Working Hard or Heart-y Working?

Theorizing Child Protection’s Occupational Construction

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Positioned within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, Working Hard or Heart-y Working (WHHW) employed qualitative interviews and a constructivist grounded theory approach to examine how child protection workers conceive of the professional identity-influencing forces that define, prescribe and proscribe their occupational perceptions (and resultant praxis) (Charmaz, 2006): examining of child protection work’s specific occupational articulations at this historical moment offering insights into this professional realm and regarding more general contemporary social work practice.

WHHW’s initial evidenced framework offered that within a neoliberal context, child protection work is “invisible work for an open but total(ly) greedy institution”. Subsequent analyses indicated that child protection work could be understood as an exercise in myth, myth-making and myth-perpetuation (with worker experiences broadly characterized by themes of determination, dependence and distance/dissonance/disconnect).

In short, it is offered that the child protection myth project is delineated by allegiance to the noble callings of child safety and improved family functioning evidenced in workers'
determination to proudly provide child protection services despite feelings of liability-related anxiety and disposability. It is offered that current child protection practice is premised on a myth of individual worker accountability despite overt acknowledgement of overwhelming occupational expectations. Thus, the perpetuation of the child protection system depends on workers continued labour within a Sisyphean occupational environment characterized by distance and disconnect between workers and those responsible for the regulatory systems they occupy and even the wider communities these workers service.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to Ivy Redmond (née Winter), my grandmother, whose love I feel without our ever meeting and whose tenacity I strive to emulate; Janet Redmond, my mother and first teacher. She laid a good foundation and called me “Darling” as much as by my name; Elaine Winter, my Auntie, a mother to my adult self and my greatest champion; Jonathan Winter, who is always Number One with me; and finally to Danae Page-Winter, my “niece”, a constant wonder and my “Best Girl”.

I am because we are.
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I also want to thank all those whose names do not appear here but have travelled with me before and during the “PhD Classic”. I have been generously held in love, laughter and tears. I appreciate your kindnesses more than you can ever know…

And finally, in the words of The Tragically Hip:

It’s been a long time running
It’s been a long time coming
It’s been a long, long, long time running
It’s well worth the wait.
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WORKING HARD OR HEART-Y WORKING
Preface

I was working as a front-line child protection worker and I had come in to the office on the weekend. This was not unusual. Often the only way to stay current with the paperwork associated with my job was to work on a Saturday or Sunday (when one could justifiably ignore one’s telephone) in order to write reports (undisturbed) for hours on end.

I walked into the office and called out as I always did, “Who’s here”? I was greeted with at least half a dozen, “Me!”s and “Hey, Melissa!”s. As I sat down at my desk and waited for my computer to boot up, one of my co-workers came over to my cubicle. He pulled up a chair and began to tell me about a telephone conversation he had had with a mother he worked with.

My colleague noted that when a client of his had recently required immediate shelter, she had called an emergency housing general intake number only to be informed that there were no further available beds for that day and that she should “try again tomorrow”. Despite the client’s explanations regarding the urgency of her need, she was told that money had been set aside for a certain number of emergency beds a day and those beds had been filled. “Can you imagine,” my colleague asked, “what would happen if child protection workers did the same when it came to [child maltreatment] investigations”? He said, “You know, Melissa. We can’t do that. We can’t start a waiting list or tell people to call back tomorrow. It’s not acceptable”.

My co-worker was not advocating for a wait-list for urgent child protection services. He could readily acknowledge that this woman’s wait was due to a scarcity of needs-appropriate subsidized units and that this dearth existed against a backdrop of little to no governmental funding for the development of social housing, temporary or otherwise. His complaint lay not so much in the refusal of service this woman was forced to endure but rather in the implausibility of
the child protection agency for which we, and the other workers who had come in on another Saturday afternoon, worked behaving in a similar manner.

Arguments might be made that child protection service is no more essential than access to adequate housing and yet, even as child protection agencies undergo the same fiscal pressures as other social services that they rely upon, children’s aid societies do not share the same response options. In his numerous years of employment as a child protection worker, his feeling had been that despite the numerous changes in policy, legislation and fiscal management, the expectation was that he would continue to do his job with the same, if not increased, efficiency. My colleague had articulated a difference between the occupational construction of child protection practice and other social service provision – a distinction that complicates child protection practice and left me wondering about the impact of this difference upon practitioners and their praxis.

I offer this story as a way of querying why child protection is different, if not unique, amongst social services and thus worthy of particular scrutiny. On a Saturday afternoon when neither of us should have been in the office, my co-worker and I were digging deep into the reasons that underscored why we were there (both literally and figuratively). Does child protection practice demand more and receive it from the professional conventions of its workers? Whether explicitly stated, as on that afternoon, or tacitly embodied through the occupational practices of its workers, management, regulating bureaucracy and the ferocity of public condemnation, we wondered whether child protection is unlike other forms of social service. From the intricacies of attempting to cooperatively engage children and families under the constant spectre of societally-sanctioned yet authoritarian power to the operations of a system which, though restrictively funded, prescribes absolute adherence to externally established
practice standards regardless of demand, child protection practice offers fertile ground for an examination of what constitutes social service and how workers negotiate the price to be paid for this communitarian commitment.

Ultimately, it was a conversations like the one between my colleagues and I and another that I had years later at a different Children’s Aid Society that convinced me to return to school to pursue a PhD. I was with my supervisor, discussing the progress made (or lack thereof) with each of the families on my caseload when she exclaimed, “I love reading your recording. I always feel like I know the family described better by the end of it”. I was taken aback. I had always struggled with each of the narratives included in my professional documentation and so I said, “That’s weird. I always feel like I want to tell a story that is bigger than the space [allotted]”. To which she replied, “Really? Well maybe you should go back to school”… And so I returned to school armed with the questions that had underscored (read haunted) my attempts at “best practice” as a child protection worker. I came back with a head full of the questions raised by debriefs over lunch or drinks or dinner: debates over what had happened, what was happening and what to do next which had taken place in offices, in cars and over the phone at any time of the day or night.

I have tried to reflect the depth of these questions and thinking in the title of this dissertation project. Just like the social work practice child protection workers engage in, I wanted the title of this study to invoke the layered and complex nature of the work I attempt to describe and explore therein. It was in this spirit that, Working hard or heart-y working (WHHW) was conceived.

I am not sure when I was first jokingly asked if I was “working hard or hardly working” or exactly when I came to believe that a variation on this light-hearted gibe was an apt title for a
dissertation examining the occupational prescriptions and perceptions associated with child protection practice in Ontario. I titled this project, *Working hard or heart-y working* to reference several points. First, that just like the work alluded to in the original saying, child protection work seems to be most visible to the people engaged in it. One wouldn’t have to ask the originating question, if the hard work was more conspicuous or could be seen. Second, the project’s title, through the replacement of the word hardly with heart-y, alludes to the emotional nature of child protection work—whether the vicariously traumatic effects of the investigations undertaken, the constant demands of one’s caseload or the depths of feeling that one must draw upon in order to facilitate change and/or support grieving, child protection work is neither for the affectively shallow nor the emotionally fragile. Third, it was hoped that the title would call into question, the critical gaze most often turned upon child protection workers. A gaze that often lacks in nuance (one can only choose between two options: hard or hardly) and often presents workers in a glaringly unflattering light, that is as inept, uncaring “baby-snatchers”.

Even as its explorations are grounded in personal and emotional commitment, this dissertation is neither apologia nor soap box. It is a preliminary attempt to critically and respectfully engage the hard- and heart-work that is child protection practice in Ontario at this historical moment.
1 Working Hard or Heart-y Working: Introduction

Working as public servants in the private realm of the home, child protection workers are positioned at the intersection of many diverse, and sometimes divergent, societal discourses. Pivotal Canadian works, such as the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings* (Trocmé et al., 2005), provide much-needed information about the rates of child maltreatment and the demographics of those families subject to child protection investigations; however, there is little scholarship regarding the personal occupational narratives of those who provide child protection services (For important practice exceptions see Hall, 1997; Milner, 2001; and Reissman & Quinney, 2005), and less still pertaining to these public service workers’ perceptions regarding the societal constraints and opportunities inherent to their work (de Montigny, 1995; Zell, 2006).

Much of child protection’s extant worker-focused research concentrates on the interplay among institutional, interpersonal and individual factors in child protection workers’ experiences of job satisfaction and occupational stress (e.g., Bennett, Plint & Clifford, 2005; Harvey, Mandell, Stalker & Frensh, 2003; Lloyd, King & Chenoweth, 2002; Stalker, Mandell, Harvey, Frensch & Wright, 2007; Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001). This literature often reflects concerns regarding how these factors impact upon child protection agency turnover rates (e.g., Andersen & Gobeil, 2003; Curry, McCarragher & Dellman-Jenkins, 2005; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Mor Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001: Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2006). More importantly for this project, this literature’s employee retention focus also points to child protection workers possessing untapped understandings of the possibilities inherent to the work they do. By focusing on how child protection workers feel (job satisfaction), social work research has
preempted an interrogation of the occupational antecedents necessary for workers to make these judgments⁴.

As individuals asked to implement child protection policy, workers are interrogated about their job satisfaction and their intentions to “stay” but not what it means to continue “staying” in a particularly contested social service occupational domain. This project seeks to document front-line child protection workers’ understandings of their occupational roles relative to social vectors such as political, social and gendered forces, including governmental and regulatory systems. It offers that workers’ sense of their professional selves is formulated in relation to the boundaries of their work and their own professional interactions, that is, their praxis’ occupational construction. Thus, rather than exploring child protection work from job satisfaction or retention standpoints, this project seeks to query workers’ understandings of the opportunities and constraints of their day-to-day practice maintaining that it is these perceptions that offer deeper insight into child protection’s occupational landscape.

1.1 Neo-liberalism & You: Economic Ideology as Social Service Provision Backdrop

Child protection is a social service. It might be argued that child protection workers in Ontario are arm’s-length state employees. While they do not work directly for the province, they do work for agencies that are regulated and at least legislatively answer solely to the province’s government or provincially sanctioned bodies. This is not to minimize the relevance of local community in managing and influencing their service agencies, but to point out that such influence occurs within provincially-defined regulatory and fiscal boundaries. In this way, the

⁴In order to say that one is occupationally dissatisfied one must possess a sense of how one’s professional life might be different and what forces influence its current configuration.
political ideologies embraced by the government of the day prescribe the backdrop against which child protection workers practice.

In Ontario, the 1995 election of the Harris government on the “Commonsense Revolution” platform represented a seismic shift in the province’s ideological landscape. Through the end of the century and into the 21st, the Keynesian ideas and ideals of the welfare state gave way to neoliberalist strategies and a resultant leaner governmental profile: one focused both politically and bureaucratically on provincial program spending cuts, deregulation, tax cuts and privatization (Cohen, 2001; Coulter, 2009; Kozolanka, 2007; Lightman & Riches, 2000; Ralph, Régimbald & St-Amand, 1997). Though seemingly historically remote, this electoral event is recognized cross-disciplinarily as the definitive start of an era whose policy shifts transformed and continue to reverberate through Ontario’s public sector and beyond (Basu, 2004; Clark, 2002; Condon, 2001; Hackworth & Moraih, 2006; Ilcan, 2009; Prudham, 2004).

Steger and Roy (2010) offer that neoliberalism, though generally considered an economic concept based on the classical liberal notion of the self-regulating marketplace which emerged in the 1980s, can additionally be thought of as three interrelated phenomena; (a) “an ideology”; (b) “a mode of governance”; and (c) “a policy package” (p. 11). In brief, neoliberalism’s ideology, touts notions of global economic interdependence predicated on the supremacy of free-market capitalism and thus privileges relatively unfettered market responses to most societal issues. As a mode of governance, neoliberalism celebrates among other notions, entrepreneurial spirit, decentralization of state authority to local powers and less regulatorily influential government. Neoliberal forms of governance find their social service correlates in the adoption of New Public Management principles: advocating the adoption of more business-like attitudes towards social service provision (Connell, Fawcett & Meagher, 2009; Hood, 1995; Marobela,
Finally, neoliberalism offers the D-L-P formula as policy package premise: a) economic deregulation; b) trade liberalization and c) privatization of state-owned industry (Steger and Roy, 2010).

Neoliberalism might be said to influence child protection practice through each of these gateways. In an era of economic flux, child protection workers seek to address the social effects of globalized neoliberal ideology (increased poverty and societal stressors for much of its service population) with more prescriptive outcome-focused practice within a context of fiscal frugality (NPM as mode of governance). Less evident, but still arguable, is the streamlining of children’s aid societies into agencies that offer almost exclusive child protection services (risk and maltreatment investigation, validation and resultant service) to the exclusion of child welfare (maltreatment prevention and parental education) services. In sum, neoliberal ideology influences the adoption of child protection policy initiatives that reinforce certain forms of service provision and occupational governance.

This project is rooted in a proposition that the sea change in political understandings of the role of the state has influenced workers who engage in child protection practice through pressures upon their traditional client-base (economically marginalized and/or racialized communities), organizational culture(s) and administrative regulation of their work. Working Hard or Heart-y Working’s aim is to interrogate workers’ understandings of their occupational praxis against this ideological backdrop.

1.2 Social Work Implications

As public service workers working primarily in the private realm of the home, child protection workers’ practice is uniquely positioned for critical analyses of related professional discourse. Critical exploration of child protection workers’ occupational positioning through an
examination of their narratives offers a unique opportunity for exploring child protection work as social work praxis and interrogating specific occupational articulations for insights regarding general practice. Viewing this work as emblematic can further our profession’s critical engagement with the notion of “social work as work.”

Child protection practice, like other social services, has been under the influence of quasi-market forces for decades. While the influence of market forces upon social work practice, methods and philosophy has been a topic of concern for social work theorists (see Adams, 1997; Dominelli, 1997; Fabricant, 1985; Healy & Meagher, 2004; Midgley, 2007) and critical exploration of child protection workers’ occupational positioning through an examination of their narratives offers a unique opportunity for exploring child protection work as perhaps emblematic of more general social work praxis, doing so while social policy continues to shift away from a Keynesian-inspired welfare state model toward more neoliberal positioning also offers an exciting opportunity to not only look into child protection workers’ understanding of their practices but their perceptions of this praxis relative to shifting social and regulatory expectations. By asking what it means to continue to provide “child protection” as a social service when societal notions of the state, citizenship and responsibility are in flux, we privilege the mediated expertise and professional articulations of child protection worker practice developed within a context of fiscal restraint and increasing bureaucratization of their professional domains. Rather than asking if child protection workers are happy (job satisfaction studies) and/or compliant (regulatory and documentation assessments), social work’s occupational discourse benefits by the WHHW project asking workers to articulate what happiness looks like and how compliance feels in light of current economic/social policies.
The importation of managerialist techniques into social service provision management has influenced workers, their agencies and clients (Baines, 2004a). Whatever changes take place at agency, provincial administrative and/or national levels influence workers who, ultimately, are expected to implement these shifts. Child protection workers bear witness to the changing face of social service provision in both the needs of the children and families they serve and in the avenues accessible to them, as employees and change agents, in response to these demands. We, as social workers, should question the wisdom of our profession’s boundaries and practices being dictated from without, that is, by managerialist reasoning whose epistemological grounding differs from social work’s.

Where managerialist reasoning privileges efficiencies, savings, efficacy and return on (financial) investment, oft-touted “social work values” prize notions of distributive justice, social inclusion and advocacy (Reamer, 1993): notions which are not as readily monetized or measured. This is not to imply that trans-disciplinary professional input is neither needed nor welcome or that social work practice is not interested in efficiencies, but that those engaged in this professional re-orientation must have a clear sense of the historical placement and contemporary implications of these proffered changes. As often practiced in Canada, social work practice is deeply involved in providing the social services that are fundamental to the welfare state. This view of the state is changing. I offer that despite the large-scale integration of social work practitioners into the state apparatus, wholesale adoption of unexamined extra-professional ideologies (in this case, neoliberal and managerialist ones) is problematic. This work will examine existing knowledge(s) in order to contribute to these professional debates.

By asking child protection workers to examine their occupational behaviours within a context wider than individual interactions, this study’s findings may further inform the
construction of a generalizable model of child protection workers’ occupational (dis)engagement in light of neoliberalist influence on social service provision, practice and practice expectations.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics (2005) lists social justice as a core professional value. Further, it charges social workers to “promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs” (p. 5). Currently, social work professionals have been called to advocacy on behalf of those who have been negatively affected by globalizing economic forces (see Midgley, 2007). In light of the effects of globalizing forces on all workplaces, WHHW offers that social workers in general, and child protection workers in particular, should engage in informed occupational advocacy for their clients and themselves. Thus, drawing on the occupational parallels which exist between clients/consumers/citizens/community members and social workers, both groups impacted by globalization, this study will introduce a theoretical framework which will provide a basis for much-needed structural analyses and related social work occupational advocacy, perhaps better equipping the profession to meet its ethical calling.

In sum, by exploring the professional articulations of Ontarian child protection workers situated at this historical moment, the WHHW project may benefit social work through (a) the development of a generalizable model for a discussion of “social work as work”; (b) highlighting the practice navigations of social service workers caught in changing social policy currents; and finally, (c) offering a view into social workers’ understandings of themselves as workers within increasingly globalized contexts.
1.3 Study Approach and Research Queries

The overall aim of this project is to document child protection workers’ understandings of their occupational roles relative to societal vectors such as political, social and gendered forces including governmental and regulatory systems.

The key objectives are to detail how child protection workers

1. Understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities.

2. Understand and engage the forces that influence their day-to-day practice.

3. Understand the roles of child protection workers in societal functioning.

4. View the social construction of themselves and their profession, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies.

5. View themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal bodies).

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

In this first chapter, I introduce the area of interest – the occupational construction of child protection work – and offer insight into the importance of such scholarship. Next, Review of Literature will offer an introduction to child protection practice in Ontario and explicate several theories pertinent to the development of WHHW’s exploratory framework. It positions this study relative to multiple interdisciplinary realms, ultimately summarizing these offerings in a hypothetical theoretical framework: invisible work for an open and total(ly) greedy institution. Building on the second chapter, Method and Methodology includes a detailed discussion of the project’s rationale and methodology (Modified Grounded Theory). The chapter also describes the project’s data collection process and analyses, including limitations and ethical considerations. This dissertation’s fourth chapter, Results and Analyses contains an in-depth
look at this project’s major thematic findings, describing each one in turn. Finally the *Discussion* chapter thoroughly explores each of the themes introduced in *Results and Analyses*, offering insight into their scholarly significance including a summary of the project and reiteration of each of its key findings with a view to positioning these in the extant literature. It also details the methodological relevance of this work and offer ideas regarding future research theory-building.
2 Historical Placement & Review of Literature

2.1 Child protection in Ontario – Then and now

2.1.1 Child protection practice in Ontario – Then.

While primary responsibility for the care, safety and wellbeing of children usually lies with their parents or other caregivers, many communities do recognize that socially-mandated interventions through local organizations may be required when, for whatever reason, those needs are not or cannot be met by these usually entrusted individuals. At present, in Canada, the Constitution Act (1982) transfers authority for the operation of child welfare systems and creation of its mandating legislation to each province or territory. The ultimate goal of these systems is to ensure the wellbeing and safety of each jurisdiction’s children (Gough, 2005).

During the 18th century, services to the destitute and/or neglected children were addressed through privately funded and volunteer-led initiatives spearheaded by local charities. Similarly, routes to service for abandoned or orphaned children were few: assistance could be obtained through a criminal conviction (jail and reformatory school systems was government-funded) or through apprenticeship programs where children exchanged their labour for support (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), n. d.; Sutherland, 2012).

In 1874, provincial legislation was passed to permit Ontario charities to intervene in the prevention of maltreatment of apprenticed children through governmental agency cost-sharing arrangements. In 1888, An Act for the Protection and Reformation of Neglected Children granted judges the authority to render children wards of charitable organizations or institutions while local governments assumed the costs associated with their care. By 1891, the acclaimed reformer

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2 The historical and contemporary implications of child protection’s foundation in charity and the near conflation of poverty and neglect (poverty as maltreatment), while of note, lies beyond the scope of the current scholarly endeavour.
J. J. Kelso had founded the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto: the first agency of its kind in Ontario (See Chen, 2001; Jones & Rutman, 1981; Kelso, 1911; Urbaniak, 2001). Kelso then lobbied for passage of the *Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children Act (1893)*: legislation that made the province’s children’s aid societies semi-public organizations possessing the legal authority to remove children from their homes, place minors in agency care and recoup the cost of child-rearing from municipalities.

Shifts in child protection policy and attitudes toward childhood have been reflected in the legislative overhauls undertaken since the 19th century. This period saw a move away from institutionalized childcare toward preventative service offerings and non-institutional care. In Ontario, major legislative changes were passed in 1921, 1954, 1965 and 1984, which brought the enactment of the extant *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*. Over the ensuing years, the Ontario provincial government assumed direct responsibility for child protection service delivery: moving the child welfare from a volunteer-based charity model to a “professional service system” funded by the province that also provides agency reporting guidelines and supervision (OACAS, n. d.).

More recently, the years between 1998 and 2000 brought significant change to Ontario’s child protection landscape. Spurred by the findings of several Provincial Coroner’s inquests into the deaths of CAS-involved children, a report by Ontario’s *Child Mortality Task Force* and a

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3 Though this historical information is reflective of this project’s focus on Ontario, it should be noted that while Ontario was the first Canadian province to establish a children’s aid society and child welfare legislation, most Canadian provinces were quick to follow, often using similar legislative templates: with the exception of Quebec, whose child protection efforts were greatly influenced by the Catholic Church until the introduction of provincial legislation in 1977 and Newfoundland’s similar ecclesiastical influence upon child protection could be felt even after the nation became a province in 1949 (Swift and Callahan, 2006; For additional information regarding other Canadian provincial and territorial child welfare jurisdictions, consult [http://cwrp.ca/infosheets](http://cwrp.ca/infosheets): Gough, 2006a; Gough, 2006b; Gough 2006c; Gough 2006d; Gough, 2008a; Gough, 2008b and Lajoie, 2006).
Panel of Experts report, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS)\(^4\) spearheaded reforms which included a revised funding framework, introduction of multiple legislative amendments, the adoption of obligatory risk assessment tools, launching province-wide information–sharing through the FastTrack system, a renewal of the foster care system and additional accountability measures (MCYS, 2005; OACAS, n. d.).

As part of the Child Welfare Reform strategy, the amendments to the CFSA included the inclusion of neglect and emotional harm as grounds for protection, a clearer articulation of the public’s duty to report and a re-articulation of the maximum time a child may remain in care before obligating a court-sanctioned decision regarding permanency. More significant still was the adoption of the Ontario Risk Assessment Model, a mandated and structured approach to child protection case-related decision-making.

By 2003, in addition to evaluative reports prepared by parties implicated in the Ontario child protection project (e.g. see Harvey, Mandell, Stalker & Frensh, 2003; Grand River Zone Executive Directors, Directors of Service and Finance Managers, 2000), the results of an evaluative review of child protection programming and services begun in 2002 outlined a need for improvement in areas of “child and system outcomes, integration, accountability, efficiency and sustainability” (MCYS, 2005, p. 4). In 2006, Bill 210, a further amendment to the CFSA, promoted the placement of children with family acquaintances or other relatives as an alternative to state care, while detailing a wider range of permanency outcomes for children. These changes, coupled with the introduction of a Differential Response Model, which privileges clinically-informed non-CAS alternatives for cases deemed low(er) risk at case referral, are part of the

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\(^4\) Currently known as the Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS).

2.1.2 Child protection practice in Ontario – Now.

In Ontario, 53 child protection agencies are legally mandated to investigate reported concerns regarding child maltreatment or threats of child maltreatment at the hands of his/her/their caregivers. The province’s Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS) funds child protection agencies while also being responsible for the policy and legislation that governs child protection service in Ontario. Ontario’s Child and Family Services Act accords authority for Act-related policy and program development to the MCYS: this power includes the creation and oversight of provincial child protection agencies. Thus child protection agencies are incorporated, non-profit organizations run by community-based Boards of Directors mandated to investigate and validate allegations of child neglect and abuse, while providing continual protection, foster care, and adoption services to children and families in their designated communities (Gough, 2005). The Child and Family Services Act also details the administrative benchmarks, assessment standards and mandates agency response times to child maltreatment allegations (OACAS, n. d.).

In Ontario, child protection agencies are legislatively required to (a) investigate allegations that children under 16 years of age, whether in the community, in the society’s care or under its supervision, may be in need of protection, (b) protect, where needed, children under 16 years of age, whether in the community, in the society’s care or under its supervision, (c) provide counselling and other services to families for the protection of children or for the prevention of situations demanding the protection of children, (d) provide care for children charged or committed to their care, (e) offer supervision to children assigned to their care under
the Child and Family Services Act; and (f) offer adoption services (CFSA, 1984; Gough, 2005; OACAS, 2011). These services are provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by agencies that are independently operated but required to adhere to child protection assessment and service standards that are determined at the provincial level.

When called upon to investigate allegations of child maltreatment, child protection workers assess whether the implicated child is in need of protection (as outlined under the Act). If the reported concerns are validated and depending on circumstance, the agency may attempt to work cooperatively with the child and family on a voluntary basis. Where this is not possible, more intrusive steps are taken to ensure child safety. These might include working with a family on a non-voluntary basis through court-compulsion (supervision order) or by removing a child from the family home into the temporary care of the agency (Society Wardship) or permanent care of the state as administered by the agency (Crown Wardship).

In addition to the legal framework provided by the Child and Family Services Act and Ministry oversight through directives, regulation and policy, provincial child protection agency practice is also governed by (a) the Family Court System, which protects the individual rights of parents and children; (b) the MCYS, which conducts yearly file reviews of every Crown Ward, audits client services and monitors funding allocations; (c) the Child and Family Services Review Board (CFSRB) which hears complaints from families, children and/or youth receiving child protections services and reviews agency decisions; (d) the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth which assesses Child Fatality Case Summary Reports (related to deaths of children serviced by child protection agencies), addresses systemic challenges and hears complaints from children in protective agency care; and (e, f) the Officer of the Chief Coroner of Ontario and the Paediatric Death Review Committee which independently investigate
child death within the province, publically report finding and recommendations for systems of care improvement (OACAS, n.d.).

2.2 Child Protection in Ontario: A Note on Contested Terrains

In an effort to present as direct a historical progression, the proceeding chapters may have obscured the continually contested societal discourses associated with child protection in Ontario and Canada. From the chronic overrepresentation of racialized and First Nations’ children and families at every stage of the child protection process (Breton, Dufour, and Lavergne, 2012; Clarke, 2011; Lavergne, Dufour, Trocmé, and Larivée, 2008; Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004; Woldeguiorguis, 2003) to the problematic constructions of mothering women (Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca and Redmond, 2007; Benoit, 2000; Davies & Krane, 1996; Hughes, Chau and Poff, 2011; Krane & Davies, 2000; Swift, 1995) and near invisibility of parenting men (Brown, et al., 2009; Scourfield, 2001; Scourfield, 2006; Scourfield & Coffey, 2002), child protection practice in Canada is not without detractors and many valid critiques. In addition to the querying of individual and collective child protection experiences, social work literature contains concerns regarding child protection’s societal, organizational and theoretical positioning (Cameron, Coady & Adams, 2007; Freymond & Cameron, 2006; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Swift, 2011). As examples, Cameron et al. (2011) point to the rise in the numbers of child protection investigations, increasing organizational costs and numbers of children in agency care and high frontline worker turnover. Thus, despite my linear and progressive presentation, it should be noted that contemporary child protection is practiced on contested theoretical and experiential terrain.
2.3 Child Protection and Child Welfare: A Note on Language Choice

According to the OACAS website, “the field of Child Welfare is focused on improving the health, well-being, education and safety of children and youth” (OACAS, n.d.). While Children’s Aid Societies (CASs) do attempt to assure that each of these charges is met, I offer that CASs are not solely responsible for the welfare of the province’s children – their mandate and funding is far more restrictive than the term child welfare indicates. Provincial CASs provide child protection services: their primary mandate is to assure children are safe from legislatively-proscribed maltreatment. I maintain that the overall well-being of the province’s children encompasses more than the CFSA prescribes and ultimately is the responsibility of all Ontarians.

In an effort to acknowledge that child protection is a mandated service provided by area CASs but not a local organization that should be seen as the sole arbiter of or exclusively responsible for child welfare, I have privileged the terms “child protection” and “child protection worker(s)” as opposed to “child welfare” and “child welfare worker(s)” throughout this work, thus drawing attention to a contemporary child protection practices with a less than holistic orientation (See Dumbrill, 2006; Spratt, 2001).

2.4 Review of Literature: Introduction

As a scholarly realm, social work benefits from a plurality of theoretical perspectives. Staub-Bernasconi (2009) maintains that this “ad hoc pluralism” can be divided into the (a) individual, (b) interactional, (c) societal and (d) systemic social work approaches based on each partial theories’ ability to explain/diagnose and offer guidelines for action within a professional social work value system.
Drawing on the 1974-1984 work of the system theoretician and philosopher, Mario Bunge, Staub-Bernasconi offers that differing theoretical traditions can be incorporated into an “integrated pluralism” (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009). In the face of social work practice and theoretical heterogeneity, the possibility of integration without homogenization refutes historical concerns regarding (a) the impossibility of social work theory-building due to its heterogeneity: its transdisciplinary knowledge-base is similar to other professions and thus not prohibitive (Weiss and Welbourne, 2007); (b) an understanding of social work practice models as a collection of often disconnected practice models subject to trends and/or fashion yet each offering panacea; (c) the assumption that social work is a “moral” or “ethical career” (Jones et al., 2007): cautioning that such a position would open the profession to substitution of knowledge with a belief system that presented social workers as always “good” and doing “right”; (d) the assumptions of “grand social theories” (Frankfurt school, Marxist theories, Foucault’s governmentality etc.) which view social work as a “marginal, negative (ergo subject to criticism) example of social practice” (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009, pp.10-11) and finally (e) that eclecticism is the only route to social work theory-building: “anything goes so long as it works”.

In short, Staub-Bernasconi (2009) notes that despite the prominence and popularity of these positions, they either fail to address social problems as the object base of social work and/or do not clarify the epistemological issues inherent to professional theory that combines action directives, explanations, and definitions.

In response to these concerns, Lovelock (2004) and Staub-Bernasconi (2009) maintain that an integrative approach, which acknowledges social work as both a profession and a discipline, can be used in theoretical formation. In so doing, they advocate the adoption of an “open triangle” attitude: “as the interrelation of conceptual systems, research and practice, or
‘applied social science plus social work values and skills’ linked in a dynamic way” (Lovelock, 2004, p. 3). Pairing this attitude with the work of Soydan (1999), theory generation is seen as a basic scientific undertaking aimed at connecting the following elements: (a) a theory of the individual as a biological, psychical and social being and, as such, as a member of different social systems; (b) a theory of society and culture and the relations between the individual and society/culture; (c) a policy or programme as a scheme for changing problematic situations; and (d) a set of people, including professionals, involved in various forms of social organisations (social services, social movements, networks etc.) committed to carrying this change through with the help of specific methods (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009, p. 12).

It is in the spirit of a theory-generating “open triangle” that the sections that follow are offered. Each of the following expositions is a piece of a theoretical formation designed to frame the qualitative exploration of child protection worker narratives that are the heart of WHHW. Due to the number of facets, rather than a triangle, this dissertation’s theoretical landscape offers a four-sided frame.

First, an introduction to feminist organizational theory and its relation to child protection practice will follow an exploration of the gendered implications of child protection’s perceived invisibility. This facet’s focus on gender mirrors the predominance of women as child protection workers and service recipients. The framework’s second “side” is formed by an exposition of New Public Management (NPM) as the operationalization of neoliberalist ideology and its effects on child protection service and discourse. This facet is related to the effects of globalized economic understandings and their localized impact on child protection service provision. Third, an examination of the Foucauldian notions of power, governmentality and discipline will be detailed in order to explore the implications of bureaucratic and documentational demands on
workers’ understanding of surveillance and self-governance. The section on the framework’s final facet offers a notional integration of Goffman’s (1961) total institutions, Coser’s (1974) historical understanding of greedy institutions, and Franzway’s (2000) contemporary formation to better understand the institutional contexts and implications of encompassing child protection service employee demands.

