

PARENTS SPEAK: "TREAT US WITH RESPECT"





# **Parents Speak: “Treat Us With Respect”**

A study of child protection service user perspectives

A thesis  
submitted as a requirement  
for the degree of Master of Social Work  
McMaster University  
School of Social Work

by  
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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (2007)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Child Protection Parents Speak: "Treat Us With  
Respect" – A study of child protection service user  
perspectives

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 109

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a secondary data analysis that examines what child protection service (CPS) providers can learn from the experiences of the service users in regards to service delivery. Using Grounded Theory research method, this study analyses the experiences of 44 parents who have used or were currently using CPS in Ontario. The findings suggest that respect is that vital yet missing element in the delivery of CPS. The study concludes by calling for a reconceptualization of service users from the deep-seated pathologizing framework to a strength-based framework.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

March 10, 2005...Why don't their stories get heard? CASs need to hear their stories not me...How can I do justice to their stories? Would I be able to meet their expectations within the confines of this research?

My research journal logged in this entry the day after I interviewed two research participants. At the time I was working as a research assistant on a research project that examined parental perception of child protection services (CPS), which in Ontario (where the study was being conducted) are delivered by Children's Aid Societies (CASs).<sup>1</sup> Many of these participants chose to take part in the research on their own accord despite little active recruitment. Some impersonal flyers and some help from community agencies appeared enough to draw eager participation. Most were compelled to participate by the negative experiences they had with the child protection system. The two parents I had just finished interviewing left me with unsettling feelings. I remember their anguish. More, I remember their expectation. They seemed to be harbouring, rightly or wrongly, certain expectations that through me or whatever they perceived to be my undertaking, somehow their stories would get heard. Never have the responsibility and power accorded to my work hit me so strongly until then.

Now two-years later in contemplating the direction of my MSW thesis, these dormant feelings and thoughts re-surfaced. Reflecting on my journal entries,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Children's Aid Society (CAS) and cp services (CPS) will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

something I had read in a research article occurred to me, “somehow I felt I was taking something away from them by ‘intruding’ into their lives, without being able to give anything immediate or tangible in return” (Boushel, 2000: 78-79). Although disconcerting, at the same time these words were invigorating as the possibility of giving parents a voice through my thesis energized me. Perhaps this is not only a way to tell their stories as the parents hoped I would, but also a way for me to “show respect and gratitude for access to [their] knowledge” (“A framework for ethical research with Aboriginal communities”, n.d.). So that is how it was decided. I will do a secondary analysis of this same research I assisted with.

The objective of the secondary study builds on and complements the project which provides my data; that project sought to give parents a voice by involving them in developing a service user’s guide. Parents, therefore, were using their voice to advise other parents about the ways to manage child protection intervention. It was gathering this information and preparing it for dissemination among parents that I began to think that their stories needed to not only be heard by other parents, but by CASs themselves.

June 19, 2005 - It seems that there are far more data that can be turned into advice for CASs than for parents. May be the next beneficial thing to do is to produce an advice booklet for CASs on how to provide a user-friendly service...

Yes, if there is going to be a user manual from user perspectives, why not also a worker manual from user perspectives? If changes need to be made for the better, why should the onus be on the parents, the less powerful party? Although the



objective of this thesis is not to produce a worker manual, some of the questions I wondered at the time remain relevant for what I intend to do for this thesis. What are parents saying about CPS now? What are they saying that CPS should be? Are there central messages to CASs? To sum up these questions, my thesis will examine and give voice to the stories and opinions parents shared that have implications for the ways CPS are delivered. Given this objective, perhaps the responsibility I feel to give voice to parents' perspectives about service delivery can be discharged.

## **CHAPTER II. CONTEXT OF THE ORIGINAL STUDY: LISTENING TO SERVICE USERS**

The original data for the current analysis come from a research study titled “Building service users knowledge: understanding child protection services from the receiving end”. It is a qualitative study that employs the Grounded Theory and an action/participatory research method to enable parents who have received CPS to draw on their lived experience and develop a service users’ guide for parents newly receiving services (Dumbrill, 2004). The original study started in September 2004 and was placed on hold in March 2006 when I took a leave to undertake my Master of Social Work (MSW) studies. The primary research project has two more years to finish under the SSHRC guidelines, and is slated to continue after my MSW is complete. More details of the original study will be discussed in the respective sections under Chapter V Methodology. But first its context should be noted.

Beresford (2000) observes that social work theory has always been constructed from the ideas, position, and perspectives of the professionals. Listening to parents’ ideas is an unpopular, if not radical, idea in the field of child welfare not least because of the stigma inherent in being a CAS service user. Stigma was an overt and integral part of child welfare service and policy ever since its inception during the Victorian era (Colton, Drakeford, Roberts, & Sholte, 1997). Stigma, as Colton and colleagues (1997) observe, “fulfills a functional

purpose of marking the boundary between the deserving and the non-deserving, between the respectable and the non-respectable” (p. 249). The construct of the worthy and the unworthy and the association of welfare and moral defects have their roots in the Elizabethan Poor Law (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2000; Offer, 2006). Later in the 1834 Poor Law Reform, the same assumption of “moral failings” is reflected in the principle of “less eligibility” (Offer, 2006: 291). By virtue of being someone in need of help, a person is deemed “less eligible” in society or, in other words, becomes undeserving of the respect and treatment that are due a human being. The stigma attached to modern-day CPS users is a part and parcel of this thinking. Literature abounds in the association of social stigma and the marginalization of the voice of parents using CPS (Alpert, 2005; Chen, 2005; Colton et al., 1997; Swift, 1995; Waldfogel, 1998). Closely associated with stigma is also the lack of power of CPS users. Concurring with Marshall, who is known for his work on citizenship, Higgins observes that equal social worth is the necessary condition for the full exercise of civil and political participation (Higgins, 1997). It is not surprising that those deemed less worthy are often those living in the margin of and hold less, if not completely no, power in society.

In modern-day child protection, stigma for CPS users takes on an added meaning - the “criminalized” image of being a child abuser. The idea of involving “parents accused of child abuse and neglect” in service delivery decisions has long become a conundrum for child protection policy makers (Dumbrill, 2006b: 14-15). On one hand prudent policy making necessitates the

involvement of those being affected, yet on the other hand, the pathologized image of service users has hampered their involvement in any meaningful way. As such this public conceptualization of CPS users has become an unspoken justification for the limitation or exclusion of parents' participation. Moreover, parents using CPS are further marginalized by their low social economic status as the majority of them are financially struggling families (Diorio, 1992). As Thede (2005) observes, the limitation in access of social and economic resources entails the limitation of civic and political participation.

Thus parental voice is buried deep within a multi-layered social process – their perceived low social worth, “criminalized” image, low social economic status, and powerlessness. It is no surprise that parental voice is known as the “missing voice” in child welfare (Chen, 2005; “Child welfare in Ontario”, 2005; Dumbrill, 2003a, 2006b; Kellington, 2002). It is against this backdrop that the purpose of the primary study becomes cognizant. Listening to CPS users is taking an anti-oppressive stance; it signifies that marginalized voice needs to be listened to and marginalized views count. Not only is the voice of CPS users worth listening to, as Dumbrill (2006b) argues, it holds the key to the answers to the practice and policy problems that plague the child protection system.

### CHAPTER III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Interests in service users' views emerged during the 1970s with Mayer and Timms' "The client speaks" (1970) being the seminal writing. Research on service users' views during the 1970s and 1980s came mainly from the fields of social and therapeutic services (e.g., Rees, 1978; Sainsbury, 1975) rather than from CPS. The stigma attached to CPS users may have hampered the interest in the research on their perspectives (Alpert, 2005; Beresford, 2000; Colton et al., 1997; Waldfogel, 1998). The sporadic studies found during this period of time, however, do provide a beginning picture of parental perception of CPS. Both Shulman (1978) and Magura and Moses (1984) are evaluation studies using surveys to examine CPS users' views of service. Shulman (1978) highlighted a good worker-client relationship as key to clients feeling helped while Magura and Moses (1984) showed that most of the 250 parents surveyed considered workers helpful. However, evaluative studies tend to give an over-simplified view of parental experience. For instance, in Magura and Moses (1984), despite the findings that most parents considered workers helpful, a range of substantial problems remained following intervention. Thoburn (1980) did a qualitative study on 25 families revealing the trauma parents feel when children were admitted into care. The view generated, however, is somewhat limited due to the sole focus on admission to care. Another qualitative study by Magura (1982) elicited client view of factors that contributed to positive case outcomes. Echoing

the findings in Shulman (1978), Magura (1982) identified worker-client relationship as key to successful service outcomes. These qualitative studies, though establishing a linkage between client-worker relationship and service outcomes, are sketchy about what goes on in that process.

Since the 1990s, more studies on parental perception of CPS begin to surface and highlight the importance of research in this area (Dale, 2004; Farmer, 1993). While there continues to be evaluative and survey types of studies (e.g., Colton et al., 1997; Kapp & Propp, 2002; Kapp & Vela, 2004), there is significantly more qualitative studies that yield rich descriptive and explanatory data.

In the UK, the increase of research on parental perspective in CPS appears to correspond with a series of new developments in the UK during the late 1980s and early 1990s: the 1988 Working Together guideline following the Cleveland Inquiry (Corby, Millar & Young, 1996), the 1989 Children's Act (Jones, 1994; Spratt & Callan, 2004), and the "refocusing" debate during the early 1990s (Dale, 2004; Jones, 1994). All these developments highlight the importance of partnership with parents in CPS. Research studies found on parental perspective during this period generally fall on two areas: general intervention process and case conference process. Farmer (1994) did a qualitative study on the impact of child protection intervention. She interviewed 44 children on child protection registry, their parents, and their workers. Parental experience is characterized by exclusion: Not being consulted before interviewing child, and feeling excluded in

decision-making by not being adequately informed and by the professional language/culture during case conference. As a result, parents feel “anger”, “distrust”, and “unable to affect the course of event” (Farmer, 1993: 42-44). Dale (2004) did a qualitative study on 18 families who had received CPS. Findings are mixed with 50% of participants reporting some level of helpfulness and 22% reporting harm. What constitutes the positive experiences is receiving supportive and therapeutic services and workers being “human”, supportive, and listening to parents. In particular, parents identify humane and respectful treatment as central to their positive experiences. Not surprisingly what constitutes the negative experiences is not getting the needed help and being treated as a “criminal” (p. 150). The straining of resources particularly in the form of over-loaded workers and preventive services is highlighted as underlying reasons for not getting help. Some parents are able to articulate that they are being dealt with in “draconian” ways because workers approach them from the perspective of the “worst possible scenario” (p.152). Richardson (2003) published a paper on her own experience of child protection intervention which she described as having “traumatic, profound and enduring effects” (p. 124). The article particularly focuses on the absolute power CPS has in the construction of information about her family, and the resulting sense of utter powerlessness in ensuring the file records of her family “a complete and accurate representation of what actually happened” (p. 124). The central theme that runs through her article is, having acknowledged the difficult and sensitive nature of child protection intervention, “the right of all human

beings to be treated with dignity and respect and afforded the rights of natural justice” (p.124).

Case conferences are an important part of the child protection intervention process in the UK. Many studies on CPS users’ perspectives have a case conference either as the main or part of the focus. These studies highlight the intimidating (Dale, 2004; Hunt, MacLeod, & Thomas, 1999), disabling (Booth & Booth, 2005; Freeman & Hunt, 1998), and traumatic (Dale, 2004; Thoburn, Lewis, & Shemmings, 1995) experiences parents had. One participant in Dale’s (2004) study used the analogy of “a fish in a bowl” to describe the traumatic and humiliating experience of being scrutinized during the case conference proceeding. A striking and recurring theme in many of these studies is that parents’ positive or negative experiences of case conference hinge on worker intervention styles. If workers adopt a collaborative position, keep parents well-informed, prepare parents for what to expect of the proceedings, and let parents read reports about the family well in advance (Booth & Booth, 2005; Dale, 2004; Freeman & Hunt, 1998), then parents’ perceptions of service outcome are likely to be positive. On the contrary, negative outcomes will result if parents perceive workers as lack of transparency, let parents read reports only shortly before conference, and arbitrary in decision-making. Corby and colleagues (1996) studied parental participation in case conference examining the views of parents, workers, and researchers’ own field observation. Despite 65% of workers acknowledged the value of parents’ attendance, and most parents acknowledged



the conference being well-conducted, only 18% of parents described their experiences as positive. Moreover, researchers' field notes revealed a more complex process. For instance, parental participation may be influenced by the intimidating atmosphere and the covert understanding that they needed to be viewed as cooperative. The study raises question as to the extent parents participate in key decision-making.

Many of these British studies highlight the profound impact of intervention style on families and remind the age-old central social work principle of humane service (Dale, 2004; Freeman & Hunt, 1999) and respect for clients (Corby et al., 1996). The same is true of studies in the USA. In the USA, while there is a large body of child protection literature on case characteristics as indicators of case outcomes, parents' experiences are not considered part of the variables (Alpert, 2005). The handful of studies found in the USA mainly relates to parental perception of worker-client relationship and foster care process. Drake (1994) asked parents and children service workers about what aspects of the client-worker relationship that positively impacted child protection intervention outcomes. Top of the list is that "workers must show clients basic human respect" followed by effective communication and comfortable relationship (Drake, 1994:597). Spending time with clients is perceived by parents as a form of respect. Parents emphasized the need to be treated as a person. Effective communication refers to transparency between workers and clients and workers talking to clients on their level. Comfortable relationship emphasizes the element

of empathy. Not surprisingly the perception of being pre-judged, falsely informed, and misrepresented constitutes the elements that negatively impact intervention outcomes. Worthy of note is that parents were able to articulate that workers should enter intervention without preconception. Substantial congruence is found with workers' views. Workers identify non-judgmental attitude and effective communication as foremost in casework relationship. Diorio (1992) and Haight et al. (2001) highlighted parental perception of power in child protection intervention. Parents in Diorio's (1992) study articulated "the agency as having limitless or unstoppable power" to intervene in their families (p. 227). They experienced this power in the form of overwhelming feelings of fear, and being denied of their parental rights and rights to participate in decision-making. Similarly parents in Haight et al. (2001) identified their experience with foster care as being shaped by their perception of agency power and control. Also in the area of foster care, Kapp and Vela (2004) interviewed parents using the newly developed Parent Satisfaction with Foster Care Services Scale (PSFCSS) and found that client satisfaction improves with solid social work skills which are respect for client, making expectations clear, and involving parents in decision-making. These American studies, like their UK counterparts, highlight the need for respect of, transparency for, and inclusion of parents. Parental perception of these factors plays a pivotal role to their service outcomes and satisfaction.

In Canada, Dumbrill has made significant contributions to the research of parental perspective of CPS. Dumbrill and Maiter (2003) asked parents to give

constructive advice about the ways services could be effectively delivered.

Participants listed workers listening more, keeping parents informed, and parents given choices and participation. What listening means to parents is more akin to the basic social work skill of empathic listening, that is listening with care and understanding (Cournoyer, 2000). Both keeping parents informed and parental participation recognize the place of a parent in a child's life. The study concludes the relevance in seeking client view in CPS, and that parents are indeed capable of giving sensible, thoughtful, and constructive advices in the way CPS can be delivered. In another study Dumbrill (2003a, 2003b, 2006a) uses Grounded Theory to explore 18 parents' experiences of CPS. Parental' perception of CPS power is delineated as the core process that explains parental view of CPS. His exploration on power has taken the findings of the studies of Diorio (1992) and Haight et al. (2001) a step further. Dumbrill shows that parental view of child protection intervention is shaped by the way parents perceive workers in using their power. Two types of power are delineated: power with and power over. Those who perceive workers using power over them would tend to respond in fighting the system or playing the game whereas those who perceive workers using power with them would work with the system. Dumbrill (2006c) suggests a service users' union as a means to give support and provide a collective voice for parents in the face of CAS power.

Anderson (1998) did a study of six participants who are clients of a Native agency that provides preventive and support services, and is in the process of

seeking child protection mandate. All participants either have had experienced apprehension of their children or as a child by a CPS agency. The emotion expressed in relation to CASs is that of anger, hatred, and fear. Discussion about CASs is primarily negative, so much so that it is suggested that if the Native agency ever gains the child protection mandate, it should avoid calling itself a CAS. The significance of this study is the comparison the participants made between CPS and the Native agency service. Being “helped” is the prevailing comment parents articulate in relation to the Native agency. Service outcomes include better parenting skills and improved communication with children. This establishes a rather clear relationship between parents’ service experiences and service outcome – positive experience likely results in positive outcome and vice versa. Another notable point parents mentioned is “an absence of power” (p. 447). The shortcoming of this study is its small sample size which precludes any convincing generalization. Also significant to note is the recommendations parents give in the case that the Native agency gains mandate: Be supportive of parents (not just the children) and keep families together. Being listened to and included in decision-making are articulated as indication of support to parents.

