Swimming in an Endangered Estuary: Female Social Work Professionals' Responses to Work Demands

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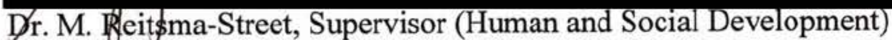
We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard



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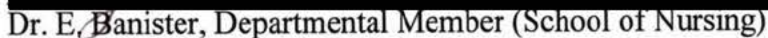

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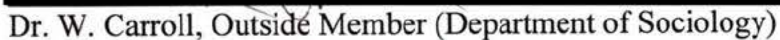

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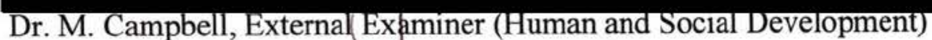

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Globalization is calling into question the provision of governmental social safety nets. This pressure intensifies when government services are scrutinized through inquiries such as British Columbia's Gove Inquiry in 1995. This inquiry followed by a Social Services Ministry re-structure in 1996 created a particular work environment for field social workers who work with the provinces' most vulnerable citizens. Most of these workers are women.

This research conducted in April 2000, sought to discover how six female mid-aged social workers experienced and responded to pressures and expectations in this setting. Spradley's (1979) ethnographic *Developmental Research Sequence Method* was used as a guide for conducting the research. Analytic steps of increasing complexity were used beginning with the break down of participants' language into functional components which were then categorized, comparing and contrasting to search for similarities, and differences, culminating with three themes. These three themes were: tough complex, devalued jobs; positions filled but with no one in them; and fear of the pointing finger of blame.

The themes, themselves paradoxical, revealed an endangered work environment which resulted in "survival" social work. The unravelling net and consequent unsupportive and fearful work environment, warn that the well being of our most vulnerable citizens and those who work with them are increasingly at risk.

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I am deeply grateful to my husband Bill, our collective of four children and four grandchildren, to our extended family and to our friends and my colleagues for their patience and support throughout this process. There were births, deaths, marriages, graduations and many other life events and celebrations that unfolded along side the solitary process of research and writing into the wee hours. With the loving endurance of everyone, it was a gracious, messy and rich process.

I thank the Ministry for Children and Families team leaders, managers and regional executive director who supported this research.

Lastly, I extend my appreciation to each of the six women who shared sage stories and descriptions of their work days with me. They provided a "point-in -time" portal into the obscure world of field child welfare social work in a mid-sized community.

DEDICATION

To my husband Bill, my family, friends, colleagues and community. To social work, social workers and those they offer empowerment information to.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

> I think the role of social work in general is devalued in MCF [Ministry for Children and Families].[1] Working with people to enhance their lives or help them work out their problems is now the least of what we do. We are bean counters, form fillers, quota meeters, data entry clerks, and bureaucrats in spite of our best intentions. The "system" is spiralling down to entropy at a spanking pace, as the demands and lack of rewards make recruitment and retention next to impossible. I don't think offering a select group of social workers $12,000 to head north for two years is the answer. I fear it will just inflate the substance abuse and mental health statistics for the Northern Regions. I am feeling extremely negative about the Ministry today, and it's probably a good thing I am not due a performance evaluation in the next few weeks.

Public sector work is coming under increasing negative scrutiny due to pressure on governments to become more efficient in today's globalizing and privitizing economic arena. Pressure on governments to become efficient is passed along to its public service workers. As the opening quote illustrates, there are days when employees are frustrated in their attempts to do social work, and consequently feel negatively about public sector social work (deMontigny, 1989). The trickle down pressure is passed on to clients who often experience this under- resourced service as too little or too late. The taste of an increasingly unpalatable public service thus completes the vicious circle of negative opinion toward public services (McQuaig, 1995; Menzies, 1996; Rekart, 1993; Teeple, 1995). The general public, taught by a range of media to be ambivalent about the use of their tax dollars for maintaining a social safety net, has little knowledge about actual services, or limits to service provided by human service public servants, such as the social worker above. There is a media induced cultural myth however, that public servants are if not lazy, then ineffective (McQuaig, 1995). Social workers in particular fall under public scrutiny being charged as they are with protecting our society's most vulnerable

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[1] When participants were interviewed for this research project in April 2000 they were working for the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF), founded by the B.C. New Democratic Party (NDP) government in September of 1996. Soon after the B.C. Liberal Party was elected in April 2001, MCF was renamed and re-structured. It became the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Depending on time frame, I refer to both MCF and MCFD in this thesis.

progeny (Callahan & Callahan, 1997). When a child known to a child protection ministry dies or is seriously harmed or neglected, it is social workers who are placed foremost under the gaze of the media. It is through this medium that the public learns to be outraged and to want retribution. There is little acknowledgment of the shrinking public commitment to resource such services, and little in-depth analysis of the context of such painful events as child death or injury. Instead such events are used by the media to create a further tear in the fabric of our social safety net. Governments are being encouraged to question their involvement in providing a social safety net (Menzies, 1996; Rekart, 1993; Stewart, 1999; Teeple, 1995).

What is it like to work within this tearing net? This research study presents what six experienced mid-aged women child welfare public sector social workers from two mid-sized western communities say about their everyday work life. The women work with children and their families, some with mental, physical or developmental challenges and often under protection legislation such as wardship. An ethnographic approach was chosen in order to understand the cultural aspects of this specific work environment, as it is experienced by the mid-aged women social workers working there. In particular I wanted to understand the work ethic by hearing about how work pressures and expectations are experienced and responded to. Work is a human behaviour which has meaning and ethnography provides a method to discover what that meaning is (Spradley, 1979; Streubert & Carpenter, 1992). The research questions for this thesis, which evolved from my personal interest and work life, are:

1. How do mid-aged female social workers in child welfare public service describe the pressures and expectations of their work culture?

2. How do they deal with or respond to the pressures and expectations?

Personal Interest

There are both current and past origins of my personal interest in the subject of this research study. The cultural work ethic of overwork impacts daily on my professional practice as a social worker. Though I enjoy a fast paced, challenging work environment, at times I doubt how such a work pace can be maintained without a negative impact on the quality of service I can deliver and on the quality of my life. My

expectation to provide quality service stems from a professional desire to assist people and systems in an empowerment process. However, I also value quality of life having grown up in an alcoholic-workaholic family. Like many such families, my family was greatly impacted by lack of non-distracted time. We learned either to be very busy, very incapacitated or both. Like many who grew up in such families, I hoped to do things differently when I grew up.

Fifteen years of working in public service, both doing and observing work I value and enjoy, has shown me that things are not different, either for myself or for the colleagues I work with every day. There is a constant flurry of work activities that leaves little time to think or feel. As a mid-aged female, public service social work team leader and thus an "insider", I have both experienced and observed this particular work culture which, in my opinion, *is* one of overwork. Overwork in this environment is reinforced in many ways; by self, peers, management, bureaucratic structures, the public, media, globalization, and the trend since the 1990's to downsize the public service (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1997).

The resulting bull-dozing approach to social work raised preliminary questions for me that eventually led to this research study and the two research questions above. Originating queries included: where does this work ethic originate; who benefits and who is harmed by it; what is behind loading human service workers with so much work, that the job, the profession, becomes impossible to do properly; when volume of work prohibits doing a proper job, what is the effect on how social workers view themselves in terms of their service to clients and communities? I wondered if social workers in other work sites experienced work pressures and expectations that seemed excessive to them and if so, how did this look on an average day? Had I not witnessed and experienced the work culture of guardianship and other related child welfare social workers, I could not have imagined such a work environment in which to try to do social work. I set out to discover through this research study what happened in other communities. What were the experiences of other women social workers with long years of involvement in this area of social work?

Background to the Research

The U.N's International Labour Organization identifies work related stress as one of the most serious health issues for workers around the world today (ILO,1999). In my role as a team leader, I have observed field social workers experiencing significant stress and have struggled to find ways to help reduce some of the stressors. Research on burnout (Katz, 1992) indicates that one stressor is a nonsupportive supervisor or manager. It is encouraging as a team leader to know that being supportive of staff is an effective way to reduce stress in the workplace. I have observed within the ministry what I believe to be a lack of organizational support for the field. Lack of support is conveyed through the volume and complexity of at times contradictory expectations on employees. This lack of support is magnified by resource constraints that cannot be ameliorated by levels of authority at and near the field and, is intensified by focusing blame at the field level when something goes wrong. In public service it is not possible, as far as I am aware, to say "we are at capacity work load and cannot take in any more clients for the time being." How then, does the never ending flow of clients with complex concerns combined with a finite number of staff, get managed effectively? When not combined with authority to hire staff as needed, team leader and manager support are limited to emotional rather than practical support. Research and personal observation shows that providing even this support to front line workers reduces stress, but it does not address the systemic problem of "overwork" (Katz, 1992).

A both tacit and explicit solution in this work environment to the common dilemma of too much work and too little time *is* to work "extra-time". The "extra-time" is generally not compensated for with money, but rather with time. When compensated with time off, "extra-time" is often not fully compensated. Rarer still is compensation at an overtime pay-rate. Finding the time to take off out of existing work hours is difficult due to workload and to no one being available to fill-in when a social worker is away during core hours. Therefore, many hours of "extra-time" go uncompensated. Furthermore, there is an emotional price when one does not work "extra-time". There are

feelings of personal guilt from the sense of letting others down. There is the fear of negatively impacting clients by taking longer to see them or of taking longer to put services in place for them. These delays are due to a backlog of work not cleared away through working "extra-time". There is the worry of causing a backlog or of holding others up who *do* work "extra-time". If not for union protection many would also fear losing their job by not working "extra-time". [2]

There is another downside to performing these unpaid hours of work (Braverman, 1974; O'Hara, 1993). It keeps the real crisis and need for additional workers from becoming blatantly obvious and it keeps the problem focused on the individual social worker rather than on the larger systemic problem. Those working paid overtime or "extra-time" create a backlog of work for those who do not or cannot work extra hours. This is particularly noticeable with excluded (non- union) managers who tend to work long hours and unionised clerical staff who must work only their contracted hours. These clerical workers must be available during operating hours, usually 8:30 to 4:30, to meet the public. Having to be present during operating hours makes it difficult to receive compensating time off for "extra-time" worked, particularly in offices with only one or two clerical staff such as in smaller communities. Management also have an unspoken expectation that social workers will work the same long hours that they do. There is little sympathy for social workers who do not or can not work these long hours, even while acknowledging that social workers have a union contract with specified hours of work. Many social workers therefore, work "extra-time" with no compensation. It is a tacit expectation. It is an important work culture belief to make explicit if quality of service and employee well-being are to be realized or conversely the lack of quality service and employee well-being are to be better understood (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

Another real and serious contributor to the pressure to work extra hours is the professional belief in helping clients. It is very difficult, if not unethical to say, "okay I'm

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[2]Here I differentiate between paid overtime which is explicitly sanctioned by the employer, and "extra-time" which is more often an implicit expectation which may even be openly denied, and which may or may not be compensated for in time off. Many employers expect that employees will "donate" a percentage of "volunteer" time, because that is what professionals do ... if they care. This belief is generally held by professional

tired, I need to go home now," when there is a child at risk, or a family exploding in pain in your office. A desire to support people and to create possibilities for empowerment is often what brings social workers to their profession, and what keeps them working those extra hours. Staying longer to assist clients, or to do the massive paperwork that arises out of working with clients is a part of an unconscious compliance with working extra hours as well as an attempt to live up to internalised social work ideals and values. Unconscious compliance to overwork also happens as the result of a belief that expectations are self-generated and that as professionals, social workers have autonomous control over the work flow in their day.

Market globalization and management practices of today's companies, such as reorganizing and streamlining or downsizing, often result in layoffs or hiring freezes. This is particularly so in public service where most human service workers work. These workers are generally women (The Canadian Council on Social Development, 1997). Hiring freezes, lay-offs, reorganizing, streamlining, and new workers being reluctant to enter an obviously non-supportive work environment, leaves an aging workforce. The social work profession, especially at the field level, is predominantly women and is comprised mainly of babyboom generation women, making this particular work force largely middle-aged (Canadian Council on Social Development, Research Report, 1997; Galarneau, 1994). As this population bubble of social workers exits the labour force over the next ten to fifteen years, their wealth of experience and awareness of problem areas leaves with them.

Each age demographic is affected by the socio-economic conditions prevalent at the time. The year of entry into the labour market may affect a woman's subsequent career path (Galarneau, 1994). According to Galarneau babyboom generation women are concentrated in a limited number of occupations. She wrote " ... nearly three quarters of women work in five occupations. Clerical and related occupations head the list, followed by service occupations, sales, health care, and finally teaching and related occupations" (p. 27). Notice here that the profession of social work is not specifically noted. Not

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employees as well.

specifically naming the profession may be a way to depoliticise it, such as referring to social work as one of the "helping" professions (deMontigny, 1995). Social work is a political profession in that it serves those most vulnerable to and affected by the for profit sector in this society. Naming the profession, and giving female mid-aged social workers a venue to express both their experiences of expectations, the pressures of their work day in the field, and their responses to them are important reasons for doing this research study. The research will offer us a way to better understand this social work culture which employs an often un-named and invisible segment of the work force, namely mid-aged women (Melamed, 1983; Scott, 1984).

In this study, I am concerned with what Galarneau (1994) calls, *female baby boomers, first wave* (those born between 1946 and 1955). I have confined my target group for this research to mid-aged women for several reasons. There are large numbers clustered in human service work. Some studies suggest that women in this age demographic miss less work time than both older and younger workers (Giorgi & Marsh, 1990), they express less stress and more job satisfaction. Public service has entered a robust downsizing trend where younger workers can not get in or are being laid-off, and older workers are taking early retirement, leaving the work to middle-aged workers, particularly women.[3] In looking at the work culture of this group I wanted to discover if public sector social workers were experiencing work pressures within their current work situations which may reflect a "do more with less" theme. If pressure *is* being experienced, how is it dealt with by this age group of women social workers?

The Canadian Council on Social Development (1997) states:

> ...while public sector downsizing may improve the short-term balance sheets of government and public institutions, it does not come without a number of

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[3]While completing final editing, the B. C. Liberal government began implementation of a plan to reduce government service and staff by 20-45% over three years. Those with less than 3 years of public service will be laid-off. Early retirement packages were offered to those with 3 years of service who were at least 55 years of age. Legislation was passed allowing the government to open and alter collective agreements. "Bumping right" is the ability to exercise seniority rights to move to the most favorable position if one's job is "made redundant". To move into an occupied position the worker "bumps" the other employee out. The "bumped" employee then must begin the same process. Large scale bumping due to a high loss of employees can cause many upsets in a work place. "Bumping rights" however is a hard won right of labour through collective bargaining. This may be one area tampered with due to legislative changes.

> additional social and economic costs. When individuals lose good jobs, family economic security is threatened. If the unemployment is long-term, it can lead to a range of mental and physical health problems for family members. The local economy also suffers as economic insecurity reduces consumer confidence and spending. And, when the capacity of public services to deal with our most pressing social problems is diminished, there is a negative impact on the quality of life in our communities (p. 2).

This same research report points out that with downsizing of the public sector, there has been a fall-off in public sector employment for young people. The Canadian Council of Social Development (1997) writes "With the "greying" of the public sector [the majority of public sector workers are middle-aged or older], who will have the experience to deliver quality public services in the future if young people are systematically shut out today?" (p. 2). Human service jobs require a large and continuous output of energy. Lessening of energy is one of the developmental aspects of those in their middle years (Banister, 1997; McKinlay & Jefferys, 1974). If it is true that an aging work force is being expected to do more with less, while experiencing a lessening of personal energy, what is the ultimate health cost to them and what is the cost to the public in terms of quality and quantity of service?

The public sector has been a source of well-paying jobs for men but particularly so for women. As the Canadian Council on Social Development (1997) points out, many of the traditional female occupations such as teaching, health care, clerical and social services have benefited from high rates of public sector unionisation. Loss of women's jobs in the public sector may threaten the economic gains made by women over the last several decades. What is the impact of a threatened and weakened social safety net on its workers and its clients, both of whom are mainly comprised of women? Is the target group for this research study experiencing effects of a threatened or weakened safety net such as increased pressures on the job?

Relevance of the research

By creating the possibility for an awareness of pressures and expectations and how they are maintained in a specific work environment and population such as mid-aged female public service child welfare social workers, participating individuals and readers

have an opportunity to become more aware of how their work culture functions. Having increased knowledge of one's work world can enhance decision making based on that awareness and information. Increased awareness may assist participants and readers of this study to see the effects of this organizationally and socially induced work ethic on self, clients, family members, community members and others. This research, through the experiences shared by the women and the meanings they ascribe to their daily work as social workers, will also add to the literature in the areas of social work and middle-age women and work.

As the target population represents a highly experienced area of the social work profession, study results can point unions, professional associations and employers to what may be happening for the mature work force, with implications for younger workers and raising questions for further study. The wisdom gleaned from the participants may also assist the employer in knowing how better to support and acknowledge experienced and younger members of the social work profession. Such constructs as mentoring or apprenticing of younger social workers with mature social workers, could benefit both age groups and their clients. This research also raises further questions about the profession of social work as a whole. Emergent themes and inferences could inform policy and contract negotiations in the future. Overwork can cause personal, social and cultural harm and an explicit understanding of our work culture and the work ethic embedded in it, can reduce some of that harm if this understanding is acted upon in a people and community-centered direction.

I am an example of a public service social worker who is becoming aware of the work ethic in my work culture. I find knowing more helps me have better boundaries on how to priorize my time at work and how to draw limits to extra or volunteer time due to work overload. This prompts me to encourage others to do likewise, and to share this information where I can. As a supervisor I am in a strategic position to be an example and to support others to have firmer boundaries around unpaid extra-time and a healthier life perspective. But, these are individual responses to a systemic problem rooted in a growing disbelief in a social safety net. Having conducted this research, I find myself

wondering more clearly now than before what the profession of social work would be like for workers, clients and our society if there was a stronger belief in providing a social safety net where, for example, more young social workers *were* brought in, the wisdom of experienced social workers shared, or better reduced time and or shared work time and retirement packages negotiated. I wonder how maintaining a strong, healthy and caring profession that is able to give quality service without decimating those who would give it, would impact on recruitment and retention initiatives.

Definition of Terms

Key concepts below have been described and some will be expanded upon in the following literature and methodology chapters. In the literature I found a range of meanings and descriptions for these concepts. No one meaning appeared to be *the* definitive descriptor, but rather a meaning derived from a particular perspective at a particular point in time. I have defined the following terms:

Babyboom Generation:

> Using the Statistics Canada time frame for babyboom which covers the twenty year period from 1946 to 1965, the expression "babyboom" usually designates the population explosion that occurred after the Second World War in a number of countries, including the United States, Canada, New Zealand Australia (Galarneau, 1994, p. 5).

Culture:

> "The acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour" (Spradley, 1979, p. 5). According to Theodorson and Theodorson (1969, p. 95), culture is "the way of life of a social group; the group's total man-made environment, including all the material products of group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next."

Domain:

> A symbolic category that includes other categories, related by at least one aspect of cultural meaning. It is the primary unit used for ethnographic analysis (Spradley, 1979).

Emic:

> Insiders' perspectives of a culture which are derived from investigating their language, beliefs and experiences. The prerequisite for ethnographic interpretation is based on the assumption that individuals have some understanding of their own feelings, actions and values (Boyle, 1994).