Each of these facets works in tandem in the construction of a framework that provides a space of interrogation: a theoretical backdrop against which the narratives of the workers interviewed for WHHW may be explored. In this case, I offer that they may come together in a formulation which facilitates an understanding of the relationship between front-line child protection workers and regulating mechanisms — the social, interpersonal, and individual systems that define, proscribe and prescribe child welfare workers’ occupational perceptions. I offer that interviews with front-line employees will reveal their understandings of the professions gender(ed) discourse, occupational values, required professional commitments, and dependence on overwhelming workload and occupational emotional labour. These interviews will contribute to the formulation and validation of a conceptual framework that will allow for the assertion that within a neoliberal context: child protection work is “invisible work for an open but total (ly) greedy institution” (Coser, 1974; Franzway, 2000; Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1991; Goffman, 1961; Hood, 1991; Weick, 2000). What follows is a detailed exploration of the constitutive parts of this framework.

2.5 Child Protection Practice as Gender(ed) Work

2.5.1 Social working? Gender’s lurking: Introduction.

As an initial point of departure for the construction of the WHHW framework, it is acknowledged that within the Ontario provincial context, social work is a profession where
female workers predominate (see Schilling, Morris & Liu, 2008 for American demographic analyses). Further, child protection is a field where the same is true but women also represent the majority of clients (see McPhail, 2004 and Pease, 2011 for a discussion of the implications of female numerical but not necessarily occupational preponderance). These demographic facts point to the importance of integrating a gender(ed) analysis into this discussion, not only because of the predominance of child protection-implicated women but due to the need to examine the operation of gender in the occupational discursive undercurrents regarding the constructed “invisibility” of such work, the public/private divide and its related gender associations, the increasingly fluid construction of work in the neoliberal (read fast) economy and feminist notions of caring.

2.5.2 Child protection practice as invisible work.

In the face of globalizing forces and ever-increasing demands, little attention is paid to employee understandings of the changes wrought in their work environments. Speaking to social workers as a professional whole, Ann Weick (2000) proposes that this social inattentiveness is a direct result of the gender of the majority of workers who provide social services. It could be argued that her general assertions could be used to speak to specific subsets of the professional population. What Weick maintains for social workers in general, is helpful in furthering our understanding of child protection workers, in particular.

In Weick’s (2000) article, she exposes the unseen and rarely celebrated labour of social workers. Weick notes that, though comfortable with their public roles as advocates on behalf of the marginalized, social workers are less at ease asking for and receiving recognition for their essential work as societal caregivers. Thus, due to this lack of acknowledgement, and as an occupation typically chosen by women, social work is a hidden profession “except for those
occasional moments when errors in judgment or questionable practice bring public blame” (Weick, 2000, p. 395).

Ironically, the argument that Weick offers to explain the overlooking of women’s work on a societal level might also explain the invisibility of men in child protection work. Speaking broadly, just as women’s social labour is undervalued, men’s domestic involvement is eclipsed by prevailing gender(ed) attitudes. Theorists and researchers have decried the tendency of child protection services to uncritically highlight women’s caregiving (Benoit, 2000; Davies & Krane, 1996; Krane & Davies, 2000; Swift, 1995), obscure the caregiving roles played by men within families (Brown, et al., 2009; Scourfield, 2006; Scourfield & Coffey, 2002) and as practitioners (Gillingham, 2006; Hood, 2001). Thus, just as social work is invisible and undervalued because it is often work performed by women, the very existence of social work-involved men (as caregivers receiving services and/or practitioners providing care) is obscured and discounted because men should not/do not perform women’s work.

In making her argument regarding female social workers, Weick (2000) draws a compelling parallel between household labour and the work women as social workers perform in their communities. While she deems social work a “noble calling,” Weick points out that just as traditional homemaking is carried out primarily by women behind closed doors and away from the public eye in response to household needs, so too is social work undertaken by women who have acquired and developed skills as often unnoticed but still essential responses to community hardship (p. 396). Thus, according to Weick, the caregiving women often perform in the home finds its professional corollary in the societal caregiving of social work, and inevitably suffers the same fate: invisibility and undervaluation.
Just as many women make their contributions to family, workplace and community without any hint of bravado, social workers offer their daily services to clients, groups and organizations without expecting recognition or appreciation. This reticence about recognition actually sits on an even deeper level of experience: Women in general and social workers in particular have difficulty believing that what they do is important (Weick, 2000, p. 396).

Weick introduces the historic public/private analogy in order to expose the invisible nature of women’s work, in general, and social work practice, in particular. Interestingly, it might be argued that as a subset of the social work profession, child protection workers are more prone to undervaluation of their work because their workplace is the home and their primary clients are women and children. The household/community dichotomy exposes the gendered and sometimes arbitrary nature of the public/private theoretical divide in the occupational lives of women.

Thus, in summary, the previous section used the demographic preponderance of women as child protection workers and recipients of service to inspire the WHHW’s framework’s adoption of a gender(ed) analysis: one which queries the constructed “invisibility” of child protection work, the public/private divide and its related gender associations. Further, just as gender (discourse) influences societal evaluation of the social caregiving performed by social workers, gender ideas and ideals also impact the organizations in which social work takes place: the second piece of this proposed framework’s gendered “side”.

2.5.3 Feminist organizational theory and child protection practice.

In addition to the embodied nature of the gender discussion above, some would also argue that power is gendered in society and in its organizations (Britton, 2000; Macdonald, 1997). Gendered organizational theory maintains that agencies should not be seen as neutral entities
tainted by their employees’ multi-facetted identities, but should instead be viewed as environments in which these issues (particularly gender, but not excluding race, class, sexual orientation, ability and/or other identifications)\(^5\) are present and continually enforced, reinforced and legitimated (Acker 1990, 1992a; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). As Britton (2003) notes, “gender is not something imported into organizations with workers; it is an inseparable part of the organizational structure” (p. 6; See also Mills, Simmons and Helms, 2005).

More specifically, Britton (2003) offers that organizational gendering occurs on three levels: a) through organization structure; b) by way of cultural and ideological assumptions that workers hold and to which they respond; and c) through workers’ agency. Thus, workplace policies and practices assume and (re)create gendered divisions of labour and legitimate fundamental notions about men and women. Workers “do gender,” (re)producing themselves and their colleagues as gender appropriate organizational actors (Acker, 1992a; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In contrast to Britton’s (2003) analysis, Acker (1990) suggests engendering practices within organizations can be divided into five processes: a) gendered patterns of jobs, salaries, and hierarchies; b) the production of images, emblems and conscious forms of knowledge which explain, substantiate and counter gender divisions; c) alliance- and exclusion-creating interactions between men and women which (re)create domination and submission; d) the individually produced understandings of organizational work structure and what behaviours are gender appropriate; and e) the construction of seemingly gender-neutral organizational logic(s). Acker (1992b) also maintains that these organizational processes are intimately related to

\(^5\) For a more in-depth discussion of intersectionality see Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris & Hamilton (2009).
a gendered substructure of organization that links the more surface gender arrangements with the gender relations in other parts of the society. Ostensibly gender neutral, everyday activities of organizing and managing large organizations reproduce the gendered subculture within the organization itself and within the wider society. (p. 259)

Thus, an examination of the gendered underpinnings of child protection organizations can provide not only an understanding of their occupational relevance for social work but can also provide insights into wider community functioning as well.

As a woman-dominated occupation charged with working with primarily female service recipients, child protection may benefit from an analysis which places organizational theory and gender at the forefront, but privileging such an investigation can be problematic and serve to “expos[e] the alleged uniformity of gender” (Gherardi, 1995, p. 19).

Gendered identities are neither static nor singular. They are (re)created through social processes and practices (Butler, 1990; Gherardi, 1995). Though often examined as a concept distinct from others, gender is “played out in conjunction with …other aspects of identity such as nationality, race, ethnicity or social class…[aspects which] impinge on women’s construction of their experience” (Adib, 2003, p. 414). Thus, any examination, through narratives, of the gendered nature of organizations should also encompass investigation of the potential intersections amongst the organizational and personal concepts of gender, race, sexuality, class and ability.

As the first facet of WHHW’s proposed interrogatory space, the preceding sections detailed the gender(ed) implications of the demographic preponderance of women in roles as service providers and recipients and how this may be implicated in the way in which their
engagement(s) are (not) seen and interact with and within organizations. The paragraphs that follow will examine New Public Management’s role in the exploratory framework.

2.6 Child Protection Practice and New Public Management (NPM)

2.6.1 Introduction.

The sections that follow detail New Public Management’s (NPM) effect on the societal construction of child protection work. This framework “side” examines the roles played by NPM, as the operationalization of neoliberal ideology, in debates about child protection efficiency and social work’s deprofessionalization and examines these concerns through a discussion of Ontario’s adoption of the Looking After Children (LAC) model of service provision for children in long-term out-of-home care.

New public management is a globally emergent trend in public administration. NPM is most often associated with the public service in the United Kingdom, but it is not a solely British phenomenon (Dent, Chandler, & Barry, 2004). Adopted internationally in various forms, a “key trigger for [these administrative] change[s] has been an actual or perceived crisis of legitimacy, responsiveness and efficiency in government” and, by extension, governmental service provision (Thynne & Wettenhall, 2004, p. 609; see also Dent, Chandler & Barry, 2004).

The classic formulation of NPM (Hood, 1991; Osborne & McKaugin, 2002) is characterized by a) entrepreneurial and hands-on management (Clarke & Newman, 1993); b) detailed articulations of performance measures and standards (Osborne, Board, Martin, Trickery & Waterston, 1995; Dent & Barry, 2004); c) focus upon output controls (Boyne, 1999); d) prioritizing decentralization and disaggregation of public services (Polity, Birchall & Putman, 1998); e) the promotion of competition in public service provision (Walsh, 1995); f) a shift
towards private sector style management (Wilcox & Harrow, 1992); and g) the endorsement of
parsimony and discipline in resource allocation (Metcalf & Richards, 1990).

These notions find their correlates in theorists’ assertions regarding comparatively broad
and narrow definitions of NPM (Lane, 2005; McLaughlin, Osborne & Ferlie, 2001). Thus, while
NPM’s rhetoric differs from the language of traditional public administration and policy, it
broadly emphasizes notions of effectiveness, productivity, customer service, privatization,
deregulation and leaner organizational structure (Lane, 2005). More specifically, it often
advocates the use of market-inspired mechanisms (including incorporation, contracting out,
policy-provision split and/or purchaser-provider split) in order to increase governmental
efficiency (Lane, 2005; Walsh, 1995).

Within welfare states, this dual allegiance, prioritizing savings and efficiency while
simultaneously seeking to improve performance, has created tensions within public service
realms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). Pressure is thus placed upon public institutions, such as non-
profits, to increase efficiency and accountability while justifying funding or other support within
quasi-market frameworks (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Eisenberg, 2000; Quarter, Mook, &
Richmond, 2002).

NPM’s influence on public policy and service management has not been internationally
consistent. Different countries have fostered their own brands of NPM as policy changes
interacted with national circumstance. In Canada, managerialist attitudes at the federal level
were first seen as early as 1979, and pursued through the North America Free Trade Agreement
(NAFTA) debates of the late 1980s, though “the largest cuts [to federal transfers and programs]
occurred under the Liberal government elected in 1993” (Glor, 2001, p. 122).
Peter Aucoin’s (1995) pivotal and domestically-focused work noted that unlike other federated democracies, after making significant spending cuts, Canada failed to realize a pervasive governmental decentralization scheme or implement innovative strategies that could improve efficiency (see also Barzelay, 2001). Service provision was re-structured to reflect business models, though some maintain that managerial apprehensions about union response contributed to a less than full implementation (Roberts, 1996) and significant reduction in the number of cabinet seats under then Prime Minister Kim Campbell was seen as an important step in the governmental streamlining process (Barzelay, 2001). Despite a lack of sustained ministerial support, fundamental changes were achieved due, in large part, to bureaucratic and managerial “buy-in” to NPM tenets. These attitudes were given some cultural validation within the Canadian public service, especially through the Public Service 2000 initiative, which explicitly propounded that government should seek to satisfy citizens as customers. (Barzelay, 2001, p.38)

Though theorists like Barzelay and others may label the Canadian NPM project incomplete, in that it did not produce all of the oft-touted policy transformations, theorists like Glor (2001) disagree, while others insist that NPM has made its mark in Canada through defence department re-organization (Detomasi, 2002); project-based (instead of core) funding in public services like health care and education (Gibson, O’Donnell, & Rideout, 2007); and even definitions of what constitutes social service work (Baines, 2004a). In summary, there may not always be agreement among theorists as to what NPM is but almost everyone agrees it has had some public policy impact.

Within Ontario, the 1995 election of the provincial Conservatives led by “populist neoliberal Mike Harris” marked a pivotal moment in the promulgation of the neoliberal agenda
in Canada (Coulter, 2009, p. 29). In a period of economic crisis and deficit hysteria, Mike Harris and other Ontario politicians were able to deflect attention away from the unemployment precipitated by a global recession and Canadian trade agreements by “[blaming] the welfare state, government regulation and public spending” for contemporary jobless rates (Coulter, 2009, p. 31). What ensued was the Common-Sense Revolution, a period of governmental program spending cuts, deregulation, tax cuts and privatization (See Cohen, 2001; Coulter, 2009; Kozolanka, 2007; Lightman & Riches, 2000; Ralph, Régimbald & St-Amand, 1997). Politically, the stage had been set for the provincial arrival of NPM.

Definitional dissent complicates NPM research. While the literature may document its existence and detail its operations in and impacts upon public service, Dent and Barry (2004) caution that it is not a movement of integrated practices per se but a “theme” which operates differently throughout social service domains. Thus, because “[NPM] varies across sectors,...within sectors and…according to outcomes of specific management-professional settlements,” as a subject of study, it invariably looks different and behaves differently across disciplines (Dent & Barry, 2004, p.1).

2.6.2 New public management, efficiency and accountability.

Despite some underlying similarities noted above, Dent and Barry (2004) maintain that NPM is not a universal administrative panacea but a toolbox full of managerial instruments that have been transformed by time and use across disciplines. What critics maintain these instruments have in common is an epistemological grounding in a desire to increase efficiency/productivity in the public service at all costs.

In her 2001 work, J. G. Stein introduces her critique of post-industrial society’s obsession with the notion of efficiency by offering that efficiency has become an “overriding goal of public
life,” and, as it is capable of advancing its own agenda and political purposes, it has become a cult (p. 6).

By invoking cult status for this concept, Stein notes that the societal promotion of efficiency for its own sake is dogmatic and re-enforces a value system that prizes cost-effectiveness above other valued public goods. Stein offers that the language of the marketplace has extended into the realm of public discourse, thus changing what citizens, or more aptly clients/consumers, require of public goods/social service delivery and their subsequent questioning of service provider accountability (read efficiency).

Mirroring the tenets of NPM, Stein notes that the role of government has shifted from provider of public goods to that of regulator and funding source of public markets. These shifts are mirrored in societal discussions valuing productive efficiency above many other social values. Thus, the types of interventions available to, or even imagined by, governments and communities are artificially proscribed and the standards by which the deliverance of public goods is judged are politically (and semantically) contested.

Ironically, Stein’s analysis draws attention to Gow and Dufour’s (2000) exploration of whether NPM is, in fact, a paradigm possessing its own epistemology, theory, instrumentation, and scholars who debate within its confines. Despite their assertions that NPM does not function as a paradigm in a strictly Kuhnian sense but rather as more of a rhetorical device, if Stein’s assertions are to be believed, NPM is not only a method, or way of doing things, but it is also a way of thinking (or perhaps not thinking) about doing things. As the language and methods of the marketplace infiltrate social service agencies, the very work that employees are performing cannot help but be affected.
2.6.3 New public management & (de)professionalization.

Dent and Barry (2004) do not imply that NPM has had a benign influence on the relationships between communities and professionals but insist instead that NPM “is redefining professional autonomy in ways that make it compatible with the new managerialism” (p.8). The authors believe that professionals attempt to influence NPM’s social impact through (a) colonization: asserting the professional right to be responsible for the behaviour and thus influencing assessment standards, (b) de-coupling: insisting that the formalities have no impact on the “real work” and thus lessening its relevance and (c) reconfiguration: amalgamating (a) and (b) so as to assure continued control of the organization and offered services. Dent and Barry’s (2004) seemingly dispassionate attitude toward the effects of NPM on professional life stands in stark contrast to much of social work’s often more ‘critical literature and highlights the different transdisciplinary uses of the term but may find a parallel in a theoretical analysis of power and resistance.

Bosanac and Jacobs (2006) hold that the professionalization of work, in general, is linked to an acknowledgement of an emerging reliance on credentialism (education, unique skills and experience) deemed essential to a professional realm. Their position is challenged by theorists such as Swift and Callahan (2009) who call on Etzioni (1969), Evetts (2006), Davies (1995) and others to highlight the operations of gender (semi-professions are usually female-dominated) and social power and control when considering the occupational implications of professionalizing discourse.

Professionalization thus includes recognizing commitment to a field that explicitly subsumes regulatory bodies that set professional, employment, and practice standards that are officially recognized in laws, regulations, and policies. It further encompasses implicit incorporation of less evident but still significant power and gender relations (Swift and Callahan,
Professional regulatory bodies also work to maintain control over the provision of professional services and to restrict entry into the profession based on the possession of “appropriate” credentials (Bosanac & Jacobs, 2006, p. 2). As the marketplace language and methods infiltrate social service agencies and regulatory bodies, the very work that employees are performing cannot help but be affected. Some workers and theorists lament this insinuation, holding it has resulted in deprofessionalizing impacts upon social work practice.

Thus, despite promising to improve service quality and client experiences, theorists like Healey and Meagher (2004) contend that deprofessionalization will continue to negatively impact service delivery. They define deprofessionalization as “the fragmentation and routinization of social work and the concomitant loss of opportunities for the exercise of creativity, reflexivity and discretion in direct practice” (Healey & Meagher, 2004, p. 244).

Theorists like Healey and Meagher (2004) point to the deprofessionalization as one effect of social service marketization. Social work literature points to deprofessionalization as contributing to the reduction in the relative number of professional social service employment opportunities and concomitant underemployment of social workers who must work in the para-professional positions where their expertise is neither fully employed nor acknowledged (Baines, 2004a; Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996; Healey & Meagher, 2004).

Reminding us of an argument that Dent and Barry would contest in 2004, Dominelli (1996) maintained that the impact of economic globalization (characterized by many of NPM’s tenets) has overwhelmingly contributed to the ruin of reflexive and autonomous social work practice. Detailing the repercussions of competency-based social work education, Dominelli laments (a) the depoliticization of social work advocacy brought about by an educational preoccupation with “decontextualized practical skills” (p. 172); (b) the dearth of social work
educational funding not linked to governmental aims; (c) the marginalization of social workers’, social service consumers’, and social work educators’ expertise; (d) employer- and governmentally-administered training agendas; and (e) citizenship and empowerment rhetorics which obscure the marginalizing interventions to which consumers are often subject.

The concerns of Dominelli (1996) and others can be seen to be enacted in what some theorists have referred to as “proceduralisation” (Bauman, 2000, p. 9; see also Garrett, 2004; Munro, 2010). Garrett invokes Bauman to caution against the moral distancing from “the original ethical purpose” of social work that may occur when meeting administrative deadlines trumps engagement with the ambiguity and messiness of practice (Bauman, 2000, p.9), while Munro (2010) laments child protection’s (a) blame culture; (b) person-centered child death investigations; and (c) performance management systems for working in concert to unduly control and proceduralize child protection practice.

Upon further analysis, Dominelli’s (1996) critiques appear grounded in concerns that NPM is the operationalization of the neo-conservative paradigm. While acknowledging the role of government in the welfare state, NPM, in privileging decentralization (read: leaner/less government), service provider competition and private-sector management style touts many of the neo-conservatism’s central tenets. Social work critiques regarding deprofessionalization thus represent an acknowledgement of the inevitable impacts upon social work practice of such paradigmatic shifts in public policy ideology.

In concerns regarding the emphasis upon individual responsibility in citizenship and empowerment rhetorics; for example, we can see the laying of the groundwork for social work practice that highlights individual responsibility to the detriment of a more structural analysis
and resultant advocacy (Mullally, 1997), advocacy that, to date, was thought to be fundamental to social work practice and its ethical ambitions (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005).

2.6.4 New public management and Looking After Children (LAC).

Currently, child protection workers’ roles and responsibilities are negotiated within the public discourse of NPM and social work theorists’ critiques of social service marketization. The effectiveness of child protection workers’ clinical interventions is judged within the context of demands for increased accountability, efficacy, efficiency and fiscal restraint (See Swift and Callahan, 2009). As these notions represent the backdrop against which child protection work is enacted, they must be examined in the course of investigating child protection’s occupational construction. As a public service provider, what does it mean to be repeatedly asked to “do more with less”? And how will resultant performance be judged?

Within social work domains, concerns regarding increased professional alienation are not new (Flexner, 2001), but more recent cautions have taken on a dire tone, warning that deprofessionalization characterized by an increasingly fragmented, routine and unimaginative professional practice, in addition to loss of opportunities to express professional discretion, fewer “professional” jobs in social service provision and underemployment of social work professionals in these quasi-professional positions, have contributed to the flight of social workers from public service agencies and a fundamental questioning of the continued relevance of the profession (Baines, 2004a; Dominelli, 1996; Epstein, 1992; Fabricant, 1985; Healey & Meagher, 2004; Hugman, 1996). These warnings stand in stark contrast to non-social work theorists, such as Dent and Barry (2004), who insist that the occupational tension created by NPM’s infiltration in the public service need not necessarily be viewed negatively.
Some authors point to child protection work’s promotion of and (over)reliance on assessment models like the Looking After Children (LAC) framework as evidence of a pervasive and intrusive NPM agenda. Noting that LAC was developed in the United Kingdom “at a time when the language of social forces and performance measurement had infiltrated social work,” they caution that systematic focus on “outcomes,” performance-driven accountability and documentation protocol is, in fact, confirmation of the state’s mistrust of social workers’ commitment and ability to maintain social order in light of ensuing economic changes (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004, p. 241; see also Beck, 2000; Garrett, 1999a, 1999b; 2002; Munro, 2001). The development and promulgation of the LAC system provides an interesting example of the tensions inherent within the employment of assessment tools by child protection practitioners in globalized practice environments.

Developed in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, Looking After Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes (Department of Health, 1995) was commissioned by the British Department of Health to “produce a comprehensive methodology for assessing the long-term effects of social work services for children in need” (Ward, 1998, p. 204). This sentiment is mirrored in the Canadian LAC practitioner’s guide which highlights the use of the system to collect comprehensive data as the “first step” in service to citizens because it addresses the lack of comprehensive assessment evaluation data (Lemay & Ghazal, 2007, p. 2).

The LAC system\(^7\)(modified and known as CanLAC and OnLAC\(^8\)) has been described as “a strength-based resilience-focused approach that systematically operationalizes good parenting

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\(^6\) This is a 2001 reprint of Flexner’s seminal 1915 discussion of the social work’s status as a profession.

\(^7\) LAC is known in Canada as CanLac (Child Welfare League of Canada, 2009) and as OnLAC within the province of Ontario. In general, I will use LAC to describe the tool.

\(^8\) OnLAC became a mandatory plan of care tool for children in the care of Ontario’s child protection agencies in December, 2007 (Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth, 2009).
for children and youth who are in care of the state” (Lemay, Byrne, & Ghazal, 2006, p. 316) and as a “program initiative in results-oriented government that takes an individualised approach to children in care” (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004, p.233). The LAC system is composed of two types of forms: 1) the Essential Information Record, Care Plan, Placement Plan and Review Forms and 2) the Action and Assessment Records (AARs). AARs form the conceptual core of the system and can be used by front-line staff “as a stand-alone assessment tool” (Lemay & Ghazal, 2007, p. 97). By filling out the AARs, workers assess, monitor and plan interventions regarding the development of children and adolescents under state care within seven developmental domains: health, education, behavioural development, emotional development, peer and family relationships, social presentation, and identity.

Since its initial development, the LAC system has been adapted, piloted and adopted by jurisdictions in Canada, Australia, and several European countries. While the LAC system has been transnationally popular, its adoption in multiple jurisdictions has not been without critique. As the originator territory with the most experience in LAC application, it is interesting to note that the majority of its critics are from the United Kingdom while the work of Canadian commentators appears mostly descriptive and accepting (e.g., Flynn, Dudding & Barber, 2006; Kufeldt, Simard & Vachon, 2000). While this contrast may be due, in part, to Britain’s longer LAC implementation history, it also points to some of the difficulties inherent in the transnational adoption of mandated assessment tools. Local pilot projects undertaken for the transnational application of assessment tools, no matter how sound the subsequent evaluative project design or noble their goals, may not be able to counteract the deleterious effects of mandated instruments with problematic origins (Myers, LaRose, & Redmond, 2009).
One of LAC’s most vocal critics, Garrett (2002) laments the difficulties inherent in offering a critique of the LAC system, noting that criticism may be construed as blanket acceptance of and therefore approval for an, in many ways, inadequate child-in-care practice status quo. Nonetheless, he insists that the LAC model must be questioned regarding the research and assumptions upon which the system was built.

Advocates, whose positions are ably summarized by Penglase and Yeatman (2004), insist the system should be more widely adopted for work with children-in-care and support this assertion by noting that LAC is “an effective way of improving practice and of providing for an outcomes-oriented approach” (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004, p. 234. See also Francis, 2002; Jackson, 1998; Kufeldt, Simard & Vachon, 2000; Owen, Jones, & Corrick, 1998; Ward, 1998; see also Drolet & Sauvé-Kobylecki, 2006; Lemay, Byrne & Ghazal, 2006 for Canadian content).

The LAC system facilitates comprehensive data collection, developmental stage assessment and outcome tracking. LAC serves to “guide” workers’ practice through explicit reference to evidence-based best practice, providing a continuous systematized record of child in care development regardless of worker attrition or file transfer. In addition, LAC is a system which assumes that “each child is to be case managed” in consultation with stakeholders such as parents, foster parents and the child (once s/he is old enough): “The assumption is that the child’s case has to be managed so that transparent, accountable, and continuous decision making…can occur” (Penglase & Yeatman, 2004, p. 236-237). This is achieved through regular care planning meetings and documentational requirements.

On the other hand, the LAC system’s critics lament its developmental preoccupation, its biased normative stance, its foundational research methodology, the appearance of undue governmental influence during system development, and its potentially bureaucratizing impact.
upon child protection practice. Some theorists object to the positivist premises inherent to the developmental and normative framework within which children are assessed (Garret, 1999a; Knight & Caveney, 1998). They note that children and their families are decontextualized and evaluated relative to White middle-class parenting norms and unquestioned notions (‘reasonable parent’ or ‘child’s needs’ presented as axiomatic; Garret, 1999a, 2002; Knight & Caveney, 1998).

Concerns regarding parenting norm bias may stem from assertions that the community study upon which LAC was based has never been published and did not include a representative sample of families: youngsters under three years of age, children with disabilities, children in state care and members of “more deprived areas” were excluded (Garrett, 2002, p. 836). Aside from criticism regarding the lack of peer review for the development of this tool, the exclusion of children and families who could have contributed to a more representative sample, (e.g., varied socioeconomic status), is also cause for concern.

Socioeconomic status is linked to numerous childhood health, cognitive and emotional outcomes (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Unfortunately, the generalized use of this assessment tool also serves to obscure the structural challenges faced by many children and families living in poorer communities and the effects of these constraints on parenting and child development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002: Borenstein & Bradley, 2010; Evans, 2004). The lack of transparency associated with LAC’s tool-building process legitimizes an assessment instrument whose obligatory use ultimately individualizes, in this example, the structural effects of poverty, and evaluates children’s behaviours and accomplishments (or lack thereof) relative to a standard that never included them, their families or their realities.

Ironically, due to the high representation of families living in poverty on child protection caseloads, the exclusion of children from “deprived areas” means that LAC is more likely to be
used in work with the very children and families that had no input in its development (Garrett, 2002, p. 836, Jonson-Reid, Drake & Kohl, 2009; Trocmé et al., 2005). It must be stated that this argument is not maintaining that children should not be assessed, nor that they should be evaluated employing developmental assessment tools exclusively catering to them, it merely attempts to point out that the use of a generalized standard that evaluates progress but excluded the input of the primary users seems disingenuous, if not punitive.

Additionally, concern has also been raised about the proximity of the tool’s developers: the U.K’s bureaucracy and Conservative government (Department of Health officials retained the right of veto on the publication of unfavourable research or commentary; Garrett, 2000, p. 839). Garrett questions the political influence that may have been exerted upon the LAC’s research team to develop and promote a tool reflective of a neo-conservative worldview.

An historical engagement with the factors influencing LAC system development may reveal its outcome orientation as fitting into governmental attempts to address “more pervasive concern[s] about the way …welfare systems must be ‘seen to work’ [and] promote social order” (Garret, 2002, p. 838). Thus, LAC’s outcome focus reveals a “quasi-market” attitude, that is, promoting and rewarding a systematic focus on discernible measures, while obscuring and negating the ambiguities often inherent to social work with children and families.

Thus, despite concerns regarding the validity of the system’s foundational research, Garrett (2002) maintains that LAC’s paradigmatic acceptance is linked to its placement in “academic and managerial discourse” (p.833) and warns that its popularity may be due less to its foundation in “objective” research than to the role it plays within governmental “objectives.” He notes that the questionnaire format of the AARs obscures their ontology: if AARs were first developed as research instruments, how could they have gained such quick acceptance as
practice tools while still retaining their questionnaire quality? One asks if perhaps this may be to preserve at least the appearance of objectivity. And, one might also query this template’s effects on the process of social working. Whether due to a poor understanding of psychometrics, governmental manipulation, unintended end-users practice or well-intended efforts to improve the life of families and children, these criticisms call into question widely accepted contemporary provincial practices.

Garrett (2002) and others caution that far from being able to maintain a neutral stance, social work research must acknowledge the perils inherent within too close an alliance with “dominant political forces” (p. 840) and must instead insist on the emancipatory potential present in its regulatory function. Without a clear understanding of contemporary practices’ historical and paradigmatic locations, child protection practitioners and policy-makers are ill-prepared to analyze practice products such as LAC and their impacts upon service delivery. In light social workers’ dual allegiance to individual and collective action for social justice, such ahistorical practice may be of questionable, if not deleterious, value.

In light of the overarching presence of NPM and managerialist sentiment, the desire to develop a child protection assessment system that simultaneously standardized practice, systematized practice outcomes, and encouraged accountability through documentation is not surprising. Neither should the fact that timely completion of AARs and other mandated forms is used as a performance measure. What is remarkable is the apparent failure to interrogate the wisdom of employing a tool developed to collect practice data as the tool that now frames practice and in so doing defines effective practice: where efficacy is not necessarily judged by client outcomes but workers’ documentational compliance.
Further, child protection theorists like Munro (2001) mirror the concerns of Dominelli (1999) and others when they caution that an “unintended consequence” of such standardization initiatives may be the obfuscation of the needs that children and adolescents themselves articulate (Munro, 2001, p. 137). For example, as aptly pointed out by Munro (2001), despite a professional commitment to child empowerment, there is currently little room to accommodate a teen’s expressed desire not to devote her/his limited time with a child protection worker to the completion of the LAC tool.

This is not to imply that obligatory child protection assessment tools cannot contribute to good social work practice but to call attention to the fact that “gathering information and accountability,” that is, the creation of knowledge(s) to be used for outcome evaluation, was fundamental to this project’s development (Lemay & Ghazal, 2007, p. 4) but at least in the short term, have been displaced by the organizational immediacy of documentation requirements rather than trumped by best practice for children. Hearkening back to Stein’s (2001) wider social service provision concerns, the types of interventions available to workers and families may thus be artificially proscribed within a practice bounded by NPM’s epistemological and methodological trappings.