Palmer, Maiter, and Manji (2006) examined the experience of 61 parents in child protection intervention. The study focuses on what contributes to positive and negative experiences without specifying which is the predominant view. What constitutes positive experience is being treated with respect and receiving support. Support is expressed by parents in various forms: Good referrals,

emotional supports, and concrete help. What parents perceive as respect echoes the findings of Dumbrill and Maiter (2003): Being clearly explained processes and limits of agency power, given choices, and being listened to. What constitutes negative experience is inadequate service and being treated unjustly. Inadequate service refers to either no service available or getting less help. Unjust treatment refers primarily to being unfairly judged, inaccurate information about families, and control of information by CASs. Callahan, Field, Hubberstey, and Wharf (1998) elicited the views of both parents and workers on what constitutes best CPS practices. The study concludes with viewing parents with strengths and respect as the core to best practices.

To summarize the literature review, despite the increase over the past decade, research in parental perspective of CPS is still considered by some researchers a largely unstudied area (Alpert, 2005; Booth & Booth, 2005; Dale, 2004; Kapp & Vela, 2004; Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, 2006). With the existing studies, three important observations can be made. First, in spite of their social stigma and powerless social position, parental experience is an equally, if not more, important variable in informing how CPS should be delivered. As Dale (2004) notes:

Researchers are agreed that the views of many parents can extend beyond the biases of their particular personal experiences and consequently can offer sophisticated and insightful contributions that are of much value in relation to the development of good cp practice. (p. 138).

Second, regardless of geographical locations and child protection regimes, parents share strikingly similar experiences. There is a consistently strong tendency of parents to be critical of the child protection intervention process. Whenever positive experience is articulated, it is consistently associated with parents being treated with respect, well-informed, and included in decision-making. Of significance also is that respect as perceived by parents can appear in different forms, for instance, workers spending time with parents and explaining intervention process to parents are two examples. The absence or opposite of these three elements is consistently found among parents' negative experiences, often as dominant themes. Above all there is a strong association between parental perception of agency power and parental experience, be it "power with", "power over", or "unstoppable power" (see Diorio, 1992 and Dumbrill 2003a, 2006a, 2006b above). Last, all the studies under this review are basically descriptive in nature and did not attempt to explain what may be the underlying processes of those descriptive experiences. Dumbrill (2003a, 2006a) is the only noted study employing Grounded Theory in an attempt to conceptualize parental perception of CPS.

## CHAPTER IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Every analysis or argument is viewed through certain vantage point(s).

The present study, as with the primary study, begins with the premise that CPS users' voice needs to be heard. Also parents' perspectives have a relevant and indispensable place in how human services should be delivered. Though unpopular (see Chapter II Context), the position is informed by several theoretical perspectives: Service Users Theory, the strengths perspective, and social work values and principles.

### Service Users' Theory

The term "service user", though adapted by service users as a term of self-empowerment, has been used in the UK to refer to those socially marginalized groups such as the disabled and psychiatric survivors in derogatory ways by the state or social service systems (Beresford, 2005). Peter Beresford who perhaps is the most prolific writer of service users' knowledge observes:

There has traditionally been a tendency in social policy to marginalize and invalidate service users' viewpoints and knowledges. The knowledge of disabled people has been dismissed on the basis of their perceived incapacity; that of survivors because of the assumed unreliability and irrationality of their perceptions and understandings and those of people with learning difficulties on the basis of their perceived intellectual deficiencies. Discrimination on grounds of ageism, disablism and mentalism have all been at work. (Beresford, 2000: 495)

A psychiatric survivor himself, Beresford vigorously argues that service users' voice needs to be heard and their experiences counted in practice and policy. At least four reasons can be found in his works to support his argument. First, the subjective and experiential-based service users' knowledge is just as valid a form of knowledge as academic knowledge (Beresford & Evans, 1999; Glasby & Beresford, 2006). Here Beresford argues from an epistemological standpoint and challenges the conventional notion of valid knowledge. To him formalized knowledge, the recognized form of knowledge, has always been constructed from the vantage points of the professionals or "experts". It is to this dominant discourse that Beresford challenges and argues for the validity of the experiential-based service users' knowledge (Beresford, 2000). Second, the first-hand direct experience of service users fills a key knowledge gap that no other forms of knowledge can fill (Beresford, 2000; Beresford & Croft, 2001; Glasby & Beresford, 2006). The emphasis here is the irreplaceable quality of the service users' knowledge. This perhaps is his strongest and least contentious argument yet. One can argue what constitutes valid knowledge and it would remain contentious. But who can contend with the monopoly of the first-hand experience of the service users? Third, service users need to be heard because they too are members of society. To dismiss their voice is to disenfranchise their citizenship right of full participation. This is unjust from the social justice and human right stand point (Beresford, 2000). Last, service users' voice needs to be heard on the basis of an anti-oppressive practice perspective. To ignore diverse voices,



Beresford (2000) contends, is to “remain part of the dominant discourse which has defined and continues to define service users in ways which...are oppressive” (pp. 496-497).

Like that of the service users in the UK, the voice of CPS users is minimized due to their perceived deficiencies or stigma. To do research on CPS user perspectives is to take the position that service users’ voice has a central place in informing policy and practice. The experience of the CPS users, as Beresford would contend, is regarded as a valid form of knowledge on the basis of epistemology, irreplaceable quality, social justice, and anti-oppressive practice.

One important concept of the Service Users’ Theory is reflected in the choice of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the research method of the primary study (Dumbrill, 2004). PAR embodies the value of respect and the principle of partnership with research participants (Beresford & Evans, 1999). Moreover, a true PAR entails the collaboration with and the optimum control by research participants (Beresford & Evans, 1999; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Whitmore, 2001). In the primary research, research participants are regarded as co-researchers (Dumbrill, 2004). Parents took on an active role while the researcher’s knowledge and skills are only at research participants’ disposal (Whitmore, 2001). It is a “research with” rather than “research on” or “research for” the participants (Lee, n.d.). As such, the research process bespeaks a value on the strengths and the true voice of the participants.

Both the Service Users' Theory and PAR are the foundational frameworks that underpin the primary research, particularly its methodology. Although the role of PAR is less obvious in this secondary analysis due to the nature of secondary data analysis (see Chapter V Methodology for further discussion), the concepts of giving voice, respect, and equal partnership continue to be the underlying influences of the current study.

### **The strengths perspective**

If the Service Users Theory and PAR are the foundations of the current analysis, the strengths perspective and social work principles/values are its frameworks. By means of strengths perspective, it does not necessarily refer to The Strengths Perspective by Dennis Saleebey though it includes his works. The small case "strengths" is used purposely to denote its generic rather than specific usage. The strengths perspective here is informed by a combination of Saleebey's works and the works of other authors. The basic premise of this perspective is two fold. First, it is the recognition of human strengths, not deficiencies, as the basis of human services. Capacities, competencies, and resources of individuals and families are the foci of the helping process (Saleebey, 1996; Weick & Saleebey, 1995). Second, closely related to the first one, it is the deep respect for human dignity. Underpinning the arguments of the strengths perspective is the belief that every individual is entitled to the respect and dignity due all human beings (Saleebey, 1997). Thus strengths and respect form the two pillars to the conceptual framework of the strengths perspective.

Two concepts from Saleebey's works may help to further illustrate this perspective. First, the concept of "positive beliefs" which refers to "the positive beliefs about one's self and condition" (Saleebey, 1996: 301). A strength-based approach would always seek to work within a context of positive thinking. It would seek to foster an environment that nurtures a positive outlook. Symbolic Interactionist Herbert Mead's idea of the formation of self would further illuminate on the concept of "positive beliefs". Simply put, one would believe oneself to be competent if one perceives that one is being seen as competent (Mead, 1962). Along that same vein, positive beliefs of self can be fostered when clients perceive that they are viewed as possessing strengths and competencies. The implication of this is significant. It implies that a positive and supportive environment is the context in affecting changes. Second, the concept of empowerment emphasizes on the discovering of one's strengths and resources within and around them (Saleebey, 1996, 1997). Though Saleebey (2004) did talk about the "inherent powers" of an individual (p. 588), he appears to give equal weight to both the inner and outside sources of empowerment. I would tend to agree with Friere (2000) that power can only be liberated from within oneself. In other words, empowerment cannot be imposed from outside but rather be generated from inside. Social workers can be agents to unleashing that power in clients. The basic social work skill of validating the qualities clients already have (Cournoyer, 2000) appears to be that simple yet vital means to unleashing the strengths in clients.

In sum, both concepts of “positive beliefs” and “empowerment” highlight the significance of a positive and supportive environment as the context for change. The driving force for change for families is not just solving problems and resolving crises (Weick & Saleebey, 1995), but rather that the recognition and validation of strengths in clients is the very context to affect that change (Saleebey, 2004).

As with many human services, central to the goals of CPS is affecting changes in individuals and families. The strengths perspective presents particular challenge to CPS. The deficit model has come to characterize the Child Welfare Reform and dominate CPS up until recently when the child welfare “Transformation” agenda took over (note that all participants sampled for this analysis were drawn from the Reform regime). To view clients with strengths is likened to an ostrich that turns a blind eye to the existence of problems or ulterior motives, as some critics may contend (Saleebey, 1996). However, endorsing a positive approach in CPS does not mean being unrealistic about the reality of risks. Rather, it is the emphasis on the hope and confidence on people’s strengths and abilities to change before problematizing which tends to quickly dismiss any possibility or potential for positive changes (Saleebey, 1996). Like all theories which base on certain assumptions, the strengths perspective assumes the integrity and resourcefulness of the general human race. The implication for CPS practice and policy is that parents receiving CPS need to be viewed as fellow human beings who possess the same fallibilities and strengths that they need to be treated

with due dignity and respect (Saleebey, 1996). This argument finds support in Callahan et al. (1998)'s argument for best practices in child welfare. They argue that clients need to be viewed as people of strengths and that workers should enter into a relationship with a client with the attitude of learning something from them. Such a perspective demands seeing people through a new lens, and, as Saleebey (2001) says, "requires a serious change of heart and mind" (p. 221).

### **Social work core value and principle**

Listening to clients and viewing them as having strengths are in fact nothing new. They are the very principles that social work is founded on. Beginning from where the client is has always been the founding principle of the social work helping process (Cournoyer, 2000). Listening to client with understanding and purpose is an integral part of that principle. One of the social work's core values and principles is defined by "respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons" (Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, 2005) which is the very same value and principle espoused by the strengths perspective. As such the theoretical perspectives that inform this study/analysis are in effect very consistent with the social work core values and principles. However, child protection work is known for its adversarial and intrusive approaches to intervention. Viewing parents with respect and strengths is obviously not the CPS priority. Thus a theoretical tension exists between the

adversarial framework current CPS operates from and the framework of respect and strengths that this current study is based on.

### **Summary of conceptual framework**

To summarize, this secondary analysis is situated within the theoretical tension between viewing parents with respect and strengths (as embodied in the three perspectives the current study is based on) and viewing parents with deficiency (as embodied in the CPS service system). In the broader conceptual framework classification, from the perspective of Neuman's (1997) typology, this study straddles between the Interpretive Social Science (ISS) and Critical Social Science (CSS) frameworks. It is ISS in that it values personal experiences and feelings as legitimate knowledge. Where it departs from the ISS is that it does not stop at just listening to participants' experiences. In order to distill any central message(s) or pattern(s) that may underlie the experiences of parents (see purpose of study in Chapter I Introduction), the study will venture further to conceptualize those experiences (see Chapter V Grounded Theory section). As such, some form of theorizing of parental experience is expected as part of the analysis. The interest in underlying cause and in conceptualization signifies a shift to the CSS position. Yet on the other hand, this study also departs from the CSS position in that it does not value so much the "expert's" or "researcher's" interpretation (which characterizes the CSS) as on the integrity of voice (which characterizes the ISS). Thus, apart from the theoretical tension, this study is also situated in the

methodological tension between the freedom to conceptualize (as represented by the CSS position) and the rendering of true voice to participants (as represented by the ISS position).

## CHAPTER V. METHODOLOGY

### **Research design: Secondary data analysis**

Secondary data analysis is research performed on existing data that were collected for a different research purpose (Heaton, 1998, 2004; Hinds, Vogel, & Clarke-Steffen, 1997). While secondary data analysis has been widely accepted in quantitative studies for over a century (Heaton 1998, 2004; Hinds et al., 1997; McCall and Appelbaum, 1991), according to Heaton (2004) who did an extensive study on how secondary analysis is used in qualitative research, it is a “new and emerging methodology” (p. 35) in qualitative studies. Interest for using secondary analysis as a research methodology only becomes evident during the mid-1990s (Heaton, 2004). As with many new and emerging developments, qualitative secondary data analysis is marked by unsettling debates, mostly over what Heaton (1998, 2004) and Hinds et al. (1997) call epistemological/methodological issues. For instance, in regards to epistemological issues, there are debates over whether the secondary research question should be similar to or different from the primary study question. If the two questions are too similar, there is concern whether the secondary study is distinct enough to generate new knowledge. If the two questions are too different, there is concern whether the secondary research question can be answerable by the pre-defined primary data (Hinds et al, 1997). In regards to methodological



issues, there are debates over whether it is better or worse for the secondary analyst to have been involved in the primary research. If the analyst had not been involved in the primary research, there is concern over the loss of the contextualization of data. If the analyst had been involved in the primary study, there is question whether the analyst can remain un-bias for the new study (Heaton, 2004). This is just some indication of the lack of an unified view as to how a “proper” secondary analysis should be conducted (Heaton, 1998, 2004). Four of these issues will be discussed in this section as they have implications on the validity of the current study in relation to its research design.

The first issue concerns the primary data, whether it is the right set of data for a different research purpose. That the original study of the current analysis used the Grounded Theory approach may raise a question as to the suitability of its data for a secondary analysis. According to Heaton (2004), primary studies using Grounded Theory perhaps have the most unsuitable data set for a secondary research purpose. The argument is that the gradual narrowing of concepts necessitated by the conceptualization process such as theoretical sampling is expected to limit the scope of the primary data for a different secondary research purpose. The primary data would have been so much shaped for the primary purpose to be viable for another research purpose. Fortunate for this study, however, by the time the primary research was put to a halt due to my study, the delimiting process was still yet to take place. The predominant concern at the time was to allow as many concepts or themes to surface as possible in

accordance with the Grounded Theory paradigm. Following the paradigm, the prescribed data-collection and coding procedures (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002) were duly followed. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with the characteristic “grand-tour” questions (e.g., “what is your experience with CPS” or “perhaps you can begin by telling me how you first got involved with CPS”) making up the semi-structured interview guide. All sessions were audio-recorded for transcribing (Dumbrill, 2004). Thus the still broad-base primary data set inadvertently makes the current secondary analysis possible.

The second issue is whether the secondary research question a viable question, that is, whether it can be answered by the primary data. If the secondary research question is too different in “intent and topic” from those of the primary data, then the secondary question and the primary data are considered not the right “fit” (Heaton, 1998, 2004; Hinds et al., 1997). As is implicit in the introduction chapter, the idea for the secondary research question is grounded on the primary data. It was noted during the coding stage that the majority of parental experience is bad. This prompted me thinking that there has to be a message for the CASs from these bad experiences in regards to the delivery of CPS. Moreover many concepts that surfaced are not only useful to the new service users, but also just as useful to the service providers - the child protection agencies. For example, the categories of “good worker” and “bad worker” consist of valuable information also to the CASs. This information will foreseeably be under-utilized if only used for the service users. As such, the secondary question

is data-driven, or what Heaton (2004) called “endogenously derived” (p. 59). A secondary data analysis having such property suggests that the secondary question is sufficiently close to the primary data to ensure a valid research finding.