Etic:

The outsiders' framework of the influence of scientific explanations of reality upon the phenomenon of inquiry. The etic perspective is also what researchers see and observe as they engage in the fieldwork (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Explicit:

Cultural knowledge that can be easily and directly communicated by informants through language (Spradley, 1979).

Female Professions:

An academic profession which has historically and currently been dominated, though not exclusively, by women, e.g. nursing, elementary school teaching, front-line social work (Gripton, 1974; Kinnear, 1995; Baines, 1998).

Folk term:

Symbols used by the informant to represent cultural meaning (Spradley, 1979).

Globalization:

Robertson (1987) in Eriz and Early (1993, p.4), describe globalization as "the crystallization of the entire world as a single place."

Middle-Age [Mid-Age]:

A stage in the life span of a human being that lies between youth and old age. This may be determined in a variety of ways according to the literature but for the purpose of this study. Following Funk and Wagnall's' (1974) lead, I have used the years between 40 and 60 to define middle age.

Participant:

A native speaker or person representative of the culture under study, who through the use of native language provides information to the ethnographer, Spradley uses the term "informant" rather than participant (Spradley, 1979).

Participant observation:

The researcher's role in the field that requires she or he to participate in the social world and reflect upon the products of that participation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). This term was used to refer to observations gleaned from my paid work in the field as well as observations as an unpaid graduate student at the sites of research.

Professionalization:

Glazer and Slater (1987) said "...that control over expert knowledge and the awarding of special credentials was a crucial component of professional autonomy"(p. 20). The legitimisation of a field of work through a process of

gaining autonomy, special credentials and control over expert knowledge is professionalization.

Public Sector Occupations:

Generally not for profit jobs which take place directly within governments. They are often called "direct service" jobs.

Reflexivity:

Suggests that the researcher is part of the world he or she is investigating and is affected by it. Reflexivity involves researchers' reflections on how participants are similar to and different from themselves, and how researchers' reflections affect their interpretation of participants' worlds (Banister, 1999).

Social Work:

Theodorson and Theodorson (1969, p. 396) define social work as:" A specialized professional field concerned with the application of sociological and psychological principles to the solution of specific community problems and the alleviation of individual distress. Social workers deal with a variety of problems related to the adjustment and functioning of the social organization of the community and the integration of the individual into this social organization. Specific areas dealt with include poverty, unemployment, youth guidance and organization, recreation, delinquency, family disorganization, health, drug addiction and mental illness. Social work is often classified into case work (with individuals or families), group work (for example with youth gangs), and work in community organizations."

Tacit:

A significant part of culture that is not readily available or explicit. *Tacit* knowledge consists of the information members of a culture know but that they do not talk about or express directly (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993; Spradley 1980 in Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

Work Environment:

The aggregate of external circumstances, conditions and things that affect the existence and development of an individual, organism, group, *or workplace* (italics added) (Funk & Wagnall's College Dictionary, 1974, p.443)

CHAPTER TWO
Locating the Research Study Within the Literature

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the work culture of six mid-aged women public sector social workers working in various areas of child welfare services. By listening to participants' experiences of their work expectations and pressures and their responses to them, a picture of their work culture emerges. To provide a larger cultural context in which to situate this work culture, this chapter briefly summarizes the underlying forces shaping paid work in this society. Moving in for a closer look at the work world of female professionals, social workers in particular, it also reviews related studies.

Braverman (1982, p.35) said that "humanity is a working species." Work paid or otherwise, is a central part of the human being and of human culture (Rinehart, 1987). George and Larsen (1988) quote Cockburn (1985) who says "... when people are working they are not just producing goods or services or earning a living. They are producing culture - the work culture of a group "(p.63). In this sense culture pertains to basic values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour that are shared by members of an occupation that shape who they are, what they do and how they see the world.

As mega corporations gain increasing control over work processes, the focus of problems, stresses and pressures in our work culture are increasingly viewed as individual ones. Once problems are defined as "individual" they can then be seen as requiring individual solutions, with individuals to blame if those solutions fail. Considering this shaping force as we hear what the participants have to tell us adds to an understanding of their work culture. The chapter proceeds from the general to the specific and includes the following sections: general changes in the culture of the helping professions; media's role in the shaping of public perception of the welfare state; work expectations and pressures for public service social workers; and responses of human service workers to their work environment.

Changes in the Work Culture of the Helping Professions

The society in which we live is a capitalist one originating some 200 or 250 years ago. The purpose of a capitalist enterprise is to use the surplus that is extracted from the process of production. Only by creating a surplus for corporations do we gain permission to create necessities for ourselves. There have been slave societies and feudal societies which have taken labour and produce from others, and in so doing created a particular work culture. However, in the past 200 years capitalists have taken direct control over all processes of labour and production, and have produced a particular work culture (Braverman, 1982 & 1974; O'Hara, 1993; Rhinehart, 1987; Teeple, 1995). Capital and its processes now dictate how much work will be done, when, under which circumstances and by whom.

Reducing Autonomy, Skills and Demand for Labour

In a capitalist work culture deskilling creates a rift in workers' connection to and understanding of the overall process of work. Tools and technology are used for profit and efficiency not for the benefit of humans or the environment. Automation and technology have not been used to provide more leisure time but to increase productivity and to reduce the numbers of workers needed to do the same or larger amounts of work. Computerization has been used to determine speed, flow and content of work, rather than to help create ways to better understand and improve the quality of work. New management techniques and more subtle applications of Taylor's scientific management seek to control the workforce for maximum profit. Management and employer groups are concerned about the need to develop a strong and competitive work ethic; studies are commissioned by these interests to see how workers measure up and to see where they need to improve their work ethic (Ali & Azim, 1993; Bell, 1996; Furnham,1990; Furnham & Reilly, 1991; Giorgi & Marsh, 1990; Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn, Steensma & teBrake, 1998; Lehmann & Roth, 1993; Li-Ping Tang 1992; Lipset, 1990; Neipert-Hedges 1983; Tigler 1931; Wayne, 1989; Weaver, 1997).

Braverman (1974) charts the path of industrialization on several occupations and show how there was a systematic deskilling through automation and technology so that

little knowledge or training was needed to do a job. Work was divided and compartmentalized into ever smaller units so that individual workers would no longer have all the knowledge necessary to complete a whole process and product, concentrating complete knowledge of a work process into management hands only.

Braverman (1974, p. 236) wrote "A necessary consequence of management and technology is a reduction in the demand for labour." Though mechanization created more productivity with fewer workers, these workers were not eliminated from the labour force but rather were displaced, becoming surplus workers. A surplus in labour could create pressure on workers to work for lower wages or to work harder with fewer workers. This more than mechanization itself, determined the point at which labour was considered by the employer to be cheaper than machinery. Braverman (1974) described how the evolution of machinery, bright with possibility for humans, was bent to capital's purpose.

> In this way the remarkable development of machinery becomes, for most of the working population, the source of not freedom but of enslavement, not of mastery but of helplessness, and not of the broadening of the horizon of Labour but of the confinement of the worker within a blind round of servile duties in which the machine appears as the embodiment of science and the worker as little or nothing (pp. 194-5).

Though Braverman was writing about a particular point in time, this historical view has application today not only in industrialized jobs but in the work of the participants of this study. They were frustrated with the way increased administrative procedures had taken away from their ability to connect with clients. These procedures required the social workers to be "on" their computers for much of the day.

Braverman (1974) saw deskilling and capital's influence and control of education and training to be closely linked. On the one hand, the population in capitalist countries are required to be educated to a level higher than most jobs actually require. On the other hand jobs are classified erroneously to benefit the goals of capital, in particular with a false "bumping up" of the semi-skilled category. A current example of such inflated educational requirements can be seen in the B.C. government's reaction to the Gove Commission. The Gove Report stated that Mathew Vaudreuil's death was in part the result of under-trained, under-educated and under-supervised social workers. The

government decided to increase the qualification and training level requirements while fragmenting the work for new social workers. While most social workers agreed with the upgrading of qualifications in the hopes that it would increase the credibility of the profession, a BSW or MSW is not actually necessary to do the increasingly prescribed and administrative job that now exists. Most social workers are frustrated that they can not practice "real" social work but are instead expected to be bureaucrats.

The structure of hired employment according to Braverman (1974) is expressed in two forms. On one side capital hires a labour force which must work under external direction to increase capital. On the other side, capital selects from its own ranks representative management staff to supervise and organize the other. Between these two, lie a range of categories with gradation of position based on authority on the management side, and on levels of technical expertise on the staff side. Professionals lie along this continuum based on levels of authority and expertise ascribed to the position. Included in the middle "... the mass employments of draftsmen and technicians, engineers and accountants, nurses and teachers, and the multiplying ranks of supervisors, foremen, and petty managers." Though not specifically named, social work would fit here (Braverman 1974, p. 407).

The conflicted and bifurcated nature of the social work profession may be explained in part by its fulcrum-like position on this continuum. On the one hand it is clearly not a part of the continuum that increases capital, though the profession often works with those who do or would do if not currently disenfranchised. On the other hand the profession has authority and expertise. The nature of this expertise is to assist and encourage empowerment of clients at the field level and to create and ensure policy at a more managerial level. This type of expertise is not a particularly comfortable "fit" with the goals of capital or always within the profession itself (deMontigny, 1989).

Braverman's (1974) work acted as a catalyst to other thinking on the topic of the labour process in monopoly capital even though his writing was criticised as both too general on the concept of deskilling and not complete enough as a historical overview (Albury & Schwarz, 1985; Beechey, 1984; Cuneo, 1984; Derber, 1982; Littler, 1984;

Wood, 1982). For example, Charles Derber (1982) advanced a theoretical perspective of the proletarianization of the twentieth century professional. An erosion of conditions for self-employment and therefore of independence for 19th century professionals, meant that by the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, more professionals were working for employers. This can be seen today particularly but not exclusively in the "women's professions" of nursing, teaching, and social work, where most work for large bureaucratic organizations. Derber (1982) argues the authority and autonomy of professionals are decreasing due to the increasing demands and controls placed on them by their employing agencies.

Tudiver (1987) argues (by using Frederick Taylor's concept of scientific management) that professional autonomy is assaulted by management through deskilling and rationalization. In human service work, roles such as "case aid and probation interviewer" have been created to take the more administrative tasks away from the social worker, the probation officer, or other professional leaving them more time to do the "skilled" aspects of the job. These more administratively focused positions are usually paid at a lower rate. There are similar less skilled positions created in nursing, teaching, law and other professions.

Although some say Taylorism or scientific management is an idea of the past, others believe this management philosophy is still very much with us. Menzies (1996) writes of the "new management style" current in North America:

> Meanwhile, the new management style of employee involvement went to work fulfilling Frederick Taylor's original idea, that "joint obedience to fact and law" would replace "obedience to personal authority." ... What this meant in other words, was not external control but internalised control by a compliant workforce. ... The contradiction in all of this - namely that management still controls the definition of these facts and laws - is buried under the corporate-cultural rhetoric of post - Taylorist employee empowerment (p. 125).

Menzies (1996) also points out that under the banner of "quality" and "excellence" the work environment is being degraded in the workplace. She made this claim in the context of recording the stories of a group of women who had worked for Bell Canada and who had lost their jobs due to the computerization of the switching of local and long

distance calls. Before the jobs were downsized however, the workers had engaged in competition with each other to produce more, "tattling" on each other about who was working harder than their colleagues. This did not save any jobs. Modern transformational management techniques, invite employees to buy into the spirit of the company (Senge, 1990; Pitcher, 1997; Covey, 1992), dislocating families and moving to where the jobs are, if necessary. The bitter irony is that workers, professional or not, may still lose their jobs.

Rifkin (1995) writes about American and European companies flattening traditional organizational pyramids to transfer more decision making responsibilities to networks and teams, eliminating "... millions of jobs and hundreds of job categories." (p. 101). Hardest hit is middle management, that part of organizations traditionally responsible for co-ordinating the work flow up and down the organizational ladder. Rifkin (1995) writes:

> ... 'time' is the critical commodity, and corporations bogged down by old-fashioned hierarchical management schemes cannot hope to make decisions fast enough to keep up with the flow of information that requires resolution" (p. 101).

Computers are being used instead to perform the coordinating functions previously carried out by many middle managers and professionals. The Ministry for Children and Families for example, has taken pride in having one of the flattest organizational structures of B.C.'s ministries, relying heavily on e-mail and other computer systems to keep employees informed, in-line, and electronically guided.

Technology and Computers

> Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxilliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him trouble at times (Freud, 1962, p. 39).

Freud makes a point to ponder. The many technological advances made in the past two hundred years has rendered us God-like, if God-like means having special powers over the lives and affairs of people and the course of nature (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1997). But technology can give us trouble. Like Freud, Menzies (1996) cautioned that technology is *not* a neutral tool that anyone can control. The assumption

that it *is* neutral leaves some people unprepared for and reluctant to acknowledge that "... its larger construction can limit choice and exclude people from the decision-making process altogether" (p. 27). Yet it is also a problem if one believes technology is "... so big and powerful that only huge institutions like government can grapple with it, and even they can do little more than mitigate its effects" (p. 27).

Menzies (1996) argues that technology is a social construction. The values and priorities of the people who control it are reflected in its design, organization and use. These are then imposed on whoever uses it. She says that the direction of technological restructuring since the 1960's had overwhelmingly, "... advanced what scientist and activist Ursula Franklin has called the prescriptive production model over the holistic growth model" (p. 29). Menzies talks of the "technological dynamo" where technology is driving people faster and faster, at peak performance, with scarcely a moment unbooked. She describes a scene of constant change which leaves people without the time to get comfortable with a new technology or systems before something new appears. Participants of my study spoke of the constant administrative and human resource changes leaving them unsure of "what the rules were" at times.

Harry Braverman (1974) maintained that machines out of the "hands" of workers became a labour controlling tool for management, transforming labour from subject to object. According to Braverman, in defining machines, one was forced to choose between two essentially different trains of thought. One was the engineering approach which defined the machine in relation to itself, as a technical fact. The other was the social approach, which viewed technology in its connections with humanity. Braverman said that Marx saw machinery as a tool *for* humans, in particular, workers. Braverman (1974, p.192) also said that it was Marx who put the worker back into the equation by describing how advanced machinery and processes such as electrical, chemical and other physical forces, could be described as an evolution where there was an increase of worker control over the action of tools, and with this control, tools could be, "extensions of the human organs of work including the sensory organs." Maybe this was the magnificence of "auxilliary organs" that Freud alluded to in the heading quote. In more recent times,

technological change has frequently involved computer technology. John T. Pardeck has authored and co-authored several articles on the impact of computerization on the way human services are provided. Murphy and Pardeck (1992, p.61) argue that "technology is not a tool." The concern was that practitioners generally *did* see computer technology as a tool and as such, value-free and able to guide the delivery of social services uncontaminated by opinion. He warned of the need to understand who controls this technology and to what end. Boden (1977, cited in Murphy and Pardeck, (1992, p.61) says "computers do not merely 'crunch' numbers but manipulate symbols. In other words, data are useless to a computer unless they assume a particular form." The particular form data must take in turn forms how the practitioner does their work confirming Marx's argument that new production forces cause change in the mode of production which in turn creates change in the workers social relations. Murphy and Pardeck (1992, p.71) encouraged the productive use of computers and that to do so, practitioners should be aware that this technology was supported by a particular philosophy. They say that once this is understood, practitioners "... can conclude that certain knowledge may or may not be readily amenable to computerization, without worrying about being labelled a neo-luddite." The authors were perhaps unaware of the degree of lack of autonomy many practitioners have in their various workplaces, particularly those that work for government ministries or government funded agencies. Whether or not to use particular computer programs and forms to capture and record client information and conduct assessments for example, is often not a choice a field practitioner has. Murphy & Pardeck's (1992) admonishment that the human side of the intervention must not be diminished in importance is worthy of note. Their solutions in this regard were weak or not applicable to many of today's agencies where much autonomy has been taken away from or given up by professionals. Though frustrated at the volume of administrative computer work, participants of this study did not question the content of the computer generated "forms and screens" they had to use, or the consequent shaping of interactions and information gathering with their clients. But they did say that doing administrative paper work even if done mainly by computer, "got in the way" of doing social work with

clients.

Earlier Murphy, Pardeck et al. (1987) examined a variety of conceptual problems associated with the use of computers in social work, and argued that how computerization could shape social work was often overlooked. They claimed that computers did not operate on the basis of technical knowledge alone, but required that the world be conceptualised in a particular manner. Both practitioners and clients may be dehumanized by computerization; this could be avoided by placing computers in a reflexive environment. The authors argue that the computer micro-world influenced at least four areas of social service delivery. The first area of concern was the rendition of the social world that is advanced. The system dictated the parameters of acceptable behaviour and how those who violate norms were to be handled. With family and child service social work in B.C. for instance, the *Comprehensive Plan of Care* dictates a particular examination of a child's life including trips to doctors, dentists and so on. The second area of concern discussed how computers shape the nature of data. Unknowingly, a practitioner may begin to treat clients in an insensitive manner, because only information that can be computerized can be admitted to their record. The third concern was language use, particularly how clients and practitioners communicate with one another. If the way clients used language was ignored or simply classified and not understood with respect to what the client meant socially, then the client's dynamic character was ignored. The fourth concern, involved how computers transformed organizations. The work becomes more fragmented as it is broken down into reporting units. The focus of an organization becomes information gathering and computer generated reports. These then come to define both an organization's parameters and its utility. The opening participant quote in chapter one reflected the social workers frustration on this very point. Shortliffe (1993, p. 395) saw the use of computers differently. He questioned the common assumption that the increasing use of computers in health care would necessarily lead to dehumanisation of the process. Dehumanising would occur he said because "we allow it to happen, not because there is something inherently dehumanising in the technology itself." Shortliffe suggested that it was at least

as likely that time pressures on modern medical practitioners, or the movement of patients from provider to provider were as likely to interfere with the physician-patient relationship as would the use of computers. He did not mention any ways that computer programs could negatively shape the medical process but points to his interest in helping to create computer programs that could assist physicians with complex decisions in patient care settings. Despite resistance by many physicians to the idea of "information technology," Shortliffe (1993) spoke positively of a future in medicine which included computers, and a future when computers fade into the background.

In brief, Shortliffe sees benefits in having the technology seemingly disappear, whereas Murphy and Pardeck advocate keeping the technology in plain sight and under examination, advocating that practitioners be ever reflexive and vigilant to the shaping nature of computerization. Shortliffe sees the use of computer technology as a means to have more time freed up to improve on the patient-physician relationship. Of note, the research on physicians who have much more societal power and prestige, takes up a pro-computer technology attitude, whereas those researchers more closely linked with human service workers, who have less societal prestige and power, have a more ambivalent tone. However, both authors admitted that their position was not generalized across their fields. Their articles were part of a flurry of articles written on computerization in the 1980 to 1990 period. The dearth of articles since may indicate that computers have "faded into the background" and have become as accepted in the modern work world as the assembly line became in industry and manufacturing. It may also explain why this study's participants did not question the content of computerized social work to the same degree as the volume of work that it generated.