Assessment tools, like LAC, developed within the neoliberalist framework, not only assess child-in-care development but are often used to measure worker performance as indicated by documentary protocol compliance. Thus, despite assurances that commitment to service quality is paramount, because of the difficulties inherent to quantifying many of social work’s fundamental skills, “quality is equated with standardization and documentation,” not human interaction but proof of contact (Tsui & Cheung, 2004, p.440).
Building on the concerns of Garrett (2002), Knight & Kaveney (1998) and others and paralleling Stein’s (2001) wider argument, Tillbury (2007) reminds practitioners and theorists that despite their depiction as “neutral, technical exercise[s] providing objective data for decision-making,” performance measures also play “normative role[s] in framing policy problems and [the effectiveness of proposed] solutions” (p. 115). Many critics of the role played by NPM in public service provision maintain that performance measurement operates as a top-down management tool that prizes efficiency over effectiveness (Pollitt, 1993; Tsui & Cheung, 2004). Further, organizational focus on protocols and routinization serves to undermine the value of the not easily quantifiable aspects of practice in favour of those facets that are more readily measurable (Munro, 2000; Munro, 2001; Parton, Thorpe, & Wattam, 1997). Thus, in an effort to increase efficiency, the very measurement practices employed for assessment affect the performance of the tasks under scrutiny.

The impact of market forces upon social work practice, methods and philosophy is a topic of concern for social work theorists. Whether cautioning against the deprofessionalization and routinization of social work as a result of globalizing economic influences, societal fragmentation, and/or social service organizational focus upon “productivity,” writers lament the weakening of the profession’s ability to actively pursue and encourage advocacy through “the exercise of creativity, reflexivity and discretion in direct practice” (Healey & Meagher, 2004, p. 244; see also Adams, 1997; Baines, 2004; Dominelli, 1997; Fabricant, 1985; Midgley, 2007; Swift & Callahan, 2009). When viewed as a profession responding to major societal shifts brought on by globalization, some thinkers encourage changes in social work’s discursive foundations and wonder about the future of its organizational and professional context(s) (Camilleri, 1999; Dominelli, 1996; Hough, 1999). Some note that what is required is a re-
examination of “the connection between social work theorisation and the actual practices of social workers” (Leonard, 1997, vi), while still others hold that “new paradigms are emerging that challenge social work to adapt or perish in the face of the deconstructive forces of the market” (Powell, 2001, p. 23).

The previous paragraphs discussed New Public Management’s (NPM) effect on the societal construction of child protection work through discussions of the roles played by NPM in social work practice’s perceived increasing deprofessionalization. They also detail an example of these concerns through an analysis of the Looking After Children (LAC) model.

2.7 Child protection practice & Foucauldian Lenses

2.7.1 Introduction.

When examining the occupational construction of child protection practice as situated within a globalized economic context, post-structuralism and the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault offer an array of relevant lenses through which the increasingly decentralized nature of state authority can be viewed. This decentralization is accentuated by more localized, even internalized, notions of regulation and is thus enacted within organizations, imprinted upon bodies, and reinforced through discipline and surveillance (Chambon, Irving & Epstein, 1999; Foucault, 1991; Linstead, 2004; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Parton, 1999; Thapan, 1999; Trainor & Jeffreys, 2003). Thus, post-structuralism becomes a way in which to examine the roles undertaken by social workers (Wilson, 2008), in general, and child protection workers (Todd & Burns, 2007), in particular.

While the previous facet of the exploratory framework examined the influence of NPM on the child protection workers’ tools and perceptions of professional autonomy, the following discussions continue in a similar vein but encompass an examination of the Foucauldian notions
of power, governmentality and discipline so as to further explore the implications of bureaucratic and documentational compliance demands on workers’ understanding of surveillance and internalized occupational governance and regulation.

2.7.2 Foucault’s power.

Foucault does not understand power as being “exercised over individuals or groups, but as being constitutive of both the relations which exist between groups and hence equally of individual and group identity themselves” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 305). Power thus creates social reality and subjectivities through knowledges (read discourses) that are in essence embodiments of power and expressions of power relations.

For Foucault, power can be divided into four tenets. Power is (a) omnipresent (operating not only at/through the traditional “seats of power”); (b) power is always related to resistance, (c) power is exercised through disciplinary practices which give rise to self-regulation (governmentality); and (d) power is productive (not repressive; Foucault, 1995; Irving & English, 2007). Rather than traditional notions of coercion (exerted by the state through legislation over citizens/subjects), Foucault offers that power is located not only within the state (read governmental) apparatus but co-exists and co-operates in various different sites including but not limited to families, community organizations, educational institutions and work environments. While these sites are not political, in the strictest sense, their varied histories and societal roles “are intensified and refined by their application within closed institutions…[They] swarm within the “social body”…[Thus, to] restrict attention to the way in which government is involved in political subjectification is to ignore the way in which governmental practices of self-formation come to colonize, compose, and transform the state itself” (Dean, 1994, p. 156).
Therefore, in studying “governmental” organizations, even those, like child protection, which can be seen as distanced or ‘arms-length’, one is also examining social organization and the push-pull that exists in the Foucauldian power dynamic. It is in this articulation of power dynamics that cautions regarding the effects of neoliberalist and New Public Management forces upon social work, and by extension child protection practice, can be tempered.

While many social work theorists lament the effects of NPM policy upon the profession, speaking to worker assessment, Tilbury (2007) offers that resistance is not only ultimately possible but also inevitable, as “managers, frontline practitioners, and other policy actors are active agents who, in the informal domain of everyday practice, may shape, reproduce, or subvert the performance measure process” (p. 119). Scholars like Considine (1994) expand this analysis and maintain that pressures from new societal players, novel circumstances or the tenacity of old problems can create circumstances for change even in policy environments with strong centralizing tendencies.

2.7.3 Foucault’s governmentality.

Further challenging the idea that power is exclusively uni-directional, top-down, and oppressive, Foucault’s works, *Discipline and Punish* (1995), *Will to Power* (1990), and *Governmentality* (1995) detail the history of governmentality, a concept he maintains is fundamental to modern societal functioning. The social regulation of sexualities, bodies, populations, children and citizens is (re)created through a complex nexus of power relations. Thus, governmentality is “the collection of institutions that seek to ensure the production and reproduction of a citizen subject capable of self-regulation” (Johnson, 1995, p.12). Through their investigative interventions in the private realm of the family and promotion of “ways of being,” for example, a “good parent” or the “well-adjusted” child, child protection agencies and
workers are definitely constitutive of this process and though not solely defined by it, as its technicians, neither are they immune.

Thus, just as quasi-governmental organizations and institutions work in concert to (re)create the self-regulating citizen, I offer that this historical moment is producing child protection agency employees as self-regulating workers. Thus, the coercion and control inherent to the worker-family dynamic also finds a parallel in worker-state interaction. This assertion can best be examined through Foucault’s notion of discipline.

2.7.4 Foucault’s discipline.

The Foucauldian notion of discipline consists of three inter-related mechanisms; (a) hierarchical surveillance, (b) normalizing judgment, and (c) examination (Foucault, 1995; see also Parton, 1991). Hierarchical surveillance involves a uni-directional gaze that permits knowledge creation through the continual collecting of data about bodies in society. Normalizing judgment, as opposed to judicial judgment, involves perpetual discretionary conduct evaluation through the invocation of “floating standards” (Parton, 1991, p. 6). Finally, examination combines both hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment:

- It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance to qualify, classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them…
- [The] examination is highly ritualized…At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (Foucault, 1995, p.184-185)

Thus, while child protection workers, as state-agents, turn their objectifying gaze upon parents and families under investigation, they, like parents, are subject to hierarchical surveillance which continually demands the compilation of information related to their
interactions, assesses this functioning relative to standards of organizational and ministerial protocols, reinforces defensive practice and finally demands and enacts a visibility whose glare is most acutely felt when something goes wrong: for example, the injury (parents) or death (worker) of a child (see Ayre, 2001; Goddard & Saunders, 2001; Howitt, 1992; McMahon, 1998).

The previous sections’ examination of the Foucauldian notions of power, governmentality and discipline form the third “side” of the WHHW exploratory framework: facilitating an examination of workers’ understanding of surveillance and internalized occupational regulation. Child protection workers’ experiences of occupational governance and regulation take place in within agencies that differ from other organizations due to the very nature of the social roles and demands associated with them. The following section discusses this in more detail.

2.8 Child Protection Practice & Institutional Analyses

2.8.1 Introduction.

The following paragraphs detail the WHHW framework’s final facet by offering notional integration of Goffman’s total institutions (1961), Coser’s (1974) historical understanding of greedy institutions (1974) and Franzway’s (2000) contemporary formulation of the greedy institution in order to better understand the institutional contexts and implications of encompassing child protection service employee demands. After critical engagements with Goffman’s (1961) and Coser’s (174) work, this “side” focuses on the child protection implications of Franzway’s greedy institutional model: (a) emotional labour; (b) commitment and (c) workload.

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9 For more in-depth discussion of the “defensible decision”, see Mullaly (1997) and Pollack (2010).
2.8.2 Goffman’s total institutions.

Goffman’s total institutions encompass organizations that are, at once, a part of and apart from society: a “social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization” (Goffman, 1961, p. 12). They are divided into roughly five categories: (( b) care institutions for those thought to be unable to care for themselves and a deemed “threat to the community” (leper colonies, mental hospitals); (c) institutions designed to protect society from individuals thought to be deliberate threats (penitentiaries, P.O.W. camps); (d) institutions that facilitate a work-related function and whose existence is rationalized by this function (military camps, boarding schools); and (e) institutions designed to give sanctuary from the wider world even as they may provide training to non-members (monasteries, ashrams).

According to Goffman (1961), individuals in total institutions live their lives under one authority and in the same location. Their day-to-day activities are conducted in the presence of a large corps of others like themselves. The corps members are treated identically and obliged to perform the same activities together. All facets of daily activity are strictly regimented “with one activity leading at a pre-arranged time into the next, the whole sequence of events being imposed from above by a system of explicit, formal rulings and a body of officials” (Goffman, 1961, p. 6). Finally, Goffman insists that the required activities are subsumed under a single logic whose purpose is linked to an institutional aim.

Despite Goffman’s assertion that his rubric was not necessarily comprehensive, his framework has been employed to examine organizations and issues as diverse as emergency youth shelters, abusive intimate relationships and prison food narratives (see Armaline, 2005; Godderis, 2006; Jury, 2005). Perhaps due to this diversity in application, Goffman’s scheme has had its detractors. Davies (1989) insists that many of the uses of the total institution concept may be without merit as there is much confusion regarding the appropriateness of its applicability as a
theoretical framework. Davies (1989) argues that while total institutions do share distinguishing qualities, they are not homogenous, and he critiques Goffman’s attempts to stretch the term’s application and Goffman’s employment of confirmatory sampling for creating an environment rife for misuse of the notion.

More importantly for this analysis, Davies criticizes Goffman’s perhaps too succinct discussion of variations amongst total institutions. In addition to Goffman’s “five rough groupings” (1961, p. 4), Davies (1989) offers that the aims of total institutions can be characterized in three ways; (a) those institutions that are “ends in themselves,” places where those who choose or are forced to resides can live lives set apart from societal conventions; (b) those institutions that perform some practical service (economic or military), and (c) institutions whose aim is transformation of the individual (education, reform, etc.). Davies (1989) notes that the degree of institutional closure (closed, intermediate, open) and the formal purpose of the institution (based on external task completion) is an end unto itself, that is, aims of individual/societal transformation aid in organizational characterization. Davies (1989) adds that the notion of the mode of compliance (coercive, normative, remunerative) also helps in total institution characterization. Finally, Davies maintains that the examination of these criteria can help one to ascertain how “total” a total institution is and thus address his conceptual criticisms of Goffman, which include that total institutions appear not only to be characterization of type but also organizations of degree.

In keeping with both Goffman’s and Davies’ findings, child protection societies can be characterized as open total institutions. Their existence is justified by the work performed with children and their families. While not physically separated from the rest of society, child protection workers in Ontario do “live” under one legislative authority in the regulatory space
created by the CFSA. With specific reference to Davies’ (1989) concerns, provincial child protection agencies may be characterized as organizations which perform a practical service (assessing child safety/family risk; acting, on behalf of the state, in loco parentis) and who have a transformative aim (enhancing parental capacity, supporting improved family functioning). Further, the administrative/occupational/professional aim of ministerial child maltreatment investigation criteria and documentational protocols is to assure that Intake and Family Service workers across Ontario perform clinical tasks in a standardized manner. These occupational requirements are formalized and scheduled “with one activity leading at a pre-arranged time into the next, the whole sequence of events being imposed from above by a system of explicit, formal rulings and a body of officials” (Goffman, 1961, p. 6; See also Parada, 2004).

Thus, Goffman’s initial assertions regarding total institutions tempered by Davies (1989) critiques offer a relevant, but partial, framework within which to query the organizational aims and operations of child protection agencies. I propose that complementary way to examine the wide-ranging impacts of various social ideologies is to use Coser’s (1974) and Franzway’s (2000, 2001) later iteration of the greedy institution.

2.8.3 Coser’s greedy institutions.

Coser’s (1974) notion of the greedy institutions offers that they “seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. The demands [made] on the person are omnivorous” (p. 4). Where Goffman (1961) speaks of physical barriers or coercion born of total control (e.g., prisons, psychiatric units, residential schools), Coser points to the symbolic mechanisms and pressures that encourage and prescribe behaviours of the greedy institution’s participants. Compliance is voluntary, but organizationally constructed and legitimated.
As with the allotment of any scarce resource, Coser (1974) maintains that organizations are perpetually concerned with how to assure members’ loyalty (and commitment) to their objectives despite the presence of interests competing for their members’ limited energies. Individuals are at once subject to and the subject of multiple affiliations and thus must respond to the many calls for their attention. According to Coser (1974), the tensions created by an individual’s multiple affiliations are mediated by normative rules and (personal) proclivities:

Modern non-totalitarian societies typically come to terms with such competing demands on individuals through a structural arrangement by which these individuals, far from being fully immersed in a particular sub-system, are in fact segmentally engaged in a variety of social circles, none of which should demand exclusive loyalty. People are expected to play many roles on many stages, thus parceling out their available energies so they can play many games. (Coser, 1974, p. 3)

This parceling out of energies can be maintained so long as no one organizational claim demands total allegiance in the face of other competing demands. Conflict results when emergent obligations are not coupled with concomitant regulatory (normative) frameworks detailing how time and effort are to be allocated. Coser (1974) notes that some organizations do make complete claims on their members—seeking at once to maximize their stake and minimize the claims of other institutions or groups and any potential for claim conflict.

In the thirty years since its introduction, the term “greedy institution” has often been used as a theoretical touchstone, but not without change. Where Coser referred to organizational appetite for employees’ commitment and loyalty through presentation of a highly enviable lifestyle, current theorists, like Sennet and Franzway, note greed’s presence in ever-increasing workload and time demands (Franzway, 2001; Sennet, 1998).
2.8.4 Franzway’s greedy institutions.

Suzanne Franzway’s (2000) discussion of women trade unionists’ labour maintains that working within a greedy institution centers around three issues: commitment, workload and emotional labour. Her project notes that the notion of sacrifice (as exemplified by commitment and workload requests) may be inherent to certain types of work and that women, in particular, may find themselves predominantly represented in occupations that require “management of their feelings [in order to] produce appropriate feelings in others” (Franzway, 2000, p. 265; see also Aldridge, 1994).

Thus Franzway (2000) argues that women’s trade union involvement is predicated on a complex interplay among three aspects of employment in a greedy institution (commitment, workload and emotional labour) and prevailing (including institutional) discourses. Invoking Barrett (1991) and Frazer and Lacey (1993), Franzway (2000) maintains that even as “discourses…constitute the conditions of historical appearance of material objects” (p. 258), they are not all-inclusive and so must be analyzed in tandem with the practices that they at once create, reinforce and proscribe. This analytical attitude fits neatly with the framework that I am proposing, that is, what is done in child protection practice must be examined within a wider context of an examination of the explicit statements and tacit understandings of what is seen and said about what should be done.

Franzway’s analysis is helpful for this research project because, just as it points to the pervasive idea(l)s which underlie traditional notions of unionism, it also creates a space in which one can imagine an examination of child protection practice as constituted by discourse and discursive practice related to social work, child protection workers and child protection working. Analysis of Franzway’s work details that striking parallels exist between her women in trade union analysis and my proposed child protection worker theoretical framework. For instance,
quoting Offe (1985), Franzway (2000) points to the sacrifice inherent in unionism’s occupational realm:

No union [read child protection organization] can function for a day in the absence of some rudimentary notions held by the members that being a member is of value in itself, that the individual organization costs must not be calculated in a utilitarian manner but have to be accepted as necessary sacrifices, and that each member is legitimately required to practice solidarity and discipline. (Offe, 1985, p.183, as quoted in Franzway (2000))

Offe’s assertions regarding union activism ring true for child protection practice. Just as Franzway argues that Australian women’s trade union movement involvement requires “complex and dynamic negotiations with available discourses and practices” (2000, p. 258), it can be held that child protection employment requires the navigation of swirling and often murky discursive currents. While child protection workers may not engage with the theoretical vocabulary that prescribes their work as this dissertation does, one can assert that they are more than capable of generating an analysis that reflects the nuance and depth of their understandings of their occupational positioning within a complex conceptual frameworks.

As it does not operate to the exclusion of an understanding of the gendered nature of the caring demands placed upon women due to their positioning within patriarchal society, Franzway’s assertions are crucial to exploration of how personal, organizational and communal factors work in tandem to create women’s occupational (read often caring) experiences (Baines, Evans, & Neysmith, 1998; Gattuso & Bevan, 2000; Gray, 2002). Personal expectations are reflected in each union activist’s commitment level, while occupational and gendered expectations are mirrored in workload demands and emotional labour requirements, respectively.
This tripartite division (individual, organizational and communal) is echoed in gendered organizational literature and the factors detailed as influential in scholarly job satisfaction and burnout literature. Thus, critical engagement with the notions of commitment, workload and emotional labour is fundamental to any analysis of contemporary child protection practice.

2.8.4.1 Emotional labour.

Steinberg notes that Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labour within the workplace refers to

the relational work that involves managing the emotions of others to achieve a desired state of mind or a desired course of action in them. It also involves managing one’s own emotions to project the appropriate emotions for the situation at hand. (Steinberg, 1999, p. 149)

Franzway maintains in quoting Beasley that the term “emotional labour” has come to refer almost exclusively to the types of work that women usually perform, and their “efforts to make to others ‘feel loved, secure, understood or competent’” (Beasley, 1994, p. 32). Ironically, these quotations seem to embody at least part of social work’s calling: creating/supporting the emotive states that sustain progressive change.

In particular, child protection workers’ raison d’être includes creating secure therapeutic interactions with parents and children in distress, and cultivating these relationships in order to address validated allegation regarding maltreatment; ensuring child safety and fostering effective parenting and child management. While investigating maltreatment allegations, devising therapeutic action plans, advocating in family court, liaising with community partners such as doctors and other public service professionals and hearing the often horrific stories told by children and their families, child protection workers are expected to effectively manage their
own emotions and responses in order to further each family’s progress. This self-management comes at a price (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2000; Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2007).

The personal costs of emotional labour to employees can be quite high. The experiences of alienation to which Steinberg (1999) and Hochschild (1983) refer find their correlates in child protection workers’ experiences of occupational stress and burnout. Burnout is a syndrome involving depersonalization of clients, feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Pines, 1979). Maslach (1982) notes that burnout can occur at any one of three levels: institutional, interpersonal and/or individual (see also Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001). While much research points to the individual factors involved in burnout occurrences, Maslach notes that there is a nexus of interaction between these levels and circumstantial factors as they contribute to a person’s experiences, though the pattern remains unclear.

Despite often reporting their chosen profession as a calling, coupled with a personal desire to make the world a better place (Reagh, 1994), the longer one works as a child protection worker the more likely one is to experience higher levels of burnout (Fryer, 1988; Saviki, 1994). Unsuccessful and/or traumatic client outcomes can negatively affect helping professionals’ experience of the world and workers’ stress levels (Cunningham, 2003).

Factors exacerbating burnout rates specific to individual workers include work overload, high job responsibility, and “reality shock” — that is, little reward for high professional output (Dane, 2000). In addition, young, inexperienced workers, especially those who wished to specialize in other social work fields, have been deemed more likely to experience burnout (Armstrong, 1979; Mor Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001; Fryer, 1988, 1989).
In addition to feelings of professional ineffectiveness, employees’ high burnout levels have been significantly associated with feelings of depression, anxiety, irritability and somatic complaints (Anderson, 2000; Dane, 2000; Jayartnee, Chess & Kunkel, 1986). Not surprisingly, these mental and physical stressors exacerbated difficulties within workers’ extra-professional interpersonal relationships (e.g., families and/or marriages; see Jayartnee, Chess & Kunkel, 1986). Thus, child protection workers often pay the price for the emotional labour fundamental to their work with their own mental health.

2.8.4.2 Commitment and Ontario’s Differential Response model.

The notion of commitment, the second component of Franzway’s (2000) greedy institution model can be explored through and engagement with the Ontario’s most recent adoption of a differential response child protection model. When it was introduced as part of the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services’ “accountability framework for child welfare,” the Differential Response Model has been heralded as a massive “transformation” in the ways in which child protection services are currently mandated, delivered, and received in the province (MCYS, 2007, p. 2). The model aims to improve service to children and their families, hone clinical tools and skills, support community involvement in child protection decision-making, and replace “cookie-cutter” protection responses with more case-specific interventions.

The adoption of these changes in Ontario is evidence of the most recent “pendulum swing” in provincial child protection discourse (Dumbrill, 2006). The highest point in each discursive swing represents the extremes of practice: child welfare and child protection. The child protection pendulum is often pushed by public demands for systemic change after some precipitating event:
Children being killed by their parents, or alternatively social workers removing children from parents with insufficient cause, quickly offend public sensibilities and flare into issues that demand immediate political solutions (Dumbrill, 2003, p. 6; see also Ayre, 2001; Trocmé & Lindsey, 1996).

Thus, in response to behaviour under scrutiny, public policy may swing toward the other extreme. For instance, as previously discussed, before the current Transformation Agenda, Ontario’s child protection system underwent a Reform (Dumbrill, 2006; MYCS, 2005; OACAS, n. d.).

According to the English theorist Spratt (2001):

A Child Protection orientation is characterized by a primary concern to protect children from abuse, usually from parents who are often considered morally flawed and legally culpable. By contrast, a [child welfare] orientation is characterized by a tendency to understand acts, or circumstances, thought of as harmful to children, in the contexts of psychological or social difficulties experienced by families. These responses to such difficulties emphasize further assessment and the provision of therapeutic and practical services. (p. 934)\(^{10}\)

Spratt (2001) insists that the social work practiced between worker and parent(s) in the protection orientation often becomes adversarial due to the practice’s legal and investigatory preoccupations. This stands in contrast to the “partnership ideal” promulgated by a child welfare practice (p. 934).

Highlighting the differing opinions regarding how to best ensure child safety and development, Ontario’s Differential Response Framework proposes to bridge the theoretical and

\(^{10}\) It is interesting to note that Spratt (2001) refers to the poles as “Child Protection” and “Family Service” and maintains that the U.S. and Canada are prime examples of the former. My occupational experiences point to the
practice gaps between the child protection and child welfare orientations. But while promoting a more nuanced child protection experience, the Differential Response orientation cannot/does not address the negative impact of the lack of support available to other social programming initiatives, such as mental health, housing, and income support — systems whose policies affect child protection practice immensely but lie outside of its immediate purview (Gladstone, Boydell, & McKeever, 2006; Park, Metraux, Brodbar, & Culhane, 2004; Russell, Harris, & Gockel, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2004). What remains is a newly introduced “accountability framework” which holds workers responsible for the effects of factors upon which they have no influence.

Further, ministerial attitudes have focussed attention on protocol compliance and workers’ meeting documentation targets. As the number of cases requiring investigation and subsequent intervention has increased, so too has the risk of liability for child protection workers:

When child welfare workers apprehend children they can be faced with civil lawsuits from disgruntled parents crying negligence and the violation of their rights. Conversely, when children remain in the home and further abuse or fatalities occur, the workers can be blamed both civilly and criminally for the child’s injury or death. (Regehr, Berstein, & Kanani, 2002, p. 32)

In Ontario, the criminal negligence charges laid against Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS) employee Angie Martin, after the death of an infant on her caseload, placed a chill on child protection practice and underscored the idea that parents are not the only scrutinizing sources (R v. Heikamp and Martin, 1999)\(^{11}\).

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\(^{11}\) Jordan Heikamp was born slightly premature to his 19-year old mother, Renee Heikamp, on May 19, 1997 in Toronto, ON. Nurses at the hospital where he was delivered were concerned about Jordan’s mother’s ability to care for him and contacted the Catholic Children’s Aid Society (CCAS). Angie Martin, an agency Intake worker,
While Franzway and Coser insist upon the voluntary nature of the commitment demanded by greedy institutions, it might be offered that social workers, and child protection practitioners in particular, are engaged in a more coerced occupational relationship. Instead of “[relying] on voluntary compliance… and…maximizing consent to their styles of life by appearing highly desirable to the participants,” child protection professionals may find their practice geared more (though not exclusively) toward avoiding public scrutiny and potential punishment (Coser, 1974, p.6).

In Ontario, governmental responses to the recommendations of public inquiries and service delivery task forces have chosen to focus attention on increasing worker efficiency, responsibility and accountability. Through the use of strict timelines and protocols, it was offered that increased worker accountability would improve service delivery. These goals, though necessary and noble, became the occupational standard in a vacuum devoid of any substantial discussion of the wider community systems and social initiatives required to truly ensure child safety. Thus, the work becomes, in the words of one worker, “impossible to do with the time and resources allotted,” and concerns have increased amongst child protection workers regarding was assigned to work with the Heikamp family. After Ms. Martin’s assessment, it was decided that Jordan could be discharged to his mother’s care only if suitable housing accommodations could be found and on May 29, 1997, Jordan and his mother went to live in the Anduhyan Shelter. On June 12, 1997 Ms. Martin met with Ms. Heikamp. Ms. Heikamp told the Intake worker that she had been to see a local pediatrician and that Jordan had been putting on weight. This was not the case. His mother found Jordan Heikamp dead in his bed on June 23, 1997. An autopsy concluded that infant Jordan had died due to “chronic starvation” in the weeks leading to his death. Both Ms. Heikamp and Ms. Martin were charged with criminal negligence causing death. By 1998 and after a 13 month long preliminary hearing exploring the circumstances of infant Jordan’s death, Justice Mary Hogan dismissed the cases noting that while a tragedy, there was insufficient evidence to prove “wanton and reckless disregard”. The dismissal of the criminal case was followed by an Inquest which, following a four-month investigation led by Coroner James Cairns, ruled Jordan Heikamp’s death a homicide and offered multiple recommendations for all parties implicated in the social service system including CCAS, hospitals, homeless shelters, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (See Cairns, 2001; R v. Heikamp and Martin, 1999. See also Kanani, Regehr and Bernstein, 2002; Robson, 2005).
possible work-related criminal and/or civil liability (K. Myers, personal communication, December 5, 2004).

Notions of accountability and responsibility operating within an isolated social service system, coupled with personnel committed to child safety and improved family functioning, serve to create a legitimated and reinforced value system, which reveres child protection, demands personal sacrifice in order to function, and engages in individualized punitive action when negatively scrutinized. Thus, child protection practice, within a public discourse of efficiency, transforms commitment to a total and greedy institution from a wholly voluntary notion into one tinged by the coercive force of possible criminal or civil liability. In keeping with Franzway’s analysis, commitment values are detailed in child protection practices’ delineating legislation, and articulated in agency protocol, organizational practice, and sanctioning of individual workers for breaches.

Additionally, recent provincial child protection discursive shifts (from Reform to Transformation) have taken place without an examination of the ideological underpinnings of the “new” practice’s positioning, demands and constraints and have left workers continuing to practice in an occupational environment whose systemic managerialist underpinnings ultimately remain unchallenged and unchanged (see Cutler, 2004).

2.8.4.3 Workload.

As previously noted, the Ontario child protection system is undergoing a period of massive occupational change. While it is too early to predict the occupational impacts of the child protection transformation agenda, it should be noted that after the last ministry-initiated changes, the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), concluded that more referrals in need of investigation, higher demand for intensive client service, more
documentational requirements, and a requisite acquisition of new expertise and proficiencies have had a negative impact upon child protection workers (Workload, OACAS, 2000, p. 5; see also Parada, 2004).

The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies *Workload Measurement Project Report* outlined the results of a study whose findings confirm what had been held anecdotally for some time: “front line staff are overworked and stressed out as a result of increased administrative demands on far too many cases” (Calvert, 2000, p.6). At the time, the number of children in children’s aid society care in the province had risen 26%. The number of investigation, protection and cases requiring other child protection services had increased by 19%, and though the number of child protection staff had increased by 26% in the same period, workload pressures were said to be threatening effective service delivery (Calvert, 2000). Calvert’s findings are reflected in the three-part, multi-year *Workload Measurement Project* (WMP) (Goodman & Hurwitz, 2008). WMP was instrumental in establishing that the funder’s estimation of the time a full-time equivalent child protection worker could work each year (34.2 weeks, minus vacation and travel time), differed significantly from what the third stage of the WMP found (29.9 weeks). Thus, funders’ anticipated over a month of additional labour (4.3 weeks) from every full-time worker when as WMP revealed a minimum of one day per week was required for travel time and court duties (Goodman & Hurwitz, 2008). The authors maintain that this finding may explain the fiscal deficits experienced by exposing the gap between funding source estimates and child protection agency realities.

Many child protection practice systems find it difficult to reward a job well done. If workers are efficient and capable, they *rewarded* with higher numbers of more complex cases. At a case level, new investigations are not concerned with how many others have immediately
occurred before. Thus if an agency can reasonably handle five new investigations a day and on average, seven new investigations a day are mandated for a period of weeks, “the cases [still] have to go somewhere”: leaving agencies and workers to struggle to address urgent needs with resources that are, by design, limited (K. Myers, personal communication, December 5, 2004).

In addition, the current funding formula is reactive, so that funding for new workers will only be provided once those already employed have reached certain levels of overwork. Conversely, should those caseload demands ebb, agencies are thrown into fiscal deficit and forced to make budgetary cuts until the next swell in case numbers. Thus, even at an organizational level, child protection work clearly exemplifies workload concerns, the third greedy institution factor outlined in Franzway’s analysis.

Further, Glastonbury, Bradley, and Orme (1987) call attention to the difference between caseload, the number of total cases or files an individual is responsible for, and workload, the number of cases plus other activities which workers are expected to perform as part of their employment. This distinction is important for frontline protection workers. Workload tasks may include travel time, court documentation or case recording, coverage for absent employees or any other activities not linked to direct (i.e., face to face) contact with one’s own client base. Some of these activities may not be associated with providing service to the individuals on one’s caseload: “liaison with other organizations and services, supervision of staff by managers, staff training and development are some examples of these activities” (Orme, 1995, p. 2).

Further, when discussing front-line staff workload, it is important to distinguish between caseload levels and caseload acuity. Caseload levels refer to the number of files (read children and/or families) that a worker provides service to. Caseload acuity speaks to the complexity and amount of intervention that an assigned file may require. Thus the operational definition of
workload required for its assessment must encompass more than measurement of discrete family dossiers. The nuanced approach required should embody a sense that the workload effect of lower file count with high caseload acuity numbers is compounded as compared to a similar caseload level with minimal complexity (Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, 2002, p. 5).

Researchers have maintained that technocratization of social work coupled with reductions in the programming and support offered by social service agencies have contributed to an augmentation in the number of agencies implicated in the lives of clientele (Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, 2002, p. 5). Thus while working with higher need clients, frontline workers must manage the occupational silos and oft competing interests of community agencies as part of their service to children and families: perhaps expending more energy in coordination that might have been employed had the service been offered in-house (Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, 2002, p. 6).