The third issue concerns the relationship between the secondary research question and the primary research question. In this respect, there is no clear cut agreement as to whether or not it is an indication of validity for the two research questions to be closely aligned. In general, both Hinds et al. (1997) and Heaton (2004) see it an advantage for the secondary research purpose to be closely aligned with that of the primary research. As previously mentioned, a close affinity between the purposes of the two research inquiries suggests a fit between the secondary research question and primary data set. On the other hand, Heaton (2004) cautions that if the two research purposes are too closely related, it would diminish the distinctiveness of the secondary study. New information is not expected to be generated. Thus a tension will always exist between the purposes of the primary and secondary studies to which any potential secondary analysis must answer.

For the current secondary analysis, the relationship between its purpose and the primary research purpose appears to lie somewhere in the middle of the affinity continuum. The primary study aims to explore a broad scale picture of the experiences and perceptions of parents who have received CPS. The ultimate goal is to draw from those experiences and turn them into advice for parents newly receiving the service in the form of either a service users manual or an

internet website (Dumbrill, 2004). The research findings are expected to be shared among parents/service users. The purpose of the secondary inquiry is to examine how CPS should be delivered from users' perspectives. The research findings are expected to inform the CASs/service providers. As such the two studies are similar in that they both share the same broad objective of understanding parental experience in receiving CPS. But the two studies also differ in a significant way. One is parent-focused while the other one is CPS-focused. The primary study focuses on what new service users should know, and aims to inform ways to best work with the service provider. The secondary analysis focuses on what child protection agencies should know, and aims to inform ways to best work with service users. This difference provides the distinctiveness of the secondary study and ensures new and valid information be generated.

Fourth and last, it is the ethical issue. Secondary data analysis often poses an ethical concern in regards to informed consent (Heaton, 1998). By definition, secondary data analysis uses data that are already collected by another study. Often primary studies may not anticipate any subsequent studies and therefore the informed consent given by participants only applies to the primary study. Further, the time lapse between the primary and secondary studies often makes it difficult, if not impossible, to trace back the original participants to get their consent for the subsequent study. As a result, the use of primary data for a secondary study

without the consent of participants is ethically questionable (Heaton 1998, 2004; Hinds et al., 1997).

The original study for the current analysis has anticipated the possibility of a secondary analysis. Although the research focused on gathering information that would be shared among parents, it was anticipated that parents might also share information that has implications for the ways services are delivered. As a result, the possibility of giving voice to these stories among an audience of service providers was included in the ethics review and informed consents. The original ethics approval includes a clause under the research purpose that says, “The project is primarily designed to develop knowledge that will assist parents, but knowledge produced by the project will also help workers gain a deeper understanding of what it is like for parents to receive CAS intervention” (Dumbrill, 2004). The statement provides just the needed latitude for the current secondary study purpose in accordance to the clause. Moreover the same clause is included in both the information letter and informed consent form, and is explained clearly to research participants during interviews and focus groups such that the participants understood the information they shared may also be used for another research purpose besides the primary one they were participating in. This foresight made my thesis focus possible.

In sum, secondary data analysis as a research tool for qualitative studies is more complicated than one may expect. There is no clear guideline as to how a “proper” secondary analysis should be conducted, yet there are many

methodological tensions need to be answered. As Heaton (1998) puts it, “secondary analysis remains an under-developed and ill-defined approach” (Heaton, 1998). The above discussion seeks to address four of the common tensions found in performing secondary analysis in qualitative data set that may challenge the validity of this study. Since there is no one “proper” model, perhaps the best way to conduct a secondary data analysis is to conduct it in such a way that demonstrates a sensitivity to the challenges confronting this still developing methodology and a delicate balance between the opposing arguments.

### **Data collection**

As stated in Chapter II, the data set used for the current analysis is taken from a primary study that is still ongoing. A secondary research conducted while the primary study is still unfinished or ongoing is what Hinds et al. (1997) called concurrent secondary data analysis. This could potentially impact on the validity of the secondary study if the amount of data available from the primary data is not deemed sufficient or adequate. It will be shown, however, that the amount of data available is indeed sufficient and is expected to provide rich information for the study at hand.

To date the primary study has collected data from 55 participants composed of 10 focus groups and 9 individual interviews. Twenty-one participants or 38 % of available data were completely transcribed and coded into the computer system using the data management software NVivo. Twenty three

participants or 42% of available data are themed on paper but are still yet to be entered into the computer system. The remaining eleven participants or 20% of available data are neither transcribed nor coded/themed. The current secondary study elects to leave off this 20% of the primary data and focuses on the 44 participants (7 males and 37 females) representing 7 groups and 7 individuals or 80% of the data. The decision is based on the following reasoning. First, it is during the course of collecting and coding/theming the first 44 participants or 80% of the primary data that the idea of the secondary research question was formulated. This indicates that this portion of the data would contain substantial information to support the secondary research study. Second, saturation of themes taken up in the secondary analysis appeared to occur towards the 30s to 40s participants. Saturation in this context means that no significantly new meanings or ideas can be expected beyond a certain point (Luborsky and Rubinstein, 1995). Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995) further suggest that the saturation of themes tends to occur between 12 to 25 interviews. Thus the possible saturation by the 44<sup>th</sup> participant observed in the primary study is consistent with the suggestion made by Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995). Last, given the time limit to complete the thesis, it may prove more realistic and fruitful to focus on the 80% more well-prepared data than to include the last 20% unprepared data that may not even add significantly new meanings to the study.

**Data analysis: Grounded Theory**

As with the primary study, the current analysis also uses the Grounded Theory as its research method. The Grounded Theory is adopted for two reasons. First, it is for its theory-generating potential (Castellani, Castellani, & Spray, 2003; Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). Although the primary objective of this secondary analysis is to give voice to parents receiving CPS, it is anticipated that some form of theory may emerge as the analysis goes on to explain parents' experiences. The possibility of explaining what parents empirically know is what one may call a latent purpose of this study. However, tension arises with this dual purpose in the light of the Grounded Theory. According to Glaser (1978, 1999, 2002), the Ground Theory method is explanatory, rather than descriptive, in nature. Its methodological emphasis on abstraction and conceptualization from descriptive data would necessarily limit its ability to stay true to participants' voice (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). Thus the objective to give voice appears inherently contradictory with using the Grounded Theory as the research method. As Glaser (2002) puts it sharply, "Grounded Theory is not their [research participants] voice; it is a generated abstraction from their [participants'] doings and their meanings that are taken as data for the conceptual generation" (p. 2). Despite Glaser's assertion, it is the position of this study that voice and theory are not mutually exclusive. Giving voice and conceptualizing can in fact be supportive of each other in an integrated framework to provide a richer analysis to the study. Afterall, the Grounded Theory tenet of grounding theory on data is



consistent with the spirit of giving voice. This study will strive to seek the delicate balance of conceptualizing or theorizing parents' experiences in such a way that remains true to their voice.

Second, the Grounded Theory is chosen for its freedom from pre-conception of existing theories (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; La Rossa, 2005) and its systematic procedures. Glaser and Strauss, the original authors of Grounded Theory, felt that the verification-oriented research methods which were popular at the time tended to force data to fit existing theories, and stifled new development and imagination. Recognizing that reality is far too complex to have all been captured by existing theories, they developed the Grounded Theory method to facilitate the development of other conceptual possibilities (LaRossa, 2005). Akin to what drives the Grounded Theory, the current analysis wants to be free from any pre-conceived ideas and derive an understanding of parents' experiences that is grounded on the data. Moreover, the Grounded Theory is valued for its systematic procedure for data analysis. The Grounded Theory provides a set of systematic procedures that could help to make sense out of much data in a logical fashion. The "openness, freedom, and conceptualization" (Glaser, 1999) and the structure provided by the rigorous method (Glaser, 2002) is just the right analytic tool this analysis needed to make sense out of the otherwise dispersed data.

The analysis follows a two-phase coding procedure – substantive coding and theoretical coding - prescribed by Glaser (1978). In the substantive coding phase, concepts are coded as they emerge from data. The term concept refers to a

conceptual label that best captures an emerging pattern made up of a collection of similar statements or phrases from the data called concept-indicators (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). A concept then is basically a conceptual label given to the recurring theme from the data. This procedure is referred to as the “concept-indicator model” (Glaser, 1978; LaRossa, 2005). Concept-generating is considered the second level of conceptual analysis (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002). An important element in this concept generating phase is a refining process called constant comparisons. It refers to the process of constant comparisons between a concept indicator to previous indicators that ensure the distinctiveness and the robustness of the conceptual label (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). Because it is a procedure that requires “much fitting of words” until the best label is found to represent the pattern, constant comparisons is seen to embody a built-in validity to data analysis (Glaser, 2002).

The second coding phase is the theorizing phase called theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). It is a phase that looks for an underlying uniformity to the otherwise dispersed concepts by examining the relationship between or among concepts or variables. It is also a phase that looks at the “why” question. Every contingency, cause, and consequence will be examined to try to explain the data. The proposed underlying reason or pattern is called the core variable (Glaser, 1978, 1999) or core process (Glaser, 2002) or third level conceptual analysis (Glaser, 1999, 2002).

The above procedures this analysis follows though conformed in principles and procedures of the Grounded Theory, the study may not claim to be using the Grounded Theory from the “purist” perspective (Glaser, 2002) unless it conforms to what Glaser (1999) called the complete “methodological package” (p. 836). The procedures adopted by this study are by no means a complete package. For one thing, owing to the nature of secondary analysis, theoretical sampling is not feasible to employ. However, there appears to be no consensus as to what is the orthodox Grounded Theory. The Grounded Theory method have been interpreted in different ways and adapted in part or in whole since its inception in 1967 (Glaser, 1999, 2002; LaRossa, 2005). Inconsistencies abound in the usage of terms and in the sequence and naming of procedures. For instance, while Glaser uses the term concept and category interchangeably (Glaser, 2002), Strauss and Corbin (1998) would make a distinction between the two. Whereas Glaser talks about two major phases in coding procedures, Strauss and Corbin refer to three phases (LaRossa, 2005). In the plethora of Grounded Theory versions, the procedure adopted in this study should properly be called a version or an approach of the methodology. Perhaps it is more precisely to call the method used by this study as one that is informed by Grounded Theory.

### **Trustworthiness**

Because the secondary study shares the same set of coding as the primary study, the trustworthiness measures used for the primary study also apply to the

secondary study. Several measures were undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The credibility of findings, that is the fit with participant's ideas and the way they are presented, was enhanced through prolonged engagement. Over a period of 18 months, I conducted a total of 7 focus groups and 6 interviews (the other 3 focus groups and 3 interviews were collected by a previous research assistant), and also coded the data as they were collected. Because the project supervisor was also present in the focus groups, I was able to check the inferences I was drawing from these data with him, which provided an additional means for ensuring the credibility of findings.

The dependability of the research was sought by ensuring that the development of participants' ideas was documented and traceable through the use of memos, audit trails, and a journal, in accordance to the dictate of Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1978). Member-checking is usually the mechanism used in qualitative studies to verify with research participants if their experiences are correctly captured (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In two occasions I brought the coded data back to the original groups for verification. I then triangulated my understanding of what participants said with my supervisors' understanding of these data. However, for the development of the core variable, which is unique to this secondary analysis, member-checking was not conducted. The reason that it was not conducted was not because Glaser (2002) dismissed member-checking as relevant means for checking theory, as he asserted:

Inviting participants to review the theory for whether or not it is their voice is wrong as 'check' or 'test' on validity. They may or may not

understand the theory, or even like the theory if they do understand it. Many do not understand the summary benefit of concepts that go beyond description to a transcending bigger picture. (p.2)

Despite Glaser's assertion, as stated in the Research Design section, it is the position of this study that participants are in fact capable of and thus should participate in conceptualizing their own experiences in collaboration with the researcher (see Service Users Theory and PAR in Chapter IV Conceptual framework). That member-checking was not conducted owed rather to an ethical reason. It was wondered whether it was ethical to gather the primary study participants for the sole purpose of the secondary research. The inability to check the core variable with participants poses the major limitation to this study. However, as the primary study is ongoing, the member-checking for the secondary research is expected to be able to carry out at the same time as the primary research resumes. This would be the future step that would take this secondary analysis research even further than the current thesis.

To ensure that I was aware of my own biases when interpreting data, I undertook a cultural review. Such review is important because in qualitative research the researcher and the researched are interactively linked (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Several things in my experience link and separate me from those I researched in ways that might create biases but may also provide insights into data.

Many of the participants were on the margins of society. Facing numerous barriers such as class and gender, the majority of participants understood

oppression on the receiving end. While privileged in many areas of my life, as a woman of colour, I can relate somewhat to participant's stories of marginalization. My experiences of not being heard and the feeling of not fitting into the mainstream society, was a source of insight but also a potential for bias in the research. My experience in this area meant that I could relate and have insight into what parents expressed, but also meant that I had to guard against assuming their thoughts and feelings about such incidences were the same as mine.

Experience I have had working at CASs are relevant in my cultural review. I have worked with CASs in two capacities. First, as an undergraduate BSW student I was placed at a CAS and found the experience positive and enriching. Next, I was employed by a CAS after graduation and this experience was the exact opposite of my placement experience, because as a CAS employee I found myself expected to police rather than help parents. Policing is sometimes needed to protect children, but the policing I was expected to undertake seemed to be punitive toward parents rather than protective toward children. As well, I found myself not fitting in an organizational culture that is pervasively negative towards parents. The authoritative attitude toward parents and directive methods my supervisor expected me to use seemed to be in direct opposition to approaches regarded as best child protection practices (Callahan et al., 1998; Trotter, 2002; Turnell & Edwards, 1999). Indeed, it seemed that I was not expected to work with parents to resolve issues and help them find ways to better and more safely care for their children, but rather I was required simply to relay to parents non-

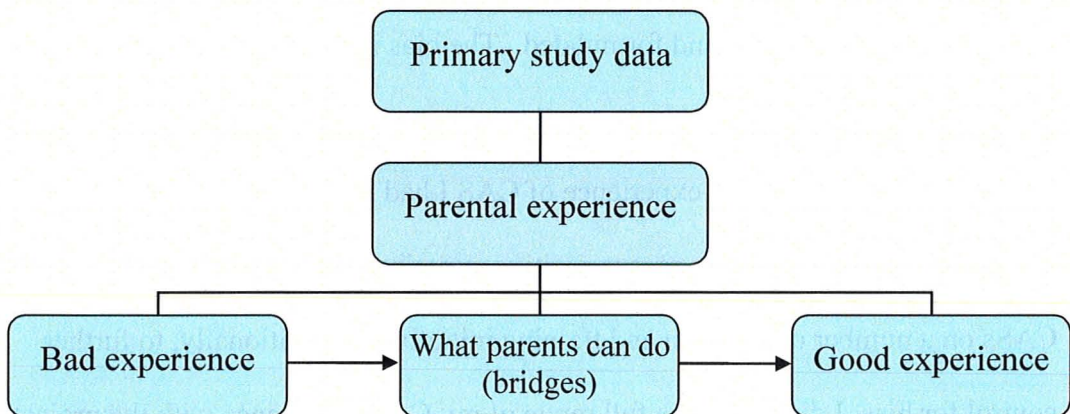
negotiable directives from my supervisor about what the parents could and could not do. At an ethical level I was unable to comply with these expectations and as a result, the CAS I worked for decided that I was not suitable to work as a child protection worker.

Needless to say, my few months working for CAS was a negative and unhappy experience. This experience brought insights into the research process but was also a source of potential biases. The insight my experience brought helped me hear stories of the way parents experience CAS intervention as punitive—without my experience at the last CAS I might have questioned the degree to which intervention could be experienced as negative—but I have seen such intervention planned and formulated. The bias is that I could let my negative experience of CAS shape my interpretation of parental experience. To control for bias, I draw on the positive experience of CAS I had in my undergraduate placement and also the more recent positive experiences I have had working with CASs on a number of research and training initiatives. Additionally, to further control for bias, I discussed the full range of my CAS experience with the project supervisor and considered with him the ways biases and insight may play out. Of course, he has his own experience which brings insight and biases too, but given that he had a long career in child protection practice, his insights will not necessarily be the same as mine, and as a result we were able to use further triangulation techniques to be sure that insight rather than bias was shaping the interpretation of findings.

