**

Cultural competency has been the dominant mode of understanding the ‘cultural’ Other in social work practice in Canada. Canada’s multicultural and immigration policies are one of the major reasons why social workers need to consider the diversity within service recipients (Este, 2007; Pon, 2009; Williams, 2006). This consideration has been adopted into the Code of Ethics for the Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) with a stress on competency within the social worker to provide a level of professional service. This highest level of social work service would consider all factors of ethnic, religious, cultural, and racial origin to understand values, beliefs, and norms of the Other (Este, 2007). Although there are various definitions of cultural competency (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs; 1989; Dana, Behn, & Gonwa, 1992; Green, 1982; McPhatter, 1997; Nash & Velasquez Jr, 2003), Este (2007) provides an accurate summary citing four major themes. Social work practitioners should have specific knowledge on diversity and oppression; social workers should have updated knowledge on different cultural and racial groups; social workers should have appropriate empathy and communication skills when working with people from diverse backgrounds; and lastly social workers should have inherent values that allow them to work with diverse groups in an ethical manner (Este, 2007).

The definitions of cultural competency that are applied in Canadian social work practice vary according to the setting. Within child welfare, workers are encouraged to take additional training within fields of diversity and cultural competence in order to work with a range of families and children. Often, this type of training is offered within child welfare agencies as a part of their professional development and training package. As previously mentioned, cultural competency training became a part of social service organizations as a way to adjust to the existing diversity within the population and to adjust to new immigration policies (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003). Service organizations like child welfare recognize the increasing benefits of cultural competency as being driven by the people that they are serving, posing a reflection of the population they serve within the agency itself (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003). Additionally, adopting culturally competent principles is considered beneficial for organizational efficiency purposes (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003). This includes attracting larger pools of social worker applicants, being considered more desirable by potential funders who value inclusivity and being more open to new referrals from other agencies who do not provide the same services (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003).

Nash and Velasquez Jr. (2003) suggest that making cultural competence an organizational priority within child welfare contributes to the overall competence of the organization. For child welfare organizations, cultural competency does not solely constitute frontline worker training, but is considered to be an operational tool for the organizations’ success in service delivery. While policies, plans, and funds are allocated to implementing change, workers also need to understand the diversity within race and ethnicity, as well as a multiplicity of other factors which impact their overall competence (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003). The authors suggest that intergenerational and gender roles, education level, parenting style, language and communication, class, sexual orientation, religion, beliefs on health care, and role of the justice system are all implicated within the model of cultural competence (Nash & Velasquez Jr., 2003).

Although cultural competence has dominated the rhetoric when it comes to understanding the Other, service providers have critiqued this mode of thought and training for many reasons. The limitations of associating culture and competency together are an illusion that culture can be known and understood if taught appropriately while assuming that ethnic, cultural, racial, geographic, and religious groups are the same (Este, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Additionally, Este (2007) suggests that cultural competency violates one of the dominant principles of social work practice - to respect the inherent worth of the individual client, and meet them within their context. In this sense, cultural competency can take away from the relationship building component of social work practice if practiced in an assumptive and ‘knowing’ manner (Este, 2007).

Yee and Dumbrill (2003) take a more critical approach by suggesting that a model of understanding culture can only yield to problems in social work practice. Cultural competence, they suggest, takes away from the experiences and voices of the Other through a process of knowledge construction and dissemination that they have no control and say over (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). In this context, cultural competence presents itself neutral, a dominant feature of Whiteness (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Additionally, by focusing on the Other, social workers can gain and disseminate ‘cultural’ knowledge while failing to critically reflect on their own privilege and how they are engaging in and reproducing existing, oppressive power constructs (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003).

“Cultural competency discourses that define cultures without consideration of power and that do so in stereotypical ways resemble new racism” (Pon, 2009, p.61). Pon’s (2009) analysis of cultural competency includes what is missing from the rhetoric, a language around race and racism. The author suggests that cultural competency embodies discourses of social cohesion, cultural preservation, and nationalism with discourses of racism which make it difficult to recognize and analyze as race and racism (Pon, 2009). Through a construction of the Other as belonging outside of the Nation, cultural competency reinforces Whiteness as Canadian; dominant without having to use the language of Whiteness, race, power, or even dominance (Pon, 2009). “When cultural competency constructs knowledge of cultural “others,” it forgets the history of non-whites in Canada and how this troubles, even renders absurd, any notion of a pure or absolute Canadian culture” (Pon, 2009, p.63). Pon (2009) also troubles Este’s (2007) argument of the need for cultural competency within child welfare by challenging the modernist assumptions of culture made by Este. Assumptions of being able to identify culture within a categorical checklist or associating culture with newcomers does not consider the intersections of oppression embedded within cultural competency (Pon, 2009).

The terms ‘anti-racist’ and ‘anti-oppressive’ social work practice have started to appear in social work practice contexts due to backlash from cultural competency (Baines, 2011; Dominelli, 2002; Siddiqui, 2011). This shift has produced new language around ‘intersectionality of oppressions’ and considering race and culture within a deeper analysis of power and privilege (Baines, 2011; Dominelli, 2002; Siddiqui, 2011). A deeper consideration of power is singlehandedly encompassing of both anti-racism and anti-oppressive theory and practice and inclusive of the organizational and institutional settings of power (Siddiqui, 2011). In Ontario, Canada an anti-oppressive practice framework has been adopted within child welfare organizations. This has come out of recent recognition that cultural competency will likely fail to address the larger systemic nature of oppression in child welfare (OACAS, 2010) but does not suggest that the rhetoric of competency has been eliminated. The document, called An Anti-Oppressive Framework for child welfare in Ontario (2010), cites four components to anti-oppressive practice that are relevant to child welfare practice. A social construction analysis of power; understanding power and oppression through individual, organizational, and systemic levels; addressing inequalities at the individual level; and evaluating actions for their impact on community, organization, and service users (OACAS, 2010).

Although not explicitly stating Whiteness and dominance, the framework for practice suggest an acknowledgement of power, from the individual to the systemic level (OACAS, 2010). This alludes to a shift in the language within child welfare. Cultural competency is still the dominant framework within child welfare as noted by the language and presentation of knowledge within the OACAS handouts. However, frameworks such as anti-oppressive practice could present a shift in how social workers learn about and construct the Other in their engagement with children and families.

The existing literature assisted in the process of developing concrete questions that would support this research assignment. Understanding the context of training, the ethno-racial Other, and child maltreatment led to queries about how the three intersect in Canadian child welfare practice. Due to my educational setting in Hamilton, Ontario, the questions were adapted to suit the context and training under which Ontario Children’s Aid workers practice. The result was a series of thoughts which formed my research questions. Again, the research questions are:

1. How do Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts influence child protection workers’ understanding and application of child neglect?
2. How do Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts inform frontline C.A.S. workers’ practice in engaging and working with racialized families?
3. How do Ontario Children’s Aid workers understand the themes emerging from Ontario Children’s Aid Society training handouts in their encounters with racialized families? Are they effective? How do they mitigate their understandings of neglect?

With these questions in mind, I began a journey in dissecting thoughts I had in my experience and translating them to daily lived experiences of Children’s Aid workers.

**Chapter 3. Methodology**

In order to prepare for research, a number of concepts had to be resolved. This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework that informed my qualitative research design, and a mixed-method design of critical analysis and semi-structured interviews (Mason, 2012). Additionally, it will also inform the reader of the steps in recruitment, engagement with participants, and data analysis that took place within the course of the study. Intertwined within these steps are tensions which arose as a part of the research process and the efforts to dilute, if not resolve, them.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Child welfare work is highly relational and based on the relationships that are formed with children and families. In order for research to be effective, understood, and applied by practitioners, managers, and policy makers, it needs to be relational as well. For this reason, the lens of Critical Social Science informs my methodology since child welfare, its legislation, and the way it is practiced has been socially constructed in North America under the responsibility of the State. Research, in my opinion, provides critical insight to pursue social action. Although I believe that there is a place for Positivist and Investigative modes, my belief in the social construction of systems posits a critical understanding and deconstruction of power dynamics (Neuman, 1997). Using knowledge to “…critique and transform social relations…” (Neuman, 1997, p.74) fuels a Critical Social Science approach to my application of research. Through my academic experiences, I have been drawn to and implicated by Critical Race Theory, a subsection of Critical Social Science that focuses on the individual, community, and nationwide implications of race and racism as a pervasive societal feature (Yee, 2005). In my personal and professional experience, I have been witness to the prevalence and pervasiveness of whiteness within Canadian society and the Child Welfare system. The discourse around the Other, legitimized through policies and legislation, is prevalent in social work organizations on an individual, communities, and national scale (Yee, 2005).

I believe that this perspective is beneficial to my research because of the existing ways of perceiving race within Canadian society. It is my opinion that a critical understanding of the implications of race has been dismantled under the existing dominance of Whiteness as a political and policy based entity within the Child Welfare system. I believe that the purpose to viewing the research question within this particular critical theoretical lens is because of the existing and growing diverse body of racialized communities within Canada and the significant gap in research to address the larger implications of the Child Welfare system on these communities as a whole.

**Power in research.** In reflecting on power, a pervasive tension is the use of evidence within social work (Witkin & Harrison, 2001) and how my research will contribute to the nature of evidence within academia, society, community, but especially for the individuals and organizations that participate in the research. I become conflicted in my belief about research as a process that is negotiated between stakeholders (I.e. researcher and participants alike) when I confront ideas of credibility of research, applicability of research, and the manipulation of research for a “social justice” motive (Neuman, 1997). How are these ideas truly collaborative in action without overarching researcher power taking over? The inherent power in research is in how the work is used for further action, something that I have not yet solidified in terms of this thesis. Even if I have an idea of what action should be pursued, can I control alternate ways in which the work will be used, especially if it counters the original idea? I want to be able to acknowledge the power within the research process and stay true to the outcomes. However, these are some of the concerns I have about my research, its application, and its role within an evidence-based social work model.

The variations that research can take in terms of disseminating results and the social action principle behind my theoretical standpoint come into conflict when I think about what participants view to be social action and whether they see a higher purpose to the research itself. Fook (2003) asks “… [h]ow do we uphold a metanarrative of ‘social justice’ while at the same time deconstructing it?” (Fook, 2003, p. 126). Fook (2003) goes on to ask many of the same questions that I experience within this particular tension. Most importantly, Fook (2003) asks “…[h]ow do we know whether social justice for one group will function as, or will be experienced as, social justice by another?” (Fook, 2003, p. 127). I have the same question in regarding whether one specific group of participants will be as effective as a diverse group of child welfare workers, or whether policy makers in child welfare also experience this thesis as a mode of social justice.

This is not to say that either tension has been dissolved through the process of research. The tensions are greater than ever. In fact, these are tensions that I will likely experience as a researcher throughout any future research that I choose to participate in.

**Insider/outsider.** There are a number of subsequent tensions that come up for me under this particular research topic, using particular theoretical and qualitative methods, and as a consequence of my personal being involved within the research. I will frame them using an insider/outsider analogy. “Narayan (1993) suggests that all researchers are simultaneously insiders and outsiders to varying degrees” (LaSala, 2003, p.27). Through this process, I am privy to be an insider in two main examples. As a person of colour, an immigrant, and a woman, I have experienced directly and indirectly a number of consequences of structural and systematic racism within a number of institutions. I have been the subject of concern in a child welfare investigation. Reflecting on the process of investigation and what this means for families gives me a deeper understanding of how I practice. I believe that this is the key insight to my perspective as a social worker and a researcher.