Reduced Government Role in Professional Human Service Work

Rekart (1993) raised important issues about government privatization policies and the possible effects these policies will have on the future of the welfare state in Western society. The policies may stabilize or reduce government social expenditure and put the responsibility for social welfare to private hands. She maintains that policy strategies cannot be debated without confronting the ideological issues that have to do with one's

view of the role of government in society. She sees the political context of the 1980's as one in which privatization should be recognized as an ideological attack on societal responsibility. Rekart (1993) says that both the right and left have a growing interest in the voluntary sector and its role in the delivery of social services. Neo-conservatives seek a reduced role for the state and an increased reliance on other sectors such as the voluntary, informal, or private for profit sectors. State collectivists on the other hand, see voluntary agencies as important mediating structures than can bring about decentralization and more responsive services to people. Rekart's (1993) study showed that the voluntary sector has always played an important role in social service delivery in British Columbia but funding and enforcement of contract obligations increased dramatically in the 1980's as direct delivery of services by the government decreased. Rekart (1993, p. 151) writes "contracting out may solve the current contradiction in which the general populace wants more government services but less government." Contracting out may be a way to serve social needs without drawing too much attention from the public against the welfare state. Perhaps it is a more palatable way to increase government growth of social services. With more government funding there is consequently more government influence in the volunteer sector. According to Rekart (1993) privatization appears to be motivated by a desire to reduce the apparent size of government. British Columbia is encouraging the development of the private sector on grounds of efficiency but does not address how privatized service delivery can promote greater equity and social justice. Privatization has imported market principles into social services. Clients become consumers who will be able to effect change through their purchasing ability and their power to switch allegiances. This supposes that "public choice" will lead to self-regulation. By tightening of eligibility criteria and its referral system, government has ensured that those who can afford to pay will purchase these services in the "privacy" of the private market. Those without funds will rely on the informal sector of family and friends or on a residual publicly-funded social service.

Delegating service delivery to voluntary organizations may make it easier for the government to dismantle the social services through a process of resource starvation. But

this type of privatization by a succession of British Columbia governments have been constrained by legislation that defines their mandate, rules of the provincial budget set by Treasury, and funding arrangements with the federal government. Rekart (1993) pointed out that the Federal government's commitment to deficit reduction created a venue to subtly shift away from universalism toward greater targeting of social programs such as a means-tested family allowance, old age security and even user fees in Medicare.

Since 1993, social services are being squeezed on a provincial, federal and global basis. To deal with the squeeze contract reform in 1998 attempted to create a more interactive partnership approach in B.C.'s social welfare system. However, it is in its infancy and with a change in government from NDP to Liberal in May 2001, the question remains. How will the government and the public sector resolve the contradiction between voluntary organizations' need for state funding, and the government's wish to promote efficiency and accountability through competition in the tendering process? Regardless of the mix of public and private service providers however, it is the lack of access, coherence, continuity and co-ordination that are characteristic of services found in most advanced welfare states. Rekart claims that the scale of government funding to the voluntary sector indicates that the future of the sector is tied to the future of the welfare state. She maintains that the sector cannot return to philanthropy, the historical source of funding for the volunteer sector. Rekart urges the volunteer sector to organize themselves in such a way that public bodies will understand the diversity of the sector and that allows them to be more than passive ad hoc consultants or advisors with no legitimate voice in decision making, planning and policy issues.

Media's Role in the Shaping of the Public Perception of the Welfare State

The work context of professionals is shaped by capitalist managerial efficiencies, the technology of computers, and the reduced role of government. The media is also an important part of the work context.

In 1995 McQuaig wrote about how we as a culture have been enticed down a social program slashing, regulation removing, privitizing and user fee imposing path under the guise of debt reduction. An example of selling this concept to the Canadian

public came through television journalist Eric Malling on CTV's current affairs program, "*W5*" aired for the first time in February 1993. Malling showed viewers a quick scene of a cute newborn hippo pup splashing by her mother in the water. He then cut to the scene of a small school girl who tells the viewer that the hippo has been shot and killed. This powerful and evocative set of images is about the national deficit. The connection? The baby hippo had to be shot because there was no more room at the zoo just as government has no money for services. Although the story was about New Zealand, Malling makes it clear that it is really a story about Canada's future. This episode was seen by 1.7 million viewers and in McQuaig's opinion this marriage of image and message became part of the popular Canadian mythology of the deficit. By comparing New Zealand's situation to Canada's potential future, Malling encouraged the public to save the baby hippo, to save ourselves from teetering on a precarious cliff edge and, to prevent ourselves from slamming into a concrete wall of debt. McQuaig (1995. p. 5) pointed out that there was another New Zealand story unfolding at the same time that was not told by Malling. This story was about how New Zealand politicians embarked on an experiment in which an advanced social democracy was transformed into "...a free market jungle with massive unemployment, growing inequality and a damaged manufacturing base" (p.5). Once the Federal Liberals were in power in 1994 they too took up the cause to reduce the deficit. By doing this the Liberals gave a signal to the financial community that they were on board. Though there is more than one factor driving the deficit, such as unemployment, and high payments on interests to private banks, the focus has been restricted to the role of government spending in driving it up. Solutions have almost exclusively focused on the need for spending cuts. Though staunchly defending social programs when the Conservatives implemented major cutbacks, the Liberals did an about-face once elected. Deficit reduction was to become the new government's top priority, with social spending cuts to be brought in with the following budget.

In the 1980's Hideo Mimoto, a career civil servant, began to notice that talk of social spending did not match the numbers. Since 1964 he had expanded the gathering of information on social programs and made it publicly accessible. He released a 600- page

report on Canadian Social Security programs in the late seventies, and a 300-page report on unemployment insurance. By the mid-eighties when the deficit debate was heating up and becoming more focused on social spending, he noticed discrepancies between the debate and the statistics. He decided therefore, to put together another report to publish his data. By 1991 he had collected statistics that had the potential to upset the deficit debate. The data showed that government spending and in particular social spending, was not the root cause of the deficit problems.

According to McQuaig (1995) Mimoto concluded that there was no explosive growth in social spending. That was not the cause of the deficit. His report circulated for review through a number of experts. There were no major concerns with its accuracy, none-the-less, a slightly watered-down version was published in the Canadian Economic Observer in June 1991. The Finance Department was not happy about the report as it impacted on their goal of selling the concept of deficit reduction by spending cuts, to the public. After much discussion a disclaimer published in the August 1991 edition of Canadian Economic Observer, which did not deny the report content but *did* express regret that the report added to the controversy rather than reducing it. The report was not highlighted by media and it faded from sight.

There was another story not told by the media. According to McQuaig (1995) social spending in Canada was not out of line with that of other industrial nations and was lower than the social spending in the advance nations of Western Europe. The Paris-based Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) measure all aspects of the economies of the advanced industrial nations. It calculates the nature of each country's deficit. To do this it is necessary to determine how much of a country's deficit is caused by recession, since these cause deficits to balloon. The OECD can then measure the "structural deficits" which is the gap between the revenue a government collects and the amount it spends when the economy is operating properly, free of recession. The OECD separates out the part of the deficit caused by recession. Though Canada's overall deficit was the third largest among the top seven nations, once the recession portion of the deficit was removed, Canada had a "structural deficit" of only 2.1

per cent, better than the U.S.A. Overriding this "less told" story was the goal of the Federal government to cut spending on social programs. To the degree that the public bought into the created myth that cuts to social programming solves the deficit, there was and will be pressure for workers within the public sector. The public sector will be seen as responsible for the debt, which the media will help personalize. The public will see government workers as responsible for government financial problems and pressures. Just as media have played a role in promoting the interests of the "elite" in decreasing public support for government social services, the media also play a role in creating a discouraging message about social workers. For instance, the press is uninterested in child welfare and social work professionals until a tragedy occurs. Press stories are obtained from a host of sources, disaffected friends, neighbours, relatives/owners' reports, inquiry findings and so on. Whereas those more directly involved remain silent due to shame, criminal charges or policies of confidentiality. Several authors have shown how media influence a negative public opinion for social workers in Britain, the U.S and Canada (Reder et al, 1993; Armitage, 1998; Stevenson, 1989; Trocome & Lindsey, 1996).

When something tragic happens to a client involved with a child welfare agency the "story" often unfolds in the public eye. Hallet (1989) points out that reasons cited for holding inquiries in public include legitimate public interest and "the restoration of public confidence." Restoring public confidence was the reason given in making the hearings for B.C.'s Gove Inquiry open to the public and media. In some cases media have been invited in to the inquiry process, supposedly to keep the public informed. This happened with the 1995 Gove Inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil. Judge Gove outlined his perception of the role of the media in relation to the inquiry as follows:

> A number of television and radio stations applied for permission to record and broadcast the public hearings. As there was no opposition to the application, and because I wanted the hearings to be as open to the public as possible, I allowed for coverage of them by television and radio. Child protection has, for as long as anyone can remember, been conducted in secrecy, with at least the perception that social workers are not accountable. This secrecy does not serve the child that it is supposed to help nor any family that is under scrutiny (1995, p. 5).

According to Hallett (1989) inquiries such as the U.K.'s Malcolm Page Inquiry

also hoped that public education would be a result of their work. There was the hope that the public would better understand the role of social work. However, the role of the press in publicizing and amplifying concern before inquiries are set up has been the subject of critical comment. Hallet (1989) writes:

> Despite the carefully-worded reports of many committees, the burden of reporting, especially in the tabloid press, has been to emphasise only the failings of individual workers. Until recently, the harshest treatment has been reserved for social workers, but doctors have become the focus of attention in reporting of child sexual abuse in Cleveland and elsewhere (p. 137).

Callahan and Callahan (1997) examine press coverage of a public inquiry of a child welfare tragedy in British Columbia and compare it to actual testimony given at that inquiry. Callahan and Callahan (1997) stated that it is a meaningful endeavour to unravel the press-created images of child welfare and social workers at a time when all social programs are under scrutiny. How the press portrays the people and programs affected by proposed cuts to social spending, will provide information to us about how and why a culture such as ours builds itself a public case through the media for making those cuts.

Callahan and Callahan (1997, p. 41) limited their study to press coverage by the Vancouver Sun, a major British Columbia newspaper which, "claims a reputation of a fair-minded mainstream press," and further limited the study to the inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil. Using content analysis and critical discourse analysis, they found that the very first article written about the case at the sentencing of the mother and before the Gove Inquiry began "set the tone for all that followed" (1997, p. 42): the mother as evil and self-centered caring more for herself and boyfriend than her child; the social workers as incompetent in assessing character, inattentive in noticing signs of child neglect or abuse, and lacking in courage to defy government policies making it easier for an inadequate mother to keep her child. But, the Gove transcripts show a much more complex story. They show the mother as mentally handicapped and as economically marginalized as inconsistent in her parenting, ranging from capable to inadequate, loving to neglectful. The transcripts show the social workers investigating complaints, providing thousands of dollars worth of support services to the family, and taking time and attention

to help the mother and child. Yet the child died and more actions may or may not have prevented his death. Callahan and Callahan (1997, p. 43) pointed out that in spite of their access to "vast amounts of information *in this case at least*", there was no change in the way reporters covered this sensationalized child welfare case.

In brief, for the press to choose child abuse stories as "good copy", is to keep the focus of the public on the individual and away from the structural. Suggesting solutions or attributing blame at the individual level diverts attention away from the structure of power relations in capitalist society (Hachey & Grenier 1992). Callahan and Callahan (1997) concluded that, in the end, the press account did not support state intervention in families nor state care for children; instead it supported state action to dissolve improper families and support traditional ones. By calling into question social workers as individuals and social work as a profession the press played a role of reaffirming the capabilities of family and community. The press can appear neutral, a protector of our traditional cultural values of caring for children and families, while being instrumental in creating mistrust in government services, even while those in government services try to fill in the gaps created in families and communities by the current capitalist system. Callahan and Callahan (1997, p.55) also concluded that rather than the futile exercise of trying to influence the press by providing more facts, social workers as a profession should, "...analyze press coverage and find some ways to expose others to media bias and misinformation."

Work Expectations and Pressures for Public Service Social Workers

This part of the review moves in for a closer look at expectations and pressures in the women's professions and specifically in social work. Men also work in these professions. However, the majority working in these fields are women, hence the label "women's professions." Baines (1998) addresses the history of female professions including social work. Aronson and Sammon (2000) discuss study findings which have many parallels to my study. They describe the funding cuts and organizational changes in recent years in Ontario which have particularly affected social workers in front line practice. Finally, Early's (2000) qualitative study attempts to gain a more formal

understanding of what child protection workers were experiencing in the post- Gove era. She discovers a fear of blame.

Baines (1998) analysed the influence of an ethic of care on the evolution of women's professions and the tension women experience in combining caring and professionalism. The contradiction of maintaining an ethic of care while seeking more professional autonomy and equality within the caring professions would not be easy to resolve. Baines (1998, p. 42) writes "the answer does not lie in either glorification of caring or a repudiation of professionalism." Both reinforce a gender division and both must be examined. Being aware of limits to professional autonomy for example, is one of the requirements for change. Baines showed that in social work in particular, women are not operating collectively for change but are still solitary, working out practice problems as individuals.

A formidable barrier to change in social work and other women's professions is their presence in large bureaucratic organizations. Changes need to be centered on examining and altering the internal structures of the professions, the state organizations in which they are embedded and the barriers that prevent the advancement of women. But change will not occur if women devalue their unpaid work in the home and community and bring that thinking into their paid professional work. Being a superwoman and emulating men while doing all the "women's" work will not produce change (Baines, 1998).

Aronson and Sammon (2000, p. 167) emphasize the importance of sustaining a critical consciousness "of the origins and consequences of the contradictions workers may encounter and of the possibilities of challenging these dilemmas". They describe the funding cuts and organizational changes in recent years in Ontario which had particularly affected social workers in front-line practice in social service settings. The particularly rapid cuts and reorganization in Ontario in the last five years had an especially disruptive impact on social work practice in health and child welfare settings. There had been a steady reduction of "institutional arrangements" for health care and child welfare in Ontario but the process accelerated with the changes introduced by the Conservative

provincial government.

There are parallels between British Columbia and Ontario in this regard. The time period during which this study's interviews were conducted took place under a New Democratic Party provincial government in British Columbia. A Liberal provincial government, elected in British Columbia in April 2001, has similarly had an intention of making cuts to the provincial civil service of potentially 30% to 50%. The Aronson and Sammon (2000) study might reasonably have been seen as a foreshadowing of things to come in British Columbia due to the recent election of a more right wing government. However, participants of my study were already describing very similar experiences to those that participants in the Aronson and Sammon (2000) study described while the New Democrat Party was still in power.

Participants of the Aronson and Sammon (2000) study in institutionally-based health services and child welfare services identified how crucial aspects of what they deemed good practice, were being squeezed out of their jobs. The transcriptions, written records of their experiences, were analyzed for emerging themes and tensions. These were seen as entry points into the "ruling arrangements" which embedded their employing organizations and their work lives. Three themes emerged. First, all participants described how they were required to assume heavier and more complex caseloads and to work at a faster pace. These expectations meant they felt constantly pressed for time, in turn this resulted in rushing their encounters with clients. Participants spoke of frustrations about the lack of "quality time" for clients' complex needs. A second theme concerned "administrative procedures that standardized the processing of service users" (p.172). Participants expressed concern and frustration over such things as "benchmarks", "critical pathways" and "risk assessments" which based provision of service on meeting narrowly defined goals based on institutional efficiency rather than the much more" messy and extensive" range of client needs. As a trade-off to being able to provide in-depth and quality service to clients, one participant described her work as "getting the answers you need to fill in." The participant reasoned that "You want to know at least the paper is there...so that if your name goes in the headline in the paper...at

least I've done what was expected of me..." (p.172).

Along with the over simplified and standard approaches to practice required by such processes was a third theme. This was the fragmentation of labour between different workers. Fragmentation involved deskilling evidenced by the hiring of part-time and casual staff with less training, such as social work assistants (called case-aids in British Columbia), support workers and visitation supervisors. Tasks seen as requiring less skill would be carved off the over-all case work and assigned to the assistants. This was seen by participants as providing "piece-meal" service where families and children had to deal with several workers that knew only a piece of the situation or knew the overall case superficially. This fractured the knowledge base and lessened the confidence of workers.

The pressures of time limits, ill-fitting organizational forms, and fragmented and divided labour squeezed good practice out of the jobs. All participants mentioned the loss of relationship with their clients resulting in concerns about the ability to assess, plan with, and provide service for, people they did not know sufficiently. The critical dimension of practice that participants felt suffered due to the organizational pressure to rush, narrow and simplify their practice was their ability to reflect or even to think about their work. The "reduced", "constrained", "confining" and "frustrating" conditions experienced by participants in the Aronson and Sammon (2000) study placed them at odds between their day-to-day realities and their sense of good practice.

The participants of the Aronson and Sammon (2000) study were not completely compliant with the external and contextual changes that bore down on their practice. There were struggles against the pressure but they were individualized, small-scale and therefore hidden. Fighting for clients fell into two key forms of work: complex referral and resource finding practices; and resistance of organizationally defined limits to building relationships. But these individualized efforts did nothing to expose or challenge insufficient resources, narrow eligibility criteria or to make it widely known that front-line tensions were systemic rather than individual. The ability to connect clients with resources depended upon their personal connections, the reputations of the individual workers and their gained wisdom of knowing which words to use or avoid to

ensure client entitlement. Worker turnover and constant change shrunk this web of connections and subtle understanding of process.

Resisting time limits to relationship-building inevitably meant the social worker gave of her own time to do this, as well as complete other obligations. Participants in my study described this same gift and theft of personal time. As Aronson and Sammon (2000) showed, doing good social work on their own time resulted in a mix of satisfaction and tension that was complex and contradictory for study participants. It was often in these stolen moments of their own time that participants reported experiencing the pleasure of performing skilful practice. On the one hand these "impostor" efforts brought satisfaction, on the other the moments could not be described wholeheartedly or completely with satisfaction as they were accompanied with feelings of insufficiency, of fraudulence and with the knowledge they must be kept secret. Although their study was conducted in urban Southern Ontario, their findings of restriction, contradiction and isolation are transferable more broadly "as other social service sectors and other regions of the country face similar ideological and economic retrenchment in social programming" (p.182). The findings of my study indicate that this is so.

The final piece of literature in this section of the review is an article by Early (2000) discussing her research study entitled "Fear of Blame: Post-Gove Child Protection in B. C." Early was a former child protection worker of ten years who after an inquiry into a child death on her caseload lost her delegation letter and therefore her ability to practice child protection. She conducted a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with ten British Columbia Lower Mainland social workers representing a wide range of age and experience, both male and female. The information from this research illuminated what the meaning of the job had become for those social workers who "are attempting to perform demanding work under difficult circumstances"(Early, 2000, p.8).

Early's (2000) research uncovered a number of areas of general concern which contributed to the overall dissatisfaction of child protection workers under the current system. There were experienced changes in the work following the B. C. Provincial government's response to the Gove Report. This she pointed out, left a "poisoned"

atmosphere due to the government's readiness to believe social work incompetence contributed to child deaths. Social workers reported being treated like "kindergarten kids" showing management's disrespect for social work professional training and judgement. A perceived false dichotomy constructed by the government between keeping the family together versus protecting children made these two priorities mutually exclusive, ignoring the complexity of the work and creating strong frustration among social workers. There was the "overwhelming" issue of workload where the toll of worker exhaustion went unheard by management. The result of being disregarded "drains the energy of even the most determined survivor" (Early 2000, p.8). The result of this demoralized situation, according to participants of her study, was that people were becoming ill or developing a focus "about how he or she was going to get out" (p.8).

