What is Measured Matters: A Textual Analysis of Screening and Intake Tools Used With Youth

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty of Human and Social Development

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ABSTRACT

This institutional ethnographic textual analysis explores the impact screening/intake assessment tool usage has on youth workers. Fourteen screening/intake tools used by youth workers, transcripts from interviews with youth workers and accreditation manuals and public documents pertaining to the current political climate were collected and examined. The objective of the inquiry was to explore the role these tools play in linking the youth/worker/organizational context and how these often “taken for granted” tools have the power to transport external and internal influences into the youth worker work process and shape their experience. Findings show that tools used have a great deal of power to shape the practice in various ways: they dictate how work processes happen, how clients are perceived, how practice decisions are made and who has the ultimate control over practice.
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The many pathways leading to the completion of this work have meandered; often going off down rabbit trails and at times even reaching seemingly complete dead ends. However, lining the journey there has always been a multitude of supporters and those who were willing to get me back on track. There are many such people and they know who they are and the impact they have had upon me. However, in particular I would like to especially thank the following: Dr. Sibylle Artz, an amazing supervisor, for her enthusiastic ability and infinite patience to inspire my confidence and ensure I had what supplies I needed to complete this trip. Dr. Jim Anglin, a fellow traveler, for his patience and willingness to listen to my various plans and diverse proposals and yet who never sat in judgment. Gratitude to Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, for her support and introduction to the world of policy analysis and for her nurturance of my critical thinking skills. I would also like to thank Dr. Marie Campbell for introducing me to the work of Dr. Dorothy Smith and guiding me through some of its complexities. I would also like to thank the entire faculty, students and youth who directly and indirectly influenced my ability to collect and process the knowledge that made the journey conceivable. I am most grateful to my family in England and husband Ray and our children, Amie, Aynsley and Nick who have traveled the many pathways with me and at times wondered if this journey would ever come to an end. Their love and belief in me have sustained me, even though at times completion seemed unfathomable. I owe a special thank-you to my friends who have listened through endless thesis stories and grown long in the tooth waiting for the grand finale. Lastly, a special gratitude is owed to the Gabriola Whine Club where I went to recharge, ponder life and always left filled and ready to go again.

Finally, I am thankful to the creator for giving me the courage to go for my Masters and the strength and health of mind and body to finish it.
FOREWORD

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference." Robert Frost

A word to the reader, this foreword represents a brief overview and review of the thesis in order to provide a road map for the reader to follow. I have provided this information, as the thesis does not follow a traditional format.

In 2001, I was a member of a collaborative, community-based research project, the purpose of which was to develop a user-friendly, gender-sensitive guide for the assessment of community needs and resources for high risk young women aged thirteen to seventeen years (Artz, Nicholson, Halsall & Larke, 2001). My primary role on this team was to collect, describe and review twenty-six tools used by community workers working with youth on southern Vancouver Island. The tools collected were primarily assessment and diagnostic tools used for screening/intake, risk/need assessment, diagnosis and developmental assessment.

During the analysis of these tools, I also worked on the literature review and participated in interviewing youth workers and youth. Immersed in the resulting data, I soon began to speculate that assessment tools were more than instruments for the systematic gathering and synthesizing of data used to identify patterns and ensure appropriate service provision to youth clients. My conjecture that something else was happening was based on my awareness that I was having growing negative reactions to the tools, which I had previously seen as innate texts used to assist me in my work with youth. I began to wonder why I was having these reactions and what was it about the tools that was eliciting such a response. Once tuned into my own reactions I soon began
to hear some of these reactions from youth workers in the transcribed interviews I read. This initial consideration of the alternate more significant roles assessment tools may be performing, led me to consider the influence of these tools in the worker/youth process. Ultimately, this ability to consider assessment tools from a different perspective became a critical, pivotal point in my formulation and interest in this present inquiry.

At the same time, and almost serendipitously, as a manager in a non-profit agency, I was also immersed in the process of designing a screening/intake assessment tool that would meet the external directives of a quality assurance accreditation body (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). I found myself struggling with my own resistance and difficulties, trying to design a tool that would meet the multiple requirements imposed by such external influences as accreditation standards, political, and economic directives and the variety of internal needs recommended by youth workers, while wanting to put service to clients first. As I continued to strive to understand my own discomfort with the process, I also became attuned to these same frustrations expressed by workers during our interviewing process. At this point, I began to see more clearly the linkages between the design and use of tools and the internal and external influences that were having an impact on organizations and offices in which youth workers worked. While considering what these potential influences might be, I found myself questioning whether it was these external influences that were contributing to worker's reactions to the assessment process and their use of assessment tools that I had heard in the interviews.

Consequently, this inquiry had its beginnings embedded in the realities and actualities of the worker's and my own experiences. It was further developed as my
realization grew that work environments are organized more by relations or webs of influence and are connected to larger processes and demands than I had previously considered. From this point, I decided to conduct a literature review of assessment tools, organizational processes and the exertion of power or influence on the work processes of youth workers to see what others already knew about this topic.

This literature review, coupled with my growing awareness and the concerns raised by the workers led me to develop a set of questions that reflected the voices of workers and my own inquiry into assessment processes. The three research questions I formulated to direct my inquiry were:

1. What does screening/intake assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?

2. Who in institutions utilizes screening/intake assessment tools?

3. What is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?

At this point in my research process I made several assumptions. Firstly, I presumed that in order to understand how documents affect people's lives; these documents must be treated as something that can be examined. Secondly, I accepted that examining an organization's assessment tools would reveal how tools had the capacity to organize and mediate an organization's work process and consequently the practice of workers' and their service provision to youth (Smith, 1999).

Simply stated, an organization’s assessment texts appeared from my initial considerations, to exist as vessels for conveying internal and external control and power in organizations. These assumptions can best be illustrated by a work situation I observed. In order to refer a youth to a court directed program, a youth probation officer
is required by organizational policies and procedures to activate a work process, accomplished by completing a section of an intake assessment tool about a specific youth. From this point, the tool’s text literally directs the youth probation officer, to forward the tool on to the youth’s medical practitioner for further processing to address specific questions. The youth probation officer, upon receiving the completed tool from the medical practitioner, is then required to attach other collateral documents related to the youth in question, about the offences committed and then forward the whole tool to the referral program for acceptance or rejection. The youth probation worker, medical practitioner and the intake staff at the referred program all enter into a relationship linked by the tool in order to provide a service to the youth, as directed by the court.

In this situation I saw how tools had the power to create and direct specific kinds of relationships and linkages between workers and youth, who did not know each other and who had never met. The tool pre-determined who would be in the relationship and also coordinated the nature of the actions between the parties to the relationship. The responses of those involved are coordinated and controlled by the requirements of the text and a “conversation” about the youth occurs within the bounds of the text, yet the parties, in reality, had not met each other. The tool conveys both the internal and external influences of the organization and the justice system and directs the work process of the youth probation officer. The tool also has the power to dictate what is shared between the parties and ultimately has the power to “inform” the referral organization about the youth as she/he is constructed in the text. The decision to accept or reject the youth is ultimately based upon what is contained in the text.
Given my research questions and my initial understanding of the power of texts, I decided that a textual analysis of organizational tools, augmented by secondary data in the form of transcribed voices of youth workers, collected in an earlier research project (Artz et al., 2001) would form the main focus of my inquiry. Accepting the nature of the inquiry I had decided upon, a methodology that would assist me in the discovery and analysis of tools and texts which influence work processes and link them to organizational agendas was required. In addition, I needed a methodology, which would provide me with the opportunity to begin with the actual voices of those with the real experiences and extend my analysis from there. I investigated several methodologies and decided to conduct a textual analysis grounded in institutional ethnography (Smith, 1975, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999). Institutional ethnography is a distinctive theoretical approach to research that extends beyond traditional ethnography. As a tool of inquiry this method recognizes that people’s own knowledge and ways of knowing are crucial elements of social analysis. Using various kinds of methods such as interviewing, observations and documentary analysis, this method guides the researcher to discover and analyze the ideological practices which organize work processes and link them to the organizational agenda. Considering the complex web of social relations people engage in from the standpoint of a particular peoples, rather than as an abstract concept allows researchers to understand “people’s activities as components of, and contributors to, an ongoing series of courses of action” (Bell, 2001). A course of actions that as Smith (1987) suggests, “is already organized as it takes up from what preceded and projects its organization into what follows” (p.183).
I was, however, cautious in my use of institutional ethnography because this method tends to use a specific discourse and language that can prove to be a barrier to the articulating and disseminating of the study findings (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). Since my underlying research goal was to understand the influence of assessment tools on the youth/worker process, I wanted the findings to be accessible and available to these workers. I realized that the density and complexity of some of the traditional institutional ethnographic discourse meant that using this methodology in its purest form could result in obscuring my findings through the use of the jargon specific to this method. I balanced this weakness against the strength of the methodology, which provides a useful theoretical framework for analysis, locating the research focus with those who have experiential knowledge, while disclosing the source of the power relations that shape their experiences (Hartley, 1992; McKee, 2002).

This research was conducted in three phases termed entry, exploration and exposure. In institutional ethnography the entry phase is defined loosely as the understanding and collecting of information about the local setting and the individuals who interact there and their experiences. In this inquiry this involves my understanding of the setting and my own reflective journey or experience with assessment. The second stage or exploration phase of the study involves an intense review of the data, which allows meaning to evolve. I decided to review and analyze three primary data components during this phase. The components were:

1. Fourteen intake and screening tools. This cluster was defined by Artz et al., 2001, as "those tools used to assess the appropriateness and eligibility for admission to a particular program" (p.2).
2. Data in the form of secondary documents pertaining to the 2001/2002 political climate and accreditation standards. This public domain data was collected as I participated in my youth serving agency’s accreditation process and government restructuring and redesign initiatives.

3. Transcripts from eight interviews with youth workers and three transcripts from focus groups, totaling two hundred and ninety pages of single-sided, font 12 data.

These data sets were chosen as they were manageable in size for exploration and from my experience with the initial research project, appeared to be key areas that would shed light upon the research questions posed.

During the second or exploration phase, nine pertinent themes were extrapolated through intensive reading and listening to the voices of the youth workers. These themes were:

1. Eligibility for service
2. Resource allocation
3. Tools as active constituents of organizational process
4. Processing interchanges
5. Documentation as the basis for organizational accountability
6. The creation of a formalized account through categorizing
7. Organizational literacy
8. Authoritative knowers and discourse
9. What is measured matters.

Upon further reading and reviewing with a focus upon these nine themes, four dilemmas or contradictions were uncovered. These four areas comprise the third phase, termed exposure in this inquiry. Exposure in institutional ethnography refers to the final stage of inquiry when those relations of ruling, which are not explicit in what is said or realized by the participants, are exposed. In this inquiry the four areas exposed are:
1. Paperwork vs. relationship building
2. Authorized knower vs. objective, standardized documenter
3. External vs. internal accountability
4. Outcomes management vs. the intangible process of youth work.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the findings and suggestions for future research.

In summary, through an examination of screening/intake tools and the transcribed voices of youth workers as an entry point to begin my inquiry, I have attempted to understand the implicit role intake and screening tools play in the youth/worker/organizational context and how often “taken for granted” tools are able to transport organizational influences into the youth worker’s work process.
CHAPTER TWO

Defining the Parameters: A review of literature

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the particular stance institutional ethnography takes in relation to literature reviews. What follows is a description of how this literature review was constructed, including the sources and areas of literature searched. The remainder of the review is divided into sections that begin by looking at five institutional ethnographic studies, which consider the relationships between assessment, organizational processes and the exertion of influence. Next the literature review looks at assessment and assessment tools used by workers, and then finally considers organizational and administrative processes.

Literature reviews and the institutional ethnographic inquiry

As institutional ethnography is foundational to this inquiry, Campbell and Gregor (2002) suggest that the institutional ethnographer "read the literature both for conventional reasons—to discover the scope of the knowledge in this area—and for the particular reason related to her own positioning" (p.51). Smith (1990a) concurs but cautions the institutional ethnographer to avoid considering the literature to be the ultimate authority. Instead, Smith (1990a) supports self-consciously attending to one's own stance and position in the everyday world and not importing the concepts in the literature as predetermined frameworks for one's inquiry. This literature review was conducted to assist me with refining and limiting the topic and to provide a context for my proposed inquiry. In this instance the context was particularly important as academic literature and theoretical knowledge not only influence me as the researcher, but also influences the way organizations and external influences construct the youth work
process. The literature in this case was not seen as the authority but rather as an opportunity to understand another realm of influence.

Sources and areas of literature searched

In order to locate literature from broad sources in the area of assessment, I conducted a literature review using a multi-disciplinary search of the University of Victoria Library’s databases, Psychlit, Sociofile, ERIC, First Nations Periodical Index and Social Work Abstracts, along with the World Wide Web. Key words such as assessment, screening and intake tools, assessment tools and work processes, accountability measures, human service organizations, bureaucracy, human service management, outcome management, tool activation and youth were used. These key words were chosen as they allowed me to search for potential linkages between assessment, organizations and work processes that I supposed existed. This combined search produced 1500 articles, books and studies that were loosely related to the topic. After reviewing the literature found, I narrowed my review to one hundred and four. I did this by reading on-line abstracts of journal articles and studies and reviewing available information on the books. I was looking for publications that were specific to the human service field and would provide academic perspectives already available on the topic of assessment and work processes. I also included literature that allowed for alternate considerations of the subject, such as different service design models found in administrative texts. In addition I did not limit my search to texts found only in the child and youth care field, but included other human service contexts, such as nursing, social work and justice. From amongst the one hundred and four texts, I then searched very narrowly for institutional ethnographic studies, which made direct links between
assessment tools and work processes governing practice. However, after finding only five studies, I again returned to the original one hundred and four texts and sought literature that spoke to the topic more broadly: the use of assessment generally in human service work and literature on organizational management and potential external influences on either process. Once I broadened the search I eliminated nineteen books, articles and journals that were of no relevance to this inquiry. This literature review is created from the eighty-five remaining sources.

**Institutional ethnographies**

Given the specificity of my research questions, I sought literature that analyzed the relationships between the use of assessment tools, organizational processes and the exertion of power or influence. This initial search revealed limited published analysis in this area. Smith (1990b) proposes a possible reason for this omission is that often we see text—in this case the assessment tool, as objectively separate from ourselves, and therefore we do not recognize or consider how it influences us.

In Smith's words:

The text comes before us without any apparent attachments. It seems to stand on its own inert, without the impetus of power. But in situations of our everyday life as contrasted with scholarly activities, we find the text operative in many ways (p.122).

As mentioned, I found five studies that explored the connections between assessment tools and the institutions that they were designed to serve. In other words, these studies examined how the institutions used their assessment tools to shape the work process in service of the institution. Two studies, one conducted by Campbell, Copeland, and Tate, (1999), and the other by Rankin, (2001), explored how sense is
made of mediating procedures and the exercise of power in health care settings with nurses.

Campbell et al. (1999) looked at how intake nurses who assess public subsidies and services required by their clients, used assessment tools or forms as agents of their organizations. They concluded that the use of the assessment tool structured the nurse/client relationship and the corresponding work processes. Regardless, of what the nurse expected from the helping interaction, the tool imported the organization’s administrative requirements into the relationship and thereby exerted a form of power that was coordinated and external to the interaction. Through the mapping and analysis of such interactions, the researchers were able to identify how “taken for granted” organizational processes define institutions and shape helping relationships (Campbell, Copeland, Tate, 1999).

Rankin (2001) explored what nurses do in their every day work environments. Rankin’s focus was on exploring, explicating and making visible the socially organized impact that managerial changes were having on the practice of nursing, an impact that was seemingly going unnoticed by managers. She heard nurses complaining about losing their head nurses due to organizational re-structuring and this became her entry point into trying to understand how hospital nurses are able to integrate new managerial efforts and strategies into their work. She found that the nurses held a different understanding of what was happening than management. While her focus was not solely on the differing perspectives of nurses and management, these different views allowed her to explore the social organization that controlled the day-to-day work of nurses.
Ng (1996), in her institutional ethnographic study, focused on employment seeking immigrant women. This study supported the value of looking at the linkages between assessment documents and the demands of the organization. Ng noticed that despite women mentioning many aspects of their lives during pre-employment interviews, only those aspects considered by the employment counsellors as important for employability were highlighted on the forms completed. She noted that, "the counsellor in effect produced a client as a special commodity having special characteristics" (p.63). She also found that what was defined as essential for employability was defined external to the organization by both the labour market and government incentives, and then imported into the client/worker relationship through the assessment tool.

A fourth institutional ethnographic study conducted by Bell (2001) looked at what happened to a ten year old child with a degenerative condition called Rhetts Syndrome, who, according to a Coroner’s Service inquest, died from severe malnutrition. The evidence presented in this inquiry showed that one week prior to the child’s death, three health care providers conducted individual assessments of this child. Bell analyzed the texts produced by these health care providers using institutional ethnography. She discovered that the health care providers’ assessments led to an “authoritative” or official account of the child as “terminal” rather than “neglected” or “malnourished.” This official account was adopted by all subsequent workers involved with the child and led to other potential views and interventions of the child being subordinated or not documented. Once the child was interpreted via the texts as terminal or dying, no other considerations of her not eating were considered. Bell concluded her thesis by
suggesting that while the professional and organizational texts of professionals are an often "taken for" granted aspect of the day to day expectations of practice, in actuality these texts should be understood as active catalysts in relation to service provision, as their impact can be profound.

Lastly, a study conducted by Barron (2000), again using institutional ethnography as a method, aimed to give a voice to youth to speak about their actual experiences with the justice system in Canada. With a particular focus on how youth experience and interpret their own experiences of violence, Barron offers a departure from standard criminological approaches to youth violence. In its place, she suggests that by accessing the testimony of youth we might gain new insight into the issue. For example, punishment or treatment by imprisonment for violent offences is only effective if the youth perceives it to be so. If we do not understand their perspectives, we may be offering neither effective and meaningful treatment nor punishment. This lack of understanding of the youth's perspective is also reflected in assessments used with youth connected with the justice system. In these situations, Barron like other researchers using the institutional ethnographic method considers how the extensive interviews and assessments conducted on violent youth rarely consider the information given by the youth as valuable in its own right. Rather, information is interpreted through a specialized, professional language, which often has the result of pathologizing the youth and classifying their behaviours. Once classified, the behaviours reaffirm professional discourse or what is already known about this type of behaviour. Therefore, little room is left to consider alternatives or offer new insight into the issue of youth violence. Barron illustrates her findings by offering one of her youth respondent's experiences of
being misclassified as a “gang member.” In Barron’s study this respondent indicated that once labeled as such, she was treated as if this were the only explanation for her actions, noting “the prosecution made me sound really bad, like I was the big horrible gang member…they described me as cold on the stand, but I cried on the stand so I don’t know why that was said” (Barron, 2000, p.74). Barron points out that in this case, the classification of the youth as “gang member” fits with a professional discourse that attributes some forms of youth crime to those who associate with identifiable ethnic or class groups. Barron concludes her study by emphasizing the importance of incorporating and seeing as valuable, the actual voices of youth when looking at youth violence.