After conducting focus groups at eleven Nova Scotia child protection and other social service organizations in Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) Working Group (2002) offers that high demand for child protection service and an intake screening process mean that “only the highest-risk cases [are] considered for service” (p. 6), despite research indicating that workers enjoyed higher levels of job satisfaction with more mixed caseloads:

High-risk cases require more ‘policing’ on the part of workers and more administrative duties. Caseworkers felt that the ‘social work’ had been taken out of their jobs and they experienced reduced jobs satisfaction as a result (NSGEU, 2002, p.7).
This juxtaposition of “social work” versus administrative requirements (read paperwork) of child protection work is not a novel concern or construction (see Tsui, 1998). Contemporary child protection practice has many documentary requirements, some of which have been previously discussed in relation to its assessment tools. Reports are required to open a file, conduct an investigation, file transfers, and update case files. Each file must contain notes detailing every client and community collateral contact (face-to-face or otherwise). The child protection worker’s administrative and documentary skill-set must often extend from the clerical (writing letters to community members, obtaining required consent forms) to the juridical (drafting court papers) and beyond (agency-specific/departmental reports, mileage tracking).

Every action or decision requires a specific form of documentation, thus making workers feel that paperwork is their “predominant task” (NSGEU, 2002, p.9) and perhaps exacerbating workers’ feelings of overwork. The transfer of clerical tasks to individual workers speaks to the often-unexpected effects of the introduction of new technologies into the workplace (NSGEU, p. 31). Data entry, telephone message taking, faxing, letter writing—all of these tasks were performed by clerical staff in the past but are now the responsibility of the front-line worker.

Workload management takes place at many levels. Individual workers manage their workload through daily decisions, regarding priority and performance. Organizationally, some acknowledgment of case acuity, case number and other workload related activities, and a weighting thereof often contributes to qualitative attempts to balance workplace demands (Orme, 1995, p. 4).

NSGEU (2002) maintains that the increase in volume of families requiring service, concomitant documentation requirements and lack of worker coverage contributes to an occupational orientation of constant crisis (p. 11; see also Lindsey, 1994; Parton, 1999). Workers
have reported feeling that there was a pervasive disregard for the mental and emotional toll demanded by child protection work (NSGEU, 2002). This crisis orientation contributes to little time being available to debrief after traumatic events. Remaining workers report little sympathy for those workers who decide to take stress leave, as their absences compound the problems of overwork. Those workers who do report difficulties handling occupational stressors are told that they “may not be cut out” for child protection work (NSGEU, 2002, p. 27).

These assessments constitute part of child protection occupational mythology. NSGEU (2002) found that workers felt pressured to work long hours by their supervisors and often underreported their overtime for fear of being seen as ineffective and inefficient. Thus, the efficacy discourse and crisis orientation might be seen as contributing to the myth of efficient child protection practice. Workers, who are unable to do the jobs within the time and with the resources available, do not report their difficulties and thus unwillingly contribute to the reinforcement of a view of accountable practice as the sole responsibility of front-line practitioners, thus obscuring the effects of over-arching systematic constraints. This individualizing of what may in fact be systemic issues is mirrored in the critiques of assessment of NPM techniques’ effectiveness.

Just as “failure [within public and private organizational contexts] leads to pressures to change management teams and structure but not to abandon a belief in the efficacy of management” (Cutler, 2004, p. 207), questioning a worker’s suitability shifts the querying gaze from the functioning of a barely tenable system to the professional “deficits” of individual personnel. As Baines (2004a) notes in her study of social service work in an age of restructuring, “[as] long as unpaid service work remains known only to those performing and receiving it, it
will remain an invisible subsidy to a system designed to be smaller and less caring” (p.6; Baines, 2004b).

The previous paragraphs detail the WHHW framework’s final facet by offering notional integration of Goffman’s total institutions (1961), Coser’s (1974) historical understanding of greedy institutions (1974) and Franzway’s (2000) contemporary formulation of the greedy institution in order to explore the institutional implications of child protection agencies’ organizational and bureaucratic demands. After critical engagements with Goffman’s (1961) and Coser’s (174) work, this “side” focuses its examination on the child protection implications of Franzway’s greedy institutional model including emotional labour, commitment and workload.

### 2.9 Chapter Summary

#### 2.9.1 Invisible work for an open but total(ly) greedy institution.

Child protection organizations are not neutral entities. They are (re)created by employees’ engagement with each other and other identity- and agency-influencing forces that infuse work environments and (re)enforce societal functioning. Forces like hegemonic gender(ed) occupational discourses, New Public Management, Foucauldian notions of power, governmentality and discipline, Goffman’s total institutions and Coser and Franzway’s greedy institutions aid in the construction of a framework within which workers’ occupational perceptions may be examined (Coser, 1974; Franzway, 2000; Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1991; Goffman, 1961; Hood, 1991; Weick, 2000).

Davies (1989) acknowledges the possibility that there can be some overlap between total and greedy institutions. This paper offers that, if total institutions are organizations of degree, the opportunities imbedded in this concept, perhaps to Davies’ dismay, actually become wider and more inclusive. Thus, child protection organizations are, in practice, open total institutions;
situated in the theoretical space created by the amalgamation of both Coser’s, Franzway’s and Goffman’s concepts. In addition, Weick’s notion of hidden work is offered as a foundation for an amalgamated total and greedy institutional framework.

Using coercive power granted to them by the state apparatus, agencies, through workers create the means by which social goals will be achieved. But power as a multi-directional force also encompasses the possibilities and challenges of resistance, governmentality and discipline detailed in Foucault’s writings. While its exercise is influenced by societal aims that are subject to change, as the paradigmatic shifts in child protection policy dictate (family preservation to child protection and back), the demands placed upon workers, against a policy backdrop of NPM, neoliberal and managerialist preoccupations, become more and more onerous.

Finally, the chapter that follows will employ the notions previously examined to explore the relationship between front-line child protection workers and regulating mechanisms — the social, interpersonal, and individual systems that define, proscribe and prescribe child welfare workers’ occupational perceptions. I offer that interviews with front-line employees will reveal their understandings of the professions gender(ed) discourse, occupational values, required professional commitments, and dependence on overwhelming workload and occupational emotional labour. It is offered that these interviews will contribute to the formulation and validation of a conceptual framework that will allow one to assert that within a neoliberal context, child protection work is “invisible work for an open but total(ly) greedy institution” (Coser, 1974; Franzway, 2000; Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1991; Goffman, 1961; Hood, 1991; Weick, 2000).
3 Method and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

*Working hard or heart-y working* is positioned within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm. It employed a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach to examine how child protection workers conceive of the professional identity-influencing forces that infuse their work environments and underscore societal functioning (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory was chosen as the methodological approach most appropriate to *Working hard or heart-y working* because as an exploratory study aimed at theory generation it was thought paramount that any emergent theories be directly related (read grounded) in the information provided by the project participants. Grounded theories are also likely to provide in-depth insight, heighten understanding and offer guides for responsive action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998): objectives in keeping with the expository nature of a study such as *Working hard or heart-y working* and the Code of Ethics’ pursuit of social justice tenets which one imagines should apply not only to equitable access and fairness for those receiving service but also extend to service providers (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005).

3.2 Constructivism

Constructivism is a social scientific approach that holds that individuals create the realities they inhabit (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). Constructivist researchers begin by asking how (and often why) participants construct the meaning(s) in their specific experience(s) as they do (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) maintains that the use of grounded theory methodology and the subsequent formulation of theory are social actions. That is, understandings created by the study participants, researcher, colleagues, organizational (read supervisory and/or ethics review) committee members and numerous others who influence the way in which studies are
conceived of and conducted are social acts. Thus, a constructivist approach encompasses more than exploring how individuals (read participants and researcher) think about their situations by acknowledging that just as participants share their experiences to make meaning with researchers, researchers use their experiences, knowledge, understandings, contacts and contexts to interpret these utterances (read data) and build further understanding (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). Theory, researcher, participant and context are thus intimately and inexorably connected.

_WHHW_ is consciously positioned within a constructivist paradigm because of this framework’s recognition that the research(ed) experiences constitute part of wider, often hidden, interconnections, systems, networks and structures (Charmaz, 2006). While some theorists have critiqued constructivism for its perceived tendency toward relativism and solipsism (Schwandt, 1994), this method’s emphasis and willingness to engage “the obscured” suits the type of investigation I propose and is in keeping with the transdisciplinary literature “findings” that _Working hard or heart-y working_ has been framed by.

As a former child protection worker, I knew child protection workers possessed sophisticated understandings of their day-to-day practice because I had heard this knowledge and learned from it during my time as a practitioner. As a Family Service Worker, I had come to my own understanding of my place in the child protection system by assigning meaning to my experiences: meanings that were not identical to those around me because of my distinct history but which I used to make sense of my world as an employee and as a member of a team and wider organization. In approaching this project, I believed grounded theory was the most appropriate approach to adopt in part because of my employment history and positioning relative to the subject matter and participants and also from a desire to assure that interviewees through participation were afforded the same opportunities that I had had: a chance to make sense of their
experiences and use them to contribute to the knowledge resource represented by this
dissertation. Thus, *WHHW* is reflective of the assumptions listed by Creswell (2014) in reference
to Crotty (1998): (a) using open-ended questions to allow interviewees to share their views; (b)
rooted in a desire to understand the contexts experienced by participants and (c) and an
acceptance that the generation of meaning occurs in interaction.

3.2.1 To literature review or not to review: It is still a question.

Grounded theory originators Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially argued against researcher
*a priori* engagement with extant literature. Concerns regarding undue influence of existing
literature on grounded theory development include (a) that in-depth literature reviews undermine
the grounded theory process by obscuring the work to be done with the work that has already
been done by others (Glaser, 1992; Heath, 2006; Olshansky, 1996); (b) that engagement with the
work of other theorists may leave researchers insecure regarding their own analysis and theory-
generating abilities (Glaser, 1998); and (c) that the type and scope of literature review required
cannot be known at the outset thus potentially wasting valuable time and effort (Dick, 2007;
Glaser, 1998; Locke, 2001). Yet despite grounded theory’s originators’ advice to “ignore” the
literature related to the area of study in the initial stages so that categories can emerge
naturalistically (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 37), Dunne (2011) notes that with the increased
popularity of grounded theory fostered factious debate. Ironically, current points of contention
lay not so much as to whether existing literature should be consulted but when (Cutcliffe, 2000;
McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007). Authors such as Charmaz (2006) and Stern (2007) note
that once emergent categories begin to consolidate, pre-existing literature may be assessed for
their relevance and used to frame the study’s relevance and place within the field.
While concerns regarding an in-depth literature review’s potential negative effect on the engagement necessary for the emergence of high quality grounded theory are understandable and have existed since the early days of grounded theory, in the intervening years, Strauss (with Juliet Corbin) was willing to acknowledge the practical difficulty of the purist positioning of such thinkers as Glaser (1998), Nathaniel (2006) and Holton (2007) as blank slate researchers do not exist in nature (Cutcliffe, 2000; Eisenhardt, 2002; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005).

Despite these concerns, I agree with Hallberg (2010) and others who view as misguided the idea that commitment to grounded theory requires ignoring extant research literature before one has begun analyzing emergent theory-generating conceptions. S/he notes that researchers often already possess a wealth of cross-disciplinary knowledge from which they may not easily detach when beginning a new study, instead Hallberg (2010) insists that good grounded theory research can be achieved by maintaining a theoretical sensitivity steeped in constant comparisons and on-going memo writing. S/he offers that a preparatory literature review can not only provide a sense that the proposed study has not been undertaken before, but also offers a contextualizing sense that its issues exist and are worthy of study, ethical approval and or funding.

Theorists in favour of early in-depth engagement with literature note that doing so (a) ensures that the proposed study and methods have solid justificatory foundations (Coyne & Crowley, 2006; McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007); (b) identifies gaps in current knowledge (Creswell, 1998; Hutchison, 1993) and/or (c) how the issue has already been studied (Denzin, 2002); (d) assures that identical research has not already been undertaken (Chiovotti and Piran, 2003); (e) helps place the study in context (McCann and Clark, 2003) while (f) assisting researchers avoid methodological and conceptual errors (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007).
Despite a mellowing toward extant literature engagement of the some grounded theory stalwarts, there still remains a tempered “to review or not review” grounded theory debate. In response to the concerns regarding the possible taint of literature review, Dunne (2011) offers researcher reflexivity and mindfulness as a way to bridge the gap between these methodological sects (see also Robson, 2002; Hallberg, 2010; Heath, 2006; McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007). He also notes that grounded theory methodology also includes steps which supports and encourage such awareness including memoing and the constant comparative method (McAnn & Clark, 2003a; Suddaby, 2006): thus, addressing some of the principal concerns raised as a matter of design.

Further, rather than thinking of early literature engagement as impeding theory creation, Bowen (2009), referencing American sociologist Blumer (1954), suggests that sensitizing concepts or a collection of notions invoked at the start of a research project serve as a loose grouping of ideas to engage the researcher’s interests and early thinking (see also Charmaz, 2006). Sensitizing concepts then operate as evidenced (i.e. grounded in literature) and reflexive entry points into the research realm. Again, conscious engagement with these notions as suggestive rather than definitive means that they can support, rather than limit, the critical analyses required for grounded theory development (Charmaz, 2006). Ultimately, the literature reviewed in WHHW’s second chapter speaks not only to the relevance of each of the disparate parts but also of the possible links and interconnections between the detailed stances.

It is worth mentioning here that the nature of the review and subsequent framework constructed in *Historical Placement and Review of Literature* implicates *WHHW* in an interesting (but ultimately resolvable) methodological conundrum. I have maintained that interviews with front-line child protection employees about their occupational commitments will
offer greater insight into worker understandings of the profession’s gender(ed) discourse, occupational values, required professional obligations, and dependence on overwhelming workload and occupational emotional labour within increasingly neoliberal contexts. The previous chapter offered an understanding of the theoretical backdrops against which such workers might navigate, negotiate and influence the context(s) within which much creative occupational engagement occurs. Thus while the transdisciplinary literature discussed previously details an evidenced entry point into worker realms of occupational understanding, this framework is but one of myriad possible starting points. Ironically, while this framework is not (and should not) be immune from criticism for its omissions and/or errors, the very idea of any engagement with research literature, let alone that required for the creation of the WHHW conceptual framework is somewhat controversial.

3.2.2 Constructing conceptual frameworks: WHHW’s sensitizing concepts. Miles and Huberman (1994) define a conceptual framework as an artifact “that explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts or variables – and the presumed relationships between them” (p.18). A conceptual framework or “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs …research” is a fundamental part of research design (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2002). Maxwell (1996) and Schram (2006) agree that a study’s conceptual framework assists in the grounding of what information regarding the project is available and tentatively offering an explanation of how these concepts may relate to each other. This is done to establish a firm foundation for the refinement of research goals, development of relevant study questions, selection of appropriate research methods and finally, to assist in the identification of possible threats to research validity (Maxwell, 1996; 2005).
Conceptually, *WHHW*’s second chapter offers that the sensitizing concepts of (a) gender; (b) New Public Management; (c) Foucauldian perspectives (including governmentality, discipline and power); and (d) greedy institutions work in discursive concert to constitute this project’s conceptual framework. As child protection practice is caring work done primarily by women with other women, the concept of gender represents an engagement with the societal positioning (read visibility and associated valuing) of women and related occupational dynamics (caring, the public/private divide). New Public Management’s global influence on social service provision and administration secures its role as a *WHHW* concept due to its influence upon the contemporary social service administration; influencing not only how child protection work is undertaken by front-line workers but also how such practice is defined. Foucault’s understandings of governmentality, discipline and power are included in this conceptual schema because his articulations of the role of quasi-governmental organization in the creation of self-disciplining citizenry (or in parallel the role of regulation and surveillance in the (re)formulation of the self-disciplining and ultimately discipline-ready child protection employee) provides a important view into the self-perpetuating systemic and discursive engagements experienced by child protection workers. Finally, the notion of greedy institutions privileges *WHHW*’s early engagement with personal costs associated with the organizational demands exacted by child protection practice (emotional labour, commitment and workload pressures).

Thus in sum, the research and theorizing explicated in this work’s second chapter, *Historical Placement and Literature Review*, constitutes an evidenced backdrop of sensitizing concepts against which the emergent themes of a constructivist grounded methodology might be seen. It offers an evidenced entry point into the researched realm, not operating in solitude but as constituent of a reflexive method and consistent constructive orientation.
The previous chapter might best be summarized as an evidenced framework of concepts that hold that child protection work is “invisible work for an open but total(ly) greedy institution” (Coser, 1974; Franzway, 2000; Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1991; Goffman, 1961; Hood, 1991; Weick, 2000). While such a statement may appear overly definitive when considered within the context of constructivist grounded theory’s epistemological privileging of in situ knowledge creation, the “invisible work” statement and its supporting research forms part of a necessary conceptual foundation whose construction, through engagement with existing knowledge, can be justified within a context of contemporary grounded theory debates.

3.2.3 Grounded theory.

After the initial pioneering work of theorists Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987), grounded theory’s methodological paradigm has undergone some transformation. While Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that new theory emerged separately from the scientific observer (read researcher), methodologists like Charmaz (2006) challenge the notion that research knowledge is waiting to be discovered/uncovered. Instead, she offers that “we construct our theories through our past and present involvement and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). This shift toward constructivism in grounded theory application and understanding is central to the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the Working hard or heart-y working research project.

I imagined WHHW’s purpose to be to provide a context within which the occupational lives and comprehensions of child protection workers can be valued, validated and better understood. As social service providers and social servants (in the semantic sense of the term – i.e. offering service to community), I believe that a respectful interrogation of the child protection workers’ intellectual appreciation of the constraints and opportunities of their day-to-
day practice offers not only the validation (through attention paid) to the hard work associated with this form of social caretaking (of children and families), but additionally a view into child protection work and occupational understandings required for practice in changing social service contexts and demands with an aim to better supporting practitioners and by extension, our youngest community members and their caregivers. Thus, the use of a constructivist research(er) stance reflects not only convictions about the nature of knowledge(s) and how knowledge(s) can be accessed through research endeavours but also convictions that, fortunately for the internal coherence of the project, also lie at the heart of my initial critique of extant CPW literature’s oversights regarding critical engagement with worker’s understandings (read constructed beliefs and knowledge) regarding the contexts, constraints and opportunities implicit to their praxis.

3.3 Study Design: Introduction

*Working hard or heart-y working* was designed to critically examine the front-line child protection workers understandings of the occupational backdrops and contexts against and within which their praxis is performed and evaluated. It is offered that such an examination of the professional articulations of Ontarian child protection workers situated at this historical moment, could point out conspicuous oversights in the analytical engagement with CPW, their work and the occupational social service discourses of which their praxes are constituent. To that end, rather than engaging in a discussion of intention to stay or job satisfaction as readily operationalized and accepted concepts, this study assumed a more curious stance relative to worker articulations of practice challenges/opportunities and practice-influencing policy. Thus, not asking participants “will you stay and for how long” but “how do you understand the intricacies related to staying” in order to add a dimension to the “social work as work” discussion.
Ironically, as a researcher, the assumption of this curious stance rendered some methodological decisions so seemingly self-evident that the implications of those decisions remained obscured until later in the research process. For instance, having already assumed a position that called into question, not the validity or value of extant “worker retention” literatures but questioned whether said literature might benefit from posing different, previously unasked (as opposed to unanswered), questions to child protection professionals, Working hard or heart-y working was, at inception, an exploratory study whose methodology would evidently be qualitative and include interviews of child protection workers, supervisors and managers: where the population of interest (front-line and two occupational degrees of separation) reflected the foci of previous occupational interest.

3.3.1 Working hard or heart-y working project aims.

While the overall aim of Working hard or heart-y working was to document child protection workers’ understandings of their occupational roles relative to societal vectors such as political, social and gendered forces including governmental and regulatory systems, the project’s key (and related) objectives were preliminarily translated into an interview script (see Appendix B: Proposed study questions/interview question match-up for a schema describing the relationship between Working Hard and Hearty Working study and interview questions).

WHHW’s aims were to

- Understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities.
- Understand and engage the forces that influence their day-to-day practice.
- Understand the roles of child protection workers in societal functioning.
- View the social construction of themselves and their profession, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies.
• View themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally
governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal bodies).

3.3.2 Study design, sample and recruitment.

Thus, as part of the Working hard or heart-y working project, I conducted 23 interviews
with child protection workers, supervisors and managers at six agencies throughout Ontario.
Interviews were conducted between July 28, 2010 and November 29, 2011. Participants were
recruited to discuss the challenges and opportunities of child protection work in individual
interviews employing questions that I designed. There were two interview guides: one for front-
line employees; one for managers/supervisors (See Appendix A: Interview Script). The interview
questions were used in slightly different ways, even within each guide, in response to differences
among respondents with respect to their day-to-day practice experiences (supervisors enter the
field far less frequently than Family Service workers, for instance).

Guiding qualitative literature maintains that grounded theory sampling may cease once
theoretical saturation is reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006;
Morse, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The number of participants necessary to reach theoretical
saturation depends on factors including (a) the qualitative method and research design used
(Morse, 2000); (b) the scope of the study (Mohrman, Tenkasi & Mohrman, 2003); (c) the quality
of data collected (Morse, 2000); (d) researcher expertise (Jette, Grover & Kreck, 2003); (e) the
nature of the topic (Thomson, 2004); (f) the number of interviews per participant (Lee, Woo &
Mackenzie, 2002); and (g) the prevalence of shadowed data (Morse, 2000). In short, sample
numbers required to achieve theoretical saturation are often increased when study design requires
it, the study scope is general and/or difficult to discuss, when participants repeatedly reference
the experiences of others (shadowed data) or provide “less than deep” data.
Despite reservations regarding predicting the *Working hard or heart-y working* sample size required to achieve theoretical saturation before beginning to interview participants or conduct analyses seemed counter-intuitive, consultation with relevant literature allowed me to initially estimate a sample size of 15 frontline workers (primary interviews) and six child protection managers (key informant interviews) (Morse, 2000; Thompson, 2004), and this estimate turned out to be fairly accurate regarding numbers but not sample composition.

The *Working Hard or Heart-y Working* sample was composed of 21 female workers from 6 Ontario child protection agencies. Interviewed participants had a mean age of just under 41 years ($M=40.8$ years, $SD=8.3$) with just over 10 years of cumulative frontline practice experience ($M=10.2$ years, $SD=5.2$). Many interviewees reported holding multiple service roles; moving repeatedly between Intake and Family Service, for instance. Their occupational roles at time of interview primarily included Intake, Family Service, and “Generic” (where all workers are responsible for both Intake and subsequent Family Service), among other postings. Participants also possessed high levels of educational attainment, including (by highest level of tertiary education achieved), Early Childhood Education diploma (3); Bachelor of Arts (3), Bachelor of Social Work (12) and Masters of Social Work (3).

Due to a lack of male frontline participants (0 participants) and involvement from just three supervisors/managers (one female and two male), the inputs of male participants were excluded from further analyses after initial coding. This decision left only one female supervisor. Her excerpts are identified in the next chapter under a pseudonym, Trudy Bechard, and by her supervisory role. While initially canvassed for its key informant insights, Ms. Bechard’s input was subsequently employed to support established thematic understandings gleaned from analyses of worker interviews.
Strong consideration was given to excluding Ms. Bechard’s interviews. Just as the interviews with male participants were excluded from later analysis because of a lack of gender representation, Ms. Bechard’s could have been excluded for lack of a supervisory cohort. However, Ms. Bechard’s perspectives were included not so much due to a privileging of her key informant (supervisory) perspectives but because they succinctly supported thematic analyses.

In keeping with the ethics protocols for *Working hard or heart-y working*, child protection agency administrations were contacted regarding the project (See Appendix D: Agency information and consent form), and with their assent, announcements were sent to agency employees (most often through agency or employee listservs, e-bulletin boards, general emails). Agency employee communication included a brief introduction to the email content, a Research Participant Recruitment Flyer (See Appendix E), an Information Letter inviting them to participate and detailing that participation was voluntary (see Appendix C: Information letter and consent form for research participants). The Research Participant Recruitment Flyer was sometimes used a bulletin board pin-up or wall poster.

The procedure outlined above was initially developed and employed in an effort to first inquire about, and then adhere to, differing child protection agency protocols regarding employee research but as information about *Working hard or heart-y working* spread through word-of-mouth, individual workers and offices, eager to contribute to the research, self-selected and contacted me directly despite, in one case, their agency’s expressed reticence. In retrospect, the idea that I would receive agency approval from all organizations approached was misinformed and naïve considering the occasionally fraught nature of worker-employee relations/organizational politics. In retrospect, I offer that it might also have been unintentionally
insensitive to employee personal agency: asking the employer whether I might speak with workers about their personal and organizational experiences might be viewed as patronizing.

Thus, in addition to initial efforts at purposeful(ly) sampling, I consciously endeavoured to ensure that while conducting WHHW, I was approaching child protection agencies representing a multiplicity of communities; servicing differing geographical catchment areas, dense and sparsely populated areas, meeting multiple ethno-cultural communities/linguistic/religious needs, remote/rural/suburban/urban communities and varied agency size, and subsequently engaged in theoretical sampling throughout the data collection and analysis processes (Charmaz, 2006; Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007; Hood, 2007)

Interestingly, despite my initial (arguable) missteps, snowball sampling, in which individuals, many referred by previous interviewees, approached me regarding project involvement also proved an important participant generating process. It seems that some workers recommended participation to their colleagues and I as able to return to two agencies for additional interviews.

3.3.3 Data analyses.

Grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2006) includes concrete but flexible steps regarding the qualitative data collection and analyses: steps that encourage the building of theory emergent directly from gathered data. Qualitative coding is used to sort and amalgamate early data while memos and comparisons of the questions and thinking about these codes are employed to further deeper data-steeped knowledge and thus generate a conceptual understanding. While the former appears to be articulated as simply a matter of execution, Saldaña’s (2009) understanding complements and complicated the processes by describing coding as both an imprecise science and interpretive act. This interpretive exercise’s constituent steps (including perception, documentation and subsequent coding) are subject to the
researcher’s level of personal engagement during fieldwork, the types of documentation produced (fieldnotes, memos), the variety of questions posed of participants, the race and gender of participants (including researcher) and as such are constitutive of the constructive/interpretive project.

*WHHW*’s data analysis adopted Saldaña’s (2009) multi-step process: First and Second Cycle coding. *WHHW*’s analyses consisted of two interdependent methodological stages comprised of the coding methods deemed most relevant for grounded theory generation. First cycle coding includes In-Vivo, Process, Initial (First Cycle), followed by Focused, Axial and Theoretical coding (Second Cycle). This analytic attitude was adopted in part because its suggestions were in-keeping with Charmaz’s (2006) invitation to engage in the collection of rich and detailed data, initial line by line coding and then more focused coding. Integrating coding results with extensive memos kept during data collection and analyses permitting comparison among codes and evidenced justification for decisions made regarding theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation. Subsequently, *WHHW* attempted to follow in Charmaz’s continuation of the Geertzian tradition: prioritizing “rich data” as information that contains relevant statements including information regarding participants’ social and structural circumstances and context and participants (within the organizational setting) supplemented by observational fieldnotes, participants written accounts or other detailed narratives (transcriptions).

Considering coding as a continuation of the interpretive process that began with the decisions related to qualitative approach, ontological, methodological and epistemological positioning and supported by the attitude embodied throughout the data gathering phase, Miles and Huberman (1994), point out that coding is not equivalent to analysis in that it is primarily constituent and ultimately heuristic in nature - unprescribed with regards to specific steps but
still cyclic and self-referential. Codification allows one to be able to distinguish between selections of relevant data through steps that are often iteratively similar in means but whose ends differ. Thus the In-vivo (literal or verbatim) coding initially carried out stands as particularly relevant to a project such as WHHW that seeks to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2009). It is also fundamental to grounded theory methodology. While important to the development of themes, concepts and categories, WHHW did not use the In-Vivo approach as its sole coding method. Process coding, using gerunds to detail contextualized actions, emotions and interactions (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), was undertaken simultaneously with Initial and Axial coding (Saldaña, 2009). In addition to applying action codes, it was also paramount to acknowledge participants’ articulations (read perceptions) of the consequences and implications of the said actions or emotions in their retelling. For WHHW, process coding was intimately linked to memo-writing in order to better explore and map the inter-relationships identified. Thus while its initial coding involved a reflexive deconstruction and decontextualization of gathered data, this was undertaken to compare the constituent excerpts across data sources and subsequently better engage commonalities and contrasts. Ultimately, while similar in their deliberate examination of project data with the aim of further knowledge production, each coding First Cycle stage embodies a different (but still related through nuance, iteration and design) analytical attitude.

This awareness is carried through into Second Cycle coding, where the codes developed through Initial Coding (undertaken with WHHW data with an attitude and reflective approach coupled with meticulous line-by-line analysis) were employed in a Focused exercise (Charmaz, 2006). Taking a more streamlined attitude than Axial coding, here codes developed in the Initial coding process are examined for those are the most significant (make the most analytical sense)
(Saldaña, 2009) without the commensurate analyses regarding dimensions. It is through Axial Coding that the disassembled excerpts were first reconstituted throughout each step through the constant comparative method combined these into the notions of developed “category”. Analytical memos were essential to this analytical stage and it is here that one first hopes to achieve saturation. Integration of these notions contributed to the development of a central or core category, through which all categories and subcategories are related.
4 Results and Analyses

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the analyses and results of the WHHW project. It proposes that the experiences of its interviewed child protection workers are broadly characterized by 5 thematic Ds: experiences of Determination, Dependence and interdependent Distance/Dissonance/Disconnect. These experiences can be further understood as exercises in child protection myth, myth-making and myth-perpetuation. It is offered that the child protection myth project is delineated by allegiance to the noble callings of child safety and improved family functioning evidenced in workers’ determination to proudly provide child protection services despite feelings of liability-related anxiety and disposability. It is offered that current child protection practice is premised on a myth of individual worker accountability despite acknowledgement of overwhelming occupational expectations and systemic constraints. Thus the perpetuation of the child protection system depends on workers’ continued labour within a Sisyphean occupational environment characterized by distance and related occupational disconnect between workers and those responsible for the regulatory systems practitioners enact and the communities these workers ultimately service. The sections that follow will examine each of the foundational thematic factors; a) determination, b) dependence and c) distance/dissonance/disconnect.

4.2 A Note on the Use of “Named” Participants

It should be stated that each of the WHHW project participants has been given a pseudonym. So while interviewee input in the paragraphs that follow is denoted using a first and last name, these monikers in no way identify participants but rather have been used instead of numbers in an attempt to underscore the subjectivity and humanity of participants in a way that a
numbered code may not. Thus, while participants are “named” throughout this chapter, their anonymity has been respected in that they are not identified.

4.3 Determination

The myths of the child protection system require the pride and commitment of its employees to sustain them. Despite the difficulties associated with their jobs, interviewed child protection workers love their work and believe in its societal value. They remain resolute in their efforts to assure child safety and improve family functioning. This determination can be seen in their (a) occupational pride despite feelings of (b) disposability and vulnerability; (c) anxiety regarding perpetual responsibility; and (d) understanding of liability discourse(s) as disciplinary.

4.3.1 Occupational Pride

We screw up and we make mistakes, but I think …our attempts to protect children [are] important and invaluable. (Sree Aguelo)

Interviewed child protection workers expressed a deep sense of pride in their profession and occupational practices. While many interviewees reported being guarded about who they told they were child protection workers and when, several also maintained that it was a matter of not necessarily wanting to open up unwanted discussion or run the risk of making strangers/mere acquaintances uncomfortable. Thus these decisions, while they might be seen at some level as “hiding”, should not be interpreted as a consequence of occupational shame. The negotiated presentation of child protection workers’ professional selves to the public (including during their non-work lives), and an understanding of the profession’s short-comings did not prevent, interviewed participants from expressing great pride and enthusiasm for their work and the societal functions they perform. Thus, despite the difficulties associated with their occupational
roles, workers reported receiving great personal satisfaction from their efforts. Below, Ms. Aguelo and Ms. Nemec talk about these rewards:

Well, I think that I would say that our work is invaluable…I really do like this job. And even though it’s not the greatest some days and you’re overworked sometimes and maybe feel a little underpaid at times and not appreciated, I really, really do like the job. (Sree Aguelo)

and

I’ve been doing child welfare for 23 years…so if I really didn’t believe in the child welfare system I wouldn’t be here… But and I’ve made lots of sacrifices in my career for that, but I generally enjoy, which is the self-serving part of doing the work in order to see the difference that it can have on people’s lives and I like that. (Elaine Nemec)

Highlighting the juxtaposition of concerns regarding occupational constraints and the reward of her relational work with youth, Shanna Borel intoned:

I always say this, if I left the agency it would be for the political stuff and the government, like, standards and policies and procedures and stuff that we can’t do anything about, but it would never be because of the kids I service ever because I truly enjoy that work. (Shanna Borel)

Ms. Borel noted that, like many of her colleagues, she never expected that she would remain a child protection worker for as long as she had (11 years) and that for her, only agency and/or regulatory politics could precipitate her leaving her job. Her admission underscores the tension inherent to this theme. Despite the professional pride expressed by all the interviewees, it is not the difficulties of their work with children and families that constitute occupational problems. Interviewed child protection practitioners said they love their work with agency-
involved families but they also reported that they have difficulty with the procedural, organizational, and regulatory constraints that complicate their work with families.

