

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF PRACTICE: From Family Support to Child Protection

by

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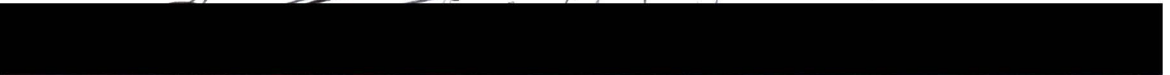
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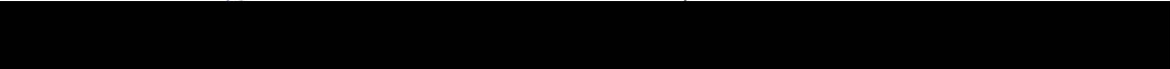
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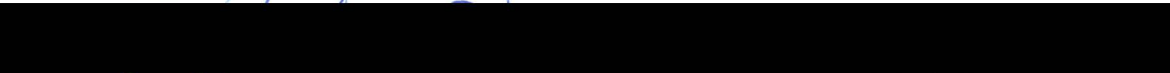
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ABSTRACT

This research began from a personal interest to better understand the conflicts between the stated and the actual outcomes of practice of Provincial Government child welfare workers - in other words an exploration of the line of fault that exists between policy and practice. A structural feminist methodology was chosen as it is my belief that it is impossible to separate our everyday lives in work, family and community from the larger values and philosophical underpinnings of the culture in which we live.

The research concentrated on a very small aspect of policy and the probability of this being achieved through the practices of workers. What was discovered was that the philosophy and policy that is expected to drive practice is rendered inconsequential with the employers preoccupation with control of workers. This coupled with increasing workloads and depersonalization of clients into objective 'cases' to be managed represented a fundamental contradiction vis-à-vis the policy.

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PREFACE

Social workers must develop an understanding of their own working conditions in order to struggle to overcome them and thereby become more effective in their work with individuals and communities. If instead they continue to internalize the unrealistic expectations of the agency and fail to see the social work agency as part of the larger political economy, they will be unable to prevent their own 'battering' and will probably be equally unable to comprehend or alleviate the 'battering' of their clients. Burnout is a symptom of a political problem not a personal one (Reisch, Wenocur & Sherman, p. 110).

The impetus for this research grew from my experiences as a social worker in two provincial government child and family services systems: experiences of joy, pain, frustration, anger, and at times agonizing personal and professional conflicts. My journey as a child welfare¹ practitioner from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia led me into the bowels of the system and at times to the depths of my soul. The struggle to grasp and affirm who I am - my personal values and beliefs as distinct from my professional and bureaucratic identity - has on occasion been enormously difficult. I am not always able to keep these parts separate, and have often found the personal, the professional and the bureaucratic in conflict. At times I find my own persona fading, becoming fused with the bureaucratic system that employs me or the professional body that dictates the ethics of social work practice.

Everyday I encounter workers who have succumbed to the bureaucracy and speak as if they are one with the personality and values of their employing organization. Often it seems as if the beliefs and values that led us to work with the vulnerable and disadvantaged of our society are suppressed to ensure that our employment is safeguarded. We are caught in a capitalist web that subtly coerces us to adopt certain values if we wish to pay our mortgage or rent, or have enough money to raise our children. It is ironic that the system we work for and in essence join, is part of a complex network that keeps others hungry and inadequately housed. Child welfare social workers become part of this system - one that contributes to the production and maintenance of poverty and inequality in Canada.

The Research Environment

This research was conducted in a period of considerable turmoil and change for British Columbia's child welfare services. My initial research proposal was presented when the Child and Family Services Act (1980) provided the legal mandate for child welfare. However, the research was carried out very shortly after the dissolution of this legislation and the enactment of The Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996). My original proposal spoke to the previous child welfare policy and the philosophical underpinnings of that policy. This policy stated that:

Collectively the range of services offered is intended to achieve the following outcomes for families who have received assistance.

Families will be stronger, more confident and have increased capacity for independent functioning.

Families will acquire new skills and abilities.

The quality of parent-child relationships will have been improved.

Families will be better able to meet the developmental needs of their children.

The unnecessary, out-of-home placement of a child will have been prevented.

Families will be better able to utilize their network of social support.

Families are better able to address conditions in their community that are detrimental to family well-being.

Support strategies will encourage utilization of existing family strengths and capabilities.

The family's social support network will be used to identify resources for meeting and achieving aspirations. (MSS Policy Manual, Vol. 2, Family Support Services p. 4(a).1.1 & 1.2).

Although the new legislation and policy does not speak specifically to these principles and places greater emphasis on ensuring the protection of children from neglect

and abuse, it is more explicit in its commitment to family and community input and partnerships in decision making. The guiding principles of the new act are:

Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm.

A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.

If with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided.

The child's view should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made

Kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible

The cultural identity of children should be preserved

Decisions related to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner (Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996).

Although the research was carried out during a very tumultuous period of change, I must confess some surprise as I did not experience or witness the change of which many spoke. The change in legislation and policy that spoke to different philosophical beliefs in service development and delivery did not appear to change the practice of social workers significantly. In fact, the involvement of families and communities in the development and delivery of programs remains minimal. I do not wish to leave the impression that change will not occur. A recent public inquiry, The Report of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection 1995, into the tragic death of a child involved with the Ministry for Children and Families, followed by the establishment of a Transition Commission whose mandate was to recommend and implement change in the ways families are served and the establishment of a new ministry, may result in considerable change in structure and approach to service delivery in the future. Only time will tell.

Organizational Overview

The Ministry of Social Services (MSS) was replaced in September, 1996 by the Ministry for Human Resources (MHR), providing income assistance services, and the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF), responsible for the delivery of child protective and family support services. This announcement followed a major recommendation of the Gove inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudrieul.

The Ministry of Social Services (MSS) was one of the largest Ministries in British Columbia. With its reorganization into the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) I suspect it will retain its place in terms of size. It is a large, bureaucratic organization that emphasizes a linear, hierarchical approach to decision making. Its emphasis is on administrative approaches to service, including use of documents, forms, computerization and adherence to legislation, policies, procedures and standards.

The Gove Report recognized the inefficiencies of the system in protecting children and spoke of a need for structural and organizational change (Matthew's Story: Report of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection, 1995). Although I have some reservations about the report's narrow mandate in assessing the abuse and neglect of children, specifically the lack of attention to the impact of environmental stresses on parents such as poverty, many of Judge Gove's observations are perceptive. This is especially true in relation to the poor coordination between the various ministries that serve children and families. What often appears to be of prime concern for ministries is ensuring that their power or turf be protected. In this regard Judge Gove recommended that existing practice and administrative reviews be strengthened, and new ones established.

The new Child, Family and Community Services Act calls for the creation of an independent child and family review board. This board's mandate is to investigate complaints about abuses in the system from children in care and their families. Judge Gove recommended that this board be given a broader mandate for complaint and appeal mechanisms. In addition, he recommended that the Child, Youth and Family Advocacy Act should be amended to incorporate powers similar to those given in the Ombudsman Act. His report also recommended the establishment of a Children's Commissioner,

whose mandate would include the establishment of a fair process for receiving, investigating and responding to complaints regarding the protection of children; appointing independent complaint investigators and reviewing all children's deaths. This commissioner's office was established shortly after the release of the Gove Report. Finally Judge Gove recommended that the courts be given powers to question the withdrawal of cases before them, if the courts felt there were unresolved issues with the ongoing safety of a child (Report of the Gove Inquiry, 1995).

Shortly after the release of the Gove Report, sections of the Ministries of Health, Education, Attorney General and Social Services - that previously served children and parents - were combined into a large integrated ministry serving families and children (MCF). Income Assistance was separated from this new ministry. For many social workers who work directly with families this is puzzling, as the largest percentage of families facing crisis who come to the attention of child protection social workers are those living in poverty, and who depend fully or partially on income assistance. The relationship of poverty and the child welfare system will be discussed further in this thesis.

Chronology of Events

To assist the reader understand the scope and order of change in the Ministries responsible for child protective and services to families at the time of this research, I have included a brief chronology of events.

- 1980: proclamation of the Child and Family Services Act
- July, 1992: Death of Matthew Vaudreuil
- October, 1992: Release of two community panel reports into child protection in British Columbia; Making Changes: A Place to Start and Liberating our Children : Liberating our Nations.
- April 1994: Verna Vaudreuil, mother of Matthew, pleads guilty to manslaughter of her son.
- May 1994: Release of the Superintendent of Family and Child Services report into Matthew's death
- May 1994: Announcement of an independent Commission of Inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil; The Gove Commission.
- May 1994: Introduction of two new statutes, The Child, family and Community Services Act and The Child, Youth and Family Advocacy Act
- November, 1995: Release of Gove Inquiry into Child Protection in British Columbia.
- December, 1995: Establishment of the Transition Commission to review, recommend and oversee changes in service delivery to children and families in British Columbia. This commission came about as a result of recommendations of the Gove Commission.
- January 29, 1996: Proclamation of the Child, Family and Community Services Act and The Child, Youth and Family Advocacy Act.
- January 29, 1996: Creation of an Independent Child and Family Review Board to investigate complaints from children in care or their families about abuses by the system.
- September, 1996: Dissolution of Ministry of Social Services and establishment of the Ministry for Children and Families and the Ministry of Human Resources.

- January, 1997: Dissolution of Transition Commission.
- June, 1997: Proclamation of the Children's Commission Act, replacing and broadening the powers of the Child and Family Review Board to include investigation of complaints from children in care and their families as well as monitoring key aspects of child serving systems of government, assessing the quality of their work and reporting information publicly.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Personal Perspectives

Although researchers are warned not to be biased, they frequently mistake this advice to mean they should avoid commitment. Research without personal commitment lacks an essential source of motivation and is likely to be deprived of experiential insight (Reinharz, p.142).

In 1985, I graduated from Memorial University in Newfoundland with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and commenced work with the provincial government's Department of Social Services in Sheshatshit, Labrador. One of my roles² was to deliver legislatively mandated child welfare services to the people of Sheshatshit, a small First Nations community. It quickly became apparent to me that the rights and interests of clients were often quashed in favor of the interests of the organization for which I worked. If I could simultaneously reconcile serving the needs of the government and the needs of the people of Sheshatshit, that was a bonus. If I could not, my first responsibility was to my employer.

This fact was plainly brought home to me by the firing of three social workers in my office for apparently not following 'program policy'. These workers, (one was aboriginal) who had been employed in the community for many years, recognized that many of the government policies directing service did not serve the 'best interests' of the members of the community. As I also came to realize, certain policies further alienated and prevented people from achieving any sense of control over their lives. The workers chose to listen to the voices of the citizens for whom they were working. They realized that the policies of the ministry were not congruent with the everyday, real needs of these people (Lundy). The policy that resulted in the firing of four workers was related to a social assistance policy that they considered potentially harmful to Aboriginal people.

This situation highlighted for me the realities of oppression of both clients and workers; clients because the very policies instituted by government led to their oppression; workers because they had no right to question or change the role they played

in clients' oppression. Those that did lost their jobs. My first social work job absorbed me in this conflict; a conflict between the ethics of the profession that stress enhancing the well-being of clients, and employer expectations, which can mean implementing legislation and policies that do not enhance the well-being of those the agency was designed to serve.

Another personal experience led me to think about the oppression of both workers and clients. Shortly after I began in Sheshatshit, a group of Goose Bay women (a neighboring community made up primarily of non-First Nations people) were successful in lobbying the Department of Social Services for funds to create a transition house. The facility was to have a regional mandate that included service to the women of Sheshatshit. It concerned me that the hiring committee for the facility did not recognize the importance of recruiting any First Nation crisis intervention workers. There were wide cultural and language differences between the predominantly white people of Goose Bay and those of Sheshatshit. From my perspective, it was imperative that if the facility was to properly serve the women of Sheshatshit it required staff who could communicate with and understand the needs of First Nations women.

In my capacity as social worker I wrote a letter to the hiring committee asking that serious consideration be given to hiring First Nations crisis intervention workers. I copied my letter to the Chief of the Band Council, as I thought it was important for the leadership to be aware of a possible gap in service to some people in the community. I also copied the letter to my supervisor. Much to my dismay I was reprimanded by my supervisor for writing to the Sheshatshit leadership. He was concerned that if First Nation crisis intervention workers were not hired, then the Band Council could 'implicate' the government as the funding agency. The implicit message was that my 'master' is the one that pays my salary, and that is to whom my first allegiance must remain. At no time during our conversation did my supervisor discuss the needs of the women of Sheshatshit, only the needs and interests of our employing agency.

A more recent experience with a family in British Columbia has highlighted to me that the system and its workers are limited in their ability to understand the dilemmas that truly face families in crisis. I began working with parents who had recently had their

children apprehended. The information I gathered from the file, prior to meeting with them, was that the problems appeared to be primarily alcohol-related, and this was affecting the parents' ability to care for their children. In other words the problems were seen to be solely of an individual nature - the parents' personal deficiencies. As I came to know the couple they talked of issues that were much more real for them than that of alcohol - issues that in all likelihood led to the abuse of alcohol. They were a First Nations family, and they talked of the turmoil and difficulties of growing up in communities marginalized and discriminated by society. They spoke of parents struggling with cultural upheaval and genocide resulting from residential school experience; of severe neglect and abuse they experienced as children; of the difficulties and fear of raising three small children with little or no financial or community resources; of housing that was below standard; and finally of a marital separation that placed the mother in serious crisis. (When I met the family the parents had reconciled.)

These issues had never been documented in the family file, and were not identified as realities that led this family to its current situation. This family's experiences, it seems, had no place in the files or practice of the social worker. The family, as they came to tell me, felt that they had never been heard by ministry social workers. The realities of their lives were rendered invisible by social workers who identified and defined their problems for them.

The Journey Continues

The road I have traveled as a provincial government child welfare social worker, and more recently as a graduate student has helped me better understand who I am as a person, a social worker and a public employee. It has helped me see that the personal, the professional and the bureaucratic are deeply entwined. Yet this is not always visible to us. We must search deeply to understand and make these connections visible. This research is designed to help me understand how my everyday work as a child welfare social worker, which encompasses the personal, the professional and the role of public employee, lends to my involvement in the continuing creation and maintenance of a world of power and wealth imbalance. My deeply held personal and professional convictions

and beliefs often become overwhelmed by the bureaucracy in which I work, and have little or no impact on my day-to-day practice as a child welfare social worker.

This research has been a catharsis of sorts. Although what I have seen and felt has at times been disagreeable, and indeed, quite painful, it has helped me gain insight into the roles I play in maintaining a world of power imbalance based on gender, class, race, sexual orientation, age and ability. It is my hope that this research can be of assistance to other workers in an organization that is charged with helping children and families, that not only appears to perpetuate and entrench existing power and poverty, but often overpowers those who work in it.

The Research Question

Every child is entitled to be protected from neglect and from physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The Ministry's mandate of providing protective services should be delivered consistent with the Ministry's philosophy of supporting families (MSS Policy Manual, Vol. 2, 6.0.1).

This overarching philosophical principle was entrenched in child welfare policy in British Columbia at the time this research was undertaken. Although the policy has been recently revised, the underlying principal of protecting children while working with families remains intact in the new Act and policies. Policy espouses that services for children at risk of abuse or neglect should be delivered within the context of the 'whole' family, as strengthening families leads to better and improved quality of parent-child relationships, and thereby presumably reduces risk of abuse and neglect. Ministry³ policy is consistent in its assumption that stronger families are more confident, have increased capacity for independent functioning, and are better able to meet the developmental needs of their children.

Although ministry service principles and stated service outcomes adhere to the belief that stronger families will lead to the better protection of children in our society, this research will examine whether those philosophical principles on which family and children services are based are carried out within the existing delivery system.

The question for this research is:

In what way does practice with families in the Family and Children Services system reflect the Ministry of Social Service's philosophical beliefs about improving parent-child relationships; enhancing conditions that lend to increased confidence, independence and strengthening of families and assisting families acquire new skills and abilities?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter Two examines the theoretical and ideological framework of this research. The framework is based on structural concepts, with an emphasis on feminist theory. Marxist concepts have also been explored. However, Marxism is limiting in that it does not incorporate the role of gender in power and wealth differences. To examine child welfare without incorporating the roles of gender and poverty would be deceptive.

The theoretical framework that guides this research highlights the dominance of patriarchal values, and the misrepresentation of the realities of women in the development and evolution of social, political and economic institutions. This research places gender at the center of the study in an effort to provide reflections of women's place in the world of child welfare, and to acknowledge a better understanding of their oppression.

Chapter Three briefly reviews the historical context of child welfare work, specifically the changing nature and structure of organizational settings. This chapter begins to highlight the discord between the ideological foundation of patriarchal, capitalist values and ministry policy that reflects a belief in the strengthening and independence of families.

Chapter Four provides a framework to connect the everyday experiences of workers in the child welfare system with broader values inherent in patriarchal, capitalist ideology. A review of the literature shows to the reader how child welfare practice outcomes in many respect parallel and reflect dominant patriarchal, capitalist philosophy.

Chapter Five examines the methodology guiding the research. A feminist approach, institutional ethnography, was chosen, as it acknowledges and validates the examination of practices of child and family social workers through a gendered lens. Institutional ethnography highlights the relations of power and ruling that are contained in all aspects of daily life. It maps the connections between ordinary, everyday activities and

powerful patriarchal, capitalist institutional processes. Every action and performance in which a child welfare social worker engages produces an intersection between the subjective world of the everyday and ordinary with the world of institutional, administrative, bureaucratic power.

Chapters Six and Seven present the research findings. Chapter Six contains the voices of child welfare social workers. These voices assist in bringing visibility to systemic oppression of both workers and families, and the role oppression plays in creating discord between the written policy identified for this research and actual day-to-day practice.

Chapter Seven explores the processes of client-making in the British Columbia family and child service system. Through institutional processes it is demonstrated how the everyday work of social workers brings into being and maintains a world of power imbalance, and the role they play in oppressing those that require service by the child and family service system..

Chapter Eight concludes the study by discussing the realities of social work practice in the family and child service system. In the context of the research question, there is a discussion as to whether practice by child welfare practitioners is dignified and respectful and lends to the creation of independent and strong families. There is also a brief discussion of possible alternate directions for child welfare service delivery.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical frameworks

This chapter will explore the theoretical and ideological frameworks that guide the research. A structural approach was chosen, which directs the reader to understand and interpret human behavior not by focusing on individuals, but rather by paying attention to the impact broad political, economic and social forces have on the lives of individuals. Structural and critical approaches, such as feminist and Marxist, see the roots of personal and social problems based in ideologies and social institutions that are shaped by and mirror the interests of the powerful, rather than those of the majority.

It is my observation that child welfare social workers in the British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families are often unaware of the larger political, social and economic forces that direct and shape their practice with families, and produce outcomes that at times appear contradictory to those that they seek. These forces, rooted in various institutional and organizational structures and discourse, play a pervasive, beguiling and often invisible role in directing and controlling worker's involvement with children and families.

Common sense, professional ethics and official ministry policy dictate that child welfare work is about empowerment and creating conditions that lead to the strengthening of vulnerable and at-risk families. Many workers come to recognize that these are often impossible to achieve given the existing organization (compliance to administrative approaches) and structure (bureaucratization) of child welfare. In order for workers to truly understand their work with families they must understand the dynamics of oppression, inequity, control and power and the impact these have on the work they engage in. The child welfare institution incorporates these dynamics into its structure and discourse and they have significant impact on practice outcomes with families.

Feminist Theory

Feminist scholarship raises fundamental questions about the way social science has explained women, men and social life. Its most basic criticism is that either women have been left out of social and political theory, or their experiences have been misrepresented. Feminism argues that neither conventional social science nor Marxist theory for that matter, have understood women's position in the family or the labor force, nor have they adequately accounted for the economic or social value of women's domestic or paid work. As a consequence of this lack of understanding of women's positions, social policy reflects conservative notions of women and men in the family and the economy. Social policy and programs are developed by governments that are dominated by wealthy, white, male politicians and upper echelon bureaucrats. These people are also connected to one another and to powerful interest groups in the broader society (Gilroy).

Being excluded, as women have been, from the making of ideology, of knowledge, and of culture means that our experience, our interests, our ways of knowing the world have not been represented in the organization of our ruling nor in the systemically developed knowledge that has entered into it (Smith, 1987, p. 18).

Since women and gender have not been topics for research until recently, and women have been excluded from political and policy making processes, it is hardly surprising that social policy is not informed by analyses of gender inequality and exploitation of women in the private sphere of the family and the public arenas of the economy. Women are still primarily defined in terms of their relationships to men, for example as wives, mothers or caregivers.

My mother has talked of her educational experiences in the early 1950s. Girls were socialized to serve their future husbands; were directed to courses that taught servitude, not independence. They were told that their future husbands' success would depend on great measure on how well he appeared, and it was the wives' job to ensure they presented well.

It is not a question of social attitudes about what is right and proper for women and men to do. Rather it is a failure to recognize that women's labor is essential to both the bearing and raising of children and to the

creation of material goods, that is to both reproduction and production. The sexual division of labor and its effects are well documented. Women are not seen as workers at home and are not paid equally to men in the labor market. Women are poor, especially those who are lone parents. In fact poverty among women is so widespread we speak of the 'feminization of poverty'. If women's domestic labor were assigned its real value, and if there were effective pay laws, then there would be much less poverty and less need for social assistance. Most poor families are headed by women. Many of these survive on welfare payments because they cannot support themselves and their children on women's wages (Gilroy, 1990, p. 60).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy, the institutionalized system of male domination and privilege, is the mechanism that ensures women's subordination (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman).

Patriarchal paradigms espouse a world that is 'objective', 'observable', 'linear in thought', and that is somehow 'visible' (Maguire; Smith). If we examine structures, organizations, and those things which are most valued in our society, we recognize the patriarchal characteristics of objectivity, visibility, rationality and hierarchy. (Gilligan; Grillo).

The female mode is characterized by an 'ethic of care' which emphasizes subjective characteristics such as nurturance, connection with others, and contextual thinking (Maguire; Smith). In our world these characteristics have less value, whereas patriarchy embodies that which is valued and granted privilege. Capitalism, professionalism and bureaucratization all embody patriarchal values. Most organizational structures value linear, hierarchical approaches to decision making. professionalism is also rooted in that which is positivist, objective and visible (de Montigny). Bureaucracies attempt to define and direct work tasks, the evaluation of workers and the distribution of rewards and punishments in a systematic, routinized web of objective rules and regulations (Edwards). The ever expanding network of legislation, regulations, standards and policies that guide everyday, public, organizational life are permeated with the values of objectivity and routinization in decision making. The courts and our legal system, which are responsible for ensuring that people live within the boundaries of laws, epitomize the concepts of objectivity and observability and are important structures that validate and permit the continuation of a patriarchal society.

The relations of ruling are rationally organized. They are objectified, impersonal, claiming universality. Their gender subtext has been invisible... We had thought that women would be treated equally in law, in business, in jobs and so on, were it not for the distortions of rational process created by men's sexism. But the deeper our analysis, the better our knowledge of history, the longer our experiences of the sources and modes of resistance to change, the more visible is the gender subtext of the rational and impersonal... The patriarchy of our time has this form (Smith, 1987 p. 4).

Existing human service delivery approaches minimize the value of relationship-building and in its place have emphasized methods that are 'administrative' and 'documentary' in nature (Smith). We create clients and families through collection of written and electronic documents, and capture the information in 'files'. It is the information that is collected in these configurations that is passed on as a 'true' and 'accurate' reflection of client experience and needs. The word of the client is suppressed and obliterated in the face of this documentary reality. Clients' views on problems and possible solutions are not considered as primary data in this framework.

Protection and control at this level are a matter of survival, and, since personal initiative and responsibility are considered the enemy, they must be stamped out and replaced by clearly prescribed policies, procedures and standards (Fewster, Times Colonist, Oct. 11, 96).

Organizational and administrative discourse and structures determine direction and answers. We have all been exposed to the farcical routine that suggests a person's non-existence due to computer or administrative errors. Although these demonstrations are frequently presented in a laughable, satirical manner, this characterization of the significance of administrative discourse is not one to be viewed lightly. A recent movie *The Net* (1995) portrayed the power of administrative approaches to defining human existence. By erasing the chief character from main frame computer networks, in essence she no longer existed.

Changing Directions

Feminist theory, and the incorporation of an analysis of inequities for women in our society have been a force in changing the focus and emphasis in social work education, research and to a lesser extent professional practice. Feminist theory espouses that people, primarily individual woman, find themselves in positions of poverty, abuse and exploitation not because of their individual deficiencies, but because of their lower status in social and political systems.

Although there is tremendous diversity within feminism, (e.g., liberal, Marxist, socialist, and radical feminism) a common thread is the analysis of the connection between the individual and the political. This perspective moves away from the dualism of personal and political, to a dialectic in which personal and political dimensions are seen as influential in shaping our understanding of oppression, and of the nature and extent of effective strategies believed necessary for achieving equality for women (Gilroy).

Feminism: Incorporated or Neglected in the Work of Child Welfare ?

The emergence of structural approaches to interpret and understand human behavior have had significant impact on changing the direction and focus of social work curriculum in some professional schools. Marxist and feminist thought challenge the assumptions of traditional social work theory, practice and research. Education, and a view of the 'personal' and the 'political' within a dialectical perspective has led to a search for approaches that embrace both personal and social change. Since gender cannot effectively be separated from issues of class and race, many social work programs give special attention to poor and minority women who are over represented among social work and specifically child welfare social work clients (Gilroy; Lecomte).

Structural social workers believe that ways and means of accumulating wealth may change depending on historical time and place, but systems of injustices inherent within capitalism remain. The structures for producing wealth impose hierarchical relations of domination and subordination among people. Perspectives propose the roots of personal and social problems are to be found in social institutions that are shaped in the interests of powerful males.

Social service agencies are enmeshed in and reflect the inherent inequalities and contradictions in capitalism. Although there is some acknowledgment that existing social programs do benefit some people, a structural philosophy believes that there are problems in the establishment of programs based on assumptions that people's poverty and other problems are caused by themselves or were accidental, rather than as the result of systemic factors.

Although these themes have influenced social work education and practice over the past twenty years, within bureaucratic work settings that employ many social workers, including those in provincial government child welfare settings, the impact of structural, Marxist or feminist theory has been minimal.

Conventional child welfare social work is based on assumptions that individuals are more powerful than social conditions in creating problems and conditions for change. This mirrors the dominant ideologies of the larger society. Factors such as race, class and gender are not viewed as important in determining social conditions in which individuals and families find themselves. People are thought to "interact" with one another and with social institutions on an individual, free and equal basis. Child welfare programs developed by governments are understood to express wide consensus on values and human needs. As a consequence, most programs in the arena of child and family service are developed with an emphasis on knowledge and skill to work with individuals and families on what are considered personal problems (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail; Gilroy).

In child and family social service agencies most social workers experience frustration with the lack of resources available to address clients' needs, but they very rarely connect these limitations to larger social forces. Their employment socialization frequently excludes an analysis of how larger social or economic forces work to disadvantage people, specifically women and visible minorities. Child welfare social workers, therefore, rarely challenge the status quo.