Essential to each of these inquiries is the researcher’s interest in exploring and making visible the linkages between the common, taken for granted use of texts and their potential for directing or creating work processes in human service institutions. The thrust of this kind of research is to expose or uncover the power or influence work related tools and documents can have on professional practice in the human service field. The literature that I reviewed provided me with valuable insight into how power relations can be created through texts that structure the work of organizations. In addition, these studies also provided and supported the value of examining texts as a way of understanding the use of power in organizations.

Given the limited amount of specific literature on the relationships between assessment tools, organizational processes and the exertion of influence or power, I returned to my literature records with the goal of finding literature that focused broadly
on singular elements of my inquiry. This time I reviewed literature specific to the following areas:

- Assessment and assessment tools used with youth,
- Organizational administrative/work processes, which create the need for assessment tools,
- Situations where external political and social influences impact organizational work processes.

**Assessment and assessment tools used with youth**

Given that intake and screening assessment tools used with youth are focal to this inquiry, I reviewed literature specifically seeking reference to these kinds of assessment tools. I found no literature, which spoke or considered *intake and screening assessments* in particular. Therefore *assessment and assessment tools* in general was searched. An abundance of assessment tools, widely used by human service workers was located (Artz et al., 2001; Augimeri, Koegl, Webster, & Levene, 2001; Fischer, 2000; Van Bockern & Brendtro, 1999). In total, in four sources researchers spoke about fifty-one different assessment tools currently used with children and youth.

The abundance of assessment tools found appears to be indicative of the pivotal role assessment plays in the work of human service providers. However, despite their abundance there was a distinct lack of analysis of assessment tools in the literature, which seems to point to the fact that assessment tools remain a taken for granted aspect of human service work (Bell, 2001; Ng, 1996; Smith, 1990b).

When it comes to the practice of assessing, there is a significant amount of literature suggesting what it is as an activity, and how it ought to be carried out. As a work activity, assessment is commonly considered to be the cornerstone of both counselling and other human service work. It includes the systematic gathering and
synthesizing of information about and with a client in a manner that should promote effective treatment (R. Cohen & Swerdlik, 2001; Hepworth & Larsen, 1990; Plake, 1995). The literature generally defines assessment as a systematic and unbiased evaluation employing professional principles and assessment procedures in order to identify patterns, which exists within a mass of data (Van Bockern & Brendtro, 1999). While, it would seem that in general the literature is relatively clear about what assessment is as an activity, several authors advise caution and careful consideration when using particular assessment methods (Proctor, 2002; Sattler, 1992). In particular, Sattler (1992) stresses that care should always be exercised when information about a child or youth is only gathered from a single, isolated source, particularly if the assessments are standardized or are in a questionnaire format. Instead, he suggests the need for a stronger emphasis to be placed on considering ethnic and cultural diversity in order to gain a more complete understanding of the client and their context. Proctor (2002) concurs and expands on these concerns by adding,

The thoroughness and accuracy of clinical assessment—which can be conceptualized as the most critical of professional decisions—is threatened by communication barriers. Language, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are among the commonly recognized challenges to worker-client communication (p.5).

In their review of the British “Looking after Children Project” scholars also speak to the use of assessment tools and the outcomes produced by them in institutional child care situations (Parker, 1991). They appear to agree with other researchers and note that, “a one-dimensional view of assessment outcome is generally unhelpful and can narrow work with children and families in ways which exclude important opportunities for
making progress” (p.78). Instead, they suggest that a multidimensional assessment is necessary to reflect the fact that children have both negative and positive aspects in their contacts with institutions of care, and to produce an understanding that children experience both gains and losses. Multidimensional models of assessment are not a new phenomenon and have been widely researched and explored for many years (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Prilleltensky, 2000). This form of assessment is best summarized in the literature as an activity which takes a broad view of all potential influences on a child’s development, including genetic and constitutional influences, all the way to family, neighbourhood and cultural spheres (Rose, 2002).

Further assessment literature (Artz et al., 2001; Law, 1999; Maier, 1991; Richardson, 2001; Van-Bockern, 1998) point to the importance of noting the focus of the assessment tool, whether it is slanted towards problem or strength identification. Considerable criticism was found in the literature regarding assessment tools that centered upon problem identification or pathologies independent of their contexts because such an application of assessment can create an objectifying and potentially damaging process for young people (Parker, 1991; Richardson, 2001; Van-Bockern, 1998). Clark (2001) agrees, noting that a problem focused assessment does not work with youth, because young people are active and generative and the severity, magnitude and frequency of their problems are constantly changing. Clark suggests that child and youth care workers do youth a profound disservice if they take an approach that represents their problems as static and constant, as this implies that a youth’s presenting complaints have a quality of permanence that is contradictory to the idea of change.
In response to the concerns raised about problem focused assessment techniques, recent literature favours assessment practices that support identifying the capacities, capabilities and contexts of youth, thus avoiding a preoccupation with psychopathology, family disorder and personal weaknesses. This literature suggests these approaches to assessment can assist workers to move away from a risk/problem focus towards a strength based perspective (Artz et al., 2001; Leadbeater, Schellenbach, Maton, & Dodgen, 2003; Madigan, 1998; Reisman, 1993; Richardson, 2001).

After considering what assessment is and the preferable kinds of assessments to use, the assessment literature considers the preferable context or milieu in which assessment ought to occur. Often referred to as the creation of a therapeutic alliance or relationship, this area of research is not new (Rogers, 1957; Trieschman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969). However, it has received a further resurgence of interest recently and is seen as foundational to the youth assessment process (Artz et al., 2001).

In order to build therapeutic relationships, recent literature suggests the importance of certain attitudes and actions for workers: Empathy, acceptance, warmth, trust and self-expression, will assist in engaging youth clients in therapeutic relationships (Artz et al., 2001; Clark, 2001; Richardson, 2001). Also important is that youth workers who perform youth assessments must remain constantly self aware and be accountable for themselves as practitioners. Ricks and Charlesworth (2002) suggest this can be done by continuously monitoring the impact that their own world view, value and belief systems, assumptions, context for practice, planning systems models, frameworks, tools and resources have on their relationships with youth.
In summary, the literature, in considering the role of assessment in human service work with youth, offers multiple suggestions for practice. Supported is assessment that is multidimensional, dynamic, and continuous and able to consider various contexts such as diversity, socioeconomic status, and culture. In essence, youth assessments that are focused upon the capacity, context and capability of youth are seen as preferable to those that focus on problem identification. As Larry Brendtro (2003) succinctly recommended at a recent conference “youth assessments should glance at problems and gaze upon strengths.” In addition, the literature accepts that assessments for youth are important tools for gathering information and providing a product for outcome measurement, providing it is done in the context of a therapeutic relationship.

The literature however, with the exception of the studies by Bell (2001) and Ng (1996), does not explicitly document the possibility that assessment tools are vessels importing influences into the youth/worker relationship in such a way that they have a significant impact on the way the youth work is constructed. Perhaps the closest the literature comes to this suggestion is when assessment tools are acknowledged as having the potential to be more than a cataloging of where the youth is at. In these instances assessment tools are seen as having the capacity to guide the worker through a work process based upon the work practices expected by an organization (Proctor, 2002). This consideration of the activity of assessment as an organizational accountability practice shifted my focus from assessment conducted by the worker to assessment as it is used in administrative and organizational processes.
Organizational and administrative processes

Returning again to my literature records and using key words such as organization, bureaucracy, administrative process, accountability measures, human service organizations, human service management, and outcomes management, approximately thirty-five relevant studies or books in this area were generated for review.

Definitions of human service organizations found in the literature are multifaceted (Crook, 2002; Gross-Stein, 2001; Hasenfield, 1992; Netting, 1996). Netting (1996) defines these entities as “the vast array of formal organizations that have as their stated purpose enhancement of the social, emotional, physical, and/or intellectual well being of some components of the population” (p.15). While Crook (2002) sees them as a grouping of complex interrelationships, which exist among four dimensions of structure: division of labour, professionalization, managerial hierarchy, and administrative apparatus.

Literature on human service organizations acknowledges the importance of considering all domains in which human service organizations exist (Hasenfield, 1992; Miles, 2003). Domains can refer to what the organization does and whom it serves, in other words its boundaries of operation. Domains can also refer to the macro context in which the organization operates such as the political or social culture.

In considering the boundary domain in which an organization operates, some researchers suggest particular attention should be paid to the boundaries or niche for operation that organizations establish. Miles (2003) points attention to human service organizations who regularly “adjust their boundaries according to a wide range of
factors, sometimes to the easiest, most profitable to serve (creaming). Being poor, having complex, long standing problems are characteristics that simultaneously increase the level of need, yet ironically decrease the likelihood of being served” (p.4).

In the larger context, human service organizations in Canada are seen as existing within a capitalist economy, and generally relying on the purchasing of “labour power” from which could be extracted a quality and quantity of labour at a sustainable price (Rubin, 1973). Given that the primary topic of this inquiry is publicly funded organizations, specific literature sought in this area indicated that public institutions are organizations which are expected to be productive, fiscally viable and provide adequate human services, while remaining accountable to their funding sources (Gross-Stein, 2001). In addition, public human service organizations also need public social sanction to allow them to remain viable (Miles, 2003). Within this context, human service organizations are created to organize and ensure that the labour force is coordinated, predictable, and effective and exists as a sustainable system. As a result, legislative mandates, complex policy and procedures and professional and practice interactions rely on these institutions for their implementation (Gross-Stein, 2001).

The currently accepted, established method of ensuring the accountability of an organization is through work processes described as "management" or "administration." These two terms appear to be used interchangeably in the literature (Bolman, 1984; Robbins, 1973, 1992). Despite being an older organizational text, Robbin’s (1973) description of management continues to be applicable and succinct. He defines the administrative process as, "the universal process of efficiently getting activities completed with and through other people"(p.15). In a review of administrative literature,
Robbins (1973) found that three commonalities were observable in any comprehensive definition of administration. Firstly, there must be goals so that activity can be directed to some end, and secondly, there must be finite resources to manage. Robbins (1973) illustrated the second point by noting, "economic resources, by definition are scarce, therefore, the administrator is responsible for their allocations. This requires not only administrators be effective—that is, in achieving the goal or goals that are established—but additionally, they must be efficient: they must relate output to input (p.15). The last requisite Robbins notes, is the need for two or more people to be involved to necessitate administration.

In order to perform the activity of administration and control the labour force, a variety of managerial technologies, dependent upon the specific organization, are utilized. These managerial technologies may include, but are not limited to, recording documents that demonstrate the "textually mediated forms of ruling and their organizing scope" (Smith, 1987, p.53). These documents are generally referred to as "paper work" by workers, and provide verification and accountability to the organization and the stakeholders that procedures and standards have been followed. Paperwork in the human services field often includes the completion of assessment tools and written documentation of actions taken with clients. However, as a review of assessment records collected in the "Looking after Children Assessment and Action Records" indicates, verification and effectiveness is largely dependant on the extent to which tools are completed by workers and on the quality of the data collected (Quinton, 2002).

Rose (2002) in her research also looked at human service organizations and in particular at such factors as new technology, the professional workforce and the
complexity of new systems in place in work with children. The conclusions she reached expressed her concern that the present need to satisfy stakeholders—the public, government and clients—may in fact be inhibiting the work done with children and families. She agreed that in the rush for service providers to find systems that are more rational, have more rigor and coherence ensure greater transparency and accountability, we may forget the child is a person and not merely the object of our concern (Butler-Sloss, 1998, Rose, 2002).

Human service organizational literature indicates there is a need to seek a balance between operating effective and efficient administrative systems, while holding as central the youth with whom we are in a helping relationship (Cohen, 2002). Clearly, there is value in collecting evidence of work done for the purposes of informing our interactions with clients and also to satisfy the organization’s and funder’s needs (Miles, 2003). However, as Rose (2002) indicates, after documenting the value of an evidence-informed approach to human service work, evidence of something done is only a small part of practice. To this end she argues for keeping the client at the centre of practice, while remembering that other factors are also important such as “availability of resources, staff skills, organizational stability or upheaval or performance indicators that have to be met” (p.315).

From the perspective of ensuring staff proficiency, research exists that suggests assessment tools can also be used as decision supports for practitioners (Proctor, 2002). Proctor recognized that assessment tools were often designed as “structuring records (paper or electronic)” that guide service providers through each component of the decision making process and are used within organizations to “ensure greater
accountability, reducing error variance, and bolstering provider authority when treatment decisions are scrutinized” (p.4).

From the child welfare perspective, DePanfilis (1996) also writes about assessment texts and their role as managers in the work process. These authors, referring in particular to risk assessments used in child protection agencies, discuss assessment tools as products of systemic developmental processes, which assist with resource allocation. They emphasize that these “structured risk-assessments are seen as tools to enable agencies to improve workload management through comprehensive assessment and classification of cases by level of risk, allowing agencies to target the most serious cases first” (p.443). In this vein, assessment tools take on the role of prioritizing the worker’s work load (DePanfilis, 1996).

To summarize, in the current human service arena there exists the expectation that publicly funded organizations that provide human services are productive, fiscally viable, and accountable to their stakeholders. In addition, these organizations are required to ensure that they employ a coordinated, predictable, and effective labour force and exist as sustainable systems. These expectations are assured and controlled through a system, referred to as either “administration” or “management”. In order to perform these tasks, administration employs managerial technologies such as recording documents or paperwork. Often the paper work comes in the form of an assessment tool, which as indicated by several researchers serves multiple internal functions (Bell, 2001; DePanfilis, 1996; Ng, 1996; Proctor, 2002; Rose, 2002). Assessment tools often personify the administration function in an organization when they operate as decision
supports, evidence collection devices, and verification that processes are followed, and have the capacity to prioritize workload.

In addition to organizational controls exerted through the administration process, external controls also impact human service organizations (Cohen, 2002). Research indicates that human service organizations are expected to demonstrate a fusion between public interest and good management and administrative practices (Martin & Kettner, 1997). Publicly funded organizations are expected to facilitate accountability for the use of public resources by allowing public scrutiny, disclosure, and monitoring and directing expenditures (Gross-Stein, 2001). It is an expectation that accountability, effectiveness and efficiency are clearly demonstrated to meet these obligations and account for such responsibilities conferred by the public (Deputy Minister's Council, 1996). The government, in conferring funding and responsibilities for services, requires organizations to utilize strategies, which ensure that the organization follows the government’s current social and economic expectations (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002).

Currently, in British Columbia, these strategies have included a core service review along with the need for contracted agencies to be accredited (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, October, 2001; Office of the Premier, 2001; The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). Researchers note that public sector organizations and non-profit agencies are being encouraged or even exhorted to develop performance measurement systems to assess their program activities and outcomes (House, 1984; Martin & Kettner, 1997; McDavid & Hawthorn, 1984).
While external pressures for greater external accountability appears to have increased recently, Barlow (1996), in his introduction to the work of Fisher and Corcoran (1987) notes that it has been around since the 1970’s or earlier:

Government regulatory agencies and other institutions have anticipated turn of the century historians with the implementation of procedures requiring practitioners to evaluate what they do. This practice often subsumed under the rubric of “accountability,” will very soon have a broad and deep hold on the practice of countless human service workers; (p.xxii)

Accountability is touted in the literature as a noble aspiration for practitioners to ensure responsible work and a way for organizations to monitor work processes (Ricks, 1984). Accountability as a concept should be considered more than a service goal, as it inherently involves the organizing of practice. Smith (1999) describes this as:

A source of information traveling between work organization at the level of the shop floor to the decision–making level of corporate executives and financial managers. It is an actual organizer of the relations articulating people’s work (p.88).

Ernest House (1984) indicates that in conceptualizing public service organizations, we assign metaphors to them that we expect to see when we describe them. House illustrates this suggestion with the example of a popular metaphor which currently fits one current perspective of organizations. His metaphor is that of “industrial production” where work is organized similar to an “assembly line production:” tasks are repetitive and standardized and resources (inputs) are combined and converted within the organization into activities to produce “outputs.” The outputs then become the key form of interaction between the organization and its environment.

This external influence is also reflected and introduced in educational institutions, which are tasked with producing the human component of the labour force for human
service institutions (Freidman, 2000). Friedman, a professor discussing new curriculum for social workers at the University of Washington, echoes these influences as she sees them reflected in social work education, she reports:

The best research curriculum of today teaches social work students to evaluate service outcomes. The best curriculum of the future will teach students to proactively manage service outcomes. Effective social workers will understand how to “unpack” complex clinical, demographic, program and environmental contributions to good/poor outcomes, analyze trends, and redesign service and clinical processes to improve outcomes (p.1).

Friedman supports her assertions by stating that “the increasing competitive environment of human services requires an unprecedented degree of accountability from professional social workers, government, community and private funders have moved towards “outcomes-based” contracting and awards with health and human service providers” (p.1).

This unprecedented need for accountability can also be found more than ever in the expectations imposed by the state (Cohen, 2001; Gross-Stein, 2001). However, Cohen suggests it is especially important in the present climate that we look beyond the immediate system for solutions. He notes that we are quick to place the problems of our human service organizations on lack of accountability, limited government resources, or poor ineffective workers, or bad tools. Rather, we need to look at how we design our service delivery systems to meet both the needs of clients and the bureaucracy.
Present political context

According to Wharf and McKenzie (1998), our Canadian social policies are significantly influenced by ideologies and partisan politics. These ideologies in turn guide the role of the state in the provision of social programs. These scholars suggest that “differences among these political philosophies are substantial and the consequences for citizens and social programs are profound” (p.11). In a brief and condensed manner, they highlight the ideologies and the corresponding relationship of ideology to social policy (Wharf, 1998). Presently, both federally and provincially in British Columbia, we are influenced by a neo-liberal ideology. Accordingly, we can expect the following relationship between ideology and social policy: “public social programs are important in addressing general risks to well-being, but these are subservient to economic issues” (p.11).

Assessment tools used in this climate are prone to extend these economic imperatives into the work process. Miles (2003) refers to this as “bureaucratic disentitlement” and describes it as a situation where “clients fail to receive benefits or services to which they are entitled due to decisions that are based on internal organizational considerations rather than service needs” (p.8). This process has been described as “creaming” (Dobrowolsky, May 03. 2002). From Dobrowolsky’s perspective, creaming is created when an organization’s contract or funding is connected to an outcomes-based measurement of success, compelling the organization to “[intake] the best clients… in order to achieve success and receive payment” (p. 2). This in turn creates internal conflict and ethical dilemmas for organizations as their work contravenes their boundaries and missions.
Unger (2001) looks at creaming from a slightly different perspective by suggesting that through the assessment process, "youth are made clients, residents and patients of these services" (p.138). This construction of youth from “person” to “client” can result in objectifying. Once youth are made into clients, their needs, issues, problems or risks are organized to fit within the boundaries (mandate) or services, which correspond to current political and social trends (Wright, 1998). Smith (1975) refers to this process as constructing a "documentary reality," meaning the “facts” accounting for the youth are constructed to reflect the requirements of the service context. In doing so, the facts and particulars about the youth are abstracted and the actualities of the youth’s lived experiences are assigned descriptive categories and a conceptual structure to fit the organization’s services. The assessment tool is used as the frame to organize and extrapolate the "facts" and "descriptors" that best describe the youth and/or the behaviour or situation and measure their potential to benefit from services (Smith, 1975). In this way the youth's needs are re-constituted to fit the "available" resources as opposed to the "ideal" resources. The concept being that assessment tools perform the role of constructing or abstracting facts and particulars about the youth to "fit" the service provider's mandate, which corresponds to the allocation of resources by governments, rather than serving the actual needs of youth (Miles, 2003; Ng, 1996; Smith, 1975).