Another insider perspective that I possess is the experience of Child Welfare interventions. As a social worker, I have been present at several interventions and have had to conduct a few of my own. This process gives me an understanding of what the process, legal legislation, and language used looks like within the context of Child Welfare intervention. Granted my experience has been in British Columbia, the translation of legislation to Ontario’s system is not inherently difficult for me to understand. The remainder of the tensions place me within an outsider role as the researcher.

I experience being an outsider within the community of Hamilton and the larger community of Ontario. This means that I am not privy to the same depth in knowledge of the community, compared to someone who has lived here for longer than 10 months. In the larger structural context, I might not be aware of the specifics of Child Welfare legislation, or CAS organization as they operate in Ontario, as opposed to BC, or the way that it is applied by case workers within Hamilton (through different risk assessment etc.). An additional barrier is the distinction of Catholic Children’s Aid and Hamilton Children’s Aid, which does not exist in BC. I am an outsider because I am not a parent, because of my age, because I have never worked as a child welfare worker in Ontario, and because of my socio-economic status as an educated young woman within a Master’s program.

These tensions are important to acknowledge as they are a constant within the research process. They help me locate myself within this assignment, from its more technical aspects to the findings and discussion.

**Research Methodology**

In order to effectively engage in the relational aspects of child welfare practice, qualitative research was specifically chosen. I was attracted to the mixed-methods approach (Mason, 2002) to research because I wanted to have insight into the experiences of New Worker Training and training in child welfare settings in general. The purpose of conducting qualitative research is to provide further insight into the subjective nature of child welfare work (Mason, 2002). Through this process, the purpose of the research is not to quantify and measure, but to understand the relational and contextual aspects of training and practice when it comes to working with child neglect, and engaging with the Other (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research offers a myriad of methods in order to engage in critical analysis of this subjective matter; out of which I chose Semi-Structured Interviews and Critical Analysis (Becker, Bryman, & Ferguson, 2012; Mason, 2002).

I was curious as to what frontline workers had to say about their experiences within New Worker Training and was also interested in how workers constructed their understanding of training materials through the language that they used (Mason, 2002). It was important to me to listen to their accounts in order to in gauge their perceptions, and dissect what was meaningful to people that had engaged in the training themselves (Mason, 2002). Therefore, I chose to conduct a semi-structured one on one interview with consensual participants (Mason, 2002). In addition, to understand how training handouts convey teachings on neglect and working with the Other, critical analysis informed my interrogation of the New Worker Training handouts. I chose the handouts because of restricted access to the OACAS Trainer Documents and to coherently understand what workers took away from their training. I elaborate on both these methods below.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

In order to understand the experiences of New Worker Training and how training influences practice, the voice of frontline C.A.S. workers had to be present within the research.

It is my opinion that the discussion and findings of this research would have been incomplete if not for the voice, thoughts, and critical reflection offered by frontline child welfare workers. In order to answer the research questions, I had to speak one-on-one to frontline child welfare workers who had completed the process of New Worker Training and were willing to participate in the research. Initially, I thought about holding s focus group so that workers could collaborate and engage in fruitful discussion, feeding off common experiences (Mason, 2002). Upon further thought, the sensitive nature of race as well as the confidentiality associated with particular caseloads and scenario’s led me to believe that I would get more candid and honest information about such topics in a one-on-one setting (Mason, 2002). I also did not want to risk having two workers from the same agency within a focus group as it could infringe on the safety of the overall group process.

**Critical Analysis**

Analysis of the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) New Worker Training Handouts and results of interviews with frontline child welfare workers are informed by Critical Analysis.

Underlying Critical Analysis is an interrogation of materials from an epistemological framework in order to critique the presentation of information. As previously stated, I am using Critical Social Science as well as Critical Race Analysis (Ahmed, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003) as my lens to interrogate the New Worker Training handouts. The goal was to understand the experience of New Worker Training through the lens of frontline child protection workers.

**Recruitment Process**

Before engaging in any research, I applied and received approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). Four social workers were recruited through an email script that was sent to several contacts within McMaster University (Appendix B). The email also included the Research Recruitment Poster and the Letter of Information (Appendix C and D). They, in turn, forwarded the email to managers and directors in the Southwest Ontario region of Children’s Aid Societies who in turn either forwarded the email to their employees or posted the Recruitment Poster in common spaces for frontline workers to view and respond. Recipients were informed of the voluntary nature of participation and that they could decline to participate. A total of four social workers were recruited through this process.

The process of recruitment was not as easy as I initially thought it would be. Although recruitment information was disseminated in a myriad of ways, this could only be done after achieving Ethics Approval at the end of April. The first three participants contacted me within the month of May and interviews were conducted before the month ended. The last participant contacted me in the middle of July at a time where was deeply engaged in data analysis and writing my findings. In reflection, I would have contacted CAS agencies and Directors before receiving ethics approval to gauge their interest in the research, hopefully resulting in more participants.

**Participant’s Description**

Participants in this research are frontline social workers working within the Southern Ontario region of Children’s Aid Societies (CAS). All of the social workers are White and three out of the four workers are women. Three out of the four social workers work for Catholic Children’s Aid. The workers have a range of experience in frontline child welfare practice in either role of Intake Worker, Family Service Worker, or on the Community Health Team, with experience ranging from 2 to 7 years, and varying experiences of training. Three out of four workers have finished all of their New Worker Training within the first year of their employment with a CAS organization. The fourth social worker has one final module to finish as a part of their New Worker Training. Three out of four workers had a full caseload of 16 to 20 families while undergoing some portion of their training. At one point, while in training, one worker was the only person on their team other than their supervisor due to worker turnover. Three out of four participants are currently employed with a CAS agency and one was on extended leave from their organization.

**Interview Process**

I conducted four interviews, each between 45-90 minutes using a semi structured interview guide (Appendix E) that was also included in the letter of information so that participants had access to the questions that would be asked before agreeing to participate in the research. The letter of information was read through with each of the participants before consent was signed. The only addendum to that was with the fourth participant who was interviewed in July. This participant was made aware that by signing the consent form that they would not be able to withdraw from the research in the way that other participants had the choice. After this was agreed upon and the consent form was signed, the interview began. Although I led the interviews, I was open to participants’ thoughts and insights about New Worker Training that led the conversation into new directions. At times, the conversation had to be drawn back with the guidance of the interview questions. All of the interviews were recorded with participant consent and I transcribed them accordingly.

**Data Analysis**

**Semi-structured interviews.** After I transcribed the interviews, they were printed out and read line by line to pick up themes of ‘culture’, the ‘Other’, ‘neglect’, and the experience of training. This process involved highlighting and underlining themes as they presented themselves throughout the first reading. Additionally, the initial two readings of the transcriptions were done while listening to the audio recording of the interview. This was done in order to get a sense of participants’ emotions in their voice, as they were speaking about particular themes. In the fourth and fifth readings, I went back to the highlighted and underlined themes and read above and below them to understand the context.

The data from the fourth participant was read a little differently because of the time constraint. After transcription the document was read, without listening to the audio version, to gauge whether the presenting themes within that conversation matched larger themes that were drawn from the previous three interviews. Similar themes were highlighted and written into the findings chapter. The document then was read again, three more times, to check for any themes that were outside of or contradictory to the existing data. The reading of the fourth participant was done looking for themes that emerged from the previous participants (Mason, 2002). The well documented readings produced several findings that have been categorized into themes.

**Critical Analysis.** Before starting analysis, I had to obtain a copy of the handouts that are given to child welfare workers when they undergo training. Initially, I wanted to review the OACAS Trainer Manual to engage in what was being taught to CAS workers in training. However, due to restricted access and lack of willingness, I was not privy to the documents. When I settled on reviewing the handouts, I looked on the internet to see if it was available through the OACAS website or had been uploaded onto the internet via other means. Once I could not secure the handouts through that method, I started to speak to people who had any form of connection to child welfare in Ontario; as employees, former employees, associates, researchers etc. I emailed Executive Directors, spoke to McMaster Faculty that had connections with CAS agencies, and spoke to peers within the McMaster School of Social Work.

I had a backup plan of seeking approval through the Canadian Freedom of Information process where the handouts, being under a crown corporation, would be seen as a public document and therefore eligible for release. However, I wanted to obtain the handouts in the least bureaucratic method possible. Luckily, speaking about my research interests proved fruitful as I was contacted by someone (who preferred to remain confidential) willing to lend me the New Worker Training documents from 2008 for the purpose of the research. Therefore, a document that was initially out of reach became accessible in order to continue with the study.

***First reading****.* After the handouts were obtained, I read through the text line by line looking for themes and words that emerged as relevant to ‘race’, ‘whiteness’, ‘Other’, and ‘neglect’. After the first reading of the document, the search terms had to be expanded to include terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’. Having to adapt to what came out of the initial reading was something I was consciously aware of before I started reading the text. Therefore, I was open to change as a part of the research process. In the first reading I copied excerpts of text that matched my inquiry onto a Word Document on my computer, making notes about my thoughts and writing down questions that came to mind.

***Second to fifth readings***. I read through the handouts line by line again. This time I focused on the surrounding slides, context, grammar, and sequence of information that came before and after the excerpts that I had pulled out of the first reading. After each reading I made more notes, went back to some of the literature I had read for the literature review, and wrote down more questions that came to mind. Re-reading the document five times allowed for a concise analysis of what was written in the text and allowed for more developed themes to form as a result.

The following chapter will discuss the findings of both interviews and analysis of the New Worker Training handouts.

**Chapter 4. Findings**

This chapter will review the findings of the semi-structured interviews and the Critical Analysis from the New Worker Training Handouts. This perspective is illusive of what visual engagement workers take away as part of their training, not including what perspectives the trainers contribute to New Worker Training as a whole. Within the two respective findings are several dominant themes which are presented to the reader.

**Interview Findings**

Four frontline workers were interviewed for their thoughts on New Worker Training and their subsequent experiences in child protection practice. Four major themes have been extracted from the conversations: worker`s perceptions on New Worker Training, tensions between training and practice in child protection, definitions of neglect, and culture, ethnicity and the Other in child welfare practice.

**Worker’s perceptions on New Worker Training.**  When asked about their general experiences within New Worker Training, good or bad, workers had a variety of insight into the process of training and its impact on their introduction to child welfare practice. Consistent throughout the conversations was their reflection on how the training was both informative and important to aspects of practice and yet participants perceived it to be inflexible, outdated, and irrelevant at times. Workers reported they were either given training documents relating to all of the courses or had them available to print out or view online. When asked if participants had referred to these documents since they were in training, only one said that they used the documents to refer to standards and procedures within a year of completing the training and nothing since then. The other three participants had their documents, but had not seen or referred to them since completing training. Workers also commented on how learning that occurred within training was not spoken about, referred to, or engaged in with supervisors and peers after training was complete.