Radical theorists do not view governments as neutral, impartial actors, but rather as aligned with the interests of those with wealth and power. Governments primarily responsible for the development and implementation of legislation and regulations that

guide our everyday lives, enact child welfare legislation the orientation of which predominantly reflects the conservative notions and interests of those with power and wealth.

CHAPTER 3

Child Welfare in Canada: An organizational Overview

In the first century of the emergence of professional social work, naturally there have been significant changes in the philosophical, methodological and ideological underpinnings of practice. This young profession has struggled to carve its niche in the professional landscape, but has faced internal conflict about the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that guide it. Discussion about the essential social work mission have been greater than in most professions. From the very beginning, discussion has revolved around whether social work should focus on individual or social change, private troubles or public issues, or both? The search for balance between these competing emphasis has pushed the profession to search for integrating concepts and structures that permit attention to both (Wharf, 1990). In the struggle to integrate diverse, and what many see as opposing philosophical principals, the profession has long experienced a kind of crisis of conscience and identity. This chapter explores some of the conflicts and changes experienced by this fledgling profession, and provides the reader with an overview of the roots and reasons for the struggle. It will examine the impact bureaucratic documentary accountability have had on the development of the profession, and the changing organizational and professional contexts in which child welfare social workers work.

Social Work in the Twentieth Century

In the early part of the twentieth century, private philanthropy and volunteer efforts played a central role in the provision of social services in Canada. Women worked with individuals or families in a manner that reflected a less fragmented approach to understanding problems and providing services than presently exists in public human service delivery systems. Today, statements about the goals of social service programs rarely connect political and economic policies to the situations in which families frequently find themselves. During the early 1900s there was often greater recognition of the importance of absorbing and synthesizing information that would lead to a better

understanding of the intrapsychic dynamics of an individual and the complex forces at work in the community (Fabricant). There was growing awareness, for example, of the impact expanding industrialization was having in creating a new class of urban poor. Work with families was often carried out in a manner that recognized these societal forces. This growing awareness of the negative effects of industrialization and urbanization in contributing to poverty led to increased emphasis on social reform in some sectors. MacIntyre (1993) cites numerous charitable organizations that sprang up whose goal was to advocate for social reforms in the face of advancing capitalism. Such groups included the Women's Missionary Societies; the Young Women's Christian Association; the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women.

It would be misleading to comment on these organizations without acknowledging their many limitations. They were for the most part inbred with a narrow concept of 'morality' based on existing white and upper middle class, patriarchal values that classified the poor as 'deserving' or 'non-deserving'. Those deemed as 'non-deserving' were treated with derision and disrespect, and were not granted the support and empathy that 'deserving' poor were usually accorded. Although many organizations worked from an ethic that linked societal failings with individual problems, there was little understanding or analysis in early social work of capitalist social, political and economic policies and their impact on poverty.

Traditionally, those considered 'deserving' poor were women who had lost a financially supporting husband due to employment-related death or disease, and who were left to raise children with no income; or elderly people who had spent a lifetime working and found themselves without economic resources and too old to be of use in capitalist workplaces. Women who had children out of wedlock or able-bodied men who were not working and unable to support themselves or their families were accorded the status of 'non-deserving'. Although most charities did not have a structural view of power and poverty and owners of places of production were able to mistreat labor and use it for the creation of their own wealth, there was a relatively strong awareness by those working with the poor of the impact poverty had on disease and human neglect.

Advocates spoke loudly for the development of social programs to alleviate such misery for the 'deserving' poor. Because there was little if any understanding that the success of capitalism relied on surplus workers and a percentage of able bodied men being unemployed at any time, the concepts of 'deserving' and 'non deserving' could be maintained. Many would argue that these values are still alive and well today in a subtler form.

Initiatives spawned in this era did recognize to a degree the effects of poverty on family health and functioning. Some charitable organizations worked to improve conditions for families through advocacy for better wages; elimination of child slave labor; creation of paid family holidays; shorter work weeks, etc. (Davis; Fabricant; MacIntyre). In part, the advocacy of these pioneer organizations led to increased public support for later government legislation and social programs, specifically those that attempted to cushion the most vulnerable in society from debasing poverty.

A number of other significant social and economic upheavals in the twentieth century led to eventual state intervention in social welfare programs. These included the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as two World Wars. Working class militancy spawned a series of protests, with left wing groups openly calling for an end to capitalism (Carniol). To maintain the socio-economic status quo, business reluctantly supported state intervention in the form of social programs. The growth of provincial and federal programs during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s included the development of unemployment insurance, worker compensation benefits, old age pensions, Canada Pension benefits and allowances for children, among others.

Although it is widely acknowledged that many public social programs do protect the poor from disease, malnutrition, abject poverty and death that were common in earlier times, many also argue that modern social policy has also brought outcomes other than those espoused, and in fact, many think that social policy today is fraught with conflicted outcomes (Carniol; de Montigny; Diamond; Lundy; Smith).

There is a paradox here because an expanding state not only rescued capitalism from its worse excesses, such as mass poverty. It also curbed the public's dissatisfaction, provided employment and tried to show the system cared, while at the same time consolidating the power of primarily white, male, corporate elite. (Carniol, 1990, p. 118).

It is also postulated that although there was growing recognition of the need for public social policy to protect the weak and disadvantaged, this also brought a new set of ideological controversies about the intent and success of public social policy. Many saw the transfer from familial patriarchy to social patriarchy, whereby women and children became dominated not only within the family by the male head of the household, but in the public domain, through publicly funded institutions, laws, and regulations which still reflect dominant male ideological values (Carniol; MacIntyre).

The Changing Organizational Contexts of Social Workers

In the industrialized world, organizational make-up and structure have changed significantly over the past century. Places of work have evolved from small family oriented operations to large bureaucratic organizations where there are clear delineations between workers and managers, and decision making is hierarchically based. These organizational changes and the inherent values of bureaucracy parallel broader cultural values and beliefs in which our industrial society is grounded. The following section will explore a number of well developed organizational theories including bureaucratization and scientific management, and feminist organizational theory will be examined.

Bureaucratization of Human Service Delivery Systems

Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) write extensively on changes in modes and methods of production and service delivery in capitalist workplaces. With the introduction of the industrial revolution during the latter part of the nineteenth century thought turned to organizational management. Prior to this modes of production needed neither complex organizational arrangements nor complex ideological bulwarks such as policy and procedural directives or personnel guidelines.

Few problems of organization existed when organization was primarily through either the guild or small-scale family enterprise. Writing about these early organization forms of industrialization, Claus Offe (1976a, p. 25) has termed "the production organization of the small craft workshop with its triple hierarchical division of master, journeyman and apprentice a 'task-continuous status organization". This is the type of organization which developed from the guild form of organization, in which there

existed a relationship between different positions in the hierarchy 'such that there is a wide area of technical rules to which equal obedience is required from all the occupants of the positions (in the structure)'. A superordinate position would differ from a subordinate position 'merely in terms of greater mastery of the rules and greater ability, knowledge, and experience in production'. The rules that a subordinate must obey become, in their entirety, components of the role definition of a superordinate and so on, up the hierarchy (Clegg & Dunkerley, p. 74).

Once enterprises began to develop into large scale organizations, more formal methods of management were required. Scientific management and the theory of bureaucracy marked the first major developments in the theory of organizations (Clegg & Dunkerley). These changes emphasized clear division of labor; delineation between management (task planning and task outcome) and worker (specific tasks assigned to them); work measurement; task prescriptors; and incentive schemes (Clegg & Dunkerley).

In addition to these new approaches to organizational development and management the number of state supported and financed social service agencies and workers increased dramatically, primarily at the provincial level. Some saw this increase as a response to new, humane values. Critics had a much different view. They interpreted the expansion of social welfare infrastructures as a means of social control, and saw programs developed in the guise of a caring society as perpetuating the control of a few wealthy capitalists.

The very nature of the welfare state as we know it is contradictory, since it purports to be concerned with the well being of all citizens (and even implements programs that claim to address the basic needs of the less advantaged), yet maintains and protects the social and economic structures that create and perpetuate gross inequity and poverty (Lundy, p. 190).

Increasing involvement by the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government in social welfare programs, as well as ever increasing numbers of people working in that system led to dramatically changed service delivery systems that resembled the characteristics of organizational development in private enterprise such as scientific management and bureaucratization.

Fabricant (1985), Davis (1990) and Hasenfeld (1983) speak of the growth of bureaucratization of human service delivery systems that led to the increased routinization, fragmentation and de-skilling of professional tasks. In addition, human service organizations have centralized authority through vertical, hierarchical structures, whereby power and authority is placed in the hands of a few senior managers and politician. And finally, it appears that public human services are also increasingly separating conception of tasks from their execution. Human service organizations refer to this as 'functionalizing' services, in that clients are passed from one 'team' to another depending on the stage of service delivery. This is evident in the delivery of child welfare services in that clients move through a number of professional contacts (e.g., from intake worker to family service worker through to a permanency planning or adoption worker). If service is required by the family in other areas such as alcohol and drug treatment services or mental health they are referred to other workers with expertise in these areas. Fabricant (1985) argues that these changes have led to a labor process that is independent of craft and the worker's own knowledge. There is increasing reliance on management's monopoly of knowledge which is entrenched in a system of administrative rules, regulations and policies. It would appear that human service organizations are increasingly following organizational and managerial philosophies associated with profit-making organizations.

The development of the ruling apparatus is a story of expanding jurisdictions of direct control and of the continually advancing absorption of the work of production into capitalist relations. One important dimension of this dynamic expropriation of skill and knowledge is the 'deskilling' process described by Braverman, whereby workers' skills, knowledge and discretionary control over their work are displaced by scientifically developed technologies, vested in a managerial process and enhancing the managers' capacity to control the labor process (Smith, 1987, p. 82).

There is debate as to the real extent of bureaucratic control over the practice of professional child welfare social workers. This is primarily because of the unpredictable and unique nature of input (clients), and the fact that social work skills are largely employed in face-to-face contact with clients beyond management scrutiny (Callahan; Davis). There is general agreement, however, that the tasks and methods of service

delivery in child welfare are evolving in many respects in a similar manner to capitalist profit-making organizations. This is evident in the increasing control of work through administrative or legalistic approaches; and the expanding use of financial controls and technological tools in the workplace, such as computerization. These aspects will be explored later in this chapter.

Hasenfeld (1983) argues that many human service organizations, including those delivering services to children and families, search to simplify ways of serving clients, and this is frequently accomplished by constructing a simplified model of reality. When decisions are made in this organizational context it is the organization, not complex client need that defines the parameters of decision making.

Specifically the division of labor, authority, standards of operating procedures and patterns of communication set the limits and shape the boundaries of the decisions individuals in the organization can make: by controlling the occasions for decisions, by determining the information inputs into the decision, by defining the range of acceptable outcomes and available alternatives and by influencing the values considered to be desirable (Hasenfeld, p. 29).

This human service organizational approach creates challenges for social workers in a providing meaningful service to clients based on a body of knowledge that is congruent with the information elicited from the client (Hasenfeld). Rather than client need defining service goals, existing organizational frameworks frequently expect client need to fit into its framework.

Written Text

This changing focus of child welfare services from broad-based to narrow-focused services directly tied to interpretation of laws, has resulted in legislatures, courts and senior managers continually attempting to clarify not only definitions of abuse and neglect, but how, when and why social workers should intervene in the lives of families. This increasing reliance on legal authority to guide service places social workers in positions of increased accountability and liability. Practice must fit within ever-narrower legal mandates and this often has serious consequences for workers in their efforts to

protect children. Before proceeding with any action they must also be sure the parental rights are not violated.

More and more of our political debate now is not about what should be done but about words on paper, that is the legalistic regulations that define everyone's rights and responsibilities. By far the most important change has been in the subtle redefinition of democratic responsibility. Rather than common sense and tradition and a sense of civitas or of civic duty, the test of proper behavior has become whether according to the written rules, this or that individual or institution did or did not do what they should have done (Richard Gwyn, Times Colonist, Sep. 7, 1996, p. A15).

Child welfare legislation was originally developed a century ago to provide rudimentary protection for children. In the last two decades it has increasingly regulated the child welfare practice of social workers in an effort to balance the rights of parents with children's well-being.

Before the 1970s, intervention by child welfare agencies and juvenile courts often was justified as a way of helping children who were exposed to "inadequate care". No specific harm was required, and likelihood of future harm was not a prerequisite for court intervention. Child protection agencies were therefore not generally concerned with carefully assessing risk. More recently, many legislatures have made it clear that child protection service intervention is justified only when a child has suffered (or is highly likely to suffer due to current parent behavior) specific types of maltreatment, not to provide general services to families (Wald & Woolverton, p. 6).

Closely related to rights issues is the challenge of defining neglect. This grows out of the framework established by early child welfare legislation which relied on investigation of parents to ensure that specific parental duties were carried out. There was little developed criteria, however, about what were appropriate parental expectations or what constituted child neglect or abuse. Modern legislative frameworks attempt to clearly articulate child abuse and neglect.

The most recent British Columbia child welfare act attempts to define clearly when intrusion into the lives of families is warranted. A great deal of energy has been devoted to define neglect and abuse and to clarify appropriate grounds for intervention by child welfare social workers.

As child welfare social work practice has become increasingly governed by narrow legislative frameworks that define when and why intervention is required, many child welfare jurisdictions have shifted to provide service only when a child is deemed to be in serious jeopardy. The point of entry for service is often an intrusive process in which parenting skills and abilities are scrutinized closely. In some instances the outcome is removal of children. As the sanction for intervention with families becomes increasingly narrow, many jurisdictions lose sight of a need for a continuum of child welfare services ranging from prevention to removal. There is little awareness that families are at different junctures on the need for service continuum, and agencies lose sight of the need for integration of child protection (clearly identified physical and emotional risk of children) and family support services (preventing children from being at risk of physical harm). There is little understanding that child protection, albeit a legitimate part, is but a small domain on the child welfare continuum.

Although British Columbia's new child welfare legislation was developed in response to community demands for greater service flexibility, my observations indicate less flexible interpretation, increased rigidity and a narrower focus. This changed focus came about in large part from the Gove Report which recommended changes to Bill 46 prior to it being passed as The Child, Family and Community Services Act, (1996). These changes altered the primary focus of the act away from supporting families in caring for their children to emphasis on safety and well-being of the child. Social workers' fears of criticism and further fatal errors following the Gove Report, have led to a more intrusive, policing approach to service, with an amplified separation between child protection and family support. Family support now takes a back seat to child protection. Managers and social workers, fearing for job security in the aftermath of the death of Matthew Vaudreuil, appear to have abandoned the notion of flexible and adaptive intervention with families. The new legislation as well as ministry restructuring has led to a stronger residual practice approach that stresses child protection at the expense of family support values. These aspects will be further discussed in the findings of the research.

Although it is presumed that social policy based on definitional standards of child neglect and abuse will eliminate a cultural and class value based approach to service, there are still difficulties in ensuring all families are treated equally in child welfare service delivery. After all, child welfare legislation and policy are developed by those of class, gender and culture which are generally different than the majority of people who require service. Swift (1991) examined the 'relative' nature of neglect. She states that what is seen as neglect in one context may not be defined as neglect in another.

I can personally relate to this. As a worker in a poor, northern, aboriginal community for a number of years, the standards I and my coworkers held for child care were much different than if we were working in the neighboring, predominantly white community. Research has confirmed that this is common amongst workers (Swift). Social workers evaluate specific cases of neglect and maltreatment in relation to the prevailing norms in the area. If the community is uniform in terms of culture, class and values then the definition of neglect becomes consistent there. The problem arises with the movement of different classes and cultures to urban areas where predominantly white, middle class child care values and standards prevail. Families who live in poverty, by the very nature of their economic status, are not even able to provide the basics for their children and are targeted by child welfare agencies. Because most single female headed homes live in poverty, their representation in child protection caseloads is disproportionately high.

Accountability of Service

Over the past century, as finances supporting family and child welfare services have increasingly come from the public purse, the public demands that organizations receiving tax dollars account for the manner in which moneys are spent. Greater energy and time is being spent by workers and managers delivering services in a manner that is thought to please the general public (Doueck, English, Panfilis & Moote).

With public demands that child welfare work become more effective and efficient, come increasing responsibilities for individual workers. In my experience, this is noticeable in the voluminous written policy and procedural expectations, and increased

administrative responsibilities including forms and computer entry. Although these may be aimed at greater efficiency in service delivery, these increasing expectations and responsibilities place severe strain on those who deliver services. Studies have documented the increasing amount of work assigned to child and family workers, and the negative impact on them and their practice (Callahan; Dunne).

Although it would appear that the strain on workers lends to their mistreatment of families in crisis, there is little understanding or analysis by workers of how the service delivery structure creates divisions between families and workers. The similarities in the systemic oppression of both clients and social workers remains invisible, and protects the system from internal conflict and demands for change. Workers and families target each other with their animosity rather than the organization (Callahan). This will be examined in the context of the research, specifically the impact workload, organizational structure and written text has on child welfare workers' ability to fulfill ministry policy; policy that speaks to strengthening and empowering families in a dignified and respectful manner.

Another impact of increased demand for accountability to funding sources is the shift in a service delivery focus from needs of families to ensuring dollars are spent in efficient and effective ways (Ng). As organizations grow and expenditures increase, processes are developed to track clients and services provided, not necessarily in terms of service quality, but rather how efficiently dollars are spent. Greater emphasis is placed on completing month-end and annual reports, financial reporting, etc. Quality of service as perceived by clients and efficiency as defined by funders are often at odds with one another.

Increased emphasis on tracking expenditures produces two significant outcomes. First, more time and energy is spent by staff fulfilling requirements to maintain accountability to funding sources. Less time is spent actually working with and advocating for clients. Second, social workers' knowledge of clients is rendered more and more 'objective' and detached from an experiential base (Ng). This means that social workers are less interested in getting to know their clients' fears, strengths, weaknesses and aspirations. As this process of objectifying clients continues and expands, people are

rendered invisible and seen as quantifiable objects, who can be 'acted' on, rather than as subjects who 'act'. In an analysis of a parallel process in nursing homes Diamond says:

Caring work is turned into discrete and quantifiable tasks; these then become the nuts and bolts that allow nursing homes to run as enterprises for profit. The caring relations are coded into measurable and cost-accountable tasks: talk into psycho-social stuff, emotional into technical, the cheese sandwich into units of protein, quality into quantity (Diamond, 1993 p. 97).

Technology - Its Impact on Child Welfare

The changing organization of work, increasing bureaucratization and reliance on policies, procedures, documents and forms as tools that shape and direct the interaction between worker and families all reduce the discretion of social workers. A new tool, computerization, is also impacting on the work of child welfare social workers.

Computerization in many child and family agencies is being implemented as a means to better record and control the work of social workers as well as to monitor agency spending. Computer technology in the social service workplace also increases the potential for administrators to monitor and control front line intervention with families. Electronic technologies allow senior bureaucrats to identify work carried out by front line workers that is considered necessary but also unnecessary by the agency. This limits the flexibility workers have in their practice with families and the services they offer, but increases the numbers of families who can be processed by the organization. Client characteristics must fit within the narrow frameworks defined by various forms and tools, for example intake forms and risk assessment tools which increasingly workers are documenting through computer technology. It is these tools that determine service eligibility and if client need falls outside the criteria determined by the form, service will not be provided. As demand for service outweighs the resources available the forms and tools are modified to further narrow criteria for service.

Campbell (1993) in her analysis of changing technological practices in the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, concluded that computerization enhanced senior management's ability to control services expenditures as opposed to improving services. For example, an administrator assessing a social worker's decision to bring a

child into care not only takes into account the professional assessment but also the cost of the service. Likewise, family counseling or other interventions are assessed according to cost, and eligibility for service is frequently determined on the basis of dollars available, not need.

Technological innovations allow senior administrators and politicians to monitor and control expenditures related to service delivery. Often work considered important is that which is valued administratively and defined in accordance with budgets. Work considered administratively unnecessary is often considered important by families and social workers. Administrators' concern is financial management.

For example, as a worker who has removed children from their parents, I previously had the ability to grant parents who would lose their federal child tax credit to maintain this financial benefit. The administrative policy required that the benefit be terminated when a child came into the care of the director. Front-line social workers often recognized the extreme hardship this created on parents as they worked to have their children returned. For many poor families, this extra money is used to assist with rent, transportation or utility expenses that are not directly related to the child, but are required to maintain the family. Although many workers circumvented the policy, it was recognized as a benefit for many families, and did not add further stress to parents experiencing tremendous stress. The ability to influence this decision was recently removed from the front line worker. The introduction of computer control ensures that workers do not overstep their authority and make decisions contrary to written policy in this area. This administrative policy was designed, introduced and executed by people far removed from the front line and the families who require service from the ministry. Its purpose is cost saving and does not consider the implications for families in their efforts to have children returned.

As organizational and managerial philosophies associated with social welfare delivery systems change, so do the intended practice outcomes of social workers. The challenge for child welfare social workers is to maintain a commitment to provide service to clients centered on their needs and life experiences, in an environment that tends to give priority to the needs of the organization

Feminist Approaches to Understanding Child Welfare

If one examines the types of work performed by most women in the labor market, they reflect a similarity to the role women carry out in the family. The role is essentially caring for or serving others. Women are heavily involved in labor market activities caring for children, the elderly or the disabled; serving business or administrative leaders as secretaries or administrative assistants; or waiting on patrons and cleaning-up in hotels, restaurants or nightclubs. This devaluation of the role of caring affect women both in the home and in monetary compensation in the workplace.

Feminist economic and organizational theories place women at the center of the discussion. Traditional theorizing about economy and workplace omit a gender analysis, and in fact present gender as unbiased and universal.

The making and dissemination of the forms of thought we make use of to think about ourselves and our society are part of the relations of ruling and hence originate in positions of power. These positions of power are occupied by men almost exclusively, which means that our forms of thought put together a view of the world from a place women do not occupy (Smith, 1987 p. 19)

Throughout this period in which ideologies become of increasing importance, first as a mode of thinking, legitimating and sanctioning a social order, and then as integral in the organization of society, women have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant or adequate to express their own experience or to define and raise social consciousness about their situation and concerns. They have never controlled the material or social means to the making of tradition among themselves or to the acting of equals in the ongoing discourse of intellectuals. They have no economic status independent of men. They have not had, until very recently, access to the educational skills necessary to develop, sustain and participate in the making of culture (Smith, 1987, p.18).

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, production of goods was carried out in the home. Roles associated with domestic activity and those associated with production were not separate. The family was not only the place for raising children but was also central to production. The Renaissance was a period of rapid expansion of knowledge and technology which ultimately gave rise to new modes of social relations that differentiated male activity and female activity. It was a period that saw the birth of

capitalism, from which, in turn emerged a sharp delineation between domestic work and work associated with production.

As capitalism grew, spheres associated with production expanded and those associated with domestic activities contracted. Access to new knowledge was limited to those involved in the sphere of production, primarily a male domain. Women lost access to knowledge and modes of production and subsequently became increasingly dependent on males for support. At the same time as caring work - the primary work of women - became increasingly 'invisible' and its value lessened, capitalist work practices required families to become smaller to meet the production owners' need for a highly mobile workforce. This further increased the dependence of women, as caregivers, on men, for financial support, as there were no longer large multigenerational families which could serve to support the needs of women and children. Families evolved into smaller two generation entities commonly referred to as nuclear families. This family model is comprised of a mother providing care in the home, and a father responsible for economic production. The mother's caregiver role frees the father to work in the economic world. Social policy has been and continues to be developed from the perspective of nuclear family functioning. The structure of the welfare state assumes a well-functioning nuclear family, and all families are judged according to whether they provide care for their children through the gendered division of labor expected in this model.

A conspicuous example of the conception of families as being primarily nuclear is shown in the government of British Columbia's recent television advertising of its new family bonus program. The commercial depicts a family of four - mother, father, son and daughter - being stretched by the high cost of living, and the advantages the new financial program has for working poor families. In fact, statistics indicate that most of the families living in poverty and those who would most benefit from the program are single-headed, female families (Evans). The depiction in the advertisement perpetuates the myth of family composition, suggesting that families not fitting this make-up must somehow be abnormal.

The traditional nuclear family is not the one that child welfare workers typically see in their practice. Child welfare social workers are all too aware that the majority of families they encounter are single parent, female-headed families.

Legislation and policies that define neglect have traditionally been based on community standards, and generally these standards reflect the gendered division of labor. The expectation is a mom and a dad carrying out their gendered roles of caring and economic production. Unfortunately, female single headed families, often fail miserably to meet the expectations for providing care to children.

In response to community demands, the British Columbia government enacted a new child protective legislation that attempted to recognize the diversity of family and to involve clients and community in problem identification and problem solving. The Child, Family and Community Services Act, January, 1996, espoused new approaches to service delivery. The writing of this legislation grew from the two community panel reports, Liberating our Children: Liberation our Nation and Making Changes: A Place to Start.

Government has learned through its consultative processes, that parents, children and youth want more opportunities to be heard, greater involvement in decision making, and to have more flexibility in creating solutions to address their issues (Doig; Case management: A discussion paper, p 2).

Successful implementation, however requires overhauling other aspects of the existing system, including organizational make-up and management support (Doig). Organizational and structural change that are congruous with the philosophical assumptions respecting service delivery outcomes of the new legislation have been generally unsuccessful. This idea will be further expanded in this research.

CHAPTER 4

Child Welfare: Relations of Ruling

Culture is preserved in part through the development of political, economic and social institutions and discourse. These frameworks reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the culture. Inasmuch as all institutions and structures are representations of the theoretical belief and value systems to which a society adheres, the study of human and organizational phenomena must be considered from a standpoint that incorporates analysis of macrocosmic cultural philosophies. Any study of a problem that fails to take into consideration the broad beliefs on which the society is grounded minimizes the value of findings.

Our social welfare system, of which government delivered child welfare services is part, is built on an ideological foundation of patriarchal values. This ideology accepts the authority of individual, visible, objective, rational, administrative modes of thought and practice, and minimizes subjective, contextual, relationship-oriented values. The practice of front-line workers is expected to reflect an approach based in patriarchal frameworks.

Through a further exploration of the literature, this chapter will review the parallels between front-line child welfare practice and the values inherent in dominant, western ideology. It will highlight how everyday child welfare work is part of broader ideology, or as Dorothy Smith, puts it, part of the complex relations of ruling (Smith, 1987). The chapter provides reasons why front-line child welfare workers may find it difficult to achieve practice outcomes prescribed in ministry policy to create stronger, independent, healthier families through dignified, respectful approaches.

Change or Status Quo?

Adamson, Briskin & McPhail outline how western industrial society has structural reinforcers that ensure significant change in the ownership and exercise of power will not occur. Those who occupy positions of political and economic wealth and power dictate an ideology that ensures continued wealth and power imbalance. Public policy,

legislation and organizational structures are developed to reflect the existing order. Significant deviation is not tolerated and will be quashed.