In conclusion, literature in this area demonstrates the power tools have to identify and cream off which youth are given access to services, based primarily on a neo-liberal political agenda which sees the provision of human services as subservient to economic viability. In essence the services that are provided are those that meet the social and
political mandate and produce the best outcomes. Understanding how tools are used to respond to such demands is crucial to the provision of best practice in child and youth care.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodological imperatives: Institutional ethnography as a “bread crumb” approach to research

“The practical conduct of institutional ethnography is hard to explain...an inquiry in institutional ethnography in not neatly packaged, and its parameters clearly bounded as with some other types of research” (M. Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion about how this inquiry developed and led to the formulation of the hypothesis or problematic, as it is termed in institutional ethnography. The chapter then broadly focuses on why I chose to use the methodology of institutional ethnography and textual analysis, followed by definitions of these terms. Next this chapter considers the limitations of both the methodology and the research design. Following this are descriptions of the data collection and data analysis with a particular focus on the three phases of the research process, entry, exploration and exposure as they relate to collection and analysis. In addition, this chapter includes a brief discussion about ethics, validity and reflexivity considerations as they relate to this inquiry.

Methodology

My primary focus in this inquiry was to enter, illuminate and expose the linkages that appeared to exist between youth workers, screening/intake assessment texts and the ideological and organizational practices that coordinate and mediate the work processes of youth workers.
This research is based on the hypothesis that practitioner’s texts—in this case screening/intake tools—are capable of transporting external influences into the worker/youth relationship and thereby construct the youth worker’s work process. Prior to becoming involved in research on this topic, I had taken assessment tools for granted. I had seen them primarily as an aid to the counselling process, paper documents that provided a place to collect and store standardized information and a means to elicit responses to questions from clients in order to select appropriate services. It came as somewhat of a revelation to me that assessment tools might actually be constructing and influencing the work process. As I read and re-read the youth worker’s transcripts collected in the earlier study on needs assessment (Artz et al., Nicholson, Halsall & Larke, 2001), I began to think that these workers were also acknowledging the inherent power of assessment tools and began to suspect that they were more than collection devices to assist in therapeutic interventions. In the transcripts, I heard youth workers reacting to the influences of the tools although they did not express an explicit awareness of the links between the tools and sources of power external to the youth/worker relationship. Rather, I noticed they were relating to four primary concerns connected to assessment tools:

1. The amount of paper work they needed to do.
2. How paper work was getting in the way of working with the youth.
3. Dismissal of the significance of the paper work and its influence on their practice.
4. Relegation of tool completion to the role of a “necessary evil,” an organizational formality.

As I continued to work with and design tools in my practice, describe them in my role as a research assistant I began to notice the power they had in ordering what I
did as a worker. For example the tools dictated when I should complete them, which other professionals I should consult about a youth, what questions or information I solicited about a youth, how I constructed an assessment interview, how youth were constructed within the confines of the tool’s texts and what actions I should take once the tool was completed. It was at this juncture in the research that began to strongly agree with Smith (1999) who cautioned that, "if we don't examine and explicate the boundaries set by the textual realities of the relations of ruling, their invisible determinations will continue to capture us" (p.65). My concern was that many of the youth workers I heard in the transcripts were already feeling the power of the tools and felt their practice confined and yet were not making visible the links between these feelings and what was actually happening. Instead they seemed to be frustrated on a global level about using assessment tools in general. It was also at this point that I began to believe that the power tools had was connected and influenced by organizational bureaucracies and political ideologies. At this stage in the inquiry, my evidence for this came primarily from how accreditation standards, enforced by the government and funding source had influenced the creation of the screening/intake tool in my work place. This tool had been created with my assistance, despite the fact that based on my practice experience and knowledge I disapproved of many of the questions asked and its format. I was however, powerless to influence its construction in any way as it was predetermined by external influences.

From this growing awareness came the questions posed in this inquiry. I wanted to validate the frustration that I experienced in my own practice and heard from the youth workers by trying to find a way to understand and expose these links. I concluded
that the youth workers, including myself, were representative of helping professionals who had become products of a pervasive system of tools, policies, bureaucracy, and discursive power. I was not however ready to conduct an inquiry premised on the idea that as helping professionals we were “unconscious minions” or robots following policies and completing texts unaware of their impact (Floersch, 1998). I believed that the need for personal autonomy in practice was motivating some of the resistance to paper work exhibited by some workers. As well, I was sufficiently persuaded by the worker interviews and my own experience of frustration, that the workers were indeed conscious of what was happening in the field, but had not necessarily connected the dots between their actual experience of youth work and the power embedded in texts which was directing their practice.

*Why institutional ethnography and textual analysis?*

In order to explore my research questions and ground my inquiry in the reality of youth work, it became apparent that several factors were central to deciding upon a research method. Primarily, it was crucial for me that the descriptive voices of youth workers be included. As mentioned, I saw these workers as reflective of the actualities of the daily experience of being in youth work. I also viewed them as the experts, in reference to how they made sense of the work process and usage of assessment tools used with youth. In addition, I sought a method which would allow me to dig beneath the surfaces of practitioner’s texts as organizational mediators of youth work processes, in such a way that would push past the seemingly authoritative or taken for granted knowledge of administrative processes.
After consideration of several methods, I decided on a textual analysis heavily influenced by the theory of institutional ethnography (Smith, 1975, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999). Initially I chose this method because it incorporated descriptions of an individual's or group’s social life while allowing an investigation to be extended from there into a context which would facilitate an exploration of how practitioner’s texts organize and mediate within work processes. My decision was supported by Swift (2001) who conceptualizes institutional ethnography as, "a methodology designed specifically to examine the process through which power relations are produced.

**A working definition of institutional ethnography**

Based on adaptations of the work of Smith (1999) by Campbell and Gregor (2002) institutional methodology at its most basic level can be defined as a strategy for understanding problems existing in everyday life. With the premise that in order to understand the complexities of another’s or ours life we must be able to uncover the actual determinants of those life conditions and expose them. Institutional ethnography as a distinctive form of ethnography adopts a particular research stance, which recognizes that people's own knowledge and ways of knowing are crucial elements of social analysis. Building on this experiential knowledge, institutional ethnography’s theoretical construct guides the researcher in making visible the powerful ideological practices that organize work processes and reveals linkages to organizational agendas.

It is an investigation in which the direction of looking is reversed. The institutional ethnographer takes up a point of view in a marginal location; she "looks" carefully and relatively unobtrusively, like any fieldworker, but she looks from the margins inward-toward centers of power and administration-searching to explicate contingencies of ruling that shape local contexts (DeVault, 1999, p.48).
Drawing upon institutional ethnography as an underpinning method therefore, provided me with an approach that enabled links to be made between the micro level of actual personal experiences and the macro level of institutions and relations of power. Using textual analysis rooted in institutional ethnography allowed me to derive conclusions about youth workers and work processes through an examination of practitioner's texts and their transcribed voices.

A working definition of textual analysis

As institutional methodology employs analysis of texts and processes through which texts are produced as central features” (p.59). I decided to use textual analysis as an opportunity to explicate an interpretive apparatus or structure from the assessment tools I studied. Textual analysis, as it is utilized in institutional ethnography identifies how texts are produced and how they participate in an ongoing sequencing and coordinating sequences of actions through text-reader interaction. As Campbell and Gregor (2002) assert, texts used in this manner can be relied upon “as crystallized social relations … and institutional ethnographers can consult them as an alternative to, and antidote for, accepting ideological accounts” (p.79). I took this to mean that a textual analysis inspired by institutional ethnography would permit me to look beyond superficial descriptions of an organization’s screening/intake tools and get at what influences they were able to import into the youth worker/youth relationship.

Textual analysis in this inquiry involved several stages: initially I completed a descriptive analysis of the screening/intake tools. I then explored all the data for reoccurring topics or areas of interest based upon my research questions. Next I explored each of the areas highlighted by looking at what the youth workers said about
the area and contrasted that with what external influences, such as accreditation and government documents indicated and finally, I looked at what the tools revealed. I began by looking to youth workers, who were tasked with the completion of a screening/intake tool: a seemingly uncomplicated process of responding in a written form to questions or completing check-lists. I discovered the contrary to be true: these “taken for granted” actions belie a complex process, with numerous tentacles reaching, linking and coordinating a multitude of actions, across many spheres.

**Limits of the methodology**

Theoretically, institutional ethnography provided a sound backdrop for this inquiry. However, the practical construction of a textual analysis inquiry inspired by institutional ethnography proved to be complex, and difficult to articulate. Initially, two issues came to the forefront: the intense and absorbing nature of the theoretical construct of institutional ethnography, and the complexity of explicating data using this theory.

At the completion of this thesis I remain convinced that the methodology I have chosen enabled significant illumination of the data and provided an opportunity to stretch myself in a unique manner. I must admit that there were times during the multiple re-writings and re-readings of this inquiry that I acknowledged my use of the theory of institutional ethnography may be doing more to cloud my understanding and ability to explicate from the data, rather than illuminate it. I also became increasingly concerned as I adopted the complex discourse of the theory that it was obscuring and potentially creating a further power differential barrier between my inquiry and the audience to whom I wanted to disseminate my findings. This was particularly apparent in the initial phases of this inquiry, where I adopted the jargon of the theory and had
difficulty articulating my findings without using the complex language of Smith’s institutional ethnography. I found that this caused me to draw my findings away from the context in which they occurred and to talk about them as institutional ethnographic entities, rather than actual processes grounded in a time and place.

Jordan and Yeomans (1995) had similar concerns to my own in their critique of institutional ethnography and in particular the work of Smith (1990). They commented “the dense style of Smith’s writing does not lend itself easily to open and accessible interpretation” (p.398). They drew the following conclusion about Smith’s work:

On one level she intends to write as a feminist who is concerned to revoke the everyday oppressions of women. At another level, she addresses the institutionalized academic and a specialized academic too. In short because of her leaning to an academic audience, her project remains entangled within the very conceptual practices she attempts to deconstruct (p.39).

Smith (1999) herself recognized these same difficulties in her own work and admits that she has struggled with developing “a sociology that speaks in and of the world as it is” (p.25). Yet as her work has become known in academic contexts she has “participated in discourses of quite a different order. These were discourses that were framed within the academy and were determined more by feminist dialogue with established disciplines than by one with activists” (p.26). Smith also notes that her work has both been strengthened by this shift towards a theoretical discourse and yet has lost some of its “anchorage with the actualities of people’s lives” (p.26). She acknowledges that her shift is largely due to the discursive setting of the “implicit political organization of the ivory tower university” (p.26) and less reflective of her own intent. Smith proposes several reasons for why this occurred, saying that “the academy creeps up on
us” (p.26) and that “to keep our jobs...in order to get our papers published we have to conform to procedural and methodological canons” (p.26).

My experience with this inquiry initially presented a similar tension. Once I decided that institutional ethnography was an appropriate methodology I too believed that in order to have my thesis accepted by academia I had to adopt whole heartedly its language and procedures. I believed that in order to demonstrate that I had grasped the methodology I had to replicate it jargon and all. Once the realization came that there was room within institutional ethnography for my own voice, there was an incredible sense of liberation in my writing. I realized that I could articulate and make visible the coordination and co-ordering of organizational practices, while at the same time not participate in and potentially perpetuate the over powering process I was attempting to untangle. Throughout the inquiry I continued to wonder at times whether my own experiences had become too enmeshed with the “ruling practices” theory and whether my findings would be more representative of the theory than the data. In order to counteract this possibility, I remained diligent to my reflective process and constantly questioned my intent and my observations. In an attempt to keep my inquiry anchored in the realities of youth work, I focused heavily on the transcribed narratives and the kinds of data I collected.

**Limits of the research design**

As I delved further into the methodology, I realized my research design also had some limitations. I thought it would be preferable to find a pre-existing template to assist with the construction of my research design, as I was having difficulty moving from the theory of institutional ethnographic textual analysis into practical application.
However, a brief search of studies which used institutional ethnography as their primary method of inquiry revealed a variety of ways in which such a study could be orchestrated without using a template (Barron, 2000; Bell, 2001; Rankin, 2001; Rankin, 2003; Swift, 2001; Townsend, 1998). Clearly, no one template for constructing such an inquiry was preferable, as evidenced by these studies. Consequently, I sought a textbook to assist with my struggle and found two that offered assistance with a practical application of textual analysis in institutional ethnography (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; DeVault & McCoy, 2001). These texts confirmed that textual analysis anchored in institutional ethnography should generally be designed around distinct, yet overlapping layers of analysis (Barron, 2000; Bell, 2001; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1987). While these layers were presented as linear or occurring in an ascending order on paper, I found in application they occurred often concurrently and were intertwined. After much consideration, I opted for three layers or as I termed them “bread crumbs” to follow for my inquiry. These layers were “entry”, “exploration” and “exposure” (Barron, 2000; Bell, 2001; M. Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Swift, 2001). While, these are basic institutional ethnographic technical terms, there appeared in the research literature to still be slight differences in the interpretations of their usage. In order to reduce confusion, the definitions I chose to attach to these terms are more clearly articulated in the following pages and again in the attached glossary (Appendix A).
Data collection

"Document, a paper that furnishes information, proof or support of something else" (Webster, 1997).

Data used in this study came from two different sources and was gathered on two separate occasions. Firstly a 2001 study on needs assessment (Artz et al., 2001) yielded two sources of data: thirteen screening/intake assessment tools used by youth workers from three south Vancouver Island locations working with a variety of youth, in a mixture of settings, for the purposes of screening youth into or out of services, and two-hundred and ninety pages of transcribed narratives of youth worker's talking about assessment and assessment tools. The second source of data came from documents such as accreditation manuals (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002) and government produced documents (Hogg, 2002) all of which were in existence in the public domain during 2001-2002 and therefore, easily accessible to the public and professionals, working with youth on south Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, at that time. An additional assessment tool was also added during this second collection of data, bringing the total number of screening/intake tools collected to fourteen.

Data collected from the initial study

During the aforementioned initial study (Artz et al., 2001) two focus groups and twenty-nine interview participants were requested to provide assessment and diagnostics tools that they might have and/or were using in their work with youth. The workers who volunteered tools represented a variety of roles and positions in branches of government, child and family services and contracted agencies. The workers, representative of three
south island communities on south Vancouver Island, contributed their knowledge and tools from the following areas of practice:

Public health nursing
- Youth outreach
- Sexual abuse intervention
- Child and youth mental health
- First Nation youth services
- Probation services
- Youth forensics
- Transition from custody services
- Girl’s alternative education
- Youth shelters
- Sexually exploited youth services
- Youth empowerment
- Youth intervention programs

Thirty-four assessment tools were submitted and twenty-six were reviewed and analyzed (eight tools were repeats and so discounted). Transcripts from interviews with eight youth workers, who provided the tools and transcripts from three focus groups were reviewed, which totaled two hundred and ninety pages.

The initial analysis focused upon a tool review which resulted in a basic description of each individual tool collected, using the following criteria: the physical description of the actual tool, the development history and background of the tool, the tool’s apparent purpose or intent and the main features of the tool. Additionally, a cursory review of the literature on gender sensitive needs assessment provided a framework for compiling observations and considerations for each tool. The literature review suggested that the tools be assessed with respect to five key elements:

1. Attention to the youth’s whole world (including diversity).
2. The youth’s involvement in the assessment process.
3. The relationship building which the tool facilitated between workers and youth.
4. Whether the tools used a capability-based approach for assessing need.
5. Whether a grounded understanding of how change occurs was implicit in the tools.

During and after completion of this descriptive analysis of the tools, it began to become apparent to me that there was another aspect to assessment tools, an aspect that had received little or no attention in the published literature studied. This was the idea that assessment tools have embedded within them an underlying capacity to coordinate work processes and direct the work of youth workers and thereby have an impact on their practice. I noticed that when completed, these screening/intake assessment tools became an entry point into a bureaucratic process, which seemed to mediate and order the professional practice of youth workers. For example the tools dictated when in the counseling process they should be activated and how facts about the youth should be constructed and under what descriptors. The design and use of the assessment tools also appeared to be reflective of the external influence of both the political and social context. This interpretation of the tools was initially based upon my experience as both a front-line worker and a manager who regularly screened clients. As I spent more time with the data, I came to appreciate further Smith’s (1987) understanding about how our work world and the activities of people in it are administered through a complex textually mediated social organization.

The more time I spent with these tools, the more intriguing and perplexing their linkages and connections began to appear. In order to better understand what I thought I was seeing, I decided for the purposes of this present study to focus my attention upon thirteen of the tools, which had been submitted and placed in the clustering category “screening/intake tools” by Artz et al. (2001). This cluster had been defined by Artz et
al. (2001) as "those tools used to assess the appropriateness and eligibility for admission to a particular program" (p.2). I chose this cluster because these tools represented the entry point for most workers and youth into an organization and so might best reveal something about the organization and why they were using these tools. Practically, the size of this particular cluster also made it manageable from an analysis perspective. Amongst the screening/intake tools collected, I found there existed considerable variation in their completeness, as many lacked dates of development, authors, and guidelines for their use or intent.

**Data collected from the second source**

The second set of data I collected was in the form of documents outlining the recent changes in British Columbia Government funding, accreditation manuals and my participation as a manager in the development of a screening/intake assessment tool, designed to meet accreditation requirements. These documents included the following:

- British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Core Services Review (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, October, 2001)

- British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. Correspondence to community stakeholders from The Premier's Office, no date.

- Correspondence to youth serving agencies, from Gordon Hogg (2002) of The Ministry of Children and Family Development.


- Minutes from the C.A.R.F. meetings discussing the development of the "Client Intake Form."

This set of data was chosen as I expected it would tell me something about what was happening external to the organizations. This was based on my experience with the development of a screening/intake tool which highlighted for me how the accreditation directives orchestrated by government policies impacted greatly the actual development of that tool. I therefore reasoned that other tools reviewed might also be the products or vessels of other influences to some degree.

At this stage in the inquiry I decided to include the “Client Information Form” (C.I.F.) used at my place of work, which was not included in the initial study’s tool collection. I chose to include this tool as it was designed with my assistance to specifically meet external C.A.R.F. (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002) accreditation specifications and requirements initiated by the government of the time. This C.I.F. tool therefore represented a concrete, tangible example of the capacity of a tool to influence what was happening in youth work environments.

Therefore after collecting the data as outlined above, in total I had fourteen screening/intake tools to consider, along with the youth worker’s transcriptions and multiple other documents. The following table indicates the fourteen tools I analyzed and their acronyms, which will be used to refer to them in the remainder of this thesis.

The fourteen tools that I chose to analyze are noted below.
Table 1. Screening/intake tools to be considered in this inquiry

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (OSPREY)</td>
<td>Pacific Family Services Association Client Information Form (2002) (CIF)</td>
<td>The Female Youth Addiction Treatment Residential Program (PLEA)</td>
<td>The Turnabout Referral Form (TURN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell Valley Women's Centre Residential Services for Young Women (CVWC)</td>
<td>Individual Placement Program Referral Form (1997) (IPPR)</td>
<td>Vernon Girl's Residential Attendance Program Referral Package (2000) (VGRA)</td>
<td>Xyolhemeylh Western Region Youth Healing Programme Referral Form (XYOL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Eagles Lodge Referral Form (2001) (EAGLE)</td>
<td>Kootenay East Youth Program Referral Form (KEY)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethics approval

As the data used for this inquiry existed either in the public domain or had been collected for the same purpose during another study (Artz et al., 2001) under the auspices of the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Committee, a waiver was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data analysis/ textual analysis

"It is methodologically important, institutional ethnographers insist, to be attentive to how someone speaking about their life, misses its social organization. In order to discover and disclose how this taken-for-granted social organization is meaningful to what happens; a specialized inquiry must be conducted" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p.91).