## CHAPTER VI. KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In the primary study, the data were coded, in accordance with the Grounded Theory, for anything and everything that may be potentially relevant to parental experience (Glaser, 1978). The category “parental experience” was then further divided into “good experience”, “bad experience”, and “what parents can do” which is also nicknamed “bridges” (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Primary Study Data**



The resulting three categories reflect the objective of the primary study which is to understand the experiences of parents receiving CPS and how their experiences can help new service users to better work with the system. The middle category is nicknamed “bridges” because the statements coded under it are things that parents can do to turn “bad experience” into “good experience”, or at least to where the bad experiences can be mitigated (as illustrated in Figure 1). This shows that



parents' advice to new service users always stem from the context of their experiences with CPS. For instance, one advice from "what parents can do" is to get well-informed; it stems from the "bad experience" of being ill-informed or left "in the dark" (see pp. 55-58 in this chapter). However, though having great relevance to the primary study, the middle category "what parents can do" has little relevance to my secondary study which has an objective that is directed to the service provider (see Chapter I Introduction). Thus the two categories, "bad experiences" and "good experience", are the primary focus of analysis for this study.

The majority of parental experience falls under "bad experience" which has coding from every focus group or interview. Few parents have good experiences. Only some parents from two focus groups and another two parents interviewed alone had something good to say about their involvement with CPS. Thus "bad experience" clearly emerged as the predominant experience for parents receiving CPS. To give an idea, the ratio of "good-experience" coding to "bad-experience" coding is roughly 1:9. It should also be noted that it was the prevalence of bad experience found during data collection that first drove the impetus for the secondary research question (see Chapter I Introduction). As a result, similar ratio will be reflected in the discussion, though not necessarily in the significance, of respective categories. However, as the amount of "bad experience" data is substantially larger than that of the "good experience", it is

expected that the “good experience” data serve a supplementary role to the overall analysis of data.

Four major concepts eventually emerged from “good experience” data; and eight major concepts from “bad experience” data (see Figure 2). All the major concepts will be discussed in turn. Then an attempt will be made to examine any underlying process/pattern that may explain parental experience in the substantive level, particularly “bad experience”, by looking at the relationship between the major concepts under both “bad experience” and “good experience” categories (see Grounded Theory in Chapter V).

**Figure 2: Major Concepts or Categories**

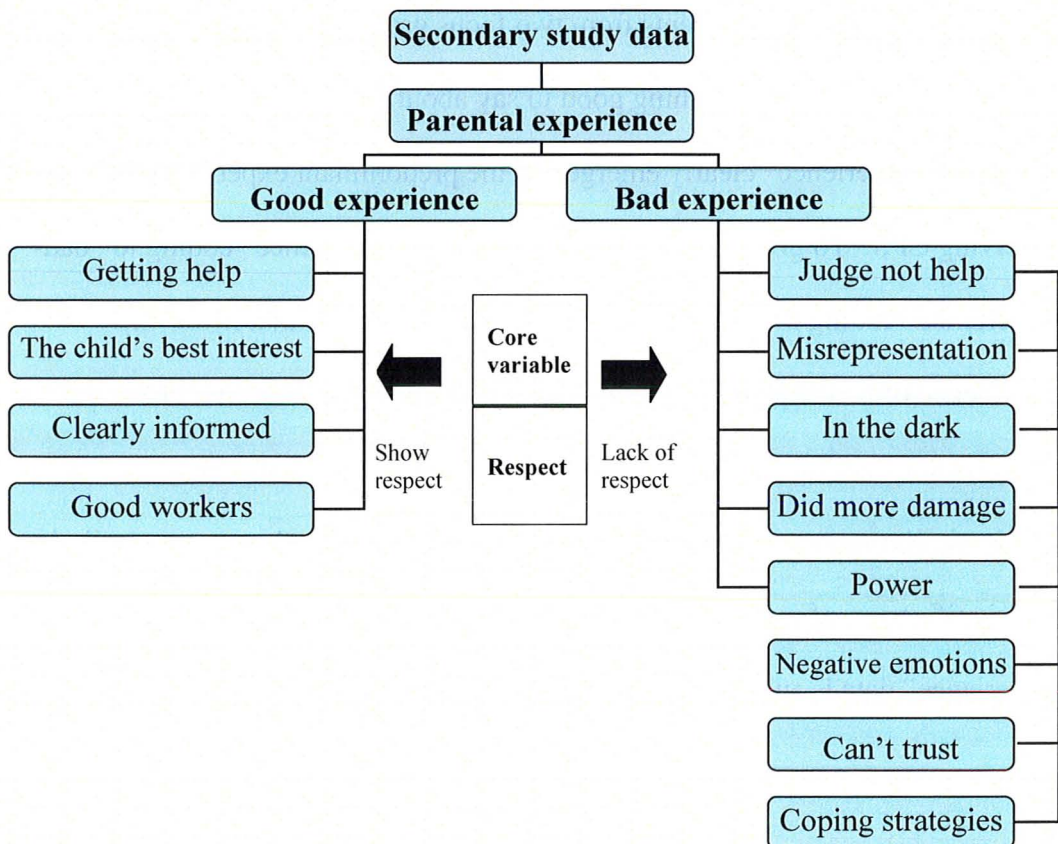


Figure 2 shows that the first five bad experiences (shown on the right) lead to the final three. As will be shown in Chapter VII (Summation of concepts), the first five experiences are perceived by parents to be actions undertaken by CPS while the last three bad experiences are reactions to the perceived actions of CPS. It will be shown that all major concepts hinge on a single core concept — the issue of human respect. In the final analysis, the core variable derived from each of the analysis of “good experience” and “bad experience” mirrors one another in that being shown respect is found to underpin “good experience” (as captured in the four major concepts) whereas the absence of respect is found to underlie the “bad experience” (as captured in the eight major concepts).

Although this is a qualitative study, numbers or percentages of parents are added to each concept to convey a sense of its prevalence.

### **Good experience**

For the “good experience”, out of the 44 participants, only 9 have something good to say about their CPS experiences. As shown in Figure 2, four major concepts emerged as constituting to parental perception of “good experience”: getting help (56%), the best interest of the child (33%), clearly informed (33%), and good workers (56%).

“Getting help” is perceived by parents in different ways. One parent was grateful for the practical assistance she received:

This worker, she got our son into daycare in two weeks, while our previous worker it was seven months. (AG01g:04)<sup>2</sup>

Two other parents perceived being helped when workers work with rather than work against them:

...my worker...she is more helpful. You can tell you have a good worker when they don't say, "Okay, oh my God, look what you did, you know what you need to do, you need to do this, and if you don't you're not getting your kids back, that's how they talk to me in Toronto. My worker will sit down with me and say, 'Okay you know what, I think it would be helpful if you took parenting, that way it would show that'...So, I really like my worker, she's really helpful, she's on my side, she makes me aware of things. (AG01g:01)

And through the course of that she [daughter] actually started to act out.... CAS went with us.... It was a very gradual thing. ... They were always on our side I think to make that change. (AB01g:02)

Another parent perceived help when CAS helped her to change:

...I did get all my help from CAS, but at first I didn't feel that the problem was with me, I felt it was with my partner, but I allowed him to be in my house around my children to witness all that...As soon I started working with them and doing everything they said everything fell into place just how it is supposed to be. Your eyes open you start to notice things. Things you might not have changed without CAS...CAS help me change my life for the better...a whole new learning experience...my eyes were open ..." (AB01g:05)

"The best interest of the child" is what Glaser (2002) called an "in vivo" concept, one that comes from "the words of the participants in the substantive area" (p. 2). The concept represents the series of statements made by those parents who perceived CPS as ultimately for the benefit of the child:

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<sup>2</sup> A code name is assigned to every focus group and interview during coding. The same code names are used here to denote the identity of the participants. If there is a small letter "g" in a code name, it means that the participant belongs to a focus group. The number after the small letter "g" will only be given when there are more than one participant in the same group is being quoted for a particular scenario. If a code name is not being attached by a small "g", it refers to an individual interview.

But because we were having trouble and she wasn't going to school and the school became aware of it so it was basically you call CAS or we will. So, basically I made the phone call, but I had no choice. I had to call.... And then when the worker came to our home she really, you know she was thinking about the best interest of the child, so it was really comfortable. (AB01g:02)

What I found was they were looking after the child's, children's eventually, welfare. (AB01g:04)

You come to the realization that CAS involvement is really for your child's benefit. (AB01g:0U)

However it is unclear how parents perceived the child's best interest to be. All the parents, and there were only three as above, who spoke positively about CPS in relation to their child, expressed only in general terms as found in the child's best interest or the child's welfare.

The concept of "clearly informed" is derived from the series of statements made by those parents who experienced the benefits of receiving clear information from their workers about the intervention:

And they [workers] would work with [parents] in terms of this is what you really have to concentrate on, this is what you have to do to get the kids back. This isn't a permanent situation, and making it very clear every step of the way. You do this and this and this and demonstrate certain things and the children will come back to you. (AB01g)

She [worker] was good. She would communicate with me. She'd tell me, you know, what was going on...And she'd tell me, um, my part in there, like she'd keep me included. (AF01)

It should be noted that being clearly informed was perceived as inclusion by the second parent. This parent perceived being included as a partner in the

intervention process when the worker kept her informed about the intervention process.

The concept of “good worker” represents those worker qualities parents perceived as constituting to their positive experience with CPS. This makes sense since parents’ perceptions of CPS often are mediated through workers. Parents articulated a series of qualities but “communicativeness” and “respect” emerged as the two most prominent qualities. Two out of the nine parents (22%) articulated “communicativeness” as a positive worker quality that contributes to their good experiences:

She [worker] was good. She would communicate with me. She’d tell me, you know, what was going on...And she’d tell me, um, my part in there, like she’d keep me included. (AF01)

That’s what a good worker is supposed to do. Make you aware of what goals they think are suitable enough for you to be able to be a better parent I think. (AG01g)

These two parents spoke about the clarity of knowing what was going on, inclusion, and increased awareness as a result of a communicative worker. It should be noted that the good-worker quality of “communicativeness” echoes “clearly informed”, a constituent to parents’ positive experiences. Parents’ value of being “clearly informed” is reflected in their value on the quality of “communicativeness” in a worker.

The other good-worker quality valued by parents is respect (22%), as explicitly articulated by this parent:

Um, the way they talk to you. They show you respect. They don't degrade you...It's the way they talk to you with respect, 'we're going to work together to get your kids back.' (AG01g)

It should be noted that other good-worker qualities mentioned by parents appear to be subsumed under respect, though not explicitly articulated as such, for instance, empathy. An empathic understanding needs necessarily be mediated through a relationship built on certain level of respect. Based on this broader conceptualization, respect is seen much more prevalent than is explicitly articulated. It is found implicitly in all of the above four major concepts and their constituent parts. For instance, how can parents' perception of "clearly informed", of inclusion, of workers on parents' side, and of "the best interest of the child" be separated from a perception of respect from workers? As such, respect appears to be the underlying concept that unifies all the four "good experience" concepts.

From the brief synopsis of the "good experience" above, two observations can be made. First, as already mentioned, respect, though only explicitly articulated under one of the four major concepts, is more prevalent in its broader conceptualization. It is seen as the unifying element that integrates all the major concepts that constitute the "good experience" of parents. The second observation is that the "good experience" concepts appear to mirror those of the "bad experience". The antithesis of three of the four "good experience" concepts (except for "good workers") are found among the eight major concepts under "bad experience". To be specific, "getting help", "the best interest of the child", and "clearly informed" mirror "judge not help", "did more damage", and "in the



dark” from the “bad experiences” concepts. The fourth concept “good worker” can also be considered mirroring “in the dark” by inference as its constituent part “communicativeness” is a direct reflection of parents’ value in being “clearly informed”. This shows that there is great consistency between the factors that constitute parents’ good experiences and those that constitute bad experiences. Also such consistency found in the concepts between two opposing categories (“good experience” and “bad experience”) gives some indication to the trustworthiness of the development of concepts.

### **Bad experience**

Altogether eight major concepts are derived from “bad experience” (see Figure 2). Each concept will be discussed in turn as follows.

#### **Perceived action: Judge not help**

Although there is individual coding for both parental perceptions that CAS judges and also that CAS does not help, there is a notable tendency for the two elements to be expressed in combination. It is decided, therefore, that the two elements should be put together to form one concept. Combining the two elements best captures the frequently expressed contrast in parents’ expectation of getting help and the reality of being judged. The concept of “judge not help” consists of coding from four focus groups and five individual interviews. Characteristic expressions are such as:



They're not in the situation and they need to realize that somebody is looking for their help, not their judgment. (AA01g)

and

...they give you no help whatsoever...they can condemn you faster. (AC01)

Often the two elements in the concept are conveyed together in such a way that it is as if the negative experience of being judged is compounded by a prior expectation of getting help from CPS. The expectation of help is often found in statements such as:

They are supposed to help you. (AD01, AL01, AK01).

You're not even thinking of that because you're looking at them like they are going to help you. (AA01g)

The most poignant example of an expectation (of getting help from CAS) turned “nightmare”, to use one parent’s words, is as follows:

I was like walking into CAS blind...I have never heard of CAS...I figured children’s aid, you help children, right...oh it’s a nightmare, my life is never the same again. (AK01).

Undeniably some parents’ expectations of help are met (see p. 42 “getting help” under “good experience”), but those cases belong only to a handful of research participants. The majority of the participants voiced their resentment in finding no help from CPS.

The perception of being judged is typically found in expressions such as “they judge you” (AL01) and “right from the get-go the judgment is on” (AG01g). Statements about being judged are basically found in two contexts. The first context is where parents perceived being pre-judged in the wrong. The following

statements capture some parents' perceptions of a pre-conception of them being in the wrong:

You are guilty until proven innocent... (AH01g:01; AL01)

...they would take your kids then you would have to prove that you didn't do it to get them back, that's what we had to do... (AH01g:05)

Damned if you do, damned if you don't..." (AS01g)

Under CASs' eyes, anything you do is wrong. (AD01)

The following parent gives a poignant illustration to what the above statements mean:

If you make a phone call [to child] and you're emotional that's no good because you're showing your child that you are unstable with your emotions. And then if you're too strong [not emotional], that's not good either because you're not showing that you care. So no matter what you do you cannot be perfect with CAS. (AA01g)

All the parents above convey the same sentiment that, as one using CPS, their actions are already judged guilty before verdict.

The second context is that parents will never be good enough for the CASs no matter how much they try:

...Like, um, okay my children taken away, what am I going to do? So, I go to parenting [classes], 'Oh, I'm sorry, you need to go to anger management [classes]'. 'Okay I'll go to anger management.' 'Sorry you have a problem with the house that you live in,' so that's not good enough. (AG01g:01)

...The home wasn't good enough, we didn't keep the place clean enough, even though it was clean. We didn't have proper furniture anywhere. They find anything, something small wrong. (AG01g:02)

The impact of this on parents is illustrated by the following parent who expressed a sense of helplessness and a sense of giving up:

I did that. I did that and what happened at the end of the year, they said, ‘You know what? After the parent capacity test we still don’t think that you’re able to take care of your children, we’re not going to give them back to you.’ That’s exactly what they said. ‘We’re not going to give them back to you, we’re going to adopt them out.’ And now I’m like all, whatever. There is nothing else I can do. (AG01g)

Some parents perceived and suggested that that they were being pre-judged for two reasons. First it is connected with labeling: Many parents using CPS are very aware that they are either overtly or covertly labelled ” bad mother” or “bad parent” by the child protection agencies (AB01g, AC01, AG01g, AM01g). Such awareness by parents is both implicit and explicit in what they say. Some of them are connecting this label to the ways they were being treated badly, as the following parent relates:

To the workers I would say, you know, just because we’re angry, probably we’re hiding something, that’s why our guard is up. We shouldn’t be treated badly or that we’re a bad mother or this and that. (AC01)

The second reason parents thought that they were judged is associated with a class bias. Some parents link their negative image and their subjection to unrealistic judgment to class difference between the “privileged workers” and “poor CPS users”:

...look at us, those who get picked [by CAS] are low income, single mothers, live in an apartment... (AH02g)

White, middle-class people don’t lose their kids. Don’t tell me they don’t sit there and have a couple of beers and yell at their wife...I’d make them take classes on real life. Not just in a school book. You live in, I’m sorry! Kids that are in university, I haven’t seen too many that have lived under the poverty line, okay. (AD01)

Moreover, one parent sharply points out that it is the difference in value system due to class that made them vulnerable of losing their children to CPS:

And CAS doesn't understand that. They think everybody should live this way or be raised this way. That's not reality...Not all of us have mommies and daddies that didn't drink and weren't drug users and didn't have a lot of issues happening. But we all survived it and our kids will survive it just like we did. You don't have to take them away from us. Because if we don't teach our kids this way, how are we going to learn? They're going to grow up, they don't live in the white picket house with the nice green fence. They live in the real world with parents who have addictions and parents who sometimes lose it. But that is reality, and that's the way they're raised and that's the way they're going to be, and that is going to make them stronger than the little kid that is going to go to university. (AD01)

The two observations made by the above parents are significant and are not without basis. As discussed in Chapter III, academic literature has long observed the connection of social stigma and CPS users. Likewise, anti-oppressive practice literature has also well established the propensity of oppression along the lines of class, race, gender and other variables (Dumbrill, 2003b). But it is only from the stories of those who are affected by such stigmatization and class prejudice that one gets a glimpse of what it is like on the receiving end (how they become vulnerable of pre-judgment and ill-treatment). These parents' stories resonate with the very first thing that struck me when I first started working as a child protection worker. I was perplexed from day one by what I see as a pervasive organizational culture that is primarily negative towards parents, the very subjects the agency seeks to serve. My journal, kept when I worked at the CAS, logged in these lines:

June 11, 2004 - ...some workers gathered around in my office, that must be Friday, either that or I am still a novelty to them...they started chit-chatting about the families in their caseloads. I don't know why, all the while I didn't feel comfortable. They were so negative and sarcastic about these parents that I wonder, do they [parents] really deserve that? Are they [workers] not supposed to be working with them [parents]?...I feel like I am in trouble. I don't feel fitting in.