“We’re not asked to think about it and relate it…who engages with me in a conversation about my training when I’m done? No one…so it’s really self-directed learning and you can take as much or as little from it as you want with no…accountability.” Participant One

Two out of the four participants experienced conflict with being present in training since they carried full caseloads of (16-19) families and children while in training. For this reason, participants cited getting pulled out of training when a crisis occurred or were busy mitigating the crisis from the training site, either through phone calls or email.

“… [T]here’s been times where I have been sitting in 3 day trainings on engaging families and all I can think of is the crisis on, on my caseload, trying to manage it from offsite through my cellphone, through email, and I am not getting anything done.” Participant One

“I think that my agency tried really hard not to have that happen. What would end up happening is that…the understanding would be, well we won’t pull you out of training but you still have to do this work. I had two different times that I had a child come into care while I was in training and so, like, I couldn’t go and do it myself but I did have to go and stay all night…so for those times I said I’m going to come back late from lunch and…going to choose to miss it [the training] myself.” Participant Three

“I didn’t have…I didn’t start with a caseload. I was building a caseload and I think they really try to do that with new workers. So I think, you know, by the end of the training I definitely had a full caseload but I think for at least about 6 months I probably had about 10 to 11 cases and that kind of built as, over those 6 months and then after the 6 months, I probably had a full caseload and had the training at the same time.” Participant Four

Participants mentioned that the expectation from organizations is that, although training is in progress, that daily standards still needed to be met in order to manage their caseloads.

“…[S]o our time isn’t protected really. We’re expected to make phone calls on breaks and on lunches and do home visits after training to manage the stress of the job.” Participant One

One participant specifically said that their time was protected, and credited this to their supervisor.

“No, my supervisor is really, my supervisor is quite experienced and just, like, amazing and so that time was always protected.” Participant Four

The ‘protection’ of time that workers are in training refers to the balance that workers often face; between the daily requirements of their positions, the needs of the families on their caseload, and the expectation that they will be present and participate in New Worker Training. Workers refer to how this leads to disillusion about the training, especially since it happens at the beginning of their practice in child protection.

“…[I]t just seems like the futility of [New Worker Training] was what stuck out the most to me and just, just that feeling of panic of ‘*I don’t have time to do this*’ and, like, ‘*I’m just learning to juggle all of this*’. This isn’t helpful.” Participant Three

“…sometimes I don’t want to be here, I just want to be working and so you’re not getting much out of it [the training].” Participant One

Disillusions were also attributed to the stress, complexity, and number of caseloads that participants had while undergoing New Worker Training. Three out of the four participants completed the New Worker Training courses consistently within the first year of their full time employment with a CAS organization. The remaining participant addressed the inconsistency in the training availability and provision as a shortcoming of the New Worker Training system.

“I think they need to have a better system so that new workers actually complete the training prior to on within their first year rather than some workers who’ve never completed any of it or parts of it like myself…it’s almost like you need to go away for 2 weeks, get your training done without the distractions of the office, being able to absorb it and actually be present because so often we’re not present.” Participant One

This worker reported having an extensive gap between the first 4 courses in New Worker Training and the next courses and suggested that a better system of conducting training be implemented. In their experience, workers who have been employed with CAS in child protection for an extended time should be eligible for advanced training. However, in many cases like theirs, because they have not finished their New Worker Training, they remain ineligible.

“So, how do we get the more specific training on neglect when I’m two years in and not done my New Worker Training so I can’t access those advanced trainings because I’m not done the basic ones. But the advanced one would really help inform my work. So it’s kind of a double-edged sword, right?” Participant One

Although it was clear that participants agreed that New Worker Training was beneficial as it laid out guidelines and boundaries for child protection work, retention of the information and engagement of the material largely depended on the facilitators and the manner in which the information was presented. Most of the participants touched on how facilitators can either read off the PowerPoint slides or engage with the material, each having a different outcome for the training. Likewise, if facilitators were able to gauge the workers within each course and adapt the training to suit the nature of the audience, the training was considered to be ‘better’ than the alternative. Additionally, one participant suggested that the nature of the facilitators and the experience they brought as instructors of the training was important but created a scenario where many of their examples within training were hypothetical. Relating to a hypothetical scenario made it hard for this particular worker to connect to the material, resulting in a directed focus to what was more applicable for them, at that time.

“… [I]t’s almost like they need to have two stages, like a preliminary training…that’s lighter, shorter, less intensive at the very beginning and then this other stuff, the content that I’m talking about, it didn’t really make sense until you’ve worked with families who have matched the summary presented in the case examples, right? So it was very, very hypothetical.” Participant Two

Although all participants agreed that changes needed to be made to New Worker Training, there was unanimous agreement that the training was an important component of the introduction to child welfare practice.

**Tensions between training and practice in child welfare.** Participants in the interviews alluded to the contrast in child protection work; a reflection of the need for concrete and knowable answers versus the reality of subjective, grey area, work that encompasses working with families and children. Participants in this study commented on retaining the concrete, technical, and directly applicable aspects from the New Worker Training more so than they did with the types of maltreatment or anything else. This included legal information such as affidavits, the court process, standards for documents, appropriate deadlines for documents, and the various roles within CAS organizations. At some point during the conversation, every participant alluded to the subjectivity in child protection work. However, all of them specifically mentioned how concrete and definite information on roles, rules, and expectations provided in training gave them foundational knowledge that they took away into practice. Herein lays the tension.

“…it kind of helped me answer the question of if something is relevant. I mean building rapport is one thing and figuring out the ecological system that we always learn about that’s one thing. It kind of helped me figure out, ok, do I actually need this information?” Participant Two

Three out of four participants found that effective boundaries were necessary in order to guide their practice, especially as they were just starting employment. Focusing on their specific role gave workers clarity in understanding on how they should work with families within a given context, especially when there is more than one CAS worker involved in a family unit. This, in turn, is indicative of worker confidence.

“So for me New Worker Training was really narrowing the scope of practice and defining what we should be doing.” Participant One

Participants stated that effective boundaries were important to them because of the ease in getting trapped in a family dynamic. The participants shed light on how, as beginner case workers, being able to define their role was critical to how they felt about working in child protection. As participants spoke about being able to set boundaries, they spoke with a verbal expression of confidence, without wavering and in a clear and concise manner.

“…[F]or me, it almost translated into my boundaries as a worker because, I mean…it’s never as clear cut as it’s supposed to be…” Participant Two

“What is my job? …and what are the child protection concerns? And then how to work with families in addressing them but really defining our role with families because I think it is easy for us to get involved with the family system and feel like we have to fix everything. But really focusing our role on what it is, because otherwise we’ll get overwhelmed and burn out.” Participant One

Participants reported that by addressing information relevant to particular positions and boundaries that need to be in place with a family, New Worker Training gave some workers the tools to have a sense of control within an often unpredictable environment. All participants expressed the retention of information within training that further contributed to this sense of being able to negotiate boundaries and maintain boundaries within client relationships and within their position in CAS.

When asked about the learning process in engaging with New Worker Training, participants used words such as ‘literal’, ‘structure’, ‘directly applicable’, ‘concrete’, ‘technical’, and ‘standards’. These terms, used in conversation, shed insight into what workers engaging in New Worker Training find most relevant and engaging at the beginning of their child protection practice.

“It [the training] helps, kind of, inform your understanding what child abuse is in all different forms…and it helps inform your understanding of what that is and being able to spot it and identify it and learn what role you play as a child protection worker. And I think part of New Worker Training has taught me how to identify my role as a child protection worker. What is my job?” Participant One

Answering the question of “what is my job”, as Participant One indicates, is not an easy process in some stages of investigation. Participant One offered the example of working with separated parents who have issues balancing custody and access of their children, where a worker can get trapped in between the parental disagreement and lose focus on what role they play as a “protection” worker or an “intake” worker. Participant One also shared the example of working with an individual who no longer needs CAS intervention but is in a place where they are attached to the emotional support they are receiving. Participant One expressed their internal conflict by stating,

“…[S]o you’re getting wrapped up in ‘*this isn’t a child protection concern but I can’t just leave you*’. Like…you get committed to them. So if I leave her, her world is going to fall apart is what you start to think.”

The need to establish some type of structure within a profession that is based on relationships is proven difficult. For this reason, it makes sense that participants cited the most fixed and knowable aspects of the training.

“I guess what stuck with me the most were the aspects that were most concrete. You know, there was a legal training that taught us how to write legal documents. That one I found directly applicable…you know, it seemed very technical…very concrete to me because…there was, sort of, only one way of interpreting it, right?” Participant Two

Participant Two spoke in depth about the ability for the technical teachings from New Worker Training to be directly applied to the work at hand. The example given was about legal training in writing affidavits by legal counsel working at CAS. The term “black and white” was used to describe the nature of that training, suggesting a knowable distinction between two categories as opposed to a hazy grey. Another example given by Participant Two was about the standards in regards to referrals, and deadlines in regards to decision making and documentation. In specific, the example given was of the process after protection concerns have not been resolved after two years where the child stays in care, a formal application is made for crown ward ship and appropriate documents have to be prepared for court. As stated by Participant Two, learning those technical processes,

“ …sort of answered the bigger question of what we’re trying to do as an organization…so it helped me, sort of, understand my role in the bigger picture…it has, sort of, helped me structure my work in terms of, you know, what question am I answering?”

This sentiment was shared with Participant Three as well.

“…I learned, I think I actually learned and, sort of, internalized a lot of about what the literal rules are…even just deadlines. I didn’t know that stuff about this was supposed to be due in 30 days, this is what is due in 60…I didn’t know that stuff. So that was really helpful, just to keep that in mind.”

What is apparent is that out of all of the courses offered in New Worker Training, covering a range of topics about child welfare, this sample of frontline workers found benefit in the legal, technical, and directly applicable aspects of training. Their recollection of these aspects is a reflection of their confidence in their positions as CAS workers as a result of their practice knowledge.

“…[T]he thing that I find the most relevant in my everyday practice…is that , I think that going through the New Worker Training and then having the worker training to reflect back on as I practice, I feel like that has helped to give me the confidence to then decide when do I use this and when do I not…[It] gave me something to compare to and say, ok this is when I choose to do this and this is why and I know why it is here and so I have a better understanding of when I might enact it and when I might not.” Participant Three

Participants in this study also understood and were able to explain how this does not always mean that child welfare work is as black and white as what they have retained. This is exemplary of the conflict workers experience. In a follow-up question, I asked Participant One whether the boundaries they have learned about and attempt to set still confuse them on a day to day basis. Their response is indicative of the complexity of New Worker Training; in its need to have guidelines for both workers and families, and in its need to be able to apply context due to the relationship based nature of the work, training is not a simple process.

“Definitely, because you’re dealing with people. People aren’t simple. People are complicated. And family when you go outside of individuals you’re looking at family systems, and sometimes some of the families that we’re working with are huge…huge family systems and its never simple…” Participant One

Participant Four had an interesting take on this conflict, but presented it in a way that was different than the other workers.