Relations of power are embedded in all social institutions - our schools, families, welfare agencies, work places and the state. Many applaud and support the notion of ideological and social change if existing programs are not meeting the needs of populations they are designed to serve. If, however, one looks longer and deeper into our beliefs surrounding change, we begin to understand some truths. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail speak of four threads that must be examined if we are to understand the structural reinforces that inhibit change. First is our belief in individual ability. The assumption is that we live in a classless society, and that issues of race, gender and class are irrelevant. Individual ability is the focus. By focusing only on the individual we mask structural exploitation.

Second is our focus on changing attitudes. The predominant belief is that oppression is based on individual cases of sexism or racism. Education therefore concentrates on changing individual attitudes. Again, this directs attention away from structural factors inherent in capitalist, patriarchal values, beliefs and institutions which maintain imbalances of power based on gender, class and race.

Third is our fear of change and the belief that it will lead to chaos and the destruction of democracy. In essence the 'devil we know is better than the one we don't know.' This fear of change has typically been driven by images of communist, totalitarian regimes, and has led us to believe that capitalism is tied to the protection of democracy. Little thought is given to the fact that totalitarianism exists in some capitalist regimes.

Fourth is the belief that representative democracy is the route to social change. Again this is flawed, in that our political system is based on an electoral strategy that elects individuals to power. In order to have access to this political forum, resources are required. Most individuals elected are white, middle class, urban males, who reflect powerful and wealthy class and corporate interests that provide substantial resources to individuals and parties who wish to attain political power. This prevents individuals having an equal chance of being elected. The similarity in make-up of those in the

corridors of political and financial power helps explain why elected bodies produce legislative and policy directives that support existing class and corporate interests.

Wholesale change cannot occur in existing schemes. What we accomplish is 'tinkered' change. Existing political, social and economic structures remain untouched. Power imbalances based on class, race and gender are not altered (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail).

Karger speaks of the politics of social work, and specifically of social work research. He argues that social work research is congruent with the existing political and ideological values of the society in which it is done and is influenced in many ways by this. The kinds of questions given priority, what receives financial support, the tools that technology develops to study (and sometimes to determine) questions, and the reception given to research findings reflect the host context and values (Karger).

Carniol (1987) believes that the expanding professionalization of social work has had an opposite effect on social change than one would expect. In Case critical: The dilemma of social work in Canada, he portrays increasing professionalization as having created a situation in which social workers have become agents of the state at the expense of change, and criticizes schools of social work as upholders and defenders of the status quo, as for the most part they turn out people who fit well into state social agencies. Minor criticisms of social agencies are tolerated, but there is expectation that students carry out assignments and practicums with little conflict.

At an early Canadian Association of Social workers meeting the following comment was made.

Social workers are paid by the capitalist group, for the most part, in order to assist the underprivileged group. Thus organized support of political issues would be difficult if not dangerous...because of the danger of attempting too radical changes, since we were paid by the group who would resent such changes most (Carniol, p. 39).

de Montigny (1996) drew a similar parallel to his experience as a student of social work.

To survive as a professional candidate in the school of social work, I had to learn, along with fellow students, not only a new language, but a grammar of expression and a professional form of disembodied presence marked by containment, control and managed emotionality. This professional imperative to produce emotional composure, rationality and

regulated expression seemed not only alien but antithetical to the passion and outrage that I felt were essential to political activity from the standpoint of the working class (de Montigny, p. 41).

Child welfare workers have the unenviable job of working with those on the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder who have little prospect of their situations changing. Workers are expected to pay lip service to policy that has grand expectations of what should happen to these families.

Poverty

An analysis of poverty through a feminist lens demands a discussion of structural factors of wealth, power and privilege based on gender, class and race. Dominant patriarchal, capitalist values play a significant role in shaping the structure, goals and purpose of existing social, political and economic institutions, organizations and practices, including those of child welfare. A latent outcome of capitalist, patriarchal structures is the creation and maintenance of gendered poverty and power. This helps explain how production and caring place women in positions of unequal power and wealth in relation to men.

For the purpose of this research, poverty is defined as living below an 'economically' defined adequate standard of living. This definition is frequently questioned as it invalidates a cultural definition on 'wealth' based on social interactions and aspirations. Emphasis on individual material wealth disregards cultures that view as important other criteria such as kinship or connection to nature. Poverty and development based on economic standards, it is argued, mean nothing more than projecting the American model of society onto the rest of the world. The trouble with such definitions is that they reduce the living reality of hundreds of millions of people to classifications that validate only material wealth, at the expense of emotional and spiritual balance and health.

In First World countries most 'development agencies' evaluate need for intervention on economic criteria, and minimize social values. So, despite a need to question this definition of poverty, existing world orders use only economic lenses.

Poverty is not considered here from the perspective of the individual poor person. Rather, I solicit the reader to consider the organizations, institutions and values of capitalist production processes, and patriarchal values as the root of problems, and the appropriate arena for study (Mueller). Adamson, Briskin and McPhail (1988), argue that power and privilege is structurally maintained based on class, race, gender and sexual orientation. Those with power have a vested interest in maintaining current social arrangements. Power and privilege transcend both political and economic spheres as those who traditionally maintain power in the economic world are those who control political decisions through economic wealth. In addition, the desire for power is not intrinsic to human nature, but is constructed from the organization and distribution of resources and the social validation of power and privilege, rather than co-operation and equality (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail).

Poverty and Child Welfare

An analysis of child welfare social work practice is deficient without taking into account the impact of poverty and gender on families who come into contact with the Ministry for Children and Families.

Women's poverty is the result of the intersecting processes of the family ethic and capitalism that assign men to work in the public world and women to work in the private domain of the household. This separation of the roles of men and women, the dichotomy between the public and private, marginalizes women's involvement in the labor market while at the same time it assigns little or no value to the caring and domestic work within the family (Evans, p. 176).

Feminist thought explains the inability of many single parent, female-headed families to provide the level of child care expected by the child welfare system, by reason of women's inability to access adequate jobs in the labor market. Women have consistently earned less than males in Canada. The percentage of women's earnings relative to men remains between 60% and 70%. Lower wages serve to keep single parent female-headed homes in poverty or reliant on income assistance, lacking even basic resources for children in these families.

The absence of class and gender analyses in child welfare work serves to prevent front line social workers, primarily women, from better understanding the conditions in which they work, and the impact and outcomes of their practice on clients, also primarily women. As front-line workers in a caring profession they are all too often emotionally battered by a system dominated by men in positions of power. For the few women in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, success is normally attained by compliance to the status quo. The systemic battering of workers frequently leads them to participate unconsciously in the emotional battering and abuse of the clients they serve. These layers of systemic oppression are invisible to most, but are critical factors in the perpetuation of power and wealth imbalance. Social welfare legislation and policy purports to equalize imbalance and enhance the strengthening and independence of families. However, the values inherent in the complex of relations of rulings in patriarchal, capitalist society ensure this does not occur. Through child welfare work we better understand that everyday practice is contained in relations of ruling and plays a role in perpetuating gendered poverty and wealth imbalance.

A mother struggling to raise her five year old son on her own while relying on income assistance observed,

I don't understand why there is more value given for me to flip burgers at Wendy's than for me staying home to provide care for my son. If I went to work, my son would be neglected because the wages I would earn would not allow me to offer the things he needs, such as my time (Conversation with a client, April 1996).

She is speaking about her personal experiences with societal expectations that she work for a wage in the visible world, and the lack of value given of her work in the domestic arena, an invisible world. Her work in the home is not considered true work. Her work in the marketplace means that she sustains the status quo for those who are wealthy and powerful and for those who live in poverty. By choosing to remain at home caring for her son, she remains in poverty. Choosing to join the labor market will also keep her poor.

Government delivered child welfare service is part of the complex of institutional relations described by Dorothy Smith (1987) as designed to maintain existing power and

privilege. Examination of child welfare social work practice shows that poverty is rarely implicated as one of the major reasons for child abuse. Yet the literature indicates a strong relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect (Gil; Pelton).

The myth of the classlessness of child abuse and neglect has taken hold with such tenacity among professionals and the public - despite evidence to the contrary - that suggests it serves important functions for those who accept it.

Maintenance of the myth permits many professionals to view child abuse and neglect as psychodynamic problems, in the context of the medical model of "disease," "treatment," and "cure", rather than as predominantly sociological or poverty related problems...The mystique of psychodynamic theories has captivated many helping professionals, who seem to view the espousal and practice of such theories as conferring status and prestige upon themselves. Unfortunately the mundane problems of poverty and poverty related hazards hold less fascination for them...Thus the myth serves several functions. It supports the prestigious and fascinating psychodynamic medical-model approach and, by disassociating the problems from poverty, accords distinct and separate status to child abuse and neglect specialists (Pelton, p. 30).

Literature dealing with child abuse and neglect speaks of these phenomena not being limited to the poor, but occurring across all socioeconomic levels. Reasons for the disproportionate number of cases reported in lower classes is because of greater public scrutiny. The lives of middle or upper class people are less open to inspection by public officials and they are less likely than people in poor neighborhoods to turn to public agencies when help is needed (Pelton). This is not disputed. However, the disproportionate reporting of poor people can not be fully explained by this argument. As education about and intolerance of child abuse have heightened over the past twenty years, one expects that the number of reported cases of abuse in middle or upper class families would increase. To date this is not the case.

As the focus on mistreatment of children has shifted attention to parental deficiencies and inadequacies, this has led to de-emphasis of the damaging effects on children of environmental conditions (Elmer). This, I suggest, has made the relationship between political and economic factors and poverty indiscernible to many professionals. In addition, professionals who are interested in studying and reforming problems related

to child abuse find research dollars tied to the myth. If research implicates structural factors such as economic and political policies in the abuse of children, those who control research dollars and who in most cases benefit from the maintenance of power and wealth inequities are less likely to support the release of dollars for research (Karger; Pelton).

Social Work and Political Activities

Although much of the literature speaks of the 'apolitical' nature of social work, Dominelli (1989) questions this assumption. She argues that workers are extremely political, in that their work often endorses and supports the political and economic status quo, whether they realize it or not. Dominelli also argues that a view of community work as a neutral activity ignores how it develops in response to political and economic pressures beyond immediate local control.

In his ethnography of social work practice, de Montigny looks specifically at front line child welfare workers. He, too, concludes that social work practice in this realm is political in nature and occupies a political place in the institutional apparatus of the capitalist state. Managing class conflict is political work and this is part of the business of child welfare (de Montigny).

Social workers' use of power is political as it enacts organizationally determined courses of action, names, reality, and manages their own and clients' lives. Social work power expressed in the codes of science, ideologically appropriates a lived world and sets the boundaries for professionally appropriate action. As front-line social workers use problem-solving methods, they are enmeshed in a political standpoint (de Montigny, p. 107).

Income Assistance and Child Welfare

Many families who come in contact with the child welfare system rely on income assistance for survival. In the office where this research occurred, my observation is that there is general surprise if a client is not partially or fully in receipt of income assistance. Living on income assistance is being in poverty. The moneys provided do not suffice for basic food, shelter and clothing. Although most child welfare workers do not dispute this, the organization of their work rarely assists them in identifying poverty as the root of

many problems facing families with whom they are involved. This will be further discussed in the research findings.

Another reason that hinders workers from connecting child abuse and neglect with poverty is the commonly held perception that those in receipt of public financial assistance are indolent and lazy - the undeserving poor. This attitude heightens the general belief that certain people are not worthy of support. It is acceptable for workers to blame individuals for their fate and amplifies the invisibility of systemic barriers to change.

One client with whom I worked, struggling to leave an abusive partner with four small children, summed up her relationship with her income assistance worker:

Well, I would not want to get to know the worker personally...Oh, I'm sure if I met her on the street, or at a party, she'd be nice, but as an income assistance worker, she's there to only give me grief (Conversation with a parent, March 1996).

Comments such as this highlight the perceptions that families have of the income assistance system, and more generally of the whole public welfare system, including child welfare. During this research I heard over and over again from parents involved in the system about the lack of respect and dignity they were accorded by social workers who did not or could not understand their realities, their stresses, struggles and the effects of poverty on them and their children. Although clients frequently blamed individual workers for their poor treatment, further discussion with them often revealed their understanding of the work realities for front-line workers, and their understanding that workers are treated poorly by the organization for which they work. Many clients appeared to have a rudimentary grasp of workers' realities in the system - that they were controlled in their practice and directed away from helping due to workload and other organizational influences. Clients understood that workers role is about carrying out the work of those with power to ensure that they are not truly helped to improve their situation.

Contradictions in Child and Family Social Work

A residual social policy approach operates from an assumption that social welfare institutions should only come into play when the normal structures of support - the family and the market break down (Armitage). The assumption is that most families should look after themselves and their children, and that state intervention should be limited to those situations where families fail to provide for the welfare of children. Most existing child welfare organizations presuppose a residual approach and do not assist workers to identify and challenge environmentally caused danger that place children at risk.

Although, the community panel reports on child protection in British Columbia released in 1992 did document the impact of poverty (Liberating our Children: Liberating our Community; Making Changes: A Place to Start), a review of the Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996 indicates little understanding of the deleterious effects on families of living with inadequate income. This narrows the mandate for protecting children to targeting the personal deficiencies of parents. Child welfare assumes little social responsibility for protecting children from factors that create conditions for neglect and abuse. It only accepts social responsibility to enforce minimal care by parents, the vast majority of whom are poor.

An institutional social policy perspective places no stigma on the need for state support in the provision of child care. Social welfare services are seen as a normal and legitimate needs of families in modern, industrialized society. This perspective recognizes the complexity of modern life, and the inability of parents to provide fully for a family is considered a norm given a complex society (Armitage).

Residual and institutional perspectives flow from conflicting ideologies. Most contemporary social welfare policies and programs in North America reflect a residual philosophy. During the 1970s there were some attempts to develop programs based on institutional values. The lack of continued support for such programs, is best understood by analyzing past and existing legislative, organizational and societal values regarding social welfare programs.

Analysis of the differences between residual and institutional social welfare approaches to service shows contrasting notions of individual versus collective

responsibility. Patriarchal, capitalistic thinking emphasizes and encourages individual approaches to success. An individual rise from 'rags to riches' is accounted for by individual hard work and perseverance. There is little discussion of the role class, race or gender play in producing and maintaining wealth.

Legislation that governs everyday life, including child welfare law, focuses on individual rights and responsibilities as opposed to collective responsibilities and expectations. An examination of the wording of the British Columbia Child, Family and Community Services Act shows that it emphasizes the "rights of the family in decision making regarding the care of its children" and "that parents are best able to make decisions regarding their children."

It is interesting that in an era characterized by group movements of all kinds, (e.g., visible minority movements, women's movements, aboriginal rights groups, rights of the child associations) there is continued emphasis on individual approaches to success and failure. One debate in child welfare questions whether state intrusion into private family life has occurred too frequently. Critics suggest that social workers impose white, middle class values of child care on the poor and culturally different, and argue for demonstrable harm to a child as the minimum grounds for child welfare intervention (Swift).

Harm created by the imposition of white, middle class values has been most apparent in child welfare work in aboriginal communities. The destruction of native families and communities over the past century is testament to this. Native leaders have argued for changes in legislation that protect the rights of individuals and families.

Professional Standpoint: Individual or Social Change?

Systems and ecological theories emphasize skills that support and influence individuals to cope better with existing social conditions. The struggle for social work clients, however, is that social conditions often make adaptation impossible, or worse, self-defeating. The client feels further victimized and oppressed by a professional who sees the problem as being with them.

Again and again I was told that my understandings of the world were not compatible with the understandings represented in the school of social

work. If I outlined that a client's problems were the effects of social factors, such as unemployment, poor housing, exploitative landlords, racial harassment or unsupportive social workers, I was understood as rationalizing the client's failure to cope. By addressing matters of oppression and injustice and inequality, I revealed either a refusal or an inability to think properly (de Montigny, p. 42).

This continued emphasis on individual adaptation is reflective of the emphasis in many undergraduate social work programs on practical, clinical skills (Wharf; Lecomte). Students are taught to be non-judgmental, to empathize, to understand, to gain an understanding of clients' perceptions of their situation. In practice, we are more likely to focus on our perceptions, our assessments and our definitions of perceived problems. Social workers' acknowledgment of clients' perceptions and assessments of their problems is usually minimal, and this minimization of client input is considered professional. The relationship between worker and client is therefore a one-sided process much of the time, with the social worker dominating decision-making and problem-solving at the expense of the client's expertise and growth (Carniol).

Another factor embodied in the social work profession's practice, is the way cases are assigned in social agencies. Individual workers are assigned individual clients or families. Callahan (1991) believes that the most significant outcome of this approach to work is that it encourages a sense of individual responsibility and obscures the impact of social conditions.

It is clear that circumstances well beyond the control of the worker may actually determine the outcome of any investigation. Workers are expected to carry out their jobs in the face of inadequate resources, and clients often live in inadequate housing in chronically depressed neighborhoods and suffer constant poverty (Callahan, p. 77).

Fischer (1973) reviewed eleven programs in an effort to determine the success of social work casework in effecting changes in clients' behavior. He concluded that traditional individual casework is generally ineffective, and that clients had not benefited from social work intervention. Wood (1978) in reviewing Fischer's work, came to similar conclusions, and further identified the deficiencies in the approach that caseworkers took in their involvement with clients. She pointed out that in none of the studies that Fischer

reviewed did social workers begin with clients' perceptions of what their problems were and the help they thought they needed. Rather practitioners appeared to start from their own theoretical and ideological orientations, which they applied to their clients. Wood argued that a changed approach which would have incorporated client's in problem identification and decision making may have produced more successful outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

Methodology

Purpose of the Research

My purpose in pursuing this research is not only to describe and interpret social reality but to play a small part, if only ever so small, in changing it. Furthermore, my intent is to transform the interpretation of reality 'with' rather than 'for' others. In this case, front line child and family service social workers.

It is my hope that this research will offer insights into how everyday child welfare social work is organized and the impact of this on practice outcomes with parents and children. It is my goal to provide insights of the limitations in the present system; limitations that prevent workers from achieving the very goals and objectives that the organization states as its mandate. It is anticipated that upon completion of the research, the sharing of information will help make visible for workers the impact the organization has on their practice.

I will enter the research through the workers' practices, as I believe this method will lead to a better understanding of the social construction of child and family service, and more specifically the incongruity between actual outcomes of practice and stated philosophical assumptions about how practice should flow. How does the ministry's philosophy and statement of outcomes for families - that is the belief in respect, dignity, empowerment, strengthening and independence of families; and community and family partnership in the development and implementation of service - emerge within the organization of family and children's service?

I believe workers must begin to confront the multitude of dynamics that affect work with families and the role our practice plays in the maintenance of these dynamics. There is no disgrace in this, as our practice is shaped and controlled by power and wealth far removed from our everyday worlds. Those who control wealth and power dominate and organize the relations of ruling; relations which have the capacity to organize, control and direct our everyday actions into standard forms of organizational action without our knowledge (Smith, 1991). It is only when the interrelations and intersections between

the everyday and the institutional are understood and made visible, that the truth of our work can be truly appreciated.

It is necessary to start an investigation with a preoccupation in trying to understand the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. If I perceive reality as the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, then I begin to use methods for investigation which involve the people of the area being studied as researchers. They should take part in the investigation themselves and not serve as passive objects of the study... Thus, in doing research, I am educating and being educated with the people... to the extent that we put into practice the plans resulting from the investigations, we change the level of consciousness of the people, and by this change, research again. Thus there is a dynamic movement between researching and acting on the results of the research. (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, p. 34)

Institutional Ethnography

Institutional ethnography is a method of inquiry that seeks to disclose how everyday, ordinary activities of people in families, communities and workplaces are organized and arranged by political and economic processes - relations of ruling - that appear far removed from the scope of everyday life.

The work of the sociologist is to develop a sociology capable of explicating for members of the society the social organization of their experienced world, including in that experience the ways in which it passes beyond what is immediately and directly known... Rather than explaining behavior, we begin from where people are in the world, explaining the social relations of the society of which we are part, explaining an organization that is not fully present in any one individual's everyday experience." (Smith, 1987, p. 89).

Institutional ethnography espouses that relations of ruling are cultivated through a myriad of media including texts, words, numbers, and images on paper, in computers or on TV and movie screens.

Texts are the primary medium (though not the substance) of power. The work of administration, of management, of government is communicative work. Organizational and political processes are forms of action coordinated textually and getting done in words. It is an ideologically structured mode of action - images, vocabularies, concepts, abstract terms of knowledge are integral to the practice of power, to getting things done (Smith, 1987, p.17).

'Institutional' is a term used to identify a complex of relations forming part of a 'ruling apparatus' such as health, education, law or social services. The complex incorporates structures, laws and more importantly social relations. Customarily we speak of 'norms' or expectations that are generally tied to certain situations. However, these words are used to describe observable behavior, and do not address the invisible, underlying constitutive work that leads to the expected behavior. This analysis of 'norms' according to Dorothy Smith misses how our everyday actions are articulated to social relations.

Social relations here mean concerted sequences or courses of social action implicating more than one individual whose participants are not necessarily present or known to one another (Smith, 1987, p. 155).

Ethnography is used to mean an exploration and analysis of the complex of relations. This exploration is not from a general perspective, but rather begins from an entry point in the everyday world through a particular person or group of persons. This entry point brings forth the nexus between ordinary, everyday activities and the larger cosmos of political and economic structures and processes.

This method of inquiry examines the ways in which our everyday lives in families, communities and work places are not only shaped and directed by processes of the larger political, social and economic world, but how everyday activities of people also serve to perpetuate existing economic and political structures and values. These connections remain largely invisible to us, and without specialized study we are often unable to discern the influence and interrelationship of relations of ruling on everyday activities. This methodology examines how everyday situations are organized and shaped by social processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it (Smith, 1991).

The work of the sociologist is to develop a sociology capable of explicating for members of the society the social organization of their experienced world, including in that experience the ways in which it passes beyond what is immediately and directly known (Smith, 1987, p.89).

My research studies the everyday practices and experiences of provincial government employed child welfare social workers and highlights the social relations that organize the workers' experience; social relations that are not necessarily visible in individual actions or words, but through specialized study can be made visible. Thus the ordinary, daily work of child welfare workers, has an implicit organization tying each particular local setting to a larger generalized complex of social relations (Smith, 1987).

Institutional ethnography does not claim to generalize 'truth' from particular or individual experiences and realities to a larger population. Generalization is a problem with sociological ethnographies, as accounts of people's lived experience cannot stand as general statements about society or social relations. Institutional ethnography does not concern itself with a particular case. Rather it presents itself as a point of entry through everyday activities to a path that connects the everyday, ordinary to larger social, economic and political processes.

Locating the sociological problematic in the everyday world does not mean confining the inquiry to the everyday world. Indeed, as we shall see, it is essential that the everyday world be seen as organized by the social relations not observable within it. Thus, an inquiry confining itself to the everyday world of direct experience is not adequate to explicate its social organization.

One way in which sociological discourse has maintained its hegemony over experience has been by insisting that we must begin with a conceptual apparatus or a theory drawn from the discipline, if only because to embark on inquiry without such a conceptual framework exposes us to the wild incoherence of 'history' or of the actualities of people's worlds ...As it is used here, we follow a procedure of going from a social actuality to develop a conceptual apparatus disclosing and explicating its properties. The problematic is property of the social organization of the everyday world (Smith, 1987, p. 89 & 91).

It is important to recognize that institutional ethnography, while espousing feminist analysis, is not solely concerned with women's experience. It recognizes, however, that in our society the private and everyday worlds have been primarily relegated to a knowledge associated with women. The world of males is a public world, of business, commerce and education, from which, throughout history for the most part, women have been excluded. Institutional ethnography is a feminist methodology that places the everyday world at the center of inquiry and provides subjects with the means

of grasping and better understanding how larger social, economic and political structures and values organize the worlds of their everyday experiences.

The Setting

My point of entry for this research is a Family and Children's Services district office of the Ministry for Children and Families, in the Victoria, British Columbia region, and more specifically the workers employed in this office. The office has seven permanent front line social workers - of which I am one; one temporary front line social worker; a district supervisor; and a number of administrative support workers. (My role in this office will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). The office serves the community of Victoria West, which encompasses the down-town core and surrounding areas. The catchment area of this office means that many of its clients live in poverty.

The seven permanent child welfare workers are divided into an intake team of four workers who respond to and investigate community concerns regarding children's welfare, and a family service team of three who provide intensive support to and monitoring of families at severe risk of neglecting or abusing their children.

The intake workers assess complaints received and determine if these fit the criteria set out in the child welfare legislation. If so, the worker investigates the situation to determine whether the complaint justifies further intervention by the ministry, or if no further response is required. The workers assess the type and need of service for families, which can range from an array of supportive services including respite care, daycare or homemaker service, to removal of a child from its family.

The front line family service team provides intensive intervention, support and monitoring of families in crisis. These families are usually transferred by the intake worker after assessing that intensive support is required to ensure the safety of the child(ren). Many of the transfers include children who have been removed and placed in foster care. The family service workers assess whether the family is able to resume care of the child(ren) and if so what services need to be put in place. Assessments, however, can determine that parents are not in a position to resume care of the children and family service workers seek permanent custody orders through the courts. The focus then

becomes less directed toward the support and reconciliation of a family, to one of long term planning of the child outside his or her natural family.

Although efforts are made to make clear delineation between the role of intake and family service workers, intake workers often carry family service responsibilities. This occurs for a number of reasons, one due to large caseloads carried by the family service team. Another reason is the preference and professional style of intake workers, some of whom keep family service files to provide children and families with continuity of professional service. These cases tend to be families at lower risk requiring ongoing supportive services. Intake workers are not in a position to maintain high risk, time-consuming files because of the demanding and unpredictable nature of intake responsibilities.

One front line temporary worker provides extra coverage for permanent staff who are on various absences including secondments, illness or holidays. This position is also available to assist at times when particular workers are dealing with work-related crises, and who are unable to keep up with day-to-day intake responsibilities. This position may also assume temporary intake or intensive family service responsibilities.

The office staff also includes a permanent district supervisor. The district supervisor does not provide direct service to families, but has a number of case management and administrative responsibilities flowing from service delivery to families and the community. Consultation and support to front line workers in their dealings with a multitude of situations is extremely important, and is one of this position's main responsibilities. This position also assists workers interpret and understand ministerial policies and regulations, as well as mediating between workers and families if difficulties ensue. This district supervisor also intercedes between front line workers and senior levels in the bureaucracy, and is a conduit between front line practitioners and policy developers and senior administrators. It is this position that passes information and deals with problems between front line practitioners and various levels in the ministerial bureaucracy.

The office also has a number of administrative staff who support the front line workers and the district supervisor in administrative functions associated with child

welfare work. Their duties include typing letters, organizing and filing case materials, answering the phone, etc. As the work of child welfare becomes increasingly administrative and automated, more duties once considered the domain of clerical, administrative staff are becoming the responsibility of professional child welfare workers. This factor will be examined in this research, and the changing practice and organization of the work of child welfare workers will be addressed as part of this institutional ethnographic study.