Early (2000) reminded us that these issues have always been present to some degree in child protection. These have heightened with the implementation of new policy and administrative procedures as has the negatively charged work environment due to the fear of blame. My research study will show that a fear of blame has spilled over into other areas of child welfare such as guardianship, resources, and community living services social work. Early (2000) writes that social workers are trained to think critically and expected to take responsibility for the decisions they make in situations where they have some control. This is a hallmark of professional and ethical practice. It is also true that as control over the work has diminished and volume of work has drastically increased, professional accountability has been replaced with blame. Fear and demoralization congealed around two changed aspects of work life. One change was the new risk assessment policy introduced in 1996 supposedly to provide greater precision and quantification of child abuse and neglect. The other change was the companion government audit or review process set-up to "monitor" and judge the quality of social work practice.

In summary, expectations and pressures experienced by field social workers are onerous, particularly in mandated areas like child protection. Restrictions, isolation and impossible contradictions face social workers everyday. Many social workers have left

government service in B.C. Government recruitment of new social workers to deal with attrition and policy requirements have been unsuccessful. Those staying are vulnerable to burnout, the topic of the next section.

Responses of Human Service Workers to their Work Environment

Of the various authors examining burnout (for example, Bramhall and Ezell, 1981; Carroll and White, 1982; Karger, 1981; Maslach, 1982; Pines and Aronson,1988; Ratliff, 1988; Scriven, Moe and Sparkes, 1979; Seiderman, 1978). I will concentrate on a study by Katz as she researches the burnout of social workers. Katz (1992) states that "burnout" as an empirical construct can be criticized because there is controversy over its definition, and because it manifests through a variety of signs and symptoms versus a more discrete set. Maslach (1982) in Katz (1992) points out however, that most researchers agree with the following three points:

> 1. burnout does occur in individuals
>
> 2 the internal psychological state of burnout involves feelings, attitudes, motives, and expectations, and
>
> 3. the experience of burnout is negative and involves discomfort and negative consequences (p. 24).

Katz (1992) lists fifteen standard and current definitions of burnout, three of which I list here since they relate directly to professionals and to the work environment or work culture, two aspects of my study.

> A progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work.
>
> A process in which a professional's attitudes and behaviour change in negative ways in response to job strain.
>
> A condition produced by working too hard for too long in a high-pressure environment (pp. 16-17).

Katz (1992) maintains that there are many signs and symptoms of burnout and that individuals react to burnout in different ways. Some react psychologically, showing symptoms of depression, boredom, disenchantment, confusion, teariness, sadness, paranoia, anger, and moodiness for example. Others react by somatically displaying such

symptoms as fatigue, exhaustion, headaches, shortness of breath, and weight change. Additionally, burnout has been correlated with physical illness such as flu, frequent colds, and general malaise, psychosomatic symptoms and substance abuse. Witnessing this range of symptoms in colleagues as well as experiencing some of them myself caught my attention, and raised my curiosity regarding the work processes of public sector social work.

According to Katz, the term "burnout" dates back to the mid-seventies though the phenomenon itself is not a recent one. Historically, burned out workers quit their jobs, or got fired or laid off. During the seventies workers began to remain in their jobs long enough for the condition of "burnout" to be named and assessed. The mid-seventies was a timeframe in which technological change was being introduced causing downsizing. It was also a time when restraint programs were being put in place making social programs harder to access, a practice back in vogue at this point in time. People may have stayed in jobs longer during this timeframe because they were less secure about leaving one job for another.

Katz specifically looked at the degree of burnout experienced by social workers in skilled nursing facilities as compared to other human service providers and locations. She was also exploring dimensions of the work environment to determine which dimensions were predictive of "burnout", as she hypothesized that work characteristics influence burnout more than do personality or other individual characteristics.

Katz (1992) found that job satisfaction was associated to intrinsic factors such as recognition for work well done and the work itself. While job dissatisfaction was associated to such extrinsic factors as salary and administrative policy, Katz (1992) also found that the more education a participant had the more they reported both higher accomplishments and emotional exhaustion, and lower depersonalisation, than those with less education. Older employees had lower emotional exhaustion and lower depersonalisation. She did not define the age range of "older" employee, how or if this correlated to length of service, or level of education of the older employee. Katz (1992) noted there is a positive association between the number of hours worked in a day and

burnout.

Katz (1992) and others such as Arches (1991) discussed the tendency in the literature to focus on the symptoms of the individual worker in the individual's workplace, with solutions focused in that area. Katz suggested looking at the environment and Arches suggested that theories need to confront the social relations under capitalism and the class that benefits from workplace factors that are associated with burnout. Arches turned to Karger (1981) who suggested that as long as social workers used the term "burnout" rather than the term coined by Marx "alienation," the focus and analysis will remain on the subjective and the individual. Using the term "alienation" would allow social workers to focus on and analyze the objective and organizational.

In conclusion, social work is on one hand focussed on subjective relationships with professional autonomy, individual discretion and knowledge crucial to effective, satisfying, best practices. On the other hand, the context in which social work practice is shaped includes capitalist managerial efficiencies, the technology of computers, the diminishing public sector and the negative influencing role of media toward social work and social workers.

What the pressures and expectations look like and how experience is focused provide a front-line snap-shot of the confluence of these two belief systems creating a visceral encounter in practice and policy for the reader. My interest in mature social work women, known in the literature for their dependability and who work in practice fields heavily regulated by the laws and policies governing child welfare, has two origins. Firstly, I occupy this same age, gender, and professional niche, and therefore have a sense of this location. Secondly, I believe that mid-aged women social workers, a majority minority will, due to their years of combined knowledge, history and life experience, provide an in-depth description of "estuarial" social work. The two questions driving my study are:

> 1) How do mid-aged female social workers in child welfare public service describe the pressures and expectations of their work culture?

2) How do they deal with or respond to the pressures and expectations?

CHAPTER THREE

Method

Conceptualising the Research Process

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe two elements of the work culture of mid-aged women social workers in public service: first, the pressures and expectations they experienced; and second, the responses they made to pressures and expectations. This chapter discusses the method and procedures used in the study. After presenting the research methodology, influences on the researcher, and rationale for choosing Spradley's method of ethnography (Spradley, 1979). I describe entering the field, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Methodology

Ethnography was chosen as the research methodology for this study as it provides an approach which allows for discovery of participants' perspectives of the pressures and expectations of them in their work culture. Spradley (1979) says:

> In ethnographic description we should represent the meanings encoded in that language as closely as possible. As a translation, ethnographic descriptions should flow from the concepts and meanings native to that scene rather than the concepts developed by the ethnographer (p. 24).

By use of an ethnographic method, the participants' language was analysed to uncover encoded meanings in the everyday life of mid-age women social workers on various types of child welfare teams.

Ethnography seeks to document the existence of alternative realities and to describe these realities in their own terms. In this case, given that the voice of women in social work has been historically quieted, their words would be an "alternative reality" (Burke, 1963). Ethnography offers a strategy for discovering theory or theories grounded in the empirical data of cultural description. It offers an effective way to understand features of modern life, such as the complex work and devaluing work culture of mid-age women public service social workers. Ethnography can show a range of cultural differences whereby people with diverse perspectives interact such as those in public

service and media. It can even show a range of more subtle cultural differences and how people with seemingly similar perspectives interact, such as between various Family and Child Services, Resource and Protection teams within the Ministry for Children and Families. One goal of ethnography is to understand ourselves, the human species. But, it offers more than simply knowledge for understanding; it offers "... dividends to anyone involved in cultural change, social planning, or trying to solve a large range of human problems" (Spradley, 1979, p. 1).

Spradley (1979) notes that ethnography always implies a theory of culture. His use of the term "culture" refers to " ... the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour" (p. 5). He points out ethnographers make cultural inferences from three sources: what people say; the way people act; and from the artefacts that they use. Spradley (1979) writes:

> Because language is the primary means for transmitting culture from one generation to the next, much of any culture is encoded in linguistic form (p. 9).

For this study, I primarily used the language of participants, gathered and transcribed from interviews, as well as noted in follow-up conversations and personal observation.

Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology through the studies of comparative cultures by anthropologists such as Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe, Brown and Mead. It was the first hand collection of data of existing "primitive" cultures that distinguished these anthropologists from different scientific approaches. In the 1920s and 1930s anthropological field methods were adopted by Park, Dewey and Mead at the University of Chicago, in order to study cultural groups in the United States (Creswell 1998). Since that time there has been an expansion of approaches to ethnography which include "schools" of ethnography such as symbolic interactionism, critical theory or feminism (Creswell, 1998). Studying groups or individuals in one's own culture requires that the ethnographer look for fine distinctions in meaning and conduct thorough interpretation (Agar, 1980). Streubert and Carpenter (1995) write "... the ways of traditional science were inadequate to discover the nuances of people who live together and share similar experiences "(p. 89). This led to the beginnings of ethnography as a

means of studying "life ways" or patterns of groups of individuals.

About social work research Wise (1990) writes:

> ... much of what passes for 'expert writing' on social work fails to show what it is that social workers actually do. Continual reiterations of 'social work is the long arm of the state' tells us *nothing* [italics hers] of what this job entails for the average social worker, nothing about what kinds of people and problems you have to work with, nothing concerning what kinds of powers you actually have and even less about how these are mediated by circumstances and other people, nothing on what 'a case' looks like; and, equally, it tells us nothing at all about how it is experienced by the client on the receiving end of it. As far as I am concerned, one kind of person and only one kind of person really knows 'what social workers do'; those who experience it as workers or as clients (p. 239).

Wise (1990) raises important concerns about 'expert writing' that leaves those written about feeling that the details of their day to day social work experiences remain invisible or misrepresented. Ethnography provides a methodology for understanding the day to day realities of persons, and of giving participants the opportunity to validate or repudiate the information being written about them. As Wise (1990) stated, many people today have expressed concern about what others write about them and they have asked hard questions about being "studied" in ways that are non-beneficial to them. There is a growing recognition in the field of ethnography of the ethics involved in gathering research information about a given culture or cultural niche. It is thought that the needs of participants should have equal weight with ethnographic information-seeking. To do that participants must be consulted about which elements of their cultures they see as being of particular or urgent research value (Spradley, 1979). The verification process allowed participants to focus on those elements of their culture that *they* wanted to highlight.

In the following section I outline the values that informed the conducting, analysis and interpretation of my research efforts, including relevant comments on critical and feminist approaches to ethnography.

Influences on Researcher

There are several influences governing the lens that I used to collect and analyse data for this study. Turnbull (1968) whose ethnography was written in the form of a narrative tale, revealed an incredible journey into the Ituri Forest in the Congo to visit the BaMbuti Pygmy people. His description of many facets of daily life for tribe members gave the reader an opportunity to see how a group of people lived with the forest and other peoples around them at a particular place and point in time. Though my research thesis is not written as a narrative tale, it *is* a journey under the canopy of the dense forest of public service social work. I learned from Turnbull's work that if you are not seen by participants as worthy of being told about their world, you will not be told about their world, or, you will be told an edited version of that world. Being seen as worthy or safe is generally a by-product of building rapport and that can happen in many ways. Turnbull proved himself acceptable to the Pygmy tribe he was living with by involving himself in their work, play, food and rituals to the fullest extent they would allow. Thus he was able to learn from them. He was even initiated as a "forest person" and given the scarification ritual of that tribe. I believe participants opened up to me, because I worked, played and survived in the same "forest" as they did, simply in another agency location. I already *was* a "forest person"; I supervised an over 12 guardianship social work team and interacted daily with the closely connected resource social work team, protection social work team, and community living services social work team in my home community in British Columbia. I knew what was of urgent value to my team and to myself. Our concerns about increasing pressure and expectations propelled me into this study. Also, the participants' team leaders and managers sanctioned their connection with me. Given that this was a very hierarchical work culture, this added to their sense of safety in talking to me, a kind of agreement between tribes.

Critical Theory Influence.

My ethnographic research was influenced by critical theory and feminist theory perspectives. Critical ethnography, which assumes the crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism, was applied to the conceptual and data analysis aspects of this research.

Critical theory and feminism are both theories that examine sources and impacts of power, and oppression. Our culture is capitalist and patriarchal at this time. These theories provide a framework through which to view power and oppression sources in connection to the well-being or lack thereof, of parts of the child welfare sector in our society. A capitalist culture such as ours encourages an individualistic, entrepreneurial outlook which can focus blame at the individual level when things go wrong. Likewise, responsibility for change-making and solution-finding falls to the individual. Critical theory provides a framework to look beyond individuals and to follow the road toward the sources of power, money and influence that are shaping our culture. It is at this place that structural reparation in a culture can best be made.

The Ministry for Children and Families delivers services to the most vulnerable in our society, and to those who may fall outside our culture's definition of "proper citizen" or "proper family" (Callahan & Callahan, 1997). How are those who deliver this work impacted? One way to find this out is to ask what is expected of them and to follow this to its root. Another way to discover how this segment of workers experience culture in their workplace, is to find out how they experience pressures in their work. What are those pressures and how do they deal with them? Hearing these experiences will tell us a little bit about where we as a capitalist, patriarchal culture place mid-age female public service social workers and the expectations and pressures on them.

Jordan and Yeomans (1995) say of critical ethnography:

> First, it allows the exploration of social relations and practices of contemporary capitalism as these materialise within the everyday world, whether in schools, hospitals, prisons, gay bars, factories or coal mines. Second, ethnographic research has a unique capacity to get close-up to sites of exploration and oppression, thereby endowing the researcher with not only first-hand experience of what forms these take and how they are organised but also a privileged standpoint in respect of constructing emancipatory epistemology/ontology (p. 389).

In this case, the everyday world is that of female mid-aged social workers from various types of child welfare social work teams in two small western communities. By means of semi-structured interviews I heard how the participants made sense out of their work day,

and they in turn had an opportunity to reflect on their daily work.

King (1999) speaks of the emancipatory and transformative potential of ethnography stating:

> Further, the impact of critical ethnography can be measured based on its reflexive utility. Dippo introduced the construct of reflexive utility to mean the extent to which a study, project, or intervention, which is intended to empower participants, can be seen to provide opportunity structures for the participants self-empowerment. After all, "empower" is not a transitive verb, and participants cannot be empowered. This moves project success criteria away from amount of change to opportunities for self-examination that may lead to personal change or self-transformation (p.482).

There were such opportunities for self-examination in this research study. For example, some participants had not given much thought to how much work they were taking home after work or what their lives would be like once they had retired and were no longer *allowed* to take work home. In this sense, I believe there was an element of uneasy emancipation that took place for participants in the interview and verification processes. Realizing that they were not as autonomous as they had thought created an opportunity for participants to examine more closely where limitations to autonomy might lie. Also, an opportunity was created for participants to examine how they used their personal time now. In doing so participants became aware that; they were taking home much more work than they had realized, that they had become comfortable filling their own time this way and, that once retired they would not have access to this way of filling time.

Conducting and disseminating ethnographic research in such a way that it is of value to participants and to others as well, is a tricky business. Jordan and Yeomans (1995) acknowledge that many critical ethnographers believe that ethnographical work had to be measured in terms of "... its impact on developing critical consciousness among a broad range of social groups "(p.399). They too believe that it is important to find a "popular" way to disseminate information where the purpose is the transformation of society. Critical ethnography therefore has to decide which audience to address and by which means. I agree but argue that there can be more than one audience for the dissemination of ideas or theories born out of a critical ethnography, whether academic or

popular.

This research for example, is conducted by me as an ethnographer working at the field level in which this research takes place. Though the research material will be presented in an academic setting in fulfilment of an academic requirement, the material will also circulate at the field level and into a variety of levels of the organization in which this research was conducted. There are many mature students such as myself who obtain their degrees and make academic affiliations while continuing to work in their field careers and in their home communities. Today, with academic students concurrently working as professionals within a variety of agencies and with access to a variety of levels of organizations as well as to clients, colleagues and community agencies, there are various avenues where academic research can and does find expression. Though this study does not claim to be transformative for society, or for the organization it is referencing, it will raise awareness with participants, with readers of this study and others in their professional worlds. Awareness precedes transformation (Baines, 1998; Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992).

Feminist Perspective Influence.

A feminist outlook would encourage an examination and awareness raising regarding the actual or potential oppression of vulnerable groups in the process of caring for others. A feminist perspective also influences this research project since it focuses on women social workers who work in a system in which decision and policy makers are predominantly men (Gripton, 1974; Stanley, 1990). One aim of this research would be to encourage thinking which promoted more women into decision and policy making positions. The aim of feminist research according to Lather (1991) in Creswell (1998) is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position"(p. 83). Wise (1990) described her struggle to marry her feminist beliefs with her job as a social worker. She maintained that social work was seen by some feminists as an institution which is fundamentally anti-feminist due to its nature of being sexist and anti-woman. Wise's (1990) struggle was to find a way to do social work in a non-oppressive manner, which, for her was, "... the policing of

minimum standards of care for, and the protection of the most vulnerable members of our society - some of whom are women, but most of whom are not" (p. 236).

Rationale for Choosing Spradley's Ethnographic Method

I chose Spradley's (1979) ethnographic Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) method, summarized in Table 1, as the main guide for this research project. Though somewhat dated Spradley's (1979) ethnographic method was a good fit for me as it provided a semi-structured interview style that I was already comfortable with and a way of asking questions that focused on how things were rather than what they were, allowing for meaning to come from the participants versus the researcher. This method was applicable to my current practice in which several work cultures had come from various other ministries in September 1996[4] to live side by side in one location, and in one new Ministry for Children and Families (MCF). Spradley's method focuses on the words and phrases people use and the relationships between those words and phrases. Having had to learn many new "languages" as team leader of a multi-disciplinary team, this semantic approach had appeal. Though all teams used the English language, they each had their own cultural language, awash in acronym soup and, much of it tacit. Tacit means that team members on the various teams assumed others knew the meaning of the words and procedures they used and therefore their use of language. Generally, there was no explanation of the language nuances to "outsiders", including clients and other colleagues. Lack of explanation occasionally had a negative impact on working relationships due to a lack of understanding of language nuances. To illustrate the idea of a "tacit" language nuance in a multi-disciplinary setting, I will relate an example from my own workplace. As a team leader I was once asked to mediate a strong disagreement between a mental health and an addictions worker. The use of the word" confront" by the addictions worker had prompted a strong reaction from the mental health worker. Only after asking each to tell me and their colleague *how* they used the word "confront" did it

[4]The new ministry was created by the elected provincial, New Democratic Party (NDP), following a critical inquiry resulting in the *Gove Report*. In April of 2001 a newly elected B. C. provincial Liberal government announced impending changes to MCF beginning with a change of name to, Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD).

Table 1

The 12 Steps in Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence

1. Locating a participant
2. Interviewing a participant
3. Making an ethnographic record
4. Asking descriptive questions
5. Analyzing ethnographic interviews
6. Making a domain analysis
7. Asking structural questions
8. Making a taxonomic analysis
9. Asking contrast questions
10. Making a componential analysis
11. Discovering cultural themes
12. Writing the ethnography

- Adapted from Spradley (1979)

not mean the same thing to each professional. To the addiction worker, confronting a client with discrepancies in their story was a way to create cognitive dissonance, and was an act of caring and teaching. To the mental health worker the word conjured up an attack on someone in a fragile emotional state and was an act of cruelty and disrespect. Once each understood the other, the discomfort between them ended. The two professionals discovered they were in agreement regarding the overall treatment plan for the youth they were both working with. This was good news for the client. Imagine how colleagues and clients get caught within the web of so many language and culture nuances which often use the same sounding words in vastly different ways! A research method which helps me understand how language is used in a specific niche is of great benefit to my daily practice.