“What we deal with is practice, we deal with engaging with families, that is our role, that is our job. Um, but how much training and effort goes towards those direct skills versus paperwork, legal stuff, recordings, that kind of stuff is probably kind of astounding… And I think that is the skill set that is the most important work in child protection but how much we focus on… that other stuff, like that court stuff and those things wouldn’t be nearly as onerous but, I think we are a reactive system versus being proactive. We’re really trying but when you have, you know, the ministry and the standards and everything, there is only so much I think that managers and supervisors feel like they can do to manage those, right?”

**Diverse understandings of neglect.**  Workers addressed their understanding of neglect as a form of maltreatment in three phases; before (social work or) New Worker Training, and after training within the current scope of practice. Additionally, workers presented themes of both the ambiguity of neglect and the manner in which it can be presented (as factual, with evidence). Before any formal social work education and child protection training, participants expressed a little to no understanding of what the concept of neglect meant. Descriptions ranged from ‘minimal’, ‘ethno-centric’, and ‘having no idea’, to an honest reflection of not having to think about neglect. Not having to think about neglect as a concept is indicative of participants having little prior knowledge about the complexities of neglect.

After the completion of their social work training and New Worker Training, participants shared their understanding of neglect as a complex indicator of child maltreatment, one that has many factors and variables to consider. The variables presented are known though a combination of training, education, and practice knowledge. Participants identified a conflict in knowledge about neglect, from something that needs to be quantifiable to a type of maltreatment that is both ambiguous and complicated. Workers commonly cited the Eligibility Spectrum as their reference point to identifying the different types of maltreatment, including neglect. The Eligibility spectrum is an Ontario Based assessment of maltreatment used by CAS to identify and report on cases of child maltreatment (OACAS, 2006). In Section Two, Scale Two of the Eligibility Spectrum document, the reference point for neglect is through the Child and Family Service Act and below the legal definition are the interpretations of the definition as workers would see in their interactions with families (OACAS, 2006). This is exemplary of a fixed message and interpretation of neglect.

“…I think my earliest definitions of neglect would be most heavily influenced by the eligibility spectrum…the way I interpret that in, like, a really basic sense would be a child is considered neglected and in need of protection essentially when there is some sort of evidence…” Participant Two

“… [T]he eligibility spectrum of course that helps inform my practice and consult…”

Participant One

In reference to the eligibility spectrum, Participant Three credited the assessment tool, calling it helpful, especially in knowing why the tool is used in risk assessments and what its purpose is. The training informed Participant Three of the purpose in asking the types of questions that are asked within the risk assessment and safety inspection which added to the validity of the eligibility spectrum.

“I think I credit that training to…putting some stock into it [the eligibility spectrum].”

Participant Three

When asked about how participants defined neglect, Participant Two spoke heavily about their earliest definitions of neglect as something that is quantifiable and measurable, where there is some form of “evidence”. This type of definition is indicative of the type of training received about neglect. Under this definition, child maltreatment could be taking place but until it was quantifiable to some extent, the label of neglect was not suitable to use. This same worker spoke about how their definition has expanded through their practice, due to cases where neglect was clearly a factor in the child’s life but could not be addressed due to the manner in which it manifest itself.

“So a kid could very well be neglect[ed] in a lot of other ways that just wouldn’t come up to the surface in a quick intense interview and investigation.” Participant Two

This comment addresses how even though neglect has to be quantified for legal purposes, it is hard to identify during the initial “Intake” period of 60 days since identifying factors would be difficult to quantify unless the degree of neglect was severe.

“Neglect is really hard to identify, really hard to prove. You can’t quantify it. It’s so…it’s almost like this intangible thing, right? Physical abuse you can see the bruises. Verbal abuse you can hear the yelling but neglect it’s more difficult to see…neglect is such a huge umbrella…there is so much that falls into neglect in child welfare and…sometimes it feels like if we don’t know what it [the maltreatment] is, it falls under neglect because we know something is wrong.” Participant One

The previous statement makes one question what it means to identify and categorize a type of maltreatment as neglect. Participant Two also alludes to the difficulty in finding quantifiable evidence for neglect because traditional signs that reflect maltreatment are not the same under this category. The reflection is a key aspect of the conflict that workers experience between applying concrete, fixed categories of knowledge within contexts that are often grey and contribute to lack of worker confidence in identifying neglect.

“I think it speaks to why I now have a wider…more grey, less black and white view of neglect…it could be a spectrum because the kids were brought in for whatever concerns, measurable in certain ways but then when, if what I described happens where the kid thrives to an unprecedented extent in the foster home, that’s where we’re all unsure, right?” Participant Two

“…[I]t raises a lot of questions for the workers and that’s where we get very…we lose confidence in some of our decisions because we think, ok well, is this kid more successful in general now that they’re in foster care…it makes us ask the question, were they getting neglected? Was there more going on that we just didn’t know? And it’s pretty much impossible to find out because at that point you’re basically asking an experimental question.” Participant Two

“…[S]o I mean think, that is a really interesting point because it [neglect] is this…it’s a ‘morphus’. How we all view neglect is so different and it’s such a stigmatizing term too, right, even the word neglect.” Participant Four

Participants even used metaphors to describe what seemed complicated otherwise. Participant Three used the metaphor of a tangled ball of string to describe the complexity behind the cases of neglect that they have experienced. Expanding on the metaphor, when Participant Three was asked what the individual pieces of string resemble, a number of issues are presented.

“I think it shifts with every family, right? It’s always different but I think in general there is, you know, issues like substance abuse, poverty, um, isolation, domestic violence, like, personalities of kids and parents. You know, those clashing or not clashing. The number of children in a family and, I think, previous experiences with CAS…” Participant Three

Through the presentation of such issues, it becomes easier to understand how neglect is viewed as an encompassing category of maltreatment. Poverty, as a variable of neglect, is mentioned more than once as a socio-economic factor that is considered in cases of neglect.

“… [W]here does it verge on neglect versus us imposing white middle class standards onto that family? So, it’s, kind of, learning how to identify when neglect becomes harmful or versus when what we think is neglect might just be a different standard of living.” Participant One

“So the kid could just end up being the circumstances, just blossom into these amazing people but when they go back home and those same resources aren’t there, um, whether it’s the parenting skills, or just the finances, or the neighbourhood they live in…” Participant Two

“And you run the risk of being extremely classist I think of saying *well they did better in the foster home, you must be doing something wrong* when it could very well be just, you know, the neighbourhood they live in or the family’s income or…something that isn’t and should not be a variable for neglect.” Participant Two

“So a person who is living in poverty where they may be limited food or they may not be able to pay electricity, is that neglect? Or are they, um, is that a circumstance of their situation, right? When somebody only makes 700 dollars a month and they have to choose between food, or clothing, or electricity, when there isn’t enough money, you know, are they being neglectful? Or are they just trying to survive?” Participant Four

The excerpts of conversation are representative of a focus on poverty and class as an indicator of neglect. Although participants could not provide definitions of neglect, they could express the varying issues that play an intricate part in the risk assessment process. Additionally, participants showed critical reflection of neglect and poverty, expressing the conflict that they experience in labelling neglect as a form of maltreatment.

“I think what makes it complicated is that they’re all compounding. So all of those concerns, all of those issues feed off each other, um, and so you can’t start to work on one even if you want to. As a family, you can’t start on one unless you’re working on all of them and that is often just an insurmountable mountain. It’s just too big to consider all at once.” Participant Three

“…I think they do talk about the systemic things like poverty, um, and, um, mental health and things like that, right? Um, but I think you can’t really understand neglect in its complex until you work with the families and then you try to help them…”

Participant Four

***Neglect and the other in child welfare practice*.** Participants were asked to reflect on what they had learned about neglect in relation to working with families of “culture” or of racialized backgrounds. Their comments offer critical insight as to what information is retained from New Worker Training and how this translates into practice. In specific reference to neglect and race, workers commented on the minimal information presented to them.

“In terms of cultural sensitivity and informing my practice, I’ve never connected New Worker Training to cultural sensitivity to be honest. Maybe I missed that part, maybe I was doing something different or not even there but when I think about being culturally sensitive and taking into consideration different cultures, values, beliefs and all that in my work, New Worker Training doesn’t connect with that for me.” Participant One

“I can’t really recall the cultural piece that was discussed or whether it was kind of in that [training]. I’m sure culture was mentioned multiple times and we could have conversations around that.” Participant Four

Working with diverse families was labelled as many different things: cultural sensitivity and anti-oppressive practice being a few. Participant One addressed how their education was the foundation of their understanding of how to work with diverse populations.

“… [T]hat really came back to my BSW training…And maybe that was just because I already knew about it so when I heard it in New Worker Training, it was nothing new but, like, I don’t feel like New Worker Training gave me some sort of leg up or any sort of new understanding in terms of anti-oppressive practice at all.” Participant One

It is interesting how the connection between any forms of culturally sensitive or competent practice is not connected back to New Worker Training, especially since the training goes to lengths to define and express competency as a key factor in child protection practice.

“I guess the only thing I can really remember discussing in the training was, like, I remember being told that…different cultures…do accept physical discipline and presently so I’m told that is an acceptable part of training.” Participant Two

In reference to neglect and working with racialized families, Participant Three expressed:

“…so New Worker Training didn’t address that in particular with me. Um, yeah, it didn’t touch on it. We barely touched on Indigenous families which I thought was a bit odd but…honestly I think the only thing New Worker Training talked about was making sure that you have an appropriate translator there.”

When race, ethnicity, and culture became a topic of conversation, participants were likely to speak about issues of migration, immigration, and express the conflict between ‘Other’ standards versus Canadian standards.

“So when they come to Canada, they may have been doing parenting practices in their home country, different from ours and they may be considered neglectful here but not considered that way there. And so that informing your work with the family, right?” Participant Four

Additionally, participants spoke of ‘standards’ in the sense that they represent, and uphold, Canadian legislation within their work in child welfare organizations. Participant One and Three both addressed what they considered reasonable standards versus other standards that they consider unreasonable, or ineffective, in working with families.

In relation to working with people of different cultural backgrounds, it becomes about “educating on what our standards are but taking into accommodation…their culture and what they’re used to.” Participant One

While upholding standards, participants were also reflective of experiences where they have had to educate the public on standards of neglect when it comes to ethno-cultural families. Participant Two described a scenario where a school had placed a report of neglect for two children from the same family since they were coming to school without lunches. The worker presented a context where the children were two of the only ethno-racial children in the school which was located in a predominantly upper-middle class Caucasian neighbourhood. Part of the assessment Participant Two undertook involved a critical analysis of what the school administration considered neglect and the school’s reaction given that the children were from an ethno-racial background. In fact, the children were throwing away their prepared lunches on the way to school because they would receive food they were not allowed to eat at home from the school when they did not present a lunch.

Participant Four also brought up a similar experience in working with a hospital clinic that was providing services for a child on the caseload. The participant referred to a scenario where the clinic referred to the child’s mother as neglectful until a meeting was arranged by the participant to discuss the concerns.

“And I guess the appointments are at 8 am…She’s never been able to make these appointments. And what has the hospital done to help her with that? They’ve done nothing. They’ve kept scheduling these 8 am appointments. She’s continuously been late and they’re seeing her as being neglectful. Versus, this is impossible; you’ve created an impossible situation.” Participant Four

Workers have to engage in critical reflection when it comes to their interactions with families and maltreatment, but also have to be aware of societal understandings of maltreatment and diversity as part of their daily practice.