The Participants

This research will examine how the Ministry for children and Families (the institution) is an embodiment of larger economic, political and social values inherent in capitalism and patriarchy, and the significance of this in any conflict between philosophical assumptions about goals for practice written in various ministerial text and actual outcomes. This will be examined through an ethnographic exploration of workers' everyday practices in the organization. The entry point for the research will be through the everyday practices, actions and experiences of workers in the child welfare organization, including my own. The research will not attempt to generalize workers' experiences, realities and practices to the larger population of child and family service workers in British Columbia. Rather, in keeping with an institutional ethnographic approach, it will focus on exploring the social and economic relations workers enact through their actual practices. The social and economic relations the workers bring into being and create through their everyday work are not necessarily fully visible to them. One can only see so much without specialized investigation. This is the researcher's special business (Smith, 1987).

At this point I would like to assist the reader understand the context of some of the participants' comments, as at times they may appear acrimonious and harsh. In order to understand practice outcomes of child welfare social work in a ministry setting and whether they adhere to the service outcome or service delivery principles stated in ministry policy, an institutional ethnographic approach directs the researcher to gather data through the actual voices of workers. It is the researcher's job to connect everyday

practices to broader institutional frameworks. Institutional ethnography differs from other qualitative research methodologies in that participants' understanding and interpretation of their life situations and experiences does not provide the basis for research findings. Institutional ethnography calls for specialized study to make visible how everyday worlds are contained in broader institutional frameworks and are in fact the foundation for gendered and racial inequity and inequality. By documenting workers' comments we get a sense of the incongruity between philosophical service delivery principles and actual service outcomes, and why this is so. Unfortunately, due to the nature of my role as a front-line child welfare worker and researcher I was unable to be part of interactions between other workers and children and families. My own workload prevented this. My research relied on listening and hearing workers' comments through private and team discussions. In no way do I wish to leave the impression that because of the severity of some workers' comments I condemn their practice. After all, this research is not vested in personal values regarding child welfare practice, but rather looks at how structural factors impact how and why practice outcomes differ from philosophical objectives. I recognize that some workers may feel offended by the quotes in this research, but they are necessary if we are to understand the role we play in maintaining power and poverty imbalance.

My role in this research is both as researcher and as front line worker. The gathering of research data was carried out while I was an employee of the Ministry for Children and Families, and a researcher pursuing a master's degree at the University of Victoria. It involved working alongside child welfare social worker colleagues in a district office; being part of their experiences, frustrations with the system and the families they work with; their failures and successes. The research was carried as part of my day-to-day work with families and involvement with workers and clients in the office. Data are drawn in part from my observations of workers, my conversations with them, and flows from my feminist approach to practice.

Ethical Issues in this Research

There are significant ethical implications in carrying out research in an organization while at the same time practicing as a front line child and family service

worker in it. Prior to collecting data I spent considerable time reflecting on the ethical conflicts that could arise. To be a social worker responsible for the protection of children as well as carrying out research could place the two roles in conflict. It was imperative that for the duration of this research the protection of children and families at no time be compromised for the sake of research.

The process of gaining approval from the University of Victoria's Human Subjects Review Committee provided safeguards for dealing with ethical issues that could arise in the course of the research. In addition, the Victoria Regional Director of the Ministry of Social Services (later to become the Regional Operating Officer in the new Ministry for Children and Families) reviewed the proposal, and granted approval for this participatory research to take place. Finally, prior to beginning data collection I embarked on a review of the literature regarding existing participatory projects involving dual roles. The review indicated that service need not be ethically compromised if research is carried out conscientiously and with considerable care (Diamond; Maguire; Ng; Reinhartz, 1979, Reinhartz, 1992; Wharf, Callahan & Lumb, 1994). I believe that this particular research in no way compromised the legal and moral responsibilities of my worker role.

The data gathered for my research are directly related to my intervention with families, and although it is impossible for practice not to be affected during research, every effort was made not to change how I normally intervened with families or would continue to intervene with families in the absence of a research project. The research is about analyzing my own and other workers' existing practice with families within the framework of the Ministry of Social Services (at time of writing reorganized to Ministry for Children and Families). To change my practice during the research or attempt to change others' practice would undermine results.

Although I feel confident that the research did not compromise service to families receiving services from the ministry, a number of precautions further ensured this did not occur. A former senior ministry employee sits on my thesis committee to provide a perspective from this particular field of practice and organizational context. In addition, the district supervisor where I carried out the research monitored my performance in light of my dual roles, and could comment on any apparent ethical conflicts. All staff were

fully appraised of my dual role and could provide feedback at any time. The information about my research was presented to them at a team meeting, along with consents to participate.

Another challenge for this type of research is to ensure that the rights and freedoms of participants are protected. A participatory approach to research creates challenges in terms of typical consents obtained from those involved in a project.

Much has been written on the ethics of research, particularly research that involves participant - observation or ethnographic approaches (McGuire; Punch; Reinharz).

The concept of consent would seem to rule out covert research, but how 'honest' do you actually have to be about your research purpose?...consent often serves to reduce participation...I am seriously concerned that a strict application of codes will restrain and restrict a great deal of informal, innocuous research in which students and others study groups and activities that are unproblematic but where explicitly enforcing rules concerning informed consent will make the research role untenable (Punch, p. 89 & 90).

Reinharz (1979) in Dilemmas of Participant Observation, describes data gathering on a continuum from complete observer to complete participant. She discovered through her own participant study research of friendships of patients in a mental institution, that acceptance and tolerance by staff is much greater for those who are complete participants - that is employed within the agency - than of those who are gathering data in the role of outside observer. During Reinharz's (1979) study, a young filmmaker wanted to make a film about adolescent patients, and was conducting preliminarily participant observation research using the complete observer stance. The hostility emanating from the staff members at their meetings and the resentment they felt for the amount of time 'wasted' discussing whether to allow him to participate in their meetings, reinforced Reinharz's preference for participation. She felt that the difference in the staff's response to a participant and an observer was striking.

It is my belief that as a complete participant within a MCF office, one who shares in the stresses, dilemmas and pains of service delivery to families, staff acceptance, trust and willingness to disclose their realities will be much greater than with one who is not viewed as truly understanding the 'truths' of the work. As a complete participant, it is

my hope that staff can more easily identify with me, (as I can with them) and the goals of the research.

A recent significant participant observer study was completed by Diamond. His accurate and honest account of nursing homes in the United States, in the widely acclaimed Making Grey Gold, (1993) would have been impossible to complete with such reverence if he had not shared in the day-to-day drudgery of the work of nursing assistants as a coworker. His understanding of and sensitivity to the plight of staff and residents was accurately mirrored because of his knowledge of work in nursing homes. Although Diamond's ethnography was 'covert' and he obtained no consents for his research, he has won numerous awards, as well as praise and acclamations from those alongside whom he worked.

In my research, consents were distributed to all the workers in the office in which they were clearly advised that I was not only a front line family and children service worker, but was also gathering data from my day-to-day work that address my research question. I recognized that my dual role may affect and inhibit workers in their day-to-day work. However, Reinhartz (1979) found that as she became more familiar with the staff in her research and they more comfortable with her presence, their inhibitions seemed to dissipate as they forgot her dual purpose and related to her as a fellow staff member.

Covert participant studies are the only methods of research that reduce the likelihood of participants changing or altering their practice during research. However, ethical realities which demand that participants give informed consent often do not allow covert research. One has to balance academic enterprise with research ethics, bureaucratic protection and secrecy, political control and individual rights and obligations. Research must balance what is public and private, and ensure little or no harm to people (Punch).

A copy of the research proposal was distributed to all staff in the office, with an opportunity to discuss it at team meetings. Individual consents were drawn up that dealt with issues of confidentiality. No names or comments attributed to a particular worker appear in any of the findings. Finally, draft copies of my findings were made available to

all staff at regular intervals during the research. These were made available through updates of progress to staff at team meetings or during informal discussions in which staff expressed interest in my progress. Draft copies were also placed periodically in a small local library developed by the district supervisor. A copy of the final research was given to the district supervisor prior to the oral defense. His consent was sought for a particular quote that identified him publicly. Due to the volume of paper required it would have been difficult to give individual copies to all workers. These practices were put in place to ensure that all participants were aware of my progress in the research, and the opportunity for them to comment on validity or not with findings, as well as ensuring no betrayal of individual rights. All but one staff member consented to being part of the research. The one non-consenting staff indicated disagreement with the theoretical and methodological framework guiding the research, and felt unable to be part of a research whose methodological basis was feminist. Although there are difficulties in participatory research that does not involve all staff, significant efforts were made not to attribute any comments or statements from this worker.

Data Collection: Participant Observation

Participant observation is defined as the conscious and systemic sharing, insofar as circumstances permit, in the life activities and on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons. Its purpose is to obtain data about behavior through direct contact and in terms of specific situations in which the distortion that results from the investigator's being an outside agent is reduced to a minimum (Reinharz, p. 156).

Participatory research has evolved in conjunction with feminist thought. This research emphasizes identification with subjects, trust, empathy and non-exploitation, as well as a process in which subjects are seen as partners in the research process. Action research seeks to empower participants (Punch) and offers a way to openly demonstrate solidarity with oppressed and disempowered people through research work (Maguire).

Included in this participatory approach to gathering data were individual and group discussions with workers in the office, and observations of various dynamics and discussions at team meetings. Although participatory research often has no demarcated beginning or end, a period of two months was selected for the purpose of this research to

gather and journal data, commencing on March 1, 1996 and ending on April 30, 1996. It was thought that a two month period would be suitable to collect the information required for the research. An initial two week period was used to introduce the topic to staff, present the proposal and have consents to participate signed. The latter six week period was used to gather and journal data.

In addition to day-to-day observations, I drew workers into discussions about the dynamics of their employment, the bureaucratization of their work, the legislation and policies they work under, their caseload numbers and their insights of the impact this has on their work with families. Each worker consented to a private interview which lasted between one and two hours. They were advised prior to the interview that the information was being gathered for the research. The interview was informal, with no set questions, although I directed them to talk about their work experiences and the factors that they felt most impacted on their work practices. Areas of concentration focused on during the interviews were policy, administration, the structure of their work, changes occurring in the ministry and workload.

Workers also shared insights through group discussions at team meetings. These discussions were not solely for the purpose of data gathering, but were regular staff meetings. Discussions at these meetings revealed valuable insights from workers about their impressions and assessment of the work. These meetings were held weekly, on Wednesday mornings from 9 am to approximately 10.30 am.. These gatherings were the few opportunities that workers had to come together as a group and share information regarding administrative and policy changes in the workplace. Occasionally workers used this opportunity to discuss a particularly difficult case with other staff for the purpose of case consultation. The district supervisor generally chaired the meeting, and it was an opportunity for him to pass information from senior levels in the bureaucracy to front-line staff. Many of these meetings were not only informational, but allowed social workers a safe environment to express their feelings of frustration and anger at the impossibility of the work they were expected to carry out. In addition to the interviews and the discussion at team meetings, I engaged in informal discussions with workers during lunch and coffee, and listened while workers engaged with each other during similar times.

The six weeks of data gathering also involved the close monitoring of my own practice with families, and the impact that policies, rules, forms and organizational structure impacted and shaped my work with children and parents. This six week experience of diligent monitoring of my own practice has had a significant impact on changing the focus and direction of my practice. I have become much more cognizant of the value of ongoing assessment of structural factors that impact my work that I would not have been prior to the research. This will be further discussed in the findings.

Policies and Documents

Because there is a strong emphasis on written, administrative language and tools in the work of social workers in a provincial government child welfare organization, I spent considerable time reviewing these aspects of the work. Specifically, there were discussions with workers about their impressions and the value they attach to policies and written tools, such as risk assessment devices. The work of child welfare workers is increasingly computerized, and a considerable portion of time was spent discussing workers' impressions of computers and their impact on service delivery.

In addition to discussions with workers, I spent time reviewing the contents of files that were being assigned to me. Although this information was valuable in the context of the research, it was an important aspect of my work as a child welfare worker. Prior to meeting a client, I would review their file to determine the extent of previous involvement by ministry social workers. These reviews were not only mandatory for my day-to-day job, but provided tremendous insight into the type of assessments and work social workers did with families. The majority of files I assumed indicated years of ministry involvement with a family. The involvement, however frequently lacked consistency and continuity. This will be reviewed in the findings.

I also reviewed policies that play such a large role in workers' day-to-day work with families. In modern, bureaucratic organizations, written language such as rules and policies, as well as forms that flow from the policies are tools used to ensure that clients' needs fit the goals of the organization. Administrative aspects of the work are not only designed to ensure the exclusion of those whose needs do not fit with the organization's

mandate, but also serve to 'create clients'. People are 'worked up' on forms in accordance with policy so that they fit with the expectations the organization has of them. It is my plan to study this process from the documents and technology of the organization.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data gathering. This is a standard feature of qualitative research methodologies, and one that distinguishes it from traditional, linear, quantitative methodologies.

During the research period significant observations of formal interviews were journalled after work each day, and analysis of the relevance to my research topic was noted as the information was gathered. The information was organized and brought together into broad topic areas. These areas include an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of service and service outcome expectations as stated in ministerial policy, and as interpreted by workers based on their everyday practice; the role institutional, administrative tools such as policies, forms, documents and computers play in service delivery; the impact of organizational structure and discourse on service delivery outcomes; caseload size; and professionalization of social workers.

Line of Fault

The research will attempt to highlight the lines of fault that exist between practice and policy in child welfare. It is impossible to document all the content and voices heard during the research, and what will be presented is but a small sample of workers' experiences, including my own, in the delivery of service to children and families.

As is common in institutional ethnographic approaches to research, the experiences in and of themselves are not significant; meaningfulness only emerges in understanding and making visible the links between every day work practice and broader values and ideology inherent in our society. Our everyday work practices are integrally linked to each other and to the values and discourse of larger political, social and economic beliefs. Yet the ties that bind frequently remain unobserved.

I will attempt to demonstrate through the stories of the workers (including my own) the problems that arise in attempting to implement ministerial policy. Time limitations permitted only the examination of a very narrow component of ministerial policy, that section which declares that practice outcomes should 'strengthen' and 'create independent families in a dignified and respectful manner. It was the area selected as it appeared to go to the very core of what child welfare workers should accomplish.

CHAPTER 6

Workers Speak

This chapter documents the voices and experiences of child welfare workers in the Victoria West Child and Family Services Office of the Victoria region. The data gathered during two months of research incorporate both my experiences as a social worker with families and researcher with children and families, and the experiences of other workers who participated in the research. Attention is directed toward the everyday work of front-line child welfare practitioners through their comments, opinions and actions and it is these experiences that provide the point of entry for the research.

The District Office

Shortly before this research began, there were significant staffing changes in the office selected for study, including a supervisor change. The office had been relatively stable in its staff compliment for a number of years prior to these changes. The office also revealed a physical set-up that is not client-friendly. In fact, it is quite alienating to anyone who requires service. The waiting area would be best described as a small holding area, lacking invitation and warmth. There is little reading material and no children's toys. The walls are painted a sterile grey, and the door to enter the office area is secured and could only be accessed by key or by being 'buzzered in'. The reception desk is divided from the waiting area by a large plexi-glass, and clients present themselves through this glass. I normally associate this set-up with secured environments such as police stations. Posters on the wall are scant, and the few posted do not reflect a respect for supporting families. Rather they spoke of behaviors that would not be tolerated by staff. Such behaviors not to be tolerated included swearing, violence, spitting etc. I wondered if the assumption was that most clients needed to be reminded of how to act in this office.

The office did not suggest an 'ethic of care' but presented as cold and indifferent, with little interest in making those who entered feel comfortable. There was no sense of community interaction with people comfortably coming and going from the office, and

workers interacting in a friendly manner with those that came through the doors. This environment that was mandated to care about children and families presented as unresponsive and childless.

Change in the District Office

As previously mentioned, in a short period of time the office experienced significant staffing changes after a period of relative stability. During a period of three months, a new supervisor arrived, along with three new permanent (including myself) and one new temporary worker. The eight person office now consisted of five new staff and only three original staff members.

Some of the more senior staff felt that the previous supervisor was committed to community initiatives. I am unable to comment fully on his role in the community, as staff were unable to articulate what he actually did in this regard and could not articulate any changes in relationship between the community and the office as a result of his work.

The particular period under study, then, was not only one of major change in the ministry (structural and legislative changes), but also of personnel change in this district office. At the outset of the research, workers were still getting to know each other and there was frequently a sense of trepidation and cautiousness between them. The workers with longer service in the office tended to feel more comfortable and remained aligned with each other, and the new workers tended to gravitate to each other. I was very conscious of this as I embarked on this research. Workers were understandably worried about how they would be perceived by me throughout the research process as many of the senior workers did not know me well. The sense of safety and solidarity built up amongst workers over the previous years about their child welfare practice was being eroded by the amount and quick pace of change. One staff member chose not to participate in the research, and another, although consenting, was open about her fears prior to an interview with me.

I want you to know I am worried about how you will interpret what I am going to say to you as I believe we have very different beliefs about how child welfare should be. I hope that you will be fair and respectful of the concerns I raise to you (Interview with a worker, March 1996).

I indicated my understanding of her cautiousness, but attempted to explain that the research was not exploring individual practice per se, but rather the impact of such things as policies, legislation, organizational structure and caseload size on everyday child welfare work. I clarified that my interest was to understand whether practice outcomes were congruent with policy and legislative statements. My methodology, institutional ethnography, directs research to find answers by studying the everyday experience of workers. My research would ultimately attempt to clarify the role everyday practice plays in maintaining a world of power and poverty. This was my focus and not so much her personal beliefs about practice.

The new office supervisor encouraged workers to consider changed approaches to service, specifically enhanced community partnerships, and to spend greater time analyzing alternative practice approaches. His interest was to assist workers rethink the existing organization and direction of child welfare work, and consider approaches that could help balance power and control between the institution of child welfare and its clients with a view to producing practice outcomes that conform to philosophical and policy statements.

I have remained and survived in this system because I realize that as an employee of the child welfare system I have access to information, and access to information gives me power. If I worked outside the system I would not have the same access to information that I have now. The key is what you choose to do with the information. You can hold it to yourself or you can share it with the community. Many workers do not share it, you need to decide what you want to do with it. I know what I do with it. (Conversation with the District Supervisor, April 1996)

For many workers this changed approach to practice was difficult to comprehend; their practice continued to reflect a need to remain separate from their clients. Although many struggled with and condemned the existing organization of their work, they did not appear interested to discuss or pursue alternative approaches. The only discussion workers seemed to engage in was discussion of maintaining the status quo with more resources needed to do this. For most workers reorganizing practice was a waste of time.

It seems a waste of our time and energy to reorganize how we do our work, when we don't have time to do what we're presently expected to do. This

employer needs to recognize that if we are to change service to the community they had better give us the resources to do this. I believe this whole exercise of change is a waste (Social worker, April 1996).

Workers were weary of the idea that more money should be diverted into community initiatives. After all many felt that existing dollars directed to the community were ineffectual and did not provide them or their clients the services needed.

I am so sick and tired of all the money that is pumped into the community with no results. Maybe we should consider a reduction of this and more put back into the public service (Social worker, April 1996)

The supervisor encouraged workers to educate the community about the role of child welfare workers, even through interviews with the media. Apparently this was supported by the Regional Director and flowed from considerable bad publicity about child welfare workers in the media from the much publicized death of Matthew Vaudreuil and the subsequent Gove Commission and report. The lowest point for workers came with a damning portrayal of social workers in a cartoon caption in the Times Colonist (Times Colonist, Aug.16, 1996).

Whenever workers had an opportunity to do so - at team meetings, during informal discussions over coffee and lunch, or during private conversations with me - comments were made that indicated their anguish, frustration and anger at the impossibility of doing work that had been presented in the Gove Report and was now being publicly advocated by government politicians as the way things would be done. No more children would die in British Columbia from neglect or abuse, and families and children in crisis would be adequately supported. These were typical of the public statements being made by politicians (Vancouver Sun; July, 23, 1996.). Given child welfare workloads (this will be examined in greater detail further in the research) and the structure in which service was delivered from, workers knew such goals were impossible and once again they were fearful they would be blamed for mistakes or tragedy. They saw no support from the community which they experienced as a community condemning them for individual incompetence. Their angry and frustrated comments about their day-to-day work, directed at each other and management and indirectly in their practice with families and communities were at times overwhelming. I believe these feelings were

accentuated for many workers because they were now expected to become more visible in the community - a community that misunderstood and treated them poorly.

Workload

One of the major complaints of workers was the high numbers of clients to whom they were expected to provide public service. Child welfare in British Columbia places no limits on caseload size, as is the case in other fields of professional practice, e.g., mental health or alcohol and drug services. Child protection is unique from other areas of social work practice in that it is legislatively mandated, and therefore it is unacceptable and against the law to place families on 'wait lists' for service if children are potentially at risk of abuse or neglect. Given the recognition by management that child welfare workers have generally high caseloads (my caseload fluctuated between four to ten ongoing intakes and fifteen to twenty family service files while the average caseload for family service workers was between thirty and fifty) child welfare workers are trained in 'prioritizing' skills. The dilemma and fear for the child welfare social worker is that by not prioritizing correctly, the death or injury of a child is a possibility. The social worker then becomes responsible and held accountable for poor judgment and skill. The training for the new risk assessment tool emphasized the skills child welfare social workers required, and one of the areas emphasized was of 'prioritizing response to intake calls' and which cases required immediate attention. It was expected that if an intake worker received four phone calls in one day, each requiring follow-up to assess a child's need for protection, the worker would have the skills to determine action priority. The problem arose in that not all calls came at the same time in the day, and a worker may be in the midst of an investigation, and receive another call that indicated equal or greater concern. I frequently found myself unable to conclude an open investigation in a timely manner as other intakes were determined as requiring greater attention. In fact some intakes took many weeks to complete, placing tremendous stress on families waiting to be advised of the status of an investigation.

One of the frustrations workers often faced in attempting to access other publicly funded services such as alcohol and drug services or mental health for their clients was being told that the person would be placed on a wait list. Child welfare workers became more frustrated because they knew they did not have this luxury. Workers, however frequently spoke about developing a 'waiting-list' for child welfare follow-up. They realized this would not be tolerated.

Maybe we should advise management that we are going to develop a system of wait listing clients, can you imagine how that would go over. I wish we could say sorry my caseloads full right now, you'll have to call back later. I'm sick and tired of hearing mental health say sorry, we're full right now (Social Worker, March, 1996).

Over the past quarter of a century neglect and abuse of children has become increasingly visible. This is due in part to various inquiries such as the Gove Report. This heightened public exposure to child abuse and neglect has led to an increase in the number of community and self-initiated reports to the Ministry for Children and Families. This increased reporting coupled with increased expectations for assessment and investigation have evolved with few additional resources to offset the increased burden. Workers are expected to expand their knowledge and skills about the complex nature of families at risk. At the same time they are burdened with increased administrative duties while the numbers of children and families they are expected to support is fast rising. This carries tremendous implications for front-line child welfare practice in that workers are unable to provide basic service to complex family needs and their attention is directed to satisfying administrative requirements. Families see them as abandoning their needs. Social workers are all too aware that with caseload numbers ranging anywhere from thirty to fifty families it is impossible to provide the kind of service as laid out in the Child, Family and Community Services legislation and policies.

Workers gave examples of what would appear to be simple expectations not being able to be carried out due to heavy workload. One example spoken of quite frequently related to a child welfare social workers' guardianship⁴ requirement for children in care. Workers are expected to visit with children as often as once every three months. On the surface this appears to be a simple expectation, but many workers will

advise that given the crisis oriented nature and heavy workload of their job, they are unable to fulfill this policy requirement. Children in care often never meet with their social workers. Children and families are offered an illusion of service, and workers and families recognize the illusion. However, government politicians continue to sell to the public that service is of a high quality, and children and families are not being placed at risk.

It's ridiculous what we are expected to do, how can I provide high quality service when I am constantly being given more cases? I believe we should be saying no.

If the public only knew what really goes on in this place they'd be shocked.

I'm so tired of all the free time I give to this employer. The supervisor says he'd rather we only work 75% of our time, but he expects us to be at our peak for that time. You know who'll get blamed if a kid died? I would because it was on my caseload. Those that review cases don't look at all the other cases we have (Comments from social workers, March, April 1996).

The issue of workload also relates to workers' perceived fear of physical threat from clients. Lipsky (1980) has identified street level bureaucrats' fear of safety evolving from the organization of their work as opposed to the real threat of physical harm. Such factors include heavy workload and proponderous administrative duties permitting little time for workers to spend with clients to make appropriate, clearly thought out assessment and timely decisions.

Even when physical threat is not particularly present, street level bureaucrats must make quick decisions because of the social reality that they are in the presence of clients who will interpret indecision as incompetence or lack of authority, with consequences for subsequent client interactions (Lipsky, p. 30).

Even when physical threat is not present, workers often must make quick, complex decisions with inadequate time and resources. There is the constant fear that clients will interpret their inability to make a quick decision as incompetence or lack of authority. This interpretation by clients has significant consequences for subsequent worker-client interactions. Workers become fearful that clients who are frustrated with a lack of quick, competent decision-making will turn their wrath onto them (Lipsky, 1980).

As social workers became more and more stressed with the increased workload and associated expectations, there is a tendency to blame children and families for the positions in which they find themselves. Frequently workers make disparaging comments about families' situations, and hold individual families accountable without analyzing or understanding the social political or economic context of their lives.

Often workers will speak with indifference about families to other workers, or worse will speak openly about confidential matters in areas such as lunch or coffee rooms. I have often been present, and have found myself drawn into open discussions about a family's confidential situation. The manner and tone of these discussions is often in an unduly familiar and disrespectful fashion. It is suspect to presume these discussions are professional case consultations, as the time and place would not be considered appropriate for this manner of professional dialogue.

Band-Aid Service: Truth or Fiction ?

Workload also has implications for the continuation of what is frequently referred to in human service institutions as 'the revolving door intake' of clients. I identified this approach in my review of client files assigned to me. Workers in the past had frequently initiated service for a family with little analysis or understanding of the context of the families' lived experiences. Many files I assumed had numerous previous interventions by the ministry. File records indicated either a parent would approach a ministry social worker or a community member would report their concern about a parent's stress or frustration in parenting. Workers would focus on the personal deficiency of the parent and would initiate daycare, respite or homemaker service for the purpose of providing relief from the task of childcare. In many cases the files were then closed, with no further involvement by the social worker. There was seldom any attempt to understand or connect parenting to the broader context of the families circumstances. Issues such as poverty, poor housing or unemployment were rarely noted in family files as realities facing families (and most families who requested service were poor). These services were solely based on assumptions of personal deficiency and not structural deficiencies, and although in some cases may have provided temporary relief, seldom led to any

improvement in the quality of parent - child relationships, one of the service outcome principles stated in ministry policy.

I also noted throughout the research workers frustration and cynicism at families continued requests for service or community reports on families who had previously received service.

The Smiths (pseudonym) are calling wanting service again. I don't know what to do with them...give it to another worker. They'll never get it together (Comment from a worker, April, 1996).

As the number of clients requiring service far outweigh the resources and personnel to deal with their needs, workers often respond to a client request with minimal assessment, and provide a service that may have little to do with real family problems. Once the service is in place the file is closed, although little has been done to ameliorate family dysfunction. The family continues in cycles of stress and find themselves again approaching the ministry or being visited by a social worker because of a new complaint of child neglect. In more cases than not, the worker who responds to the second complaint is different and again response is cursory and ineffective. This manner of intervention for families can occur several times, with each worker gaining no better insight into the true context of the family's experiences. Services offered deal only with surface issues. The costs, both in financial and emotional terms are phenomenal, and yet the family is often no further ahead than when they first came in contact with the ministry.