Generally, data is collected by researchers going out into the field to listen, observe and record, gathering whatever appropriate data assists the researcher to better understand what people are doing (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Geertz, 1988; Wolcott, ...
However, when it comes to exploring texts as active constituents of organizational processes a specialized inquiry is needed. An inquiry which will allow the researcher to explicate, discover and analyze the ideological practices, which organize work processes and their connection to the organization agenda is required. I believed that by increasing the visibility of texts and making more obvious their relationships to and activation of the formal organization, the organizational process would be more transparent.

As Smith (1990b) states:

Texts are situated in and structure social relations in which people are actively at work. Texts enter into and order courses of actions and relations among individuals. The texts themselves have material presences and are produced in economic and social process, which is part of the political economy (p.162).

Smith's (1990a; 1990b) writings on the social organization of knowledge reveal how ubiquitous the texts of contemporary society are, and how texts are employed to process people and manage certain aspects of their lives.

The purpose of my data analysis was to examine the texts of assessment tools for linkages between the tools, the documents produced by government and accreditation bodies, and the everyday experiences of work activities in youth organizations. I looked to the tools and documents to explicate what they could tell me about how the event of assessment happens as it does. The intent of my textual analysis was to be able to identify and trace the linkages that describe the social relations that extend beyond the boundaries of work experience to sites outside of the work environment.

Analysis in this inquiry was accomplished through textual analysis, which encompassed three phases: a reflective journey or entry phase, an exploration phase, and
an exposure or findings phase. In this thesis, a chapter has been dedicated specifically to each of these phases of analysis. However, for the purpose of clarity, each phase as it pertains to data collection is defined briefly below.

**Entry level data**

For the purpose of this inquiry, entry level data was defined as data which is concerned with the local setting and the interactions which occur there as well as individuals and their experiences. Throughout this inquiry, entry level data included my observations of and participation in what was happening in the daily world of youth work (Campbell and Gregor, 2002).

Analysis at this phase of the inquiry included reading and reflecting upon my journal entries that encircled my research and practice experiences as a youth worker, my professional involvement with core service reviews conducted by the presiding Provincial Government. As I reflected on these experiences my attention was drawn to how my actions and those of youth workers were being concerted and coordinated through our use of assessment texts. Further, my role as a human service manager undergoing an accreditation process conducted by an external body highlighted this process. I realized as I analyzed my reflections that my interest lay not in uncovering the potential meaning these assessment texts held, but rather I wanted to know more about how they were organizing lives in the youth work setting without the seemingly conscious knowledge of those who were using them. As this awareness surfaced, I experienced my own resistance. I now recognize this moment as a key step in the formulation of the “problematic” as it is defined in institutional ethnography.
The problematic is often described as the knowing moment when one detects there is more involved in an experience than was first conceived (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). It is the moment of recognition that there exists another way to account for something that is occurring, in a work setting. For me, this realization created a sense of discomfort and led to a questioning of what might be going on that had not been considered previously. From this problematic, or experience of disquiet, emerged the research questions for this inquiry.

1. What does screening/intake assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?
2. Who in institutions utilizes screening/intake assessment tools?
3. What is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?
Exploration

The second phase of inquiry is often referred to as the exploration or “explication” phase in institutional ethnography (Bell, 2001; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1999). Exploration in this inquiry occurred through textual analysis. Swift (1995) describes this level of analysis as an “attempt to make explicit the activities involved in producing documents, demonstrating procedures involved in writing and reading accounts, and showing how the account is legitimated within itself as an actual account” (p.27).

Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain that a textual analysis of texts completed in such a manner, is able to explicate an alternative interpretation of a process and actually forms “the analytic core of the research process in institutional ethnography” (p.59).

The data I studied at this level of the inquiry had as its object, the discovery of organizational details and documents viewed in a way not normally considered in the “taken for granted” work environment. By looking “outside of the box” in this way, linkages and webs of influence that had surfaced as the “problematic” during the entry phase of the research were exposed and illuminated.

At this phase of the inquiry my research appeared to take on the qualities of a forensic audit (Bologna & Lindquist, 1995). I examined the data as it appeared superficially, in the “taken for granted” manner. I then peeled back the layers of language and script in the tools and tried to follow the links from the assessment tools back and forth to work practices and external documents of influences. The links I followed were those that were hinted at by the youth workers in their transcribed interviews about assessment and assessment tools and from the directives I found in a review of the tools themselves and the literature.
This forensic-like process is described by Campbell and Gregor (2002) as the institutional ethnographer’s particular way of understanding the data. They suggest as a guiding theory that the researcher read their data analytically with a focus upon uncovering “what does it tell me about how this setting or event happens as it does?”(p.85). In this way, data is found and used to discover material connections between what happens around assessment in a setting and what triggers particular events. In this phase of the research endeavour, my purpose was not to be concerned with lengthy descriptions, counting, coding or cutting data to uncover themes, but rather to focus on uncovering and discerning connections between workers/tools/internal and external structures “in their setting of use as they arise there” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, p.85).

During this exploration phase of research, I considered the notion of recursivity. In my inquiry recursivity took the form of noticing how successive patterns or linkages between the tools/workers/organizational influences were organized. It was these patterns I wanted to reveal and try to understand.

*Exposure*

The exposure “breadcrumb” in this inquiry was the final layer of inquiry. Exposure was an intense process whereby the data was reviewed and re-reviewed through my reading and re-reading. I sought to reveal alternate interpretations as the layers of data were pulled back. This process in the inquiry allowed alternate understandings to evolve. In particular, the webs of influence that were not “explicit in what is said, or even realized, by the respondent” were uncovered (Smith, 1987, p.48).
Validity and reflexivity

"As long as we strive to base our claims and interpretations of social life on data of any kind, we must have a logic for assessing and communicating the interactive process through which the investigator acquired the research experience and information" (Altheide, 1994).

"Determining the accuracy of the account, discussing the generalizability of it, and advancing possibilities of replicating a study have long been considered the scientific evidence of a scholarly study" (Creswell, 1994). However, in reviewing the methodology literature it is clear that while the subject of validity must be explored in research, it is a complex and extensively debated issue (Burke, 1997; Creswell, 1994; Fonow, 1991; Maxwell, 1996). The question becomes how shall it be decided that what we say is true or valid?

With institutional ethnography as foundational to this inquiry, I turned to Smith (1987) to address these issues of validity. She suggested that validity can be addressed by a commitment to “an investigation and explication of how "it" actually is, of how "it" actually works, of actual practices and relations.” (Smith, 1987, p.160). Therefore, questions about validity in this inquiry were dealt with through reference back to those processes themselves, and with the asking of questions such as “does it indeed work in that way? And is it indeed so?” (Smith, 1987, p.160). Fonow and Cook (1991) suggest that one of the ways that validity can be increased is by the researcher understanding the nuances and special perspectives of that, which is studied. As I am already a human service worker, involved in organizational activities and the use tools, I have a familiarity and experience with that which is being researched. This familiarity, Fonow and Cook (1991) state is “necessary if the qualitative researcher wants to avoid errors”
Further, they suggest that it is important that the researcher also note the area where they do not have experience. G. Smith (1995) explores the shift necessary between researcher and researched in institutional ethnography:

This is not a shift from an objective to a subjective epistemology—which some feminists have chosen to make—but rather a move from an objective to a reflexive one, where the sociologist going beyond the seductions of solipsism, inhabits an actual world, the social organization of which she is involved in investigating (p.22).

By means of this statement George Smith (1995) suggests the feminist concept of reflexivity. Helen Callaway (Naples, 1997) defines reflexivity as "...opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of... constructing knowledge...Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self analysis and political awareness" (p.viii). Other scholars view reflexivity as a crucial element for permitting knowledge to be not static or to be discovered or proven, rather allowing it to be an unfolding that takes place while considering context, meaning and changes over time (Burke, 1997; Nicholson, 1995). Burke suggests, “reflexivity involves self awareness and "critical self-reflection" by the researcher on his or her potential biases and predisposition's as these may affect the research process and conclusions” (p.8).

My inquiry as a reflexive inquiry is one in which I investigated those social relations I actually participated in. In this vein my intent was to continually critically evaluate and reflect on my experience of the youth work world.

My bias in this inquiry was the fact that I am a white, middle aged woman who grew up in an English working class environment. However, I now move in a middle class sphere where I am privileged to have the benefit of a graduate education. This
duality of working class early socialization and a present middle class situation, constantly presents a tension for me. While, I carry the notion that our social services are designed and operated by those in similar class situations as I presently find myself, I also acknowledge that these services are largely provided to those who live in working class environments, similar to my past. Therefore, I feel often distressed that services may be withheld or unavailable because of the influence of bureaucracy and economics, which are often concealed from the potential service recipients and service providers. My projection is that potential service recipients get left feeling unworthy and less than, and denied service because of the decisions and power of others. At the same time youth workers such as myself, experience frustration that they are often caught between either completing the paperwork and having power over clients and the provision of service or being in therapeutic relationships with clients and empowering and advocating for them within organizations. For youth workers there seems to exist a perceived polarity, you can either work for the organization or for the client, but to do both often requires compromise and the ability to be subversive.
CHAPTER FOUR

Entry: Reflective journey to the problematic

"There's a social language I'm compelled to speak and often struggle mightily to make my own, there's also a private language, a way I speak only to myself. Each time I use it I strengthen my connection to myself" (Levoy, 1997) p. 124.

This chapter is concerned with my entry into the data which upon reflection led to the problematic explored in this inquiry. This is the point where I entered the web of ruling relations and began to map out the linkages I understood between experience and external influences.

This chapter considers my own experiences of using and creating a screening/intake tool and how I came to realize that the creation of the tool was not so much the main issue per se, as it was a "constructed trap" heavily influenced by the extra-local forces swirling about it. This occurred when as an employee in an organization heavily invested in government sanctioned accreditation, our organization was obligated and compelled to create a screening and intake tool to be used to determine eligibility and access of clients to our eleven programs. This tool became known as The Client Information Form (C.I.F.). I was very involved in the design and development of this tool, which was heavily influenced by the prescribed standards required for our upcoming accreditation survey (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). However, as a professional youth worker, I had concerns about how the tool seemed to evolve as a device constructed to fit clients into categories in order to determine their fit for our services, rather than serve a useful role.
for youth. As a partner in the creation of this tool, I was puzzled how, despite what I considered vital in a tool creation, the tool appeared to take on a life of its own as it evolved under the auspices of accreditation standards. For example a requirement of the accreditation body was that a preliminary assessment rating be completed at intake. At this stage the youth was given six categories in which to rate their level of concern around issues such as "fire setting" and "current sexual abuse". These categories narrowed the fields in which a youth could express concern and some were inappropriate questions to be asking at intake, prior to the establishment of trust in the counselling relationship.

I realize now upon analysis and reflection that the external ruling apparatus of the government and accompanying political shifts largely influenced the creation of this tool. These issues, once highlighted, were obviously considerably larger than just my individual concern. In addition, these were issues that no amount of training around tool usage would illuminate. I realized that something deeper was happening and it needed to be captured, so it could be better understood. As Koegl, Webster, Michel & Augimeri (2000) propose, "the responsibility lies with professionals within both domains (research and clinical) to lobby governments for resources that address the "raw life" complexities faced by children and their families" (p.245). However, before lobbying can happen, the issues need to be understood and revealed. As Smith (1999) reminds us:

The issue is not a matter of individual guilt. Rather it is to be located in the social relations embedding a politics at a level of the organization of the academy, where it is not visible as such. Making it visible is a first step in addressing how we can overcome, bypass, and as a minimum, avoid consciously replicating and reaffirming a politics which is neither good for women or people in general (p.28).
Coupling the experience of the C.I.F. tool creation with what I learned when working on the initial tool review, where the tools were compared across the five categories discussed earlier, I embarked upon my inquiry.

Situated knower as researcher

As two authors note (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1990a), those who study institutional ethnography must acknowledge and see themselves as located in the actual world and finding meaning there. Rather than rely on library research and the application of theory, they must investigate, rediscover and re-orient what they are seeing and doing in a theorized manner. Smith (1990a) advises that the researcher does this by starting as follows:

[Research] begins from our own original but tacit knowledge and from within the acts by which we bring it into our grasp in making it observable and in understanding how it works. We aim not at reiteration of what we already know, but at an exploration of what passes beyond knowledge and is deeply implicated in how it is (p.23).

Therefore, I begin this account by sharing my own location or position in relation to my research, as I understand it from my present standpoint. Rosaldo (1993), an ethnologist, describes the idea of position as “a structural location from which one has a particular angle of vision” (p.193). I share my position in an effort to demonstrate why this research was of interest to me and to allow this thesis text to reveal my authorial construction of inquiry, as opposed to obscuring it. This however, is not an exercise in offering my arguments as to why this account might be considered credible or accountable. Rather, it is an attempt to make visible the schema or apparatus which mediates this piece of scholarly work in much the same way I have attempted to make visible the apparatus and relations of influence in the research topic. I am not a passive
observer or constructor in this work and it is my voice, which articulates the knowledge discovered. However, I have, where possible, included the voices of others in the form of direct quotes as they illuminated and made visible the problematic, but again acknowledge that I chose each quote and wove it into the blanket of this work, based upon my experience and location.

If I think back and ponder, as I have been since the inception of this inquiry, I would say that my first memory around the role of "assessment" occurred when I was a young adolescent. At that time I was attending an all girls’ school in England during the seventies, and had been denied the opportunity to participate in an "O" levels education program. The concern of the school was that I was not "up to" the rigors of an "O" level program. I insisted I was able and fortunately with my mother championing my cause, the school decided that the only way to know for sure whether I should be allowed an opportunity for college preparation would be an "educational assessment."

The consequent results of this assessment created the opportunity for me to complete not only "O" levels, but also "A" levels and attend college. That assessment ultimately placed me on my current academic path. So now, after having assessment tools open doors for me, I sit here pondering the role assessment tools may play in my professional practice and as a gatekeeper in service provision. This issue has seemingly swirled around my academic world for as long as I can remember and yet has remained largely ignored by others and myself until now.

The specific nature of this inquiry was developed and highlighted as the result of serendipitous insight gained through my participation in a previous study (Artz et al., 2001). As a member of the aforementioned research team, my primary focus was to
gather literature concerning assessment, risk, resiliency and need. The purpose was to provide a foundation for the development of a gender-sensitive community needs assessment tool for supporting at-risk girls and young women between thirteen and eighteen years of age. In this initial literature review, approximately 100 publications relating to the development of a gender sensitive needs assessment tool were accessed.

Another component of this study (Artz et al., 2001) involved the collection of assessment and diagnostic tools which workers may have known or have and/or were using in their work with youth on South Vancouver Island. The workers who supplied these tools represented a variety of roles and youth serving positions in branches of Government, child and family services and contracted agencies. I focused considerable attention on these collected tools and several more months were spent reviewing, describing and analyzing them. The review involved examining existing tools, as well as omissions, with particular attention paid to gender and cultural sensitivity. The result was a detailed analysis and review of twenty-six assessment and diagnostic tools used by workers when assessing the needs of youth. The findings from the initial tool analysis make evident that assessment tools are far more complex than they appear from an initial perusal. A deeper analysis is required to fully delve into the impact that assessment tools have upon service delivery and practice in the human service field.

Identifying the “problematic”

As I described and reviewed the aforementioned tools, I noticed that they were implicitly coded with theoretical underpinnings, bureaucratic processes, social, economic and political intent reflecting the era during which they were developed. The design of the questions, checklists and scoring, which created the format for many of the
tools, seemed to hold clues to their original intent. It was this potential intent, which
began to interest me, and prompted the present inquiry.

While being immersed in this research process, I had what Campbell and Gregor
(2002) describe and Smith (1990b) calls a “disjuncture” or “moment of disquiet” which
motivated the excavation of the “problematic” and which has now become this inquiry.
This “disjuncture” as described concisely by Smith (1990b), is that “knowing moment
when an individual notices there is a difference between knowing something from a
“ruling versus an experiential perspective” (p.83). The problematic I came to know grew
from my experience of participating in research and realizing that external relations of
ruling socially organized my actions as a front-line worker conducting assessments.
These relations seemed inherent in the screening/intake activity, and were activated by
assessment tools.

As I puzzled over what I believed to be “problematic,” I began to unravel what
was happening by looking at the role the assessment tools were playing in the lives of
those who were seeking service and the workers who were screening them for possible
service provision. In particular, I became quite interested in understanding and
unraveling the difference between the use I had rather unaccountably attributed to
assessment tools and what I was beginning to “see” they might potentially be.

Campbell and Gregor (2002) suggest that in institutional ethnography, the
technical term “problematic” does not mean that the researcher studies problems as
informants may describe them. Rather, the researcher “uses the concept of problematic
to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of
puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are “latent” in the actualities of
the experienced world” (Smith, 1987, p.91). Indeed, the set of questions I began to ponder appeared to have been concealed in the organizational process. The stand-point from which I decided to regard this present research was from my world as a professional located in the context of an organization, which utilizes assessment tools.

Research questions

At the heart of this inquiry there are three research questions. However initially, when his inquiry developed I also considered several other questions. These were:

- How are assessment tools activated and on what occasion?
- How do tools mediate and organize within organizations?
- How can the bureaucratic practices inherent in assessment practices be made visible?
- How, in times of fiscal restraint, can we ensure that assessment tools are not “feel good” devices for rationing resources and funneling demand to meet the limited supply?
- How are processes happening and can they be mapped to make visible the external relations of influence?
- How is our knowing about youth organized through assessment texts?

However, I soon realized that my focus was too broad for the timely completion of a Masters thesis. I therefore decided to winnow down the questions and look at only three of the six questions, posed in my initial research proposal and focus upon screening/intake assessment tools and supporting secondary data, rather than assessment tools in general.

The three questions I decided to focus upon were:

1. What does screening/intake assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?
2. Who in institutions utilizes screening/intake assessment tools?
3. What is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?
CHAPTER FIVE

Exploration through textual analysis

This chapter is concerned with the second level of inquiry seen in institutional ethnography, often referred to as the "exploration" phase (Bell, 2001; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1999). The exploration phase in this inquiry involved a textual analysis of fourteen assessment tools, including reviews previously conducted (Artz et al., 2001), an examination of data in the form of transcripts collected during the first inquiry and secondary documents concerning government practices and accreditation standards (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, October, 2001; Minnesota Department of Human Service, 1996). In addition, findings from the literature review inform and support the analysis. In research traditionally, this section of the inquiry would constitute the results section of a thesis. However, in this institutional ethnographic analysis the "results and discussion" are blended, with the results explored and their relevance discussed concurrently. This has been done, as findings cannot be revealed unless the interpretive structure used to uncover them is also revealed, in this inquiry the two are inextricably linked.