***Culture, ethnicity, and the other in child welfare practice.***  Participants framed child welfare legislation under a subsection of Canadian culture and standards of care for children, something that newcomers to Canada should learn as a part of their assimilation and integration process. Exposure, standards, and what is considered acceptable are concepts which are “to be learned” as a part of being “Canadian” or being accepted into Canadian society.

“…realizing what pieces we need to address such as leaving the toddler alone where as some pieces can be educational and learning about the culture here in Canada and what’s acceptable here versus what would be normal and, kind of, unspoken in their community where they’re from.” Participant One

In speaking about addressing culture and maltreatment,

“I think the neglect piece is just them not understanding necessarily ‘Canadian standards’ quote unquote, like, versus what they’re used to where they’ve come from.”

Participant One

“So my whole intervention is saying…*everything about your plan is perfect except for the actual hitting part. You need to just replace it with…go to your room or loss of allowance*…or something that is deemed acceptable today in Canada.” Participant Two

“…the context, because most of the cases I can think of…where this sort of thing was happening, …the kids were first generation or, like, the whole family had just moved here so…they hadn’t had a lot of exposure to contemporary Canadian culture…”

Participant Two

“…My experience has been that new families are very nervous about having this government agency…come in and question what they are doing with their children. More than once I have had families, like, absolutely be convinced that they need to move back right away because otherwise they’re going to be moving back without their kids.” Participant Three

“It would be more abuse that I would kind of say that, more kind of that corporal punishment that is a big learning curve for families coming to Canada.” Participant Four

Workers expressed how lack of knowledge around Canadian laws on child maltreatment framed the manner in which they approached the “unknowing Other”, through the lens of education.

“…[E]ducating around the culture of ‘*no, you know, people don’t just know, you’ve got to let them know*” but also then education, you know, then leaving the two year old alone is neglectful ad talking about what could have happened should that two year old have been alone.” Participant One

“...[T]o get them to trust you and to get them to understand why we need to be there and what the concerns are but at the same time respecting that their family system is a very closed system…” Participant One

“…I still saw them as good parents and stuff. It was kind of like they just didn’t get the memo of, by the way, you can’t hit your kids in Canada says Children’s Aid. Don’t do it.” Participant Two

When describing what the educational process looked like, transparency about information collection and procedures was an integral part of the conversation.

“…I mean, it’s never going to be equal between any client and a CAS worker but I feel like it was less unbalances when I tried to frame it as an educational thing because I think that just my demeanor and the way that I spoke to them sort of changed…to saying, giving a message if only implicitly that was more along the lines of hey, look, I want to help to adjust to this new home and I want you to keep your kids and I want you to not get in trouble. Let me fill you in on a few things that you didn’t know. I mean, give you a cheat sheet, give you a heads up.” Participant Two

“…[M]y style is very, very transparent and [I] say ‘*here’s how we work, here are the rules around it, here are the laws, here are your rights, here is what I’m going to do, here’s anything you want to know about me and, um, here is how I see this going down’*.”

Participant Three

“I’ve had families ask me for access to, like, the eligibility spectrum and the documents that are online so…now I go out with that written down so if you want to access those, you can. But I didn’t learn that from New Worker Training.” Participant Three

In their approach to education and transparency, workers rejected the term “cultural competency” and described the intervention or initial meeting as an inquisitive conversation, one based on appropriate questioning, irrelevant of cultural difference.

“… [I]t’s just engaging in a meaningful conversation with the parent about what that looked like and how that has changed here…In your community at home, yes its unspoken, but in, I think, you can do better work with a family, if you engage in a meaningful conversation and actually listen to them about why this wouldn’t have been a concern for them and then explaining why it is now.” Participant One

“…[T]he general message was more…do a bit more investigation…try to find out what is going on so…if someone comes from a different culture, there’s going to be all sorts of stuff that I don’t know and I will not know until I start asking questions. So I think that the general message that I recall was not jumping to those conclusions, like, is this someone who has been raised in a different country than you, at a different time than you. You don’t know what they’re thinking so you need you find out first, or at least try to.”

Participant Two

“I think in any case I am probably asking a lot more questions now and trying to ask questions before jumping to any conclusion. I think that, that probably started through work with people from different cultures because as I became aware…without asking questions, without seeking context…I wouldn’t have known and then the next logical step is kind of, ok, well maybe I am still making assumptions about everybody, right?” Participant Two

“ For me, the biggest thing for me, is just asking questions about cultural differences and being ok with the fact that I don’t know your culture…I don’t know what your story is. I don’t know why you’re here…just asking questions and just being very, very transparent.” Participant Three

“…I always sort of think no matter what family I am going into a. at the very base, I don’t know your family, I am just meeting you now, I don’t know what your life is life, I don’t know what your history is like, I’m going to ask you questions about it…and not only that but whether we are the same colour of skin or not and whether we are the same age or not, my life is really different than yours...but you always need to be asking those questions.” Participant Two

“So, I think again it would be going back to kind of the poverty and the other sort of systemic barriers might be experiencing, um, because they are you know have refugee status or they are new immigrants and experiencing a different reality than what they planned for. So I feel the cultural piece plays more of a factor … but I think as long as you still have the lens of the systemic piece that are surrounding it, and the additional barriers that would face that family…” Participant Four

The presenting findings from the interviews shed light on what workers had experienced within New Worker Training and how they translated that knowledge into their practice as child welfare workers. It also highlights the complexities surrounding understandings of neglect, particularly when racialized families are involved.

**OACAS Training Handout Findings**

When I first started reading the handouts, I started by looking for words that would be clear indicators of Otherness. Words such as ‘race’ and ‘minority’ came to mind in preliminary thoughts. I quickly found out that the dominant presentation of the Other as presented in the courses was through the use of the term ‘culture’, ‘diversity’, and ‘ethnicity’. A range of terms associated with culture could also be read. These included cultural competence, cultural differences, cultural self-assessment, cultural knowledge, cultural diversity, culturally appropriate, and cultural beliefs and values to name a few. Below, I present three emerging themes from my reading of the OACAS New Worker Training document: culture as an entity, culture and child maltreatment, and culture and ethnic identity.

**Culture as an entity.** The presentation of the Other in the OACAS New Worker Training Handout is segregated between an understanding of culture and ethnicity. Presented to the worker within a set of competency guidelines for the first course (OACAS Course One: Handout One), a definition of culture is presented as:

“A shared system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions and learned standards of behaviour that regulate life within a particular group of people.” (OACAS Course One: Slide 60)

Although culture is a commonly used term, there are various definitions and varying ways of explaining how it works. Since there are no alternative definitions of culture present within the handout, this definition determines how a cultural Other is conveyed to New Workers as a part of their training. The following slides in the first course (61- 71) hope to engage workers in a conversation about this definition of culture.

After the definition, workers are presented with a list of ways in which culture is ‘expressed’. The list of expressions are not presented as variables but in a definitive “culture is expressed in” statement, contributing to the nature of culture that the New Worker Training assumes (OACAS Course One: Slides 61-62). Certain expressions of culture such as family structure, roles, values, decorum and discipline, religion, and food are also overlapping concepts with ethnicity. Although not explicitly stated, the differences between culture and ethnicity are explicit enough to warrant a distinct differentiation. The language of ethnicity and race is evidently invisible in this first module. This begs the question: why culture? By stating the word culture, what vernacular is missing from this conversation about an Other?

Aligned in the assumption within this course module that culture is a fixed concept, the training includes five elements of cultural competence (OACAS Course One: Slides 63-64). The five elements that workers should be able to practice include:

“The ability to:

1. Value diversity and similarities among all peoples
2. Understand and effectively respond to cultural differences
3. Engage in cultural self-assessment at the individual and organizational levels
4. Make adaptations to the delivery of services that reflect an understanding of cultural diversity
5. The ability to institutionalize cultural knowledge” (OACAS Course One: Slides 63-64)

Disguised through the language of acceptance through terms such as ‘value’ and ‘diversity’, culture is masked as something which can be explicitly ‘understood’ and illicit ‘effective’ response. An assessment of culture at an organizational level permits the institutionalization of cultural knowledge. This is elaborated on within the Discussion chapter.

Following the elements of cultural competence, Slides 65 and 66 of Course One ask workers to engage in cultural self-assessment by asking four questions meant to incite personal reflection.

“1. Am I sufficiently knowledgeable about my culture?

2. Am I culturally competent within my own culture?

3. What do I need to learn more about to enhance my cultural knowledge and understanding about my culture?

4. To what extent does my understanding of my culture (my attitudes, feelings, beliefs, etc.) affect how I interact with children and families in my culture?”

(OACAS Course One: Slides 65-66)

It is important to encourage self-refection in a taxing and demanding workplace such as child welfare. However, words such as ‘knowledgeable’, ‘competent’, ‘learn’, and ‘understand’ have severe implications, regardless of whether this is an analysis of self or Other, when speaking about culture as a fixed entity.

Handout Five of Course One is an assessment of a pre-chosen film called *Whale Rider*. The assessment is meant to be a reflection of workers’ understanding of what they know of culture as it is presented within the film. Questions asked of the workers are indicative of the static manner in which culture is presented; questions of ‘values’ and ‘elements’ (OACAS Course One, Handout Five). My argument is that culture may have elements, like water has elements of hydrogen, but in the case of culture with human populations, culture can change, transition, and look different depending on context. My argument is that by answering “Identify elements of the Maori culture” (OACAS Course One, Handout Five), workers have not been explained that those elements are subject to change and adaptation based on the definition of culture provided.

**Culture and child maltreatment.** Course Three of the OACAS training handout, called Protecting Children and Strengthening Families, addresses the different types of child maltreatment and introduces workers to the eligibility spectrum. The eligibility spectrum, mirroring the protection concerns of the Child and Family Services Act, is the marker for the different types of abuse and their severity for the purposes of case noting, documentation, and legality. In the analysis of the document, neglect was the first form of maltreatment presented within the module. Appearing on Slide Four (Page 3), sub-categories, child indicators, physical indicators, child behaviours, parent behaviours, and poverty are discussed as indicators of neglect. In is important to note that within this segment on neglect as a sub-form of child maltreatment, culture and its various indicators are not mentioned within behaviours of parents who neglect. Culture is not present within the specificities of neglect.

The term ‘culture’ is mentioned later in the module under the segment on emotional abuse (OACAS Course Three: Slide 65). Slide 65 in particular addresses factors that influence impact that emotional abuse has on a child. The last of the factors listed on that side is ‘cultural factors’. This remains to be explained within the larger context of maltreatment. Why are cultural factors present only when there is emotional abuse? Additionally, these factors go unexplained within the text which begs the question of what information is being presented to workers by those who are teaching the courses. Cultural factors relating to emotional neglect but no other forms of maltreatment are worthy of questioning.