In my discussions with workers as well as reviewing files I noted that even with little change in family functioning child welfare social workers continued to sanction the continuation of these 'Band-Aid' services, in many cases for years, without any analysis of the goal or outcomes expected. This approach to practice was evident during the research. Workers would regularly appease families' requests for reducing stress of caring for their children by putting daycare services in place and then closing files. These services were used with minimal and in many cases no assessment of the families' realities, weaknesses and needs. For the worker, however, it placated the client, and presented the illusion of service that reduces risk to children. I do not want to leave the impression that many cases did not warrant daycare for their children. However, for

most families it did little to improve the quality and strengthening of parent - child relationship, the overall goal of service.

Administrative Work

Without exception, one of the biggest frustrations workers spoke of was the amount of administrative work required. Some workers felt that up to 50% of their day was focused on documentary aspects. These documentary aspects included the completion of running records (policy expected records to be updated quarterly). When asked most workers required one to two hours of time to complete an adequate quarterly update. With a family service worker averaging thirty to fifty cases this accounted for forty five to one hundred hours every three months. This time did not include the rough notes that workers were expected to keep on clients. There was also the ministry requirement that intake forms (see Appendix 2) be completed. To conform to ministry informational standards these could take up to two hours to complete. Intake workers, could count on two to six calls per day, subsequently four to twelve hours could be spent documenting the intake information on the forms. In the office where the research occurred workers generally found themselves on intake every three to four days. In addition workers would have to complete a voluminous array of legal documents if a child was brought into care, either removal or voluntary. These documents could take anywhere from two to four hours depending on the information surrounding the child coming into care. In the office where the research occurred an average of two children a week would be brought into care.

In addition to the actual written work, increased technological expectations (computerization) further confined workers to the office to retrieve or send information via this means. One of the areas addressed in the Gove Report was the need for increased use of technological apparatus to enhance workers ability to retrieve quick, accurate information on clients. Judge Gove noted that manual systems limited workers ability to retrieve information on clients especially if they frequently moved around the province. On the surface this appeared an efficient manner for service delivery, however the new systems were being implemented without mobility of access by workers.

Workers had no ability to retrieve e-mail or check on a family's status from outside of the office as they had no access to laptop computers. Workers did not have cellular phones or voice mail, so had to come to the office to retrieve messages. On one occasion I attempted to work from home, and called the office for messages. A number of calls I had to return were long distance. When I attempted to make a third party long distance call from my home, I was advised by the operator, I was unable to charge the call to my office. I had to return to my office phone to return these calls. I requested a calling phone card, but did not receive one.

Dorothy Smith recognizes the significance accorded to documents. An institutional ethnographical approach to research requires an examination of various texts, and although text is not the substance of power it is definitely the primary medium of power.

A documentary reality is fundamental to the practices of governing, managing and administration of this form of society. The primary mode of action and decision in the superstructures of business, government, and the professions, and other like agencies, is in the symbols, whether words, mathematical symbols or some other. It is a mode of action which depends upon a reality constituted in documentary form (Smith, 1993, p. 117).

As a worker in child welfare I have found it impossible to ignore the voluminous array of policy and procedural manuals that are expected to guide practice. Following the proclamation of the new act, each worker was given two large policy manuals. Each volume had approximately 200 pages of information. These manuals did not include other aspects of service delivery including regulations, standards guiding foster homes, information on forms and general standards of social work practice. Workers frequently joked about the expectation that they read and incorporate all this information into their daily work. Although workers were aware that their workload did not allow them the opportunity to fulfill ministry policy, they did know that if a tragedy happened on their caseload, such as the death or injury of a child, their practice would be assessed against the written policy in an inquiry. As long as public attention was not drawn to their work, they could laugh about the enormity of policy manuals. However, they were aware of the inherent risks in not following policy.

You know what is frightening to me is that someone up in the policy division actually thinks these manuals are helpful to us. I guess once you leave the front you quickly forget the realities of work down here.

This constant passing down of more and more administrative work and policy directives has to stop. Your practice is assessed as to whether your following policy. If you're not you'll be in deep trouble (Comments from social workers, March and April, 1996).

It appeared to workers that the introduction of new legislation in January, 1996 brought with it substantial increases in administrative responsibilities and policy directives, rather than reductions. My review of the policy and procedural manuals helped me understand just how directive the manuals were toward the practice of workers. Regardless of whether workers had the time to follow all the directives, the manuals quite clearly spelled out the intent and expectations for workers and provided little discretion and flexibility of practice with families. The manuals directed workers to an increasingly standardized practice model. They were organized in such a manner that every section was followed by an outline of the ministry's philosophy and rationale for the particular section of legislation, followed by a very clear framework as to how workers were to translate the ministry's legislative philosophy into practice. A example of the content and format of the policy manuals is attached in Appendix 2. This Appendix outlines how a worker is to proceed once a report has been made regarding a child's welfare, even outlining response time frames, who should be interviewed, observing protocols etc.. On the surface this appears to be a good format, outlining good practice outcomes. The problem for workers is that it is impossible for them to complete an investigation and assessment in such a clean, well thought-out manner, taking into consideration all the aspects outlined in the document. The manual does not reflect the true realities of what occurs during an investigation, and the limited time frames that most workers have to complete an investigation. This format is again a set-up for workers, as non-compliance to the rigid expectations and philosophies as outlined in the document could result in them being held accountable for poor practice in the event of a mistake or tragedy.

Although the voluminous growth of policy and procedural directives frustrated workers, embedded in these directives was the increasing expectation for workers to account for their work through expanded use of forms. Workers were beginning to be trained in the use of a new risk assessment tool, (although not yet used during this research) and workers recognized the extensive time required to complete this new form. It was anticipated that proper completion of this document would take between three and four hours. They saw that existing workloads would not permit this form to be completed as expected. Workers' concern in implementing this new format for risk assessment and reduction, was that politicians and senior bureaucrats were publicly voicing the success this tool would have in eliminating child deaths and injuries from neglect and abuse. Workers viewed this as another promise that would set another unrealistic expectation in the public's mind that already saw them as incompetent. One worker became so frustrated with the increasing expectation for documentary work she drafted a letter to the Victoria regional management team outlining the number of forms workers had to complete to outline the same information on a plan for children and families. She outlined in her correspondence four forms that would provide the same information; quarterly reports, risk assessment forms, child-in-care planning report and child placement service plans. Her point was that each form reproduced the same information and took time from important work with clients.

Another frustration for workers was the exorbitant amount of time they spent on court matters. To many this appeared to increase with the new Act. One concern related to the time frames set in legislation for notifying parents of court proceedings after they had had their children removed from their care. The issue was not with the fact that parents should be given adequate notice of the Director's⁵ application regarding wardship, but how certain matters which previously could be dealt with between social worker and parent were now removed from this relationship and could only be dealt with through a court⁶ hearing. The Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) requires that social workers provide parents with ten days clear notice prior to the court date outlining the Director's plan regarding wardship. In the busy world of child welfare, this time frame is sometimes difficult to accommodate. Under the previous act if social

workers had missed this deadline, the parent(s) by signing a written declaration, usually in consultation with their lawyer, could waive the ten day rule and this would be acceptable to the court. If a parent was not satisfied with the lessened time frame there was still the right to present concerns to the court and have the judge make a ruling. The options for the judge in these cases were to waive the ten day notice or advise the social worker that jurisdiction of the child was lost. If this happened, the worker would have to determine if re-removal of the child(en) from the parents should occur. In most cases the judge would waive the ten day notice.

Under the new Act flexibility by parents and social worker in determining waiver of the ten day notice was prohibited. In a letter written by the Director's counsel, social workers were advised that if they had not provided the required notice, regardless of whether the parent was willing to consent in written form to the waiver, the social worker and the parent had to present the information to the court and have the court grant the waiver. This interpretation added further administrative workload, including the arranging of court time prior to the court date for the hearing, completion of various court documents and usually waiting at court for a number of hours until the case could be heard. (See letter in Appendix 3)

Although it is impossible to provide all aspects of documentary reality in child welfare work in this research, it was demonstrated through worker's comments and their work activities the enormous administrative, documentary toil required by the system.

The Gove Report: Oppression or Enlightenment?

During this research one area of major concern and frustration for workers was the release of the Gove Report (1996) and many of its the recommendations. As a new worker in the British Columbia system, initially I was unsure of the reasons for their anger and frustration. It became apparent, through conversations with workers, however, that their concern was with the perception of the media that social workers were responsible for both systemic problems and parental inadequacies and should be held accountable. Social work staff felt they were being blamed for the death of Matthew Vaudreuil. Many believed the blame should be more fairly placed at the feet of the

person who committed the crime, his mother, Verna Vaudreuil, and at a system that failed to provide workers with adequate tools and manageable caseloads so that they could adequately protect children from harm. Workers frequently made comments such as:

We are expected to save every child from harm That is just impossible (Social worker, March 1996) .

We are blamed for every family's problem. Why are parents not held responsible? (Social worker, March 1996)

Someone has to be blamed. Why is it always us? (Social worker, March 1996).

We can not be given the job of saving every child in British Columbia especially with the caseload sizes and lack of support we are given (Social worker April 1996).

These comments were made at the same time politicians were publicly declaring that no more children would die in British Columbia from abuse and neglect. Workers felt these public comments put tremendous pressure on them. They knew that under any circumstance, but especially given their lack of resources, the promises were utterly unrealistic. This made many of them even more afraid of interfacing with the community. After all, how could they fulfill unrealistic public commitments made to a provincial community that through the eyes of the media saw them as incompetent?

One of the most enlightening conversations I had with a worker about reactions to the report came after she had attended a day-long post-report presentation by Judge Gove. Her response was extremely emotional. She was angry and hurt with the report's attempt to present the practice of child welfare as work that is 'objective', 'rational' and 'impartial'. For her it disregarded the 'greyness', 'subjectivity' and complex, discretionary nature of the work. By presenting the work as purely objective, she felt that politicians and senior bureaucrats could readily account for errors on the basis of individual social work incompetence. After all, work that is measurable, visible and objective should succeed if it is carried out in accordance with the rules. Failure can be attributed to not following the rules correctly. This worker believed that no matter how the system was

restructured, working with families could never be totally objectified. I think her comments reflected the views of many social workers, - that the Gove Report made it easy to hold social workers accountable for systemic problems.

de Montigny explores the evolution of social work. He states that in their quest for increased recognition and professional status, social work practice has sought to reflect positivist, scientific values and methods. The assumption is that practice can adhere to rational, logical and objective knowledge constructs. By following practice paths that reflect a positivist discourse social workers' stories of clients transcend their everyday experiences, feelings and thoughts. To be accepted as practitioners who belong to a professional class, social workers must create a standpoint fundamentally apart from the lives of the client (de Montigny). When social workers make sense of their practice by employing the logic and codes of positivist science, they affirm their authority as members of a profession (de Montigny).

Social workers can only validate their claim that their work is professional, that is routine, systematized and orderly by following positivist scientific method. By entering their work into a discourse of positivist science, social workers' stories about cases are constructed to be guided by relevances that transcend the personal, the situated, and the unequivocal. To be seen as warranted practitioners of scientific discourse, social workers must create an epistemological standpoint fundamentally apart from their daily life (de Montigny, p.41).

This approach to practice, however, negates the realities of the social work profession; a profession which works with vulnerable human lives fraught with subjectivity's, incongruities and non-tangibles.

Community Relationships

In my first few weeks of work I began to understand that the appearance and physical set-up of the office reflected the staffs' need for distance from the community-at-large. The rationale provided for security of entry was concerns of violence by clients. I later found out that the concern for violence had arisen a number of years prior to the research when a client had become aggressive with front office staff. In defense of staff, this had been a frightful experience. However, it was a relatively isolated incident, and I

found it interesting that the actions of one individual had led to an ongoing belief that staff may be at risk. During the research I did not note any client actions or behaviors that would have remotely required such security.

In my first few months at the office, I began to identify other behavior staff had developed that clearly kept them distanced and distinct from the community. They rarely met clients outside the office. I noted that the majority of time spent in the community was during an investigative process, and often a police officer or another social worker was present. Staff never spoke of having a friendly visit or a coffee with a parent. This approach to service appeared to be supported by ministry management. Workers did not give any thought to the impact this might have. It was considered the normal way of doing things in child welfare. When I questioned workers on their thoughts about the impact this might have on how the community and families perceive child welfare services, the responses were often ones of confusion and lack of understanding of alternative approaches, or defending existing practice because of heavy workload.

I don't have time to spend doing nice parts of this job, I'm too busy to worry about that (Comment from a worker, March 1996).

We have to do very dangerous work, and I am not going to put myself at any risk (Comment from a worker, March 1996).

You know the police think we are crazy to do what we do. We walk into crazy people's homes, with no protection (Comment from a worker, March 1996).

This is what we do in child welfare, our first mandate is we have to protect kids (Comment from a worker, March 1996).

Comments from workers indicated that professional and personal dignity was tied to maintaining distance and being apart from the community. Child welfare work was often discussed as indispensable activity but at times extremely dangerous. Workers justified an approach that required silence, secrecy and concealment from the public due to the dangerous nature of the work. Interestingly, client confidentiality was not raised as the reason workers choose to practice in a secretive manner. Workers presented the need to carry out work in this manner as a means to protect and enhance their professional dignity. Clients rights were not seen as paramount in the manner of professional practice.

The public has no idea of the physical risk we place ourselves everyday. We deal with crazy, violent parents every day and there is an expectation that we put our necks on the line without proper training and resources. The police think we are nuts to do what we do, they at least have guns to protect themselves (Social worker, March 1996).

I'm not putting myself at risk by being more exposed to clients, I have to think of my own safety first (Social worker, April 1996).

In addition, many child welfare workers believe that they are viewed by other human service professionals as being on the bottom rung of the professional hierarchy.

I am sick and tired of the high and mighty attitude of those mental health workers. They should come down to our level and see what real work is about (Comment from a worker, March 1996).

I wish we could be treated with more respect by our so-called community partners (Comment by a worker, March 1996).

I wondered if the low position of child welfare practice on the hierarchy of respectability in the social work profession was tied directly to its prevailing practice approach that professed to rely heavily on client secrecy, control and inequity, and did not recognize the need for clients' input and recognition of their strengths. In other words the methods of practice workers have chosen to defend and exonerate their work to clients, the community and other professionals, may be the very reason they are ostracized.

Although in the research maintaining distance from clients and community was reflective of efforts to increase professional status, workers' comments also demonstrated the need to maintain distance and separation from the community was tied to personal protection from condemnation and criticism. The fear of being exposed to the community was highlighted in some of the comments workers made at team meetings or during informal discussions. This became particularly evident during the review by Judge Thomas Gove.

I can't be bothered trying to justify my actions every single day, we'll just get put-down anyway (Social worker, March 1996).

I have more important things to do than spend all my time telling the public how and why I make a decision (Social worker, April 1996).

I observed that staff presented themselves as 'a team' and relied on each other for verbal and emotional support in their work with families. When I arrived, the staff were a fairly tight knit group. Although there were slight differences of opinion regarding philosophies of service, they relied on each others' support to keep distanced from a community that they felt condemned and criticized them. The community was that place that staff did not feel a need or a desire to connect with. For them it was a frightening place in which to do their work. So they continued to do their work behind the walls, buzzers and plexi-glass screens of the office.

I can't be bothered or have the time to justify the way I do my work, I'm too busy with protecting children from abuse and neglect (Social worker, April 1996).

People don't really want to know what we have to do, they just want to find someone to blame when it goes wrong, and we're the easy ones to blame (Social worker, April 1996).

Whatever the reasons for workers remaining separate from the community they worked in, this had tremendous implications on their work with families and children. Clients on my caseload frequently spoke to me about child welfare social workers who they had previously been involved with as insensitive and callous towards them and the realities of their lives. Clients did not see workers as being there to help them.

The problem that I have had with previous workers is they are not honest or respectful of me. I ask them a question and if they don't know the answer or find it too hard to deal with they just keep me hanging. I would rather that they gave me a 'no' answer so at least I know where I stand, rather than keep me hanging. Its horrible having to keep calling and leaving messages and no-one gets back to you. Its like they don't want anything to do with the problems I'm facing and just wish I'd go away. It makes me feel so worthless (Comment from a client, April, 1996).

Community or Institutional Work?

As previously indicated, there were considerable changes occurring in the office during this research. Workers were being asked to consider new theoretical,

philosophical and practice approaches. This came through new leadership in the office, and new approaches laid out in legislation. Consistent with a new, open, community approach was an opportunity for workers to work with the local media to demystify their work and publicly present its realities. Workers were encouraged to partner with client families in presentation of the work in the community. It was hoped that such an approach could provide a fairer, more balanced understanding of child welfare work and the families who interface with this system. For some in the office this opportunity was exciting, for most there was significant reluctance, especially about the inclusion of families in this process.

These comments are illustrative of workers' responses to these initiatives:

What if a client reads the article and feels that we are talking about them?

Will the Ministry really support us?

What if we say something that the Ministry doesn't like or agree with?

Are we allowed to talk about policy?

It's not really appropriate for us to be doing this...the ministry has communications people who should do this! (Comments from various social workers, April 1996).

One worker was so concerned that she wanted to have the newspaper article approved by the ministry before it was published. She was so uncomfortable being interviewed she agreed to provide a written précis of the 'day in the life of a social worker'. Interestingly, her written comments for the newspaper reflected the negative side of the families we work with. Her article focused on families' abuse of alcohol and drugs; on violence in their lives; on parents' neglect and abuse of their children. For her this was a way of publicly defending the often impossible realities of the work. Unfortunately for the families who come into contact with the ministry, it would have left them feeling angry and ashamed.

It was obvious in the tone of some workers' comments that they believed this process either was a set-up, or they felt afraid of losing what little authority and power they had in their work. I found the responses intriguing. They highlighted the impact

these emotions must have on their practice with families. Fear and power, although in different places on the continuum of feelings, have a similar impact on practice. Both emotions tend to curb creativity and risk-taking with clients in search for solutions.

Individual or Collective Work?: Reframing our Priorities

The majority of front line social workers in child welfare are women, which was reflected in the office where the research occurred. Of the eight staff in the office five were women and three were men. The majority of clients are also women, which was also reflected in the statistics of the Victoria West office. In fact women accounted for approximately 90% of the caseload of the office involved in the research. An analysis of those who work for the system and those who are served by it indicates certain similarities of treatment and one might assume a connection, an understanding between these two groups. Yet this does not appear to be the case.

Social workers do not, for the most part, challenge the unfairness of the welfare system primarily because they lack awareness of the systemic nature of social problems flowing from inequalities in wealth and power (Gilroy). Social work practice primarily emphasizes work with individuals rather than groups and communities, and defines problems predominantly as individual, as personal rather than political. Everything about the work emphasizes an individual analysis. For instance, we interview and interact with clients as individuals; as social workers we are supervised by individual supervisors who are accountable to another individual. There is minimal support in the system for development of collective approaches to service, for example, through team approaches by workers, or stimulating collective support groups of clients.

I have experienced this myself in my efforts to develop a parent support group. Although this approach is supported in ministry policy, it is regarded as a low priority in the work of child protection. Workload prevents social workers from giving priority to this important activity. Comments by a middle manager highlighted the lack of validity and value given such work. He questioned my purpose for being involved in it, and stated that it was not to take time away from the more important aspects of child welfare. There appeared to be little understanding that this approach to practice goes to the very

core of child welfare work, and should be given its rightful priority place. Although my supervisor supported this practice, he is also aware of limited encouragement of it in the system, and has advised that this cannot take priority over other aspects of work, including administrative ones.

However, the comments from mothers who I have introduced to the support group are ones of appreciation for such approaches. For them it reinforces that they are not alone in their struggles, and helps them see that often their problems are not just personal but are found with social, political and economic structure that keep them downtrodden in their day-to-day lives.

Callahan (1993) used a feminist approach to study the rifts between child welfare workers and clients. Their research asked workers to talk about situations in which they felt both powerful and powerless. In the analysis of child welfare, they identified that the work was unpredictable, lacking routine and invisible. They noted that these characteristics do not fit well with an organization that is built on a hierarchical, technological philosophy that values predictability, visibility of work and objectivity in decision making. The results appear to verify that the organizational processes of the work are not conducive to healthy, positive work with families. They distance workers from clients. Workers' experiences of day-to-day work with families and the lack of routine and unpredictability mirrored some situations facing parents, primarily single women in trying to raise and support their children.

The Invisible Similarities between Workers and Clients

A social worker shared her views with me that spoke strikingly of the similarities between worker and client experiences. At the time of this research, the Ministry of Social Services reviewed and supported the recommendations of the Gove Commission Report arising from the investigation of the death of five year old Matthew Vaudreuil at the hands of his mother. This case and the subsequent inquiry made headlines in British Columbia for a long time because of the viciousness and cruelty of this little boy's death, and by the fact that many ministry employees had long been involved with this family.

A social worker I spoke of earlier who had attended a day long session by Judge Thomas Gove told me of becoming tearful and angry at his presentation. When I asked why it had this affect on her, she stated that the report disregarded the 'greyness' of our work, and made it seem as if it was black and white in nature. She felt this was disrespectful of workers in a world where things are not objective in nature, but exist as shades of grey and where decisions are frequently subjective. She felt Judge Gove minimized and invalidated the realities of social workers in child welfare. She was angered that Judge Gove was given the mandate to examine this tragedy in hindsight. Social workers often have to make quick life and death decisions based on subjective, limited data.

As I listened to this worker speak and felt her anguish over this review process, I connected her feelings of anger with the hostility of many families with whom we work. When we step into a family's life, our work is organized to investigate and assess risk factors that attempt to objectify the problem. We present the problems to the family in a manner that appears black and white, without regard for the many shades of grey of the family's realities. Although this social worker was speaking from a different place from which clients speak, her feelings of invalidation and minimization are strikingly similar to theirs.

Advocate or Bureaucrat?

Another area many workers struggled with was in the conflicted role expectations of them from the families they were working with and those of their provincial government employer.

One worker very clearly described her advocate role. She felt it was her role to strive, at whatever cost, for enhanced quality of life for families and particularly children in these families. She struggled with the impact that poverty had on families she worked with, and was zealous about getting needed money and services for them. Her zeal to obtain services and resources could offend others at times, but her commitment to clients was great.

This social worker spoke of her experiences of advocating for families, which on a number of occasions resulted in reprimands by her superiors, as her actions were not considered 'appropriate professional behavior.' When I asked how the families felt about her work on their behalf, she thought they had applauded her and been thankful. The reprimands of this worker for advocacy on behalf of clients indicates a lack of organizational support for this type of practice, and coercion to change it. For many workers this is one of the most feared threats to job security. Such reprimands are normally enough to ensure that the social worker's practice will change.

I faced a similar experience in attempting to advocate for a family. The worker to whom I advocated was part of the same system, although her role was to assess and distribute income assistance. The worker complained that my actions were offensive to her. She felt my role in the institution should be one of collegiality with her and not advocacy for clients. My superiors concurred with her, and I was reprimanded for my actions. In my efforts to advocate for the family, I challenged her to question some of the policies and procedures affecting her work. I believe she thought I was personally attacking her, and subsequently responded by complaining about my tactics. In my analysis of the situation, I came to realize that the offended worker aligned with her employer. Her personal values seemed to have become synonymous with those of the values of the bureaucracy for whom she worked (Ferguson).

Another practice experience highlighted the lack of support or understanding of a need for client advocacy. Cathy (pseudonym) is a mother with whom I worked for four months. She fits the profile of 90% of my caseload - a single mother, abused in her family of origin, who as an adult gravitates towards abusive relationships. Today, she struggles to raise her children with minimal support from the social welfare system. As Cathy sees it, she is raising her children in spite of the system.

So many women like this come to the attention of the child welfare system. I came to realize that many of Cathy's stresses flowed directly from her poverty, including inadequate housing, poor nutrition, inability to provide money for her children's activities, and not enough money to provide basic necessities for herself or her children.

In addition to dealing with a myriad of environmental stresses, with my encouragement Cathy began confronting childhood horrors in therapy. This therapy was crucial if she was to understand the impact childhood experiences played in her adult life, for example, choosing inappropriate partners and having poor relationships with her children. It was necessary if she was to become a healthy parent and ensure the well-being of her children. Paradoxically, this therapy added further stress to a person who already lived with many heavy burdens, as any change can do.

In a phone conversation she indicated that her income assistance cheque was a week late. She had no food, and her rent could not be paid. She admitted that she apparently had made an error in not advising the income assistance division of her eligibility for continuation of benefits for the next month. As soon as she became aware of this, she completed the forms and requested to pick up the cheque when it was ready. She was advised she could not do this. It was ministerial policy for cheques to be mailed. Now regular mail is not the most expedient way to send correspondence. In fact, this caused Cathy's family to be without food for several days. The social welfare system failed Cathy; was unresponsive to her needs; placed her in a position of further stress. Recognizing the damage produced for this family, I began to advocate for understanding and compassion of this family's plight. Unfortunately, my advocacy role was seen as suspect, and I was advised by management that I had no right to question the policies and procedures of the Income Assistance Division. In essence I was overstepping my authority and should not interfere with matters that did not concern me. I was put in the position where my allegiance to the organization, and its policies was questioned. There was little recognition that Cathy and her daughter were encountering systemic abuse which did not support the 'protection' of her children. This experience highlighted again the threats workers encounter when they assume a role of support for client over support of the agency.

In an interview with another worker, he was very clear about his role as a bureaucrat, working for the maintenance of the system. He acknowledged that the institution of child welfare is not set up primarily to enhance the quality of families' lives.

For him stress and pressure came from a system that sent workers conflicted messages about their roles and responsibilities to families.

I am very clear about what my job is. It's about being a bureaucrat and an administrator serving the system. I get very angry that they pretend that we are doing something that we are not. I wish they would just be honest about our job...The reason they can keep pretending we're doing something that we are not is because the public doesn't want to know what we do, because it's dirty work, and most of the time it is kept hidden. The death of Matthew Vaudreuil and the Gove Report has forced the carpet to be lifted and exposes the crap that the community really doesn't want to know about. I'm quite happy doing my bureaucratic work, but I'm not happy that they set it up as something different. I am very clear about being a bureaucrat (Interview with a worker, March 1996).

This worker does not feel an internal role conflict. He is resentful of the double message of his employer. It is this double message that keeps workers feeling isolated from the community. They are aware that what is presented as truth about practice is often a lie.

Problematics of Practice

One of the realities I understand from both my own personal experience in the child welfare system as well as that of other social workers, is that for many survival is tied to remaining cognitively and emotionally distanced from families in crisis. Workers quickly appreciate the lack of control and autonomy they have over their practice with families. The large caseloads, unsolvable problems, poverty, insufficient housing, bureaucratic red tape and fragmentation of services contribute to workers becoming emotionally drained and overwhelmed with the problems facing families they work with in the child welfare system.