This component of my inquiry focused on identifying and displaying how tools are produced and how tools are able to structure and make actionable youth workers' practice. In this sense, I saw the tools as "petrified meaning structures" (Smith, 1999b, p. 223) that meaning could be derived from. I believe I was in a unique position to be able to explicate and interpret meaning from the data collected, in part because I have considerable familiarity with tools and organizational practices and contexts (Fonow, 1991). Also, I have had the benefit of being immersed in studying assessment tools for
several years, beginning with my participation in the earlier study and this experience has enhanced my capacity to view tools differently from their normal accepted usage.

While my strong association with assessment tools has given me a greater level of understanding, it has also revealed and promoted an equally strong bias against the neo-liberal agenda that appears to promote screening and assessment tools as gatekeepers or entry points into a system of service provision for youth. The current service provision structure seems predispositioned by its economic slant to be moving towards a system in which only those youth, who would benefit most, as demonstrated by measurable outcomes, would receive services. In other words, it appears that the services of organizations are designed with pre-determined outcomes and political mandates in mind rather than meet the needs of youth. With this acknowledged preconception based on my experience, I have tried to counteract my bias by paying particular attention to the voices of the twenty-nine youth workers in order to validate or repudiate my understanding of the actual issues associated with assessment practice.

With institutional ethnography as the theoretical backdrop, I examined screening/intake documents and related data to determine whether my initial interpretation of the meaning I had attached was valid or supportable and whether what I thought was occurring in present human service provision actually was occurring. The overarching goal of this inquiry was to make visible “how the language of documents operates as a conceptual coordinator of social action and how texts are connected to a larger set of social relations” (G. Smith, 1995, p.30).

Upon reviewing and analyzing the data I had collected, it became apparent that these aforementioned linkages we so embedded and entangled in the process that laborious and careful examination, through reading and re-reading and note
taking was required to peel the layers back and reveal the power concealed within the frame of the tools. I experienced this process as all consuming and never complete. My analysis is only unpacked to the point in time where I chose to stop reviewing it, knowing that it likely has more to reveal, dependant upon one’s stand-point at any given point in time. It seems then that this inquiry exists as a “moment in time” capturing a specific time in the dynamic arena of the human services field. As Altheide and Johnson (1994) note:

A text is provided which in turn is to be read and interpreted by readers or audiences, who, because of their own interpretive and sense making capabilities, will derive unique meanings or readings from the text (p.486).

The main themes, which I uncovered and then explored during this analysis process, were:

1. What does screening/intake assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?
   - Eligibility for service
   - Resource allocation
   - Tools as active constituents of organization process
   - Processing interchanges
   - Documentation as the basis for organizational accountability
   - The creation of a formalized account through categorizing

2. Who in institutions utilizes screening/intake assessment tools?
   - Organizational literacy
   - Authoritative knowers and discourse
   - What is measured in tools matters

3. What is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?

My process of uncovering and exploring understandings of my research questions, through textual analysis, follows.
Descriptive textual analysis of screening/intake tool utilization

The tools I chose for the textual analysis are the texts of human service professional practice and are constructed within both professional and organizational contexts of interpretation. Specifically, the fourteen screening/intake tools analyzed were those used to determine appropriateness and eligibility for admission to particular programs.

The fourteen tools I reviewed were: The Mentor Research Institute Youth at Risk Screening Questionnaire (YAT) (1999); Victoria's Mental Health Centre's Young Person's Information Form (VMH), SEEDS To Independence Referral Form (SEEDS); The Kamloops Individual Needs Residential Attendance Program (KINRAP) (2001) and The Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (OSPREY); The Female Youth Addiction Treatment Residential Program (PLEA); The Turnabout Referral Form (TURN); Campbell Valley Women's Centre Residential Services for Young Women (CVWC); Individual Placement Program Referral Form (IPPR) (1997); Vernon Girl's Residential Attendance Program Referral Package (VGRA) (2000); Xyolhemeylh Western Region Youth Healing Programme Referral Form (XYOL); Young Eagles Lodge Referral Form (EAGLE) (2001); Kootenay East Youth Program Youth Referral Form (KEY); and the Client Information Form (CIF) (2001).

These assessment tools were then sorted into three sub-clusters, reflecting the tools' focus. The largest grouping consisted of seven tools. All of these tools were referral/screening/intake documents for justice programs for "adjudicated youth" or "young offenders" and are shown in Table 2.
Table 2. Sub-cluster: Justice programs for youth on correction orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program name</th>
<th>Residential /Day</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Kamloops Individual Needs Residential Attendance Program (KINRAP 2001)</td>
<td>Residential (4-6 months)</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>12-18 years.</td>
<td>Adjudicated youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Turnabout referral Form (TURN)</td>
<td>Family based home placements (no time given)</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>No age</td>
<td>Young offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kootenay East Youth Program (KEY)</td>
<td>Residential (no time)</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>No age</td>
<td>Early offenders with short records of property crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xyolhemeylh Western Region Youth Healing Programme (XYOL)</td>
<td>Residential up to six months</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>12-18 years</td>
<td>Aboriginal youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernon Girl's Residential Attendance Program (VGRA)</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No age</td>
<td>Female youth on at least four months probation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Eagles Lodge (EAGLE)</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>13-18 years.</td>
<td>Alcohol and drug program for aboriginal young offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Placement Program (IPPR)</td>
<td>Family based home placements (no time)</td>
<td>Male /female</td>
<td>13-17 years (or 18 if on a Youth Order)</td>
<td>On a Correctional Order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second sub-cluster represents residential treatment programs and is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Sub-cluster: Residential treatment programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Residential/day</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campbell Valley Women’s Centre Residential Services for Young Women (CVWC)</td>
<td>Residential (3 months)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13-19 years.</td>
<td>Females with issues of substance abuse or other identifiable issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Female Youth Addiction Treatment Residential Program (PLEA)</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12-18 years.</td>
<td>Females needing youth residential detox/treatment and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (OSPREY)</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Male/female</td>
<td>No age</td>
<td>Youth needing drug and alcohol treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third cluster consists of four tools, more loosely defined as screening/referral tools used to determine the level of program intervention and these are shown in Table 4.
Table 4. Sub-cluster: Screening/assessment forms to determine the need for intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Research Institute Youth at Risk</td>
<td>Risk questionnaire to determine whether child's problem range requires intervention</td>
<td>Male/female</td>
<td>No age limits given</td>
<td>Youth at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire (YAT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria's Mental Health Center's Young Person's</td>
<td>Documentation of information gathered from youth to look at present situation and concern area.</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>No age limits given</td>
<td>Young persons referred to mental health services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Form (VMH)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Information Form (C.I.F.)</td>
<td>Documentation of information gathered at screening/intake to determine priority and type of program appropriate to needs of client</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Different programs have different age limits. For example Project Breakthrough services youth aged 10-19 years and the Community Outreach Program accepts referrals for youth aged 4-18 years.</td>
<td>Youth who are experiencing difficulties in the home, school and community and live in the geographic area covered by the Western Communities office of the Ministry of Children and Families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS To Independence Referral Form (SEEDS)</td>
<td>To determine goals and objectives for independence.</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>No age limits given</td>
<td>Youth for whom independent living is being considered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My initial textual analysis of these tools was descriptive and occurred as a component of the previous study (Artz et al., 2001). At that time my focus was upon
three main areas and the goal was to cluster the tools and describe primarily their history and function within the sub-clusters I had created.

- A developmental history of the tool
- The purpose indicated by the tool
- The main features of the tool

**Justice programs for youth on correction orders**

**Development history and background:**

The tools in this sub-cluster requested a myriad of data, from basic demographics, full details on medical examinations and justice system involvement, to requests for educational transcripts and psychological social histories.

All of the tools had been developed or revised in 2000-2001. The tools were from program locations across British Columbia, including Victoria, Langley and one from each of Vancouver, Kamloops, Vernon, East Kootneys and Mission. Other than the names and locations of the tools, there were no authors listed or other historical data found in this sub-cluster.

**Purpose:**

The overall intent or purpose of these tools was to screen and determine via an intake/referral process those youth that fit the criteria for each program. The overarching goal for the sub cluster was the corrective rehabilitation of youth involved in the justice system.

**The main features:**

While each tool varied in scope and size, they all appeared to be seeking youth for established programs who would fit the following loose criteria:

Youth aged between twelve and eighteen.
Youth who are in good physical and psychological health.
Youth who are covered by a medical plan.
Youth whose families are at best involved, and at the least aware that they are attending the program.
Youth referred by a Probation Officer and subject to probation orders and/or justice supervision.
Youth whose Probation Officer's focus is upon the need for a residential, rehabilitative placement. However, most were clear that youth with "extensive" histories of serious offences such as arson, violence or uncontrolled running away would not be appropriate for admission.
Youth who are able to participate in either an educational or employment readiness component.
Youth who are committed to attend and follow the rules of the program, which are dependent upon the program focus and underlying beliefs about change. In some cases this is seen as achievable through structure and behavioural reward/token systems.
Youth for whom there is an "aftercare plan."

The tools therefore were primarily made up of a series of questions and requests for information that would provide the intake worker with a sense of the youth's suitability to the particular program.

Residential Treatment Programs

Development history and background of the tools:

As with many of the tools no history of the programs or development of the tools was found. However, each tool gave a program address and contact information. Only one program, the CVWC was explicit about their foundational beliefs regarding their
programming mission. They state they "maintain a client-centered approach which promotes respect and autonomy of the individual residents" (p.1). Suggesting that this is operationalized by building "an egalitarian, non-discriminatory supportive living environment and a therapeutic community" (p.1). No other tools were as explicit about the philosophy behind their programs or how a youth might expect to be treated upon intake.

**Purpose:**

The overall intent or purpose of the tools in this cluster was to screen and determine via an intake/referral process, those youth that fit the criteria for each program. The overarching goal for this sub-cluster was the treatment of youth with issues of substance misuse who may be involved in the justice system and require a residential facility.

**The main features of the tools:**

All three tools are designed to be completed by a professional in the community through a referring agency. Generally the tools are to be completed by Drug and Alcohol Counsellors, with the exception of the CVWC, which indicates that they accept referrals from "parents/guardians" (p.3). The youth are screened and accepted for service based on the following criteria:

Youth meets the demographic requirements such as age, gender and geographic location.

The youth has substance misuse as a main issue, although they may have other identifiable issues also.

The youth is motivated to begin working on decreasing their substance misuse and their involvement with the criminal justice system. The OSPREY program suggests using the
"Stages of Change Model" as a means to determine the youth's stage of readiness for change (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994).

The youth must not present as a safety threat to the program participants or self. The CVWC will accept youth who present with "the possibility of mental illness or of being labeled “difficult to handle”" (p.1), unless they have "severe psychiatric disorder (psychosis, severe depression, violent or disruptive) unrelated to substance abuse" (p.4).

There must be at least one family member willing to participate in treatment.

An after care plan is in place.

*Screening/assessment tools to determine need for intervention*

**Development history and background of the tools:**

There are three tools reviewed in this section and each indicates an author, a date and in two cases provides a context for the tools development.

The SEEDS tool is attached to a Duncan office from a program called "Community Options Society." The VMH tool is a Ministry of Health document from the Victoria Mental Health Centre. Finally, the YAT Questionnaire is authored by the Mentor Research Institute and is dated 1999. No historical information leading to the development of any of these tools was found.

**Purpose:**

There appear to be different intentions for each tool in this sub-cluster. The VMH form states its purpose as "to get some idea of how things are for you right now…This helps us to help you" (p.1). This form is to be completed by a "young person" who has come into contact with mental health services. The SEEDS referral form is to be completed by a social worker and the intent is to develop a "goals and objectives plan for independence"(p.1). The YAT Questionnaire is designed to be
completed by someone who has "a youth who you are concerned about" and the intent is to "indicate a level of risk that your child's problem behaviour will escalate without intervention" (p.1).

**Main features of the tools:**

All three tools begin by requesting basic demographic information. The remainder of each of these brief tools is comprised of brief statements or questions, which limit the respondent's answers to narrow responses. The SEEDS tool is clearly concerned with the pragmatics of living independently and requests responses in the following domains: identification, housing, jobs, money, legal, school, social, health and parenting. The YAT's tool consists of fifty-one negative behaviours, which have each been given a value. The respondent checks those that are relevant and if a score of between five and sixteen is found then the youth is considered at low risk to escalate without professional intervention. Scores between seventeen and thirty-two are moderate, between thirty-three and eighty-four are high, and over eighty-five extremely high. After scoring, the respondent is encouraged to e-mail or send their scoring or additional questions in and they will receive a response in one to three days. If imminent danger is present then the respondent is encouraged to call the police or 911. The VMH form is designed to capture the concerns a young person may have when seeing a mental health professional.

**Initial tool analysis**

At this stage of the inquiry the tools described above were then analyzed based on the initial findings from a literature review conducted by Artz et al., (2001). The literature reviewed at that time focused on assessment, risk and resiliency and determined that ideally, assessment tools used with youth should reflect the following:
• Attention to the whole world in which the youth lives
• Youth’s ability to be involved in the assessment process.
• A capabilities approach-based approach to assessing need.
• A grounded understanding of how change occurs.

This analysis follows:

**Table 5: Brief analysis of tools based upon literature review findings (Artz et al., 2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FINDINGS</th>
<th>Attention to the youth’s whole world (including diversity)</th>
<th>Youth’s involvement in the assessment process</th>
<th>Relationship building between workers and youth</th>
<th>Capabilities based approach to assessing need</th>
<th>Grounded understanding of how change occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Research Youth at Risk Questionnaire (1999)</td>
<td>Gender neutral, no other diversity consideration</td>
<td>It is to be completed by a concerned adult about the youth.</td>
<td>Not explicit.</td>
<td>Consists of 51 negative behaviours and no strengths.</td>
<td>Establishing risk is the goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria’s Mental Health Centre’s Young Person’s Information Form</td>
<td>Gender neutral, asks about relationships with the “opposite sex” and does not make space for difference.</td>
<td>Form to be completed by youth.</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
<td>Asks youth “what do you do well?” (p.1). Remains problem focused on concerns youth has.</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS To Independence Referral Form</td>
<td>Gender neutral Mentions “cultural connectedness” (p.1). Includes questions about youth's world.</td>
<td>To be completed by worker and youth.</td>
<td>Goal and objectives planning, not clear about location of tool’s use within relationship.</td>
<td>Not focused on youth’s strengths.</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEY FINDINGS (cont.)</td>
<td>Attention to the youth’s whole world (including diversity)</td>
<td>Youth’s involvement in the assessment process</td>
<td>Relationship building between workers and youth</td>
<td>Capabilities based approach to assessing need</td>
<td>Grounded understanding of how change occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Turnabout Referral Form</td>
<td>Gender neutral and does not account for diversity.</td>
<td>To be completed by referral source</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
<td>Not strength based, problem focused.</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell Valley Women’s Centre Residential Services for Young Women</td>
<td>Female specific. Stereotypical issues “sexual abuse, victim/witness of domestic abuse, eating disorders and low self-esteem” (p.1)</td>
<td>Residential treatment program, youth is assigned a team.</td>
<td>Not capability focused; substance abuse problem focus.</td>
<td>&quot;A personally tailored growth plan will be developed for each resident to address problems and to promote optimal change&quot; (p.2).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Placement Program Referral Form (1997)</td>
<td>Gender neutral</td>
<td>Referral package to be completed by various referral sources, no youth input.</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
<td>Focus upon offence history.</td>
<td>“Change is understood to occur when youth can take control of their own decisions and are accountable for their actions” (p.2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xyolhemeylh Western Region Youth Healing Programme Referral Form</td>
<td>Gender neutral. Cultural context of aboriginal youth considered.</td>
<td>To be completed by referral source</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
<td>&quot;Youth’s strengths/interests&quot; (p.4) requested.</td>
<td>Change is seen as occurring when the youth acquires more skills and services (p.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Eagles Lodge Referral Form (2001)</td>
<td>Gender neutral. Cultural context of youth considered.</td>
<td>Youth is seen as expert. Section to be completed by youth included</td>
<td>Not explicit</td>
<td>No indication</td>
<td>Understanding of how change occurs (p.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The main themes uncovered and explored during this textual analysis

After completing the initial descriptive analysis of the tools above, I then explored all of the data for reoccurring themes or areas of interest based upon my three current research questions. I considered each of the areas uncovered by exploring what the youth workers said about that particular area in the transcribed interviews and then contrasted that with what external influences, such as accreditation and government documents indicated and finally, I linked this analysis with the tools. My analysis, enhanced by the literature review, revealed multiple reasons, which create the need for the activation and utilization of tools, followed by the impact they have on youth workers. On occasion tools are used for such client focused reasons as those found in C.A.R.F.:

Assessments are conducted in a manner that identifies strengths, needs, abilities, and preferences of each person served. Assessment data may be gathered through various means including face to face contact, telepsychiatry, or from external resources (p.103).
On the surface, this idealistic concept of an intake/screening tools is the one explicitly supported by organizations and external influences (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). However, this analysis revealed that tools are multi-layed. When tools are analyzed beyond the descriptive and are viewed through the concerns expressed by youth workers and the expectations of organizations, they can reveal underpinnings of the unexpected.

During this analysis I uncovered and explored nine themes. I did this by initially making an informed guess on the most likely themes based on the direction the workers pointed to in their transcriptions, coupled with my own experience of using the tools and the questions I posed. I refined my choice of themes after multiple reading re-readings and cross referencing what I found across the data using highlighting and coloured sticky papers. For example the theme of “eligibility and appropriateness” was given as the reason to activate an intake/screening tool by C.A.R.F. and also pointed to by workers in six transcripts. The first six themes uncovered allowed me to explore the first research question, “what does intake/screening assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?” How an institution employs tools reveals who it sees as appropriate for service and how it allocates its resources. In addition the role the assessment tool plays in the organization also reveals how accountability is managed and how service recipients are categorized. The final three themes illuminated a greater understanding of my second research question, “Who in institutions utilizes intake/screening assessment tools?” In considering these themes I was able to look at who in institutions are seen as knowers and therefore able to use tools to capture in text the youth they serve. I consider my final research question, “what is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?” in my exposure chapter.
The first of the themes I identified I titled “eligibility and appropriateness.” This theme reflected the most often stated reason for the activation and usage of the assessment tool. The need to ensure that only those youth who, when screened are eligible and appropriate for the program. For example a youth might only be eligible if he/she resides in a specific geographic location (CIF) and only be appropriate if they have an alcohol or drug issue (OSPREY). This theme was also most often given by external influences, such as C.A.R.F. and government policies (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, October, 2001; The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002) as the reason for the tools use. For example CARF suggests that during a screening process organizations “review each person’s eligibility for admission based upon the presenting problem and the need for service” and then consider the “appropriateness of available service to meet the need and the availability of funding sources” (p.104).

The second theme, “resource allocation” reflected the area where I began to hear workers express more concern and discomfort around tool usage. In all eight transcripts I found various mention of lack of resources and concerns over how resources were allocated to youth.

One worker stated:

Resources, resources, resources (transcript # 8, p.14).

Another said:

It’s like we’ve identified the need…now we need resources, resources” (transcript # 5, p.34).

And yet another:

We need sufficient and proper resources. (transcript # 3, p.36).
This was also the pivotal point in the analysis where I began uncovering the alternate role tools were playing, contrary to their initial obvious function. This occurred as I noted that not only was there a lack of physical resources being discussed by the workers, there was also a question of "exclusionary criteria" (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002) being considered.