Out of the many exercises at the end of Course Three, Handout Four stood out in particular. Entitled ‘Diversity in Child Rearing’ (OACAS Course Three, Handout Four), this handout is exemplary in the ways culture is misrepresented, simplified, and ill-defined within New Worker Training. The Handout is meant to be used for discussion in small groups. A precursor paragraph leads to two questions used to encourage discussion. The paragraph states:

“In our multicultural society, there are people from every corner of the Earth who have come to Canada, and Ontario specifically. They come seeking refuge from persecution, wanting a better, safer life for their children, to reunite with family members who have come before them, or simply to start a new life in a country they perceive as overflowing with opportunity and prosperity. Many immigrants come to Canada with little more than the clothes on their backs and as many personal belongings as can be jammed into maximum allowable luggage. Less obvious than their gigantic suitcases and small purses, are the values and beliefs and customs and rituals ingrained in their memories and very souls. These are alive at their cores and are manifested sometimes only in the confines of their homes. Child rearing practices and beliefs about family, family life, childhood and children are among the less often seen “ways of being” until a “problem” is suspected by teachers, health care professionals, police authorities or others.”

(OACAS Course Three: Part Two, Handout 4)

This Handout introduces the reader to the term ‘diversity’, and aligns it with the concept of ‘culture’ and ‘immigration’. As a part of the self-reflection component of the Handout, workers are meant to reflect on the following questions after having read the paragraph above:

“1. Identify three examples of parenting practices or attitudes and behaviours towards children that your own cultural group considers normal and/or acceptable that some other cultural groups might consider to be abusive.

2. Identify three examples of parenting practices or attitudes and behaviours towards children that are considered normal and/or acceptable in some cultural groups in Ontario but might be considered abusive.”

(OACAS Course Three: Part Two: Handout 4)

The next section will review the introduction and presentation of the term ‘ethnicity’ within New Worker Training.

**Culture and ethnic identity.** New Worker Training introduces another layer to its presentation of the Other in Course Four, entitled Understanding and Responding to Children’s Needs. Slides 18 to 20 present the concept of ‘Ethnic Identity’ under the topic of assessing child development. This likely fulfills the knowledge component of being able to articulate cultural considerations in the assessment of attachment for children and their families since ethnic identity is missing from the overall list of competencies for the course (Course Four: Handout One, Competency 8). This is another reflection of the blurred lines of definition between culture and ethnicity. Here, ethnic identity is defined as:

“The degree to which an individual has a sense of belonging to a racial or ethnic group and associates his/her thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with membership in that ethnic group.” (Course Four: Slide 18)

Slide 19 suggests five components of ethnic identity: ethnic knowledge, self-identification, constancy, role behaviours, and feelings and preferences (Course Four, Slide 19). Slide 20 presents three phases of ethnic identity development within adolescence: ethnic identity diffusion/foreclosure, search/moratorium, and achievement (Course Four, Slide 20, page 8).

Ethnicity is not referred to again throughout the remainder of the Courses within New Worker Training. Culture comes up again at the end of Course Four after several developmental markers have been suggested for babies, infants, and children (Course Four, Handout 3). The following disclaimer is presented at several points throughout the remainder of the course:

“The cultural context within which we seek to understand the development and behaviour of children is a critical consideration. Culture affects every aspect of a child’s development. What is considered “normal” development in one culture may not be considered within the normal range of another culture, and vice versa. Similarly what we consider ‘abnormal’ or “delayed” in one culture may be quite normal, predictable and healthy in another culture.” (Course Four: Handout 3, page 27)

This disclaimer is both appropriate and important within the larger context of development markers. However, there is a conflicting presentation of whether culture or ethnicity is the more appropriate term to be used within this context, especially since ethnicity was presented within the Course itself.

The discussion chapter will explore the presented information in depth in order to deconstruct the message behind culture and ethnicity as delivered within the training modules. This is done in hopes of understanding the intention behind the terms used and the conflict that they present in their use within an educational setting. The following discussion will lead into implications for future social work training and practice in child welfare.

**Chapter 5. Discussion**

The findings from the interviews from frontline child welfare workers and analysis of the OACAS New Worker Training Handout shed light on how workers view training and how they apply the process to their practice. The following discussion will focus on the implications of the findings and how they impact social work practice within a child welfare setting. Separated by themes, the first two are drawn from the conversations with frontline child welfare workers while the remainder are taken from the OACAS New Worker Training Handout.

**Participants’ Perceptions on New Worker Training Discussion**

From what workers addressed within the interviews and how they spoke, it was evident that workers took issue with some components of training, knew it needed to change in some capacity, but still agreed that it was crucial to the introduction of child welfare practice. A number of considerations had to be paid from the type of supervisor, to caseload complexity and amount, to the protection of time while engaging in training. All of these factors were important in how workers presented their reflections. It is important to consider how workers who have high caseloads engage in appropriate training at the same time. The retention of information is crucial to the practice knowledge that frontline workers have about maltreatment, culture, and other components of New Worker Training.

Workers found that the most relevant aspects of the training were the components that were important to them at the time as new workers. Three out of four workers spoke about boundaries, standards, and concrete aspects of the occupation as being crucial to their take away knowledge. This alludes to the complexity within child welfare practice and the inherent tensions that exist between “knowing” something (for example, a type of child maltreatment) and engaging with it in practice, as addressed by the workers. Concrete knowledge such as how to use assessment forms, writing court documents, and internal structure of child welfare organizations overshadowed the conversation on knowledge about child maltreatment, engagement with families, and relationship building.

Participant Four’s reflection on the tension is extremely relevant to the discussion. While other workers reflected on what they believed was most important to them within the training, Participant Four addressed how the belief in what is important as a new worker is created within the process of training itself. If training documents and facilitators spend a significant portion of the training on what Participant Four refers to as “other stuff” (court documents, assessments, affidavits etc.), then this becomes reinforced in how workers understand what is most relevant to their practice. Participant Four also questions how child welfare practice would look should the emphasis within training shift to a focus on direct practice. This analysis is suggestive of reflection that workers have in retrospect, after years of frontline practice and a wealth of experience.

**Practice Perspectives**

Collectively, participants in the research did not attribute their practice knowledge of working with families of ethno-racial backgrounds and their understanding of neglect to what they had learned from New Worker Training. Their overall understandings of both concepts came from a combination of practicum training, proper supervision, and their education within a social work program. Additionally, since workers interviewed had generally been employed with CAS agencies for 2 years or more, they shared how direct practice with families in a child welfare role taught workers how to engage within different scenarios with different families over time. New Worker Training was rarely cited as the principal introduction to learning about working with an ethno-racial Other and to understanding child neglect, nor was it cited as furthering worker knowledge. What the workers did share about their knowledge about engaging with families of ethno-racial backgrounds and child neglect proves important for child welfare research and current practitioners.

In discussing the intersection of possible neglect within families of ethno-racial backgrounds, participants shared limited knowledge from their own caseloads. However, what they shared was indicative of knowledge gained through their experiences in CAS roles. The equation of working with an Other and the concept of child neglect was framed within an educational context. All workers addressed the “lack of knowledge” that families can have within the process of immigration and expressed their role as educators, providing transparency within a mandatory process. Additionally, knowledge was often referred to as “standards”, a reference to Canadian standards of child rearing. In this case, Canadian culture was something that could, and should, be learned by newcomers to Canada as part of their integration process, not the other way around.

The misunderstanding or lack of understanding of Canadian standards is what Ahmed (2007) refers to as part of the construction and renewal of the Other. Within Ahmed’s analysis, regardless of the transparency of the worker, the assertion (through intervention) that the norm has been disrupted, that standards are no longer being followed, is a process of making aware (Ahmed, 2007). By making aware of the Other, Whiteness, or in this case where the standards come from, is rarely questioned and upheld within the language of education (Ahmed, 2007). The construction the Other within the language of immigration is a narrow understanding of the complexities of diverse ethno-racial groups and their engagement with child welfare workers. It begs the question of how workers view ethno-racial families who having been living in Canada for a long time, or are second, third, fourth generation Canadians. It also begs the question of worker caseload experience and comfort in sharing situations of disillusion.

Cultural competency, or knowledge about cultures, as a stand-alone point was rejected by all workers who approached engagement with families in similar ways, regardless of them being an ethno-racial Other. Workers spoke about approaching families from a place of curiosity, transparency about the processes involved within investigation, and having meaningful conversations with people, irrelevant of culture. The presentation of a non-judgemental attitude was cited by all workers and sets a crucial standard that contrasts how culture, ethnicity, and diversity are presented within the New Worker Training document. Additionally, workers approached engagement from an ecological framework referring to knowledge about immigration processes, refugee claims, poverty, housing, and racism as impacting their intervention (Gitterman & Germain, 2013). Evidence of holistic mindsets are indicative of how supplemental training moving away from cultural competency and the role of education can impact workers perceptions and practice with the Other.

Conversations about neglect as a stand-alone point shed light on how workers understood the confluence of race and neglect when working with families and children. White and Hoskins (2011) refer to socio-legal and bureaucratic discourses which interrupt the conversation about neglect, something that is applicable within the context of this research. Participants referred to the eligibility spectrum (OACAS, 2007), evidence, and quantifiable information to account for the procedural application of neglect (White & Hoskins, 2011). At the same time, by accounting for structural implications, namely poverty, participants allude to a humanistic discourse which operates in contrast to the legal nature of the term neglect (White & Hoskins, 2011). White and Hoskins (2011) explain this process as “walking the tightrope”.

Humanistic discourses are evident throughout the participant’s conversations on neglect. Especially important to this research is to understand where the participants were coming from before engaging in New Worker Training. Those who had extensive experience in social service organizations before coming into child welfare had a different way of explaining neglect than those with little to no experience. However, the results proved similar. Although workers knew the legal definition of neglect as presented through the eligibility spectrum and what the courts would find admissible, they worked in a subjective environment. In this environment, there was movement between abuse and neglect, disillusion about naming something neglect, and an integration of socio-political issues that added to conflicted points of view on how workers identified and named neglect as child maltreatment.

Important to the larger discussion on neglect is the implication of poverty. Named as such by all participants in this study, poverty implicates child neglect. The ability the critically reflect and link poverty and neglect by all workers, as something that goes “hand-in-hand”, should invoke larger discussion on Canadian standards of child maltreatment as linked with poverty alleviation and elimination. If neglect comprises 33 percent of all child maltreatment cases and workers unanimously link poverty with this type of maltreatment, poverty elimination should become a priority for policy makers working in child welfare and for Canadian government. If poverty is not a part of the larger discussion around child neglect, the ambiguity of the term will continue to exist within child welfare practice.

**OACAS Training Handout Discussion.**

**Culture as an entity discussion.** Introduction of the term ‘culture’ within the New Worker Training module begins by introducing the term under a set of competencies that are meant to be achieved. This frames culture in a manner which the worker must be knowledgeable in their cultural background, and also understand the fundamental concepts of culture. The definition of culture that is offered to the reader is arguably a narrow representation of culture within diverse societies around the world and in Canada.

A generalist understanding of culture can have several impacts. Two of which are that workers can believe that everyone, every individual regardless of ethnic origin, has culture or workers can believe that culture only applies to those who have strong shared values attached to ethnic origin. The problem with this divergence is that Caucasian people often do not associate the term culture with Caucasian identity (Perry, 2001). Therefore Caucasian people often do not assume that they have a culture (Perry, 2001). It is hard to say which concept workers take in when they are engaged in New Worker Training and what the impact is in practice.