Thus, many project participants, when asked to consider why they performed child protection work, were philosophical in their responses. They were direct regarding the occupational tensions inherent to the work they did and chose, when faced with the fundamental query “why do this work”, to focus not, on their everyday systemic struggles but, on their love of the work, on poignant encounters with thankful children and families, on “day-to-day things…[and]…small victories”. (Rosalinda Copland)

Because that’s the work you do. I mean, people do jobs because they like doing the jobs, right? So...you’re not going to want to stop wanting to help families because nobody’s saying thank you or nobody’s giving you a reward. …[You] look for your own rewards. So to me, you know, …you sit in a restaurant and a man who you placed a child with years ago comes up and recognizes you and shows you a picture of that child now grown… [You] do it because you know that it’s a job that needs to be done. (Esperanza Brendle)

Including one worker who laughingly inferred that her love for child protection practice was evidence that she was “psychotic” (Leonie Cuff), workers reported developed understandings of the problematics, responsibilities and real returns associated with their praxis. Ms. Doris maintained:

I absolutely love it. I just love it… I get up in the morning and I am happy to come to the office. I mean, throughout the ten years it hasn’t always been like that, right?…But, yes, I love it. I think that we have an opportunity to have such a great impact on people, on people’s lives…I don’t know, because we do have the power to do that too, right? That
power is not necessarily negative, that power – so if [the agency she works for] is calling to get something for somebody, that is, you know, that’s a little bit up here, right? That’s an okay thing, as long as [the power is] used properly...But I can say, “You know what? It’s a great gig”...

That’s all I can say...I’ve met a lot of magical people here...their commitment and their talent and their skills set I emulate or try to everyday... And I am seasoned enough to anything negative, it’s not relevant. (Allyson Doris)

The child protection professionals interviewed for this project recounted examples of their love for the field, child protection and their determination to ensure child safety and improve familial functioning despite the day-to-day challenges they face. Their occupational pride is constituent of the employee perseverance required to support the child protection mythology of a sustainable child protection system. While child protection workers believe in the importance of their familial engagements and readily acknowledge the regulatory constraints and occupational difficulties associated with their work, they chose to focus on limited praxis-sustaining occupational rewards. Such expressions of personal agency and professional focus would be additionally laudable if it were not for interviewees’ concomitant admissions that despite the reverence afforded these employment positives, their attitudes served to obscure (accept as “not relevant”) an occupational culture often rife with worker blame and systemic indifference toward employees.

4.3.2 Disposable workers

Thus, despite obvious pride in the work that they continued to perform, many interviewees also described feeling unprotected and less than valued in their places of employment. While there were near universal descriptions of good relationships with their
current and immediate supervisors, project participants described knowing that should something go wrong on their caseloads that they were ostensibly “on their own” in the face of internal or external agency review.

I am not naive enough to think that my supervisor will support me to the end. If the water’s hot, she’ll support me. If it’s…a boil over, she’s jumping ship. That’s just the reality of the job (Sofia Puig).

It might be offered that these perceptions were linked to an accepted occupational undercurrent of highly individualized child protection worker responsibility and overarching concerns regarding employee and agency liability. These revelations might cause one to question what such an occupational atmosphere might mean for the openness to and responsiveness of child protection work environments to worker concerns and/or worker collective occupational advocacy. That is, if child protection’s occupational culture is infused with a categorical (“lump it or leave it”) engagement with its professional demands, what place can concerns raised by workers, however legitimate, occupy?

Analyses indicated that workers felt unprotected and “disposable”. For example, below, we hear one worker lament that it was communicated to her during her initial new worker orientation that the expectation was that she would be able adapt to work demands or ultimately leave the agency’s employ. While she acknowledges that this can be said for any work environment, one does also wonder about the statuses of workers within the type of work environment that deems reinforcement of such a message essential at the outset of employment. This interviewee comments

I feel disposable. I have no thought or no doubt in my mind there are 50 other people that can take my job. I’m not special … and that’s just my attitude. That’s the impression I
get…[In the] new hires training I had…[Human Resources was] very clear - our upper management has essentially said that if you can’t tough it out, maybe this isn’t the job for you -- which to me, yes, it’s a difficult job, so you need to have somewhat of a backbone and you need to be able to deal with it, but that’s with any job. You need to be able to deal with what the job is and some people can and some people can’t (Tina Shunk).

In the above excerpt, one can feel the tension between the interviewee’s feelings of vulnerability (“I’m not special”), her occupational reality (to date she has been special enough to “tough it out” in a “difficult” job) and the environmental messaging (“lump it or leave”) that underscores a culture that from the outset constructs any worker difficulty as an indicator of categorical professional unsuitability. One might argue that workers feelings of vulnerability and disposability are therefore not distinct but perhaps a heightened consequence of a job description whose all-encompassing nature mandates response and can therefore brook no dissent. It might be argued that the message implicit to the “lump it or leave it” attitude is one that may, at best, acknowledge problematic work circumstances but is unwilling, by design/mandate, to support any meaningful occupational change.

The tension implicit to agency messaging, worker experiences of vulnerability and their professional realities is not expressed exclusively in the agency-worker dynamic but also finds parallels in worker/inter-departmental and worker/extra-agency relationships. So, while Ms. Shunk described a worker-management experience from early in her child protection career, Leonie Cuff’s quote below speaks to her feelings of vulnerability/disposability as understood through a sense of having to protect herself even when working as part of an in-house professional team:
Yes, I do [feel disposable]. It kind of goes back to that support; I mean that’s where you almost feel like you’re replaceable and where you fight people internally. And I use the word fight, but you know what I mean, like you have to cover your back basically. And you think, “Oh why should I have to do that? I’m a professional” and it should be a team approach. Because it always appears to be a team approach, but really it doesn’t get that feel when you’re into the job (Leonie Cuff).

Here again, one sees the expressed vulnerability (“I feel [disposable]”), organizational messaging (referencing a “team approach”) and interviewee experiences that belie the occupational mythology (she has “to cover [her] back despite professions of a “team approach”). We witness the tension between a worker’s desire for a professionalized “team approach” and her contested (with other employees) and contesting (problematizing professional rhetoric) occupational experience. Workers report feeling vulnerable and disposable because prevailing organizational messaging is not in keeping with their experiences. This lack of organizational consistency is ignored at workers’ peril (Cuff’s insistence that one needs to “fight” to protect oneself) and yet neither can it readily be challenged (“lump it or leave”).

The starkest project example of the disposable vulnerability that interviewees spoke to follows a similar tack but includes collateral social service professionals. Selena Bissett maintained:

I think that for me was one of the very first, very blunt messages that I got that the buck does stop on us because the fact that we are mandated that, regardless of the environment, if there are children there and they are deemed to be not safe, we have to go in regardless…That’s why I said that people don’t understand the work we do and in terms of how hard that could be...because we’re expendable and I think the first time I actually
really realized that was I went into a home in [a major city] and this home was so bad that I had police officers there who wouldn’t go in (Selena Bissett).

Ms. Bissett went on to describe a hoarding situation so extreme that neither the assigned police officers, building inspectors, fire marshal nor public health officials would physically implicate themselves due to hygienic concerns. She reported that these collateral agents flatly refused to even enter the home until after she had, apprehended the children, gotten the remaining family members to tidy and was able to assure the community collaterals regarding the state of the home.

So I laughed and said to my boss, “In other words, all these people won’t go in because of the fear of possible hepatitis, infection, being infested or anything like that, but we’re expendable because of the mere fact that there were children in this home that need to be protected” (Selena Bissett).

In the face of real health and safety concerns, Ms. Bissett laughingly acknowledged what many interviewees also reported: she and others like her are expendable in the social service process and their occupational realities and behavioural mandates are unlike those of other social service professionals12.

Ultimately, one might argue that these quotes point to the notion that even from the earliest moments in child protection workers’ careers they are encouraged to understand the primacy of “the work” and thus dissuaded from interrogating the possible imbalances of “the working”. That is, workers understand that they must adapt to the demands of the employment milieu despite the inconsistencies inherent to their feelings of disposability/vulnerability and

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12 The unpacking of this experience should not be viewed as an outright condemnation of worker commitment to child safety but as an attempt to begin to query how such responsibility is enacted in the lives of child protection workers and what may be lost and/or gained in the process.
their occupational realities, as it is the professional mandate and organizational messaging that
trumps even their own lived experiences. They continue to doggedly work behind the scenes of
this occupational façade (those who cannot, leave) and in so doing perpetuate its myth of
sustainability. Yet, even as it is maintained that child protection workers’ determination in the
face of occupational inconsistencies support occupational mythology, it must also be re-asserted
that this is not done without sophisticated worker understanding and navigation of the conflicted
nature of the occupational terrain.

While the possible implications of frontline child protection workers’ feelings of
vulnerability upon their practice decisions and behaviours will be further discussed in the section
examining themes related to fear and liability, it is worth further noting here that workers, like
Ms. Cuff and others, reported occasionally feeling they needed to take action to protect
themselves within their child protection work environments. From their behaviours it might be
inferred that they understood not only the contested nature of their occupational behaviour (with
clients, as employees), but also the potential cost associated with the professional risks run.

I think, if we take a leap of faith and do what kind of makes sense for the family -- Are
we prepared to take that risk? Can you justify your decision and if you can yourself,
you’ve got to almost stop and take a step back and ask would the agency stand behind
you to justify that decision? (Selena Bissett)

Thus, this worker’s assessment and those of others like her, occur on multiple fronts.
While they evaluate their actions relative to intervention appropriateness, agency standards and
personal risk aversion (that is, they are assessing the appropriateness of the intervention for
family/child), they are also calculating whether or not the agency will support them should
something negative occur. Considering their feelings of vulnerability and disposability, their
day-to-day praxis might be seen as a professional engagement with “acceptable occupational risk” as influenced but still distinct from the common (ministerial or documentary) use of the term.

Interviewees articulated their active engagement with calculations of what might be termed “acceptable occupational risk” or the levels of possibility that workers are willing to tolerate in order to achieve greater child protection goals. One is reminded that such evaluation might be better understood within a context of a regulatory system that many workers already understand as fraught. Acceptable risk involves the assessment and determination required to continue practicing in a child protection system one often experiences as impractical. This assessment and determination is coupled with a certain fatalism regarding possible systemic/regulatory/occupational consequences and a strong vocational allegiance that is not fully agency- or ministry-based but bounded by personal convictions regarding children’s safety and associated entitlements. It is not about whether or not something may happen to a child – this risk is an axiom for child protection – but whether/if something does occur do workers feel assured of agency support:

I think that occasionally I say to myself, “Crap, I’m going to get fired. What was I thinking?” I think those of us who get mixed up in some of these [complicated] files, do it fairly frequently. [A co-worker] and I would say, “Is the [agency entrance card] working today? OK, we can get into the building.”

Then I’m fortunate enough to be this old to say, “I did the best I could. Do what you need to do”... Just because this is the [agency/ministerial] expectation, doesn’t mean that’s what’s best for our families or that’s best for my mental health...I know when to put my foot over [the line] and let me tell you, I have put my foot over when I’ve had
Because at the end of the day, if I can’t live with the decisions and what I’ve done, then I shouldn’t be in this field (Sofia Puig).

Here, Ms. Puig’s assertions remind us that she and her colleague know they negotiate their day-to-day practices within a context bounded by agency and regulatory protocol and expectations. She further problematizes the dilemmas encountered by many veteran workers who, when faced with increasingly complex family files, concede that it is difficult to negotiate these interests and that should they “get it wrong” they could quickly find themselves “on the outside looking in” in a figurative and literal manner.

Such sentiment is steeped in a very personal(ized) understanding of their roles in the lives of the families and children they encounter. Thus workers have an understanding of their diminished (disposable) value with the child protection system but reconcile this lack of acknowledgement through a determined fealty, not necessarily, to their employing agency but to a different (personally articulated) occupational ideal and an stoic acceptance of the harsh occupational consequences associated with adherence to that set of values when it contravenes the child protection system (“I can’t live with the decisions and what I’ve done, then I shouldn’t be in this field”).

Thus, though cognizant of their often precarious positioning within child protection systems (precariousness that workers understand as disposability), it is offered that frontline workers negotiate their professional behaviours through dogged adherence to individually articulated occupational values and exhibit determination through a negotiated praxis that exemplifies a personalized “acceptable occupational risk”.

4.3.2.1 Stress leave as challenge to occupational culture and myth.

An interesting additional undercurrent to this theme of worker determination in the face of occupational vulnerability emerged when interviewees talked about their experiences of stress leave. Multiple participants described feeling badly for “taking time off” (i.e. stress-related leave) and/or the annoyance of their colleagues when faced with an absent co-worker despite what one would assume are serious medical concerns. While this could be explained, in part, by the increases in workload that the remaining child protection workers must absorb, I would like to offer that these workplace occurrences also speak to, what at least in practice, becomes the individualization of systemic issues. The absences of overwhelmed and/or ill workers who exercise their option to temporarily remove themselves from the work environment run the risk of threatening the integrity of a system/mythology perpetuated by high work demands while placing their determined colleagues (upon whom their professional success also rests, as they are needed to assist) in what then becomes a further amplification of already insecure occupational environments.

As discussed earlier in this section, it might be argued that child protection’s occupational culture facilitates worker feelings of vulnerability and disposability, contributes to the perpetuation of a potentially dismissive culture by proscribing workers’ ability to articulate concerns or to even organizationally receive this input as other than worker inadequacy and thus negatively influences the likelihood of systemic change or redress. Ironically, interviewees’ discussions of stress leave help us to better understand child protection worker determination in the face of this reinforced occupational precariousness.

For example, Tina Shunk and other participants questioned the nature of support for workers struggling with occupational stress despite their expressed commitment to child protection practice. Ms. Shunk maintained: 
If you do go off on stress leave, I would say that the general attitude that I get of other people is... annoyance because, as much as it’s nice to believe we’re all social workers and so on [but], if you’re not here, my workload increases and it’s that tough thing of where’s the support before that? I really struggle with that...

To say that I feel supported, no. We had an entire team almost on stress leave. To me that just screams ‘Hello’?! Nothing changes. I don’t think that people necessarily listen. I think also, and again they’re kind of little things, but it just speaks to that I don’t feel at all valued as an employee. (Tina Shunk)

What one can note here are the similarities to previously articulated organizational concerns. According to Ms. Shunk, workers, off on leave, cannot be/are not treated with compassion because of the state of crisis left in their wake but she rejects the individualization of this generalized “annoyance” by asking where the organizational support for employees was before stress leave became an eventuality or inevitability. Once again, the propensity of child protection employers to exemplify what appears to Ms. Shunk and others like her, as a complete lack of engaged organizational responsiveness to worker realities has been highlighted even as it underscores her disposability (“We had an entire team almost on stress leave. To me that just screams ‘Hello’?! Nothing changes… I don’t feel at all valued as an employee”). Her sentiments highlight the definitional symbiosis that is required for child protection myth perpetuation: workers are “valuable” in so far as they support occupational culture (i.e. mythology) through compliance (e.g. compliance in documentation, in protocol, even in the minimization of physical and mental health manifestations).
Equally poignantly, another project participant described her “traumatic” experience of negotiating illness as a “conscientious” employee within the child protection occupational context that she indicates she gave much of herself to:

I put a lot of effort into…[the multiple concurrent positions I held]…There’s a [work-life balance] cost to that...I was sick a lot…[Agency administration] went over my stats…It made me feel devalued when they questioned it…that they didn’t believe that I was sick…

It seems like a trivial thing, but for me…it was traumatic. I felt like my professionalism was being called into question...I just wanted to do my job...I didn’t want to have to go through that process -- to prove what I already knew to be true: I worked hard and that…it impacted my health -- so that I was sick. (Tashana Wunderlich)

Here, Ms. Wunderlich’s experience points to the difficulties associated with what in any other occupational environment might be considered a reasonable worker expectation among veteran workers who see themselves as doing good work. In exchange for her diligence and determination, Ms. Wunderlich unwittingly assumed a certain reciprocity and understanding from the individuals with whom she believed she enjoyed solid work relationships. Instead, she was disappointed and disheartened by the individualization of an oft-inevitable outcome: overwork contributes to poor health.

It might be offered that workers’ experiences of difficulty are individualized and called into question because they challenge the sanctity of the current child protection occupational arrangements. Illness or absence constitute a threat to an already precariously balanced system and must be addressed in a manner which re-institutes balance and dissuades further threat.
Finally, Maude Gaudreau also described the “judgment” and anger directed at her due to her stress leave. Her comments underscore the lack of occupational responsiveness to repeatedly raised concerns she and others mentioned as contributing to their feelings of undervalue, in addition to supporting the notion that leaves of absence for work-related illnesses/stress offer some challenge to the prevailing occupational narrative of current child protection practice as sustainable. Thus, individualizing occupational concerns, that is, insisting that they are mostly due to the professional inadequacies of specific workers through active (punitive managerial engagement) or passive (non-responsiveness to expressed concerns) means, allows more substantive and/or systemic concerns to be obscured: thus interfering with the possibility of structural analysis or response.

As previously mentioned, interviewed child protection workers talked at length about their determination to do their best on behalf of client children and families but these practitioners readily admitted to the impracticable nature of the very system whose practices they strive so hard to uphold. The child protection mythology is perpetuated and sustained through the dogged efforts and complicit behaviours of those it often victimizes. Ironically, worker and agency negative attitudes toward stress leaves and other medical absences reveal the existential threats to systemic and mythological coherence that these ruptures create. As one interviewee noted when discussing her employer’s indifferent response to her stress-leave and its agency-wide causal contributors:

I remember my counsellor saying to me, “I wonder if the reason stress leave is…looked upon in such a negative way in your agency is because every one of them is walking that fine line on a daily basis”. And I said, “You know what? I think you might be onto
something”. “And they all realize that they could be in your shoes with one step”. And I thought, “Wow”. (Maude Gaudreau)

The inclusion of stress leave findings in the section devoted to a discussion of worker determination is purposeful. Through them, one can begin to see the tensions inherent to the occupational mythologies that underscore contemporary child protection practice. Child protection practitioners’ devotion to the work is unwavering, so that despite their feelings of disposability and personal costs they themselves continue to absorb, there is still ambivalence toward those who, for reasons that will always be suspect, are not actively contributing to myth maintenance.

The child protection mythology requires worker determination in order to sustain it. Determined practitioners love their profession and are proud of the work they are able to do. They also possess sophisticated understandings of the fraught nature of their professional environments and yet continue to attempt their best work in the face of impractical circumstance. Despite their feelings of disposability and vulnerability, their day-to-day practices with children and families are negotiated within prescriptive regulatory regimes and relative to personal understandings of “acceptable occupational risk”. In these workers’ ability to provide service to families and children in need, this determination is laudable, yet the single-minded nature of these action can also be regarded as perpetuating, through their labour, a system that disregards them and their work.

Feelings of pride and disposability are not the only emotive states that child protection interviewees described as present in their day-to-day practice. The following section opens with a lengthy quote from an interviewed participant that evocatively illustrates another facet of worker determination: determination in the face of anxiety, fear and discipline.
4.4 Anxiety, Fear and Discipline

[That’s]…the catch 22 of our business, right? We’re supposed to create hope and goals for families, but at the same time, at our end, we’re making sure we’re covering our butts…Because what in case that family comes back and says something? Or what in case somebody dies in that family and we’re involved with them?...It’s that fear…

But our worst fear, all of us, is losing so many on our caseload for something that we haven’t done because it would be looked at, “Well, why didn’t you go and visit them?”...

You know, “Well, it looks like from your case notes you haven’t been out in 60 days”. I don’t know if you can recover from that… as a worker. What that does to your self-worth and your self-esteem. (Shanna Borel)

Ms. Borel begins by detailing the practice predicament that child protection workers often encounter: seeking to empower families and children while addressing organizational demands within a potentially litigious relationship. Interestingly, the tension inherent to (prospective) court involvement exists, not only as a backdrop to the working relationship between child protection worker and parents but is paralleled by similar potential (for review and sanction) in the agency-worker or worker-societal dynamic. Next, Ms. Borel speaks to the fears associated with not only negative case outcomes (most tragically, child harm or deaths) but also the further personal responsibility often embodied by workers deemed to have (potentially) overlooked a practice proviso or left an administrative requirement unmet. Though not mentioned in the quote above, Ms. Borel went on to detail that these fears exist in a work environment where youth are, by definition, at increased risk of harm (whether within or out of their family homes) while practice options are prescribed by provincial fiscal and service mandates.
Ms. Borel’s statement underscores the child protection worker’s perpetual and layered engagements with fear, anxiety and responsibility and as noted in the previous section, their ongoing commitment to continue to practice despite these engagements. The paragraphs that follow detail, not only interviewees’ understandings of these feelings but their implications for workers’ determined praxis. The contributory category of anxiety, fear and discipline is comprised of two sub-categories: (a) anxiety and ubiquitous responsibility and (b) fear as disciplinary.

4.4.1 Anxiety and ubiquitous responsibility.

I think about it every day that I’m going to make a wrong decision that will ultimately jeopardize or harm will come to a child. I fear that I’m going to be the cause of … I remember when I was a [Child in Care] worker, I used to just fear audit because if one of my files weren’t compliant, I’d be the reason why we wouldn’t get a license (Lorrie Goodwill).

Ms. Goodwill talks not only about her decision-making’s potential effect upon a child (or family) but also upon her organization’s licensure. In her day-to-day practice, she carries fears of being “the cause” of disaster at both the familial and organizational (read agency) levels. While Ms. Goodwill concerns may, at first glance, seem overly broad, these sentiments are analytically interesting to note because of their breadth - allowing us to follow her sense of (personal) responsibility from its origin and primary source (child safety) as it funnels outward to encompass, not only her practice decisions but also includes her perceptions of responsibility for the future of the entire organization (and one could imagine the possible child safety concerns that would occur and continue as a result of agency license loss).

[As] workers, especially when we have infants on our caseload … and we know the situation is marginal, but we can’t do anything in terms of court or anything … There’s
been cases where you just really have a hard time sleeping at night because you’re not thrilled with the situation. There’s nothing you can do, and you just pray that nothing happens to that child. And, you know, to be honest, you hope nothing happens to that child for that child’s sake, but you also hope that nothing happens to the child for your own sake, too. Because any of us can have our cases ripped apart (Esperanza Brendle).

The encompassing nature of Ms. Goodwill’s concerns regarding possible occupational and familial consequence are referenced in the statements like those of Ms. Borel at the start of this section and Ms. Brendle’s above. Ms. Brendle’s comments are interesting not because court involvement necessarily provides additional safety within a family home but because it could add another administrative safeguard that is protective of the worker/agency. The notion of worker responsibility thus potentially extends not only to work not done, as Ms. Borel concerns highlighted, but also to steps that could not be taken (because these actions lie within the purview of other practice actors). It is commonly accepted that should something “happen” in Ms. Brendle’s marginal situation, she will be held responsible.

These observations allow one to query the nature of the responsibility ascribed to and assumed by child protection workers (expressed as occupational determination). While overarching concerns for child safety figure prominently in each interview excerpt, they also include an undercurrent regarding personal and professional responsibility assumed by and/or assigned to workers for steps undertaken (or not) within an occupational context with multiple external loci of control (fiscal, practical, and/or behaviour of governmental, child or parental actors). Thus workers carry many of the individual and structural responsibilities associated with far more control over practice decisions than they actually possess given available tools and support.
This observation should not be taken as a blanket exculpation of any level of worker responsibility or negligent child protection practice but as an initial questioning of ubiquitous responsibility as a common occupational motif. It is no wonder that workers feel anxious when they acknowledge, on balance, the inappropriate nature of their personal responsibility as weighed against occupational control, effectiveness of interventions and support for workers or even client families. It also begs the question that lies at the heart of the next contributory theme. If child protection workers carry these global responsibilities, what occurs when and if something does "happen" (goes wrong)?

4.4.2 Fear as disciplinary.

Fear plays a fundamental role in child protection practice. Child protection practitioners work with it as a backdrop to many of their encounters. Whether cautioning parents or guardians about behaviours that would warrant further agency involvement (Selena Bissett), advising youth of the possible consequences of multiple AWOLs or in child protection worker liability discourse, fear of a more negative consequence is often used as a disciplinary tool. Analyses of participant interviews revealed that contemporary child protection practice is steeped in concerns about liability and commensurate disciplinary issues. While no participants reported any involvement in formal disciplinary action, interviewees discussed at length the effect that fear and discussion of these actions (or rumours, thereof) had upon their behaviours and those of others employees. For instance, referring to documentary requirements, Sree Aguelo reported:

I’ve never went through…a disciplinary [hearing] or anything like that -- but I know that does happen -- to people and…then that creates a sense of fear for everyone. And, you know, … when someone does get into a situation where they are disciplined for
documents not being completed, of course it heightens my anxiety -- and I think “Oh, gosh! That could be me. I better get on that” (Sree Aguelo).

Interestingly, interviewees reported near unanimous satisfaction with their immediate supervisors. They also drew attention to the protective elements of said relationships. Regarding practice negotiation within her supervisory relationship, Rosalinda Copland said:

I advocate the best to my ability, but at the end of the day, it’s a balance not only between what I feel is best for the family, but also that decisions made, there can be ramifications to that and there is also that fear of if something’s going to come back [i.e. warrant file reopening].

That is I think a legitimate concern for me. The climate I feel here is that – I joke all the time I don’t make enough money to make a final decision and part of that in what I see as my role, I do the best that I can…(Rosalinda Copland)

While Ms. Copland went on say she felt lucky to have had supervisors with whom she could “respectfully disagree” it is interesting to note that she calls attention to her fears regarding not only the implications of decision-making regarding a particular family but also the possibility of file return. Even as the potentially under-paid penultimate decision-maker, her administrative fears (regarding returning files) exert their influence upon the practical.

Thus it is offered that even this common salutary supervisory sentiment should be explored within a wider occupational context. Even while interviewees maintain that a good relationship with one’s supervisor supports worker practice by adding an additional layer of accountability to practice decisions – how can this sentiment be understood within the same context as interviewee inputs regarding their perceptions of disposability? What can be said about the environments within which those relationships exist and the decisions these
professional links and practices support? Workers thus acknowledge that they are not to decide alone but that if their “best” is not sufficient, they ultimately carry the responsibilities of all decisions made regarding the families with whom they practice. These dynamics reinforce a certain understanding of themselves within the child protection occupational system and ultimately influence day-to-day practice despite their systemic roots. As countered Lorrie Goodwill:

I think also too, there is a lack of systemic protection for social workers...liability should never exist. When the Ministry says that protection workers should have no more than X amount of cases, why then do I have double that amount of cases? That’s unacceptable and to me. That’s the system allowing for those mistakes to occur, even though it would have been [seen as] the worker’s liability. And that is not okay (Lorrie Goodwill).

Fears regarding liability underscore child protection supervisory relationships. Ms. Copland states this and maintains that she is not “paid enough” to assume the responsibility of final decision-making. Thus, despite interviewees’ generally reporting satisfaction with their supervisors and appreciating the seemingly protective aspects of the consultation process, Ms. Goodwill’s point regarding the perpetual undercurrent of ubiquitous responsibility and fear is an important one. Ms. Goodwill says, “that this is not okay”. Then why does it constitute common child protection occupational practice?

Contemporaneous provincial and more local managerial protocol and regulation enforcement are not the sole arbitrators of worker occupational behaviour, however. Several interviewees acknowledged the continuing chilling effects of judicial actions (inquests, criminal charges). The Jordan Heikamp criminal investigation and Coroner’s inquest were mentioned multiple times (For more details, see footnote 10):
I think I worry because I am old enough to remember that we’ve had a social worker charged. My career has been long enough that I remember that perfectly. I know on the frontline and I’ve been the brunt of it, anything that goes wrong, from there down is going to come down on you like a ton of bricks (Sofia Puig).

And when discussing liability, one worker commented:

The other liability I think I have is just when you get certain cases that are very contentious, I worry about if something happens to these kids, how is that going to end up affecting me because, obviously, from the past where you hear of cases where workers have been charged as a result of the death of a child or what not, you can’t help but wonder what does that means for me (Selena Bissett).

While Ms. Doris issued a more global warning about the nature of child protection work, document protocols and practitioner liability:

Our documents are for the world to see at the end of the day, right, because we are only one subpoena away from an inquest, and that’s true. And that sucks, and I’ve learned it just over the last few years -- but it’s true (Allyson Doris).

Thus even while interviewees reported good working relationships and talked about the kinds of protections said relationships might offer, they still raised concerns related to their nuanced engagement with and understanding of liability notions. Thus, practitioners acknowledge that child protection work transpires in a “fast and furious” (Danae Brimer) “high risk business” environment (Maude Gaudreau), that if/when “something goes wrong” they will be held responsible in part because of their positioning within the occupational hierarchy (frontline=lowest rung, according to Ms. Bissett), that this potentially exposes them to higher
risk of disciplinary action. These sentiments having been confirmed by organizational and/or provincial history but they determinedly continue to practice.

Absolutely ... the biggest error I think we make is we say our clients deserve respect, they have worth and dignity, every child in a loving home, but if you mess up, there won’t be any dignity and there won’t be any respect and it will be, “You didn’t do this, this and this. Your case note was in 24 hours later. You were 15 days instead of 14 seeing that family. You saw them on day 35, you didn’t do the collateral checks.” That’s what it will be…That’s historically how it’s always been…That’s just the reality of the job (Sofia Puig).

As underscored by Ms. Puig’s statements, it might be offered that workers do not accept this as an equitable organizational situation but tolerate it as the environment within which their social working occurs.

While interviewed workers discussed the external pressures associated with liability concerns, they also spoke eloquently about their internalized emotional landscapes: sleepless nights worrying about situations that they could do no more about, believing that there would be little opportunity to defend themselves should something unfortunate occur, fearing for the children involved and for themselves. All this against a backdrop of ubiquitous fear and personalized responsibility:

You know, when you hear stories in the news and we often don’t get an opportunity sort of to defend ourselves in the news. So when a child dies, it’s very easy to blame the child protective services involved. And I think as workers, especially when we have infants on our caseload and we have, you know -- and we know the situation is marginal, but we can’t do anything in terms of court or anything like that and it just -- some -- I know
there’s been cases where you just really have a hard time sleeping at night because you’re not thrilled with the situation. There’s nothing you can do, and you just pray that nothing happens to that child… We seem to bear too much responsibility. (Sree Aguelo)

Workers expressed conceptualizations of liability that encompassed the difficulties of responding to external demands and the constant clamour of their own values and occupational undertakings. Thus, some interviewees described agency liability concerns as secondary to the potential for personal feelings of guilt and responsibility (despite organizational constraints). Below, Ms. Goodwill expands upon her systemic reproach and explains the personal toll and fears implicit to a discussion of child protection practice:

Liability becomes more scary when workload gets too high… When I felt that I personally was becoming liable because I could not keep up with all the work that was being put on me. And so not only was I being liable but, if anything ever happened, I would never forgive myself. I would live with that forever, and I wasn’t comfortable with that. (Lorrie Goodwill)

Danae Brimer echoed this personalized sentiment when she talked about her concerns and the perpetual burden of ubiquitous responsibility and commensurate fear:

Big, big liability - …You know, what if you don’t see the client. Even if you went to try and see them and they weren’t there and then something happens. You know what I mean? Like, you’re liable and you’re responsible for whatever happens. I mean, even if… Things happen and they’re out of your control, I get that, but you’re still going to feel that. You’re going to take on that burden; I don’t care. (Danae Brimer)

Participants like Aguelo, Goodwill, Brimer and others spoke about their sense of fear and responsibility for every negative circumstance, even those they readily acknowledged lay outside
of their control. It is difficult to conceptualize another occupational realm where such ubiquitous culpability could be *de rigeur*. By way of illustration, consider a firefighter who held her/himself responsible for every dollar of fire damage caused at every conflagration attended, let alone mortalities and morbidity.