Due to years of direct and indirect listening to work load concerns, voiced more loudly by men and almost whispered in shame by women, and to my being an insider or participant observer, I have been engaging in a form of "strategic research" as it is described by Spradley (1979). As I outlined in chapter one, it was in this environment that my research questions began to form.

Rationale for Choosing Mid-Age Women as Research Participants

I wanted to focus on women as I could find no examples in the literature specifically on the experiences of female field social workers in public service, of any specific age. Field work is an important source of social work insight. Also, this generation of mid-aged social worker baby boomers comprise a large number of the overall working population, including social work (Galarneau, 1994). Hearing from this group at this point in time when their numbers have peaked, provides an opportunity for their particular voices to inform public service social work (Galarneau, 1994). As social safety nets become increasingly suspect in the new global economy, the profession of social work, the majority of whom are women, will face new pressures and demands (Griffin Cohen, 1997; McQuaig, 1995; Morell, 1987; Teeple, 1995). Looking at current demands and pressures and how this target group reacts to them, may provide insights and strategies for the future.

I had originally intended to "throw the net wide" to include any public sector mid-aged female social worker in mid-sized western communities. Two concerns emerged immediately. First, there would be a power imbalance if a participant was someone I did or had or could supervise. Secondly, if volunteers came from several communities and several different social work areas, such as mental health services, alcohol and drug services, youth probation services, and infant, child and youth guardianship and protection services, the scope of the research would be unwieldy. The target focus therefore, narrowed to mid-aged female public service social workers who I did not or could not supervise. These social workers worked in such areas of social work as Protection and Family and Child Services which included Community Living Services, Guardianship and Resources. From this target group I further narrowed to Family and Child Services social workers who worked with children under twelve. The first six volunteers who were mid-aged women, direct service social workers who I did not or could not supervise, became the research participants.

The ages of the six women participants ranged from 42 to 58, four worked in Community A; two in Community B, two small western communities with populations under 75,000. All worked in mandated services for the same ministry, MCF. The specific positions were from the following team areas; protection team doing assessment, investigation and removal of children and youth in neglectful or harmful situations, resource team providing foster and respite homes or group residential placements for children and youth removed from their families, family and child services team providing services to children under 12 and their family or foster home, community living services team providing assessment and services to mentally or physically limited adults and youth.

Gaining access to the participants was accomplished by first phoning, then following up by letter with some direct service team leaders, managers and a director.[5]

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[5]A "direct service agency" is one which employs staff directly by the government, either Federal or Provincial, to provide services to the public such as mental health services, alcohol and drug services, child and welfare services, probation services etc. A "funded agency" is a non-profit society with a board and a "contracted service" is a service provider who has made a contractual agreement with the government to

The phone call allowed me to introduce myself, briefly explain the research project and ask for permission to send a *Contact Letter* and a *Research Notice* poster.[6] The contents of both were described in detail to the Team Leaders. See appendix B for the Contact Letter describing the research project. It has been my experience that personal contact before a letter results in a better response.

Ethical Considerations upon Entering the Field

None of the research participants were in a position to be supervised by me, as each of them worked in a different community or branch of the ministry. Neutralizing any potential work-based power differences was more than ensuring that I would not be in a position to supervise research participants. It required that both the participants and I were very clear that I *was not* conducting the research in a team leader role at the time of the interviews. Being a team leader for the Ministry for Children and Families usually entails being a step removed from front line work though team leaders may on occasion do front line work. This slightly removed role provides a vantage point from which to observe the many ways of doing social work. It can feel like the role of participant observer and therefore can be easily confused with being a researching participant observer. This similarity provides a place where boundaries could blur. Even though the team leader may stand back and observe the work of the social workers she or he supervises, there is a systemic and imposed direct connection between the social worker and the team leader that is not neutral. This mandated connection means that the social worker must be able to document discussion with the team leader at prescribed decision points and must note the course of action decided upon. Regardless why a discussion with a team leader does *not* take place at those prescribed points, the social worker will

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deliver service to the public. The government can not directly manage, make changes, change work agreements etc. with contracted services or funded agencies. These employees are not government employees but rather employees of the funded agency or contracted service. There is an extra layer of authority between funded agency employees and the government. Often direct services, funded agencies and contracted services, do the same work but with different conditions and wages. Direct service employees often have better wages and conditions whereas funded agency employees and contracted service providers, have less bureaucracy to deal with. All participants of this research were direct service civil servants.

See Appendices D and E for *Letter to Agency and Letter to Executive Director and* See Appendix B *Research Notice* or Poster. 6

be seen as having acted on their own and as not having consulted. The decision points were theoretically put in place to ensure that difficult decisions were not made by a social worker in isolation. The goal was to reduce decisions made in haste, panic or without being thought through. This works well as long as a supervisor is actually available. Social workers feel under great stress when their team leader is not available for this administrative requirement. If something should happen to a client the social worker would be "out on a limb" if they were seen as not having following protocol, even if they had been unable to do so. In spite of the administrative urgency to have contact with a team leader, mandated contact can also create the environment for a close working relationship to exist between team leader and social worker. Most social workers would like more time with their team leaders than is possible and I was accustomed to having to scramble to provide at least a minimum of time to the social workers that I supervised. Given that I was a team leader in my "other life" I felt I had to be very careful to be clear both with myself and with participants that my role with them was one of researcher only. I had no authority over them, nor could I provide consultation to them on client matters. These two issues were made clear several times in interactions with the research participants.

But it was known to each participant that in my "work life" I was a team leader. It was *their* team leader that introduced this study to them at one of their team meetings. Aside from the vigilance required to have clear role boundaries, there were advantages and disadvantages that existed because of this awareness. Knowing I was a team leader meant I would know something about their work. I was also a public servant, well aware of the *Public Service Standards of Conduct* which created a place of caution for public servants when speaking to "outsiders". I believe both of these things helped participants accept me as a "safe" researcher. Being an "insider" meant that I likely missed noticing several native language terms, because I spoke *almost* the same language. Yet not being completely assimilated into the cultures of the participants work worlds, meant that there were still native language terms that I *would* notice, and there were procedures that I could innocently ask about.

My primary ethical goal was to protect the participants and not create undue hardship. I accomplished this through informed consent; interviewing them during work hours with permission from their regional manager, community manager and team leader[7]; and by interviewing them at an anonymous location or place of their choosing.

The agencies had been informed at the outset regarding the nature of the research study and who would see the final written report.[8] Informed consent with the participants included a conversation with each woman as well as giving her a letter[9] explaining the research study and asking for her signature once certain she understood and wanted to become involved in the project.

Participants were informed that the data would be stored in a locked cabinet in my home, with a code rather than participants' names. They were informed that the tapes of the interviews would be destroyed one year after the thesis was defended. Participants were informed that discussing the subject matter may bring up issues or strong emotions and that a debriefing session after each taped interview would be available if they wanted to talk. They were informed that the debriefings would not be taped but that some notes may be made at a later time. If more debriefing was required participants were assured that they would be helped to access other resources. No one did ask for additional debriefing, and most did not ask directly for any debriefing. At times there was a hesitation in leaving, so I would debrief the interview with the participant. Once I believed there was the need to offer a clinical intervention. At one point, while describing how she dealt with the expectations and pressures in her day, a participant became very agitated and increasingly bitter in expressing her perceptions of her current untenable work situation. I was concerned for her return to her work in such a state of heightened anger and frustration. I worried that the agitation would leave her distracted on her return to work or that it would spill over to colleagues or onto clients, making a

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[7]See Appendix D for a copy of the *Letter to the Executive Director and Letter to the Agency.*
[8]I let participants know that copies of the finished thesis would be put in the U-Vic library, that committee and oral defense committee members would see it, that they could each have a copy if they wanted one, that I would have a copy. Also, I let them know that I may send a copy or a report of the thesis to the BCGEU, the B.C. Social Work Association, to relevant teams, to the permission granting Regional Executive Director if requested to do so and to other appropriate persons or groups if it became relevant.

bad situation worse for her, and others. If the researcher can not do something positive at least she or he should do no harm. I therefore made a decision to do a brief clinical intervention. Using humour, a slight reframe was suggested to the participant. She had been expressing frustration and agitation toward younger colleagues, for the extra work that came her way due to their inexperience. I asked her if she could recall an incident from her earlier days where her inexperienced had caused someone else extra work. I then asked if she was able to imagine having some understanding and forgiveness for herself as she was back then. This intervention brought a smile to her face; she became somewhat less perturbed during the rest of the interview, and was even able to show humour.

The limitations to confidentiality were discussed. Some participants wanted the interview to take place at my work office or theirs, rather than an offsite location. Since participants had been told that they could choose the location of the interviews, I reiterated to each participant that there was a potential compromise to their confidentiality by doing the interviews in those office locations. At my worksite, for example, my colleagues knew I was conducting research for my thesis and may therefore become aware that a research interview was taking place. But colleagues could easily deduce that the participants were being interviewed for the research project since most had talked openly in their workplaces about their involvement in this research project.

Other limits to confidentiality were that the thesis committee members may see the coded information; and that three copies of the thesis would be left at the University of Victoria where students and others would have access to it. It was explained that the thesis would only record coded information and never participants' real names. Each participant picked a pseudonym of her choice and this was used to refer to her in the transcript and in this thesis. They were informed that this information would be presented at an oral defence. Participants were reminded of these aspects of participation before each session. They could also choose to stop the research interviews or leave at any time. I was as explicit as possible about the nature of the project and thus committed

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[9]See Appendix A for a copy of the participant *Letter of Information and Consent.*

to do all possible to ensure the safety and well being of the research participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Data were collected mainly through field notes which included; verbatim transcriptions of the audio taped first interviews, condensed notes that were recorded within and shortly after the interviews, and my research journal. Also, participants were given a brief *Demographic Questionnaire* to fill out before the first interview session. By using such a questionnaire I was able to get information on their age, number of children at home, professional degree status, information about working overtime and so on. Giving the questionnaire to participants before the interviews provided a way to gather useful information without taking time away from the interview session. I believe it also introduced participants to the focus of this research study, their work culture. There also was a second interview, audio taped, but not transcripted. The second session, a verification interview, involved the participant seeing, affirming and commenting on their examples of concepts such as "kinds of paperwork", "ways to approach cases" and "results of being a more experienced over 40 social worker", listed on cards and laid out on a large table. Follow-up phone calls and correspondence for verification provided additional data. Data were also collected through participant observation. Each form of data collection is discussed in turn.

Interviewing

Each participant was asked for a time commitment of about five hours and to attend at least two interviews as part of that time. Previous to the interview sessions a meeting was set up with each participant to go over the informed consent letter. At this same time the participant was given a set of the first interview questions, a copy of the Demographic Questionnaire[10] and she was asked to bring her day timer to the interview[11].

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[10] To see a copy of the Demographic Questionnaire, see Appendix C.

[11] Before I began research for this thesis, I conducted three pilot interviews with volunteers from three separate western communities. Each volunteer chose a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. The first pilot interview was with 'Sally', a mid-aged social work team leader, had felt quite embarrassed for being at a loss to give details for some questions. She said that having the questions ahead of time and having her day timer with her would have made her feel better about her participation in the interview. Participants for the research study

All participants commented on the value of having the questions to refer to both ahead of time and, in front of them during the interview. The interviews were conducted at a site of the participants' convenience and choice. I suggested meeting at an Access Centre[12] to provide a neutral, non-distracting place and to ensure anonymity. I booked rooms in advance, at a local Access Centre, for Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) "meetings". Some participants chose to meet at the Access Centre and some chose to meet elsewhere.

The first interview was semi-structured. There were interview questions used as a guide but the interviewer followed the participants as they described their experiences of expectations and pressures in their lived work day. Often the first interviews felt like critical incident debriefing sessions since participants vigorously talked about their day. I could barely fit in an "um hum". In designing the questions for the first interview, I drew upon Spradley's descriptive, structural and contrast type questions. The first interview was conversational in style which allowed for many queries and responses within each question.

The key interview questions were designed to find out how people talk about: 1) what they do in a day; 2) work pressures and expectations; and 3) how work pressures and expectations are met. Also a final question was included which gave the participants an opportunity to tell me what questions I had missed or for them to add what they wanted to. The interview was audio taped and later transcribed. First interviews were from one to two hours long. All participants were told at each interview, that one half hour of debriefing time could be available at a later date.

In all 'first interviews' for this research study, question one, a descriptive

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were subsequently given the questions ahead of time and asked to bring their day timer to the first interview. 'Ursula' an under forty funded agency social worker, pointed out how hard it was to think of expectations as coming from anywhere but herself. This is where the visualization of doing nothing at work was formed as a way to track where expectations may originate. 'Luke' was a mid-aged male direct service social worker who first worked with the card verification idea. With this pilot I learned that it is important to have the participant re-organize, add or delete cards as they thought necessary, in order to get an accurate sense of semantic relationships (Sommers, 1999)

[12]Access Centres are government agencies where the public applies for driver's licenses, pays property taxes and conducts other such administrative activities. The centers often offer free meeting space to government agencies.

question, elicited rich dialogue from participants. The goal of descriptive questions is to elicit a large sample of speech in the participant's native language and are intended to encourage a participant to talk about a particular cultural scene, in this case a particular day at work. Descriptive questions form the foundation of the ethnographic interview. An example of a descriptive question from the first interview was: "Can you pick a work day from this week or last week that stands out for you and can you list the things that happened in that day?" This is called a "grand tour" question since it offers an opportunity for the participant to tell the ethnographer how things are, on a particular work day. Usually, within participants' responses to descriptive questions are opportunities to ask additional questions. While telling me about the particular work day that stood out for her, one participant for example began to talk about lack of having all the allocated positions on her team filled. In the quoted text below, I followed the important grand-tour with a specific question.

> Participant:
> *Another worker we have is now on a different, ... like a secondment, on the After Hours Program, so she is not available. So ... it is tough to even count the numbers sometimes.*
>
> Researcher:
> *Mh'm.*
>
> Participant:
> *... but I think we're down to ... it wil be three when I leave.*
>
> Researcher:
> *What would be the appropriate number of people on that team right now?*
>
> Participant:
> *Four, and a full time Supervisor.*

This participant went on to give a rich description about this day that stood out in her memory. The impact on her day of not having all the allocated positions filled with live bodies was one of many mini-tours. This particular subject came up again and again in the interviews and eventually became one of the themes for this study "filled positions with no one in them."

The second interview was a validating interview. It was audio taped but not transcribed due to its "yes - no" validating nature. Dialogue was not rich enough in the second interviews. Any bits of rich dialogue were easily captured by re-listening to the tape. I prepared for the second interview sessions by first combing each transcript and pulling out what Spradley (1979) refers to as "semantic relationships". Anytime in the transcript that a participant began describing or explaining something, it was possible to find a number of these word relationships such as, *"kinds of pressure a social worker faces" "ways to priorize competing demands"*, and *"difficult parts of the job"*. I put all these semantic relationships I could find from the transcripts on separate white and numbered index cards. On cards colour-coded for each woman, I put as many "included terms"[13] as I could find from the transcripts. These cards were then laid out on a big table and the participant and I walked slowly around the table going over each of them to check for accuracy or to rearrange or add what was missing. The entire second interview therefore, was a verification session. Participants were struck by the number of examples of "semantic relationships" or parts of ideas that were represented by the individual cards. The cards reminded them of their comments from the first interview. Some participants remarked that it was strange to *see* their comments in front of them on the table. The process created an opportunity for participants to see their comments affirmed and consequently it became a trust and rapport building session. I did not realize this was happening until I had conducted the third "second interview" session with the cards on the table and a pattern in participants' reactions became obvious to me. The pattern was one of obvious opening up, demonstrated by comfort in deleting adding or moving cards around, joking, smiling, direct eye contact, questions about the research, candid comments about their work culture, and expressions about hoping to be part of something that could make a difference. I interpreted this latter as a desire to contribute to the

[13]Included terms are words that members of a culture would use to add examples, description and depth to an idea being conveyed through language. One category of words included in another. For instance, included terms for the phrase "kinds of stress and pressure in a social worker's day" were; conflict, loss, lack of support, the pointing finger, the downside of experience and unfilled staff complements. Putting these pieces back into a proper sentence would for example, look like this "Conflict is a kind of stress and pressure in a social worker's day."

profession and a desire to do something meaningful. The comments were important for rapport but they were not "rich dialogue". At the conclusion of this interview I asked participants if it would be okay for me to call them should I need more information, clarification or verification. Each participant was agreeable to the idea.

Structural questions.

In both the first and second interview I went beyond descriptive questions and asked structural questions. These explore the organization of a participant's cultural knowledge, and move away from friendly conversation. Generally an explanation of this type of question is important in preventing the participant from being taken off guard and therefore limiting their response. Structural questions ask the participant to confirm or refute a hypothesis about a domain[14], or to determine differences or similarities between things or activities. A structural question from the first interview was "What are all the kinds of pressures and expectations in your work day?" In the second interview a follow-up structural question was "How are these expectations and pressures different from each other and how are they the same?" Having all the cards previously set up on a large table provided an immediate visual cue and an opportunity to explain to each woman that this interview would not be a face to face conversation. The second interviews involved structural questions to help guide participants through verification of the many domains discovered from the first interviews.

Contrast questions.

Contrast questions ascertain what a meaning *is* and what it *is not*. These questions are designed to elicit differences among the words or folk terms in a contrast set. Contrast questions are useful tools for discovering many tacit relationships among the words and terms collected from participants. After discovering some difference between two folk terms, a contrast question would ask the participant to confirm or refute the

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[14]A domain is any symbolic category that includes other categories. All members of a domain share at least one feature of meaning (Spradley, 1979). For example, the category or domain, "social worker" includes men, women, people under 65, direct service, funded agency, protection worker, resource worker and so on. Domains have three parts: 1) cover terms, which are names for a category of cultural knowledge, for example "social worker"; 2) all domains have two or more included terms, for example men, women, protection worker; 3) all domains have semantic relationships or links between categories, for example, a resource worker is *a kind*

difference. Contrasts among members of the same contrast set can be sought, or the ethnographer can ask questions without having any differences to suggest to the participant, allowing the participant to reveal contrasts that are meaningful to them. For example, in the second interview I asked "Is going to a meeting to discuss a client, direct client work?" I thought the answer would be "yes" but it was "no"! This is where I learned what was and was not considered direct client work in this work culture.

Participant Observation

Spradley (1979) wrote that by participant observation a great deal could be learned without descriptive, structural or contrast questions. Interviews were my main source of data for making cultural inferences. However, as participant observer, I also made inferences based on behaviour, particularly the frequent movement of social workers from one position to another, and participants' animated expressions of fear and invalidation.

Condensed notes were kept during each interview and at times made following the interviews. These included random verbatim quotes, further questions to ask, and thoughts and impressions formed during the interviews. I also kept notes of site descriptions, pilot interviews, road blocks and general impressions. In addition to going over the transcripts noting domains and re-occurring ideas, I also noted impressions and inferences while interviews were still fresh in my mind.

Verification Process of Data and Analysis

Spradley (1979) wrote " ... before going on to any new phase of research, the ethnographer must go back and collect more cultural data, analyze it, formulate new hypotheses, and then repeat these stages over and over again" (p. 94). Throughout the research process I conducted member checks with participants for verification of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was emphasized to participants that their words and phrases were important. After the first interview they were told: a) that they could see the

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of social worker.

transcripts if they chose to; b) that I would be using the second interview to verify what they had told me in the first interview and; c) that I would make sure I checked with them before I used any extensive quotes.