Stigma works like a virus. It is contagious. When one works long enough in a culture that habitually sees parents in an unfavourable light, one begins to view parents through that lens too. How can child protection agencies truly serve families and children if they have such negative views of parents?

### **Perceived action: Misrepresentation**

One of the things that struck me during interviews or focus groups is how repeatedly I heard participants say that their words get twisted around, and how they were caught by surprise when they heard the things written about them in case notes or in court, as this parent said:

...in court eh, you might be in for a surprise because you might hear your workers say about you that surprises you. (AN01g)

The concept of “being misrepresented” consists of coding from four focus groups and four individual interviews. It is basically seen in two contexts. The first one highlights misrepresentation in the form of manipulation, most commonly expressed in statements such as:

They twist your words and fabricate documents. (AJO1)

Your words get twisted around...they give misleading information and lie on court papers... (AL01)

Same for an affidavit still. Turn your words. Whatever you said to them, if you admitted something, all of a sudden that became a reason that you can't have your kids, or you're a bad mother to your kids because you need this [food voucher etc.]. (AC01)

They took everything I said literally. (AB01g)

One parent gave a poignant example of what misrepresentation by manipulation meant:

Um, like your conversations are put into the affidavits, and you know they [CAS] leave words out, and it's like, 'Um, you forgot a sentence that I said to you in there, but they take the bad stuff that you said in that sentence and put it in the affidavit, like 'Oh, this mother was screaming and cursing at us.' And when they took my son, the police had to kick the door open because I wouldn't let them in, and they had knocked over my son, but CAS had put in the report that I had knocked him over. Well I had no distance because the police came in the door and automatically I was thrown this way and [my son] was over here. (AC01)

Another form of misrepresentation focuses on exaggeration:

...like they would turn little thing into big thing...turn little innocent thing I said to my kid into like something I did really wrong... (AO01)

To me, it's not looking good to be truthful because it ends up damaging you know, what's in your file, and they make it a lot worse. (AG01g)

Both of these parents spoke about the tendency of their situation being problematized and made into big issues. What they said is not too dissimilar from what the parents said about their tendency of being pre-judged (see concept#1 above) except that in here, the pre-conception appears to be materialized in the form of representation in documents.

Whether the misrepresentation perceived by these parents are honest mistakes by workers or are less than innocent, the parents' experiences bespeak a

power difference that subjects them to the vulnerability of being misunderstood or misrepresented. Richardson's (2003) story is exactly about that (see Chapter III Literature Review). From her first hand encounter with the CPS, she related her utter powerlessness in being subjected to the child protection agency's inaccurate representation of what happened to her family, and the absolute power the agency had in influencing the kind of information that went on her file. In Dumbrill (2003a; 2003b), the research participants identified five power mechanisms that CPS workers have access to – defining power being one of them. Dumbrill's research participants show how their workers can impose their definition on them, and can by way of defining a situation influence the course and outcome of the invention. That is the power to define!

Even from my very early experience of CPS as a placement student in a CAS, I was made aware of the power to define inherent in the work of child protection. I remembered sitting with a couple looking through their case notes. Their regular worker was on temporary leave and I was just taking over their file. This couple became upset and frustrated as they were reading. I heard them say, "that is not what happened" and "why do they say..." I found myself listening to their explanation of what they saw as happening and wondering what actually did happen. The truth is likely somewhere in between. But this experience let me realize these parents' vulnerability. There is unspoken power under the pen of a worker or behind a computer screen. The worker has the power to write about the clients, their children, and their family situation, as s/he sees it. It is his/her view

alone that gets into the record. If hypothetically s/he had made a mistake during the intervention, who has access to influence the representation of the situation? The worker does. And the parents are completely powerless to defend. After all who is deemed more believable, the worker or the “unfit” parent?

Apart from the power to define, some parents perceived yet another factor as contributing to their vulnerability to being misrepresented – education/class difference. As shown by the following parent who contends that there is a link between his lack of formal education and his being misunderstood/misconstrued:

For someone who has low education, the kind of words we use might be used against us...I said ‘I don’t know what kids want to eat,’ they thought I don’t know how to cook... (AL01)

This parent shows how a simple thing he said in his accustomed working class language can be easily misunderstood by a worker from a more educated and middle-class culture. A lone parent not knowing how to cook can be consequential in terms of protection assessment! So, as indicated by this parent, the propensity of working class parents being misunderstood due to their lack of formal education may have compounded their vulnerability of being misrepresented. This parent (AL01) has since learned to “watch for the words” he used recognizing that the kind of language he used can be taken wrongly by someone with higher education. Like this parent, some parents have also learned to protect themselves. One parent (AN01g) has learned to request to read affidavits before going to court. Another parent



(AO01) took notes as her worker did and had the worker initialed her notes after every meeting. This parent advised other parents to do the same:

Document everything, take notes like they do, always have pen and pencil with you, and have them initialed at the end...keep them [workers] accountable, you get protected, and they [workers] would treat you nicer. (AO01)

What these parents are doing is in fact taking responsibility of counterbalancing a power difference that subjects them to the vulnerability of being misrepresented. They did that by improvising an accountability mechanism that would keep their workers' power in check. However not every parent is as creative and resourceful. For these parents there is no accountability mechanism on a systemic level that can protect them from misrepresentation. Is there a responsibility for the child protection agencies? After all, they are the more powerful party.

### **Perceived action: In the dark**

One research participant (AB01g) articulated the phrase “in the dark” to describe his state of not knowing what was going on when he was involved with CPS. The phrase comes to conceptualize a collection of similar statements shared by other participants. This is another one of the “in vivo” concept. Some of the most characteristic statements of this concept are “they don’t tell you the process of a decision” (AD01), “You don’t necessarily understand what’s going on” (AB01g), and “there is no transparency with CAS” (AS02g). The concept consists of coding from six focus groups and two interviews. Mostly the

statements are related to the contexts of decision-making and intervention procedure. First, the perception of being kept from the decision-making process is epitomized by the following two parents:

And where do they [CAS] have the right to make decisions about us...without talking to us? 'Oh, we've decided that your partner is not allowed to see your son'. What do you guys get this information from? How did you make that decision? By never even talking to him...how do you make that decision? (AD01)

They took my youngest son from me and left me with the other two. How do you figure that? They considered me a bad parent for the abandonment of my child, but they left me with two. They took one. (AG01g)

Both of these parents articulated the apparent arbitrary nature of CAS' decisions and their sense of exclusion from the decision-making process.

The second context is where some parents felt that they are not well-informed of the intervention procedure:

If they were being honest they came to the house all these times by themselves and then all of a sudden one day the police are with them then they've got this oh I'm taking your child, but no if they were honest throughout the whole time you can at least you know they can saying to you well this is the plan so far, we see things going like this do you know what I mean? (AA01g)

I believe that if a child is not in a crown ward position then you have full parental rights so that you can come to all the planning meetings so that you're up to speed with what is contained in that plan because that document will not be presented to you unless you have asked for it. (AB01g)

You [worker] don't even tell us what you're doing? You make it look like it's a sneaky little secret. (AD01)

The first parent articulated that because she was not being informed of the steps and procedures of the intervention, when things happened, it was already too late

for her to do anything. The second parent showed that information was not necessarily offered voluntarily to parents unless they asked. But then, as one community service staff remarked, “parents often don’t know enough to ask”. And third, the parent perceived secrecy instead of transparency in her worker’s action. What these three parents said represents the most common perception research participants have in regards to information from and communication with CPS: parents were left in the dark either because information was not offered to them voluntarily or withheld from them purposely. One parent summed this up as a lack of “transparency” between service users and service provider (AS02g). The significance of the lack of information and transparency, as these parents perceived it, is the exclusion from active participation in the intervention and decision processes that could potentially impact their families in a negative way. It is also significant to note that the connection between access of information and inclusion/exclusion mirrors (and thereby reverses) a finding from the “good experience”. From the “good experience” findings/analysis, parents perceived respect and inclusion when workers kept them “clearly-informed”. Here parents perceived exclusion (and lack of respect by implication) by being kept in the dark.

It is often heard in social work that knowledge is power. I am never more reminded of this cliché than when I keep hearing from parents their confusion and how they felt being disadvantaged by being kept in the dark. Raven (1999) in his typology of power delineates six power bases of which informational power being one of the six. The other five bases of power are coercion, reward, legitimacy,

expert and reference. Informational power is a form of power that is based on information, knowledge and rational reasoning. As such, access to information is a measure of access to power. Increase in knowledge or information entails the increase of power. It is no surprise that in the primary study, “to be well-informed” emerged as one of the important advices research participants gave to parents newly involved with CPS. This relationship between information and power can be best illustrated by the following poignant example. This parent is able to keep her four children by knowing “exactly what they [CAS] want” from her:

“I just went full force with them straight from day one... Just every time I let them come to my house they see there is really nothing that they can go against me, no abuse, there is no marks, my kids want food, I always have food in the house and my kids are also in school, I have shelter...everyone tells me and my family support worker is always saying to me you are such an amazing mother, I have four kids and I’m always boom boom boom and this is going to get done they are done and there’s nothing they can get on me” (AM01g)

It should also be noted that, according to Raven (1999), informational power can threaten the other five forms of power. A history of the uprising of marginalized peoples after realizing their oppression illustrates the threat informational power poses to those who rely on coercive and legitimate power. By virtue of its capacity to challenge the other powers, informational power possesses the capacity to challenge the established order. Would the potential transfer or sharing of power and the potential of threat to the CPS authority be the deterrent for CPS in sharing information with clients?

**Perceived action: Did more damage**

“Did more damage” is also an “in vivo” concept. It represents characteristic statements such as “they do more damage” (AK01), and “they get you into more troubles” (AA01g). The concept consists of coding found in four focus groups and five individual interviews. The damage applies to both parents and children though the latter is the primary constituent to the concept. With the parents, the damage is generally seen in three contexts. First, it is the damage to the parent’s self-esteem, which is captured by the description of the following three parents:

You are like a total failure, less than a human being...you need to work your way up again...to pick up the pieces. (AK01)

Yeah, degrading you to a point you feel like you are nothing, I’m a bad mother, but you know what a lot of parents aren’t bad that they are in their lives, just the ones that had children that get drugs involved, and their kids are left out left alone, and they go out partying stuff like that, that where they should be, not to people that try their hardest try to get ahead in life, and then they [CPS workers] sit there to degrade you, and you try to get ahead and to be a better person and they belittle you, and it’s wrong. (AM01g)

...they [CPS workers] run you down... (AJ01)

Second, the damage refers to the undermining of parental position:

You are like you are not there, ‘we are not here for you, we are here for the kids’...they [workers] changed allowance, curfew, we are like outsiders...our hands are tied. (AK01)

...kids are made more aware of their rights...they [kids] use CAS to turn against you [the parent], ‘I’ll tell CAS’... (AM01g)

So you go in and you think they’re going to be honest with you. You think they’re going to tell you everything. This is your CAS worker. You’re supposed to be working together, but really they’re working with your child, not you. (AA01g)

The first parent described how her worker over-rode her parental authority. The second parent related how her child was taught about his/her rights over parents as a result of child protection intervention. The third parent described how she, as a parent, had become irrelevant in the eyes of her child protection worker. All three parents conveyed a sense that in the matter of child protection intervention, the parental position is severely reduced.

Last, there are signs of emotional trauma from some parents' stories. Expressions such as "world has fallen apart" (AB01g:0U) and "crisis" (AB01g:03) are used by participants to describe the situation when they were involved with CPS. Some parents are found not able to cope with the debilitating emotions and crisis situations, and resort to drugs and alcohol for relief. One parent (AO01) reported that she returned to drinking after two sons were removed from her. Another parent resorted to drugs:

It was either do that [alcohol] or do Valium, and I wasn't into drugs. It was so, our whole lives had been turned upside down. I wasn't coping very well... (AD01)

In regards to perceived damage done to children, participants are often found to use phrases that are reminiscent of the well-known child protection saying "the best interest of the child" but in an opposite way such as "not for the best of the child" or "not necessarily for the best interest of the child" (AA01g, AG01g, AD01, AJ01, AO01). The damage to children is generally expressed in two contexts. First it is the perceived emotional damage:

The number one excuse is that it is best for the child, even though it is devastating to the child themselves. (AA01g)

You know your kids are going through emotional hell. (AB01g)

In most cases the perceived emotional damage is related to separation from parents as a result of apprehension:

They [CAS] went in after they had returned my child, they went to her school. She had got her, she said my daughter walked in, looked at her. She said even my daughter's face just broke her heart because she saw a CAS worker in there, Mommy around....automatically just crying, you know, "You're not going to take me away from Mommy again are you?". (AC01)

They [CAS] may think, you really think you're protecting my son from [my partner] by taking my son out of his home for 6 months? And then you're going to integrate him back into my home at the age of what, 7 and a half, 8, and you think he's going to listen to us? No. He won't listen to us. He'll be so emotionally scarred that he ain't going to listen to anybody. (AD01)

The above are poignant illustrations of the emotional impacts apprehension had on their children. The second form of perceived damage focuses on the child's behaviour and development. Many of these incidents are also related to separation with parents, as expressed by the following three parents:

My kids came back ten times worst than when they went there [foster home]. (AG01g)

...Decision not necessarily for the best interest of the child...my son lost both parents, the two constant figures in his life, like within six months. He used to be well-behaved now turns more violent because he couldn't understand why he couldn't come home with mom. (AO01)

They split me and my kids twice and put in foster care...when they do come back their behaviour is just wild... Like I never abused my son, and I have a feeling he was in this last foster home he was in. Because all of a sudden he turned very angry...all he does is scream at me "You're bad, you're bad" and hides in corners and stuff like that. That wasn't my baby. He lived in the foster home and now I see a totally different baby. He would never let you touch him, you couldn't hold

him, you couldn't change his diaper, you couldn't bath him. And it was like, I didn't abuse my child this way, why would you put him somewhere where he is. (AC01)

There are also incidents of perceived damage on child's behaviour and development that are not related to separation, but are nonetheless related to the intervention process:

They pump things into kids' heads, "Here's my card, call us if anything...parents can get charged, they won't touch you...can set you up in an apartment"... (AK01)

Kids are made more aware of their rights...they [kids] use CAS to turn against you [the parent], "I'll call CAS"...this gets complicated when the kid has ADHD. (AM01g)

What the above parents shared provides a glimpse into what they perceived as damage done to their children as a result of child protection intervention, particularly in relation to admission into care. Anger, violence, and other signs of emotional trauma were being articulated. Their stories echo the findings in Thoburn's (1980) study in which "trauma" was used to describe the experiences of both parents and children who were admitted into care. The parents' stories also are reminiscent of a question raised some time ago by Child Psychiatrist Paul Steinhauer who had been consultant to two CASs (at the time of his writing) and a long-time foster parent himself. Steinhauer (1976) observed that "taking a child into care – even removing him from a severely damaging family will invariably prove traumatic" (p. 1). Apparently basing on Bowlby's attachment theory, Steinhauer (1976) argues that separation or a break in continuity has "profound", "traumatic" and "damaging" effects on a child's development (p. 2). Some of the



effects or symptoms he describes are eerily similar to those described by the parents above. Symptoms range from diffused rage such as screaming (e.g., AC01, AD01) to more lethargic behaviour such as depression and hopelessness (AC01). Quoting Bowlby, Steinhauer (1976) concurred that “there is no experience to which the young child can be subjected more prone to elicit intense, violent and persistent hatred of the mother figure than that of separation” (Bowlby as quoted in Steinhauer, 1976: 4).