While it seems ludicrous to hold firefighter responsible for “whatever happens” involving fire, it might be offered that it is just this type of occupational understanding that creates a child protection professional dynamic of disciplinary fear so all-encompassing that workers personalize responsibility for any negative outcome no matter how minimal the associated risk. Workers’ experiences contribute to understanding that because responsibility will be judged in retrospect, they will ultimately and inevitably be seen as failing to have done more.

It is offered that herein lies the more problematic undercurrent to the catch-22 that Ms. Borel referred to at the start of this section. We do not expect firefighters to assume responsibility for fire damage as a matter of principle. We expect them to do what lies in their realm of expertise in order to minimize damage. It might be offered that many child protection workers are systematically encouraged, through the environmental prevalence of liability discourse, to assume a categorical attitude toward negative practice outcomes. Thus workers embody the fears associated with ubiquitous responsibility and discipline themselves through guilt regarding “the possible” and overcompensation through striving required by for the occupational system’s survival. Fear is thus required to support the discipline needed further occupational mythology.

This being said, it cannot be maintained that this is the only understanding at play within the occupational realm. Participants also reported that workers do attempt to ensure some additional protections: taking steps to minimize their risk exposure through rule compliance as
best they can and occasionally through more covert resistance strategies. Interviews with project participants revealed that some, despite agency prohibitions, were keeping “shadow files”: personal documentation detailing worker role in, often controversial, practice decisions and situations.

Well there’s a story of a worker who had a tragedy on the case and kept this shadow file and that saved her in the end...To say, “Hey, I did this” or whatever, “I was told this”. And that’s what saved her in the end...I mean I don’t know the terms of the case, but she kept it for a reason. And it’s kind of like one of those things that the older workers tell the newer workers right away almost (Sree Aguelo).

A surprising number of participants talked about the need for such documentation. One interviewee, raising a recurrent theme, cited the frustration associated with feeling unprotected in her place of employment and wondered why she should have to “cover [her] own butt” using shadow files (Selena Bissett). She questioned why there was no room for dissent within case documentation without recrimination. Another participant raised even more apparently sinister concerns regarding contentious case files:

They’ll change things. Things will go missing in files and you need to protect yourself and you can tell which ones. You know which one is ...political (Sofia Puig).

While workers might agree about their disappointment regarding the perceived need for “shadow files”, they also recognized their roles not only as protection workers but as actors within a wider and always contentious societal discussion. If as Ms. Puig maintains, some cases are “political”, some project participants report that their responses are also calculated.

Thus workers negotiate their appreciation of liability concerns relative to their understanding of the occupational environment, their own values, and disciplinary threats and
proceed accordingly. It might be offered that, despite their fears about potential harm to children or personal responsibility, workers remain determined and committed to continuing their practices and recognize that in worse case scenarios, they may not be afforded organizational protection.

4.5 Dependence

Analyses of the Working Hard or Heart-y Working project interviews allows one to consider that agencies and workers depend on certain supportive and encompassing environments to facilitate child protection practice and assure continued functioning of this occupational system. Though constituent of one contributory factor, the category of dependence will be discussed in terms of two sub-categories: personal supports and occupational dependence.

4.5.1 Personal supports

Interviewees revealed that the primary supports and facilitators of their respective practices included (a) their supervisors, (b) their teams and (c) their families. When asked about her day-to-day practice supports, Esperenza Brendle highlighted all three of these aspects when she noted:

I think your team [supports your practice]. Your supervisor… obviously [as] part of the team. Your support staff in terms of your secretarial support and child protection support worker. And your family. I mean, if your family really don’t support what you’re doing, it makes life very difficult. Well, it’s a very challenging job on a day-to-day basis and some of the things that you see are, you know, [are] very emotive and very hard and difficult. So if your family don’t really understand that…And if you don’t get their support to do whatever it is that you need to do when you go home-- it could be to sit on your own in a cupboard for an hour or whatever it is that you need to do to keep sane,
then, you know, where would all that feeling -- where would all these feelings go? I mean, you could take it home and you would have an unhappy home life. (Esperenza Brendle)

4.5.2 Supervisors.

As seen in the Brendle quote above and referenced by many interviewees, a good relationship with one’s immediate supervisor sustains protection service. Workers mentioned leadership, mentorship and, as previously noted, protective factors (re team advocacy) associated with a successful supervisory relationship.

If we didn’t have [supervisor’s name] [practice] would be very limited. She advocates for us…So if we didn’t have her, [workers’ practice] would probably be very limited because it’s such a big agency...If you don’t have a team manager that doesn’t advocate for you then, of course, some of your needs are not going to be met, but she assures that ours are at all times (Chandra Harland).

Interviewees clearly stated that child protection practitioners depend on the advocacy, consultative and managerial skills of their supervisor to do the work that they do. Here it is important to reiterate the idea, as explored in the previous section, that supervisors, like the frontline workers they lead, sustain the child protection system as multi-faceted actors within a disciplinary system. Thus, even as they are supportive to the teams they lead, they are also accountable to a wider child protection system for these workers’ performance and enforcers of those systemic demands. Thus supervisors, like workers’ paralleled experiences in their engagement with families and agencies, can be disciplinary and disciplined actors even as they are celebrated by those they supervise.
4.5.3 Families.

Interviewed participants exposed an interesting dichotomy when discussing the role family members played in their practices. While some workers talked about familial support for the child protection project as essential to sustainable practice, others spoke to invoking familial commitments as a boundary to the daily encroachments of child protection work. As the quotes below indicate, while occupational practice is often supported by a stable family life, family life can challenge child protection practice and also be challenged by it. These accounts are united in their depictions of women attempting to achieve an appropriate (as personally defined) balance between their professional and familial selves.

Multiple workers mentioned that while trying to respect and accommodate the needs of parents and children they work with they paid high costs. Commenting her efforts to meet client family members outside of work and school hours, Ms. Tashana Wunderlich maintained:

And then I’m not getting home until 6:00 or 7:00 -- and I still haven’t eaten…And I have nothing left -- in terms of patience, energy, you know, empathy -- for my own family…

And that’s something that I noticed --in my career (Tashana Wunderlich).

Ms. Wunderlich went on to discuss how she often struggled at the end of her workday to provide her family with the emotional supports she felt they were entitled to but, because she had used up all of her energy to meet occupational demands, she was unable to provide support to her own family. Below, Selena Bissett talks about the interdependent (but still fraught) relationship between her professional and home lives.

If your family life is settled and its fine, you can do this job, but once your family life starts to unravel, it makes this job that much harder. I think that in itself is a parallel because you do take it home. My husband knows if I’ve had a bad day at work. He knows from my tone and he knows when I walk through the door (Selena Bissett).
Thus we see the juxtaposition of two, at once complementary and contradictory, assessments of the necessity of family involvement in sustaining child protection practice. The very relationships deemed necessary to child protection work are also threatened by child protection work. While Ms. Brendle (start of section) maintained that familial support is essential to child protection practice, Ms. Wunderlich and Ms. Brendle agreed with and problematize that assertion by noting that the challenges posed to worker-family emotional health and functioning by child protection practice may actually compromise familial support.

Many workers, aware of the influence that one area can have on another, described concerted efforts to establish and balance their extra-occupational commitments and their employment. Tina Shunk insisted that she “[couldn’t] do everything” and referenced her spouse’ perceptions of her inability to “put boundaries in place”. These concerns were echoed in Elaine Nemec’s decisions to do less overtime:

I can’t sustain [as much overtime as in the past]. My health is being impacted, my family life is impacted and, yes, I’m not prepared to keep rolling with the system in order to balance the system out when it doesn’t balance us out (Elaine Nemec).

Ms. Nemec’s insistence that she would no longer “keep rolling with the system” that does not “balance [workers] out” is noteworthy for its articulation of the systemic dependence inherent to the theme of dependence and particularly apt when considered relative to the child protection occupational equanimity achieved by Chandra Harland and her family.

While numerous workers talked about the need to balance their work and home lives, Chandra Harland believes her spouse began volunteering and working part-time for their local child protection agency because he wished to spend more time with her. This being said, she acknowledged that other workers and families do not share the same experiences.
He shares my passion with [child protection]. I think that’s what makes it successful right now. He realizes how much the kids and the families need us. He knows that, but others don’t have that and they expect that their partner is just an 8:30 to 4:30 job and that’s it and they question them…I’m so lucky that mine has shared it with me (Chandra Harland).

When faced with the voracious needs of the child protection system, could Ms. Harland’s spouse be literally embodying the adage, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em”? In the occupational choices Ms. Harland’s family has made she acknowledged the essential nature of the practice support her children and partner provide to their community. However, if a family that child protects together, stays together it is perhaps because they are also willing to pay through the emotional and relationship pieces, but – and they are…there to help me through some things as I sit at home and cry about a particular situation or I’m up pacing with a glass of wine or… (Chandra Harland)

respond to the insatiable needs of the child protection system with emotional and even physical backing. Thus, in the assertions of interviewees like Ms. Harland and Ms. Nemec, women who have made very different choices regarding their work-life balances, we still see articulated evidence and acknowledgement of the dependence inherent to the child protection practice occupational realm.

4.5.4 Teammates.

Interviewees spoke overwhelmingly about the importance of one’s teammates for child protection practice but as with each of the supports mentioned here have indicated this even these supports are not without constraints. So that while Chandra Harland and other interviewees like her talk about the camaraderie and support she shares with her colleagues, workers like
Esperanza Brendle note that team expectations can sometimes interfere with her own workload management.

Well, I think that being in a team atmosphere - we get quite a bit of support from each other, which is very helpful because we have team meetings. So we get information or whatever or discuss things, but then we also have informal team meetings where we'll be on our break but still talk about work, unfortunately. And we'll converse about each other's cases or whatever to, “Oh I was in that situation and I did this”, so I think that that's a huge support on our level is that (Leonie Cuff).

It should be noted that the notion of professional collegiality and support extends beyond the teams interviewees were assigned to where they could receive assistance with daily practice tasks but also included those child protection workers that interviewees could consult with in more informal settings (hallways, lunchrooms). Though roundly saluted as positive this collegiality was not without complications. Ms. Brendle, as a veteran worker, noted that being available for the crises of others often meant more difficulties managing her own caseload.

Describing navigating the demands of collegiality, she maintained:

Well, I suppose expectations from the team [are the biggest issues affecting my day-to-day work on an individual level], that really is the only thing that distracts me from focusing on my day...If something’s going on with somebody else or they need advice or they need help. Then of course you’re going to help them and so -- you don’t get your things done...But for the most part I can keep on track (Esperanza Brendle).

Thus interviewed practitioners discussed at length the importance for practice of the support offered by their supervisors, team and families. It is offered that child protection systems are premised on the foundations provided by these personal practice supports.
4.6 Occupational Dependence

We get often e-mails or how many files do you have? Well, you know, I want to be able to say 50 -- because that’s how I feel...But you can’t. You’ve...got to say 10 or 20 -- whatever it is. Whereas there’s somebody sitting there with, you know, 30 -- and you get told, well, you’ve got to have the next five, right? And that’s the point where you think, okay, this is ridiculous, right -- this is unmanageable, but then you find a way. (Esperanza Brendle)

In addition to personal practice supports, interviewed child protection workers discussed at length their professional engagement with agency and ministerial expectations. The notions contained in the following section emerged quite early in the interviewing process and contributed to the summative idea that the child protection system was dependent on several occupational myths for its sustenance and perpetuation. It might be offered that these perceptions are linked to a certain fatalism regarding the nature of child protection practice (“the files have to go somewhere”). A fatalism that serves to reinforce occupational expectations that contribute to an obscuring of the time required to execute practice tasks required to be a competent child protection worker. The paragraphs below will explore the notions of (a) occupational expectations (impossible work?); (b) time and (c) child protection workers as “experts in everything”; (d) overtime and (e) workload in an effort to further detail the nature of the child protection system’s occupational demands.

4.6.1 Occupational expectations.

Well, I think that the expectation of the agency is somewhat unrealistic in that it’s dependent on the amount of cases that are coming through, for example. So you’re not
always able to keep the numbers of files that you’re supposed to comfortably be able to work at. So the expectation is that if they come in through the door, you have to service them, which is understandable in some ways, but in other ways it makes it then impossible because you’re, you know, perhaps able to manage 20 cases, but all of a sudden you’re expected to manage 26. So then that affects your ability to keep on task and keep… regularly seeing your clients and knowing what’s going on because that’s another six other families you’ve got to think about in your head. The response is not always as quick as you would like it. So, you know, you can make a request for something and you need that answer this week, but you may not get it for three weeks, so… that affects you. So you're always dependent on somebody else. You’re waiting. You're always waiting for a colleague or a childcare worker or a child protection worker or supervisor or management, you know. It's -- so you're autonomous in some ways, but you’re not…because you've still got this other system around you that you've got to work within. (Esperanza Brendle)

As indicated in the lengthy Brendle quote above, one might note that a certain fatalism was attached to the amount of work performed due to the very nature of child protection practice. Throughout the interviews, several workers expressed some frustration regarding “unrealistic” work expectations. The phrase, “So the expectation is that if they come in through the door, you have to service them, which is understandable in some ways, but in other ways it makes it then impossible because… you’re perhaps able to manage 20 cases, but all of a sudden you’re expected to manage 26” (Brendle), succinctly captures the tension inherent to this occupational expectation. It appears, therefore, that workers are expected to offer service to the community
based on community demand at any given moment: assumptions which are unrelated to worker capacity and through these occupational expectations trump an integrated understanding of said capacity.

Workers expressed an appreciation for the fact that there were efforts made to equitably respond to service demands by, for example, distributing cases in numerically equal fashion (as reported by Ms. Brendle). Unfortunately, as has been/will be discussed, when considering worker comments regarding case distribution, workload assignment is an issue far more complex than the number of files any one worker may be responsible for.

Neither were workers insisting that there be no documentation requirements. The concerns expressed by interviewees queried the seemingly unfettered occupational expectations associated with them as child protection service providers.

As reported by Leonie Cuff:

So when you have 18 kids and you're trying to schedule all that, it's not that the paperwork is not important. It is, but you're documenting it in your case notes. You're documenting it in your Plan of Care. You're also documenting it in your Social History. Not to mention if the agency needs you to fill out whatever for whatever they're doing. So some of the stuff is not as easy to just -- well you have to get everything done and there's just an abundance.

Like, I understand why there's an abundance [of recording]. There's an accountability there. But then the numbers that we have as far as children to work with and the detail that needs to be done, the numbers are too high to get that work done (Leonie Cuff).
While referring to the systemic (read agency/mandate) demands upon workers as “seemingly unfettered” may appear hyperbolic, this language is an attempt to acknowledge the sentiments of participants who often spoke of their struggles to meet any number of ministerial/agency, documentation, temporal, service and/or protocol requirements. For example, Danae Brimer, when discussing recording requirements, offered:

So I don’t know anyone who’s got their recordings done on time and if they are, I wonder if they really would. It’s impossible-- Like, you can’t. You can’t because you’ve also got to take into consideration what’s blowing up, what you are dealing with, are you in court, what’s happening there, have you had trials, are you prepping for trial, is stuff happening on the team? (Danae Brimer)

Interestingly, Ms. Brimer’s invocation presents a nuanced contrast to another child protection worker’s sense that child protection work could indeed be performed in keeping with Ministry standards and expectations though “not consistently and not…absolutely -- but for the most part” (Brendle). Noting further that “not everybody can necessarily get to that level unless they’re helped… Yeah… this is an impossible job then, do you follow”? (Brendle), one wonders how this assertion regarding the need for assistance to perform at mandated levels are negotiated within the challenging employment contexts lamented by Brimer. Or more bluntly, how do individual child protection workers respond to calls to address minimum Ministry standards and the very real needs of their client children and families while navigating understandings of child protection’s expectations as “unmanageable” or near “impossible” to address?
That's probably I think one of the biggest difficulties, and I mean we are always faced with that challenge of trying to be creative. I've heard many a time someone say, "I know this is impossible but can you do it anyway". And I'm like, "No, I cannot do the impossible. That is a non-question". But that is the question that exists in child welfare and I think that’s unfortunate (Lorrie Goodwill).

It might be offered that Ms. Goodwill’s non-question forms a constituent part of child protection: the tacit acceptance of difficult occupational expectations by child protection workers, not in their rhetoric but through their actions, however coerced, is a trope upon which contemporary child protection practice depends- a foundation upon which the myth of a sustainable child protection system rests.

4.6.2 Time.

Related to the idea of occupational expectations is the notion of time (or lack thereof). Interviewees spoke to temporal concerns and their impact on opportunities for self-care, opportunities for professional development, client engagement and support, and scheduling stressors.

Time. I would say there's not enough time. And I know you could easily say that for everything, but sometimes you come in, something’s happened and legal needs something yesterday, so they’re harassing you. I shouldn't say harassing you...But, you know, they’re saying, “And you've got to get that done. That's a priority” and you've got something else that's happening that you've got to deal with, so time I think is a big thing.

Multiple workers expressed awareness related to the impacts of time availability and scheduling upon their practice realities and associated professional expectations (both during
initial and subsequent contacts). Speaking to the lack of time and increased possibility of practice oversights, one worker maintained,

And I think sometimes when we do these investigations, if people had only taken that time to review the history really, really correctly, some of the mistakes wouldn't have happened, but you can't do it all... And, sure, their case notes might all be up to date, but did they really, really know that five years ago this happened? (Sree Aguelo)

Ms. Aguelo went on to lament that she often wished she could do more for her client families but felt temporally constrained and thus unable to do the many things she believed would support children and families. Her concerns are echoed by another interviewee:

I don’t believe it ever comes from a professional not wanting to help people. I think it comes from just the climate of social services, maybe. It's not just social services, but whether it be not-for-profit agencies and that sort thing, where it’s just unfortunately that the theme is workers just being over-burdened, I find. And when you have more time, you give better service (Lorrie Goodwill).

More specifically, many participants also maintained that while they were committed to effective time management in scheduling, there were often additional factors that affected when, where and how they were able to address practice expectations. It is offered that communal notions of time or at least acceptance that time constraints and the related sense of crisis exist in perpetuity in child protection practice, constitute part of the occupational infrastructure that works to support current child protection practice and are thus notions upon which contemporary practice depends.
4.6.3 Child protection workers as “experts in everything”.

In response to queries regarding societal roles child protection workers might play and/or their positioning relative to other social service providers, numerous participants offered perspectives regarding occupational expectations that could be subsumed under the verbatim rubric offered by Tina Shunk: child protection workers as “expert(s) in everything”. Thus when considering their occupational statuses within their or relative to other organizations, for example, interviewees talked at length about the occupational expectations and challenges associated with the multiple “hats” they wore as child protection workers.

I think in terms of child protection you have to be a little bit of an expert in everything.

Again, I think the expectation for us is that we solve all and any problem (Tina Shunk).

Workers spoke with great passion and pride about the multi-disciplinary nature of their child protection practices.

I think there are a number of roles [played by child protection workers]. I think we are mandated to protect children. That puts us in a policing kind of place. We’re expected to ensure children are in healthy, happy environments, so now we become nutritionists then economists and then we have to teach you how to interact with your child appropriately so now we’re behaviourists. We have to be artists because we’ve got to come up with these creative plans that you’re going to buy into so you don’t hit your kid anymore. The list goes on and on and on. (Sofia Puig).

Agrees Allyson Doris:

I put on every hat you can imagine (Allyson Doris).

Thus child protection workers are expected to possess the skill sets necessary to enact each of these emergent situation-specific roles in addition to their primary occupational (child safety)
calling. Speaking more generally to some of the challenges associated with the performance of aspects of their multifaceted roles, Leonie Cuff noted:

So we wear a lot of different hats and in wearing a lot of different hats sometimes we don’t have the time, which is unfortunate, to wear all those hats correctly (Leonie Cuff).

Interestingly, it could also be argued that expectations linked to expertise could also be seen in workers’ comments related to administrative duties. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that the following comments are distinct from interviewee inputs regarding recording but instead are specific to the actions required to secure programming funding, and referrals for client families etc.

Hearkening back to earlier noted requests for more court documentation support, multiple workers noted that they required more clerical support than was usually available to meet the administrative needed associated with clients service (“I wish I had more of a support staff to sort of help me coordinate some of those extra things, like making referrals…It’s that kind of clerical stuff. I’m not very good at. It’s going to weigh me down”, said Sree Aguelo). Interviewee inputs point to many of the issues implicit to the notion of occupational expectations, including dealing with internal organizational demands and/or the requirements of collateral agencies.

More specifically, several workers highlighted tensions regarding protection-related court work. Citing the lack of available staff to assist with court documents preparation, interviewees complained that without court document assistances workers were faced with “[putting] everyone else on hold [to]” prioritize judicial demands: thus increasingly the sense of occupational anxiety and crisis. (Elaine Nemec)
[We] do not have separate people that do court work; [frontline workers] have to do that…So when you get involved with a family and decide to go to court that, sort of, impacts everything else, it puts everybody else on hold. We do court papers. That’s the priority…And to not get them done in a timely fashion could impact all kinds of other things with – and losing cases to the kids going home. (Elaine Nemec).

Interestingly, more senior front-line workers referenced times when child protection practice did not rely so heavily on court involvement. As one interviewee lamented:

We didn’t have lawyers on staff in the 90s. Here you almost need an undergraduate degree in law. No, we’re social workers. We’re not supposed to be figuring out how to make an affidavit look good...Why am I doing affidavits? (Sofia Puig).

Reinforcing the idea and ideal of child protection workers being expected to be “expert in everything”, one interviewee highlighted the problematic pecuniary nature of the assumption through her charge: “I often feel like I should be paid as a lawyer, as a social worker, as a whole bunch of different people”. Tina Shunk’s quote highlights the fluidity of the professional expertise boundaries implicit to child protection practice. As emblematic of every individual child protection worker, she is but one person, yet her occupational environment expects her to simultaneously embody so many more professional roles and often with the same level of competency expressed by sole occupational practitioners (writing affidavits like lawyers, for example).

Despite these analyses it should be stated that even as workers discussed the tensions implicit to navigating the pressing occupational expectations associated with child protection
work including time pressures and multidisciplinary expertise requirements, workers continued
to describe their commitment to family functioning and child safety.

4.6.4 Workload and overtime: Definitional problematics.

When one considers the notion of workload as discussed by interviewees, high caseload
numbers, case complexity, court involvement and other related issues were always mentioned.
Project interviewees raised many workload-related issues that reflect not only the research
findings in social work literature but also point to the difficulty of studying and addressing such
phenomena. While workers lamented the high numbers of files that each was expected to carry
and the fact that equal file distribution did not necessarily achieve equitable workload allocations,
repeated practitioner interview discussions of workload cast light upon the multiple
dependencies fundamental to the occupational culture of contemporary child protection. An
issue that arose repeatedly during the conducted interviews was the child protection system’s
dependence on certain understandings regarding workload. Interviewed individuals spoke of the
difficulties associated with workload and overtime.

Analyses of interviewee excerpts allow us to see not only the impact of high case file
carriage on workers but also its influence upon the type of service they can then offer to the
families they serve. When discussing issues of volume and volatility, Danae Brimer offered that
when considering workload, absolute numbers may be as relevant as case complexity:

The size of your caseload impacts. There’s been times where my caseload’s been way up
and it’s like you’re putting out fires. You come in. You put out fires. You come in again,
you put out other fires or you just hope that nothing else happens. When it’s too high like
that, you just can’t.... The volatility of your caseload [matters] too. Some people have
caseloads for whatever reason that they’re just all over the place and crazy and that impacts your ability. (Danae Brimer)

Though touched on in previous sections, the issue of workload and overtime warrant more in-depth discussion due to the definitional manipulation evidenced by interviewee inputs. A shocking number of interviewees cautioned that when interrogating employee workload reports it is important to remember that agency file counts do not consider all that may be entailed by the enacted work, that is, may not count all the individuals that a worker is ultimately responsible for. For instance, when workers are assigned Society Ward or Crown Ward files or kinship care files, these responsibilities are given different weights (or none at all) in the overall summation of the amount of work that will be organizationally acknowledged. Below, a project participant maintains that worker caseload numbers are consistently above the organizationally-sanctioned levels even with a caseload weighting system that is not 1:1.

Workload is a terrible issue. Again, I would like to be able to do some of the things I used to do. Our Family Service is carrying anywhere between 18 and 26 files even though our collective agreement says between says between 16 and 18. You need to look in a workload review...Twenty six [files] sometimes. Our kin homes are only counted for .5 of a file. A kin home takes as much [time/effort] as a protection home. It only counts for .5 so our workers are carrying between 18 and 24 files. Our childcare is sitting between 18 and 23 (Sofia Puig).

Danae Brimer further supported the problematic nature of differential case weighting by reminding: “And some of the kinship homes are more work than your protection [files]”.

4.6.5 Overtime.
It is offered that these constraints and cultural agreements remain in play as one follows the notions of workload into a discussion of worker overtime. Numerous interviewed workers reported possessing many hours of accumulated overtime. Workers also pointed out how they were actively dissuaded from accumulating these hours. For example, some agencies required that workers receive prior consent from their immediate supervisors or advised that they could not have more than a certain number of hours (“they don’t like us to be working overtime” – Copland). Such findings contribute to a questioning of the accuracy of agency statistics.

But I think -- like I said, if they’re doing it within the time frame, so people are either working for free or they’re documenting and juggling it like I am where it’s like, [laughing] Okay, I’ve worked, now I have to take my two weeks vacation as overtime and constantly having, like, that vacation that never gets lower either. Eventually they’ll probably come back on me [laughing] for that, too (Rosalinda Copland).

Upon further questioning, numerous workers revealed that they often did not report the total of extra hours worked and thus were indeed, knowingly “working for free”. While some workers chose not to report because they were dissuaded by additional paperwork required and/or the need to seek prior approval, I was also surprised by the number of workers who reported checking their voicemails from home (while preparing to come to work), arriving at their desks early (sometimes over to an hour before the start of the workday), and the understanding that this time was considered a coping strategy but not overtime. This is particularly important to note considering the system these behaviours support. Thus, the existential questions remain: How heavy is workload if some of the files carried are deemed to weigh nothing within the occupational system? Or if workers consistently arrive at her desk at 60-90 minutes before the official start of business, do they make an occupational sound?
So nine times out of ten I’m in the building between 7:30 and 8:00 and my day starts at 8:30 (Allyson Doris).

I usually try and get here early. That’s something I try and do for my own sanity. If I come in a half an hour early, I can check my voicemail, get my computer started and have some quieter time to get some of that stuff done. Generally then it’s appointments, phone calls, catching up on paperwork.

I am always at my desk by 7:30. People know that...It absolutely is a trend. You will see those people that survive, that’s how you survive because the expectation is you respond to your voicemail in 48 hours so if I don’t do this today and I’m in court tomorrow, I’m going to be past. (Sofia Puig)

When faced with employee after employee who underreported the amount of time spent working outside of regular business hours (including, e.g., reviewing files at home) or who did not count arriving at work 30-90 minutes early as a reportable part of their workday, I was reminded of Chandra Harland’s insistence that a 40 hour per week child protection practice was unworkable:

No. It’s impossible. I’ll back my word on it. Guaranteed. It is impossible. It cannot be done. If someone can tell you that it can be done in 40 hours, either they’re lacking in some areas or whatever it may be, but you cannot do this in a 40-hour workweek. It’s impossible (Chandra Harland).

While analyzing collected interviews, I came to consider Harland’s statements within the gendered context offered by Sofia Puig:

I think if we’re looking at this job and what it entails, if it was all males, they would pay us more. Come on!…You’re seeing workers putting in 60 or 70 hours a week and it
probably works out to $5 an hour, but that’s what the job requires. That’s how to do it well. You have a commitment to the field...We get paid for 33.75 hours \{per week\} and we put in 60 hours. If you try and claim those hours, you’re told you’re not going to be approved for overtime. So you want me to do the job or you don’t want me to do the job? We all get some kind of balance. We develop a way to balance.

These statements taken in context of other worker inputs, permits one to offer that the context within which many workers arrive at occupational balance may also work to obscure the sacrifices and dependencies required for the child protection system’s functioning and self-perpetuation. This obfuscation may also serve to prevent critical engagement with the overwhelming prescriptions of child protection’s occupational culture. The previous sections have addressed worker engagements with personal and occupational dependence and explored the some of the constituents required to guarantee the sustained functioning of the child protection occupational system. Agencies (and workers) depend on personal and professional agreements to facilitate current child protection practice. I would offer that acceptance of this understanding also contributes to the continuance of (unchallenged) child protection systems.

4.7 Distance, Dissonance and Disconnect

Numerous participants identified the experiential distance between themselves as frontline workers and hierarchical layers of administrative and provincial management. It is offered that the distance, disconnect and dissonance that workers described as prevalent within their work environments contributes to the myth perpetuation inherent to contemporary child protection by underscoring a certain occupational fatalism: workers do not feel heard by policy-makers and assessors and therefore do not believe in the possibilities of occupational change. Thus even if acknowledged, the status quo remains ostensibly unchallenged. While, as
previously noted, the significant practice relevance of a supportive supervisory relationship was underscored by many interviewees, an even greater number of frontline workers indicated that the integration of new and, at times, seemingly arbitrary regulatory and agency protocols often further complicated already complex praxis and was the result of the perceived distance between frontline child protection workers and higher level management and policymakers. It is this dynamic which underscores the final myth-perpetuating thematic components of distance, dissonance and disconnect.

4.7.1 Frontline worker distance from managers and policy-makers.

During most of the conducted interviews workers discussed feelings of distance and disconnect between themselves and upper managerial levels. It is offered that this disconnect contributes to an occupational dissonance which complicates regulatory implementation and compliance. Interviewees noted that child protection policy was being developed seemingly without much thought given to what front-line implementation and effect on practice would actually look like (Selena Bissett). Workers like Ms. Brendle maintained that the cause of this disconnect was “that the people who are in the positions of making the decisions are too far removed from the front line and have been for too many years” (Esperanza Brendle).

Whether in the form of new local agency protocol or wider ministerial practice pendulum swings, workers felt removed and effaced from decision-making and protocol design even as they remained fully, and seemingly to some solely, responsible for policy/regulatory/protocol implementation. They also maintained that decision-makers rarely considered their implementation concerns. While acknowledging the administrative challenges of provincial policy development, this perceived lack of consultation and opaque policy development practice
contributed to worker initial resistance to practice regime changes. Speaking more specifically to Differential Response, supervisor Trudy Bechard observed:

And I think although the Ministry had talked about this I’m sure for a couple of years we’d never heard about it until there was a, “You have training next Tuesday at 9 AM”…And then you go downstairs. It’s like, “Okay, we’ll no longer use the Risk Assessment Model”, and you’re like, “What?...I’m not doing it”...But that resistance to change that comes naturally… when something like that comes…in in… what I’ll say is natural Ministry way [that is] with no rationale. They send an email or a memo and all of a sudden we’ve changed our way of practice (Trudy Bechard).

Speaking more generally, it is important to note that workers were not merely resistant to change but instead many described actively and gamely struggling with how to implement called-for changes in the face of lack of resources, funding or discernible rationale.

Well, you know change needs to happen…So I have nothing negative to say about new changes and they should be embraced…however the way it comes down to me being a frontline worker is, “Here’s this new thing. We have to accommodate this. We don’t know how. We don’t know what our resources are”. When we get funding, say from the Ministry, for our programming. We don’t know if it’s going to be enough or if we’re implementing it in the right way”. All of these questions. And so really, it has been a lot of trial and error. (Lorrie Goodwill)

It is interesting to note that workers pointed to experiences of being given new provisions under which to practice without commensurate implementation support or guidance (“trial and error”). I would maintain that such an organizational stance can be assumed because of the myth perpetuation exercises workers engaged in before, in this example, the latest policy shifts. To be
required to implement a new system without any notion of cost projections or payment in a non-profit environment would seem absurd were it not for the already reinforced child protection systems of discipline and crisis fundamental to its occupational myth project. Front-line workers will continue to “do their best” no matter the external demands because that is what they do: their systemic positioning requires it. Frontline workers are already accustomed to the crisis-orientation and ubiquitous responsibility, thus policy change becomes just the latest in a long line of barely attainable responsibilities.