Quoted material was sent back to participants for verification and suggestions, which they provided. I asked the participants to check to see if what I had written was accurate, to add comments or suggest deletions if they chose, and to make sure they felt that their anonymity was not compromised. Participants made suggestions to better ensure their anonymity by removing any community identifiers. All direct service pilot volunteers and research participants wanted to talk freely about their work day but were afraid to be identified for fear of recourse. Expressed fear of recourse was something that arose with public service pilot and research study participants almost immediately within the interview. Participants did not mind if work colleagues knew of their involvement in the project, many talked to their colleagues about the study, but they did not want to be identified in any way by the larger organizational system. One of the three themes of this research "fear of the pointing finger of blame"[15] discusses the participants' experiences of fear and reprisal. For all quotes in the thesis I used the term "participant" to ensure comments could not be connected to particular individuals. The second interview was verification as well as a rapport-building session. In addition, I made several phone contacts to verify specific information.

After completing all interviews and initial analysis, I came up with three themes: 1) tough, complex yet devalued jobs; 2) positions are filled but no one is in them and; 3) fear of the pointing finger of blame. Using pattern regularities (Creswell, 1998; Wolcott, 1994), I did a careful search of each transcript of the first interviews and reviewed the verified cards from second interviews. I looked for repeat story-line phrases or comments that told about an aspect of organizational structure or about patterns of social relations that had an impact on social workers' behaviour. I further selected for phrases or comments that were said by more than one participant. Each of the three themes that I

[15]The three themes which evolved out of the domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses, are discussed further under the Data Analysis section of this chapter.

finally chose was a phrase or thought expressed by all six participants. Once the themes emerged by this process, I did member checks by sending the named themes to participants for written feedback. The participants provided me with an added depth of information in their written feedback. At this point I was confident that the themes I had chosen were representative of cultural story lines in this work setting.

The six women participants all worked for direct service, child welfare type agencies on a variety of teams. It was entirely possible that participants could be asked or could decide themselves to move to one or another of these other agencies or types of teams within the larger category of "MCF child welfare agency." At the time of the interviews each participant *was* from a different type of team or worked with a different age population of clients or came from a separate community. Triangulation as a form of verification typically involves "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). Therefore, similar experiences of expectations and pressures and similar responses to expectations and pressures regardless of being on different teams, provided corroborating evidence. This corroborating evidence illuminated a particular perspective or indicated a theme in regard to the larger ministry child welfare work culture that participants worked in (Creswell, 1998; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995).

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to find emerging themes in order to draw inferences about the work culture of mid-aged, female, professional child welfare social workers in mid- sized communities. My analysis began immediately on an informal basis by making notes on my observations of the work culture in each site. Formally, my analysis began after initial contact followed by first interviews with participants. Word strings, key concepts and themes emerged as the various levels of analysis were conducted. The previous section on verification points to the major process I used in the analysis. What follows is a more abstract presentation of the specific steps I followed using the four kinds of analysis in Spradley's (1979) Developmental Research Sequence Method (DRSM): domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis. The four

levels of analysis helped to examine answers to the descriptive, structural, and contrast questions.

Domain analysis.

A domain is a larger category that includes other smaller categories which share at least one element of meaning. I was doing domain analysis while preparing for the second interviews by going through the transcripts looking for cover terms and semantic relationships for the cards.

There are three aspects to a domain as illustrated in Figure 1. They include: 1) a *cover term,* for example "work activity", which is a central idea; 2) two or more *included terms,* for example, "direct people work", "administrative people work", "paper work" and "other", which are examples that give information about the central idea and; 3) a single *semantic relationship*, for example "is a kind of", which is a phrase that gives information about the connection or relationship *between* the central idea and the information *about* the central idea. Reconstituted back into a sentence, notice how the three domain elements taken from the above examples work together to form a unit of thought that tells us specific information about work activities. *Direct people work, administrative people work, paper work, and other, are kinds of work activities* performed by social workers. Every domain has a boundary that defines what is in and what is out of that domain. For example, "direct people work", "administrative people work", and "paper work" are part of a domain. "Making public statements about a case" would not be part of a domain about work activities in this environment because, this behaviour violates client confidentiality entrenched in the *Family and Child Services Act* and *Standards of Conduct for Public Service* and would not normally be a kind of work activity that a participant would engage in.

Spradley (1979) suggested several criteria for selecting domains for in-depth analysis such as, informants' suggestions or, theoretical interest. Eventually there were six key domains of the work culture that emerged in the particular agencies that employed the mid-aged

Figure 1 Example of the Three Elements in One Domain

Terms included in the Domain (examples related to the central idea)	Semantic Relationship (connection)	Cover Term for the domain (central idea)
direct people work administrative people work paper work other	is a kind of	work activity

* adapted from Spradley (1979)

female child welfare social worker participants of this research study. These domains[16] are presented in Table 2.

Taxonomic and componential analysis

Taxonomies were made with each of the six key domains just presented. A taxonomy gives details about each domain. It is a set of categories organized on the basis of a semantic relationship for example "*kinds of work activities.*" Taxonomies can have several levels and can be represented in several ways, as a box diagram, a set of lines and nodes, or as an outline (see Spradley, 1979, p.148). I have chosen to use box diagrams. Figure 4 in the Findings Chapter illustrates a box diagram taxonomy of "kinds of work activities". At the broadest level of categories there are four kinds of work: direct people work; administrative people work; administrative paper work; and other. In each successive level of category information is more detailed. For example in the category "direct people work" there are specific types listed such as "*attending client special events*". Then follows more detail: in "*client special events*", there is "*foster parent*

[16]By key domains, I mean that the many domains that I pulled from the transcripts were collapsed into fewer and fewer yet more inclusive or 'key' domains until there were a manageable number of domains that still included all the relevant comments from participants.

Table 2

Six Key Domains in My Analysis

1. Kinds of work activities in a social worker's day.
2. Kinds of stress and pressure in a social worker's day.
3. Kinds and sources of expectations in a social worker's day.
4. Ways to evaluate pressure and demands in a social worker's day.
5. Kinds of impacts in a social worker's day.
6. Results of being a mature female social worker.

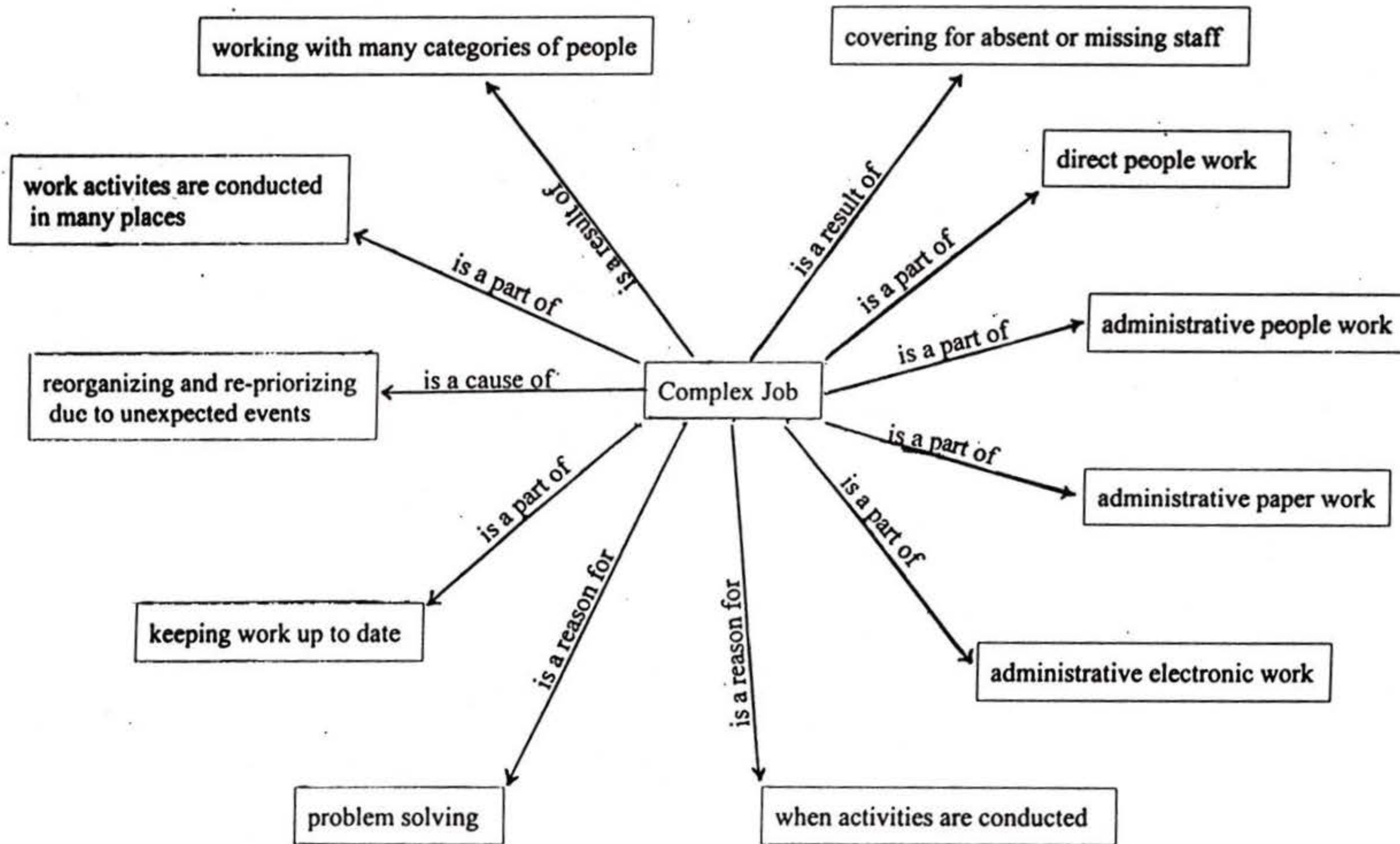
appreciation events", "*graduation and awards events*", "*birthdays*", "*music and sports* events". A taxonomy may have several levels of categories depending upon the depth of detail given by participants.

A componential analysis focuses on multiple relationships between a folk term and other symbols. Spradley discusses two ways that anthropologists have conducted componential analysis of folk terms. First, they discover attributes.[17] Attributes are ideas or thoughts formalized by participants to discover the psychological reality of their world. For example, participants in this research named many attributes that were part of doing a tough, complex job, including many categories of work such as administrative paper work and administrative people work, when work was conducted, where work was conducted, pressures that required priorizing and re-priorizing of their time and covering for missing staff, as illustrated in Figure 2. In the centre of Figure 2, I have listed the folk term,

[17] An attribute is a component or unit of meaning such as "working with many categories of people", "covering for absent or missing staff", or "keeping work up to date". See Figure 3 for an illustration showing attributes and semantic relations of doing a complex job.

Figure 2: Illustration of a Componential Analysis

Attributes and Semantic Relationships of Doing a Complex Job by Mid-Aged Female Public Service Social Workers



Adapted from Spradley (1979)

"*complex jobs*", radiating out from this are a number of semantic relationships, such as "*is a part of*", "*is a result of*", "*is a cause of*", which are placed on lines with an arrow on the end. These semantic relationships show the instructions or connections between the folk term "*complex jobs*" at the centre and, the attributes shown in the boxes, at the end of each arrow. For example "*reorganizing and re-priorizing due to unexpected events*" is one cause of the job being complex.

In the other approach to componential analysis, anthropologists seek the formal or logical differences among members of a contrast set in an effort to discover the structural reality. These differences may not coincide with the participant's perceptions. The researcher would observe and assign attributes to various activities and not necessarily rely on using the participant's attributes. For example, I could have included activities listed as administrative people work together with the activities listed as direct client work, since it was my impression that all of these things were one category because they all involved clients in one way or another. However, participants made it very clear to me that only if work was directly *with* a client did they consider it "direct client work". If it was *about* a client it was not considered "direct client work"; but administrative people work. This latter distinction, and the one which I used for this research, tells us far more about the participants' perceptions of their work than my observation alone would have. Spradley's model aims to map as accurately as possible the psychological reality of the participant's cultural knowledge and he favours the first approach in conducting a componential analysis. I also used the participant's perceptions of attributes.

There is much more that can be done with the data, such as constructing a large table or a paradigm worksheet in which identified categories illustrated contrast. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the componential analysis paradigm worksheet for "doing a complex job" shows the contrast set "*types of activities done by social workers*", where I listed the main categories of activities as described to me by the participants, such as "direct people work, "administrative people work" and so on. Next, to specify and clarify who the specific activities were done with, where the activities were conducted, and when they were conducted, I asked participants a series of questions by phone. Their responses

are presented in the table shown in Figure 3. This process was followed in the construction of various other tables shown in the Findings Chapter. Participants' responses give further grounding for the variety of expectations and pressures experienced by social workers, and how they respond.

Analysis of Themes

This research study interviewed mid-aged women and what they had to say about their experiences of expectations and pressures over the years and the many ways they had found to survive in their various social work environments over the long term. The previous three steps of domain, taxonomic and componential analyses help to uncover in rich detail the everyday life of the work culture: the activities social workers engage in, where and when, and a sense of relationships between activities; the pressures and expectations social workers experience and where these originate; the impacts that pressures and expectations have on social workers and how they respond to these impacts; and results for participants of being a mature female child welfare public service social worker. These last two areas showed not only how these women survived in tough circumstances but how in joyous, if fleeting moments, they also thrived.

As a step between these three types of detailed analysis and before going back to get a holistic overview, and presentation of themes, Spradley (1979) suggested making a cultural inventory, which involves making a careful, written inventory of all the data that has been collected. This serves as a review of what had been collected, and what needs to still be collected. It also helps the immersion process into all the data. In doing an inventory of the data I did the following activities. I listed all the cultural domains and re-read interviews to search for missed domains and to record any relationships noticed between domains. All levels of field notes were reviewed. I had used a colour coded carded inventory of semantic relationships, cover terms and included terms which were mounted on newsprint sheets and pinned on the walls of my study. These sheets created an accessible and visual representation of the cultural scene as expressed to me by the participants.

Figure 3: Specification of activities by each participant: with who; where; and when.

Dimensions of Contrast →		Who	activities	are done	with	Where	activities	are	conducted	When	activities	are conducted
Contrast Set ↓ *Types of activities done by social workers*	Child /youth/ adult	Parent, f. parent*, relatives of client	Colleagues in MCF & Public Service	Colleagues in funded agencies and contractors	Hierarchy in MCF	Residence of client	Community	Own office	Court	During core work hours	During flex hours*	Overtime official or non-official
Direct People Work	yes	possibly	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	poss.	yes	yes	yes
Administrative People Work	no	possibly	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	possibly	rarely
Administrative Paper Work	no	no	yes	yes	possibly	no	rarely	yes	rarely	yes	occ	rarely
Administrative Electronic Work	no	no	rarely	no	possibly	no	no	yes	no	yes	occ	rarely
Other: Shopping for Clients	yes	Occ	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	occasion-ally	no
Problem Solving	yes	Yes	yes	yes	rarely	yes	yes	yes	rarely	yes	yes	yes
Re-organizing & re-priorizing due to unexpected events	rarely	rarely	yes	yes	yes	rarely	rarely	yes	occ	yes	occ-	occasionally
Keeping work up to date in case of absence	yes	Yes	yes	yes	no	occ	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Covering for absent or missing colleagues	occ	occ	occ	occ	no	rarely	rarely	yes	occ	yes	yes	yes

*F. parent = foster parent * adapted from Spadley (1979) * Flex = week day off due to having already worked 35 hrs. in a week

Finally I was ready for the fourth and final step in the analysis: exploring themes that pull together the many relationships suggested in the descriptive analysis and that explored the meaning and significance of the relationships. Spradley (1979) defined a cultural theme as "... any cognitive principle, tacit or elicit, recurrent in a number of domains and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning" (p. 186). I would define a theme as a repeating thread of thought held tacitly or openly by many members of a culture and which impacts on their behaviours and perceptions of both themselves and others.

Spradley outlined a list of strategies for making a theme analysis although he pointed out that this state of analysis was open to experimentation on the part of the ethnographer. He suggested periods of immersion into a culture interspersed with times out for reflection. I was immersed in the culture indirectly as I continued to work and live as a participant observer in a separate but similar work site while conducting the research. The particular work culture described in this research with six participants in two communities was visited on a frequent basis until the initial research interviews and verification was done; but, an additional further data gathering and verification was done by mail and phone.

Three themes emerged in my analysis; 1) tough complex yet devalued jobs, 2) positions are filled but no one is in them, and 3) fear of the pointing finger of blame. As I discussed earlier in this chapter under the heading *Verification*, if most or all participants talked about a similar aspect of their work experience such as fear of "the pointing finger," I earmarked it as a possible theme. The three themes came directly from the many comments made by the participants that captured in a holistic way what work expectations and pressures were like. There were a number of comments by participants that repeatedly fell into these three themes. When I stood back from the data and asked myself what are the main things that participants have been telling me, these three stood out.

Table 3

Cultural Themes that Represent the Pressures, Expectations and Responses to them for Mid-age Female Public Service Social Workers

Theme 1: Tough Complex yet Devalued Jobs.
Theme 2: Positions are Filled but No One is in them.
Theme 3: Fear of the Pointing Finger of Blame

from both inside and outside. My particular conduct of this ethnographic methodology had its own strengths including: triangulation; depth of detail and careful analysis; and the level of verification of data which took place with the six women participants. Triangulation occurred by interviewing different types of workers at several sites, and by the ethnographic approach of collecting data which sought a variety of descriptions of experiences to pressures and expectations. The methodology utilized increasingly complex levels of analysis which were painstakingly reviewed and deepened through further information and verification provided by participants. There was a thorough verification process. Within the first interviews participants were asked to verify statements so I could be sure I had understood them correctly. In the second interviews the entire process was a verification of statements and data from the first interviews. The value of giving participants this type of opportunity to verify both their statements and what I as a researcher might be doing with the categorization of information from those statements, proved also to be a rapport building exercise. What this told me was that if participants felt accurately and adequately heard and they believed they could correct or have an opinion on the data, they would be open with the researcher. They would continue to give their time and ideas as the research process unfolded and further verification needed. I asked for and received further input from participants when I was conducting componential analyses and when I was pulling themes out of the data. I

believe an important side affect of strong verification and good rapport is the creation of ethical research. Ethical research in the context of this ethnography meant that participants had an active hand in what information comprised the final data. This was important to me as a feminist critical social work researcher. I reiterate Spradley's (1979) concerns that cultural descriptions can be used to oppress people or set them free and that the ethnographer must be aware of the impact of his or her ethnographic descriptions. In the case of this research study, I believe participants felt a sense of contribution to their profession and had opportunities for gaining personal insight.

Limitations of the Methodology

On a practical level there were both organizing and conceptual challenges to the data analysis process. Once data were collected, the conceptual challenges increased, such as, how to look for themes and patterns in the data. Spradley's (1979) DRS model became much less clear to me at this final stage of analysis. I felt suddenly "high and dry" in an otherwise clearly articulated model. I found I wasted some time waiting for the ideas to become clearer to me. I simply needed to move on into my own analytic methods as well as borrowing suggestions from other ethnographic researchers such as Creswell (1998) and thesis committee members.