Recognizing the potentially dangerous procedure of apprehension, Steinhauer (1976) suggests that apprehension should only be exercised when the decision is carefully weighed out and all other possible alternatives are exhausted. Without which, he observed “the child is liable to end up out of the frying pan but deep in the fire” (p. 5). However, he was often struck by how workers by in large seemed fail to recognize the adverse effects of separation on a child, and how they admit children into care without carefully weighing out the risks and benefits and considering all possible alternatives. One parent from our study would have concurred with him:

They are [CAS] probably justified being involved at that point because I was dealing with grief. But I would probably benefit from some help from CAS with my son still with me. But they went too far and opted for apprehension. (AO01)

What this parent and Steinhauer said resonates with my observation from my brief experience as a child protection worker. “We’ll take the child out” or “we’ll apprehend” was all too casually heard in both formal (such as supervision) and informal (such as chit-chats among colleagues) meetings than I was comfortable

with. Sometimes I did wonder if these workers understood the inherent power in their work. In fact, many comments from research participants, as follows, do suggest a perception of excess use of power by CPS:

They [CASs] went too far (AO01)

“They [CASs] go from one extreme to another (AD01)

They dip too much into power (AL01)

They have so much power...these people are as though above god (AK01)

...the CAS has too much power...how can they turn around and say somebody is abusing something when they got no proof?...All it takes is her word to launch a heck of a... (AH01g)

To summarize this concept, the majority of the parents perceived CPS as a service that did more damage than good, particularly to children in relation to apprehension. Parents' perception of the damage on children finds support in Steinhauer's (1976) professional observation of separation-induced emotional trauma. Also parents' perception of workers' excess use of power as contributing to the damage is consistent with what one may call an insider perspective of a former child protection worker. Truly, for a service that seeks the best interest of children, it may be significant to, in the light of the perceived damage described above, reflect on the questions raised by the following two parents:

How can a worker know what is the best interest of a child whom she does not know? (AG01g)

No, they say “it's in the best interest of the child. You have to do this, its-.” How do you know what is in the best interest of my son? You don't. (AD01)

These two parents in fact are asking the same questions: Who is best suited in knowing the best interest of the child, the parent or the state? Who has the right to define that “best interest”? Who has the ultimate power to define?

### **Perceived action: Power**

Power is perhaps the most recurring concept of all eight concepts. This “in vivo” concept consists of coding from all seven groups and seven interviews selected for the secondary data set. The prominence of power should already be evident from its various manifestations in the discussion of the preceding four major concepts. To briefly recapitulate, power is manifested in the forms of defining power and power without accountability under the concept “misrepresentation”, informational power under “in the dark”, and excessive power under “did more damage”. There is yet another manifestation called coercive power which will be discussed under the last concept “coping strategies”. In Grounded Theory language, these various manifestations are called properties to the concept (Glaser, 1978). A property simply denotes a dimension to a concept. While the various manifestations of power represent the different properties to the concept, excessive power or power without accountability appears to be the overriding dimension to all the properties. The rationale is that it is the propensity of CPS to exercise its inherent power (which can be manifested in different forms such as informational and coercive power) in excess without having to account for it that underlies parents’ bad experience as captured

in the preceding four concepts. More discussion of this significant concept will follow under Chapter VII “Summation of concepts”.

### **Emotional reactions: Anger & fear**

Emotional reactions to CPS were commonly seen during focus groups and interviews. In fact, negative emotion is often the first noticeable effect during focus group or interview. I was often struck by how a question that appealed to a cognitive answer (e.g., facts and incidents) would result in strong emotional reaction as first response. It is as if the name or the thought of CAS alone is enough to evoke strong feelings. These emotions cover a variety of descriptions, however anger and fear emerged as the most prominent emotions expressed by research participants.

#### Anger

The emotion of anger is clearly felt in virtually every group meeting and interview. Parents would easily get excited or be moved to tears. Anger is almost always implicit behind all the bad experiences discussed above, such as when parents felt that they were being misrepresented or unfairly judged. Owing to the nature of emotion, anger is much more readily felt than is captured in data. For instance anger may be expressed in the way a parent told her story, such as in her tone of voice, but may not be necessarily as evident in words. Therefore it should be noted that the emotion of anger expressed by the participants is much more prevalent than the words show. However, when anger is captured in words, it is

seen in the contexts when parents felt manipulated or badly treated, as shown through the following two parents:

I'd agreed to a weekend and that weekend turned out to be 6 months, so you know my anger started right off the bat because I thought I was being manipulated. I was yeah okay if I agree to the weekend I'll see them on Monday, Monday came and lets give it 3 more days, then lets give it 3 months, and then 6 months. So, I say it was crazy, crazy. (AB01g)

A lot, I used to talk to my worker, and I said you know a lot of me was angry because you were all pulling me in different directions. I had him, I had CAS, I had my Mom. In the end I lost everything, no wonder nobody ever comes to a worker. Um...say anything, just quietly sit there. To the workers I would say, you know, just because we're angry, probably we're hiding something, that's why our guard is up. We shouldn't be treated badly or that we're a bad mother or this and that. We're not comfortable saying anything because you don't know what's going to happen when we go home. (AC01)

It is significant to note, from the second parent, the kind of behaviour and effect generated by anger. It is a mixture of mistrust (as indicated in “no wonder nobody comes to a worker” and the last line “we are not comfortable saying anything because you don't know what's going to happen when we go home”), and defense mechanisms (as indicated in “we are hiding something, that is why our guard is up”).

### Fear

The concept of fear covers a series of expressions that includes “nervous”, “terrified” and “panicky”:

You're so nervous you know what I mean you're terrified to be human but at least you act like a robot and almost try to get it out of them or you think of a really good lie to tell them. (AA01g)

Intake worker is very dominating to get to the source no matter what...  
I found myself a little panicky... (AB01g)

And it's like, yup, they've got that fear in us that if anybody shows up  
at the door, your heart stops. (AC01)

Sometimes fear can be seen implicit in situations such as forced compliance or in  
the articulation of "crisis" (AB01g, AH01g):

...I don't mess with CAS. CAS is like the Big Bad Wolf. They take  
your kids. And then you have to do everything that they tell you to get  
them back. And if you slip up, you ain't gonna get 'em back again.  
(AD01)

In many cases it's a crisis point and when CAS becomes involved it is  
a crisis for everyone. (AB01g)

As with the emotion of anger, the effects generated by the emotion of fear need to  
be noted. Fear is seen to generate such debilitating effects that it leads to  
disengagement from the service, as this parent relates:

I think also, everybody saying the fear, kept that from happening. The  
parents were so worried continually that they never really engaged in  
the process. (AB01g)

Another parent observed that the reputation of CASs is such that some  
women would have rather endured the abuse at home than calling the police  
on their abusive partners for fear of losing their child to CAS:

...I had called the police because I was scarred and that is what started  
it. And I tried to tell CAS, you know what this means eh? Do you  
know how many abused women out there aren't going to call the cops  
anymore? Because you're [CAS] going to take their kids. (AC01)

What this parent said echoes an observation made by one service director of a  
South Ontario child protection agency that no one comes and knocks at the door

of CAS anymore because of the fear the reputation of CAS generates in the community.

Yatchmenoff (2005) highlights the significance of emotional reaction as a measure of engagement with service. Yatchmenoff (2005) in her attempt to understand the engagement phenomenon of CPS involuntary clients considers “affect and expressions” an important dimension along with behaviours in the conceptualization of engagement (p. 86). Engagement is defined as “positive involvement in a helping process” which is distinguished from compliance behaviour defined as “going through the motion” (Yatchmenoff, 2005: 86). According to Yatchmenoff (2005), the presence of pervasive negative feeling is an indication of anti-engagement. The effects generated by fear and anger as observed from the parents above do appear to suggest that parents were disengaging with CPS. Parents are seen to display mistrust and defense mechanism (see AC01 and AB01g above) which will be shown in the next section as indication of disengagement with service.

### **Cognitive reaction: Can’t trust**

As well as reacting at an emotional level, parents responded in a cognitive manner—they decided they could not trust CPS. The concept “Can’t trust” consists of coding from six focus groups and four interviews. The concept emerges basically from coding in three contexts. The first context is related to

some parents' comments about their dubious feelings towards the child protection agency:

CAS can help you but you have to be careful. (AM01g)

Be careful, don't be too trusting. (AN01g)

They [CAS] can help you but they can also destroy you. (AA01g)

Be very careful, don't think they are helpful because they are not.  
(AJ01)

The above comments reflect an extreme cautious attitude. It is an attitude that is not an outright dismissal of CPS yet shows great reservation.

The second context is related to some parents' suspicious attitude towards their workers whom they perceived as hypocritical:

...and maybe they don't mean to be cruel, but they're very two-faced and the more you try to help them help you, the more you're endangering yourself with your involvement. They build a case against you without even telling you... (AA01g)

You know not to trust any of them because they can be all nice to you to try and get you to admit stuff and all of a sudden it comes out against you... with me, it's still the smiley face that I don't trust as far as I can throw. (AC01)

Do not trust your worker, the wrong person can screw you...face to face they can be nice as pie but they report everything against you...workers are trained to deceive you. (AL01)

All three parents above perceived their workers as hypocritical and not to be trusted. Moreover, all of them alluded to certain hidden agenda in their workers which they perceived may harm them.

Last, some parents' mistrust stems from their perception of CPS intervention approach as secretive, blackmailing, and coercive:



You're Children's Aid...you're interviewing my son behind my back... You don't even tell us what you're doing? You make it look like it's a sneaky little secret. (AD01)

One thing I really hate, they blackmail you. (AM01g)

...they told my son...if he doesn't say that in front of the camera, he would go to jail and have nothing but bread and water. (AH01g)

Yeah, but sometimes workers push too hard. They constantly nag you and nag you. (AG01g)

Not empathize with you, but say I know what you're going through, but one of these days you're going to have to come to terms with it. Instead of saying you have to come to terms with it now, you have to change now this very second. (AC01)

The above are just some examples of parents' perceptions of child protection intervention. They used such descriptions as "behind my back", "sneaky little secret", "blackmail", "push", and "nag" that all allude to an attitude of mistrust.

"Mistrust" emerges as one of the four engagement measures in Yatchmenoff's (2005) study. The measure of "mistrust" is defined as "the expressions on the part of some clients of extreme lack of trust in the intentions of the agency and agency personnel - the sense that there was a hidden agenda and that the client was being lied to or manipulated with an intention to harm" (p. 86). The extreme lack of trust and the suspicion of hidden agenda in Yatchmenoff's definition are eerily similar to the experiences described by the parents above. More importantly, it should be noted that "mistrust" in Yatchmenoff's study is an anti-engagement measure. This means that the presence of a "mistrust" measure is an indication of disengagement. In other words, the parents in this study

display signs of disengagement from CPS according to Yatchmenoff's (2005) study.

By way of summary to the concept of "Can't trust", perhaps it is appropriate to reflect on the following journal excerpt as I was reflecting on a couple of young mothers in my caseload:

November 06, 2004 - ...I don't see how setting contract would help [client's name] to change when her underlying issue, as I see it, is a lack of trust in CAS and people. How can genuine change be possible with these clients when the cp system is one that breeds distrust - clients don't trust workers and workers learn not to trust clients?

### **Strategic reaction: Coping strategies**

The last concept consists of descriptions of behaviours and strategies displayed by parents as ways of coping with child protection intervention. There were indeed parents who chose to fight or ignore the system, but more often than not those parents that did would eventually resort to cope with the system rather than fighting it. Descriptions of coping strategies are found in three focus groups and four interviews. Basically two forms of strategies are noted. One form is compliance. The involuntary basis to the action is the defining element of the compliance strategy. The following three parents would best illustrate the concept:

They hold so much power, you really can't fight them...just have to grin and bear it. (AO01)

You can't fight them, you can't win. You may be right, but you might as well just roll over and take it. (AC01)

Bite your tongue...show only positive emotions, big time, or at least no negative emotions, cos if you do, it will be used against you. (AL01)

The compliance, as indicated by “grin and bear it”, “roll over and take it”, and “bite your tongue” is certainly not voluntary. As such, it is akin to what Yatchmenoff (2005) calls “going through the motion” in her definition of compliance. The compliance strategy as evident in the above three parents stems from a resignation that they cannot fight the powerful child protection system. Compliance with the system is only taken as an inevitable outcome. Thus CPS power and parents’ resignation to that power are seen to underlie the compliance strategy, at least as shown by these three parents. The power here can be further understood as a form of coercive power as defined in Raven’s (1999) typology. Raven (1999) defines coercive power in terms of obedience and punishment. Obedience and punishment clearly perceived by some parents as underlying their decision to comply with the cp intervention,

When you go under 6-month contract, they say “Jump”, you say “How high?” Because if you don’t, you’re going to lose your kids forever. (AD01)

When it comes to these people [CAS], it’s the same idea. They’ve got power and you either listen or you don’t listen and you suffer the repercussions. (AB01g)

They [some parents] fought every inch of the way, they [their children] never did go home. (AA01g)

Thus according to Raven’s (1999) definition, coercive power clearly underpins parents’ decision to comply with the child protection intervention.

Another coping strategy used by some parents can be termed “playing the game” as represented by the following parent:

When I had my son I wasn't going to let them railroad me, again. I knew how they [CAS] work, I knew what they were going to tell me to do. I knew. I knew how to play the game. (AG01g)

“Playing the game” is distinguished from compliance by its active and purposeful characters (as opposed to the passive and involuntary characters of compliance).

The active and purposeful act of “playing the game” is best illustrated by the following parents:

At times you feel like you were manipulating them and not being honest and truthful, but you learned that you have to do that to get them [CAS] out of your life. (AO01)

It's like inviting the Queen to your house for supper. You have to entertain the CAS. (AA01g)

Basically you just put on a smiley face when they show up, and that's all you do. You don't explain nothing to them. Everything is good. You don't admit nothing to them. Yup, everything's great. That's what it is, my little happy face. (AC01)

The parents above show that they were purposeful, at times manipulative, in putting on a superficial front in order to cope with and survive in the system.

“Playing the game” is more cognizant in contrast with the apparent genuine engagement with the service (see Yatchmenoff's definition of engagement under “Emotional reactions” in p.68) and the resulted change articulated by some parents:

...I did get all my help from CAS, but at first I didn't feel that the problem was with me, I felt it was with my partner, but I allowed him to be in my house around my children to witness all that...As soon as I started working with them and doing everything they said everything

fell into place just how it is supposed to be. Your eyes open you start to notice things. Things you might not have changed without CAS. (AB01g:05)

They [CAS] were always on our side I think to make that change. (AB01g:02).

The articulation of “working with them [CAS]”, “new learning experience”, “eye open”, and “change” stands in stark contrast with the superficial acts that characterize “playing the game”. Unfortunately positive engagement and genuine change are not the norm but only belong to a handful of parents. It is also against the backdrop of positive engagement and genuine change that the pitfall of “playing the game” becomes evident, as expressed by the following parent:

And it's not so good because they don't know what your family situation is like. They don't see what your pressure is like because the laundry is done, the ironing is done and the dishes aren't stacked and the kids are all sitting there perfectly. (AA01g)

This parent has insightfully articulated the conundrum of “playing the game”. On one hand, parents find themselves having no option but to put on a superficial front in order to survive the power exerted upon them by CPS. On the other hand, putting on a front ultimately does not change the root cause of their problems. No genuine change can be expected ultimately out of “playing the game”.

The question is why CPS largely resulted in parents feigning compliance or playing the game rather than genuine change in families?