I realize poverty plays a large role in the difficulties families face, but I just don't have the time to spend dealing with this. I have to deal with the day-to-day safety of the child (Social worker, April 1996).

For many survival entails following one of two paths. A large number choose to leave child welfare practice, and there is a high turnover rate in this field of professional practice. During the two months of the research two staff left the office, and a review of

the office at the time of writing indicate only three professional staff who participated in the research remain. This number includes the district supervisor.

Other workers opt to adhere to a method of practice that avoids subjective relationships with families; relationships in which workers become truly linked and remain connected with the historical experiences and everyday realities of families. This practice becomes a process of objectifying, identifying and labeling individual parenting deficiencies and eliminating from assessments the context of families' lives and the overwhelming systemic barriers that many people face in trying to be successful parents. For workers this can lessen the personal frustration and defeat to which commitment to a structural analysis often produces. However, practice that lacks an holistic understanding of need contributes to a service that is fragmented and often meaningless to families. Although many workers continue to cling to a practice approach that reflects narrow, objective approaches, they seldom witness significant improvement in family well being, and unfortunately, the brunt of workers' frustration and anger falls on the families who become further victims of systemic oppression. Social workers talked about these factors.

People have to take responsibility for their own problems. They are where they are because of the choices they have made in life. I have managed to do O.K. and sometimes I don't have enough money, but I don't rely on the system to do everything for me (Social worker, April 1996).

I wish someone would let me have free baby-sitting or homemaker. I tell you I could have done with that when my children were small. Sometimes we just give to much too these people (Social worker, March 1996).

It's funny how all our clients have big TVs and never have any problem finding money for cigarettes. Don't they realize this takes food out of their children's mouths? (Social worker, March 1996).

People have to take responsibility for their own poverty if they chose to live in Victoria. I can hardly live here, they should think about moving up North where its cheaper (Social Worker, march 1996)

The findings of my research also highlight other important dynamics of child welfare practice. The subtle application and manipulation of oppression, power and control at various system levels ensure that meaningful change in service delivery does

not occur. Although during the period of the research there appeared to be change happening at all levels, structural and legislative, the change had little impact on changing approaches to practice. This flows from different sources: large caseloads; increasing administrative responsibilities; fragmentation and lack of communication between service delivery systems; hierarchical, linear approaches to decision making and unrealistic expectations by a community that has little education about or understanding of child welfare work.

Workers' fear of further exposure to a community that already condemns and ridicules them through the mass media, leads social workers to shrink even further away from the very networks, community supports and involvement with families that could provide them and their clients with increased empowerment and support. Although workers are aware of their mistreatment by the system they work for, most still turn to it rather than to families and communities in the hope of receiving support and protection. Unfortunately, they are not rewarded in this regard, and remain caught in a cycle of dysfunction, in which a significant outcome is continued oppression by their employing system that is often followed by their own oppression of those who turn to them for help. These are not conscious dynamics. Until workers have tools to assist them understand the dynamics of systemic abuse and oppression, the cycle will continue.

CHAPTER 7

Client Experiences

This chapter explores client intake experiences in the child and family system during the period of research. I have chosen to map the processes that three families (actual cases) followed from their first intake contact through service provision. The cases selected are typical of the type that present to intake workers, and have been drawn from my own and others' experience. To protect client identities, some distinguishing information has been changed. In the first case, a street youth is identified as 'a child in need of protection' under the Child, Family and Community Services Act. She is at risk due to her age and her drug addictive lifestyle. The second case involves a single parent who approaches the ministry requesting support services to help her raise her children. In the third a family is identified by the ministry as having a child in need of protection. The experiences of these families are presented by analyzing the work in light of bureaucratic processes. It is hoped that by framing families' experiences in this manner, the reader can grasp the impersonal and objective manner in which workers carry out their work with families.

Most of the parents and children I come into contact with as a child welfare intake worker are families headed by a single female. I rarely work with fathers, as the majority of families that come in contact with the child welfare system lack the active presence of a father. This is either because the father has abandoned the family and the full responsibility of childcare rested with the mother, or the wife has left her spouse due to violence or abuse. Both family cases presented in this chapter are typical of the families intake workers come into contact with and are headed by single females.

Feminist thought accepts that women are relegated to positions of dependence in large part because of the inferior value attached to roles carried out by women in the home - roles associated with nurturance, caring and serving others. This reduced value of roles associated with women affects them in capitalist workplaces, and their monetary compensation in this arena. Salaries paid for jobs primarily connected with women such as caring for the young, elderly or disabled tend to be significantly less than salaries paid

for jobs associated with male activity such as police officer, mechanic or firefighter. Women frequently find themselves unable to adequately support their children due to low wages, and continue to be dependent on a welfare system to supplement earnings, or a male counterpart to support them.

The expectations of the British Columbia child welfare policy for family independence are therefore directly contradictory to where women clients find themselves economically, socially and politically. The common reality in the context of child welfare is a parent caring for children with little or no assistance. Failure to achieve the goal of independence often has drastic consequences, include women feeling unworthy, inferior and incompetent for failing to achieve the autonomy society expects of them. In turn this loss of self esteem and self confidence impacts on the quality of care they are able to provide their children (Evans).

It is interesting to note that although the child welfare ministry sets goals of independence for mothers to care for their children - a goal most women who head families alone find impossible to achieve because of poverty - our social welfare system continues to encourage dependence. Many welfare programs have 'man in the house' policies that state if a woman is suspected of being involved in a romantic relationship, that person, usually a man, is expected to support her and the children financially. Although many child welfare social workers may not report a woman's liaison with a new partner, they are acutely aware there is an expectation that they do so. For many workers, who fear job security, the fear of not reporting is great, and they choose to protect their position in the ministry by reporting. Given this policy, many women striving for independence are again put in the position of being dependent on a male to support the family.

Previous chapters have provided a theoretical framework and critical perspectives to explain why child welfare work does not help families become stronger and independent, as specified in policy. From a practice perspective the following ethnographies outline the difficulties in successfully implementing these policy prescriptions.

Judy and Evan: Their Story

Intake Process

An intake worker is the first point of contact for families who come to the Ministry for Children and Families. Judy came to my attention in the same manner many others do. She telephoned the office requesting to speak to a worker about the stresses of caring for her five year old son, Evan, and wanted to meet with a worker to discuss options available to her. Although Judy initiated contact with the ministry, her experiences are such that a neighbor or teacher or health care provider could just as easily have called to express concern about Judy's parenting. As I later found out, Judy had previous contacts with the Ministry; some self-initiated asking for support services; some community-initiated as concerns of child protection.

I began the administrative processes of determining Judy's problems and needs, processes that are not about relationship building, or getting to know another's life experiences. They are about documenting Judy's experiences and narratives into the discourse of the agency, or as Dorothy Smith says processes embedded in organizational forms of consciousness.

As a social worker listening to Judy I am preparing to translate her life into the discourse and language of 'child protection.' Her life will be described by 'facts' and 'data' that will be documented in a file as if these 'facts' represent the truth about her. Who she truly is - the realities, the discriminations, the experiences she has faced throughout her life - will be largely rendered invisible in the collection of documents that carry her name.

In addition, Judy will never get to know me, or the similar struggles we face as women, mothers and daughters. Emotions and all that which is subjective have no place in this process. Only the rational, objective and impersonal treatise that leads to an accepted course of action fits on the bureaucratic form. This is about the creation of a client, the dehumanization of a person.

I collect information I require from Judy: names and birth dates of relevant family members, address, and the reason she is calling. Each piece of information is gathered to determine Judy's 'eligibility' for service, and if 'eligibility' is determined, to ensure that Judy's experiences and realities fit into institutional policy and procedural frameworks.

The Language of Administration

Contemporary advanced capitalist society is marked by a proliferation of professional groups. Each group has developed specialized language to mark its practice terrain. Social workers' specialized language - as with other professional groups such as doctors, lawyers and engineers - is rooted in the social relations of a patriarchal and a class society. Specialized language is one tool developed and used by professional classes to legitimize their authority and differentiate insiders from outsiders (de Montigny.) Usually clients find the specialized talk confusing and some feel the need to ask for clarification. Most remain silent because of the power differential between worker and client. This contributes to feelings of inferiority and powerlessness in clients, and a sense of being outsiders in a process that is about them.

The terms we use to define and describe our relationships with people with whom we come in contact in our work are institutional, professional and administrative property. 'Case management', 'intake', 'assessment', 'investigation', 'interview' and 'eligibility' are not the language of everyday life. When we meet a friend or a relative who is having difficulties, we do not 'interview' with an eye to 'assess' or 'investigate' their need for 'service outcomes'. We have conversations with them, there is intimacy and familiarity; we cry, laugh or console them. The language of administration is about depersonalization, objectivity and impartiality. It serves to keep a distance and a bureaucratic sense of order. In the world of relationships, whether between friends who help each other, or social workers who meet families in crisis, order and organization are not the norm. Human lives and relationships are about fluidity, change, variation and spontaneity.

The Construction of Client

In intake the process of 'client' creating begins. Judy's situation begins to be chipped away, until all that remains on paper about her are institutional realities. The social service institution is an example of what Dorothy Smith refers to as a ruling apparatus. The distinctive property of a ruling apparatus is its capacity to organize various human characteristics into standard forms for organizational action (Smith,

1987). The social worker is the institutional agent who objectifies Judy, according to the language and discourse of the organization. By fitting the client's problems and needs within institutional boundaries, organizational work can be carried out on and for the client. For example, if Judy's address does not fit within the geographic boundaries my office serves, I refer her to another office. If her child's age does not fit within the legislative definition of child she is again referred. If her explanation of her need for service does not fit the guidelines for ministry intervention, I determine that she falls outside the criteria for ministry service.

Throughout the initial phone conversation questions are asked that directly relate to the intake document (Appendix 2) and do not necessarily connect to Judy's realities or primary concerns. The document focuses on individual deficiencies or characteristics of parent and child; severity and frequency of abuse, parental behavior, vulnerability of child (in relation to parental behavior), and environmental conditions. This area directs workers generally to focus on poor housing choices by parents and does not support discussion of forced choices due to poverty or discussion about government funded ghettoized housing. The case decision and the risk assessment do not allow me to focus on support or prevention, but rather direct workers to focus on identifying a 'child in need of protective' services and services needed to reduce risk. If no risk exists the form directs me to do little and refuse the family for service. I am all too aware that the form directs me to provide services only if and when I can determine Judy's child is in need of protection from her. The ministry is clear in that its mandate is not to provide service to children who are not in need of protection, there are other agencies that will deal with whatever the problems the family may be experiencing.

The form organizes the interaction between us. If she begins to discuss something not relevant to the document in front of me, for example poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment or discrimination. I direct her back to that which is administratively relevant, for example personal inadequacies, poor parenting skills, alcoholism, drug addiction, violent spouse etc. What is relevant and immediate for her and her child is not central at this point.

As I speak to Judy I assess her responses primarily in light of the definitions of a 'neglectful' or 'abusive' mother. If she satisfies the administrative definitions that she is 'neglectful' or 'abusive', and her child may require protective action as defined by ministerial criteria, I agree to follow up with her. If Judy cannot demonstrate in this initial conversation any indication that her actions may place her child in a position of being 'neglected' or 'abused', in other words 'in need of protection' I will not accept her for ministry service.

Acceptance, though, places Judy in a paradoxical position - a stigmatized, vulnerable one, as she is now categorized as fitting the institutional criteria of 'neglectful' mother or her child requires 'protective' action. Through written forms, documents and narratives Judy is constructed as a 'neglectful' mother. The term 'neglect' renders invisible the everyday realities and frustrations of a mother raising her son, that are replaced by the socially and institutionally constructed images of 'neglect.' In addition the documents serve to preserve permanently the institutional 'truth' about Judy, not her everyday truths.

Dorothy Smith acknowledges that documents mediate between people and contemporary society to a large extent. Very little knowledge of people, events, social relations and powers flow directly from our own personal experiences, but rather arise through existing documentary and written information. In future, other social workers' knowledge about Judy will be mediated through the intake text about her. That text constructs her as a 'neglectful' parent and her child requires 'protective' action if she again becomes a client of the Ministry for Children and Families.

The documented construction of Judy as a neglectful parent becomes a permanent record in the institutional apparatus of child welfare. In order for her to continue receiving service she must be willing to let this narrow institutional definition about her failures as a mother remain documented. When requesting service for families in crisis I am frequently reminded that I must provide an overview of individual parenting deficiencies, and what attempts are being made to overcome their personal deficiencies. Highlighting environmental realities of families such as poverty or poor housing is not institutionally valid. Only personal deficiencies need be documented.

Ministry policy speaks to client service outcomes being consistent with strengthening and enhancing the independence of families in a respectful and dignified manner. However, the tools and forms provided to child welfare social workers appear to direct workers away from fulfilling the policy statements. It is the tools and the forms that dictate and direct the outcomes of practice and in essence become the driving force of practice. The policy becomes inconsequential.

Judy's Truth

As I continue my assessment of Judy, our conversation turns to her explanation of why she is struggling to provide for her son. Initially the problems she presents are of personal coping failures, but I realize her problems are much broader than the reasons she presents. Judy alludes to her difficulty providing basics for herself and her son (food, shelter and clothing) because she has lost her job; the negative peer relationships her son is developing in his neighborhood and her inability to have control over these because she is stuck in ghettoized housing projects due to poverty; and her inability to provide her son healthy, social stimulation outside the home for lack of money. As we discuss these issues, I know this information is irrelevant from the Ministry's perspective in determining service need. For her these are parenting realities. However, they are not issues that are relevant in determining eligibility for service. Judy needs to demonstrate how her individual actions place herself and Evan at risk.

The factors that define Judy as a 'client' are limited to 'characteristics of the child(ren)' and 'parental characteristics and dynamics.' My initial assessment of family dysfunction and child risk is limited to individual deficiencies. Any systemic factors that may contribute to neglect and abuse of her child, such as poverty, unemployment or inability to access affordable housing are not part of the intake repertoire. If they are to be included, Judy must demonstrate that she is the source of these problems, and that her poverty and substandard housing are because of her poor functioning and adjustment in society.

Judy and I meet so I can further 'assess' her eligibility for service. For her to be eligible for service her problems and issues must be compatible with the ministry's frameworks as set out in various intake and risk assessment forms, for example severity

of abuse, impact of parental behavior or location of alleged offender. If they are not, I will turn her away, or I will need to be very creative in framing her story to fit within narrow administrative frameworks and discourse that allow service. She has little control over this process. Her voice is not defined as important. The power to determine service rests with me, and my decision is determined by forms, regulations and standards. In essence my voice is also muted.

During my interview with Judy, I am unable to keep her focused on issues germane to the agency. She speaks of her life in poverty, lack of food for her and Evan, or having to choose between paying for heat or buying food. She speaks of having to give up her home because she can no longer afford it; of lost relationships because her son has disclosed his grandfather was sexually abusing him; and a job lost as a result of trying to support Evan with difficult behaviors stemming from the abuse.

I find it impossible to fit her 'neglect' into neat packaged bundles ready for child welfare work. As I listen to her pain and agony, I feel helpless. I also know that I have little power to enhance the quality of her life or help her protect her son. Her life is framed by larger political and economic systems of which we are all part and which through our everyday actions we perpetuate. I know that my child welfare position does not allow me to address these societal issues. It only permits me to make sense of her plight by fitting her individual deficiencies into the discourse of the organization.

The Manipulation Begins

While the public expects child welfare workers to protect children, their work is organized so as not to implicate a political and economic system which contributes to children being abused and neglected at the hands of their parents. We are agents of the ruling class. Social workers have become gatekeepers ensuring that family problems cannot be connected with powerful political and economic structures that perpetuate family breakdown.

I began the process of socializing Judy into the 'rules' and 'attributes' of being a neglectful and abusive parent through the completion of forms. Judy becomes known in Ministry discourse only by the categories that define child neglect, that may or may not be a true reflection of her family needs (Ng).

My employer's expectations that I protect Evan from Judy's neglect or abuse means that the problems related to poverty or housing must drop out of sight. Lack of money for food or appropriate housing; lost relationships due to the sexual abuse of her son; lost income; I have no influence over these matters. I frame solutions to the problems of Judy and Evan in a manner that highlights their individual deficiencies. Judy is referred for counseling at a local community center to deal with 'personal' issues. Evan is referred to a local society offering counseling to children who have been sexually abused. I know, however, that if Judy left my office assured that she had enough money to feed herself and her child, or that she was not going to be forced to move from their home because of lack of money, her traumas could be minimized. I know from listening to Judy's story that Evan's neglect is intensified by a welfare system purportedly set up to help her.

However, I succeed in framing the solution to Judy's problems around her personal deficiencies and inadequacies, by placing Judy in the administrative category of a neglectful mother. In the end I declared on the form that Evan was in need of protection, but requiring support services. In order to do this, however, I had to demonstrate on the forms that there was neglect, and without support services the neglect would intensify. Unfortunately, the environmental realities did not play any role in the family receiving service, only Judy's deficiencies. In order for the ministry to continue supporting Judy, I will need to continue to demonstrate that parental neglect continues.

The Administrative Work-up of Sybilla

For many workers the frustration and exhaustion in attempting to provide flexible and client-centered service is too great. One worker conveyed to me her journey and involvement with a teenage mother. The systemic roadblocks and barriers that she confronted left her feeling emotionally drained and angry. Eventually she began to blame the client. This is how the worker explained her dilemma. The following excerpt is a paraphrased outline of the worker's explanation of her client's background, and her frustration at the system's inability to truly help this individual.

Sybilla, (pseudonym) only knew life on the street. She only knew pain, abandonment and rejection. Nurturance and caring had never been part of her life. She had been physically, sexually and emotionally tortured by those closest to her and she came to believe this is how people treat other human beings. At the age of eleven Sybilla began living on the streets, selling her body for food or drugs, the two things that kept her alive. Her life was normal. After all, she knew nothing else. She came in contact with the child welfare institution when she was 14. She was a child under the Child Welfare Act. However, her life experiences were not reflected in the tools and apparatus provided to child welfare workers in assessing child abuse and neglect. Workers did not know how to respond to Sybilla, at one level a child, at another level an adult. She could not fit into prescribed services, and previous workers became frustrated at her for not fitting into the services they tried to offer. It was easier to direct frustration at her, rather than confronting and remaining connected to this youth's horrendous history, and fighting a system that could not respond. The workers - in accordance with institutional expectations - went through the motions of trying to protect her. The services were but an illusion, as she could not fit into what was offered. At sixteen she had her first child, and became a parent. Christine (pseudonym), the family service worker became involved (Social worker, March 1996).

This worker came to know Sybilla - her realities, pain, anguish and hopes. She listened and heard the experiences of the teen. The social worker saw her beyond the administrative definitions of a neglectful parent. She went beyond the boundaries laid out by the ministry in her involvement with this client.

The worker struggled to relate with Sybilla in a manner that was flexible and realistic given this youth's life history, culture and situation. The worker's struggle was that the bureaucratic system could not respond flexibly. It could only offer the standard administrative responses, and service within constrained regional budgets. The bureaucratic system, embodied in administrative jargon and forms and hierarchical, fragmented decision-making did not mirror this teen's life realities that contributed to her present situation. Ministerial forms and organizational structure are created for and by people who reflect class and culture totally different from the majority of those served by the child welfare institution. This worker's dilemma was that she had to fit Sybilla's experiences and solutions to problems into narrow ministerial administrative perspectives. For example, this youth, given her previous life experiences, could not cope with the

constraints and expectations of most foster parents. Most of these foster parents reflect white, middle class values and are unable to deal with a youth of Sybilla's chaotic background. Ironically, the Ministry would not support Sybilla in a more independent living arrangement because of her age and inability to demonstrate 'responsible' behavior. She was denied service because she could not fit into the narrow ministry expectations. The ministry responded rigidly rather than flexibility and the teen remained on the street. As the worker continued to struggle with the situation, she eventually offered a service that was prescribed in ministry protocols. Application was made for the Sybilla's child to become a continuing custody⁷ ward. Compounding the social worker's frustration were the conflicted and fragmented communication and policies between various ministries. Youth resources - the foster care⁸ division, could not provide a suitable home for the teen and her infant, and income assistance policies would not allow money for an appropriate home for her and her daughter. There were no available homes for youth struggling with drug addiction, but if she had been an adult, service could be provided. The rules guiding adult treatment facilities would not admit Sybilla for treatment. The worker had no resources to develop a safe place for the mother and her infant - control of these remained with others. This social worker was dependent on others who did not have the same subjective insight and understanding of this teen. Their decisions were based on objective, rational, impartial criteria.

The social worker came to realize that this youth's problem had to be organized and defined in accordance within the institutional vernacular of child welfare; a world of administrative concepts that define who the teen is, and how her problems should be dealt with in a manner which objectifies, and makes invisible her subjective, everyday realities. The client's realities were obliterated in the face of the institutional, administrative truths, that are considered 'real' truths. The workers' behavior, responses and actions must, in turn, be institutionally relevant, not subjectively relevant.

The Institutional Truth of Anne's Child Neglect

Like Judy, Anne came to my attention in my role as intake worker. She did not refer herself. As I later understood, she would not refer herself because of what she knows about the child welfare system.

The referral came to me strictly as a 'child protection' matter. It was purported that Anne was placing Jennifer, her 9 year old daughter, in dangerous situations. To protect Anne's identity, the reason for the referral is not disclosed. Suffice it to say that based on the information relayed to me, in conjunction with discussion with my supervisor, I concurred that the child was at-risk and follow-up was required. I immediately placed Anne in the arena of child protection, and the administrative and institutional document work-up of her began. I intruded in Anne's life uninvited. The Child, Family and Community Services Act gives me the authority to enter Anne's life. She is given no choice. I began the process of objectifying Anne as a neglectful parent who placed her child at risk of physical danger.

Anne's Truth

In my first conversation with Anne, she said that she was all too aware of the potential risks to her child. However, as I later discovered, she spoke of risk to herself and her child in a much broader context than I could possibly see. After all, the only information I had about the life of Anne and her child was that presented by the complainant. Previous file information presented this family from an institutional standpoint of child neglect, and did not speak about the context of their family life.

Anne insisted that she was able to protect her child, and that no harm would come to her. She told me what she was doing to ensure her daughter's safety. However, because I separated incidents of neglect or abuse from the overall context of her everyday life experiences, I attached significance only to those realities that fell within the narrow, legally defined scope of neglect. I told her I did not believe she could adequately protect her daughter by continuing in her current situation. My perspective was from my place in the institutional apparatus, and through this lens I determined that her child was at risk. My knowledge of her everyday, private worlds with her daughter was minimal. As I eventually understood, Anne and I viewed the risk to her child from quite different

perspectives. She viewed it in the broad context of their poverty, unemployment, societal and organizational discrimination she confronted as a single mother on welfare, and the indifference she felt from a welfare system that she had previously turned to for help.

Coming to Know Anne

As I assessed Anne to be a mother who placed her child at 'risk', I determined that she required continued ministry intervention and supervision. Many child protection social workers might have intervened by removing Anne's child. The decisions to proceed with such action are rather subjective, (despite efforts to objectify them) and depend on the balancing of parental rights and the rights of the child. Although the legislation sets priority on protecting children, the courts' interpretation of the Act have been quite liberal on the side of parental rights. These are factors with which child protection workers must deal. Given the Act, the realities of the courts and what I perceived to be action that would be in the best interest of Anne's child, a removal did not occur. Instead service to the family was initiated.

I chose to maintain a relationship with Anne and came to know her better. Initially I was in contact with her weekly, through visits to her home, and as she began to trust me, she began to talk about her life. My relationship with her was no longer solely embedded in organizational forms of consciousness, which keep people distanced, but became grounded in my subjective knowledge of her life. She spoke of childhood experiences of frightful emotional neglect and sexual and physical abuse; and of the denigration she received from a welfare system she turned to for help as an adult. It further victimized her. Anne spoke of counselors who compelled her to do things she felt unable to do. When she was unable to follow through she was rejected and made to feel further worthlessness. She talked of counselors who would not or could not understand her struggles; of a welfare system - that when she left an abusive partner to protect herself and her child - set her up in poverty so she could no longer provide for their most basic needs. She spoke of her attempts to protect both herself and her daughter from poverty, from an abusive father, from discrimination because they were a 'welfare' family, attempts which were never recognized or acknowledged.

Anne acknowledged the difference between our relationship and her relationship with previous workers was that she felt respected and heard. She felt a comfort in calling when life was rough, for instance when she ran out of money for food, or couldn't afford to pay her hydro bill. Her previous experiences were of being judged for poor budgeting, or worse, workers not wanting to acknowledge her realities of poverty. At times I felt overwhelmed and helpless because I had little ability to alleviate these problems for Anne. I must admit I understood that it would be easier and more manageable for me to turn my back on Anne's true dilemmas, and emphasize deficiencies that reflect more concrete, manageable, personal inadequacies.

A child welfare mandate involves a search for parenting deficiencies as opposed to strengths. It is not surprising that successful parenting efforts are missing from case files. For example, Anne's efforts to leave an abusive husband were never recorded in the file. It is not the worker's job to account for good mothering, but those features of a mother's behavior that establish the existence of neglect (Swift).

The child welfare mandate directs the attention of the worker to the issue of neglect through a variety of organizational routes, including the layout of reporting forms and instructions, the principles of the legislations the caseworker is authorized to enforce, exposure to child welfare literature and training and so on. As a result of these processes, neither the case records or the academic literature about neglect includes discussion of how successful caring is managed by these mothers (Swift, 1991, p.225)

Anne's Dependence

It is true that Anne continues to be a mother who may place her child at risk, such as leaving her daughter unattended (frequently due to no money for childcare) or involvement with questionable partners, and some of her parental actions warrant concern. The complexities of modern life place many parents in a difficult position of protecting and caring for their children. For mothers such as Anne who have few resources, the risk of parenting failure is substantially greater.

As I came to know Anne better, how the system had failed her became clearer. The narrow focus of my initial intervention had prevented me from understanding the

systemic realities facing Anne and her children. The institution of child welfare does not embrace an understanding of a client's lived experience.

In the problem solving and scientific work of social workers and other professionals, moments of people's lives are sliced off from the relations and ground of their occurrence to become identified as discrete and 'problems' having an independent existence and ontology apart from people's daily lives (de Montigny, 1995, p. 83).

Young children are totally dependent on adults for the fulfillment of their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. This can place them in positions of risk. Dependence places one in a position of vulnerability. Anne is also vulnerable because she is dependent on a welfare system for survival. She does not receive enough money to pay her rent, so she takes money she obtains for food to pay the difference. Her total monthly cheque is less than a \$1000.00, of which \$600.00 is required for rent. The remaining \$400.00 must cover all other expenditures, food, clothing, entertainment, transportation, school needs for her daughter. There just isn't enough, and when she asks for more she is criticized for poor budgeting. As an adult, however she relies on this system to support her family's basic needs. Her narrative describes a system that has thwarted, rather than helped her to raise her daughter. As a single mother she will likely never shed the shackle of dependence. In all likelihood the expectation that she protect her children from abuses is a task that she, will not achieve, as she will continue to be battered by the system on which she is dependent. Her inability to safeguard herself from mistreatment at the hands of the system will diminish the likelihood of her being able to protect her child from harm.