One worker expressed his frustration around the implementation of exclusion criteria:

They [youth] have been through the foster system and have been booted out of resources because of what they are there for – bad behaviour – what do you expect from a kid with out any boundaries...they get kicked out of the resource for doing what they are at the resource for in the first place (focus group # 2).

I realized that while workers were frustrated that youth were excluded or screened out of programs for the same behaviour that the resources were designed for, they were also concerned that it was not just behaviour that was excluding youth from programs.

Workers were concerned that the move by their organizations towards outcomes measures where “kids are counted and measured” (focus group # 2, p.8) would further exclude youth who were not appearing successful in a program.

In this analysis, whenever I identified issues of concern raised by the workers in the transcripts, I took this as a lead to look more closely at the tools and the secondary data such as accreditation standards and delve deeper in the analysis. In other words, when several workers noted an issue as a concern and expressed strong emotions around the topic then I began to search for other collaborating data amongst the tools and secondary for possible linkages that might explore what was happening.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth themes emerged from the general frustration expressed by the workers over the ever demanding need for documentation of their work
process and the creation of accountability structures and resulting establishment of a paper trail tracking systems. For example workers spoke about:

Being constantly inundated with the paperwork demand (transcript # 3, p.9).

And saw the assessment process:

Being totally audit drive – this is us being assessed (focus group # 1).

On four occasions the transcripts tracked discussions amongst workers suggesting that often intake forms were completed by multiple professionals and “not in conjunction with the family or youth.” In addition they were concerned that “what was on the intake forms was not accurate...I often throw them out the window” (transcript # 4, p.7).

As I noted the direction of these comments I considered blanket themes that would encompass what they were saying and focus my ability to forge connections between what I suspected was happening and what they were commenting on as happening The themes I decided upon were “tools as active constituents of organizational process,” “processing interchanges” and “documentation as a basis for organizational accountability,” and “the creation of a formalized account through categorizing,”

The seventh, eight and ninth themes resulted from the generalized concern workers expressed around seeing their work become more standardized, resulting in the objectification and loss of the “real” youth to a textually constructed paper account. These themes came about as a result of comments such as:

It’s a checklist. I don’t use it. I’ve never used it, I refuse to use it” (transcript # 4, p.15).

And:

We are more aware of what we need to do in terms of protocol than focusing on the needs of the youth (transcript # 3, p.7).
We have to create a service plan to fit our data base...we won’t be able to do individual plans for youth (transcript # 4, p.20).

Initially, my attention was drawn to these themes as workers spoke about hierarchies within the system and who had the power to complete tools and whose perception of the youth was seen as more valid. These themes I termed “organizational literacy,” “authoritative knowers and discourse” and what is measured matters.

As one worker summarized the situation similarly expressed by others:

I almost feel two notches below them [Ministry workers] and that filters down to the contracted agencies and if we are going to go anywhere with an assessment that is recognized ...we are going to have to get to where they respect our assessment...and not only theirs is acceptable and suitable (focus group # 2).

Each theme is explored and discussed in more detail below.

**Theme 1: Eligibility for service**

Routinely, screening and intake tools are used by organizations to establish and assess the appropriateness and eligibility for admission of a youth referee to a particular program (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). The organization’s focus, funding mandate and target population determine the eligibility criterion governing each tool. For example, when a Ministry of Children and Family Development contract is awarded to an organization, it is accompanied by a “Schedule A” which outlines expected target populations, service delivery methods and anticipated outcomes. The mandate, regardless of whether the agency is government funded or privately funded, is largely dictated and prioritized by the perceived needs of the population, coupled with the scarcity of resources to meet these needs (Wright, 1998).
In looking at the role intake/screening assessment tools play in service eligibility, I noticed an interesting continuum around screening emerging. While at one polarity of the continuum screening was seen by the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission (2001-2002), which is currently facilitating a government supported accreditation process for multiple British Columbia human services contractors, as a positive process “designed to maximize opportunities for persons served to gain access to the organization’s programs and services” (p.103). Yet at the polar opposite to this government sanctioned position I found that the actual screening tools I reviewed were more prejudiced towards situations, which would exclude or reject a youth from a program or service. Somewhere in the middle of these two positions I found were located the perceptions of the youth workers. Through their transcribed narratives, six out of eight workers suggested that the screening/intake process was most often used to formally document the decision to “accept or reject” a client.

This gave evidence to the appearance of “creaming” as alluded to in the literature review (Dobrowolsky, 2002; Miles, 2003) in that of the fourteen tools reviewed, twenty-four disqualifiers were found, while some forms contained only a few disqualifiers, others had long lists. Of these twenty-four disqualifiers, fifteen (62%) involved situations that a youth would have no control over, such as age, gender, ethnicity or lack of a discharge plan. The lists included the following:

- A history of arson or fire setting
- History of excessive violence
- History of sexual offences
- History of cruelty to animals
- Significant medical concerns
- Not covered by a valid medical plan
- Significant mental health concerns
- On going suicidal/homicidal ideation
- No parental consent
• Specific geographic boundaries and referral zones
• Gender (i.e. VGRA, female only program)
• Age
• Ethnicity (i.e. XYOL, EAGLE, First Nation only programs)
• In need of immediate detoxification
• Must abstain from substance misuse for a minimum of seven days before
• Hospitalization for an eating disorder
• Reluctance to attend
• Poor commitment to the program
• Absent without leave
• Chronic uncontrolled running away (i.e. IPP)
• Not abiding by probation order
• Inappropriate referral source
• Not already linked to the system appropriately (i.e. Not on probation)
• No discharge plan in place
• Fee for service not available (i.e. CVWC)

Interestingly, of the fourteen tools reviewed, seven were screening/intake tools specifically designed to determine admission to services and programs for “adjudicated youth” or “young offenders.” Such youth, one could anticipate, may be disqualified quite readily from programs using any of the items on the above list.

**Theme 2: Resource allocation**

“In this changing landscape many believe a continuing retreat by the state from providing social protection is both inevitable and irreversible” (Gross-Stein, 2001, p.56).

When examining the actual assessment tools more closely and linking statements made in them to the voices of workers and the literature read, economic reasons for the activation of the tools began to emerge. In particular, limited resources and the resulting need to streamline services was an area that bore closer examination. Certainly in the EAGLE tool, limited resources were used explicitly as the focus for selecting program participants:

While we recognize that resources for young people in the Province of British Columbia are severely limited, we must continue to be selective when admitting
young persons to our program. Young persons who are not willing and/or not prepared to participate fully in the program will find it difficult to adapt (p.2).

One worker also noted her frustration when limited resources determine a youth’s participation in a treatment program:

I don’t know how many times I’ve gone to the hospital, gone to jail in trying to get kids into treatment but it’s tough when the beds aren’t available” (transcript #6, p.2).

Resource scarcity was also used in assessing eligibility for CVWC program. In this case, a youth could only be accepted in the program if funding was found before attendance, as the program is “presently a non-funded program. It is the responsibility of the referral agent to secure financial sponsorship for the youth referred to the program” (p.4).

Workers also voiced their experiences with assessment tools that have the capacity to disqualify a youth from a service, due to limited resources. As one youth worker aptly noted, “there’s the theory and then there’s what actually happens when it comes to tools” (focus group #1). Other workers echoed this sentiment more explicitly by saying:

An assessment is done with the youth and we decide where the biggest bang for the buck is (transcript #1, p.15).

We would assess need on what our agency could provide (transcript #3, p.34).

There are too many kids, not enough resources (transcript #1, p.15).

We always have the people who don’t fit tools and so we don’t have any place for them. Then we either have to make them fit or start looking around at the tool, so you know, in the mean time we’re convincing half the population to buy in and the other half to fit in. So there’s always the concern you can’t use my services if you don’t fit this criteria. So either I change my service or I change the criteria (focus group #1).

Several workers echoed the opinion of this worker, who suggested:
So you’re looking at what we need? We need resources. We need resources that respond when the kids need them as opposed to when they are available (transcript #6, p.19).

The present government also recognizes that there are many youth in need of services and not enough resources to go around, in stating that the “teenage population is expected to increase relative to the total child population over the next several years…the challenge for the ministry will be to deliver services effectively and efficiently by developing service delivery models which provide optimum choices and flexibility within available resources” (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, 2001, p.1). At this point in time, the primary service delivery models the government has put forward are quality assurance mechanisms and outcome measurement tools (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development Services Plan, October, 2001; Minnesota Department of Human Service, 1996; The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002). Both of these service delivery models base continued funding for organizations on their ability to demonstrate successful outcomes and submit to an audit process. These fiscal considerations are transported into the youth work process via the assessment tools (Dobrowolsky, May 03. 2002). The CIF tool for example, is designed solely on the expectations of CARF and has the capacity to screen a client for service, based on the information gathered during the assessment. With limited resources available, youth with specific issues checked off on the tool are those prioritized for service. For example, if family mediation services are funded and the youth indicates that as an area of concern and is motivated to seek assistance, the youth will likely be accepted to work on that issue.
One can speculate that offering youth services based upon available resources will continue to place an ever increasing focus on resource allocation "where the biggest proverbial bang for the buck will be." Limited budgets will impact how services are offered, and to whom and by whom they are offered will be reflected in how tools are used and the types of questions that are asked to screen youth in and out of services.

**Theme 3: Tools as active constituents of organization process**

When the data was analyzed with the goal of understanding the research question of "what does screening/intake assessment tool utilization tell us about the institutions that use them?" many facets pertaining to the bureaucratic or administrative process were revealed. Some workers suggested that the only reason an assessment tool gets used is "because we are mandated to do it, I don't need ticky boxes" (focus group #1). They further propose assessment tools may be activated as more of an administrative function, than as a client centred document:

I have tools where it's an all encompassing thing-tiresome and really a waste of time when it could be better spending my time developing relationship and let's get on with the real work (focus group #3, p.15).

The tools seem to act as the vehicles of organization practice, transporting through seemingly black and white text the tensions and influence of external relations and making actionable the kind of work the organization expects from its workers and the expectations external influences have upon its contracted organizations. The organization through the tools it chooses directs the actions of workers by sequencing and legitimizing their work processes. Policies and procedures and other conformance instruments (CARF, annual performance appraisals), dictate to the worker when, how and where they will do their "work." The tools represent recording devices of power,
which control the labour force by monitoring and directing their action. Workers are expected to translate their practice/professional experience of the screening/intake process into a set of fields that realize an organizationally constructed account of the event. While most workers indicated this as an issue for them, one worker in discussing a youth intake illustrated the point particularly well:

Oh sorry – you don’t fit this box so we’ll put you in a difference box…our job is to push the pointy parts of their personality back into the box isn’t it? (focus group #2).

Therefore, the unique situation posed by the actual youth’s and worker’s experience is rendered into a standard version of the experience, which is a version that is usable by the organization for several functions. This standardizing of texts “stand as verification that procedures have been followed” (Jung, 1988, p.5). Often this verification is necessary to conform to external influences. This is best demonstrated in the KEY tools, which states that the completion of the referral package “conforms to [meet] suggested changes from Investigation Inspection and Standards’ Audit and the upcoming Manual of Standards and Policies for Outdoor and Wilderness Activities” (p.1).

By following the textually mediated organizational flow, workers are able to demonstrate that they have met the standard required by the organization. Verification of standards serves to measure several administrative functions such as reporting for statistical purposes to demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency, usage of services and both internal and external conformance to rules of accountability. Verification occurs through completion of the desired action, adequate appropriate documentation of the action, and
also determines subsequent action based on the results, all of which is generally secured in client files for later “proof” of action taken.

**Theme 4: Processing/interchanges**

“I’ve seen where a youth probation report proceeds them and is misinterpreted or used in other ways than it was intended to” (focus group #3, p.19).

I was directed towards this theme for two reasons: first the workers noted that assessment tools were often used as “events” where youth were processed by specific workers within the system, in order to receive service. The workers defined “events” as staged occasions when an activity such as an assessment was planned in isolation to the youth/worker relationship, rather than as an integral component of the therapeutic interaction. Secondly, in the descriptive tool analysis I was surprised how many professionals were involved in the completing of each tool and yet rarely was the youth involved directly in this process. On average each tool reviewed required 3 or 4 interchanges to complete.

Interestingly, of the fourteen screening/intake tools only 57% (8) necessitated an actual meeting with the youth involved. 29% (4) encouraged such contact and 14% (2) were not explicit about whether contact with the youth was necessary. I noticed that the screening/intake tools analyzed also had the power to direct and engage the attention of the youth workers who were expected to complete the tools using a series of actions called “processing interchanges” (Pence, 1996). These interchanges are defined as “organizational occasions of action in which one practitioner receives from another a document, does something to it and forwards it on to the next organizational occasion for action” (p.60). Processing interchanges assume that there are systemic linkages between different institutions in place. For example, the probation officer assumes that
the medical doctor or the drug and alcohol counsellor will complete a section of the tool in a certain manner, consistent with their knowledge base. The interchange or procedures for reporting are governed by the information gathered in the first report. In the case of the screening/intake tools reviewed, the documents can only be requested and completed by a limited number of identified people, referred to in this inquiry as "authorized knowers" and spoken to in a subsequent section. After those workers who are given the authority, have completed the tool, several actions are possible. If the worker completing the tool works for the same organization as those who will decide whether the youth is eligible or appropriate for service, then that decision is reached based on an accounting at the completion of the tool. This completion of the tool becomes an "event" as one worker stated, "that’s what our systems like, they (youth) go to you and do it for an event, done, just so the probation officer can go done...rather assessment done, and on to the next thing" (focus group # 1, p.17). Other times it seems multiple interchanges occur in order to complete the process of screening/intake before eligibility of service is determined.

Of particular relevance to the power linkages I was interested in were the specificities of whom within the processing exchange could fill out the documentation. In the transcripts workers referred to the seemingly hierarchical nature of assessment, where some workers in the system were perceived to be able to create more valid or suitable assessments than others. This ultimately led me to pay attention to the theme of authorized knowers and discourse discussed in a later section.

Table six tracks the typical, potential processing interchanges and their corresponding actions when the fourteen screening/intake tools in this inquiry were considered.
Table 6. Processing interchanges and resulting actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Processing interchange</th>
<th>Collateral documents required</th>
<th>Resulting action</th>
<th>Processing interchange</th>
<th>Resulting action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KEYS</td>
<td>Liaison probation officer completes tool prior to screening, must sign off on tool. Youth not seen.</td>
<td>-Probation Order -Pre-Disposition report -Medical form -Parental consent -Hygiene allowance form</td>
<td>Completed tool sent to either of two named Liaison Youth Court Workers.</td>
<td>Liaison worker is responsible for screening the tool. Youth not seen.</td>
<td>Liaison worker either ticks “Accepted” or “Rejected.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURN</td>
<td>Referring agent completes form. No indication that youth is part of process.</td>
<td>-Court info. -Medical info. -School/day program info.</td>
<td>Completed form sent to intake worker.</td>
<td>Intake worker decides whether youth is able to “enter” based upon positive responses to a list of 10 high risk behaviours. Youth not seen.</td>
<td>No action indicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINRAP</td>
<td>Probation officers complete tool. Tool asks only if youth and family are aware of referral, but not seen.</td>
<td>-Pre-Disposition report -Court Orders -Release forms -Drug &amp; alcohol assessment -Post release plans</td>
<td>Mail or fax the completed tool to KINRAP program</td>
<td>“Applicants will be screened for acceptance based on appropriateness for placement, bed availability and treatment readiness”. Youth is not seen.</td>
<td>Youth is “approved” or “not approved”. Those youth with a history of sexual offences, violent or assaultive behaviours need special approval of Executive Director and the regional Supervisor. Therefore, the tool would be sent on for further interchanges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>Processing interchange</td>
<td>Collateral documents required</td>
<td>Resulting action</td>
<td>Processing interchange</td>
<td>Resulting action</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>XYOL</td>
<td>Referral probation officer must sign off completed tool.</td>
<td>-Information requested from probation officer, school, social worker, and mental health, medical. -Court Orders.</td>
<td>Completed form sent to Xyolhemylh Health and Family Services.</td>
<td>Screened by a committee from the Sto:lo community, education and probation. If able will speak to youth and family directly.</td>
<td>If “accepted” a care team is established and includes the referring probation officer and people from the youth’s community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGRA</td>
<td>Probation officer requests information from Program Leader of VGRA. “Ask [youth] in to verbalize in writing her motivation” (p.3). Probation officer must give name. Tool is completed about the youth, not with the youth.</td>
<td>-Recent Pre-disposition report. -Recent psychological and psychiatric assessment. -Medical and school information.</td>
<td>Probation officer completes tool and sends “preferably by fax” back to VGRAP.</td>
<td>VGRA Program Leader determines whether young female is “considered suitable” and places her on a “waitlist.”</td>
<td>Once on a waitlist the referring probation officer must “bi-weekly reconfirm if placement is still desired.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAGLE</td>
<td>“Referrals are only accepted from probation officers and youth custody case manager’s coordinators working within the Ministry for Children and Families” (p.3) who complete first half of package and youth complete the second part.</td>
<td>-Pre-Disposition report. -Formal learning assessments. -Medical information.</td>
<td>Completed referral is faxed to the program manager.</td>
<td>Program manager then forwards to a screening committee that includes the program manager, addiction counsellor and the Vancouver Regional Youth Justice representative.</td>
<td>Committee determines “approved” or “not approved.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>Processing interchange</td>
<td>Collateral documents required</td>
<td>Resulting action</td>
<td>Processing interchange</td>
<td>Resulting action</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPPR</td>
<td>Probation officer contacts the liaison Probation officer or Director to determine start dates and verify potential booking. Then completes the tool and mails or faxes to a post office box. Tool is completed without youth.</td>
<td>-Probation Order. -Pre-Disposition report. -Medical report. -Parental/guardian consent. -Psychiatric assessment.</td>
<td>Physician completes 4 pages of the tool. Parents/guardian complete release form.</td>
<td>&quot;Once documentation is received and into our office, the IPP will confirm placement&quot; (p.4). &quot;Please ensure all information is accurate and complete&quot; (p.9).</td>
<td>The Director named in the tool then signs off once she determines that &quot;the individual is suitable for, and can participate in the IPP&quot; (p.16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVWC</td>
<td>Referral made by a &quot;variety of referring agents&quot; (p.10) that completes a referral package and an intake assessment. Referring agent must sign off. Tools completed about youth not with the youth.</td>
<td>-Medical info. -Alcohol and substance misuse assessment. -Pre-Disposition report. -Probation Order.</td>
<td>As the CVWC is non-funded the referral agent must secure funding/sponsorship via a signature from a funding agency, ministry, band etc. before processing intake.</td>
<td>Intake assessment reviewed by committee.</td>
<td>Admission to the program is &quot;secured on a first come first serve basis&quot; (p.10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAT</td>
<td>Tool completed by &quot;a person who has a relationship with the child.&quot; No youth involvement.</td>
<td>-Knowledge about the child's &quot;at risk&quot; behaviours.</td>
<td>If referring agent has concerns about medical, psychiatric or mental health disorders, they are advised to seek &quot;professional consultation&quot; (p.1) or call 911 if there is a crisis.</td>
<td>Tool is submitted via e-mail, mail or faxed to the Mentor Research Institute for processing.</td>
<td>A response can be expected within 3 days from the Institute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMH</td>
<td>Tool to be completed by &quot;you&quot; seems to refer to &quot;young person&quot;</td>
<td>-Gives a checklist of concerns for the youth to circle.</td>
<td>Tool is given to mental health worker to &quot;enable them to get some idea of how things are for them right now&quot; (p.1).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6. Continued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Processing interchange</th>
<th>Collateral documents required</th>
<th>Resulting action</th>
<th>Processing interchange</th>
<th>Resulting action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLEA</td>
<td>Probation officer or addiction counsellor phones Program manager for a referral package. No youth involvement.</td>
<td>Psychological and educational assessments.  -Pre-Disposition report.  -Drug and alcohol assessment.  -Parental/guardian consent.</td>
<td>Referring agent completes referral package and intake tool. Referrals are accepted “on an ongoing basis” (p.1) and must be faxed to PLEA manager.</td>
<td>Screening committee views information.</td>
<td>Screening committee determines “eligibility and placement priority” and successful youth is placed upon a waiting list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS</td>
<td>Tool to be “filled out with the social worker and referred youth” (p.1).</td>
<td>-School, medical, legal, health and social info.</td>
<td>Tool completion becomes the “Goal and Objectives Plan for Independence Checklist” (p.1).</td>
<td>No action given.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSPREY</td>
<td>Screening/assessment form to be completed by drug and alcohol counsellors. Tool must be signed by “interviewing D/A worker” (p.4).</td>
<td>-Drug and alcohol assessment.  -Medical assessment.  -Parent/guardian release.</td>
<td>Tool given to parents/guardians and medical practitioner to complete several pages each.</td>
<td>Completed tool sent to OSPREY for processing.</td>
<td>Eligibility determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIF</td>
<td>Screening counsellor to complete with client.</td>
<td>-If needed suicide risk assessment.  -If needed critical incident report.  -Behaviour and need checklist completed.</td>
<td>File number and program eligibility established and priority assigned for service.</td>
<td>Placed on intake waitlist for appropriate program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 5: Documentation as the basis for organizational accountability

"To ignore accountability, or to dismiss it as a technical problem best left to experts, is to miss one of the most important conversations of post-industrial society" (Gross-Stein, 2001, p.139).