Due to the voluntary nature of the study there may have been a self-selection process. Participants' responses therefore may have been different that those who chose not to participate. Though there are qualitative studies such as Early (2000) and Aronson and Sammon (2000) with similar findings to this study, caution should be exercised in the interpretation and generalization of the findings. The results in each of these research studies however, could be seen as sources of ideas and arguments for the generation of hypothesis about what the state of our society is using social work as a "canary." Limitations to this study may be found in the gaps and holes in arguments about how this work culture created the conditions which necessitated survival social work, and in the limited breadth of described situations which revealed them. These limitations were due in part to the small window of available overall time in the field to gather data. A strength of the ethnographic methodology is the necessary journey back and forth from the

field to the journal. When this process is shortened the depth of the research is impacted. This research took place at a particular point in time and given that both workers and organizations continuously change and evolve, caution should be used in generalizing and interpreting the findings beyond that point in time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Expectations and Pressures

The reader now has a sense of how the research was conducted. This chapter presents the descriptive findings of what the expectations and pressures are in the lives of mature social workers working in small communities in Western Canada. The subsequent Chapter Five takes the findings to a deeper level, analysing themes and a key conclusion that social work, social workers and their clients are at serious risk due to the endangering environment in which they are currently struggling to survive.

In the first part of this chapter work pressures are presented followed by a description of the complex activities and types of expectations, while in the second part the pressures of the day are evaluated with responses examined. The examination included ways to priorize the competing demands and the types of impacts of these pressures on the lives of social workers. The results of being mature women social workers were also a part of this examination.

When listening to the women's stories of their work days, descriptions emerged of the pressures in their days and their responses to them. Many of the pressures and responses were an integral part of the day. They were not described or realized as separate concepts. Similarly, in writing this chapter I found I could not easily or completely separate work pressures from participants' responses to them. Nonetheless, to focus on patterns in the complex, rich data, I have conceptually separated this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I describe work pressures arising out of the "complex yet devalued jobs" that the participants did within their working environments and from the pressures that resulted from "positions filled but with no one in them". Underlying the administrative squeeze on the participant social workers' time, were a large number of expectations, both explicit and tacit and the chapter explores expectations as a source of pressure. The complexity of the participant social workers' jobs was intensified by these expectations. This section examines types and sources of expectations which participant social workers said they experienced. Repeated references from participants to the pressures that arose for them when they found themselves working on teams which did not

have a full staff complement described a work environment which was consequently often stressful. Work was downloaded from one worker to the next and from one team to the next to compensate for missing workers. Both social workers and social work appeared to be shifting constantly in a dance of pressure, response, pressure, response.

The second part of this chapter describes participants' responses to the kinds of pressures in their work days. Some of the responses to pressures in the work day included: identifying satisfying parts of the job; describing decisions that must be made; describing difficult parts of the job which included the sense of fear and blame; and how social workers priorized tasks when faced with competing demands. This portion of Chapter Four also looks at how participants' responded to the impact of work pressures and expectations on home life, home life on work, and work on work. Chapter Four concludes with a look at what the participants' described as the results of being mature women social workers. Those who have remained in social work for many years have learned to respond to the pressures of their work day differently than when they were younger or more inexperienced. This change in their ways of working over time is synthesized within participants' descriptions and comments.

Cultural themes were derived from repeating threads of thought rooted in the taxonomic and componential levels of analyses discussed in this chapter. The descriptions of expectations and pressures embodied in these two levels of analysis suggested three themes which were: 1. tough complex yet devalued jobs; 2. positions are filled but no one is in them; and 3. fear of the pointing finger of blame. These three paradoxical themes uncovered an environment that was so toxic that even when participants conscripted their combined years of experience, education and training into service they were left practicing survival social work. Even their efforts at survival social work were used by the ministry to maintain the status quo.

Work Pressures

The participants experienced many pressures in their work days due to the complex nature of their jobs. This complexity appeared to originate from the many kinds of activities and expectations, and the frequency of filled positions that were temporarily

vacant creating an ever changing landscape. After summarizing in words and tables the kinds of activities social workers do in a day, five specific pressures are presented: conflict; loss; lack of support; the pointing finger of blame; and the downside of experience.

Many Complex Activities

To make it easier for the reader to get a sense of the types of work activities that social workers do within these categories, a taxonomy is presented in Figure 4 which shows that "administrative people work" and "paperwork" dominate the types of work social workers do and that "direct people work" and "other" comprised a much smaller percentage of their daily work activities. Participants identified many more administrative tasks such as attending meetings and hearings, and doing paper work, than they identified direct people work tasks such as keeping individual client appointments or doing home studies. Repeatedly, participants described the lack of time to do direct client work as a felt pressure resulting in frustration for themselves and in fear for their clients. The system expectation to keep the administrative portion of the job up to date was expressed as another type of pressure.

Participants tended to use the words "pressure" and "stress" interchangeably which the examples in the section reflect. During the two interviews with each participant, time was not spent trying to find out in more detail how they defined these two words. Rather, responses were noted to the question, "How do you make sense out of your day?" In response to this question, participants described the stresses and pressures in their work day. All participants responded with comments about stress and pressure and how they coped with that. The componential analysis in Figure 5 depicts the pressures in a social workers day and ways of responding to them. The dimensions of contrast show participants' reactions to pressures such as "*sense of being watched*". The contrast set shows how participants responded for example to "*fear of the pointing finger of blame.*" These and other sources of stress, pressure and response experienced by participants are described next.

Figure 4 A Taxonomy Illustrating the Domain "Kinds of Work Activities"

Domain	Category	Activity	Type	Detail
Kinds of Work Activities	**DIRECT PEOPLE WORK**	Individual Client appointments		
		Client Advocacy		
		Removing clients from parents or guardians for safety reasons		
		Placing child, youth or adult in a safe residence		
		Attending client special events:	foster parent appreciation	
			graduation, awards	
			birthdays	
			music, sports, etc.	
		Conducting home studies on potential foster parents		
		Conducting "pre-service" interviews on prospective foster parents		
		Conducting investigation interviews		
		Walking clients through paperwork		
		Dealing with appropriate and inappropriate client requests		
		Dealing with client, parent, or foster-parent "drop ins"		
		If experienced, supervising a social work team in Team Leaders absence		
		Advising and mentoring younger or inexperienced colleagues		
		Talking with clients experiencing horrible personal life events		
	ADMINIS-TRATIVE PEOPLE WORK	Consulting	Colleagues inside public service	
			Colleagues outside public service	
		Setting up and attending meetings	community development	
			Comprehensive Plans of Care (now *Looking after Children*)	
			team meetings	
			liaison meetings	
			service contract negotiation	
			staff meetings at group homes	
			annual review meetings	
			personal service plan meetings	
			case conference meetings	
			quality of care meetings	
			placement and review meetings	
		Attending Hearings	Section 29 of Family Relations Act (FRA) - immediate guardianship due to parent being deceased	
			custody hearing	presentation hearings -removal within 7 days
				protection hearing
				applying for supervision order
				temporary custody order
				continuing custody order
				subpoena for parents at custody hearing (FRA)
			Children's Commission Tribunals	
			Subpoenaed as a witness	
		Processing Incoming Phone calls	protection calls	
			inquiries	
			support to family calls	
			teleconferences	
			from colleagues	

Figure 4 (continued)

Kinds of Work Activities	Category	Activity	Details
Kinds of Work Activities	**ADMINIS-TRATIVE PAPER WORK**	Taking meeting minutes and later distributing them	
		Taking after-hours memos (computer), acting on them or assigning them	
		Taking other memos - computer, voice mail, fax & follow-up	
		Dealing with incoming manual mail	
		Receiving and sending electronic mail	
		Sending and receiving letters	letters noting dates and appointments
			letters providing information/decisions
		Keeping running records or activity records up-to-date in client files	
		Gathering information to fill out manual or electronic forms	
		Filling out referral forms	to counselling
			to homemaker's services
			to various assessment sources: forensic, psychologist, psychiatrist, medical
		Checking client files and completing files according to standards. Preparing time sensitive court documents. Completing face sheets - records all services and relevant client information.	
		Paying bills, writing cheques and contracting (money management)	to homemakers
			to school support workers
			various assessments (medical/psychological)
			intensive adult care services for living arrangements, tutors, respite, top-up for daycare, vet bills, recreation bills
			MIS-RAPS system "To Do Lists" (computerized residential resource payments)
		Receiving and processing subpoena's	
		Receiving, reading, monitoring and processing reports	critical incident reports
			function assessments (a tool for measuring a person's level of care needs)
			school support worker's reports
	OTHER	Writing up and data entering "voluntary care" and special needs agreements	
		Shopping	
		Problem solving	
		Priorizing and re-priorizing	
		Keeping one's work up-to-date while "covering" for a colleague	
		Compulsory training	
		Attending in-service sessions on restructuring or other organizational initiatives	

Figure no. 5 Specifications of Pressures Experienced in a Work Day and Ways of Responding to Them.

Dimensions of Contrast →	Conflicts in expecta-tions between clients and organiza-tion	Expectations that everthing in *Standards Act* is done and up to date	Sense of being invalida-ted and insignif-icant	Sense of being watched	Fear of something going wrong due to work overload	Desire to follow an ideal of social worker practice	Sense of never being able to catch up	No compensation for case no.s when complicated cases are assigned	Feel apprehen - sion or stress when taking any kind of leave (holiday, leave, etc)	Need to know the bottom lines	The idea that more training, more often will solve practice problems	More tasks than time to do them
Contrast Set ↓												
Must let some things go	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes
Need to develop self-talk	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Fear of the pointing finger of blame	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Lack of full staff complements and back fill	partly	yes	partly	partly	yes	partly	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
High self-expectations	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	partly	no	partly	yes
High MCF expectations	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	partly
The down side of experience	no	partly	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Yes!	partly	not applica ble	no	yes
Get work done without working overtime	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes!	partly	yes	yes	no	yes!

• adapted from Spadley (1979)

Conflict.

Conflicted feelings arose for participants when they experienced two opposing positions, beliefs or sets of expectations. A resource social worker participant expressed feeling caught in the middle regarding a ministry investigation of a foster family. She said "I found ... conflict within myself because I was a ministry representative and how can you represent something you really do not agree with?" The worker did not believe the investigation was necessary and in fact felt very supportive of the foster family. She found this particular *Quality of Care* investigation very difficult, leaving her feeling disloyal to both the foster parent and the ministry. This same participant was further torn between the conflicted feelings of loyalty and her wish to work through the stressful situation so that she would be able to leave with a good feeling about things. She said

> I'm realizing that I'm less of a person to them than a number on a box, and I feel that [other] employees are the same way because I've never seen anything to the contrary. So I guess that's part of my stress and part of the stuff that I'll have to work through over the next couple of years. I'm set to retire within the next three years. I want to leave with good feelings about things.

This participant wanted to reconcile her conflicted feelings in order to leave her career on a positive note. Both her client [foster parent] and the system expected loyalty. When there was a situation, such as the above, the social worker experienced conflicted loyalties.

Experiences of loss.

Another type of stress and pressure that participants reported experiencing was loss. Participants' expressed losses were accompanied by strong feelings and fell into two general categories. There were feelings of loss related to inadequacies in the work environment. These impacted on the participants' sense of professionalism and on their physical health. There were also feelings of loss expressed as grief. More intimate in nature in that they were connected to relationships with both colleagues and clients.

The losses were experienced as: lack of efficacy when there was a continuous shortage of time to complete all necessary tasks in a day; lack of health and vitality due to continuous stress and pressure; lack of acknowledgement, understanding and support by the organization when human resources were always in short supply; lack of personal

power due to a sense of not being trusted and respected to make appropriate decisions; and as grief over the loss of relationships due to the continuous leaving and moving of team members for a variety of reasons, and to the "natural" dying of clients with multiple problems.

One participant said about the mounting paperwork requirements and the lack of time to get everything done:

> [There is] an ever mounting amount of paperwork to document things. One of the curious things about this is, the more time you spend documenting, the less time you actually have to do the things that you are supposed to be documenting having done.

This participant said that documentation demands caused feelings of stress and pressure, which in turn led to being off sick more often, the feeling of being disempowered, and an undermined sense of confidence due to, "... never being up to speed."

Loss of colleagues usually involved unfilled staff complements. Though this was experienced by individuals, the loss was also a team loss. Teams lost social workers due to sick leaves, parental leaves, holidays, moves to other teams, moves to other communities, stress leaves [labelled as sick leave by management], education leaves, quitting, dying, and retiring. When workers left teams for any of these reasons, colleagues had to pick up the extra work ensuring that the quality of work of those left would be negatively impacted. Those left also experienced the loss of the work relationship formed with the leaving worker. One participant said, "You just get to know a person, find out how to work with them, and then they are gone and someone new is in their place. That can be quite stressful." "Someone new" was in their place only if there was money available in the budget *and* there was a social worker trained and available.

While still in an initial forming stage due to several comings and goings of members over the years, a team that one participant was on had experienced more than its share of losses and traumas. The team leader was soon leaving (has since left), at least one worker was about to go on stress leave (two have since done so), one of the administrative staff was dying of cancer (and has since died), holidays were coming up for many staff and there would be no holiday replacement staff, called "backfill." Also, two social workers

from this team had left for several weeks or months to do "rapid response". When a team member leaves to do rapid response work, the remaining team members often have to absorb this social worker's case load. The participant from this team said, "This is crazy and we're really getting resentful." The participant said she felt like she was "babysitting" younger social workers. The myriad of losses being experienced by this team had no apparent outlet and were not being dealt with on any observable level. The result was escalating pressure and stress for its members and likely for the other teams that interacted with them. Grief and loss in this unsupported situation was clearly turning to resentment which would serve only to heighten the problem. Also, here was an example of how more experienced workers, so often women, are expected do their own work, take care of others and many other concurrent pressures not of their making. With little acknowledgment and no support, the opportunity had been lost for the experienced worker, other workers, clients and the organization to benefit from the gained experience of a mature social worker. Instead, an unsupportive situation prevailed creating an unhealthy work environment.

Another participant talked about her loss of trust in the ministry. She said:

> I'm still recovering from the shock of the way this family, who are level 3 caregivers, have been caregivers for 11 years and everybody gets along with them, were treated. And it has made me less trustful of the ministry.

One of the tasks of a resource social worker was to help support and maintain a resource once established. This participant felt she was in a conflicted position between resource and ministry since on one hand she was a representative of the ministry and on the other she was a support to the foster home resource. Once the investigation was completed and all found to be in order, it was the participant who was left to mend the frayed relationship between the foster parent and the ministry she represented. Being in a conflicted position she feared loss on either side depending what she chose to do. How to hold the ministry position *and* provide support? The participant felt the loss of support by her ministry in this whole process. This lack of support leads into the next area for discussion.

Lack of support

Another significant cause of stress and pressure according to several participants was their sense of lack of support. Lack of support can have many origins; team mates, colleagues, managers, the ministry in general, the public or community colleagues. Lack of support in this instance included the sense of being invalidated, the sense of being insignificant, of not being trusted to do a good job, and the sense of not being understood, of not being "backed-up" and of being blamed. The source of lack of support in this instance was the ministry.

One participant said she felt stress when her views on a work issue, such as her perceptions of a foster home, were not seen as valid. In her opinion the ministry, "Does not pay attention or agree with the things the field sees as important." She had also come to the conclusion that employees were seen as insignificant, as "numbers not people." Talking with participants, it seemed that the further away from protection social work a team was, the more its members appeared to feel devalued and disrespected. While presenting addictions information and joint addiction services and protection protocols to social workers, I was surprised to hear several protection workers self consciously joking about how they thought others viewed them. Some of their self deprecating labels included "child snatcher", "kiddie cop" and other gendarme type labels.

The non-protection social workers in child welfare, however, had a perception of their roles as less valuable to their organization than was the role of protection social worker. Participants from both a community living services team and a resource team made similar comments about this. The participant from a CLS team said:

> I think part of it is that we all [CLS social workers] feel that we don't have the kinds of pressures that the people in the intake and assessment [protection] side of things, or the involuntary family service and those guys have, so that we ought to just shut up and accept ... But it's not that we don't have a life without pressure either.... I know the F&CS social workers look at CLS as the place where old burned out social workers go to rest.

The participant from a resource team said:

> Sometimes the other teams aren't quite as understanding [as my own] because they

> don't understand our jobs. They see resource work as a more cushy side line compared to the importance of apprehending children. So they maybe don't understand that we get as stressed out as everybody else.

It seemed as though some teams did not feel they had the right to express feeling stress or pressure within their work day, because the more highly valued protection teams had a preferred entitlement to those claims.

The pointing finger of blame.

Another aspect of feeling lack of support, and the resultant experiences of stress and pressure, was the sense of being watched and the fear of being blamed. This is discussed further in Chapter Five under the theme "fear of the pointing finger of blame". Within public service child welfare social work there is a sense of working in a fishbowl where the public, the media, and the upper ministry can cast a scrutinizing glance but where a social worker may not make any comments about resources or a case that has "become public". Many participants worried that something serious may indeed happen to a client on a caseload or caseloads they were supervising. This fear arose because often they had more work and responsibilities than one person or a seven hour day allowed for. There was "pressure to make the right decision" often without ever having seen the client or the client's home. Participants often felt watched and not trusted to do a good job. One participant said:

> I think MCF has come under much scrutiny since the Gove inquiry and the response to this has been that workers feel more under a microscope. There have been some situations where the ministry has not been supportive of workers in a way that social workers feel they should be. This all creates tension and there's a feeling of having to cover yourself. This feeling has been more pervasive in the work place since Gove than prior to that.

Another participant said:

> As a social worker doing different work [not protection work], I would probably change careers completely before doing protection work. This is not because the work itself is difficult, but because the ministry has failed to support those willing to do the work. Attempts to address public concerns have led to changes which have increased workload, and expectations that are unrealistic. I feel that any public agency that says it can guarantee that no child will suffer tragedy within families is misleading the public and expecting workers to perform the impossible.

Yet another participant talked about her decision to leave family service and protection social work to take on a job that did not have a direct connection to clients, in order to avoid the sense of being set up and blamed. She said:

> It was actually leaving behind things that I really, really liked to do. But, how long can I do it in an unreal, 'We'll hang you out to dry' situation. If we don't hang you out to dry, we'll change the rules and you won't even know what they are.

This statement conveyed a fear of not being supported by the larger ministry system should something go wrong. This sense of fear was exacerbated by a belief of not even being able to know what "the rules are", that might damn one. Social workers such as this participant did not wish to see their reputation and their career end in blame and shame, and they did not want to be instrumental in harm coming to a child regardless of the reason. This participant went on to say:

> [The end of] my days in child protection social work [happened] because the expectations were just becoming so unrealistic that really at some point in my life maybe some big horrible dangerous ugly thing was going to happen and at this point in my life I wasn't wanting to be there.

Another social worker said:

> MCF makes it quite clear that a SW [social worker] is not supported by the ministry, and must hire their own lawyer in the case of a civil suit. Only if the worker in question wins their case will the Ministry help with legal fees. We are taking all the risks and MCF is only helping if the courts find in favour of the worker.

Though I interviewed the participants separately they often said similar things. I believe the comments above indicate a particular belief about, in this case, support in the work culture of public service child welfare social workers. The comments reflected feelings of fear, restriction, and a sense of having been set-up; as in not knowing the rules they were accountable for, or as in having to pay for legal costs if they were not found in favour, by the courts.