Although the OACAS has adopted Anti-Oppressive training as a part of its training regiment, New Worker Training presents culture within the context of competencies. As presented in the literature, attaching culture to competence is presumptuous in the sense that although aspects of culture can be learned, they cannot always be known (Kirmayer, 2012). Keeping in mind the ingrained contradictions between cultural competence and OACAS commitment to anti-oppressive practice, these elements of competency will be explored further. The findings indicate the five elements of cultural competence that workers should be able to practice within completion of the module, all of which are critiqued.

If to be competent is to be able to understand cultural difference, one must ideally know about the respective cultures. The idea that culture can be understood or known reaffirms the notion of its fixed status in this training module. Likewise, in the scope of child welfare practice, a response can have various consequences for children and families. Interventions look different based on workers, families, and the contexts they exist in. Since a definition, or space for discussion, of what an ‘effective’ response to cultural differences is not provided, workers are faced with intuitive, at times arbitrary, decisions and conclusions on what they are. In this sense, it is very unclear on what ‘adaptations’ should be made to services and how one adaptation could be better or worse than another, depending on the family and child.

‘Engaging in cultural self-assessment at the individual and organizational levels’ assumes that everyone engages in reflection, first on culture alone, but also on one’s own culture. Additionally, it assumes that individuals undergoing training agree to having culture. The training does not specify whether everyone has culture, or whether some have culture and others do not, or whether individuals can switch cultures. The complexity arises when individuals feel as though culture does not apply to them, the referential point of culture being of those who are different. Is engaging in cultural self-assessment a priority to those who do not subscribe to having culture? Are those who engage in individual cultural assessment more or less likely to engage in organizational cultural assessment? The discourse is limited to a simplistic read, begging further analysis on who has the power to engage in such assessment within an organization like child welfare.

Although this is not explained in text, institutionalizing cultural knowledge would in effect make it customary or regular practice. Cultural competence within New Worker Training is then suggesting that in order for workers to be considered knowledgeable on culture within their positions, they should be able to take their knowledge and make it customary and as widely applicable as possible. Institutionalization is not easily synonymous with change and adaptation. Additionally, someone who does not see themselves as having culture can still engage in the institutionalization of cultural knowledge. The limited, almost obligatory, engagement with culture within New Worker Training allows for the dominant rhetoric and gaze of Whiteness to exist. This is done in the affirmation that there is a cultural Other and that this Other can be learned, known, and institutionalized so that others can know the same. It is also written in a manner where culture remains stable and the same, allowing institutionalization to take place.

It remains unclear whether the definition of culture is suggestive of culture as a universal entity, everyone has it. Without this being explicitly stated, it is possible for people receiving training to detach themselves from engaging in cultural self-assessment and resorting to a perception of culture as something that exists outside of them, a trait of Whiteness. The concern with this possibility is that workers operate from a gaze of Whiteness that is instructed to them and a part of their formal training and introduction to child welfare.

Slides 65 and 66 of Course One is presented in a way that is meant to engage workers in a self-assessment on culture. Terms such as knowledgeable’, ‘competent’, ‘learn’, and ‘understand’ are used to question workers on what they know about their own culture. Larger questions of what it means to be knowledgeable and competent are not addressed. This becomes complicated when addressing how transmigration and immigration have altered the scope of what culture means to the diverse workers engaged in child welfare work. I can use my own example.

As a South Asian woman who migrated to Canada at the age of 8, what it means to be knowledgeable about my own culture becomes a complicated question to answer. Is the person asking the question looking at me as a South Asian woman and expecting me to answer from a primordial understanding of culture? Or should I take into account that migration, loss of religious affiliation, and language has played a role in who I am as an individual? In the second case, the answer would be no. If I am not sufficiently knowledgeable, then can I ever be competent within my own culture? Asking what I would need to learn more about to enhance my cultural knowledge reduces values and beliefs to a set of variables that can be accomplished within an assessment. The problematic in the discourse is a presumption that everyone understands that they have culture. The culture of Whiteness is diluted in the larger conversation of cultural self-assessment.

It would be presumptuous to think that just because someone has primordial characteristics that they belong to certain culture and know everything about that culture. It would be just as presumptuous to think that culture is solely learned and cannot be unlearned and adapted to context. The last question regarding cultural self-assessment is interesting as it relates to child welfare practice. Assuming that culture is the way it is presented to us within Course 1, wouldn’t the purpose of cultural competency be to gain knowledge in order to work with cultures other than one’s own? It seems contradictory to posit a question where culture self-assessment and reflection is limited to interaction with those of similar culture without including a reflection on what interaction with cultures different than one’s own.

Towards the end of Course One, workers are required to analyze a family of different cultural background through a viewing of the film *Whale Rider*. Although the activity itself is a meaningful engagement about understanding families other than one’s own, the element of culture in the way it is presented in *Whale Rider*, a movie about the Maori, Indigenous peoples of New Zealand, is reflective of an ethno-racial other. Why does the example of culture have to be of Maori peoples if everyone has culture and culture is not based on ethnic and racial ties? Why not an example from North America? Or Europe? There are similar Case Examples provided in Course 1 such as the cases of Lenora (a recent immigrant of Muslim background) and Robin (an Indigenous woman) where the notion of ‘culture’ becomes present, but only so because it is stated and therefore the reader is made aware. The remainder of the Case Examples have no identifying factors that would allude to a difference in ‘culture’. This presents a situation where all other case studies present individuals that are assumed to be of a neutral cultural background; a factor of Whiteness.

**Culture and child maltreatment discussion.** Within the larger context of child maltreatment and neglect, culture is very restrictedly mentioned in Course Three. The term culture does not appear alongside neglect as maltreatment, but does under the section of emotional abuse. This begs the question why? The focus of the discussion is drawn to Handout Four in Course Three ‘Diversity in Child Rearing’ where the paragraph and following discussion questions allude to an intersection between ‘culture’, ‘diversity’, and ‘migration’ that was never present before.

Migration and culture are presented as linear concepts within this Handout, with less than obvious presentation other than gigantic suitcases and small purses. Again, we see examples of how culture is aligned with a representation of the ethno-racial Other. This is done through the use of the term ‘multicultural’. Multiculturalism in the dominant Canadian rhetoric is a direct reference to the ethnic and racial diversity of Canadian society. The use of the term culture lacks clear boundaries and its use in conjunction with terms such as ‘multicultural’ has implications. These implications include a misconception that ethno-racial groups also have a fixed and knowable identity, much like how different cultures do. The notion that values, beliefs, customs and rituals are ‘ingrained’ and ‘alive at their cores’ is a drastic misconception of culture and the variables that impact it, namely the process of migration and assimilation.

Immigration is a largely ethno-racial process in Canada. Canada had 1.2 million immigrants enter the country between 2006 and 2011 out of which Ontario received 43.1% or 501, 000 immigrants in 2011 as compared to 52.3% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011). Out of those immigrants between 2006 and 2011, 56.9% came from Asia (including the Middle East), 13.7% came from Europe, 12.5% came from Africa, 12.3% came from the Caribbean and Central or South America, and 3.9% came from the USA (Statistics Canada, 2011). This invariably diverse group of immigrants, comprised in the majority by people from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Central or South America are not a static group of people within categories set by Immigration Canada. Invisible in the previous language of culture is how New Worker Training is referencing the ethno-racial Other while using the simplistic definition of culture.

Again, if workers do not see their personal backgrounds as cultural, using terms such as multicultural and citing immigration is not going to assist workers in their personal connection to a culture. In other terms, how are Caucasian workers who do not see themselves as having culture, engage in conversation about culture from a ‘point of view’ within New Worker Training, when culture is linked to concepts such as diversity and multicultural, terms commonly cited for an ethno-racial Other.

Additionally, the simplification of the process of immigration is a clear example of the invisibility of Whiteness within the text. Yes, Canada does accept a number of immigrants with refugee status and with ‘small purses’ but based on the points system, Canada takes in immigrants that meet the minimum requirements of saved revenue, potential to earn, family status, and so on. The fee to apply for temporary or permanent residency is hefty one and does not include the extraneous fees that go into medical appointments etc. Although the interactional experience for child welfare workers with immigrants might be with a certain class, oversimplifying the process of immigration to one where gigantic suitcases, small purses, and ingrained values are expressed as the standard for diversity in Canada is not suitable for holistic practice. Practices and beliefs about family life, childhood, and children are not commonly visible outside the homes of most citizens, let alone homes of immigrants. Presentation of the immigrant with the use of words such as ‘they’ and ‘their’ creates an illusory divide between the experiences of people.

Handout Four also asks workers to speak from self-reflection of their own culture and dissect what is considered normal versus abusive between cultures, and within regions (such as Ontario). In this process of division, workers are instructed to identify practices that would contribute to an ‘us versus them’ analysis of normal and acceptable parenting versus abusive parenting. The repetitive concern in this process is that definition of culture has been blurred enough to speak about culture in the way that one would refer to different ethno-racial groups. Diluted in the conversation about “other” cultural groups is the neutrality of normal, correct, appropriate, and Ontario standard of parenting that becomes a point of reference. It is this point of reference that constitutes the invisibility of Whiteness within New Worker Training.

**Culture and ethnic identity discussion.** In Course Four of New Worker Training, the term ‘ethnic identity’ is introduced, defined, and constructed under the label of child developmental assessment. Within the definition of ethnicity, there is no distinction made between the previous definition of culture and this definition of ethnicity. Instead of a ‘particular group of people’, the defining population of choice seems of be an ‘ethnic group’. This is also the only point in the training that the term ‘race’ has been brought up and used. This definition of ethnic identity can also be regarded as simplistic. Although Slide 19 addresses the components of ethnic identity, the definition’s association of identity as ‘belonging’ to thoughts, feelings, and behaviours is seemingly static, the way that culture is also presented. The transmission of ethnic identity is not solely based on the concept of ‘belonging’ to a racial or ethnic group because individuals rarely have the individual choice of what racial or ethnic group they are labelled under (Cornell & Hartman, 2006). The definition of ethnic identity is illustrative of the operative Whiteness which associates components of individual choice to historical methods of human categorization (Cornell & Hartman, 2006).

The following slide after a definition of ethnic identity presents five (supposedly) identifiable components of ethnic identity. Again the lack of context associated with the components is suggestive of ethnic identity that can be categorized and known. Terms such as ‘knowledge’, ‘constancy’, and ‘role behaviours’ reduce ethnicity to a series of factors and variables which are chosen, can be learned, and therefore known in a similar manner as culture. Ethnicity, although circumstantial in its context and very fluid according to purpose, is often viewed in its primordial sense (Cornell & Hartman, 2006). Additionally, the presentation of ethnic identity is for the purpose of assessment by the child welfare worker. It is eventually the worker who assesses the ‘degree’ to which a child has a certain gradient of ethnic identity. Outside of self-identification, knowledge, behaviours, feelings, behaviours, and the degree to which they remain constant is presented as a point of assessment for the worker.