## **CHAPTER VII SUMMATION OF CONCEPTS**

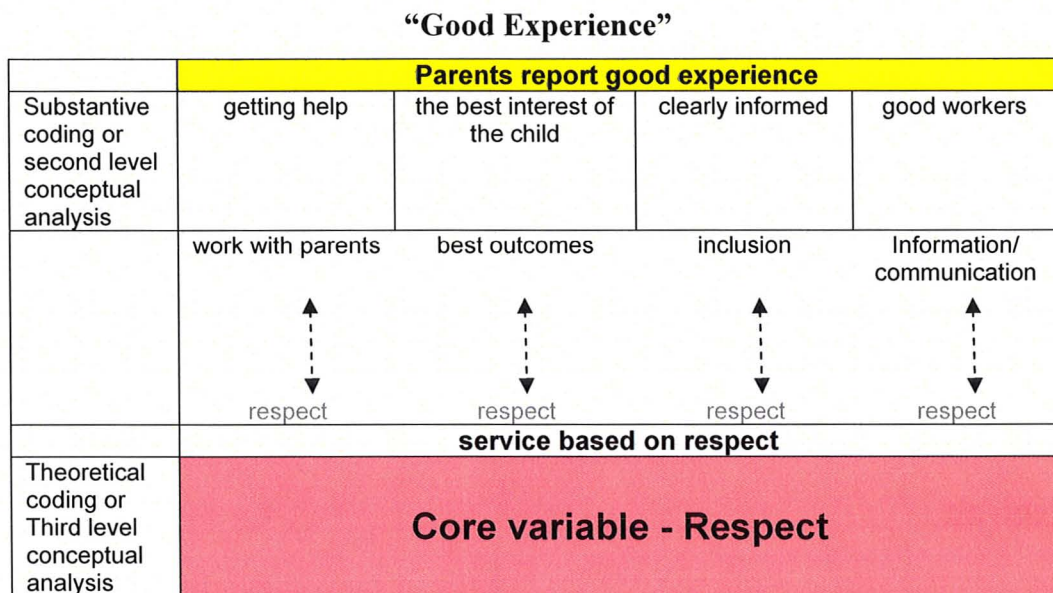
The eight concepts above capture the eight major aspects of what parents say about their experiences at the receiving end of CPS. The Grounded Theory is a research method that attempts to uncover any underlying causes/processes beneath the descriptive data. In Grounded Theory language, the method is interested in deriving a core concept/variable that may integrate the major concepts derived from the substantive data into a meaningful explanation. It is a process of how “data go to concepts, and concepts get transcended to a core variable, which is the underlying pattern” (Glaser, 1998: 840). It involves an examination of every links, contingencies, causes, and consequences between major concepts (Glaser, 1978). The process of linking major concepts and developing core variable is called the third level conceptual analysis or theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978, 2002).

### **Good experience – Relationship between major concepts - Core variable**

Figure 3 shows the development of the core variable (shown in pink colour) for the “good experience” concepts. All the possible underlying actions or processes discussed for each of the four “good experience” concepts are displayed in the center row of the diagram. Respect (for parents) is delineated as the core variable that underpins parents’ “good experience” with CPS. It is an explicit integral part of the concept of “good workers” while also implicit in the

other three concepts, particularly “getting help” and being “clearly informed” (as discussed under “good experience” in Chapter VI). The grey words, rather than solid black words, indicate an implicit presence of that element – that is the element is not explicitly articulated by research participants (see Chapter VI “good experience”).

**Figure 3: The Development of Core Variable for  
"Good experience" Concepts**



Because “respect” is only implicit in most concepts, it can only be considered a weak establishment as a core variable as indicated by the mostly dotted arrows and just one solid arrow. The weak link to the core variable is likely a result of few good experience data to begin with. Though only a weak link, it is argued that it would be difficult for workers to work with parents, include them, and communicate with them without respecting them. These

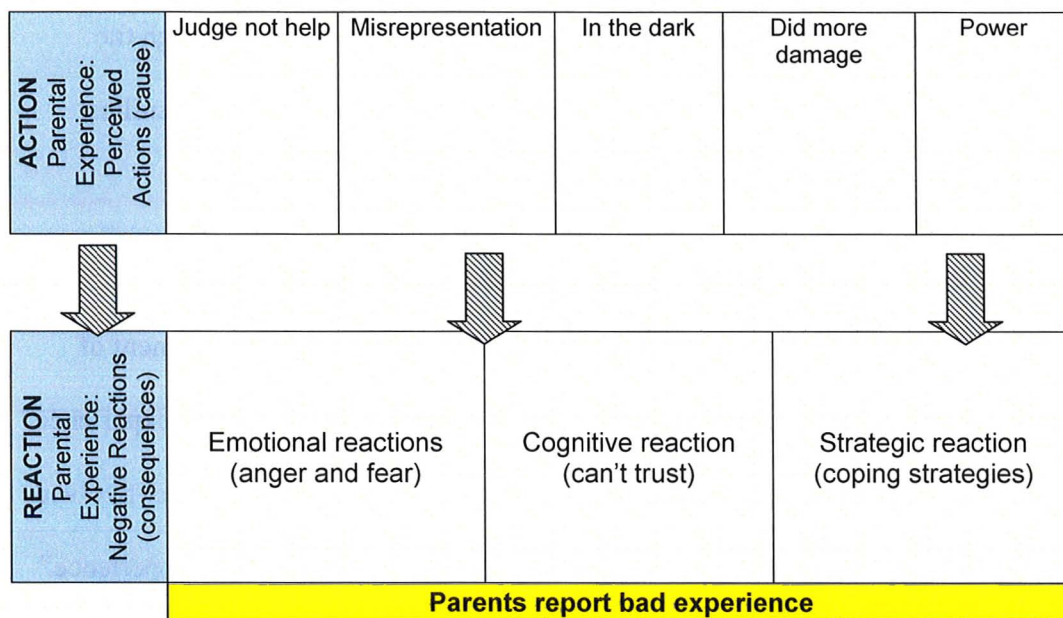
intervention variables would seem to flow naturally from a relationship in which a worker respects parents. As such respect appears to possess the capacity of a core variable that integrates and explains all the four major concepts under “good experience”.

The “bad experience” concepts are conceptualized in two levels. The first level looks at how all the eight concepts are related. It shows that a causal relationship appears to link the first five concepts and the rest of the three concepts together. In other words, the five perceived actions of CPS appear to have a direct relationship with the three negative reactions. The second level examines what may underlie parents’ perceived actions of CPS that have led to their negative reactions. As such, only the five perceived action concepts are relevant for this examination.

### **Bad experience – First level examination - Relationship between major concepts**

For the first level examination, the eight major concepts appear to form an action and reaction (or cause and consequence) relationship (see Figure 4). The first five concepts discussed in Chapter VI (shown on the top) can be looked at as five forms of perceived actions from CPS while the next three concepts (shown on the bottom) can be looked at as three forms of reactions from parents.



**Figure 4: The Relationship between the Eight “Bad Experience” Concepts**

When aligning the eight concepts under this action and reaction, or what Glaser (1978) refers to as a cause and consequence relationship, several theoretical observations can be drawn from a service outcome perspective:

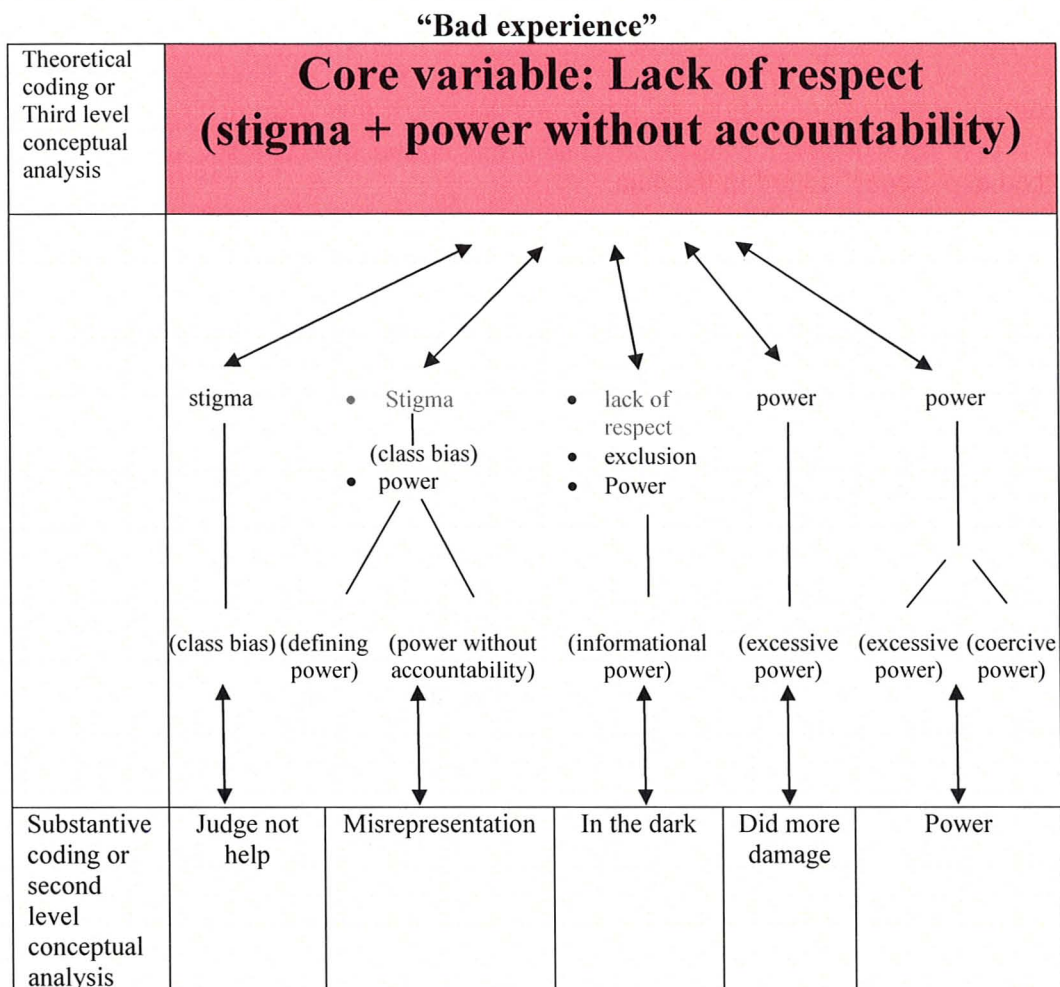
- 1) The five perceived actions on the left which constitute the “bad experience” with CPS appear to lead to the predominantly negative reactions from parents as represented by the three major concepts on the bottom.
- 2) The resulting emotional reactions and the cognitive reaction suggest that the way CPS is delivered leads mostly to parents trying to disengage, rather than genuinely engage, with the service (as discussed in Chapter VI under “Fear”, “Anger”, and “Can’t trust”).

- 3) The resulting strategic reaction suggests that the way CPS is delivered leads mostly to superficial coping strategies (as in going through the motion and playing the game) rather than genuine change in families.

### **Bad experience – Second level examination – Core variable**

For the second level examination, Figure 5 shows the development of “lack of respect” as the core variable (shown in pink colour) for “bad experience” concepts. As mentioned, only the five concepts of perceived action are involved in the analysis since they are considered the causes of parents’ “bad experience” whereas the other three concepts are considered the consequences (see Figure 4). All the possible underlying actions or processes discussed for each of the five “bad experience” concepts (see Chapter VI) are displayed in the wide center row of Figure 5. The solid arrows signify the elements in the center row as possible underlying processes for the concepts on the substantive level. The word(s) within parentheses represents the property or dimension to the corresponding underlying process in the middle row (Glaser, 1978). For instance, class bias is considered a dimension of stigma.

As shown in the center row, power clearly emerges as the most salient underlying process (as discussed in Chapter VI under “power”). This is not surprising as power is also the core concept delineated in Dumbrill’s (2003a, 2003b, 2006a) study. However, power does not appear to fully explain all five major concepts on the substantive level.

**Figure 5: The Development of Core Variable for “Bad Experience” Concepts**

Surely it alone explains the concepts of “in the dark”, “did more damage”, and “power”, but it only partially explains the “misrepresentation” and has no apparent link to the concept of “judge not help”. It appears that parents’ bad experiences are much more complex than can be explained by one single process. Stigma is the next salient process in the center row. Combining power and stigma appears to provide an integrated framework that explains all five aspects of

parents' "bad experience". For instance, the stigmatization of parents when superimposed with power, particularly power without accountability, would result in the perceived actions of "judge not help" and "misrepresentation". Thus, a combined process of stigma and power appears to be operating in causing parents' "bad experience" found in the data.

According to Goffman's (1973) seminal work on the concept of stigma, the operation of stigma is relational rather than a function of certain attributes. That is to say that one does not necessarily become stigmatized by possessing specific attributes, but rather by the transaction of attitudes and beliefs through interactions. Interaction does not refer only to inter-personal relationships, but also to the relationships between individuals and services. Under the perceived action of "judge not help", some parents linked stigma to the ways they were being treated. The discussion of that concept ended with the observation that stigma works like a virus and is contagious — that when one works long enough in a culture that habitually sees parents in an unfavourable light, one begins to view through that lens too. As such, the process of stigmatization is akin to that of hegemony. Hegemony, a concept made famous by Antonio Gramsci, refers to a set of beliefs and attitudes that is so pervasive that it becomes an unquestioned norm (Femia, 1981). In the context of CPS, the perceived deficiency of parents is so prevalent and being transacted within the work culture that it has been taken for granted as truth or an unquestioned norm. Under such norm, that parents are denied the basic courtesies of civil human interaction is regarded as "natural".

However stigma alone may not have produced the effects captured in the major concepts without power. Power, according to Raven (1999), is part of human interaction which is necessary for human civilization. Power, in particular power without accountability (see discussion of “power” in Chapter VI), appears to help materializing the internal or abstract beliefs and attitudes into concrete actions captured in the five action concepts.

Having identified “stigma” and “power” as the underlying processes (which already incorporated the major concepts), they still need to be transcended into a core variable (Glaser, 1998). The core variable “lack of respect” is derived basing on three sources. First, “lack of respect” is implied in the perceived action of “in the dark” (see discussion under “in the dark” in p. 55). Second, as established in the “good experience” conclusion (see Chapter VI pp. 45-46) there is great consistency between the “good experience” concepts and “bad experience” concepts in that the “good experience” concepts closely mirror those of the “bad experience”. For example, “clearly informed” from “good experience” mirrors “in the dark” from “bad experience”. By deduction, the core variable for the “bad experience” concepts should also closely mirror that of the “good experience” concepts. Last, it is supported by literature. Glaser (1978) recommends an examination of literature once the analytic core of underlying processes has emerged. The literature is searched for insights or ideas to enhance the understanding of the identified underlying processes. Stigma (often appears as the pathologizing of parents), power, and respect often appear inter-related in

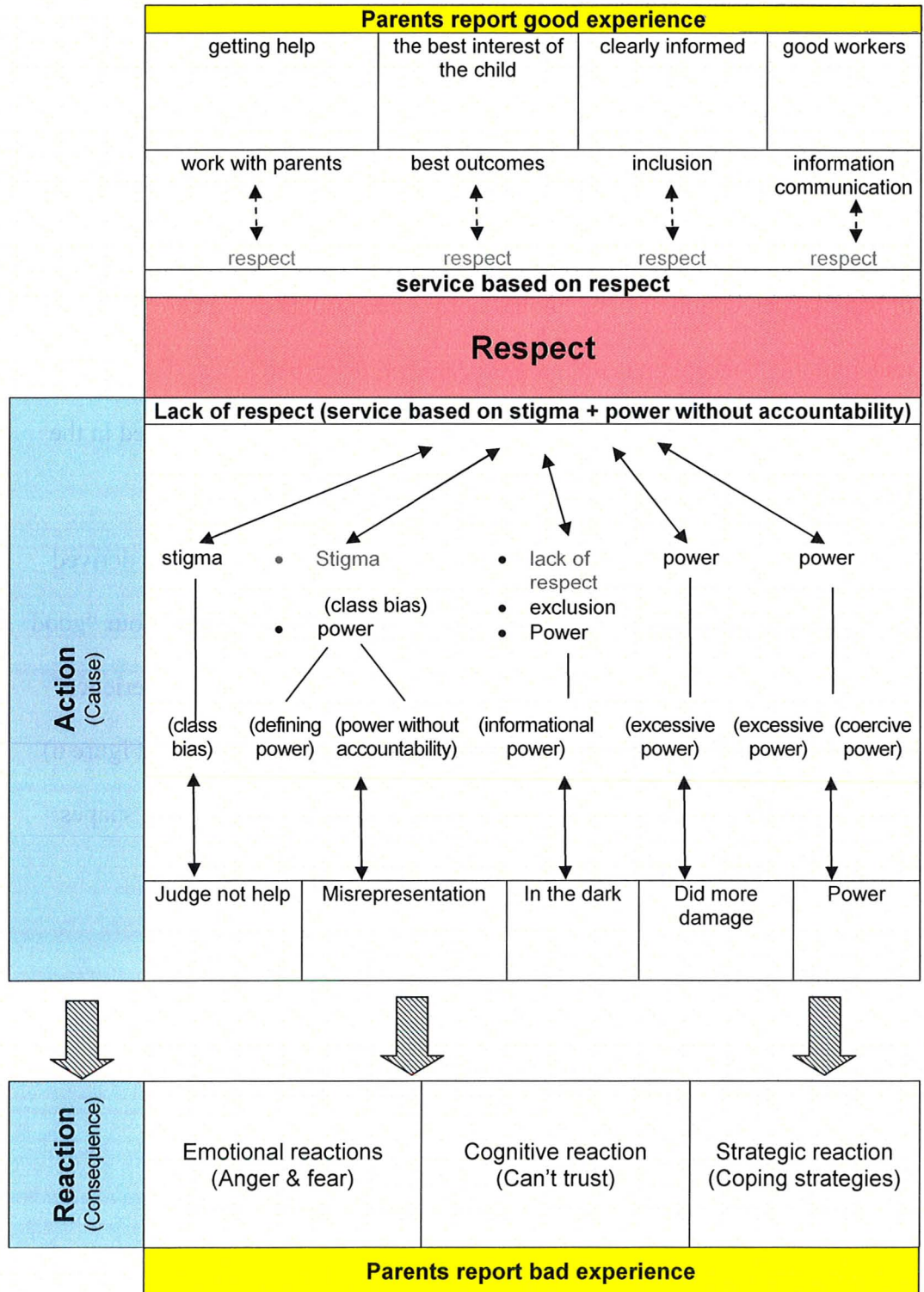
literature about parents using CPS (see Chapter II Context and Chapter III Literature Review). For instance, Colton et al. (1997) and Dale (2004) highlighted the relationship between the pathologized image of CPS users and their lack of respect; Dumbrill (2006a) highlighted the relationship between the perceived deficiency of parents and their powerless social position; and Anderson (1998) and Richardson (2003) highlighted the absolute power of CPS and parents being treated without respect. Though appeared inter-connected in literature, the three concepts have not been conceptualized as an integrated framework. Respect, or the lack of it thereof, as the core variable here would integrate the two already identified underlying processes of “stigma” and “power” into one meaningful explanation for parents’ experiences of CPS. Simply put, it is the interweaving relationship between the lack of respect for parents, the stigmatization of parents, and the unaccountable power of CPS that underpin parents’ predominantly negative experiences/perceptions of CPS.