My consideration of this theme came directly from worker frustration about the increasing amounts of paper work which consumes more and more of their client time. In Gross-Stein's (2001) analysis of efficiency, she speaks to the challenges facing those who try and define and pursue accountability in an arena where the government has delegated its authority to provide public services to institutions and organizations. Gross-Stein notes that "public accountability is an essential mechanism" (p.141) and is more in demand now as "the state as buyer requires accountability as it backs out of the delivery of public goods, devolves authority down, and contracts out service delivery" (p.146). Consequently, the state expects cost-effective services that demonstrate effectiveness as "this is the knowledge states need from those who provide public goods, and citizens need in order to hold their institutions accountable" (p.146).

In British Columbia, current government strategies for divesting itself from direct influence over human service organizations are managed through two processes, an external accreditation and standards body (The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Standards, 2001-2002) and accountability mechanisms enforced systemically through required documentation as stipulated in "schedule A” contract documents. Often this documentation appears in the form of standardized assessment tools. These tools have the ability to create a documentary format, that when completed by the worker ensures that the same standard of work is reproduced regardless of who the worker is. The result as suggested by Ng (1996) is a:
Documentary process crucial for organizing the complex division of labour within the state and ensuring reproduction, because people move in and out of, and have a limited “life span” relative to structure (p.23).

Pertaining particularly to intake and screening tools, C.A.R.F. stipulates that an organization “must use documentation to assist in demonstrating conformance to the standards” and then lists what documentation is acceptable:

- Policies and procedures defining access
- Policies and procedures for the screening process
- Documentation of initial screening
- Criteria for admission and exclusion from services
- Documentation of ineligibility and recommendations for alternative services (p.103).

The initiation of a referral to an organization for service begins a series of actions as part of the work process. In all of the referral situations I reviewed, this process must be documented and specific data must be noted on the tools provided. Smith (1990a) suggests that these textual practices actually, “co-ordinate, order, provide continuity, monitor and organize relations between different segments and phases of the organizational course of action (p.217). The primary explanation as to why the activity of intake/screening assessment is documented was located in the C.A.R.F. manual. The C.A.R.F. manual insists upon documentation as a standard to minimize subjectivity, “The organization determines which persons it is qualified to serve. When this determination is formalized and in writing it significantly minimizes subjectivity” (p.104).

Some youth workers revealed a quandary at this juncture; they expressed feeling sandwiched between the bureaucratic need for a systematic model of service provision, increasingly constrained by its usage of texts that mediate standardization and accountability. This contrasted with their professional need to move further away from
diagnostic, labeling, standardized assessment tools in order to meet the needs of their clients, in a more flexible, interactive responsive manner, through relationship building. However, for other workers this dilemma was not as explicit. In my analysis of worker transcripts I found workers did not see documented standardized assessments and therapeutic relationship building as mutually exclusive. Instead they reported, finding a balance between the two and were able to work within this practice environment. This was the case for the following workers who noted the pros and cons of using a screening/intake assessment tool as a mode of organizational accountability:

I’ve seen both sides-where the information isn’t there and the kid has to tell their stories over and over again and just shut down and give up (focus group #3, p19).

We are not super human here-we can all miss the mark. In some ways the more ways you have to assess, the more accurate we are going to be and the better off we are to cover ourselves (focus group #3, p.19).

For others, as the need for increased documentation occurs in the workplace and their daily activities become more consumed with paperwork the tension created by the two increases. As one worker stated,

What do you need that information for in the first place? Like what benefit is there for you to know that information and what difference would that be in the support that you give someone if you had that information? (transcript # 4, p.15).

Another said,

Risk assessment is the flavour of the day-but it governs our practice (focus group # 1, p.7).

Assessment tools in their design and activation represent a physical depiction of the system’s need for standardization and this intersects directly with the worker’s role in relation to their youth clients. This is concurrent with what workers found in their work with youth:

I agree with the need for us to be somewhat similar in our work so that social workers don’t go off the rails in every community (focus group # 3, p.17).
Until you make people accountable, workers accountable for their behaviour and for what they’re doing as what kind of services they’re providing and where their gaps are, I don’t even think they’re going to start looking at youth needs (transcript # 2, p.33).

Interestingly, those workers who see the benefit of using standardized, documenting assessment tools usually related their reasons to the need for worker accountability, not primarily for improved youth service. Other workers advocate that the usage of assessment tools “just gets in the way of really good youth work” (transcript # 4, p.23) and therefore some “find themselves having to work outside the existing systems or without the existence of existing systems because there is a conflict of values” (focus group # 2). Others report finding a balance between relationship building and standardized intake/screening tools because as they note without a relationship, to youth you are “just a piece of paper with questions on it” (transcript # 3, p.25).

**Theme 6: The creation of a formalized account through categorization**

“The underlying social relations that generate and sustain a category are not always explicit, and they may become completely detached from the category as it appears to us” (Swift, 1995, p.6).

Several authors (Jung, 1988; Smith, 1990a; Swift, 1995) suggest that the documentation or verification process creates a “formalized account” of an activity, in this case screening/intake. This production of knowledge in the form of an account requires that youth workers describe in writing the youth in order to create specific knowledge in a documentary form about the youth. This knowledge is constructed within a conceptual frame so that it makes the activity actionable by the organization. In this way, as suggested by the work of Bell (2001), workers participate in “an administrative formalized procedure by filling out categories on administrative forms in
a manner consistent with a methodical process" (p.91). This process is designed to "ensure that records are collected in standardized ways and not as idiosyncrasies of individuals" (Smith, 1990a, p.90). As such, the documentation process is designed to standardize work processes and ensure organizational and professional accountability and ultimately serves to define the youth by their issues. In his critique of risk assessment tools, Castel (1991) describes pacification as "the shifting of attention from the body to an assembly of facts" through which there is a "dissolving of the subject [client], which is replaced by a preordained combinations of factors" (p.283). This pacification of youth, imposed by the documentation process, shifts the attention of the worker away from youth, as this worker voiced her opinion of this process:

Well we almost get desensitized when we hear the same story over and over again and we no longer have a connection to the experience. It is the cost of doing business with kids" (transcript # 1, p.21).

In a similar vein, another worker noted:

I think a tool can make your work very objectified when really the kind of work we do is not...in terms of tools it might be interesting for research and studies, but I don't they're useful for practice (focus group #3, p.16).

The youth as subject becomes engulfed and dissolved and a "client" is produced. In the tools reviewed, youth became not defined or characterized in terms of their social relations and connections with the "outside world" and "local reality" but converted to a list of demographic characteristics and classified as a manifestation of their issues. As Smith (1985) discovered early on in her work:

Actual experience is selected and ordered on accordance with the grammatical, logical and causal connections supplied by the discourse rather than being constrained by the connections of lived experience (p.325).
All of the fourteen tools (100%) requested basic demographics at the onset of
their forms. They generally requested name, height, weight, address and distinguishing
marks, ethnicity and age. Eleven of the tools (79%) reduced the referred youth to a
manifestation of their issues such as “fire setter,” “verbally abusive to others,”
“prostitution,” and “youth uses weekly and sometimes daily.” The action of writing up
the youth acts to stabilize an account of the youth, which becomes the “knowledge”
which “objectively” measures/mediates the appropriateness of service by level, priority,
type and duration. As Clark (2001) suggests, this static, objective mode of accounting
with youth around service provision is particularly detrimental, as youth are dynamic
and generative and never static.

Who in institutions utilizes screening/intake tools?

The following three themes revealed below, are organized under the second
research question posed, as they best address this area. Regardless, of how assessment
tools are viewed, human service workers act as agents of organizations and their
professions and it is these structures which give workers the authority to activate tools.
There are however, boundaries around certain areas of expertise and their corresponding
discourses. These boundaries result in who has the authority to know, assess and use a
specific discourse. This authority is generally organizationally sanctioned and supported
both internally and externally by professional regulatory bodies, academies and
governmental acts. A worker when speaking about his/her interaction with the child
protection system gave an example of this:

I like to relate to assessment of systems—nobody really understands the whole
protection thing—nobody really knows who has the authority in their mandated
position—when I phone protection about a kid I almost feel two notches below
them and that filters down to contracted agencies and if we are going to go
anywhere with an assessment that would have to be recognized, then we are going
to have to get somewhere on an even playing field where they respect your assessment. There are so many cases where kids have been assessed up the ying yang and then they want to go on a youth agreement, the social worker has to complete a twenty-three page assessment—and only that is acceptable—other assessments aren’t substitute (focus group # 2, p.7).

The C.A.R.F. standards manual agrees and supports the idea of qualified workers initiating referral processes:

Qualified personnel are determined by the organization. The organization may base its determination on the skills, experience, and/or education of personnel, and by state, federal, provincial, or other regulating guidelines (p.109).

As a result workers, tools and supporting documents such as mandates, standards and certifications determine who is best qualified to complete an intake/screening within an institution. In addition these same data sets determine which institutions are sanctioned either formally or informally to complete assessment tools. From a formal perspective, four workers mentioned that intake assessments completed by mandated agencies such as child protection and youth probation were seen as “more credible.” However, informally generally workers also commented that they often find these mandated organizations as lacking in the assessment department as they often have preconceived perceptions of the youth and their families and tend to perpetuate labeling. One worker gave the example of a youth with issues of sexual exploitation and another of a young sex offender, whose screenings they saw as clouded by these macro labels to the extent that the immediate needs of the youth were missed. This led me to consider what knowledge about youth gets considered in the intake/screening process.
**Theme 7: Organizational literacy**

"A lot of it is about knowing. We felt it was really important to determine the limitations of the agencies and workers... I know what I am capable of and what my mandate is and what our protocol is" (transcript #2, p.35).

Human service workers who activate tools are expected to carry an interpretive framework in their head. Referred to by some authors (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1999; Swift, 1995) as organizational literacy, this frame allows workers to interpret authorized knowledge and drop out "other" knowledge. As Swift (1995) notes, this leads workers to "increasingly exacting forms and paperwork to be filled out" (p.67). The notion of authority in tools seems to be vital in understanding the relations of influence in the completion of tools and yet workers do not always appear to be cognizant or aware of how their selection and interpretation of the knowledge they insert in tools is influenced by organizational need, professional identity and the political, social and economic climate. Simply stated, some information or knowledge is considered more useful than others by the worker and their circle of influence. As one worker noted, "I think they are just more aware of what they need to do in terms of protocol than focusing on the needs of the youth"(transcript #3, p.7).

This was certainly somewhat of a revelation to me as I had never considered what information I might be unconsciously filtering out based upon my organizational and professional influence before. I began to see that tools as texts, were conversations between the text creator and the reader and the question as to who was authorized to participate in this conversation was pivotal. Pivotal as the reading and writing of the texts becomes a process of constructing meaning in which the reader connects information in the text to what he or she already knows and recognizes. I was intellectually alerted to this by Smith’s (1975) early work on the social construction of
documentary reality. However, it was not until I examined each of the fourteen tools for referral sources that I realized the influence and power the construction of a tool can have over the information elicited from the worker.

Each of the fourteen tools examined identified which agency supplied the tool and had the resources to provide a particular service. In order to access each of these organization's services, tools had to be completed by a "referral source" and thereby enter a process to consider the appropriateness of a referred youth for the service. This process in turn created a relation between funder, service provider, and referral agent, generally on behalf of the youth referee. I determined therefore that the tools were designed specifically to gather information of a certain type, using a discourse that would only be clearly understood by a worker who held that particular body of knowledge. For example a police officer may refer to a youth involved in the sex trade as a "child prostitute" based on his/her justice discourse, as prostitution is the language used in law. The youth in this case may be seen as needing a referral into the justice system. Whereas a youth worker operating from a social discourse may consider the youth as "sexually exploited" and therefore a victim of abuse and would make a corresponding referral. This led me to consider who in the tools I analyzed, was seen as a knower.

**Theme 8: Authoritative knowers and discourse**

In this inquiry a knower was considered to be the person who the tool authorized as being in a position to have the knowledge to adequately complete the tool to the satisfaction of the referral source. In looking at the tools I noticed that the knowers each were expected to hold some kind of knowing in relation to the tools. As each tool I examined began by identifying who was being given the "authority" by the organization
to complete the tool and thereby activate the work process called “screening or intake.”

Of the fourteen tools analyzed, twelve tools clearly identified in a “referral process” preamble whom they would accept a referral from. The remaining two implied an expectation as to who would complete the tool. Interestingly, these were the only two tools where the “who could complete” was not identified as a professional by title. Instead the tool completers were identified as the “person completing the form” (YAT) and “you” (VMH) that appeared to refer to a youth.

The “who” in tool completion is the person or persons deemed by the organization to have an “authoritative way of knowing” (Campbell & Gregor, p.91) and can write up the youth in a way understandable and acceptable to the organization. By the nature of their professional titles, for example, “Probation Officer,” “Youth Custody Management Coordinator” or “Screening Counsellor,” they are understood by the organization to have a body of knowledge that allows them to interpret the youth using a specific set of criteria and fit or mediate between the actual reality and the reality created by the tool.

The authorized knowers identified in the tools reviewed were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorized knower</th>
<th>Tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probation Officer</td>
<td>VGRAP, KEYS, EAGLES, IPPR, KINRAP, PLEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug &amp; alcohol counsellor</td>
<td>OSPREY, CVWC, PLEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring agent</td>
<td>TURN, XYOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening counsellor</td>
<td>CIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth custody management coordinator (MFCD)</td>
<td>EAGLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>SEEDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>VMH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person completing form who has relationship with child</td>
<td>YAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of referring agents (Dr., social worker, youth court worker)</td>
<td>VGRAP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to identifying by whom a tool could be completed, most tools also recognized from which external influence the authority was designated. Dependant upon the authority, usually the funding source, there was a pattern of related discourse. By discourse, I am referring to the language or dialogue in the tool, which relates to the location or context of the tool. For example, a tool, which has designated authority from the Attorney General, would most likely accept an authoritative knower as someone who had knowledge of the justice system and was literate in the related discourse. In this case, the authoritative knower might be a Probation Officer who could translate such text as "enclose a recent PDR" to know what was required.

It is interesting to note that the VGRA, which has no funding source and is reliant upon a "fee for service" approach, correspondingly had the most diverse list of authoritative knowers and discourse of any program reviewed. A correlation is revealed between those organizations funded by the government and those that are not. When the government funds an organization, authority and control are exercised through a tighter focus on who is sanctioned to refer to services and this power is implemented through the tool. The following table illustrates the authority where the tool was located and the resulting discourse:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Designated authority</th>
<th>Discourse used</th>
<th>Examples of dialogue used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KEY</td>
<td>Ministry of Attorney General/Corrections branch</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>“Are you currently preparing a PDR or an updated PDR?” “Has this youth been referred to Maples?” “On remand?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURN</td>
<td>Not indicated in tool</td>
<td>Justice, social</td>
<td>“temporary ward,” “previous charges.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINRAP</td>
<td>Ministry of Attorney General/Corrections Branch</td>
<td>Justice, social</td>
<td>“permissive parenting,” “failure to comply.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XYOL</td>
<td>Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>“youth at risk,” “date of next care plan meeting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAGLE</td>
<td>Circle of Eagles Lodge (supported by Community Services and Program Support Division (MCFD))</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>“status,” “YCRNA results.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAT</td>
<td>Mentor Research Institute</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>“list behaviours associated with risk.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGRA</td>
<td>Vernon Women’s Transition House Society</td>
<td>Social, justice</td>
<td>“describe relationships to various family members,” “restitution.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health, Victoria Mental Health</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>“mood swings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLEA</td>
<td>Pacific Legal Education Association</td>
<td>Justice, health</td>
<td>‘probation/bail commitments,’ “self-mutilation,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPP</td>
<td>No authority listed</td>
<td></td>
<td>“repatriation,” “reparation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSPREY</td>
<td>Elizabeth Fry Society</td>
<td>Justice, health</td>
<td>“stages of change,” “acquisition behaviours,” “treatment readiness program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIF</td>
<td>Multiple authorities, MCFD, municipalities, Mental Health.</td>
<td>Social, health</td>
<td>“stages of change,” “case manager,” “presenting problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS</td>
<td>Community Options (MCFD)</td>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>“COS worker.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVWC</td>
<td>Not funded, so no authority listed</td>
<td>Social services/justice/health</td>
<td>“increase family and social functioning,” “decrease substance abuse,” “re-disposition report.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the fourteen tools, 29% (4) primarily used a justice discourse, 14% (2) used a mental health discourse, 7% (1) used a social services discourse and 50% (7) used a combination of discourses to select information which then determined who could complete the form due to their specialized knowledge.

**Theme 9: What is measured matters**

"What is measured matters, because what is measured is what people do"  
(Gross-Stein, 2001, p.151).

As a result of funding arrangements, youth serving agencies in British Columbia currently enter sub-contracting relationships with the province or state. The funding is such that these agencies must produce a product or outcome, such as a “healthy youth” who has less dependence upon the state in return for organizational funding. The nature and parameters around what each agency is to produce for it’s funding is specific to the “schedule A” document or contract and agreed upon mandate signed with the government. Agencies become accountable to the province or state and ultimately the public for the delivery of these outcomes.