Ethnic identity is part of a larger module on child development. Following the components of ethnic identity, Slide 20 presents the steps of ethnic identity development through adolescence with three key phases. However, the markers of ethnic identity diffusion/foreclosure, search/moratorium, and achievement lack consideration of how ethnic identity can change and adapt depending on the circumstances. This homogenous understanding of what it means to have ethnicity and identity becomes more complex if we ask what happens when ethnic identity is not ‘achieved’? Achievement suggests a level of accomplishment, with sentiment of success attached to it. It is not appropriate to view ethnic identity as a set of accomplishable goals, with suitable phases, and components for it reduces complex, holistic worldviews to a set of variables with the end goal of achievement.

The introduction of ethnicity within New Worker Training is not the point of contention. However, the purpose of introducing this term within the larger category of assessment and child development is worthy of question. Why is culture the choice of term to describe difference when it comes to addressing worker competence about different practices? And why is the term ethnic identity introduced when assessment and child development are the overarching topics? The argument can be made that ethnic identity as a component of child development and a point of assessment reproduce historical power hierarchies ingrained in the categorization of individuals.

After this point, ethnicity is not mentioned within the context of New Worker Training. However, the term ‘culture’ is presented within Course Four in the form of a disclaimer on child development. As presented in the findings, this disclaimer asks workers to consider the cultural context under which development and behaviour are assessed for children. Although appropriate to consider, the term ‘ethnic identity’ was used previously within this particular module. Using culture and ethnicity in an interchangeable manner has created a blurred analysis and construction of Other within the context of training child welfare workers. It is doubtful that ethnicity is only applicable within the context of child development and that culture is applicable in all other contexts where difference exists.

It is worthy to note that New Worker Training courses are held according to availability and sometimes workers do not take them in successive order. Additionally, from the interview participants, we know it is possible to accomplish the training within both a short and controlled span of time and an extended period of time ranging more than a year. The findings from this analysis show the limited and controlled capacity in which the Other is presented within New Worker Training documents. From culture to ethnicity, this information is valuable to the analysis of interviews with frontline child welfare workers in Southwest Ontario and what they took away from New Worker Training.

**Implications for Social Work Practice**

Engaging in this research assignment has been a thoroughly insightful process of discovery and understanding. Fusing the findings and discussions leave room for observations on New Worker Training, questions to be taken up, and suggestions for the future of social work practice in child welfare.

In engaging with social workers that work in frontline child welfare practice, it is important to understand that the context in which social workers are educated and practice is ever evolving. It does not make sense to introduce workers to rhetoric of culture and ethnicity in a manner that requires competency when the OACAS has changed its mandate to align towards anti-oppressive practice. This contradiction is even more apparent as schools of social work educate on principles of critical thought and analysis to students before, and during engagement in practicum placements. Cultural competency is neither congruent with the values of anti-oppression, nor is it valid within any critical lens of social work. Associations between the discourse of culture and the demands of competency are negated by frontline social workers and the direction of child welfare practice in Ontario.

A point of contention within the discussion is the presentation and understanding of the ethno-racial Other within the confines of immigration and migration. The New Worker Training gives very little information on direct practice and yet introduces the term diversity within the context of immigration. This is reflective of how workers spoke about the ethno-racial Other within their conversations. Migration and immigration pose some barriers in terms of knowing about Canadian child welfare legislation. However, assuming that every person of colour that engages with child welfare is a new migrant with no money and large suitcases engages in stereotypes about a cultural Other. It provides a narrow understanding of the process of immigration and is reiterated in the way workers speak about educating newcomers about Canadian standards of child rearing.

Aside from that, workers did show clear reflection in how they worked with families. Engagement from a place of respect and consideration was evident as workers spoke about approaching all families from a place of curiosity and openness about the nature of child welfare procedure. Workers also spoke about patience, trust, and honesty as factors within the relationship process of all families. The manner in which they spoke about building relationships is significant to the future of anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice within child welfare. Although I cannot be certain that all workers engage in this type of reflexivity, it is important to know that there are allies in engagement of critical thought within practice.

On the other hand, workers seem to be disengaged from the processes within training and relating knowledge gained within training to practice. Although workers explicitly stated that they did not want a test, they reflected on how the process of training was left unaccountable and with little follow up as to what was taken away. This was also limited through the structural constraints of their positions; families in crisis, full caseloads, unprotected time for training, and demands of the job. Although the training does have a component on self-care, workers showed clear indication of the stressors that deter from a fruitful training process. This will be discussed further within recommendations for future practice.

**Limitations**

This study was limited by time and resources available as part of a Master’s thesis assignment. Restricted by time, the depth of the critical analysis could have been pursued singlehandedly to provide insight on the embedded power within the OACAS training document. The limited amount of time, lack of CAS connections, and general interest in the research also restricted the ability to recruit participants in higher numbers, and from outside Southwest Ontario, to produce more substantial results. This was corroborated by the time period in which the research was taking place, over the summer months, proving difficult to attract and recruit participants. The generalizability of the research is a significant limitation. As training documents, risk assessments, and procedures vary across Canada, the report is also limited to the geographical context of Ontario.

Keeping the limitations in mind, there are several recommendations for social work practice that are valid within this research assignment.

**Recommendation for Future Social Work Practice**

As a result of the critical analysis and interviews with frontline child protection workers in Ontario, the sole recommendation is that a study be conducted on New Worker Training in order to holistically assess how training impacts practice within a child welfare setting. The analysis of the interviews sheds a small light on the larger issue of training and practice experience. Further study could provide concrete recommendations on how to adapt training so that workers find it imperative to their practice and their professional development.

Engaging in this research has brought my experience as a child into a full circle. Pursuing my passion for education, it has become increasingly important to me that frontline child welfare workers continue to exhibit critical thought, compassion, and respect in working with all families. This research, drawn from my silence within my school journal, hopes to engage as many people as possible about the value of discourse, the experiences of workers, and how the two need voice within child welfare practice today.

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Appendix A: McMaster University Ethics Approval



Appendix B: Email Script



Appendix C: Recruitment Poster



**Training and Application: Recruitment Poster**

## PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN *LEARNING AND APPLICATION OF NEGLECT IN FRONTLINE CAS PRACTICE*

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a qualitative study in order to understand the application of neglect with racialized (Non-Indigenous, Non-Caucasian) families and children in frontline CAS work.

You would be asked to participate in a one on one interview to speak about your experiences with CAS training and its applicability to your daily practice with racialized families and children.

Your participation would involve *1-2* sessions;   
each session will be about *45-90* minutes long.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive   
*a light snack and refreshments*

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,   
please contact:   
*Sanober Nair  
McMaster School of Social Work*  
Email: *nairs4@mcmaster.ca*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca | Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca | Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca | Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca | Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca | Sanober Nair  **778-998-4015**  Or  nairs4@mcmaster.ca |

Appendix D: Letter of Information and Consent Form



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT**

**A Study about Understanding how Training influences the application of Neglect in Frontline CAS Workers**

**Student Investigator:** Sanober Nair

Masters Candidate

Department of Social Work

McMaster University

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

E-mail: nairs4@mcmaster.ca

**Faculty Supervisor**: Mirna Carranza

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E: [carranz@mcmaster.ca](mailto:carranz@mcmaster.ca)

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to pursue scholarship to fill some of the existing literature gap on non-Indigenous and non-Caucasian families and children in the child welfare system. You are invited to take part in this study on the impact that CAS Training has on new frontline workers’ understanding of neglect in working with non-Indigenous, non-Caucasian families. I want to speak to frontline workers one on one in hopes of understanding how context, education, personal experiences, specific cases, and anything else impact their understanding and application of neglect. This is in hopes of leaning how CAS new worker training influences application and understanding of neglect in child protection cases.

**Procedures involved in the Research**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be involved in a face-to-face interview with me, which will take roughly 45-90 minutes and will occur at a mutually agreeable, private location. I will ask you a few questions about your background (age and education. Then I will ask about your training, your practice experiences, how you think about the issue of neglect and whether this has changed over time. The specific questions are included below for your convenience. I would like to take notes and audio-record the interview, but will do so only with your permission. I would also like to contact you once I have gone through my data if there are follow up questions, but, again, will do so only with your permission. How we handle the follow-up - in person, by phone or over e-mail - is up to you.

Interview Questions:

1) Information about you: Where did you receive your Bachelor of Social Work? How long have you been working at CAS? How many people do you have on your caseload currently? When did you complete your New Worker Training? Do you still have the training documents with you?

2) Please tell me about your experience within New Worker Training? Do you remember it well? What were some parts that stuck out to you?

3) What part of New Worker Training do you find most relevant to your current and everyday practice? Please tell me more about why you think that?

Please share any examples you have from your current practice.

4) Where did you learn about how to conceptualize Neglect? Did that change during your employment, or through experiences you had, with CAS?

Please share any examples you have from your current practice

5) How did New Worker Training help you understand how to work with non-Indigenous and non-Caucasian families and children? Can you give me examples from your practice?

6) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know?

After the interview conversation is done, you will be thanked for your time. I will let you know within two weeks if there needs to be a second, follow-up conversation.

**Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. The interview may raise cases and/or issues that you feel strongly about or have been a concern for you.  You do not need to answer any question you would prefer to skip and are free to end the interview at any time. You may also worry about how others, including me, might react to what you say. Please keep in mind that I am interested in understanding, not judging. As for others, I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

**Potential Benefits**

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope that what is learned will help us to better understand how practitioners think about neglect in relation to different types of families and ultimately, make training programs more responsive to both practitioner and family needs.

**Payment or Reimbursement**

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be provided a light snack and refreshments during the interview conversation.

**Confidentiality**

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. No one but me will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. However, since your group (community) is small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me. Also, if you like, I can send you a copy of your interview transcript once it is done so that you can make any changes you feel are necessary.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked desk/cabinet where only I will have access to it until it is transferred onto a computer, after which it will be shredded and destroyed. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed after 3 months.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop or withdraw from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until approximately the end of June, 2014. This is when I expect to be submitting my thesis. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

**Information about the Study Results**

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August, 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the result, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

**Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

**Nairs4@mcmaster.ca**

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

**CONSENT**

* I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Sanober Nair** of McMaster University.
* I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
* I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately **end of** **June, 2014**.
* I have been given a copy of this form.
* I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

… Yes.

… No.

2. …Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results.

Please send them to this email address \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Or to this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

… No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study’s results.

3. I agree to receive a copy of the interview transcript and respond to any changes I feel are necessary.

… Yes. Please contact me at: ­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

.... No.

4. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

... Yes. Please contact me at: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

... No.

Appendix E: Interview Guide



Interview Questions:

1) Information about you: Where did you receive your Bachelor of Social Work? How long have you been working at CAS? How many people do you have on your caseload currently? When did you complete your New Worker Training? Do you still have the training documents with you?

2) Please tell me about your experience within New Worker Training? Do you remember it well? What were some parts that stuck out to you?

3) What part of New Worker Training do you find most relevant to your current and everyday practice? Please tell me more about why you think that?

Please share any examples you have from your current practice.

4) Where did you learn about how to conceptualize Neglect? Did that change during your employment, or through experiences you had, with CAS?

Please share any examples you have from your current practice

5) How did New Worker Training help you understand how to work with non-Indigenous and non-Caucasian families and children? Can you give me examples from your practice?

6) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know?

After the interview conversation is done, you will be thanked for your time. I will let you know within two weeks if there needs to be a second, follow-up conversation.