Figure 6 is a joint diagram of all the three diagrams shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5. It provides a visual representation of how all the concepts derived from both “good experience” and “bad experience” data are related together. Two major relationships are illustrated in this joint diagram (shown in blue and pink colours). First, it is the causal relationship between the five perceived actions and the three reactions on the “bad experience” part of the diagram (shown in blue colour). Second, all the substantive data appear to eventually converge into one core concept/variable of “respect” (the core variable can be seen here as the

embodiment of both dimensions of showing respect and the lack of respect towards parents depending on from which perspective of parental experience one views from). Joining the two relationships (as shown in the joint diagram) suggest that parents' negative perceptions/experiences and the resulted disengagement behaviours appear to hinge on the core variable of "respect". Respect has consistently been identified as part of the findings in previous studies of parental perception of CPS, but has not yet been isolated as a core underpinning concept that explain those perceptions/experiences. The significance or implications of these two relationships will be explained in the next chapter.

This chapter has tried to make sense out of the major concepts derived from the substantive data by examining the relationship between the four "good experience" concepts and the relationship between the eight "bad experience" concepts. The three analytical relationships together (represented by Figure 6) point to the direction that respect is that vital yet missing element that shapes parental perception/experience of CPS.



**Figure 6: The Summation of Concepts**



## CHAPTER VIII IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### **Implications for CAS service delivery**

Two major implications are evident from the findings. First, by failing to effectively convey respect, or perhaps failing to actually employ respect, when working with parents, CPS stands to alienate service users and generate only superficial outcomes rather than engage families in affecting genuine changes for the protection of children. If the objective of CPS is to affect change in families for the protection of children, judging from the reactions of the parents, CPS is moving away rather than towards that objective. Undeniably in CPS sometimes removing a vulnerable child from a dysfunctional home is the only remedy to protect a child. However, most of the time, engaging with families to affect change in the homes is the best alternative to provide safety. If the findings in this study are any indication, the system is driving away rather than positively engaging with parents to affect the needed change. As one parent summed up her perception of child protection intervention, CPS “creates tension” in parents (AO01). It is also possible that the failure in engaging with parents leads to the frequent resort to apprehension as protection remedy which parents perceived, and supported by at least one authoritative source, as doing more damage than good to children (see Chapter VI under “Did more damage”). If CPS continues to operate in the way it does, it will remain ineffectual in meeting the service

objective, and the vicious cycle of failing to engage with families and the resulting apprehension of children will continue. Not too long ago one Executive Director of a Hamilton child protection agency was heard on the radio recruiting for foster homes and citing that the number of children coming into care has reached a record high in recent years (CHML 900). Truly lessons need to be learned from those who are on the receiving end of service.

Second, based on the largely disengagement behaviours and superficial acts the service generates, the framework of deficiency, as signified by the stigmatization of and the lack of respect towards parents, is not a beneficial context for delivering human helping service. Furthermore, this shows that viewing clients as deficient or problematic is not the starting point for affecting change. Of course social work practice theory is well aware of the problems of a deficit based approach, however, CPS continues to operate in a framework where stigma makes it possible to regard and treat parents accused of child abuse and neglect as “less eligible” than other citizens for respect and consideration. Indeed, these parents are pathologized as such that rather than being seen as parents with problems, they are seen as the problem themselves. The core variable of “respect” suggests that to positively engage families with the ultimate intent of affecting change, CPS needs to re-conceptualizing parents from a deficiency or pathologizing framework to a strength-based framework that is founded on respect. The starting point of a strength-based framework (as stated in Chapter IV Conceptual Framework) is respect for human dignity. From it springs the view

that every individual embodies strengths and resources that, if unleashed, are capable of solving their own problems. As such, the summation of the three sets of analytical relationships suggests that CPS needs to re-conceptualize its intervention approach in a framework of respect and strengths, otherwise, CPS will continue to be unable to engage with service users and affect genuine change.

Parents in many studies (see Chapter III Literature Review) in fact have repeatedly articulated their need to be treated as a person. Drake's (1994) study is a particularly poignant example. His study participants point out that the prime factors in constituting a positive client-worker relationship are: workers must show respect for clients, have non-judgmental attitudes, and enter relationships without preconception. It is help not judgment that CPS users need. The UK child welfare service has begun to be "modeled on a code which includes respect for users and the promotion of their capacities as social actors" (Colton et al., 1997: 247) since the late 1980s. However, Colton et al.'s (1997) study in late 1990s finds that stigma continues to be a part of the experience of using CPS. This shows the deep-seated effect of stigma is not easy to undo. Parents' voice has long pointed the direction of what would work for them. But CPS policy has continued to make policies in the oblivion of parents' voice due to the stigma attached to service users (Dumbrill, 2006a, 2006b). Dumbrill argues that their missing voice is the reason for the historical swing of pendulum that marks child welfare policy. Perhaps it is time to listen.

**Conclusion**

From day one, the starting point of social work stems from the ethos of our commonality as human beings. We all share the same fallibilities and strengths inherent in mankind. Out of this ethos is the respect for human dignity. It is not a respect that needs to be earned but belongs equally to all by virtue of their very existence as human beings. Somewhere along the line this fundamental value seems to have gotten lost. The parents in this study have voiced their demand for basic human dignity, and have reminded us of this age-old social work principle. The parents have spoken. It is time that CPS listens.

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## **APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER**

### **INFORMATION LETTER**

Project Title: Building Service Users Knowledge: Understanding Child Protection Services from the Receiving End

By: Gary Dumbrill from the School of Social Work McMaster University, Hamilton.

Project Contact Number	(905) 525-9140 extension 23494
Gary Dumbrill Contact Number	(905) 525-9140 extension 23791

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The project will produce an advice book, booklet and/or a Web-site for parents who are newly receiving services from a Children's Aid Society (CAS). Parents with experience of receiving CAS services will help write the booklet. An additional benefit is that knowledge produced by the project will help workers gain a deeper understanding of what it is like for parents to receive CAS intervention.

### **PROCEDURES**

The researcher will meet with groups of parents (or in some cases individual parents) who have experience of receiving CAS services to ask what advice they would give to parents newly receiving intervention. This advice will be written by the researcher, with the help of parents, to be given to parents newly working with a CAS.

Parents volunteering to take part in this study will be asked to do the following things:

First the researcher will privately ask parents a few questions about their family background and involvement with the CAS, such as:

- When were you involved with the CAS
- What was the main reason for involvement with the CAS?
- What were the ages of your children when you were involved?

Answers will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other parents participating in the study. Parents can choose not to answer any of these questions.

Next parents will be invited to meet as a small group in community meeting rooms (such as a private room in a library). There will be between 5 to 10 parents in each group. The type of questions asked of groups will include:

- What do you think the CAS was trying to do when they were working with you?
- How would you explain to other parents what the CAS does?

- Were there any things you did that made it easier or harder to work with the CAS?
- What advice would you give other parents about working with the CAS?

Group meetings will be tape recorded so that the researcher does not miss anything anyone has to say. The researcher and a small number of volunteer parents will form the advice given by the groups into a written document. Once this writing has taken place, parents will be invited to participate in editing group meetings to ensure that the document accurately contains the advice they would like to give other parents. Parents can choose to share information individually rather than in a group if they wish.

If parents choose to take part in only one meeting, the time they can expect to be involved in this project is about ninety-minutes. Each additional meeting parents chose to take part in will take an additional ninety minuets. For those volunteering to take part in the writing team, several extra hours work will be involved.

Whatever level of involvement a parent chooses, a copy of the project's final written document will be made available to them.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Parents might feel sad or upset recounting unpleasant experiences they may have had working with a CAS. If this happens they can call the researcher for a referral to counseling assistance.

By taking part in the research parents will identify themselves to other parents involved in the project as someone who has received CAS intervention. There is, however, no requirement that a parent share the specific reasons for their CAS involvement with other research participants.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants will receive no direct benefits from taking part in this project, although they may gain a better understanding about working with a CAS.

An indirect benefit to participants will be contributing to a written booklet that will help other parents work with CASs. Also, the information participants share will help CAS workers gain a better understanding of what it is like for parents to receive intervention.

### **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

To assist with expenses that parents may have for participating in this research, such as baby-sitting, transportation or other costs, they will be given \$20.00 when they attend their first group meeting. This is a single flat-rate payment to help cover costs for the duration of the research and is not a per-meeting payment. If after receiving this payment a parent decides to withdraw, they will not have to return this money.



If a parent volunteers to be a part of the writing team, additional payments can be made to cover their out-of pocket expenses. The researcher must agree such expense payments in advance.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that identifies participating parents will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with a parent's permission or as required by law. That means any written reports will not contain information that identifies specific parents or their family members without their permission.

To protect confidentiality, tapes of group sessions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at McMaster University or when being analyzed off-site kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home-office. Tapes will be destroyed after 7 years. Transcripts will not have parents' names on them or identify them and will be destroyed after 10 years.

Circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured include someone indicating that a child under 16 is being or is at risk of being physically harmed or sexually abused, the researcher will be bound by law to report this information to the children's aid society. Also, a person saying that they plan to harm themselves or someone else is something that the researcher is bound by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Parents can choose whether to be in this study or not. Parents volunteering to be in this study may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Parents may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw parents from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Parents do not waive any legal claims, rights or remedies because of their participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). Questions about the project can be directed to Gary Dumbrill at 905 525 9140, ext. 23791, or Malene Ruddock (project manager) at 905 525 9140, ext. 23494. Questions regarding the rights of research participant can be directed to:

MREB Secretariat  
McMaster University  
1280 Main Street W., GH-306  
Hamilton, ON L8S 4L9

Telephone: 905 525 9140, ext. 23142  
E mail: [srebsec@mcmaster.ca](mailto:srebsec@mcmaster.ca)  
Fax: 905-540-8019

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Project Title: Building Service Users Knowledge: Understanding Child Protection Services from the Receiving End

You are asked to take part in a research project conducted by Gary Dumbrill from the School of Social Work at McMaster University, Hamilton. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Gary Dumbrill at (905) 525-9140 extension 23791 or Malene Ruddock (project manager) at 905 525 9140, ext. 23494.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The project will produce an advice book, booklet and/or a Web-site for parents who are newly receiving services from a Children's Aid Society (CAS). Parents with experience of receiving CAS services will help write the booklet. An additional benefit is that knowledge produced by the project will help workers gain a deeper understanding of what it is like for parents to receive CAS intervention.

### **PROCEDURES**

The researcher will meet with groups of parents, and in some circumstances individual parents, with experience of CAS services to ask what advice they would give to parents newly receiving CAS intervention. This advice will be written by the researcher, with the help of parents, into a booklet that will be given to parents when they begin working with a CAS.

If you volunteer to take part in this study you will be asked to do the following things:

First, the researcher will privately ask you a few questions about your family background and involvement with the CAS. The type of questions will include:

- When were you involved with the CAS
- What was the main reason for involvement with the CAS?
- What were the ages of your children when you were involved?

You can choose not to answer any of these questions and the researcher will not share the answers you do give with other parents participating in the study.

Next you will be invited to meet with a small group of parents who have received CAS service. Meetings will be held in a community room in your area (such as a private room in a library). There will be between 5 to 10 parents in this meeting. The type of questions the group will be asked will include:



- What do you think the CAS was trying to do when they were working with you?
- How would you explain to other parents what the CAS does?
- Were there any things you did that made it easier or harder to work with the CAS?
- What advice would you give other parents about working with the CAS?

The group meeting will be tape recorded so that the researcher does not miss anything anyone has to say. The researcher and a small number of volunteer parents will write the group advice into a guide for those newly receiving CAS services. Once this writing has taken place you will be invited to participate in additional meetings to review the guide to be sure that it accurately contains the advice you would like to give. Also, if you wish, you can choose to volunteer to be a part of the writing team.

If you choose to take part in only one meeting the time you can expect to take part in this project is about ninety-minutes. If you choose to take part in additional meetings this will involve about ninety minutes for every extra meeting. If you volunteer to take part in the parent writing team, several extra hours will be involved. Whatever your level of involvement you choose, a copy of the projects final written document will be made available to you. Parents not wishing to share information in a group can meet with the researcher on an individual basis.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

You might feel sad or upset as a result of recounting unpleasant experiences that you may have had working with a CAS. If this happens, you can call the researcher and he will provide you with a referral for counseling assistance.

Taking part in a group with other parents who have received CAS service will identify you to these group members as someone who has also received CAS intervention. There is, however, no requirement that you share the reasons for your CAS involvement with the group.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR SOCIETY**

You will receive no direct benefits from taking part in this project, although you may gain a better understanding about the ways other parents experience and interact with the Children's Aid Society.

An indirect benefit to you will be contributing to a written booklet that will help parents' newly receiving child protection services.

An additional indirect benefit is that the information you share in the project will also help workers gain a better understanding of what it is like for parents to receive CAS intervention.

## **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

To assist with expenses that you may have for participating in this research, such as baby-sitting, transportation or other costs, you will be given \$20.00 when you attend your first group meeting. This is a single flat-rate payment to help cover costs for the duration of the research and is not a per-meeting payment. If after beginning study and receiving this payment you decide to withdraw, you will not have to return this money.

If you volunteer to be a part of the writing team, additional payments can be made to cover your out-of-pocket expenses. Such expense payments must be agreed in advance with the researcher.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. That means written reports will not contain information that identifies you or your family members without your permission.

The tapes of group sessions will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Transcripts will not have your name on them. Tapes will be destroyed after 7 years and transcripts after 10 years.

Circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured include someone indicating that a child under 16 is being or is at risk of being physically harmed or sexually abused, the researcher will be bound by law to report this information to the children's aid society. Also, a person saying that they plan to harm themselves or someone else is something that the researcher is bound by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

MREB Secretariat  
McMaster University  
1280 Main Street W., GH-306  
Hamilton, ON L8S 4L9

Telephone: 905 525 9140, ext. 23142  
E mail: srebsec@mcmaster.ca  
Fax: 905-540-8019

#### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I understand the information provided for the study “Coping with child protection intervention: A guide by parents for parents” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### **SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator or research assistant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