In the present political and social context, accountability is often measured through documents and standardized through accreditation processes. My experience as a manager in the provision of provincially funded services is that the need to produce documents to satisfy contracts or appear accountable produces an increasing tension between “direct client work” and “document production.” At times the agency in which I work has closed its doors to clients in order to “catch-up” on the paper work. The “Client Information Form” designed to meet the accreditation requirements is now five pages long and has necessitated several workshops for staff on its use. Of the fourteen tools I analyzed, the average length, inclusive of brief program descriptions was eleven
and a half pages, with the shortest being two pages and the longest twenty-five pages. The tools appear to undergo revision at times, in order to remain current with changes in policy and funding and this requires additional work processes. As Gross-Stein, (2001) points out "our choice of measures and the meaning we attribute to standards engage our basic values and purposes" (p.152). The present provincial government has been clear about its goals and purposes, one of which is outlined in the 2001 Ministry of Children and Family Services Plan:

It is clear in times of fiscal restraint; the current level of service to meet the specialized needs of the ministry’s wide range of clientele is not sustainable without a radical shift in service delivery mechanisms (p.2).

These goals are filtering down and one of the shifts in delivery mechanisms is the move to an outcomes management model as supported by CARF (2001). What is interesting is that CARF suggests that an organization’s goals “regarding outcomes are based upon what consumers, providers, and purchasers of services need to know in order to evaluate and improve services” (p.79).

However, youth as consumers of services are typically not involved in the dialogue when outcome measures are proposed and evaluated. Politically, the voices of youth are limited, as they do not yet have the power to vote and often are not even involved in the assessment process directly. In fact youth are often, as in the case of probation, unwilling, involuntary consumers of services.

The opinions of workers also appear to be somewhat marginalized. Workers expressed feeling as if they did not have a voice in the implementation or determining of new outcome devices and yet were the ones expected to activate them. They suggested that they “felt out of the loop” as to the purpose of some of these measures. In fact they often felt rather than assist their youth clients, the tools were there to monitor their work.
The implementation of an outcomes management plan presumes that an organization is engaged in a quest for quality and can fulfill this purpose through documentation. The workers are often left as the ones completing these documentation measures (tools) and are not always clear as to the rationale for using them. Beyond an administrative or contractual function, they are seen by workers as somewhat of a necessary evil to retain funding and satisfy a supervisor:

Our accreditation that we are trying to do. I don’t even know what it stands for- CARF in the States. We’re going to be accredited this fall. They’re going to come up from the States and do an audit to see if we’re ready—the whole agency (transcript #4, p.27).

We have an outcomes measures program to do that. Outcome measures—we use the logic model and program design. There are inputs and outputs—if we engaged in activities (output) most of us engage in activities that go nowhere—so activities must have a logical sequence of events to lead to the outcome which fills our ministry mandate, our contractual mandate and the needs of the kids are described (focus group #2, p.6).

However, the importance of the implementation of outcomes measurement models in human service organizations can not be understated, as Gross-Stein emphasizes:

It matters profoundly which measures of effectiveness are chosen. It matters because these measures—once they are socially accepted—feed back to, and drive, the performance of those who provide public goods (p.152).

In revealing how tools can transport organizational measures into the work process, we can make visible the linkages between how workers are directed to perform their tasks and the goals of the governing external influences. While the majority of the youth workers interviewed place emphasis upon people-centred systems of work, such as relationship building and respecting youth, the organizations appear to rely on systemic measures, documentation and control structures to motivate action. The organization’s focus in this present climate is becoming increasingly narrow to measure
effectiveness and efficiency as the most valued outcomes. Just as House (1984) noted, we see again, some twenty years later, the use of industrial metaphors to describe organizational measures and people, young people even, are being reconfigured in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes. This is all occurring in sharp contrast to what workers and the current literature suggests as the best practice in assessment aimed at providing services for youth.
CHAPTER SIX

Exposure and reflections

_It find the lack of resources challenging. I find people coming to the table with the kid genuinely at heart. Let’s leave our mandates at the door, leave our policies at the door. And come together with what’s best for the kid. It’s not about my numbers. It’s not about your numbers because to keep on funding or whatever, what’s best? What are we going to do as a group to best help the child?_ (transcript # 5, p.33).

**What does this say about the work process and the impact on youth workers?**

In this chapter I expose and reflect my understanding of the impact that intake/screening assessment tools as texts of influence can have on youth workers. At the completion of this analysis I find myself not in a position to suggest the “right” way to do screening/intake assessments and certainly that was never the intention of this inquiry. Neither do I end this work with an explicit proposal as to how we reform our human services or even pass judgment on the existing system. Rather, I sought to make visible the external structural constraints, such as limited resources, political ideologies and changing social values, which are played out through tool usage and impact the role of youth workers and their ability to meet the needs of clients.

By increasing the visibility of these structures through the vehicle of screening/intake assessment tools, I have uncovered through textual analysis, two main areas to reflect upon. The first, involves the sources of contradictions and challenges, which youth workers actively struggle with in this present climate. The second is what has been revealed by this analysis in answer to the research questions identified in chapter three.
The first area revealed by the textual analysis: Contradictions and challenges

While it seems youth workers do not always immediately link their sources of internal frustration to external relations outside their realm of immediate influence, these influences do seem to affect practice. Workers are more likely to focus their dissatisfaction upon the tools themselves and on the administration within their organization because as one worker noted, “they create a need for more assessment ... you build a hammer and suddenly everything needs hammering” (focus group # 3, p.2). The workers expressed the need for less bureaucracy and documentation and reported participating in these work processes because they either saw no option, (“I would be very cautious about using them (tools) if I had a choice,” focus group # 3, p.17), or they do it as a way to cover their proverbial “butts.” (“If you have completed your tool you aren’t totally accountable for what ever happened,” focus group # 3, p. 2).

After completing this research, I can see how and why workers often identify themselves as being “torn” between clients and administration in their work. Workers face the continual dilemma between the tasks expected by the organization, such as the activation and documentation of screening/intake assessment tools, and the need to create interactive, responsive relationships with youth. These dilemmas often result in frustration and exhaustion that “burns” out workers or leads them to feel constantly compromised in their work. As workers are rarely able to meet both the needs of their clients and the needs of the organization completely, and they must constantly balance where to place their priorities.

Four main challenges or dilemmas were illuminated for workers as a result of this inquiry:
1. Paperwork vs. relationship building

This inquiry revealed a tension between the roles tools play in governing youth worker practice (i.e. the strong focus on maintaining organizational flow, compared with the worker’s assertion that forming relationships with youth is paramount in practice). Interestingly, of the fourteen tools reviewed none asked questions which pertained to relationship development. This tension is echoed by other scholars who uncovered similar conflicts in their studies (Artz et al., 2001; Castel, 1991; B. Cohen, 2002; Rose, 2002; Swift, 1995; Townsend, 1998). Castel (1991) in particular agrees with the workers and predicts that, “the present format will eventually lead to routinization of social work processes, reduced focus on personal relationships and a substantive increase in the time spent on investigation at the expense of support and prevention” (p.294). What can be surmised from this is that regardless of the intentionality of individual youth workers with regard to their preferred method of working with youth, currently these workers must participate in processes that are linked to external relations of influence, which do not begin or end with the organization. Whether, workers participate willingly or fully is a compromise some make, but in order to meet the obligations of organizations to their funders, participate they must.

2. Authorized knower vs. objective, standardized documenter

This inquiry also revealed another dichotomy faced by the youth workers who activate assessment tools. On the one hand, they are designated as the “authoritative knowers” who are expected by the organization and outside influences to hold both a
professional and organizational literacy frame in their heads in order to interpret, sort and weigh data and determine client eligibility through the screening/intake process. Juxtaposed to this, they must also balance the pressure from outside influences impacting the organization, such as economic scarcity of resources and accreditation processes which emphasize that "admission criteria reduces the need to exercise subjective judgment in making a decision regarding whether a particular program is applicable to a person’s needs" (C.A.R.F. 2001, p.105). So workers are essentially being told implicitly, that they are the designated "knowers" and yet are not encouraged to employ their subjective judgment when completing the tools. Therefore, workers in this inquiry concur with Castel (1991), who points out that "assessment processes tend to subordinate the professional to managerial policy formation" (p.287). According to Castel, this results in the "transformation of caring to an activity of "expertise" created and managed by personnel outside of the local site" (p.287). The caring work provided by the workers becomes a commodity and social relations become commodified and there occurs a transformation of a good or service for its everyday meaning into an abstract economic meaning. Workers are left feeling cynical and mistrustful of tools and yet are not always able to articulate why this may be:

I see these documents (tools) as being totally–audit driven–this is us being assessed rather than really assessing the client and I am deeply resentful. And if this gets back to my boss I don’t care (focus group #3, p.17).

3. External vs. internal accountability

With the ever increasing public scrutiny of human services in the present climate, there is a resulting increase in the need for accountability. Workers often seem to defer their internal professional accountability, particularly around decision making, to tools. Workers do this not necessarily because the tools are superior, but because when they
document action on an organizationally sanctioned form, in the words of several workers, “the tools serve to cover our butts, if there’s any question about judgment” (focus group #3, p16). The result is often the professional and practice judgment of the worker are devalued and subordinated to the need for external accountability.

4. Outcomes management vs. the intangible process of youth work

Workers expressed the challenges they faced with outcome management models that require them to further reduce and reproduce their clients from intangible, complex dynamic beings into tangible, quantifiable measures. Production and efficiency are the most important outcomes and the youth are seen as objects to be processed by the system.

We’re at work doing all this outcomes stuff and everything is coming through and being put into little boxes and that is really difficult. To be expected to put everything into outcomes. So much of what is outcomes is what you can’t measure—it’s not tangible. It’s really tough in our field to do that (transcript #3, p.18).

Measuring outcomes is very difficult because of the complexity of people’s lives and the multiple contexts in which they function. Tangible change can take years to manifest (focus group #3, p.2).

The question remains how in this present climate, which favours a system-centred approach, do workers who practice from a youth centred approach find a balance or change a system? The first step has to be to understand the impact an outcomes management system will have on them and their clients and to begin to unravel the linkages to external influences.

The second area addressed by this textual analysis: Responding to the problematic

In this inquiry, I began in chapter three with the examination of a problematic which had caused a “moment of disquiet” for me (Smith, 1990b, p.47). The problematic that I discovered was that there seemed to be a difference between the use I had
attributed to assessment tools and what they might potentially be used for. From this initial disjuncture, I came to three questions, which framed my explication through textual analysis. The three questions suggested were:

1. What does intake/screening assessment tool usage tell us about the institutions that use them?
2. Who in institutions uses intake/screening assessment tools?
3. What is the impact of tool usage on professionals who work with youth?

As I end this inquiry I now return to these questions to deduce how and if I answered each. The first question posed by my problematic is concerned with the bigger picture: what does the analysis reveal about tool usage and the institutions that use them? In some ways the specifics of this question are also alluded to by the responses to the second question. However, this textual analysis exposed a dichotomy between a setting that professes to be client-centred, as seen by the CARF (2001) references and provincial government documents, when in reality it is system-centred. The needs of both workers and youth are subordinated to the maintenance of a bureaucracy whose goals are consistent with fiscal restraint and a political ideology which, as Wharf and McKenzie (1998) assert, “values public social programs which address the general risks to well-being, but remain subservient to economic issues” (p.11).

In answer to question two who in institutions uses assessment tools? I can conclude, that our present system appears to value fiscal restraint, efficiency of service provision, and measured effectiveness over the practice needs of the direct line workers to build therapeutic relationships with active, generative youth clients. Screening/intake assessment tools are activated by professionals who are deemed to possess specialized knowledge and authority as specified by outside influences of power, such as government ministries. The tools used are standardized, objective and create an account
of the assessed youth that is static and formal and leaves little room for professional judgments. The occasions that necessitate the activation of these tools are clearly stipulated in each case and must be completed in a manner consistent with the instructions provided.

Eligibility and appropriateness for service provision are the primary reasons that intake/screening tools are activated. However, this analysis revealed that the tools are also activated to allocate resources in a manner that ensures only those who will benefit the most are those who receive service. Reasons for client disqualification were revealed, along with some organization’s desire to accept only motivated clients who will achieve positive outcomes.

When tools are activated they also serve as constituents of organizational process. In a formal, methodical process, tools can manage, document and control the work of employees and forge the connections they make with other agencies by dictating processing interchanges. Tools provide structures, which generate standardized, objective accounts that can be reproduced regardless of the individual worker or youth’s experience. They also have the ability to dissolve youth into categories, which in turn manifests them into clients who are identified by their lists of issues. Tools can make actionable an internal and external accountability structure to verify that the power conferred by the state upon the organization is utilized effectively and efficiently and conformity is documented. What is very apparent is that tools have the potential to be far more than documents, which allow workers to gather and synthesize information about youth in order to provide the best service, as I had once assumed.

The third question inquires what the impact of tool usage is on youth work. Throughout this analysis I have attempted to make translucent the linkages between
youth work and external influences, as I have understood them. At times these linkages have seemed obvious, as in the case of the government's support and implementation of accreditation bodies which place standards and impose adherence upon organizations and workers, ensuring accountability. At other times these relationships have been elusive and more like the vapours left by a passing plane. We know the links are there, but it is difficult to make the connections. An example of a vapour link is between the system's preferences for workers who remain detached from their clients, as opposed to workers who engage in therapeutic relationships with youth. Multiple examples were given by workers and echoed in the objective, formal structures of the tools, yet no clear link could be drawn from the analysis to external influences, other than suppositions.

**Snapshot of what this inquiry has revealed about screening/intake assessment tools**

From this institutional ethnographic textual inquiry, we can reveal the following about the tools analyzed:

- Tools can determine eligibility and appropriateness for service.
- Intake tools can "cream" for the youth who will have the best outcomes.
- Tools can ascertain the allocation of resources through the screening/intake process.
- Tools are active constituents of the organizational process.
- Tools make actionable an accountability structure.
- Tools organize administrative work/decision processes.
- Tools appear to have an embedded underlying interpretive schema.
- Tools require organizational literacy and an authoritative knower to activate them.
- Tools have primarily a justice or social service discourse (language).
- Tools presume systemic linkages and associations (probation, medical, youth justice, welfare, education, mental health).
- Tools create formalized, impersonal accounts of youth.
- Tools can subjugate professional/practice knowledge to objectified accounts.
- Tools often represent a tangible example of the external influences exerted on youth workers.
As with any inquiry, there are always questions left unanswered and pathways left unexplored. As it is, I have taken rather an unusual look at tools from both an institutional ethnographic perspective and a traditional stance. I have not examined one institution as a component of a larger work process, its historical development and linkages to other organizations and relations, as some institutional ethnographers might have (Ng, 1996).

Instead I have taken fourteen screening/intake assessment tools as entry-points into the complex relations that organize and influence the work of youth workers. I have looked at these tools as “symbolic bridges between the everyday/night local actualities of our living and the ruling relations” (Smith, 1999, p.7). My intention was not to explain the behaviour of workers, but rather to try and explain the impact of external organizational influences had upon them. This resulted in rather a birds-eye perspective, which has touched on many aspects and impacts of power and influence. Some readers may find a certain frustration in this and would have desired fewer points examined more intensely. However, as I progressed I discovered it a constant battle to reduce the scope of this inquiry and leave so many stones unturned. It was at this point I reminded myself that another hallmark of institutional ethnography is that the social research by its very contextual nature must remain “open-edged” and never really complete, as the setting in which it occurs is dynamic and evolving. For example, the experience of youth who participate in screening/intake assessments was not included. I thought about what they would have to say about the process of assessment in general. I wondered what they would say about the reduction of their lived actualities reconstructed into categories of objectified attributes and properties, if that was made visible to them. I speculated what would be revealed if I had chosen to look at one organization using a case study,
remonstrant of Ng's (1996) or Bell's (2001) work. I now wonder whether workers would be surprised, validated or would disagree with what I have illuminated. As a worker, I was not so much surprised by my findings as I was relieved. Relieved, because I had struggled so much with the design and implementation of the CARF suitable CIF tool and could never really put my finger on why I was having such a difficult time. I blamed the CARF conformance standards and the organization for the process and yet I never looked at the impact the implementation of the tool was going to have on my practice with youth. And now knowing that I compromise my practice knowledge when I use the tool, what do I do about it? I believe that participating in and sharing the learning I have gained through this inquiry, I am in a position to promote revision of the tools I use or at least acknowledge the challenges. And in the words of one worker, I know for sure that I will never settle for a job which promotes “pushing the pointy parts of a youth’s personality back into the box” (focus group # 2, p.5).

In conclusion, I agree with Floersch (1998) who suggests, more work is needed to assist professional youth workers in exercising their strategic power when working alongside the powerful effects of organizations, policy and totalizing knowledge systems. In short, youth workers need to be supported in finding a practice space between external, bureaucratic influences alienated form experience and the ability to form meaningful, empowering relationships with youth. We must find a way to accept the benefits, necessity and impact of assessment tools in our practice, while continuing to be youth-centred and service driven.
REFERENCES


Plake, B. S., Conoley, J. (1995). *Using Buros Institute of mental measurement materials in counselling and therapy*


APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Activation**
This is a term used to express the "human involvement in the capacity of texts to coordinate action/work processes to get things done" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p.33).

**Disquiet/disjuncture**
"That knowing moment when an individual notices that there exists a difference between knowing something from a "ruling" versus an experiential perspective" (Smith, 1990b, p.83).

**Entry**
Entry level data is the initial phase of data collection in institutional ethnography. It involves the understanding and collecting of information about the local setting and the individuals who interact there and their experiences. In this inquiry it also involves my understanding of setting.

**Exploration**
According to Bell, 2001; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1999 this is the second stage of inquiry in institutional ethnography. Exploration suggests an intense review of the data, which allows meaning to evolve.

**Exposure**
Exposure refers to the final stage of inquiry when those relations of ruling which are not explicit in what is said or realized by the participants are exposed.

**Everyday/night**
Everyday/night refers to the actual real experiences voiced by participants in their worlds. In the case of institutional ethnography as Smith (1987) suggests, this does not mean that these experiences form a self contained universe of study divorced from the larger context. Rather the everyday/night experience is seen as an entry point into the complex matrix, which encompasses both the participant's voices and the circles of influence, making visible the linkages.

**Problematic**
Problematic is a technical term used in institutional ethnography. "The notion of problematic recognizes that the everyday world, as the matrix of our experience is organized by relations that tie it to larger processes and locally organized practices" (Barron, 2000, p.46). The problematic does not refer to a problem to be understood or to the formal research question. Rather, the problematic leads to a set questions or puzzles that are "latent" in the experiences of those involved. The problematic is therefore a method of guiding and focusing inquiry, as opposed to an attempt to disconnect experience from relations of influence which provide the context for that experience.
Social relations of influence or ruling apparatus

“Ruling apparatus comprises the total complex of privileged, powerful institutions” (Barron, 2000, p.65). Knowledge is perpetuated by these recognized authorities, which include government, bureaucracies and administrative bodies, which in turn subjugate, in this case the experience of workers, to the collective “wisdom” and influence to recognized authorities.

Stand point

Stand-point creates a space for those whose voices or reality may have been excluded from the dominant discourse. In this case youth workers, but could equally apply to youth being assessed.