I also came to understand that if Anne failed and her child ended up being harmed, the blame will be laid squarely at her feet. The social welfare system will not be implicated for its lack of support of a family without basic resources.

Fusing the Professional, Personal and Bureaucratic

Child welfare social workers enter the lives of families as experts in defining and solving problems. Assessments are carried out without recognition of the value of the clients' own experiences (Bricker-Jenkins; Wood). In my experience, workers in the child welfare organization often adopt the organization's values and beliefs without realizing

the implications this has for themselves or their clients. The bureaucratic, organizational values and consciousness are internalized through subtle, or in many cases openly, coercive processes that can leave workers feeling as disempowered, disillusioned and battered as the families they serve. It seems to me that these oppressive bureaucratic processes, entrenched through the organization's discourse and structure are unwittingly internalized and absorbed by workers, who unconsciously pass similar systemic oppression on to clients. Although the basis of worker and client oppression is rooted in similar organizational forms, neither group grasps the parallels in their experiences. The similarity of their place in the institution remains invisible to both.

Organizational Discourse

As a social worker who has worked in ministries mandated to provide child protection services in two Canadian provinces, I have come to recognize that although each province and territory delivers services under different legislative mandates, the generic problems confronted by workers in the provision of child welfare services are quite similar.

Irrespective of legislation or policies that flow from it, social workers are expected to construct clients, primarily women, so that their attributes and needs fit administrative, institutional structure and format. Child welfare services are defined by categories in documents, ministerial forms, protocols and standards, as if the discourse has a universal character and is not gender biased. The work makes sense for the organization, but in many cases is frustrating to workers and meaningless to clients. Organizational structures and apparatus used to define neglect or abuse do not readily fit the realities of everyday lives of workers and families. The child welfare worker's work is not expected to begin with clients' everyday experiences. It starts from the theoretical, ideological and bureaucratic orientations of the organization, enmeshed in patriarchal values which are imposed on clients (Bricker-Jenkins; Wood).

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

Social work is deeply enmeshed in the structures of inequality that exist in the wider world, including the inequality between women and men. The dominant models of theory and practice are inherently sexist and oppressive to women. In addition, social workers' location in government or government-funded agencies makes their participation in the struggle for women's equality very problematic (Wharf, 1989, p. 145).

Child welfare social work practice and the relationships between worker and clients is structured by and can be said to mirror a system of persistent inequalities experienced by subordinate groups, particularly as the system consigns certain groups of people to poverty and grudgingly provides for public service (Lipsky, 1980). In every transaction involving workers with families, in every form completed, in every intervention in the life of a child, political and economic forces beyond the individual shape the outcome. Child welfare agencies are part of a larger system that helps reproduce prevailing inequitable conditions between individuals and government organizations.

This research has highlighted the complex of conflicting values, ideologies and philosophies inherent in child welfare social work, specifically discord between practice, policy and broader societal values. It is in this dissonant environment that child welfare social work is practiced.

The Research Question Revisited

This research began from a personal interest to better understand the practice of social workers in a child welfare system. It was apparent to me during the eight years I worked in the field that there were significant conflicts and contradictions between the stated goals for and the actual outcomes of practice. My personal experience as a social worker in the system led me to question the organization, structure and various written texts that guided my practice. At the beginning I was uncertain of the basis for my turmoil. This research has helped uncover some truths for myself about child welfare practice.

One of the major struggles was finding a manageable question on which to base the research. During my initial exploration of ministry legislation and policy I discovered that principles entrenched in these documents that guide the work of child welfare social workers, and in many respects parallel the values and ethics of the profession, were not adhered to. This was particularly obvious when I examined the outcomes of work with families. It was my desire to understand better this line of fault that provided the framework for this research.

The introduction highlighted the service delivery and outcome principles of the Ministry for Children and Families. The services offered are intended to achieve the following outcomes for families who receive assistance.

Families will be stronger, more confident and have increased capacity for independent functioning.

Families will acquire new skills and abilities.

The quality of parent-child relationships will have been improved.

Families will be better able to meet the developmental needs of their children.

The unnecessary, out-of-home placement of a child will have been prevented.

Families will be better able to utilize their network of social support.

Families are better able to address conditions in their community that are detrimental to family well-being.

Support strategies will encourage utilization of existing family strengths and capabilities.

The family's social support network will be used to identify resources for meeting and achieving aspirations. (MSS Policy Manual, Vol. 2, Family Support Services p. 4(a).1.1 & 1.2).

Although my research was proposed when the Child and Family Services Act (1980) was the legislation that in effect guided practice, examination of the new legislation, The Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) and the policies that

flow from this document indicate similar philosophical principles. The new Act, although placing greater emphasis on ensuring the protection of children from neglect and abuse, is more explicit in its commitment to family and community input and partnerships in decision making. The guiding principles of the new act are:

Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm.

A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.

If with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided.

The child's view should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made.

Kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible.

The cultural identity of children should be preserved.

Decisions related to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner (Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996).

These ministerial service principles and the incongruity between practice outcomes assisted me in framing the question that would guide this research.

In what way does practice with families in the Family and Children Services system reflect the Ministry of Social Service's philosophical beliefs about improving parent-child relationships; enhancing conditions that lend to increased confidence, independence and strengthening of families and assisting families to acquire new skills and abilities?

The Research Methodology Revisited

The research was grounded in structural feminist principles, and the methodology chosen, institutional ethnography, espouses a method of inquiry that places women's knowledge and experience at the center of the study. At the outset I was anxious in my

use of this approach. However, as I have proceeded with the work, I have come to feel comfortable and confident in my choice. I recognize institutional ethnography not simply as methodology to be used within the parameters of formal research, but as a broad framework in understanding and experiencing the world in which I live. I have also discovered that institutional ethnography fits with my own view of the world. At the onset of the research I did not fully understand this, however, over the past three years this has become increasingly clear.

By incorporating a structural, feminist approach to the research, and by continuing to use this lens to view the world I live and work, I have come to understand better the basis for and maintenance of inequality and inequity in our society. The literature has assisted me in recognizing that inequality of access to and ownership of resources and capital is based primarily on gender, class and race and is intrinsic to the continued success of dominant ideologies that reflect capitalist, patriarchal values. In order to understand the conflicts and contradictions in child welfare work it was important to understand the deeper roots of inequality and inequity. This exploration of literature and my findings in the research has helped me understand how existing ideology dictates a gendered division of labor. Those who care are primarily women, and the reduced value attached to this role has significant impact on their monetary compensation in the market place. This reduced value of women's roles and its impact on monetary compensation frequently places women in positions of poverty and unequal wealth and power vis-à-vis their male counterparts, and therefore dependent on others for survival, either a male economic provider or the social welfare system. The likelihood of a female-headed family attaining independence is not promising. This research points to the fact that families who primarily come into contact with the child welfare system are headed by single females, and as indicated through the everyday experiences of workers, the outcome of their practice reflects existing political and economic ideology. Subsequently, clients, even with the involvement of the child welfare institution, will likely remain dependent and weak, with little improvement in skills and abilities or improvement in parent-child relations.

The examination of organizational and managerial approaches to child welfare service delivery reflect principles of control, inequity and inequality with the greatest power and authority resting with those at the upper echelons of the hierarchy (bureaucratization of the work). These positions are dominated by males who enact the values of patriarchy. Women survive at these levels after demonstrating their commitment to these ideals.

The practice of front-line child welfare social workers embodies these patriarchal ideological tenets. The true outcomes of their practice are often indiscernible to them, a practice that does not lead to strengthening families, and in fact may lead to furthering weakening of parent-child relationships.

Research Findings

This research has assisted in highlighting how front-line workers are controlled, shaped and directed in their work by hierarchical structure, management, workload and an voluminous array of written (paper and electronic) discourse. Workers often unconsciously impose similar control on clients, as their practice in the child welfare institution is the embodiment of the institutional apparatus in which these social workers work. For many child welfare social workers the outcomes of their practice emerge as contradictory to their personal beliefs, as well as to stated philosophies that guide the organization of their profession. This dissonance can be explained by the subtle control of practice outcomes by the bureaucratic nature of working conditions as well as unmanageable caseloads that direct workers to focus only on personal problems of clients at the expense of a practice approach that incorporates systemic barriers for parents and children. Although workers and clients find themselves experiencing similar facets of oppression and control in the institution, few are able to identify with the similarities.

There is an expanding literature that regards the outcomes of social work practice contradictory to the goals and aspirations of a profession whose mission is to work with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society (Wharf, 1990; 1993). In order to comprehend the roots of this conflict, workers must explore how practice is organized by social relations that are not necessarily readily visible to them. It is presumed that by

better understanding the root of conflict between practice outcomes and stated professional or organizational philosophies, child welfare social workers will be in a better position to understand their place and role in the institutional apparatus of child welfare. For social workers to serve the families and children they work with better, they must understand the larger political, social and economic contexts in which they live and work. Bringing visibility to these contexts makes it easier for workers to identify and understand the dilemmas they face in their day-to-day work with children and families in the child welfare system.

Although my own previous experience led me to this research, and that personal experience led me to question practice outcomes, I anticipated that some aspects of practice would provide insights of successful fulfillment of policy. Unfortunately this was not so. Workers who spoke of their efforts to advocate for and advance the rights of families frequently found their efforts minimized or even dismissed by the organization. Some spoke of coercive methods that directed them to change their approach away from advocacy for clients to a more standard bureaucratic approach to practice. I have found my efforts to develop and maintain commitment to a practice that is client-centered at times exhausting and laborious. I have frequently found myself questioning my endurance to stay focused and committed to such an approach.

Written Text and Organizational Structure: Institutional or Residual?

One research finding that differed from my initial belief was the roles ministry legislation and policy play in directing practice of child welfare social workers. I began this research believing that written text, legislation and policies directed workers away from working in the best interest of families. My personal experience in Sheshatshit with the firing of four workers for not following program policy had entrenched this personal belief. I now believe that the dissonance created for workers between the philosophies set out in British Columbia child welfare legislation and policy and the outcomes of their practice are not created by the written text, but by other factors innate to bureaucratic work environments. This research, through the voices of workers, has assisted me to understand the incongruities between the written text and the organization and structure

of child welfare work. The legislation is reflective of an institutional approach in the delivery of child welfare services; a doctrine that service should reflect comprehensive community inclusion in identification of need. The structure and organization of the work, however, influence practice to follow residual approaches. It is this division between the values of the written text specifically the Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) and the organization and structure of the work that creates dissonance between expected and actual outcomes of practice. As Doig points out, in order to lessen the gulf between the two, the enactment of the 1996 Child, Family and Community Services Act requires a system that can support the intent of this legislation.

The new options and alternatives defined in the act, together with current policy and practice, require a system that supports ministry staff in their daily work...the system developed must make clear, both to ministry staff and to the community, the parameters of our mandate, the services we provide, and the available resources. This system can then assist communities to evolve and develop ways of supporting children, youth and families (Doig, pp. 2- 3).

It is critical to have a service delivery system that corresponds with the values built into the legislation. This was recognized by those instrumental in writing this document. To date that system has not been created. The restructuring of the ministry from Social Services to Children and Families has thus far been but an illusion of change. The new ministry still reflects a patriarchal system, one dominated by hierarchical, linear, narrow approaches to decision making and guided by standardized rules, forms and regulations. It is an organizational structure built on a foundation that values detached, objective, visible approaches conflicts with the complex, subjective realities of peoples' lived experiences.

Other areas tied to bureaucratic work conditions were also identified as contributing to the dissonance between stated goals and practice outcomes. First, service philosophies and requirements as promoted by the Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) far outweigh the resources available to meet the expectations outlined in it. Workers are required to carry large caseloads. This coupled with the complex, involved needs of families has significant implications for service outcomes. Given the large volume of families requiring service and the lack of resources to meet the demand,

workers are directed to prioritize that which merits service. Prioritizing service is no longer part of professional assessment, but is increasingly determined by ministry forms and technological tools. These standardized institutional configurations direct workers to reject assessments that incorporate client-centered, contextual realities of families and focus only on personal problems. The realities of families and children are rendered invisible because acceptance of the importance of a broad-based understanding of peoples' lives requires an approach to practice that will allow time to understand and change systemic as well as personal problems. Inadequate resources do not allow for holistic assessments but only for those features that continue to expose personal deficiencies. This approach prevents social workers from connecting systemic problems with personal deficiencies.

Second, heightening public expectation for accountability in spending public dollars and increased legalization in child welfare has lead workers to spend more time justifying decisions, often in the form of a voluminous array of administrative duties. These administrative activities drain time from work with families.

Third, bureaucratization of the work has led to those at the front-line who work closest with families having less input in decision making regarding their needs. Day-to-day decisions are often made and increasingly carried out by those with little or no contact with the realities of families in crisis. Decisions are frequently driven by available dollars, not what is deemed in the best interest of children and families. Bureaucratization of work allows decisions to be made with little subjectivity or compassion, and encourages objective, detached decision-making. Gerry Fewsters' statement is apropos here.

Let us not lull ourselves into believing that bureaucracies were ever intended to be responsible and caring institutions. By their very nature they are designed to identify and eradicate any vestige of human feeling or emotion that might contaminate their allocated mandates...And that's the way we want them impartial, impersonal, impassive and impenetrable. All the better to implement legislation, dispense resources and dish out licenses. In this way governments can do their business and we never have to figure these things out for ourselves....By the same token those known as 'bureaucrats' are systematically depersonalized and to take their place within a cold-blooded hierarchy in which the primary obligation at each level is to protect the level above....There is no place in this fortress

for “feeling” or anything remotely "personal" (Times Colonist, Oct. 11, 1996, p. A15).

The administrative/bureaucratic ministry structures, including the forms, standards and computer technology plus the priority of the safety of the child at the expense of supporting families to care for children and the ever increasing workload have conspired, albeit unintentionally, to thwart the implementation of ministry philosophy .

Impact of Research on Practice

This research has not only helped me better understand the conflicts and contradictions between the various aspects of child welfare work, but has helped me to become aware of the significance of the convergence of personal experience and political reality. Although the data for this research were collected over a two month period, I have come to appreciate that practice success has a great deal to do with honoring and remaining committed to ongoing learning. Successful practice emerges when incorporated into a framework that also embodies learning and teaching others. Although the formal data gathering ended on April 30, 1996, the role I assumed of student and researcher has not been abandoned. Every day in my work with coworkers and clients or at home with family members and friends I not only practice as a child welfare social worker but continue to research and learn. This is the business of personal and professional growth.

In addition to practice embodying learning and teaching, workers must consciously embrace an ideological framework that guides their practice. All too often workers do not ground themselves in or value the need to ascribe to a practice philosophy. Adhering to philosophical beliefs for practice fosters a commitment to the profession, and the part one plays in it. I have committed to a structural, feminist framework to assist me to understand the world I live and work, a framework which also provides an entry point to client service. Grounding and remaining connected to a philosophical framework keeps me connected to why I chose social work and specifically child welfare social work.

This research has highlighted that my dilemma as is with others who commit to a structuralist approach is rooted in the ideological conflict between a ministry enmeshed in patriarchal, capitalist values that focus practice on individual, objective, visible, separate and linear approaches and frameworks that focus on broader, integrative, subjective and collective approaches. The research process has assisted me to understand this line of fault.

When I began this research I stated that one of my goals for it was not only to describe and interpret social reality but to play a small part, if only ever so small, in changing it. Furthermore, my intent was to transform the interpretation of reality 'with' rather than 'for' others, in this case front-line child welfare social workers. I have reflected on whether I have accomplished this lofty goal. During the two month period of the research I did not. Two years after the completion of the formal research, I continue to work in the same office with some workers who were part of the research, but also many new ones. I continue to pursue the task I began during the research, to incorporate learning, research and teaching in my practice as a front-line child welfare social worker and I believe I have had an impact on practice in the office. I have come to recognize that change is a tediously slow process. I do believe, however, that workers in this office are more aware and open to the broader frameworks which impact our lives and the families with whom we work.

Ideological Change

One of the areas this research identified was inadequate resources to carry out the work of child welfare. Workers frequently complained about the lack of resources to meet the needs of families in crisis. They were frustrated and angry that they could not provide an adequate level of support and intervention for families due to their caseload numbers, increasing administrative work and shrinking dollars to provide alternate services. They were even more frustrated that they were the ones blamed for being unable to offer the kind of support required of families. Understandably, they often responded to this by shrinking further away from families and communities.

What was interesting, however, was that workers appeared to come to accept these inadequacies, and in turn expected families to make do with what was available. They would frequently defend their work and their employer to the community and families, and did not discuss openly with the community the realities of their work.

Workers appeared unaware of the role they play in allowing systemic inadequacies to be blamed on individuals. Through the practice of maintaining secrecy and silence about the realities of work, rather than developing partnerships with clients, families and communities, systemic problems continue to be blamed on staff who are perceived as incompetent. A commitment to changing practice to be more open and involved in the community may be a first step in educating the community about systemic inadequacies. This would point families and communities to refocus on systemic problems rather than on personal deficiencies of workers.

This research has helped me identify that one of the keys to transforming worker behavior is a changed ideology, one that enables workers to overcome the pressures to accept inadequate resources. In addition, this research has confirmed for me that workers must work with clients and the community to demystify the agency and the work carried out in it. Clients should be provided with insight into those areas that shape practice, and workers should actively work to simplify their work processes. This is a challenge, as the organization of the work including caseload numbers, administrative duties and bureaucratization discourages workers in doing this.

It is acknowledged that increased resources may not necessarily improve working conditions and reduce caseload significantly. Studies identify that as resources increase, demand for service matches this. Workers are still faced with large numbers of clients and the task of diluting services. Lipsky (1980) and Lundy (1989), argue that worker training should not only focus on practice and skill but also to help workers understand the nature of bureaucratic working conditions.

Contradictions of Child Welfare

A family's need for assistance in caring for its children is often created by the existing welfare system. For example, the maintenance of poverty through income

assistance policies and rates; inadequate federal and provincial housing programs; and the continuation of underfinanced and fragmented out-of-home child care. Workers face the dilemma of confronting these overwhelming realities only to discover they lack adequate support, time and tools to bring change in these areas. Emotional and financial survival leads them to divorce themselves from these broader, out of reach issues and to deal with more manageable personal deficiencies in clients. This perpetuates the myth that problems are personal in nature and ensures that workers do not implicate larger political and economic forces in the continuation of child abuse and neglect.

The ethnographies of client intake highlight this, (including manual and computerized intake systems and risk assessment processes) where an emphasis is focused on personal issues. Childhood abuse, spousal violence, alcohol and drug usage and physical and emotional problems of parent are areas accentuated in child welfare. Issues related to poverty, inferior housing, unemployment or underemployment and racism are not issues of concern on intake or risk assessment documents. When I attempted to raise these issues during the research most workers had little or no understanding of the need to include this analysis in their work. Public issues remained invisible to them.

Oppression

Throughout the research an underlying theme has been the oppression of both workers and client families. Workers, through their comments, understand their own oppression by the system in which they work. What they lack is awareness of the root causes of this oppression. They frequently complain about the lack of respect they receive in the system, and the continued expectation that they perform in overworked conditions. What appears less understood is their understanding of the internalization of oppression and how they become oppressors of the families with whom they work. Analysis of the child welfare intake process highlights the beguiling and often unconscious oppression of families by workers in the system. Most workers do not give much thought to the rationale for the intake process. It appears to them to be common sense practice. Deeper analyses highlight how intake processes direct workers to take

institutional control of problem definition and problem solving, with little opportunity for clients' voices to be heard. It is through the use of institutional tools such as risk assessment, intake forms and computerization that these controls are maintained.

Workers must understand oppression, and the role they play as both victims and conveyers of it. By understanding the similarity of their own oppression and their oppression of the families they work with, they can begin to grasp the merit of collective action with other powerless groups. Collective action can lead to the development of shared visions of world humanity and justice, and broad-based support for reshaping existing economic and political institutions; institutions which advance inequity and inequality based on gender, class, culture and race. This has been called social empathy (Wharf, 1989).

By social empathy Carniol means not only avoiding the all-too-common practice of blaming the victim but providing information about the reasons for unemployment, poverty, poor housing and violence to women. Social workers can become educators. They can use their counseling skills not only to provide emotional and other support to clients expressing their 'private troubles', but also help their clients understand the connections between their troubles and... 'public issues' (Wharf, 1989).

The overall challenge for social workers is to recognize the possibilities of alternatives to existing dominant beliefs.

There is a time to admire the persuasive power of an influential idea, and there is a time to fear its hold over us. The time to worry is when the idea is so widely shared that we no longer even notice it, when it is so deeply rooted that it feels to us like plain common sense. At the point when objections are not answered anymore because they are no longer even raised, we are not in control: We do not have the idea; it has us (Author unknown).

My Struggle

As a social worker who struggles daily to make visible and to connect the individual and social, personal and political dynamics, I am frustrated with the scarcity of tools and frameworks provided social workers to identify and embrace these connections. I believe that practice effectiveness comes from accepting perspectives that assist

workers to understand the profound connections between individual problems and larger social, political and economic issues.

This research has opened my eyes to where I have been as an employee of the government run child welfare organization. It has changed my practice significantly. I am conscious of identifying structural factors; poverty, ghettoized government subsidized housing projects, under-financed child-care or racial discrimination that detract from a family becoming healthier and stronger. I struggle to ensure that in the my written and administrative work, I not only emphasis parental limitations, but write about the systemic barriers. As I have come to understand many may not be interested in these client realities, but it is important to document this information so that it does not become lost and to let clients know that their voice is heard.

Prior to this research, I recall my experiences of anger, frustration and cynicism directed towards parents and children who appeared to choose to remain passively in a pattern of dysfunctional behavior. This research has opened my eyes to the enormity of systemic barriers that face families in the child welfare system and how exhausting and oppressive it is for those families to confront and overcome these barriers. As a worker who is now able to make visible the broader structural barriers to healthy family functioning of those involved in the Ministry for Children and Families this has created a new personal anguish and frustration. It is the frustration of working with families who are consistently and persistently oppressed in their efforts to achieve success. I believe, however, my anger is now more appropriately directed. Many workers still believe it is easier to focus on personal deficiencies and reject the significance of systemic factors. Through this research and personal inquiry I have come to understand that stress remains high when we focus only on personal change of our clients with no insight into the larger barriers affecting their lives. Stress and cynicism grow because the focusing on the individual without commitment to the political, rarely results in an assessment of the type of change needed. Then we begin to blame and despise our clients for remaining stuck in dysfunctional behavior.

A Final Note

The challenges of pursuing this research were at times significant, both from a professionally and personally. I discovered many painful aspects of the work I engage in, and often found direct conflict and contradiction between my work as a public employee, my ethics of a professional social worker, and my personal values. In addition, during the period of the research my father passed away after a lengthy battle with cancer, which resulted in a six month absence from the research.

My commitment to continue the struggle, however, stemmed from a need to validate the experiences of social workers as well as many of the women and children I have met through my role as a child welfare social worker, and to authenticate their realities of abuse and oppression. In my struggle I have discovered a much broader web of systemic abuse and oppression. I have discovered many layers of oppression, and how we are all simultaneously victims and conveyers of it. I have uncovered oppression of workers by those above them in the bureaucracy, and how workers pass on similar conditions to those below them - the families and children they serve. I have discovered the privilege of learning and better understanding my true place in the child welfare institution from both my coworkers and the families with whom I work.

Endnotes

¹ Throughout this research child welfare workers and social work child welfare practitioners will refer to those social workers working for the Ministry for Children and Families (previously Ministry of Social Services) delivering legislatively mandated services to children and families.

² The Welfare of Children's Act (1972) was the legislation that directed service pertaining to child protection.

³ Ministry unless otherwise noted will refer to the Ministry for Children and Families created in September 1996.

⁴ Includes all right, duties and responsibilities of a parent.

⁵ Director means a person designated under section 91 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act to carry out responsibilities pertaining to the act.

⁶ Means the Provincial Court.

⁷ Means an order under section 41, 42, 49 or 60 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act placing a child in the continuing custody of a Director.

⁸ Means a home in which a child is placed by a director and who by agreement has assumed responsibility for the child's day-to-day care.

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Appendix 1

3898 Lancaster Rd.
Victoria, B.C.
V8X-2B3
(phone) 477-4320

To whom it may concern,

I am seeking your approval to participate in a graduate studies thesis research project through the Human and Social Development faculty at the University of Victoria. The project is entitled Feminist Enquiry: The Construction of Family and Children's Services. The research will examine whether the practices of social workers within the family and children's service division of the Ministry of Social Services leads to service outcomes as stated in Ministerial policy. These outcomes speak to the strengthening of families; creating conditions that lead to the independence of families in crisis; and working with families in a manner that enhances their dignity and respect. In addition this research will attempt to examine and better understand the impact that Ministry structures have on worker practices with families. Examples of structure include bureaucracy, policies and regulations, workload size and the evolution of professionalism within social work. A copy of my research proposal is available for you to read if you wish to do so.

I have chosen a participatory observational approach to collecting data. In essence this means that for a period of six weeks I will carry dual roles within the office, that of a front-line intake child and family services worker and a researcher. At no time will I ask any questions about your personal life, and I will not be evaluating your work. The purpose of this research is to acknowledge your experiences, impressions, observations and thoughts about the impact that Ministry structures have on social work practice with families. Discussions with you will occur in both formal (i.e. weekly team meetings) and informal situations. The level of your participation will be a personal choice, and at no time will you be obliged to engage in these discussions.

Although the Ministry has approved this research you are in no way compelled to participate in it. You may withdraw at any time during this research project. If you are willing to be involved you are asked to sign the consent provided. All information gathered will be confidential. At no time will comments be attributed to individuals in this thesis. If you have any concerns or questions they can be directed to me or to my thesis supervisor John Cossom. He can be reached at 721-8043.

If you do not wish to be part of the research please indicate below. The information you provide below will be kept confidential, and no-one within the Ministry will be made aware of your decision.

All staff participating in the project will have an opportunity to review a draft copy of the final report if you so wish to ensure that it reflects in an ethical manner the intent of this research outlined in this letter.

Gillian Mullins (BSW)
Researcher, University of Victoria.

I consent to participate in this research project _____

I do not consent to participate in this research project _____

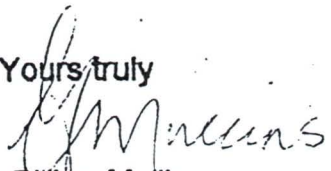
1720 Sprucewood Place
Victoria,
British Columbia,
V8n 1H3

Jane Cowell,
Regional Director,
Regional Office'

Nov. 2, 95

Further to our recent discussion attached find a copy of a draft proposal of my thesis for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of the masters program of the school of human and social development at the University of Victoria. This work has been in process since September, 1994, and since the research involves practices of social workers in the family and children services system, I have involved Ron Pollard on my thesis committee. He has been most helpful in supporting and directing me in the development of this research. My committee feels the time has arrived to approach the Ministry in an effort to obtain approval to proceed with the research. I would like to arrange to meet with you to discuss the possibility of gaining such approval. I can be reached during the day at 387-1127 or in the evening at 721-0205.