With interviewees noting that “upper management” (usually above the immediate supervisory rank- e.g. Service Directors, Executive Directors, Ministerial employees) had minimal understanding of challenges and opportunities inherent to contemporary face-to-face work with families and children and workers’ sense that this lack of comprehension contributed to difficult-to-implement directives, some interviewees maintained that these hierarchical distances contributed to the creation of occupational vacuums: spaces characterized by poor organizational communication readily filled by confusion or “office gossip”. While perhaps unintentionally, hierarchical distance, thus creates, if not exacerbates, a concurrent occupational dissonance, which can complicate service provision and implementation and perpetuates the factors required for occupational myth perpetuation.

4.7.2 Implementation disconnect.

Drawing further attention to the disconnect between assumed ideal and practicable implementation environments resultant from worker-policymaker distance, many project participants noted that policy was often imposed from above with little seeming regard for the practicalities involved with execution or realization’s impact upon individual workers or their practices (in particular, considering time and resource constraints). While the previous section
focused upon workers feelings regarding their effacement during policy development and its impact on their practices, this section examines the structural implications of a similar distancing from frontline practice that interviewees report contending with on more local bases. In essence, the Ministry of Child and Youth Services is not the only party perceived as impervious to worker concerns.

[Agency administrators] sometimes put policies and procedures…in place that aren’t…realistic and then it throws people into a tailspin because all of a sudden it’s these things that come down from upper management. You now need to do this with no help or assistance and how are you going to add that expectation onto your long list of other expectations (Tina Shunk).

As noted by Ms. Shunk, many interviewed child protection workers mentioned that as well-meaning as their agency (immediate employer) policies were they often represented impractical initiatives. For example, numerous interviewees mentioned that mandatory co-facilitated home visits with a public health nurse, domestic violence counsellor or other issue-specific professional for all children under two, or parents/guardians struggling with child-witnessed violence: these efforts representing an important acknowledgement of the additional familial complexities associated with parenting very young children or within violence-steeped dynamics. Unfortunately, despite the number of infants and toddlers served by a given child protection agency (or perhaps, in part, because of it) these professionals were often unavailable: booking agency protocol-required appointments with child protection support staff issues existing apart from difficulties associated with scheduling within explicit Ministry time guidelines. As the quote below further illustrates, Ms. Shunk, while enthusiastic about this resource programming, explicitly noted some persistent implementation obstacles.
We also have a [community liaison] here, that works through [local agency]. So, great. Fantastic for me to be able to bring [him/her] out, but then the expectation is that any child under two, you’re supposed to bring this person with you. Well, there’s one person for the entire agency…Is that realistic to always do prior to going out to [visit] a family? No…Then you need to document why that didn’t happen and time constraints are not a reasonable rationale (Tina Shunk).

Ms. Shunk’s concerns regarding the feasibility of implementing agency-specific requests were also reflected in the comments of interviewees who noted that sometimes agency expectations to, for example, visit homes in the company of other community social service providers did not seem to recognize that Public Health officials, for example, could not be compelled to assist should clients have indicated that this was not what they wanted. Again, it is important to note that workers were not advocating the dismissal of client family wishes but instead querying the imposition of inspired (co-led Public Health/CAS visits are indeed a good idea) but impractical agency protocol (Public Health is not mandated service. Public Health nurses must prioritize their service directives and while their objectives may be similar to and overlapping with those of child protection workers they are not, in fact, identical).

Later in this emblematic excerpt, Ms. Shunk further described implementation disconnect when she went on to detail her repeated attempts to get policy implementation assistance as she “loved the concept” she was being asked to invoke but did not “know how to fit that in” with her other responsibilities. She maintained she did not receive support though it was often requested. Thus while workers may experience and report policy implementation difficulties, they also discussed experiencing a communication gulf between themselves and those responsible for outlining said policies. So even as policy mandates trickled down, workers questioned whether
understandings of their experiences were reflected back up: on the local level (indicated here) or to the ministerial level (where provincial legislation and regulation are created).

As detailed by Ms. Shunk and corroborated by others, she “never really got a good answer” from her organizational superiors about how best to enact a policy she readily accepted. Similarly, other project participants, like Leonie Cuff, described a desire to communicate with administrative bodies regarding similar issues but entreaties were often tinged with disillusion regarding the benefits of “speaking truth to power” or the potential collective power of child protection worker occupational advocacy.

I see it a lot more as top coming down, regardless of who’s at the top. And I see it more that way and I feel like the frontline workers are the little ants and they get squashed by that big foot all the time. And you learn in social work school strength in numbers and whatever, but I mean we’ve got, what, [several hundred] employees here. I don’t know how many of them are frontline workers but I’m sure if we all rallied around we still wouldn’t make a difference at the Ministry [level]. (Leonie Cuff)

It is in the inputs of Ms. Cuff that we witness the worker fatalism referenced in this and earlier dependence themes. Ms. Cuff, like others, does not wish to be absolved of her responsibility for child safety but has little faith in child protection workers’ collective ability to be heard, (“If I go to my [Executive Director] and I say, “This isn’t right…I really wonder if they take that message higher”), about the feasibility of her practice responsibilities or ultimately, her ability to effect occupational change, (“I’ve asked like, ”Well why can’t we change that?” or “Why can't we...whatever”. A lot of workers don't – they have the attitude that it's never going to change. We're fighting the brick wall and we're not going to break it down”). Again, we witness the workings of a myth-reinforcing dynamic: lack of organizational responsiveness produces and
reproduces organizational cultures that highly value the appearance of stoicism among child protection workers while simultaneously dissuading attempts at organizational change.

When considering the implementation disconnect it is important to remember its relationship to the responsibility outlined in the previous sub-theme and wider rubric. Even as workers postulate that the experiential distance between themselves and upper management is responsible for the structural and communication difficulties associated with impractical policy development at the local and ministerial levels and a lack of responsiveness to the implementation concerns experiences in the day-to-day, workers continue to carry out their work as best they can, in part, because they do not believe in the inherent possibilities for vocational change. It is offered that this unresponsive top-down dynamic contributes to the bolstering of child protection sustainability myths: child protection systems need not change because, in part, the occupational silence resultant from hierarchical distance complicated by implementation and communication disconnect create a irreconcilable dissonance which reinforces system-sustaining discourses and behaviours. It is important that workers believe that their vocational systems will not respond to them in any tangibly transformative way so that they will not, in turn, advocate for said change. It is offered that the prerequisite for action is always hope and belief in at least the possibility of effect.

4.7.3 Child protection’s “business” orientation.

Another area of myth reinforcing distance, dissonance and disconnect characteristic of this analytical theme was what could be termed the “business orientation” of child protection agencies. Highlighting her assessment as to the link between experiential distance, administrative demands and “business”, Ms. Puig maintained:
For me it says you get to that point and you forget what it was like to be on the floor and it becomes that whole business kind of agency where we’re doing checks and balances and watching for money and making sure people are putting in enough time and the case notes are in...It becomes business (Sofia Puig).

Interestingly, while some identified a business-focus as impeding child protection service delivery, other participants indicated that they wanted more of a balanced integration of social work and business understandings in order to help child protection agencies run more efficiently. Most interviewees were united in their view that this tension was, at once created and exacerbated by, the perceived distance and alienation felt by workers, client families and administrators.

For Shana Borel, the distance and tension that interviewees discussed may be explained by the sociological distances between the families often serviced by child protection agencies and the individuals designing and administering policy. Commenting on her understanding of the relationship between government, service population and the inherent disconnect between these societal actors, she maintained:

Has the Prime Minister ever spent a day with a social worker? Has any member of his party ever done that? Yes, they show up for ribbon cutting of buildings...but do they truly understand the [2% of the] population [we serve]?…The people that are in government [are] part of a different 2%, right? Like they’ve had a different outlook and an upbringing, so for them they don’t understand either, they’re far… (Shana Borel).

This societal distance translated into a corporatized mindset she, as a child protection frontline worker, was asked to implement:
Yes, they come up with this legislation like we’re running this like a company. And it is. We are a company. Unfortunately, we’re also the corporate parents of 300 kids, you know, and so we run it like we expect them to be part of a company instead of part of an extended family or a community…which sounds harsh when you say to a four year old, “Hello, we are your corporate parents” (Shana Borel).

Ms. Borel went on to also underscore how such an orientation affects not only the organizational means but “corporatizes” the ultimate goals of child safety and development: creating children that have difficulty maintaining relationships because “our kids become so institutional around paperwork or what to say” and lack long-standing “meaningful person[s] in their lives…Maybe we need to develop relationships that don’t go away… but we’re so busy running a business” (Shana Borel).

Ms. Borel’s comments stand in stark contrast to those of Trudy Bechard who identifies the most pressing issues of child protection practice as including an insufficient business–orientation. Ms. Bechard believes that more integration between social work and business knowledge would be of benefit to child protection agencies functioning. Supervisor Lorrie Goodwill agreed when she succinctly offered, “maybe Directors or people on Boards should have MBAs and social work degrees…So…they shouldn’t just have the MBA, like it’s having the skills of both”. These sentiments found resonance with other interviewees who noted that while they weren’t willing to “go ‘all business’” they thought there was still value in, for example, business consultants (Trudy Bechard).

I also think it’s sometimes because we’re run by social workers… It would be helpful if somebody with an MBA came in here…We need somebody in here that has a clue how run a business. This is a … business, right? It’s a not-for-profit…And everybody,
everybody in senior management [and the Human Resources Department] is a social worker. And at some point you need somebody with a business sense…(Trudy Bechard).

Thus while workers like Ms. Borel lament an overwhelmingly business organizational orientation’s effect on service delivery and child development, other project participants called for a more corporatist attitude toward agency management. The integration of these seemingly disparate positions may lie in the comments of interviewees like Allyson Doris, who addressed these tensions by inviting a more direct and informed engagement with the practical realities of child protection organizations and practice. Her comments resonate with Ms. Borel’s comment about “ribbon-cutting” politicians:

Come roll up your sleeves with us and we’ll walk you through. Don’t do… a cursory visit and say, “Oh, hi”, and get a lay of the land, how the building looks. No, you need to see some tangible stuff, you know? Even if it’s [like] that show…Undercover Boss…All these CEOs go to work…Now, I’m not saying come here and go undercover…You will see that CEOs in the business world have no capacity or no knowledge of what’s really happening on the floor and what’s happening in people’s lives. And they have such a newfound respect for the people that they’re making demands on (Allyson Doris).

A similar attitude towards narrowing organizational distances is seen in Sree Aguelo’s suggestion that current workers be included in the hiring of potential child protection workers, case presentations to upper management and engaging community partners. These suggestions and others aimed at narrowing these distances and resultant dissonances have a common foundation in each interviewee’s mention of respect and “giving [workers] credit” (Sree Aguelo).

Yet even in the face of these suggestions, the tensions inherent to these organizational conundrums (business/social orientations) are aptly summarized in the following quote where
Janet Farrell acknowledges the conceptual gap that exists between documentary compliance and risk measurement while acknowledging that these measures do not augment child safety. As detailed in this section, she notes that child protection is difficult to run with purely as a business (e.g. an efficiency-based attitude – “10 percent…improvement”) and refers to another expressed area of worker disconnect that will be taken up in the following section: paperwork.

4.7.4 Paperwork versus “people work”.

The disconnect that many interviewees described in relation to upper management and provincial regulators finds an interesting parallel in the occupational demands made by these hierarchies. For many interviewees, paperwork was a pale substitute for the “people work” they insisted kept children safe. According to participants, onerous documentation protocols interfere with the hands-on practice that workers preferred. Thus, the connection between the documentation demands and the practice commitments of contemporary child protection workers may be too distant to hold occupational sway.

I don’t believe the recordings we do and the work we do protects children. I don’t believe sitting behind a desk recording for a week protects kids because you’re not seeing kids. You’re not interacting. You’re not getting to know their families and getting to know them because you are not given enough time to do that in a day because you are required to have this, this and this completed. And that’s not even counting the Family Court stuff, like, that’s a whole other sector (Shana Borel).

We witness this tension again when Ms. Borel talks about juggling her job’s administrative demands and her attempts to meet the needs of the children in care in a personalized manner. Like Ms. Borel, several workers commented on the impact documentation requirements and processes had on the emotional development of children in care, noting the
artificiality of discussing children’s lives in terms of “seven domains” (Shana Borel). Citing the “Number One complaint” of Crown Wards is workers’ lack of time to just “be” with them, Ms. Borel noted that she felt if she could spend some time “talking”, “hiking” or simply “han[ging] out” with children and youth that they would be more likely to communicate with her, but even she acknowledged that it was “unrealistic” to think that no child protection paperwork was required.

And therein lies an important distinction that many interviewees raised in discussing documentation. Workers understand that some form of documentation is required but are perplexed, particularly in light of their other pressing workload issues, as to why there are “duplicates or triplicate” (Leonie Cuff). As Annabelle Yedinak noted: “I think [recording protocols] would be helpful just to back you up just in case somebody comes back and tells you, ‘That’s not what I said’. It’s just [I’d] rather less paperwork to do”. Thus, interviewees’ main concerns are grounded in the sentiment that documentation requirements are interfering with their ability to address the essential goals of child safety, child development and/or improved family functioning: their professed primary occupational objective,

I have colleagues who I know time their visits because they know that if they stay too long, its going to affect the rest of their day which affects their completion of other work…I have actually just spoken to a childcare worker recently and they said they, you know what? Easily 60% of their time is just doing paperwork. It’s just filling out paperwork because it’s what’s expected versus spending time with the kids. I think that impacts us a whole in terms of the quality of the work that we can do (Selena Bissett).
Taking a similar tack, Allyson Doris called for a nuanced attitude toward documentation. While admitting that the biggest issue affecting her work was her administrative duties, she insisted that they still played an important role in her practice.

I would probably say it would be the administrative duties [are the biggest issues affecting my work]…You know, so I’m all about documenting that and …being able to justify decisions that are made. However, there is oftentimes a repetition to it… Our documents are for the world to see …because we are only one subpoena away from an inquest. Does it govern practice? No. But does it have a spot in your practice? You bet. And I think you would be naïve not to put it there (Allyson Doris).

Thus, interviewed workers underscored a disconnect between their primary objectives (child safety and development) and systemic demands (documentation protocols): reporting that documentation requirements distanced them from their client children and families. It is offered that the maintenance of this occupational distance may contribute to the mythologies and commitments required to sustain the contemporary child protection system. Thus, worker reports denoting a substantial amount of their time to the documentation demands imposed by an administrative hierarchy that is removed from day-to-day practice concerns. This disconnect perpetuated the myth that the primary goal of child protection agencies is child protection but workers maintain that the majority of their time is devoted not to that professed goal but to meeting the administrative requirements of the child protection system.

4.7.5 Funding.

Thinking again about the notion of myth and myth-making and the distance and dissonance required to perpetuate said myths - interviewed child protection professionals talked at great length about the difficulties related to funding: not only for themselves within a child
protection agency context but also with respect to their client families and the socio-economic burdens of poverty and a social service system in fiscal “crisis”.

Funding has been a huge and constant thing. That’s the word that’s been floating around for years which affects everything from staffing and which results for us the carriage of our caseload. It affects services in the community, what is available for our clients. I think the ministry standards, I find that also impacts on the work that we do. (Selena Bissett)

In general, interviewees spoke to the perpetual nature of service funding issues. They were consistent in their discussion of funding as an issue wider than their immediate agency circumstances. Workers lamented the financial limitations inherent to the social service system and articulated its impact upon themselves as service providers and their client families as service recipients. For example, workers discussed the struggles associated with maintaining client motivation while they are faced with months long waiting lists for programs deemed essential. Speaking to the difficulty of navigating the tensions of a “just in time” funding system, Elaine Nemec maintains:

And unfortunately there are files that open up based on the history as opposed to the immediate worry…And also the funding formula actually pushes us towards using because you get so many more dollars for an investigation…So our agency is opening everything because they get more money as a result…So that’s, yes…How can you use something when you’re almost punished through finances for doing what you know should be happening and yet you’re rewarded if you do the opposite view of what we morally think should be happening…? (Elaine Nemec)

Chandra Harland corroborates the tensions inherent to Ms. Nemec’s sentiments:
Hopefully their time with me is a brief. Maybe it’s going to be long or maybe someone just didn’t take the time to really look at their files and say, “Listen, this file does not need to be open. It’s unnecessary.” If it’s about dollars, it shouldn’t be. So I’m closing it and that means that they’re going to question it, “Why did you just close seven files?” Because they don’t need to be open. If you [are] only bringing me into a meeting to see that, I’ll show you why…It is always about funding and how many files you have open, how many referrals you have and how many children…I’m sorry to say that sometimes it is. (Chandra Harland)

Here one wonders about the perpetual nature of the “deficit mindset” and “fiscal crisis” effects on the occupational culture of child protection agencies. Rosalinda Copland hints to the effects of such thinking on her understanding of the biggest issues affecting her day-to-day practice: money. While interviewees like Danae Brimer believe that a re-examination of how monies are allocated to support service provision is required.

This discussion regarding funding has been placed under the facet of dependence because of the relationship of reliance with exists between child protection agencies and the provincial ministries which, not only fund children’s aid societies but also articulate the boundaries of their service mandates. It has also been included in order to query the implications of a funding system that may be systematically influencing service decisions made not only because of clinical evidence but also because of the inherently cash-strapped nature of systemic design.

While some of this discussion might overlap with the theme of dependence, it was included in this section (distance and disconnect) to highlight the roles played the notions of fiscal restraint and deficit in child protection service (monetary notions that are distanced and disconnected from the rigours and requirements of day-to-day agency practice) and many of the
service users experiences of poverty. In addition, it highlights the distance and disconnect experienced by child protection practitioners in relation to their social service providers collateral organizations.

4.7.6 Public perceptions.

The final myth-perpetuating facet to be explored with relation to distance and disconnect is related to public perception. Multiple workers mentioned that they felt members of the public and even some social service provision collaterals were unaware or misunderstood child protection’s societal role and the bounds of children’s aid society mandates. This distance complicated child protection jobs and relationships, not only with clients and collaterals, but also with the members of the communities they serve. This distance and dissonance is due in part to workers’ feelings that only those close to this field understand it. Reminding us also about CAS familial dependence, Rosalinda Copland maintained:

Well, I think in general, … child protection -- unless you work in the field...I don’t think people out there really have any idea…Or you have a family member that works in the field because I think my family has some idea [laughing] what I do because I talk…right (Rosalinda Copland)?

Interviewed workers talked at length about the complications of public and collateral perceptions associated with being mandated social service providers. One interviewee described child protection services were described as a “dumping ground”.

[We’re] the dumping ground, right? …I’ve heard it many times before…If school is calling saying we should be apprehending these children because this... you know, giving you their opinion, so the expectation out in the community is we’re going to go in and we’re going to do what we need to do no matter what and I don’t think they quite
understand what the child protection field is so we’re the dumping ground (Danae Brimer).

Selena Bissett expounded on this sentiment, noting that, unlike most child protection services, many social services were provided on a voluntary basis and thus did not possess the tools of compulsion unavailable to CASs (court involvement, child apprehension etc.) under their provincially prescribed mandates.

Because I think people know that we have to be there. I think that because of the mere fact that we do have that authority that even when families refuse to let other people in, a lot of services are voluntary. So as soon as a client says, ‘I don’t want you in my home. I don’t want services from you’, most agencies can just throw up their hands and say, “Oh, well, they don’t want our services and so here you go, child protection worker, it’s back in your lap. You figure it out and then when they want to, you can call me back.”

Whereas for us it’s mandated (Selena Bissett).

Thus, there is a tension between the responsibilities associated with a mandated and distinctly authoritarian but not unfettered role, and this is little understood by the general public and perhaps as well by social service collaterals.

Every piece plays one part of a whole and again that problem is that its so specific and individual, but child protection doesn’t have the answers to everything and not everything is a child protection concern and I think that some people or some community agencies because they don’t want to deal with an issue, it becomes, therefore, a child protection issue and then what does that do for families? (Tina Shunk).

In addition, interviewees reported that societal disconnect may be exacerbated by lack of understanding of what children’s aid societies can and cannot do in concert with an inability of
said agencies to respond to inaccurate public criticism (often due to privacy concerns). Beliefs like CAS employees can unilaterally and arbitrarily apprehend children necessitate a great deal of public education coupled with an understanding that for grieving parents, guardians and families no reasons will ever be adequate or sufficient because “It’s easier to blame an agency” (Shana Borel).

Ms. Borel next spoke to the fact that despite similarly contested societal service histories as doctors, nurses and firefighters, child protection workers did not enjoy the same societal respect and/or deference. This dissonance was echoed in the words of Maude Gaudreau who noted that being a child protection worker was very much like being in the military (without the possibility or honour of a flag-draped coffin in recognition of occupational sacrifice). Tashana Wunderlich agreed:

[The] military…they’re protecting the whole country -- from this threat, right?...When people talk about the work that our military does, there’s a sense of pride, there’s a sense of appreciation…You know, we have Remembrance Day -- every year in honour of it...Like, people are thankful that there’s people out there -- risking…and losing their lives -- and sacrificing for the benefit of the country…Whereas what we do impacts them much more directly … and they’re not always thankful…Because in reality they’re not always accepting that they’re causing harm -- to their child…And it -- it’s not something that’s celebrated. It’s not like a victory...We can explain in general to people -- but it still doesn’t get shared out in the community -- the same way-- given the confidential nature of the work (Tashana Wunderlich).

Analyses of project participant interviews underscore the disconnect between child protection workers and the perceptions of the wider community. Workers reported lack of understanding of
their mandates and parameters of their roles could complicate their already complex praxis. These misconceptions contribute to child protection myth and myth-making by complicating and ultimately isolating what could and ultimately should be more collaborative social service provision.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the results of the WHHW project. It offers that project participant reports can be best understood as exercises in myth, myth-making and myth-perpetuation premised on child protection worker experiences of determination, dependence and distance/dissonance/disconnect. It is offered that the child protection mythological project is bounded by fealty to the noble callings of child safety and improved family functioning evidenced in workers’ determination to lovingly provide child protection services despite feelings of liability-related anxiety and employee disposability. It is maintained that contemporary child protection practice is premised on a myth of individual worker accountability despite acknowledgement of overwhelming occupational expectations: factors that lie outside of any one worker’s control. Thus the perpetuation of the child protection system depends on workers’ continued labour within a Sisyphean occupational environment characterized by distance and disconnect between workers and those responsible for the regulatory systems they occupy.
5 Discussion and Implications for Practice: Child protection systems as myth projects

The Working Hard of Heart-y Working project aimed to explore frontline child protection workers’ understanding of the occupational forces that influence their day-to-day practices as well as their perceptions regarding their roles as professional and societal actors. The preceding chapter, Results and Analyses, used excerpts from worker interviews to illustrate the five major categories associated with the Working Hard of Heart-y Working project: determination, dependence, and distance, dissonance and disconnect. While interviewees spoke about their occupational environments and their behaviour within them, the previous chapter also gleans from project participant answers a wealth of inter-related themes subsumed under these five major categories; each supporting a better understanding of child protection workers and their practice at this historical moment. It is offered that in responding to WHHW questions about her understanding of her job, occupational challenges and opportunities each project participant provided a wealth of thoughtful data that when engaged, analyzed and queried contributed to the construction of a theoretical and thematic landscape that is at once descriptive and interpretive: not only do the views expressed in literature and worker interviews help describe and understand child protection work but they also permit the proposal of an overarching rubric (core category) of a child protection myth project. This final chapter builds on the previous chapter’s exposition exploring how these major categories are constituent of the core category of child protection occupational mythology (systemic exercises of myth, myth-production and myth–perpetuation).

5.1 Determination

The introduction of the determination theme in the previous chapter explored four contributory factors; (a) occupational pride, (b) disposability and vulnerability, (c) anxiety, fear
and discipline, (d) disciplinary operations of liability discourse. The following paragraphs will explore these notions in light of the conceptual framework initially outlined by the *WHHW* project.

While interviewed workers talked about their occupational pride and love of child protection work, this sense of professional gratification was not without subtlety as participants readily acknowledged not only common child protection criticisms (“mistakes”), but also day-to-day practice obstacles. When considered in relation to the sensitizing concepts introduced in *Historical Placement and Review of Literature*, determination as a major theme is conspicuously absent. While frontline child protection worker emotions were acknowledged in the project’s conceptual discussion of the emotional labour demanded by practice, these were neither presented in terms of the relational view of emotions as essential “survival tools in coping” with occupational demands (Davis, 2001) nor as a more concrete framework for examining the rewards and constraints of “helping” (Rossiter, 2001).

After initially acknowledging literature related to labour associated with the emotional self-management essential to child protection practice with others (Mandell, 2007; Mandell, 2008; Stalker et al., 2007), *Historical Placement and Review of Literature*’s offering failed to include a component that could permit the integration of the inputs of interviewees who, as noted in this theme and major category, access feelings of hopefulness and love to support their quotidian practice and perhaps use these emotions to mellow the impacts of many of the occupational challenges they described. It might be offered that the positive effects of the “small victories” described by one participant and love of the job attested to by many contribute to child protection mythology by assisting those child protection workers who remain in practice to
doggedly continue despite the overwhelming requirements and difficult consequences implicit to child protection practice and associated with failure to meet these demands.

Despite the conceptual oversight of failing to consider how emotive elements might be used by workers to support their practices, the findings associated with this major category remain timely and valuable. The remaining thematic components that made up the determination category (disposability, ubiquitous responsibility and disciplinary liability) also allow one to speak to an important aspect of contemporary child protection practices. As previously noted, numerous workers spoke to the feelings of vulnerability and disposability within the child protection’s occupational systems. These sentiments are important due to their resonance with (a) Foucauldian notions of discipline and governmentality and (b) their implications for occupational advocacy and change.

The *WHHW* findings are interesting in that they permitted a further expanding of the application of Foucauldian notions to child protection worker experience. Foucault spoke to the operations of the state in its use of power to discipline communities and citizenry (Chambon, Irving & Epstein, 1999; Foucault, 1991; Linstead, 2004; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Parton, 1999; Thapan, 1999; Trainor & Jeffreys, 2003). This project’s exploratory framework initially offered that these disciplinary techniques found their most profound resonance in the documentation requirements of contemporary child protection practice. It is offered that Foucault’s position regarding the disciplinary techniques employed by even the most apparently benevolent of society’s institutions to create self-regulating citizens finds an interesting parallel in the more general occupational experiences of child protection workers at this historical moment. This is not to discount the experiences of disciplined parents and children implicated in the societal child protection project but to point to the similarities which may exist between the
ways in which the lives of client families are governed and the occupational experiences of those who implement those regulatory regimes. Just as child protection workers police the lives of families, their occupational lives are policed through ubiquitous surveillance, constant organizational crises, accepted and systemic vulnerabilities and ubiquitous responsibilities. Following that analogy, Dumbrill (2010) calls for the creation of a child protection service users union or association allows one to consider that among those child protection workers who are currently union members, their in-house advocacy efforts are still removed from direct provincial impact as the employing agency shields the ultimate regulatory body.

Here again one sees the influence of the experiential distance between frontline implementers and regulation creators reinforcing child protection mythology. Even as workers maintain that the distances between themselves and upper management are responsible for many of the challenges associated with their practices, workers continue to carry out their work as best they can (i.e. self-regulate and self-discipline), in part, because they do not believe in the inherent possibilities for vocational change. Thus unresponsive top-down dynamic contributes to the bolstering of child protection sustainability myths: child protection systems need not change because, in part, the occupational silence resultant from hierarchical distance and dissonance reinforces system-sustaining discourses and behaviours of stoicism and fatalism. For the perpetuation of the child protection myth project, it is paramount that workers continue to believe that their vocational systems cannot and will not respond to them in any tangibly transformative way so that they will not, in turn, advocate for said change.

While interview analyses pointed to a certain fatalism amongst interviewed workers regarding the possibility for change within their occupational environments [a fatalism that contrasts with the collective strategies and positioning noted by authors like LaRose (2009)], it is
also important to consider the productive capacities associated with Foucauldian notions of power and note the prevalence of self-preservation attempts made and coping strategies used by workers in terms “working for free” and the keeping of organizationally frowned up but apparently common “shadow files”.

Consideration of the amount of unacknowledged overtime reported by participants has been deemed central to the child protection myth project but this researcher must also acknowledge that the overwhelming preponderance of such behaviour points to the tensions implicit to a practice that once undertaken by workers is both liberating (“I come in early so I can deal with my messages and get a head start on the day” etc.) and supporting of systemic exploitation-- further binding workers to unrealistic job performance expectations by creating and reinforcing occupational practices that undermine their labour by devaluing it as a matter of definition and contributing to child protection myth propagation as a matter of design. In other words, if you work unacknowledged overtime, the short-term relief found in the work done by coming in early or staying late also serves to reinforce agency and ministerial expectations regarding the amount of work which can be accomplished in “official” timeframes. This being said, the significance of this behaviour as understood by workers should not be discounted. Thus, “working for free” may very well be how workers honour their occupational commitments and make sense of a contradictory occupational bind.

5.2 Dependence

Dependence, the second WHHW major category described in Results and Analyses was comprised of notions related to (a) personal supports workers described depending upon and (b) common occupational discourses characterized by organizational dependence on frontline workers. Interviewees described their supervisors, families and teammates as being essential
supports to their day-to-day child protection practice while the notions constituent of
occupational dependence included expectations, time and all-encompassing expertise.

As previously mentioned, interviewees spoke highly of their direct supervisors and the
support that these individuals offered them. These findings are in keeping with literature that
speaks to the supervisory relationship as an essential component of child protection practice
(Gibbs, 2001) though it is interesting to note the distinctions that frontline workers draw between
their immediate supervisors (readily acknowledged sources of support) and “upper management”
(from whom they felt distanced). This nearly unequivocal positive regard toward their
immediate supervisors mirrored their feelings about their team member team members when
interviewees discussed practice support but as noted, changed dramatically in some interviewees’
discussions of the effects of sick/stress leave on collegiality. As previously stated, this may be
due to the systemic critique implicit to absenting oneself from working in an unworkable system.

In addition, interviewee discussion of the family support necessary for frontline child
protection practice offered an interesting look into the gendered dynamics hinted at by Weick
(2000). While it had been initially offered that child protection practice might serve as a
community-based parallel to the unseen and undervalued household labour that women often
perform, *WHHW* analyses point to, not a parallel process but a continual one where women
navigate the equally pressing and competing caring expectations of their home and work lives;
finding balance in either strict or non-existent boundaries\(^\text{13}\).

It is offered that these undercurrents of care and sacrifice serve to reinforce
organizational myth-perpetuating practices by reinforcing an individualized understanding of
feminized patterns of care within the child protection work structure as neutral and commonplace
(Acker, 1992b) despite the very gendered demands and expectations associated with the occupational demands met by these embodied agents of corporate parenthood (frontline employees who are usually female).

Finally, notions of occupational dependence encountered in *WHHW* were similar to those initially proposed in the project’s conceptual framework, where Coser (1974) referenced the “omnivorous” demands for undivided loyalty made by greedy institutions, he also provided a way to understand the tensions created by this fealty through the normative rules reinforced by the same system. This coupled with Franzway’s (2000) invitation to consider organizational demands of commitment, workload and emotional labour, is reflected in the *WHHW* description of occupational dependences where workers spoke at length about “unrealistic” if not “impossible” workloads and a persistence time crunch promulgated on the organizational premise that despite these demands worker expertise should extend to all components of the child protection experience (clinical, judicial and administrative). What appears different from Coser’s (1974) articulation is that workers do not seem to require external validation in exchange for their loyalty. Once again, the systemic nature of this analytical frame assists seeing the reinforcing and self-perpetuating nature of the child protection myth project through the organizational commitments embodied by interviewees.

### 5.3 Distance, Dissonance and Disconnect

The third and final major category constituent of the myth core category is distance, dissonance and disconnect. This interrelated category emerged after many interviewees mentioned their feelings of detachment from child protection upper management. This

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13 This researcher is reminded of hearing her past child protection colleagues who were also parents laughingly declaring they needed to head home before someone called CAS on their families.
complicated their daily practice as it was often these administrators (“upper management” and/or “the Ministry”) who proposed regulatory and practice changes but did not seem to respond to worker concerns regarding the possibilities and challenges of said policy implementation.

Before continuing it should be noted that interview analysis revealed two descriptive undercurrents of interest to the distance, disconnect, dissonance theme. Many workers noted that they were unaware of who exactly was ultimately involved in provincial regulatory decision-making. In analyses, this led to an acknowledgement that policy officials were repeatedly referred to as “the Ministry”\(^{14}\). Considering the lack of cohesion and spectral quality inherent to this theme (which focuses on the powerful and negative perceptions of that which “is not”), the interviewees’ Kafkaesque references to “the Ministry” and its lack of frontline responsiveness did not go unnoticed.

Further, interviewed workers lamented that decision-makers rarely considered what would ultimately become their implementation worries and several noted that the further away from the front-line one proceeded up the organizational hierarchy, the more men were disproportionately represented. It is interesting to note that while workers were readily able to share this gender observation, a more explicit and generalized gendered understanding of social work and/or child protection work did not emerge in a manner conceptually or numerically consistent with what had been initially proposed. It might be offered that perhaps like goldfish that struggle to grasp the nature of water, child protection workers at this historical moment occupy occupational systems so imbibed by gendered notions that they are not readily seen or queried.

\(^{14}\) The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) is the primary provincial ministry responsible for Ontario’s children’s aid societies (http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrensaids/childrensaidsocieties/index.aspx).
Yet despite an understanding expressed by some that had the frontline child protection work force been comprised primarily of men the profession and work performed would be regarded and valued differently (i.e. through more money, recognition, power, respect), that its occupational demands would be transformed, and that men were over-represented in agency and ministerial administrative hierarchies, these perceptions did not appear to coalesce in an understanding of these components as simultaneous occupational cause \textit{and} effect. In short, the preponderance of female frontline workers permits these gendered disconnections and reinforces the cultural tropes that underscore and support their maintenance so that even those men who do participate in this traditionally female profession are still able to employ and benefit from the privileges associated with their masculinities (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Pease, 2011).

This is not to imply that there were no gender analyses present in participant interviewees. One is reminded of the worker who clearly articulated that the average child protection workers’ hourly wage was probably closer to 5$/hour when all the unacknowledged labour was valued. Expanding upon her assertion that men would be paid more to do similar work, one wonders what a more equal worker gender balance’s effect would be upon the occupational demands and responsibilities placed upon frontline workers. While some men do perform child protection work, it is offered that the overwhelming representation of women in the frontline child protection workforce may support the kind of gendered occupational discourse that feeds and reinforces employer demands and the child protection myth project.

In addition, these interrelated major categories (distance, dissonance and disconnect) resonated with the conceptual framework’s propositions regarding the prevalent influence of New Public Management ideals and neoliberal organizational practices. Participants while commenting on the conceptual gap inherent to NPM whose conceptual benefits (accountability,
clearer service outcomes) cannot be achieved without provision of the resources required (usually more time or more money).

Child protection agencies suffer from an administrative clientelism where their mandates, response time frames, documentation protocols and budgets are defined by those seen as the most distant from day-to-day regulatory implementation. One might extrapolate further to note that many of the service users’ experiences of poverty are influenced in large part by governmental practices that child protection workers’ have little impact upon (housing, education budgets, social assistance levels, for example) but whose effects that are expected to mitigate.

Worker laments regarding the their agencies’ “business orientation”, perpetual lack of funding and their assertions that documentation requirements actually impeded their ability to do the kind of face-to-face work that increased child safety all found correlates in the conceptual framework initially proposed by the WHHW project. Each of these themes underscores the kind of administrative divide that is required to sustain the child protection myth project as the lack of responsiveness to implementation concern, practical distance between “people work” and paper work and skewed public and collateral perceptions all serve to reinforce worker feelings of organizational fatalism: “No one understands. No one listens. No one except other child protection workers care. And if not for us caring, then who”? The negative answer implicit to this question creates the organizational and emotive requirements necessary to feed the child protection myth through continued fraught practice, if only, in the words of a one provincial CAS’s motto, “for the love of children” (Howith, 1994).

Workers commented on the misinformation that contributed to child protection serving as a social service “dumping ground” because of it mandated service provision mandate. Interestingly, in interviewee discussions regarding public perceptions of their work, one sees
hints of where child protection as a community of practitioners and as community members may consider going in order to attempt to bridge the lack of public and collateral understanding of their roles. One interviewee commented on the high public regard held for Canadian military veterans despite her assertion that child protection workers had a more direct impact on Canadian lives. It is offered that perhaps the same attitude toward more general public safety campaigns, rather than the specifics of individual missions, may help raise the public perceived social value of child protection services.

5.4 Totally greedy and occupationally contested

When considered in concert with the sensitizing concepts that formed the backdrop to *WHHW*’s analyses, many of the notions initially raised find their correlates in the emergent and major project themes. For example, it might be argued that this work points to the insidious impact of neoliberalist ideology upon child protection praxis. As noted in the summative conceptual statement, child protection is “invisible work for an open but totally greedy institution” where the measurement preoccupations and clientelist relationship between the child protection frontline and its managerial hierarchy serves to obscure and efface the day-to-day workings of these occupational systems. Analyses permits one to propose that child protection work is not merely unseen but rendered invisible through its occupational functioning and culture in the neoliberalist context. This occupational rendering occurs at multiple but ideologically inter-related levels. For example, at the ministerial level by the funding projections that do not account for travel or court time and/or at the agency level where despite prohibitive collective agreements caseload numbers are weighted such as to minimize summative file tallies and/or at the individual worker level where the surprisingly common coping mechanism of “working for free” serves to liberate from (in the short-term) and (systematically) constrain
workers within often unmanageable occupational expectations. Thus, it might be proposed that child protection systems as greedy institutions operate, not as totalizing omnivorous organizations that reward adherents but as totalizing omnivorous systems that coerces, through a myth project adherence, in a manner that allows the problematic consequences of its ideological foundations to remain unchallenged (See Culter, 2004).

5.4.1 Child protection myth project.

Thus, child protection practice systems demand, enforce and reinforce discourses and processes in order to support problematic but system-reinforcing occupational practices. This produces a myth-creating and myth-perpetuating dynamic characterized by front-line worker fealty to their articulations of child protection ideals (child safety, family functioning, good work). So that despite their liability-related anxiety and feelings of disposability (feelings I would offer are encouraged by organizational discourses of individual worker accountability) workers continue to play their roles in relationship with distanced and distancing hierarchical actors; administrative relationships that capitalize on distance from frontline practice through the benefits associated with occupational systems that can continue to make overwhelming occupational demands without responding to worker concerns.

In short, workers believe in the work they do, despite the labour-effacing practices of the employment environments within which this work occurs. This contributes to the perpetuation of, what I would argue, is an exploitative dynamic where the very labour done by frontline child protection workers undermines acknowledgement of its value and import. Thus, numerous myths (e.g. individual worker responsibility, system sustainability) are supported through the very obscuring practices that belie the veracity of the mythological tenet.
When considered relative to this project’s initial conceptual offering, the following theoretically summative amalgam could be offered:

Child protection practice is total(ly) greedy institutional work premised, promulgated and rendered invisible through unintentionally complicit worker fealty to personalized occupational ideals which sustain distancing hierarchical and clientelist administrative relationships thus reinforcing systemic occupational mythology.

In conclusion, the theoretical offerings of the *WHHW* project allow us to consider that child protection workers’ professional identities can be understood as certainly influenced by socio-political, administrative or regulatory practices but are practically enacted by workers almost *despite* these demands. Workers use the knowledge gleaned from their day-to-day experiences (and those of their colleagues) to calculate “acceptable occupational risk” even as their praxis remains grounded in personalized occupational ideals. This conceptualization then helps one understand worker expressions of apparent organizational fatalism as the manifestation, in the face of limited worker resources (time, energy), of their loyalty to the values that they ascribe to and that undergird their occupational commitments despite worker lived experiences of distance and issue dismissal at the agency and/or ministerial level. Ironically, this practitioner fealty, expressed through continued labour within an “unworkable” system, serves to support the very system that continually minimizes the value of their labour and overemphasizes individual worker responsibility for the consequences of often systemic issues — thus the *WHHW* project’s theoretical offerings problematize and make explicit a self-perpetuating, labour–effacing and value-laden occupational project.
5.5 Limitations

The findings of an exploratory study of this nature should be considered within a context of the project’s limitations. Considering the size of the Working Hard, Heart-y Working sample and qualitative nature of its design, extrapolation of its findings to wider child protection systems at provincial, national or international levels cannot be made. This being said, the findings of this project do point to some interesting areas to consider for future research.

While the Working Hard, Heart-y Working project endeavoured to interview workers at a number of different Ontario child protection agencies (small, mid- and large- size organizations), self-selection assured that those individuals with “something to say” took part in the project. Neither can the six agencies visited be seen as representative of all provincial agencies. Further, it should be noted that most of the project participants were in fact from larger organizations even as smaller agencies may have had relatively higher rates of project participation.

It is also interesting to note that several project participants claimed that they would not have agreed to take part had it not been for the fact that the researcher had previous child protection experience. As important as this information was for some interviewees, it was not included in the advertising materials and was known to these participants only by word of mouth.

Had information about the researchers occupational past been included, would more participants have been interested in participating? How did this knowledge influence the ways in which participants responded to questions? Even as this researcher’s CAS history facilitated access to some participants, were there things left unsaid because of assumptions regarding this researcher’s own history with as a child protection employee (assumed researcher understanding)? Did workers seek to present themselves in a more positive light due to their perceptions of the researcher’s intimate understanding of occupational demands? It must be offered that any negatives associated with this interviewer’s previous child protection practice
were outweighed by the advantages afforded by participant frankness during my interviews of those workers who knew of my employment history.

Similarly, as has been mentioned, some of the children’s aid societies that were contacted denied this researcher official access to their employees. Considering that some participants agreed to participate after being informed that their agencies had refused access to them through their employer, what influence did the appearance of agency sanction have on the project’s participants? Might this researcher have heard different stories had interviews taken place in workers’ homes? Or if potential participants had been contacted through more general avenues like the College of Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers or the Ontario Association of Social Work? While I can state that participants were comfortable during their interviews, considering the potentially contentious nature of interviewee inputs, an initial participant engagement plan might have been better executed through social work associations instead of through child protection employers.

Finally, it is interesting to note that when asked about ethno-racial identification most (White) participants answered that they did not have such an identity and/or that they were “Canadian”. Positioned relative to readily invoked discursive notions like that of “visible minority” or “multiculturalism”, the idea of employing “Canadian-ness” as an ethno-racial identifier is revealed as problematic; this answer underscoring the assumption of Canadian-ness as White/Caucasian. As a Black woman, the juxtaposition of numerous White participants’ quizzical responses to the interview script question that began as “What is your ethno-racial identification” and morphed almost imperceptively \(^\text{15}\) over the course of the \textit{WHHW} project into

\(^{15}\) While engaging in a analytic writing exercise after interviews were complete, I first noticed the difference between how I initially posed the question in early interviews and how I, unaware of the effect of initial respondent answers, had changed the question from one requiring a descriptive answer to one which readily
“Do you have an ethno-racial identification” uncovers the powerful cultural underpinnings of the invocation of Canadian-ness or of no ethnically- or racially-mitigated identity as the reserve of White Canadians. Considering the perpetual over-representation of Aboriginal and racialized families and children involved with child protection services nationwide the seeming critical disengagement of those charged with providing said service with the practice and personal impacts of their social positioning relative to pervasive cultural tropes of “Canadian” and “Others” leads this researcher to wonder about the how these understandings contribute to the over-representation of racialized children and families in child protective systems (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Ancis, 2004; Maiter, 2009). In retrospect, I cannot identify the exact reasoning behind the question change. Maybe I was tired of starting interviews with quizzical stares or verbal fumbling. Perhaps I had allowed many of the participants’ implicit inability to engage such issues to dictate how I would ask question, thus slipping into the same rutted road travelled by the participants mentioned above. Even as I knew the question’s importance, maybe I just could not take what many participants’ inability to answer meant…

5.6 Contributions

The implications of this research project can be used to contribute to a number of social work relevant discussions. Speaking to the issue of social work education, while the development of skills necessary to work with children and families is an indispensable part of social work training, social work educators should perhaps consider paying more attention to organizational theory and the opportunities and constraints associated with their students’ future social work roles, not only as practitioners but also as employees.

accepted a discursive postcolonial categorical (Canadian = White). I was aware throughout the process of the “Canadian” answers but unaware of their effect in changing the question later posed.
This project represents a valuable addition to existing descriptions of the experiences of child protection workers, particularly with respect to providing a more nuanced understanding of child protection workers who are committed to continued service provision. In light of the effects of neoliberal forces on all workplaces, *WHHW* has drawn on the occupational parallels that exist between clients/consumers/community members and the social workers who work with them daily.

Considering the findings related to worker fatalism and administrative hierarchy, future research could interrogate worker conceptualizations of occupational resistance and potential professional advocacy. In addition, the already mentioned oversight regarding the import and context of the workers’ practice-sustaining emotive understandings could form an interesting complement to this initial foray.

This project explored child protection workers’ understanding of their day-today practice opportunities and constraints. They said they know their work is societally undervalued – societal validation is not why they do it. They said they recognize that they are being asked to address social issues outside their realms of influence – but ask if not addressed by them then whom? They know they will not always get it right and yet they stoically continue to work and risk with hopes of improved child lives and family functioning and minimal encounters with occupational discipline. As emotive work performed primarily by women with women during a period of professed fiscal constraint and further complicated by a perpetual crisis organizational orientation, this study uses a novel theoretical framework that provides a basis for much-needed structural analyses and related social work occupational advocacy.

As mentioned in the Preface of this work, part of the impetus for this project came from a conversation between a former colleague and I. He asked about the difference between the child
protection service request response and those of other social service providers and called for explicit attention to a distinction he and other agency employees experienced. He wanted to know what made us different – what made us distinct relative to other social service providers. As this work draws to a close, this conversation’s foundational questions remain just as has the question posed, perhaps facetiously, by this work’s title: Working Hard Heart-y Working?

In conclusion, I can say that what makes child protection workers different is that they are, in fact, working hard and heart-y working, putting in uncounted hours of emotional labour under the constant threat of individualized blame and occupational discipline resultant from systemic issues and that because their mandated work is usually performed by women stoically addressing the fallout from other social development decisions (e.g. education, mental health, housing, and poverty alleviation policies)\textsuperscript{16}, they toil in relative obscurity until something goes wrong, as it must inevitably, for someone, considering the challenges they face. At those times, those implicated face extreme scrutiny while their provincial colleagues add another story to the annals of cautionary tales associated with their practice and continue to labour on because they trust in the value of the work they do and tolerate, for example, societal anti-poverty complacence and/or community post-tragedy blaming rage. They are candid regarding their missteps because they honestly assess their work as daily managing unmanageable occupational demands. They believe those who have done child protection work understand its systemic challenges. In essence, they work to try to maintain both occupational and societal myths about who and what we value. It is this understanding that I offer in response to the questions raised on a Saturday afternoon so many years ago. This is what makes child protection workers different –

\textsuperscript{16} Though often discussed in isolation, child protection policy is not enacted in isolation. It is a practice affected by other social service programs and protocols (e.g. Little money for psychological assessment in school
their love, labour and commitment to child safety and improved family functioning sustains the systemic perpetuation of occupational myth that devalues them: the very people (and work) that the child protection system is so dependent upon.

___________________________________________________________

contributes to a child’s “acting out” behaviours and possible child protection involvement or a dearth of affordable housing forces a large family to live in too close quarters thus potentially aggravating family mental health outcomes.
Appendix A: Interview Script

Working Hard or Heart-y Working? Using Constructivist Grounded Theory to Theorize Child Protection’s Occupational Construction

Thank you for meeting with me and agreeing to participate in this research project. I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral research. I am trying to understand the relationship between front-line child protection workers the social, interpersonal, and individual systems that influence their practice and the way they think about their work.

Before we begin with the interview, I would like you to read through this consent form. You will be given a copy for your records. (Give participant consent forms. Participant reads form).

As the consent form indicates this interview should take no more than 90 minutes and all of your information will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions about the consent form or interview? (If yes, answer the questions. If no, proceed). O.K., then I’ll ask you sign the consent form. (Participant signs the form. Participant is given a copy for his/her records).

Great. I’m going to begin with some demographic questions and then I’ll ask you some questions that will help us better understand your perceptions regarding child protection work. I want to remind you that you can stop me at any point if you have any questions or need clarification. Also, you can end this interview at any point. O.K.?

(Collect demographic information. Proceed with rest of interview).

Demographic Information

Agency ______________________
Age: _______ Ethno-racial Identification (if any) ______________________
Educational Background BA _______ BSW _________ MSW _______
Semi-Structured Questions

(Front-Line Workers)

1. Can you tell me about your educational background?
   • Do you think what you studied in school has an impact on what your work?

2. Can you tell me about your social work professional history?
   • What other types of social work positions have you held?
   • For how long?
   • What brought you to child protection?
   • How long have you been with this agency?
   • How long have you been in this position?

3. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you tell them?
   • Is it uncomfortable?
   • If so, why?

4. Could you tell me a bit about your work environment?
   • Setting description? Community description?
   • Service population?
   • What was your social work role in the setting?
   • Specialized team?

5. Can you give me a sense of a typical day (or week) on the job?
   • What do you do?
6. What are the biggest issues affecting your day-to-day work on an individual/personal level?

• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

7. What are the biggest issues affecting your work (or folks like you) on an agency/organizational level?

• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

8. What are the biggest issues affecting child protection work your day-to-day work on a provincial level?

• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

9. Keeping these issues in mind and accepting that there would still be a need for child protection services, if you could imagine your perfect work day/week/year, what would it look like?

• If your phone HAD to ring....

10. Social work is a profession where women workers predominate. Child protection is a field where the same is true but women also represent the majority of clients. What influence, if any, do you think these facts have on the work you do and the relationships you have?
WORKING HARD OR HEART-Y WORKING

• With clients?
• With management (supervisors, Service Directors, Board of Directors)?
• As a profession re government (the Ministry)?
• As a profession with the society at large?

11. What can you tell me about your agency’s organizational atmosphere?

• How are you treated?
• What is it like for you?
• Do you feel included/excluded in policy decisions?
• Is the working environment supportive/unsupportive?

12. What role(s) do you think child protection workers play in society?

13. When I worked as a child protection worker, I would often hear my team members and colleagues talk about child protection as the place where 'the buck stopped.' That is, the social service that was compelled to address issues that other social service providers could not/would not address (housing, education etc.). What do you think about this sentiment?

• Do you agree/disagree?
• Why/why not?
• If you agree/disagree, what do you think contributes to this perception?
• If you agree, what do you think contributes to this set-up?

14. What do you do when your clinical judgment conflicts with your supervisor’s/management’s/agency policy?

• How did you deal with your feelings?
• How do you convey what you don’t necessarily agree with to your client families?
• What is that like for you? For them?
15. Can you identify some of the supports for your professional practice?

16. Can you identify some of the constraints upon your professional practice?

17. Do you worry about liability issues?
   • If so, how so? If not, why not?
   • Do they have any impact on the service you provide?

18. What about recording protocols and file audits? Do they have any impact on the service you provide?
   • If so, how so? If not, why not?

19. Tell me about workload:
   • How does it affect you?
   • How does it affect your colleagues?
   • Why is it always such as issue?
   • What, if anything, can be done?

20. What do you think about Differential Response?
   • How has this ministerial change affected your work?
   • Can you say more about that?
21. What about standardized tools and documentation protocols?
   • How do these influence your social work practice?

22. Is there anything you think I should know in order to understand today’s child protection practice in Ontario?

23. What are some suggestions you might have for the practice of child protection in Ontario?

24. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
   • Is there anything else you would like to add that we may not have asked you about?

25. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
   
   Thank you
Semi-Structured Questions
(Supervisors/Managers)

1. Can you tell me about your educational background?
   • Do you think what you studied in school has an impact on what your work?

2. Can you tell me about your social work professional history?
   • What other types of social work positions have you held?
   • For how long?
   • What brought you to child protection?
   • How long have you been with this agency?
   • How long have you been in this position?

3. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you tell them?
   • Is it uncomfortable?
   • If so, why?

4. Could you tell me a bit about your work environment?
   • Setting description? Community description?
   • Service population?
   • What was your social work role in the setting?
   • Specialized team?

5. Can you give me a sense of a typical day (or week) on the job?
• What do you do?
• How is this different from front-line workers?

6. What are the biggest issues affecting day-to-day front-line work on an individual/personal level?
• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

7. What are the biggest issues affecting front-line work on an agency/organizational level?
• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

8. What are the biggest issues affecting child protection work on a provincial level?
• In the short-term?
• In the long-term?
• Can you tell me a little more about that?

9. Keeping these issues in mind and accepting that there would still be a need for child protection services, if you could imagine your perfect work day/week/year, what would it look like?
• If your phone HAD to ring….

10. Social work is a profession where women workers predominate. Child protection is a field where the same is true but women also represent the majority of clients.
What influence, if any, do you think these facts have on the work you do and the relationships you have?

- With clients?
- With management (supervisors, Service Directors, Board of Directors)?
- As a profession re government (the Ministry)?
- As a profession with the society at large?

11. What can you tell me about your agency’s organizational atmosphere?

- How are you treated?
- What is it like for you?
- Do you feel included/excluded in policy decisions?
- Is the working environment supportive/unsupportive?

12. What role(s) do you think child protection workers play in society?

13. When I worked as a child protection worker, I would often hear my team members and colleagues talk about child protection as the place where 'the buck stopped.' That is, the social service that was compelled to address issues that other social service providers could not/would not address (housing, education etc.). What do you think about this sentiment?

- Do you agree/disagree?
- Why/why not?
- If you agree/disagree, what do you think contributes to this perception?
- If you agree, what do you think contributes to this set-up?

14. What happens when a worker’s clinical judgment conflicts with your supervisory/management/agency policy?

- How did you deal with your feelings?
- How do you convey what you don’t necessarily agree with to your client families?
- What is that like for you? For them?
15. Can you identify some of the supports for your professional practice?

16. Can you identify some of the constraints upon your professional practice?

17. Do you worry about liability issues?
   • If so, how so? If not, why not?
   • Do they have any impact on the service you provide?

18. What about recording protocols and file audits? Do they have any impact on the service you provide?
   • If so, how so? If not, why not?

19. Tell me about workload:
   • How does it affect you?
   • How does it affect your colleagues?
   • Why is it always such as issue?
   • What, if anything, can be done?

20. What do you think about Differential Response?
   • How has this ministerial change affected your work?
• Can you say more about that?

21. What about standardized tools and documentation protocols?
• How do these influence your social work practice?

22. Is there anything you think I should know in order to understand today’s child protection practice in Ontario?

23. What are some suggestions you might have for the practice of child protection in Ontario?

24. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
• Is there anything else you would like to add that we may not have asked you about?

25. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank you
Appendix B: Proposed Study Question/Interview Question Match-Up

Each Proposed Study Question (PSQ) corresponds to at least one Interview Script Question (see Appendix). The table below shows numbered PSQs (left-hand column) with their corresponding interview questions (right-hand column).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSQ1. How front-line child protection workers (FLCPWs) understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities?</th>
<th>1. Can you tell me about your educational background?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSQ4. How FLCPWs see themselves as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?</td>
<td>2. Can you tell me about your social work professional history?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ5. How FLCPWs do see their profession as socially constituted,</td>
<td>3. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you tell them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities?</td>
<td>4. Could you tell me a bit about your work environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ3. How do FLCPWs understand the roles of child protection workers (CPSs) in societal functioning?</td>
<td>5. Can you give me a sense of a typical day (or week) on the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities?</td>
<td>6. What are the biggest issues affecting your day-to-day work on an individual/personal level?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?

<p>| PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities? | 7. What are the biggest issues affecting your work (or folks like you) on an agency/organizational level? |
| PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice? | 8. What are the biggest issues affecting child protection work your day-to-day work on a provincial level? |
| PSQ5. How FLCPWs do see their profession as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies? |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSQ5. How FLCPWs do see their profession as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ4. How FLCPWs see themselves as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Keeping these issues in mind and accepting that there would still be a need for child protection services, if you could imagine your perfect work day/week/year, what would it look like?

10. Social work is a profession where women workers predominate. Child protection is a field where the same is true but women also represent the majority of clients. What influence, if any, do you think these facts have on the work you do and the relationships you have?
<p>| PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities? | 11. What can you tell me about your agency’s organizational atmosphere? |
| PSQ4. How FLCPWs see themselves as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies? | 12. What role(s) do you think child protection workers play in society? |
| PSQ3. How do FLCPWs understand the roles of child protection workers (CPSs) in societal functioning? | 13. When I worked as a child protection worker, I would often hear my team members and colleagues talk about child protection as the place where 'the buck stopped.' That is, the social service that was compelled to address issues that other social service providers could not/would not address (housing, education etc.). What do you think about this sentiment? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice?</th>
<th>14. What do you do when your clinical judgment conflicts with your supervisor’s/management’s/agency policy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PSQ6. How FLCPWs see themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal)?</td>
<td>15. Can you tell me about some of the support for your professional practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PSQ1. How do FLCPWs understand the occupational forces that influence their professional identities?</td>
<td>16. Can you identify some of the constraints on your professional practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PSQ6. How FLCPWs see themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal)?</td>
<td>17. Do you worry about liability issues?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>18. What about recording protocols and file audits? Do they have any impact on the service you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ6. How FLCPWs see themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal)?</td>
<td>provide?</td>
<td>19. Tell me about workload.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice? PSQ6. How FLCPWs see themselves (individually/collectively) in relation to professionally governing mechanisms (ethical, governmental, fiscal)?</td>
<td>20. What do you think of Differential Response?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ2. How do FLCPWs understand the forces that influence their day-to-day practice?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ5. How FLCPWs do see their profession as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQ2. What are some suggestions you might have for the practice of child protection in Ontario?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their day-to-day practice?

PSQ5. How FLCPWs do see their profession as socially constituted, that is, (re)produced and influenced by socio-political factors and policies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| 25. Is there anything you would like to ask me? |
Appendix C: Information Letter and Consent Form for Research Participants

Research Project Title: Working Hard or Heart-y Working? Using Constructivist Grounded Theory to Theorize Child Protection’s Occupational Construction

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Melissa Redmond, Doctoral Candidate (416.873.0915)

Supervisor: Dr. Aron Shlonsky, Associate Professor

Study Information: Melissa Redmond is a PhD student at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Melissa’s research project is exploring how front-line child protection workers in Ontario think about their work by looking at the relationship between workers and the social, interpersonal and individual systems that influence their day-to-day practice. Melissa hopes to be able to produce a project that will be used by workers and researchers to improve the professional experiences of child protection workers.

Individual interviews will last approximately one to one and one half hours. During the interview, participants will be asked questions about their professional experiences and the factors influencing front-line child protection practice in Ontario. Participants may be contacted and asked to participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised. Participants can refuse to be interviewed a second time.

Individual interviews will be recorded. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured by ensuring that:

1. Participants can ask that the recording device be turned off at any point in the interview while Melissa takes notes.
2. Interview recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.
3. The only individuals who might hear the recordings include Melissa Redmond, her supervisory committee members and anyone she may hire to assist with transcription.
4. While transcripts will be prepared from all interviews no identifying will be included in the final transcripts.
5. All participants will be given a code name that will be used in reference to their interviews. The master-list of codes and consent forms will be kept in a separate secure location.
6. Publications or written materials associated with this study will not include any research participant-identifying information.

While will take the steps outlines above to protect your privacy, she is duty-bound to report any concerns regarding a child in need of protection, interviewee self-harm or harm to others.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Potential participants can choose not to take part.

There are no consequences related to choosing (or not choosing) to be involved in this project.

Participants can also choose not to continue their project involvement at any time prior to data analysis. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study.

5.6.1.1 Interview Consent Form
I understand agree to participate in the study conducted by Melissa Redmond of the University of Toronto. I understand that this research is part of Melissa’s doctoral dissertation project and anonymous aggregate results may be published in scholarly social work journals or disseminated at peer-reviewed conferences.

I understand that I will participate in an interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. I understand that with my permission the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in individual interview transcripts.

I have been made aware of the potential risks and benefits associated with my participation in this study. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that my decision either to participate or not will be kept completely confidential.
I understand that as a voluntary participant I may choose not to answer any questions that may make me feel uncomfortable. I further understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation and with no consequence.

Any questions I have asked about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent to participate in this study.

Participant: __________________________  __________________________

Print Name  Signature

Date: __________________________

Researcher  __________________________

Melissa Redmond  Signature
Appendix D: Agency Information Letter and Consent Form

Date
Dear ___ :

This letter is an invitation for your agency to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree (Ph D) in the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, under the supervision of Dr. Aron Scholsky. The title of my research project is *Working Hard or Heart-y Working? Using Constructivist Grounded Theory to Theorize Child Protection’s Occupational Construction*. I would like to provide you with more information about this project that explores child protection workers’ perceptions regarding the work they do.

First, I would like to thank you for your interest in including [name of organization] in this research. The purpose of this study is to examine child protection workers’ understandings of their occupational roles relative to societal factors such as political, social and gendered forces; governmental and regulatory systems; and public opinion. In short, I am interested in the social forces that facilitate and complicate child protection practice in present-day Ontario and will be interviewing workers at several agencies throughout the province. The knowledge and information generated from this study serve as the foundation for my dissertation and may help child protection agencies and workers better understand the challenges, motivations and opportunities inherent to the vital public services they offer and perhaps contribute to lower attrition rates.

It is my hope to connect with workers who are employed by [name of organization] to invite them to participate in the *Working Hard or Heart-y Working* project. I believe that
protection workers have unique understandings relating to social service provision in Ontario. To gain access to this knowledge, I will be conducting interviews with front-line workers, supervisors and service managers. At the conclusion of Working Hard or Heart-y Working, the publication of this dissertation, presentations and academic journal articles will share this project’s findings with workers and the wider community.

To respect the operating protocols and privacy rights of the [name of organization] and its employees, I will not be contacting workers directly. I intend to provide the [name of organization] with information flyers to be distributed by the [name of organization] at their discretion. Contact information for me and my advisor will be contained on the flyers or packages. If worker is interested in participating they will be invited to contact me, Melissa Redmond, to discuss participation in this study in further detail.

Participation of any employee is completely voluntary. Each worker, supervisor or manager will make his/her own independent decision as to whether or not to be interviewed. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. Participants will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study, as well as informed consent forms.

Each participant may decide to withdraw from this study at anytime without any penalty by simply advising me. To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts used from the stories will be labeled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Names of participants will not appear in the dissertation, articles, presentations or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identified or identifiable, and only described by gender and designation (manager, family services worker...).
All paper field (paper) notes collected will be retained locked in my office and in a secure filing cabinet. All data will be confidentially destroyed seven years after the completion of the study. Finally, only myself and my advisor, Dr. Aron Shlonsky and supervisory committee at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto at the University will have access to these materials. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto. However, the final decision about participation belongs to the [name of organization], and its employees. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact the University of Toronto, Office of Research Ethics at 416.946.3273 or by e-mail at ethics.review@utoronto.ca

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 416.873.0915 or by e-mail at melissa.redmond@utoronto.ca You may also contact my supervisor, Aron Shlonsky at 416.978.5718 or by email at aron.shlonsky@utoronto.ca

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to the [name of organization], to its workers, the children and families [name of organization] serves, as well as the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Melissa Redmond
Doctoral Candidate
Factor–Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

Aron Shlonsky
Associate Professor
Factor–Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
Appendix E: Research Participants Recruitment Poster

Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

Researcher interested in what you think about your work

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
the challenges and opportunities of child protection work.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to take part in an interview.

Your participation would involve 1(one) session,
approximately 60-90 minute session.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer,
please contact:

Melissa Redmond
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto
at
416.873.0915 or
Email: melissa.redmond@uotoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto.
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