I look forward to hearing from you after you have had a opportunity to review the proposal to discuss the logistics of proceeding.

Yours truly

Gillian Mullins



MEMORANDUM

To: Gillian Mullins
Social Worker
c/o Victoria East F&CS Area Office

Date: 95 11 29

Re: Master's Research

I am supportive of your research for your master's thesis. As we discussed you have my approval to proceed with the following proviso:

- 1) That Hank is able to find a placement for you in an F&CS protection office.
- 2) That the Team you are working with consents to being involved.

Best of luck and I look forward to your findings.

Jane Cowell
Regional Director
Region L

JC/smb

pc: Hank VanderPol, Acting AM, L3A
Ron Pollard, AM, L2A

SERVICES FOR PEOPLE
WITH MENTAL HANDICAPS

DEC - 8 1995

165

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES
C2 - 770 BAY STREET
VICTORIA, BC V8T 1R1

o

Appendix 2



CLIENT FAMILY NAME	CONTROL NO.
	423797

A. NATURE OF CALLER INFORMATION (check one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> a) Protection report <input type="checkbox"/> b) Request for family support services <input type="checkbox"/> c) Request for SPMH child services <input type="checkbox"/> d) Special Needs Daycare <input type="checkbox"/> e) Request for youth services <input type="checkbox"/> f) Adoption	DO NOT REGISTER <input type="checkbox"/> g) Investigation directed by Medical Health Officer <input type="checkbox"/> h) School Board Employee Investigation <input type="checkbox"/> i) Investigation In Child Care Resource	No. of Children Interviewed
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

B. INITIAL ASSESSMENT BY WORKER
(check one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> a) Assess need for support services <input type="checkbox"/> b) Make referral <input type="checkbox"/> c) No further action	} complete boxes C, D, G, H below	<input type="checkbox"/> d) Investigate child's need for protection <input type="checkbox"/> e) Protocol Investigation	} complete boxes D → H
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------

C. NO INVESTIGATION REASON (*if a protection report was indicated in box A and no investigation is being done, give reason)

<input type="checkbox"/> a) Currently being investigated <input type="checkbox"/> b) Previously investigated <input type="checkbox"/> c) Police only investigation	<input type="checkbox"/> d) Outside of statutory definition <input type="checkbox"/> e) Referral <input type="checkbox"/> f) Assess need for support services	D. NOTIFICATION TO POLICE: POLICE FILE #
		POLICE INVESTIGATION: a <input type="checkbox"/> YES b <input type="checkbox"/> NO
		JOINT INVESTIGATION: <input type="checkbox"/>

E. CHILD PROTECTION CONCERN (SECTION 13) (check up to 4 boxes)

<input type="checkbox"/> a) Physical harm or likelihood by parent <input type="checkbox"/> b) Sexual abuse/exploitation or likelihood by parent <input type="checkbox"/> c) Parent not protecting from abuse <input type="checkbox"/> d) Neglect by parent with physical harm or likelihood <input type="checkbox"/> e) Emotional harm by parent <input type="checkbox"/> f) Deprived of necessary health care	<input type="checkbox"/> g) Parent refusal to treatment of condition <input type="checkbox"/> h) Parent unable/unwilling to care for child <input type="checkbox"/> i) Child absent from home in danger <input type="checkbox"/> j) Parent deceased: inadequate provisions <input type="checkbox"/> k) Child abandoned: inadequate provisions <input type="checkbox"/> l) Expired agreement: parent unable/unwilling to care
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

F. INVESTIGATION OUTCOME (check up to 4 boxes)

<input type="checkbox"/> a) Physical harm or likelihood by parent <input type="checkbox"/> b) Sexual abuse/exploitation or likelihood by parent <input type="checkbox"/> c) Parent not protecting from abuse/likelihood of abuse <input type="checkbox"/> d) Neglect by parent with physical harm or likelihood	<input type="checkbox"/> e) Emotional harm by parent <input type="checkbox"/> f) Deprived of necessary health care <input type="checkbox"/> g) Parent refusal to treatment of condition <input type="checkbox"/> h) Parent unable/unwilling to care for child <input type="checkbox"/> i) Child absent from home and in danger	<input type="checkbox"/> j) Parent deceased: inadequate provisions <input type="checkbox"/> k) Child abandoned: inadequate provisions <input type="checkbox"/> l) Expired agreement: parent unable/unwilling to care <input type="checkbox"/> m) Incomplete findings because family fled <input type="checkbox"/> n) No protection concern
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

G. CASE ACTIONS

CHILD DOES NOT NEED PROTECTION 1. <input type="checkbox"/>	CHILD NEEDS PROTECTION 2. <input type="checkbox"/>	H. REFERRED/ ASSIGNED TO	CASELOAD NO.
<input type="checkbox"/> a) Apply for Court Order <input type="checkbox"/> b) Offer Care Agreement <input type="checkbox"/> c) Support Services <input type="checkbox"/> d) Referral to Community/Other Ministry <input type="checkbox"/> e) Protocol Investigation	<input type="checkbox"/> f) SPMH Services <input type="checkbox"/> g) Special Needs Daycare <input type="checkbox"/> h) Family Conference <input type="checkbox"/> i) Mediation <input type="checkbox"/> j) No Service Required	<input type="checkbox"/> k) Referred to Other Office <input type="checkbox"/> l) Youth Services <input type="checkbox"/> m) Adoption Services <input type="checkbox"/> n) Return of Lost or Runaway Child	NAME OF SOCIAL WORKER D O CODE

SOCIAL WORKER SIGNATURE	DATE	DISTRICT SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE	DATE
		167(i)	



CLIENT FAMILY NAME	CONTROL No. (S2320)	PAGE
		OF

CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATION CASE DECISION: (indicate whether the subject child and/or child's siblings are in need of protective services and include the reasons for the decision)

IF UNABLE TO COMPLETE INVESTIGATION, PLEASE SPECIFY WHY:

CUSTODIAL PARENT NOTIFIED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	METHOD	<input type="checkbox"/> VERBAL	DATE	REPORTER NOTIFIED AS REQUESTED?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES, DATE
	<input type="checkbox"/> NO		<input type="checkbox"/> LETTER			

SUMMARY OF INITIAL CHILD AND FAMILY PROTECTIVE SERVICES PLAN: (brief summary of Ministry services or other community services (including police) implemented to ensure the safety of the child and to reduce risk of future harm to the child(ren) — detailed plan to be recorded in appropriate file(s) types F.S/C.I.C.):

COURT ACTION REQUIRED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	DATE OF APPREHENSION	YY MM DD	NEXT COURT DATE	YY MM DD
	<input type="checkbox"/> NO				

DISTRICT SUPERVISOR COMMENTS/DIRECTION:

SOCIAL WORKER SIGNATURE	DATE	DISTRICT SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE	DATE
	YY MM DD		YY MM DD

Legislation

Under section 16 of the Act, a director must assess information in a report received from anyone about a child's need for protection.

Finding out if a child needs protection

16. (1) *On receiving a report about a child under section 14, 15 or 27, a director must assess the information in the report.*
- (2) *After the assessment, the director may*
 - (a) *offer support services to the child and family,*
 - (b) *refer the child and family to a community agency,*
or
 - (c) *investigate the child's need for protection.*
- (3) *The director must make all reasonable efforts to report the result of the investigation under subsection (2)(c) to*
 - (a) *the parent apparently entitled to custody of the child, and*
 - (b) *the person who reported the information that led to the investigation.*
- (4) *In addition, the director may report the result of the investigation to the child if he or she is capable of understanding the information.*
- (5) *Subsections (3) and (4) do not apply*
 - (a) *if reporting the result of the investigation would, in the opinion of the director, cause physical and emotional harm to any person or endanger the child's safety, or*
 - (b) *if a criminal investigation into the matter is under way or contemplated.*

Policy

This policy section sets out policy for assessing reports about a child's need for protection. Under section 16 of the Act, a director must assess information in a report received from:

- anyone who believes that a child needs protection (section 14 of the Act); or
- a police officer who has taken charge of a child and makes a report to the director under the circumstances set out in sections 15 and 27 of the Act.

For a discussion of the circumstances that are taken into account in determining whether a child needs protection, refer to section 3.1 of this Manual and section 13 of the Act.

Underlying principles

Under the guiding principles:

- a child's safety and well-being are paramount considerations; and
- children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm.

The information which the director receives in a report may be limited. The director must commence an investigation where the director has any doubts about:

- the child's safety and well-being;
- the child's need for protection; or
- the ability and willingness of the child's parent to care for and protect the child.

During an investigation, the director may offer support services under Part 2 of the Act or refer the child or the child's family to a community agency.

Overview of process

When a report is received, the director:

- assesses the information in the report to determine the appropriate action;
- conducts an investigation, where appropriate; and
- reports the results of the investigation if carried out.

Determining appropriate action

The director must assess the information in the report before:

- offering support services to the child and family;

- referring the child and family to a community agency; or
- conducting an investigation to determine whether the child needs protection.

Investigations

If, after the assessment of the information, the director concludes that the report contains information that indicates that the child may need protection and that the offer of support services or referral to a community agency may not ensure the child's safety, the director commences an investigation.

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Reports about the results of an investigation

When the director conducts an investigation, the director reports the results of the investigation to:

- the parent apparently entitled to custody;
- the person who made the report; and
- the child, if the child is capable of understanding the information

unless

- the report of the result would cause physical or emotional harm to anyone or endanger the child's safety; or
- a criminal investigation into the matter is underway or contemplated.

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The director discloses the results of the investigation to other persons if the disclosure is necessary to ensure the safety or well-being of a child or is otherwise permitted under section 79 of the Act.

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aboriginal children

If the child is an aboriginal child, the director determines the identity of the child's aboriginal community by considering the factors set out in the discussion of the role of the aboriginal community in the Introduction to this Manual.

If the aboriginal community has an agreement with the director or has delegated authority under section 16 of the Act, the director involves the band or community in the assessment or the investigation to the extent specified in the agreement.

Where there is no agreement or no delegation to act under section 16, the director involves the aboriginal community if:

- the child or the child's parent consents to community involvement; or
- the community has an established relationship with the child and is able and willing to provide services or support to assist in the care or protection of the child.

If the child is an aboriginal child and none of the above criteria for involving the aboriginal community apply, or if the child's community is an Indian band or Inuit village outside British Columbia, the director may, with the child or parent's consent, involve another aboriginal community that is able and willing to provide services or support to assist in the care or protection of the child.

Child in immediate danger

If the child may need protection immediately before arrangements can be made to involve the aboriginal community, the director takes the necessary actions to ensure that the child is safe and then arranges the appropriate involvement.

Purpose of the assessment

The purpose of assessing information is to determine what action under section 16(2) of the Act the director takes in response to the information in the report and any other information that is available to the director. During the assessment, the director reviews, and if necessary takes steps, to clarify the information. The director then determines whether:

- the report contains reasonable grounds to believe the child may need protection and an investigation is required; or
- the report concerns a matter that is within the director's jurisdiction under Part 2 of the Act and the director may offer support services or a referral to a community agency.

If the report contains information that is not within the jurisdiction of the director to act, the director may refer the matter to the appropriate jurisdiction.

Confirmation of the reporter's information

In receiving information from a reporter, the director:

- confirms the basis for the reporter's belief that the child may need protection;
- determines the name or description of the child and any other children, the child's parent, the child's family and anyone else who may be involved;
- confirms the current circumstances of the child;
- confirms the names of other people, organizations or agencies who may be familiar with the child's circumstances;
- confirms that the reporter's identity is confidential and will not be disclosed without the reporter's consent unless it becomes necessary to call the reporter as a witness in a court proceeding;
- establishes the reporter's relationship with the child and the child's family;

Assessing the information in a report

- determines whether the reporter has discussed the child's circumstances or the duty to report with the child's parent; and
- confirms the parent's response to the discussion with the reporter.

Response to the reporter

After receiving the information, the director outlines to the reporter the steps in the assessment and investigation including whether the police will be notified and the director:

- indicates when the assessment or investigation is likely to be completed;
- determines whether the reporter wishes to be advised about the outcome of the assessment or investigation; and
- assesses the reporter's willingness to act as a resource to the child and the child's family.

Considerations in the assessment

In assessing the information in the report, the director gives paramount consideration to the safety and well-being of the child and:

- reviews the information provided by the reporter;
- reviews other information obtained under the Act about the child, the child's family or anyone else identified in the report;
- may speak with the parent;
- may speak with the child or other children, with the parent's consent, unless the child is also the reporter; and
- may, with the parent's consent, speak with anyone else who is able to assist in the assessment.

Completing the assessment

Within 24 hours

Where the director has not commenced an investigation immediately, the director completes the assessment of the information in the report within 24 hours if:

- the information in a report received under section 14 indicates that there is reason to believe that the child may need immediate protection;
- the police have reported that the child has killed, assaulted or endangered another person under subsection 15(2); or
- the police have taken charge of the child under section 27 and the director does not authorize the police to return the child to the child's parent or to another person designated by the child's parent.

By commencing an investigation

If, after completing the assessment of the information, the director continues to have reasons to believe that a child may need protection the director commences an investigation.

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By taking no further action

The director completes the assessment of the information and takes no further action if the director:

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- discloses information under paragraph 79(a) to the parent about the child's circumstances and the director is satisfied that the parent is able and willing to protect the child;
- assesses the information in the report and concludes that the child does not need protection in any of the circumstances described in section 13, unless the director receives other information during the course of the assessment that indicates the child may need protection;
- has previously assessed all of the information in the report and taken action appropriate to address the child's circumstances;
- determines that the report is unfounded;
- determines that the report is so lacking in information that the director cannot act; or
- concludes that the report contains information about a matter that the director has no authority to address.

By offering support services

The director completes the assessment of the information and offers support services under Part 2 of the Act, with the consent of the child's parent, to the child's family if:

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- the child's parent is able and willing, with available support services, to protect the child; or
- the information in the report indicates that the child does not need protection in any of the circumstances described in section 13 but the family requires support services to assist the child and the child's family in addressing the concerns raised in the report.

Support services that are available in the child's community may be adequate to assist the child and the child's family where, for example:

- the child has been physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a person outside the child's family; or
- the child has witnessed physical violence against a parent in the family home but the child has not suffered emotional harm as defined in subsection 13(2) of the Act.

By making a referral to a community agency

The director completes the assessment of the information and makes a referral to a community agency when the information indicates that:

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- the child does not need protection in any of the circumstances described in section 13; and
- the child's needs can be met through the services of another ministry, agency or self-help organization.

Investigating a child's need for protection*Purpose of the investigation*

The purpose of an investigation is to establish whether the child needs protection. During the course of the investigation, the director gives paramount consideration to the child's safety and well-being and assesses:

- the child's current state of health;
- the child's sense of safety and views;
- previous abuse, neglect or harm to the child;
- the likelihood of harm to the child; and
- the parent's ability and willingness to care for and protect the child.

Services during the investigation

During the investigation, the director may offer and provide support services under Part 2 of the Act or refer the child's family to community agencies or self-help organizations.

Removing a child during the investigation

The director may remove a child at any time during the course of an investigation where the child's health or safety is in immediate danger.

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The director must consider the other less disruptive measures that are set out in sections 5 to 7 and sections 25 to 29 of the Act before removing the child for any other reason.

Commencing the investigation*Immediately*

The director commences an investigation immediately if:

- the child's health or safety may be in immediate danger; or
- the child is vulnerable due to age or developmental level.

Director unable to meet with child

In exceptional circumstances where the director is unable to meet with the child, the director arranges for the police, a public health nurse, an

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aboriginal band social worker or another person to meet and speak or otherwise communicate with the child to make sure the child is safe before the director proceeds with the investigation. The director must get a report from the other person confirming whether the child is safe and continue the investigation.

Within 5 days

In other than immediate circumstances where the section 16(1) assessment indicates that the child may need protection, the director commences the investigation within 5 days of completing the assessment. The date for commencing the investigation is determined by considering:

- the type of injury to the child and when it occurred;
- the vulnerability of the child;
- the child's current location and living arrangement;
- the parent's conduct and circumstances within the community; and
- whether the situation is likely to change or deteriorate quickly.

Conducting the investigation

Involving the child, family and others

In planning and conducting an investigation, the director seeks and involves:

- the child;
- the child's parents;
- other family members and family friends; and
- other community members who may have been involved with the child and family or could assist in conducting the investigation including health care providers, teachers, day care providers, caregivers and the police

unless the involvement of others, including a parent, could place the child or another parent at risk or compromise the investigation.

Observing protocols with others

In an investigation, the director observes protocols with the police and other professionals, agencies or organizations, including the British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations. For the director's protocols, refer to the Protocols in Volume 2A of this Manual.

Prior to meeting with the child

The director informs the parent that the director plans to meet with the child unless the director believes the parent:

- might jeopardize the child's safety;

- might prevent the director from seeing the child;
- might leave the community with the child;
- could influence the child's discussion with the director; or
- cannot be located.

Meeting with the child

In every investigation, the director meets with the child privately and speaks or otherwise communicates with the child. The director assesses the child's safety and well-being by considering:

- the child's views on the circumstances described in the report;
- the child's views on the family's needs;
- the child's physical and emotional condition;
- the child's sense of safety; and
- any additional information the child may provide about the circumstances described in the report.

The director explains:

- the reasons for meeting with the child;
- how the investigation is likely to proceed; and
- what may happen as a result of the investigation.

The director may ask someone else to attend the meeting if the director determines that the other person is not likely to influence the child's views and:

- the child needs an interpreter and one is available;
- the child requests the person's support; or
- the director determines that it is necessary.

Examining the child

Where the director believes that visually examining the child is necessary to determine if the child has been physically harmed and needs protection, the director asks the parent or the child, if the child has capacity, to allow the director to visually examine the child. The director proceeds only when consent is obtained.

In the case of a child under two years of age, the director visually examines the child, removing the child's clothes if necessary, in the presence of a witness. If possible, the director conducts the examination in the presence of the parent and asks the parent to remove the child's clothing.

If the director believes that the child may have been sexually abused, the director ensures that the child is examined by a medical practitioner or other appropriate health care provider as soon as possible.

Authorizing a medical examination of the child

The director asks the child's parent or the child, if the child has capacity, to authorize a medical examination when the director has reason to believe that the child may need protection and the director:

- has observed the child's physical harm or injuries;
- believes that the child may have suffered physical harm or non-observable injuries;
- believes that the child may have been sexually abused;
- believes that the child may have a medical condition that requires treatment; or
- is not satisfied that the parent's explanation of the injury is credible or consistent with the harm that the child has suffered.

If the director is unable to obtain authorization for the medical examination, the director may:

- make application to the court for authorization under section 17;
- authorize the medical examination and consent to necessary health care if the director is looking after the child under section 25, 26 or 27; or
- remove the child under section 30 and authorize the examination and consent to necessary health care under section 32.

Where the director has taken charge of the child or removed the child, the director's authority to consent to necessary health care is limited by the child's right to consent to treatment under section 16 of the *Infants Act*. If the director determines that a child has the legal capacity to consent to treatment, the director cannot override the child's decision to accept or reject health care. For a discussion of a child's right and capacity to consent to treatment, refer to the Introduction in the section *Roles and responsibilities* under *The child, Capacity to consent*.

Moving the child

The director may move the child from one location to another for the purpose of meeting with the child to obtain the child's views or taking the child for a medical examination when authorized. The director acts:

- with the consent of the child's parent or the child, if the child has capacity;
- without the consent of the child's parent and with the consent of a child with capacity, if the director is looking after the child under section 25, 26 or 27 of the Act; or

- without the consent of the child's parent or a child without capacity, if the director is looking after the child under section 25, 26 or 27.

Role of the child's family and kin

In assessing the potential role of the child's family and kin in the investigation, the director considers the guiding principles of the Act, namely that:

- a family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children;
- the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents; and
- kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible.

Meeting with the parent

The director meets with the parent in person and in the child's home wherever possible, to explain:

- the reasons for the investigation;
- how the investigation is likely to proceed; and
- what may happen as a result of the investigation.

The director assesses the parent's:

- response to the information in the report;
- circumstances; and
- views.

If the parent is able and willing to care for or protect the child, with available support services if necessary, the director involves the parent to the fullest extent possible in planning and decision making during the investigation.

If the parent is unable or unwilling, the director involves other family members in planning and decision making if the other family members:

- have an established relationship with the child; and
- may be able and willing to provide continuity in the child's care.

Role of the other community members and professionals

The director involves other people, organizations or agencies who are familiar with the child's circumstances in planning and decision making during the investigation. The director seeks the views and requests information from individuals who have had contact with the child and family including health care providers, day care providers and teachers.

Under section 96, the director has a right to information that is necessary to complete the investigation and may seek an order under section 65 if a person refuses to provide records containing information necessary for conducting the investigation.

The director discloses information to others if disclosure is necessary for the child's safety and well-being or is otherwise permitted under section 79 of the Act but only:

- on a need to know basis; and
- to the extent necessary to assist the director in planning for the child's care and protection.

Role of the police

Where the director has information or evidence indicating that a child has been physically harmed or sexually abused or exploited, the director immediately notifies the police. If disclosure of information is necessary to ensure the child's safety or well-being, the director provides the police with information about:

- the child's circumstances;
- the name or description of the person who may have caused the harm, abuse or exploitation; and
- the results of the director's assessment or investigation of the child's need for protection.

The director gives paramount consideration to the child's safety and well-being. The director cooperates with the police in their investigation and may refuse to disclose information to a parent or family member if the police are conducting or contemplating a criminal investigation into the matter. However, the director's investigation proceeds to ensure the child's safety or well-being.

Reporting results of the investigation

Reporting results to parent and child

The director makes all reasonable efforts to report the results of the investigation to:

- the parent apparently entitled to custody;
- the person who made the report; and
- the child, if the child is capable of understanding the information

unless

- the report of the result would cause physical or emotional harm to anyone or endanger the child's safety;
- a criminal investigation is underway or contemplated; or
- the reporter does not wish to be advised about the outcome of the investigation.

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The director reports the results of the investigation including the reasons for the director's decision to the parent and a child who is capable of understanding the information, in person wherever possible.

Reporting results to community members

In order to involve and encourage community members including other professionals to take responsibility for the safety and well-being of children, the director orally reports the findings of the investigation to the reporter, wherever possible. The findings include the actions taken by the director and any other information concerning the child's situation that the director determines is essential for the reporter to know.

The director determines the extent of information to be disclosed to the reporter concerning the child's situation by considering:

- the nature of the reporter's relationship with the child and family;
- the role the reporter will continue to play in the lives of the child and family;
- the likelihood that the reporter will use the information for purposes other than ensuring the child's safety and well being; and
- the ability and willingness of the reporter to handle the information in a confidential manner which respects the child's and the family's right to privacy.

Concluding the investigation

Investigation complete

To meet the guiding principle of making and implementing decisions in a timely manner, the director completes the investigation within 30 days wherever possible. The director concludes the investigation when the director determines that:

- the child does not need protection;
- the child needs protection and the child's parent is able and willing to care for and protect the child, with available support services if necessary; or
- the child needs protection and further steps must be taken under the Act to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

DS

Investigation incomplete

The director may be unable to complete the investigation if the director:

- has made reasonable efforts to meet with the child or the child's family and they are not available; or
- is unable to locate the child or the child's family.

If the director is unable to complete the investigation and has reason to believe that the child may need protection, the director must do one or more of the following:

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- initiate an alert on the director's information system;
- contact caregivers, agencies or service providers in the community where the director believes the child is resident;
- contact other people in the child's community who may have contact with the child or the child's family;
- notify the police and request their assistance in locating the child and the child's family; or
- refer the investigation to another director or child welfare jurisdiction if the information in the report indicates that the child or the child's family resides in another community.

Appendix 3

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PEARLMAN & LINDHOLM

BARRISTERS AND SOLICITORS

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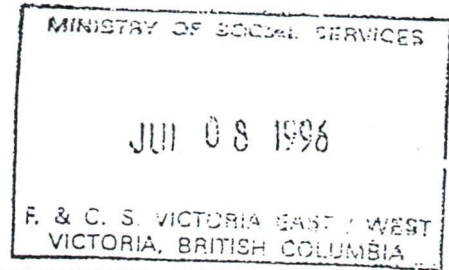
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PLEASE REPLY
ATTENTION OF
Erin A. Faulkner
File No: 49-08-00/96-5300

July 4, 1996

VIA REGULAR MAIL

Ministry of Social Services
770C Bay Street
Victoria, B. C.
V8T 5E4



Attention: Riley Hern

Dear Mr. Hern:

Re: Substitutional Service of Plans of Care and
 Waiving the ten day notice requirement

Further to my letter of June 21, 1996, attached is a Memorandum from the Ministry of Attorney General dated June 12, 1996. As set out in our initial letter, the Attorney General's office is recommending that when Orders for substitutional service of Applications For An Order are sought, Director's counsel should also be requesting that the requirement of serving the Plan of Care be dispensed with pursuant to Section 69(1)(b). Of significance is the Attorney General's recommendation that the Director should also be asking that an Order be made that the Application is to include some indication of where a copy of the Plan of Care can be obtained. The most likely place is the Ministry office where the file is located and I suggest that the following be typed at the bottom of the Application For An Order that is being served on a party:

"A copy of the Plan of Care can be obtained from the office of the Ministry of Social Services located at 770 C Bay Street, Victoria, British Columbia"

This is only to be done in situations where Orders for substitutional service are being sought. Obviously, the address of the office will depend on which office is handling the file. Once you have done this, you must ensure that if a party appears at the Ministry office and requests the Plan

of Care, that it is readily available to him or her. You may want to leave a file folder with your administrative staff which includes Plans of Care for parties where the above type of Order has been made. I will leave that procedure up to your own office administrators.

A second issue that was recently raised is whether having a party waive their right to ten days notice by typing such waiver on the bottom of the Application For An Order and having them sign it, is still sufficient. I brought this issue to the attention of the Attorney General's office and attached is a memorandum in response to my request.


The short answer is NO - a typed waiver on the front of the Application For An Order signed by the parent is not sufficient. Rather, you must attend in Court and make an application under Section 69(1)(a) to shorten the notice period or apply under Section 69(1)(b) to dispense with the requirement for service of the notice. Obviously, you must have good reason to do either of these and such applications must be made in a timely manner.

You will note that the memorandum indicates that counsel could make an application dispensing with the requirement of notice at the Protection Hearing. I would like to discourage that as it is highly unlikely a Court is going to grant such an Order if the reason for making the application is that the social worker has not made substantial efforts to locate the person. Therefore, my advice is that if you anticipate or have difficulty serving a party, you should make your application for substitutional service in advance of your ten day period. If you would like to make an application to dispense with the requirement of service on a particular party because of lack of involvement or no contact with the child or children, you should also attempt to make that application before the ten day period in case the Order is not granted and you will then allow yourself enough time to serve the party or serve them substitutionally with the required ten days notice.

Please call if you have any questions.

Yours very truly,

PEARLMAN & LINDHOLM

PER: 

ERIN A. FAULKNER

EAF/sc
Encl.

cc: Nancy Frederick
Hank Vander Pol
Ron Pollard
VIA REGULAR MAIL

VITA

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Author: _____



Sept 22, 98