<u>The downside of experience.</u>

Though the participants in this study were generally proud of the wisdom and experience gained through their years working as social workers, there were some noted

disadvantages that came with experience. For example, there were a much higher percentage of "horrible" cases assigned to them due to their experience. This usually did not mean a reduction of any other work in compensation. When I asked what constituted a "horrible" case, participants mentioned client situations that were "painful to witness". This could include excessively cruel parents, generationally entrenched families and extended family dysfunction or time consuming cases that were high risk and with little chance of positive change occurring.

Being an experienced social worker with several inexperienced colleagues on a team meant more work, with more difficult and time consuming cases. Pressure was created as one participant said:

> ... when staff turn-over, leaving new staff on a caseload, and other staff without coverage for vacations. Experienced workers end up taking on way too much, and their own caseload may suffer.

It also meant helping out less experienced social workers, who may be ambivalent about accepting help from someone they see as "old" and not knowledgeable. One participant mentioned that due to her age she felt disrespected by her younger colleagues. She said "[I'm looked upon as a] grandmother, with affection, but not to be taken too seriously....So sometimes I like to say things just to startle them a little bit into wakefulness, so they look at you as a person." This participant especially noted the reactions of those social workers "coming right from university". She said "It's just like the old ... 'I'm going to do it my way, and I'm going to do it better than you older people ever did." Lack of respect from younger colleagues was another way that a mature social worker may not feel supported or acknowledged. The "pointing finger" in MCF seemed to extend in many directions but most certainly it pointed inward. As workers felt lack of support, they in turn could be non-supportive of each other with ageism being one such side effect and a lack of respect for younger workers another. On the other hand, pointing out each others foibles may have offered a way to let off steam in a pressured situation.

The administrative requirements of social workers continued to increase and along with them, the pressure. Impacting on social workers and clients of the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) were such watch dog bodies as, the office of the Youth and

Child Advocate, the Ombudsman, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Commission, the Children's Commission, MCF internal complaints processes, various ministry review processes, the office of the MLA, media, the public and so on. A purpose for many of these regulatory systems was to ensure that harm does not befall infants, children and youth that have come to protection and guardianship social workers' attention. These regulatory systems generated expectations; they had no power however, to also generate the needed resources to deal with these expectations. The Children's Commission has suggested to MCF that lack of resources to do proper and timely casework was a factor in some of the cases they investigated. But all this body can do is suggest and recommend when it comes to resources[18].

The reader now has a sense of the types of work activities participant social workers did in a day, and some idea of the pressure caused by ever increasing administrative requirements and numbers of cases to manage, both of their own and of colleagues'. As is shown in the following section, participants did not disagree with the intent of ensuring client well being or of the concept of standardization and guidelines. They disagreed with the number of cases they had to work with which made following the guidelines very difficult. This section is a description of sources of expectations and kinds of expectations experienced by the participants.

Kinds and Sources of Expectations

Most of us do not spend time thinking about where expectations in our work day originate. They are part of our tacit understanding. Also, most professionals see themselves as being self directed and autonomous. Is that really true? We come to work each day and do what we believe "needs to be done". How is "what needs to be done" determined, and who determines it? An examination of expectations and their sources also shows how the work culture was maintained by participants by means of their own perceived expectations and how competing and contrasting expectations created pressures

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[18]On Oct. 26th, 2000 Paul Pellan, in a meeting of social workers in a small Western Community, made a comment about the lack of authority his office had to do anything more than make suggestions and recommendations to government on the level of resourcing necessary to carry out the expectations of the Children's Commission.

in their work days.

When I supervised guardianship social workers for three and one half years, I observed that while differences in style certainly existed and provided a sense of autonomy, social workers did not stray noticeably from the job description, the standards, policies, legislation or other guidelines that structured their jobs. Instead, it seemed that there was a great effort on the part of social workers to conform to systemic, societal, self and other expectations on them at work. I noticed this same pattern with participants of this study.

This observation was the background that brought me to ask participants of this research to talk about the kinds and sources of expectations they experience in their work days. I looked at how expectations were determined in public service child welfare social work as described by the participants in this study. Figure 6 offers a visual summary of participants' accounts of sources of expectations in their day. For example an *"internal expectation"* was *"wish lists"* which included expectations such as *"do a good job"* and *"have my social work job more understood by social workers on other teams".*

Since work expectations are generally tacit, looking beyond the surface of the day to day work rhythm, into the day's construction, created a more conscious awareness of the work day. This may not have felt comfortable at first. Some participants remarked that they had not thought about their work day this way before. Regarding the question, "What is expected of you at work and who expects it?" One participant said:

> Now that's a thought provoking question because they come from so many different directions, and they quite often are conflicting expectations. The expectations of me from my immediate supervisor, and my colleagues are one set of expectations. The expectations of the people to whom I provide service are another set, and the expectations of the upper management and the ministry system in general are yet another set of expectations. And they do seem to conflict.

Participants also added audit teams, children's commission, child advocate, general public, and media to the list of sources of expectations. As we see in the above quote, the participant spontaneously categorized the sources of expectations as she spoke of them. In a subsequent verification interview she also added community agencies, self and union to

Figure#6 Taxonomy of Kinds of Expectations in the Work Day of a Mid-aged Female Public Service Social Worker

Kinds of Expectations in a Social Worker's Day			
	Internal (self) Expectations	**Wish Lists**	ensure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults
			keep work up to date so someone else does not get stuck with it
			provide and receive support
			take transferred cases at agreed upon points
			provide appropriate homes for children, youth and adults when needed
			get along with team-mates
			be even-keeled throughout the day
			follow the job description
			do a good job
			expect service providers to support clients to do things for themselves
			receive respect from younger social workers rather than being treated as a nice grandmotherly type
			have my social work job more understood by social workers on other teams
			the Ministry to follow its own protocols and time lines in dealing with contentious matters
			service providers to realize they are paid as supports and not as friends to clients
			to grow in one's practice regardless of working with the same clients and the same job for many years
			connect with clients when appropriate
	External Expectations	**Bottom Lines**	follow the *Acts*, standards, policies and guidelines that create the mandate for each component of the Ministry
			follow the contract
			follow the job description
			do not work overtime; take breaks

Figure#6 (Continued) Taxonomy of Kinds of Expectations in the Work Day of a Mid-aged Female Public Service Social Worker

Kinds of Expectations in a Social Worker's Day			
	External Expecta-tions (union and Ministry)	**Bottom Lines**	behave in a professional manner as set out in *Standards of Conduct for Public Servants*
			learn to live with no backfill
	Team Leaders (Tls) and managers (CSMs) public service and colleagues		do your job when you are there
			complete paperwork
			document gathered information appropriately and thoroughly
			treat people with respect
			be accountable to clients
			keep computer documentation up to date
			cover for absent colleagues
			consult
	Community colleagues		be available with information, service, support.
			do no harm
			do a good job
	Audit Team		follow the ACTS, standards, policies, procedures and protocols
	Children's Commission		co-operate in complaint investigations and conflict resolutions between clients or between the public and MCF
			follow-up and deal with the findings
	Media		provide information on child protection "controversies" that will result in a story which can be presented to the public

Figure#6 (Continued) Taxonomy of Kinds of Expectations in the Work Day of a Mid-aged Female Public Service Social Worker

Kinds of Expectations in a Social Worker's Day			
	Internal and External Expectations	**Conflicting Expectations**	increased paperwork expectations versus less time to do that which needs documenting
			tasks in a day versus time to meet them
			get a full day or weeks tasks done even though being away at training
			the idea that more training versus more time will solve practice problems
			an old policy manual declared obsolete by the social work system versus expectations to follow no new policy manual
			union and management both say no overtime versus expectation to get the work done (magic time happens)
			social workers expect that they should be able to get the work done versus seven hour day - too much work. Extra time is donated versus social worker's admitting the work cannot all be done
			clients want their names and stories remembered versus social workers being able to remember one or the other
			requests for information from media versus mandate not to provide information to media
	Internal (self) Expectations	**Relinquish-ments**	letting go of perfection
			letting go of client's "weaknesses"
			letting go of the belief that it is possible to get all of the work done in one day
			letting go of professional elitism
			letting go of high standards when covering more than one caseload
			letting go of your youth

Figure#6 (continued) Taxonomy of Kinds of Expectations in the Work Day of a Mid-aged Female Public Service Social Worker

Kinds of Expectations in a Social Workers's Day	Internal (self) Expectations	Wise proverbs	deal carefully with stress through good self-care
			find your own comfort level with the work
			do what you can realistically do
			do not expect to have everything perfect
			given tools and skills, people **can** handle their own problems
			know that your work is important
			do not expect anyone to tell you that it is
			do not make anything worse

the above categories and she even drew a wedge-shaped diagram to illustrate the hierarchy of these sources of expectation as she experienced them. The participant placed herself

and her clients together at the *"bottom"* of the diagram, stating that she saw both of them as *"equally powerless"* in the larger organization. The union above and off to one side, colleagues above and off to the other side, because they were both "sort of" supportive. At the *"top"* in ascending order, she placed her immediate supervisor, management, and at the top, the ministry system, whom she did not see as helpful in terms of facilitating her ability to deliver service to clients. Empowerment literature suggests that due to a common experience of oppression there is potential common ground between worker and client when both parties recognize their own oppression (Arches, 1997; Keefe, 1984). If social workers are not aware of these common systemic oppressions however, there is the possibility of the oppressed worker projecting their oppression onto their clients. This participant described standing beside her clients rather than over them in the organizational hierarchy that she delineated.

Some people described an ideal or wish list of what they wanted, and these wishes became expectations. Some expectations were prescribed by the organization in the form of bottom lines. Some kinds of expectations conflicted. Some expectations showed relinquishment of ideals or values. The many and occasionally contradictory expectations that participants experienced in their work days provide insight into the messy, complicated work lives of the mature women social work participants.

Wish lists and internal expectations

It was clear in listening to participants that the sources of expectations were both internal and external. The participants had expectations of themselves and of others. Some participants, when asked about sources of expectations, could initially only think of expectations as originating from within themselves, as autonomous professionals. These expectations appeared to take the form of an idealized sense of practice, of something that may not exist now but that was longed for. These wish list expectations exposed basic values and cultural goal posts.

Some examples of wish list expectations, in their own words, that participants aimed

for, hoped for and believed in as best practice, included the following: keep your work up to date so it does not fall to someone else; provide and receive support; take transferred cases at agreed upon points; provide appropriate homes for children and youth when needed; get along with team mates; be even keeled throughout the day; follow the job description; do a good job; expect service providers to support clients to do things for themselves; receive respect from younger workers, rather than merely being treated as a nice grandmotherly type; have my [social work] job more understood by social workers on other teams; expect the ministry to follow its own protocols and time lines when dealing with contentious matters; expect service providers to have appropriate relationships with clients by realizing they are paid supports not friends; and, to continue to grow in my [social work] practice in spite of doing the same job with the same clients for many years. These examples showed what the participants wanted to see happen in their work day as well as the values that they held. Many of these things can and do happen but work load pressures or contradictory expectations created situations where the ideal could not be achieved. Wish list expectations such as these kept social workers striving for the ideal and in so doing, they maintained the work ethic or the work culture of their work place.

Bottom line and external expectations.

These examples were expectations the participants had of themselves and of others versus expectations that they perceived would be imposed on them externally. Expectations like following the job description or doing a good job came from all levels of the ministry, from self to upper management. Not being able to carry out such widely accepted expectations appeared to cause stress and a sense of not doing a good job. The stress of not feeling good about performance and the efforts made by participants to improve their performance was another way that the work ethic and the work culture of pressured working were maintained. There was a commonly held belief with all participants that the deeply feared "pointing or blaming finger" would arise from the larger system, if something went wrong on a case, regardless the reason. The past four years of observing social workers left me with the impression that the fear of the "pointing finger" extended beyond the participants in this study. I have mentioned this

sense of fear to various managers who stated emphatically that this fear is mythical and unjustified. I have been told personally that no one has ever been fired as the result of a case blowing up or becoming the target of the media. Fact or fiction, the field social worker remains nervous of the "pointing finger". This similar blaming gaze was also cast from one social worker or social work team toward another perhaps as a projection of the dissatisfaction with one's own sense of accomplishment of the variety of expectations and with the frustration of not being able to achieve the ideal.

There were expectations of self and colleagues to both give and receive support. No participant however, expressed an expectation that they should or would receive support from the larger ministry system. That there was no expressed field expectation for support from the larger ministry system was also a part of the forming picture of the work culture of the participant social workers. It showed that support from the larger ministry system had been perceived to be absent for so long that there was no tacit expectation or wish-list ideal that support would exist. Or, conversely, it showed that support was tacitly felt and therefore not experienced as a need, an ideal or a loss. Many small comments from participants and from observations of social workers in my work environment however, lead me to the former rather than latter conclusion. Every system has some fundamental expectations which its members know must happen. These "bottom line" expectations are external. Even though bottom lines may become internalised by the worker, they come from an external, organizational source. The participants perceived that the "system" or province and the Ministry for Children and Families had some global, and yet specific expectations of them. There were three such general expectations. First, keep children and vulnerable clients safe. Second, workers need to follow the ACTS, standards, policies, and guidelines that created the mandate for each component of the ministry. Third, public employees will behave in a professional manner and follow the *Standards of Conduct* for public servants. More specifically, public service employees are expected to: follow the government-union negotiated contract; to follow their job descriptions; to document gathered information appropriately and thoroughly; and to complete paperwork. Public service social workers are expected to be accountable to their clients and to treat people with respect. There is also a

perception by participants that the upper level of the organization, expected employees to learn to live with no "backfill".

Many bottom line types of expectations from the larger ministry system, according to the participants, were also categorized as such by other sources such as team leader, managers, colleagues, community and participant. This tacit acceptance of several bottom line expectations ensured that a particular work ethic would develop and be maintained, such as doing more with less or with the status quo, causing no harm, protecting children and youth from harm, or giving volunteer overtime on a regular basis.

Bottom line expectations such as these were powerful shapers of the work culture and whether willingly or begrudgingly, most social workers agreed to them. Participants felt they often had no time to think, only to act. These types of expectations were often at odds with the held ideal of social work. The discrepancies created rifts: within the social worker, between quality and quantity care; and collective versus individual solution finding. These conflicts created an even more complicated work environment (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Cohen, 1997; de Montigny, 1989; Wise, 1990). The conflicted nature of the expectations upon participants is discussed next.

Conflicting expectations.

Different sources of expectations seemed to conflict. For example, there was an increasing amount of paperwork needed to document things, which in turn, left less time to do the things that required documentation. There were no more staff hired in order to do the more extensive job required by the new model[19] yet nothing was taken away from the existing workload. There was an expectation that the new model would be implemented and annually updated, with all children and youth in care. The Children's Commission could and did randomly request CPOCS on various clients. One participant said:

> Children's Commission can be perceived as a "finger pointing" arm of the government who - at random requests copies of CPOCS without permission from the family, to review and then, requests revisions according to their standards. Again, without consent of the family.

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[19]The "new model" was a new form of assessment of children and youth in care called a *Comprehensive Plan of Care* or *CPOC*. This model was far more extensive and therefore time consuming than the past administrative requirement.

Deadlines were included with such requests. Questions were asked of the Community Services Managers and Team Leaders if deadlines were not met. This created pressure and stress for all since most social workers did not have the time to complete the CPOCs in a timely manner. A conflict appeared between tasks in a day and the time needed to complete them.

MCF provided compulsory trainings to ensure that guardianship and protection workers had adequate and updated knowledge with which to follow the legislation, standards, policies and guidelines. Improved training was one of the recommendations of the Gove Commission and a recommendation embraced by most social workers I have talked to and worked with. However, social workers were still expected to get the full day's or week's work done while away at training. No one filled in for them while they were out of the office. Rather social work colleagues "covered" for them. One participant said:

> There have been a lot of training events, compulsory things like discrimination, prevention and foster parent protocol training. The expectation is somehow that you will attend all these events and still get your complete week's work done around these things. That seems to be the implied expectation because nobody else is supplied to assist you with that.

More training is a good thing but training alone would not prevent practice problems which occur due to work overload. Suggesting that training was the main solution was a form of denying the problem of work overload and devaluing the workers by implying that it was lack of skill not time that was the main cause of practice problems. Also, community living services (CLS) participants pointed out that although there was an expectation by MCF that they follow standards, policies, and guidelines, they had a standards manual which had been declared obsolete by the MCF social work system. There was apparently still no replacement manual at the time of writing this thesis. An expectation by MCF for its employees to follow standards without a standards manual was a conflict in expectation.

There were conflicts between what management expected social workers to accomplish in the contracted seven hour day, and what could actually be accomplished in that time. Though MCF had engaged in a work load study to determine what an

appropriate caseload size per social worker should be, the study had not taken into consideration the reality that workers often monitored more than their own case load. Every participant talked about the problem of working on teams with an unfilled staff complement. What this meant was that positions were filled but no one was in them currently. This could be for any number of reasons including such things as holidays, trainings, parental leaves, union activities, doing rapid response work, filling in for a missing worker on a neighbouring team in even more need, unpaid leaves, compassionate leaves, sick leaves, and stress leaves (which was not to be called stress leave but rather sick leave) or taking a client to a service in another community.

Social worker's experienced pressure from their union not to work overtime, and pressure from their employer who also *said*, do not work overtime. But, social workers were still expected to get the work done safely and correctly. One participant said:

> Another expectation that the system now has is that we work without working overtime, because the union's expectation is that we don't work more than the stated hours of work in our Hours of Work Agreement. But somehow we are to manage to complete all our own work and other people's work when they are away because no one is supplied to provide backfill.

Some participants described feeling caught between the written union-management contract, the realities of their job and the needs of their clients. Unpaid overtime or "magic time"[20] was a result of having a temporally compressed work day which included: possibly more than one case load to monitor; many more administrative requirements than a seven hour day allowed for; incoming information, requests, and requirements from several sources such as e-mail, fax, phone, computer generated "to do" lists, MCF colleagues, community colleagues, clients, team leaders, management, the courts system, and several "watch dog" sources. Social workers expected that they *should* be able to get the work done that the day presented to them, and if they did not succeed in

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20 "Magic time" is supposedly unauthorized, unpaid for overtime compensated with time in lieu of money. It is called magic time because a team leader can quietly agree to allow the social worker to take compensating time off. Unless it is a child safety concern or other serious direct client related event, paid overtime is frowned upon. Officially, paid or unpaid overtime taken to complete administrative tasks is not acceptable by either the union or by management. Team leaders recognize the need for social workers to catch up and they make arrangements for the worker to take time off that is not officially sanctioned or documented (it is magic time). A downside of magic time is that it leaves a filled position with no one in it while the worker takes compensating time off from the regular work day. Others then have to monitor and

accomplishing this in seven hours, they often stayed until it was done. A tacit assumption that it was their inadequacy rather than too much work that saw the end of the day arrive before the end of the tasks. Often this overtime was donated due to the desire to "make right" any inadequacy. Conflict surfaced when the social worker was expected to do non-compatible tasks such as getting all the administrative work completed, the clients seen or attended to on perhaps more than one case load, and attend the meetings, committees, court hearings or trainings. All within the confines of a seven hour day. From listening to participants and observing social workers in my own work site, it appeared that social workers would like less volume of work not a longer work day to do it in.

Another source of conflicted expectations existed between the social worker and her clients. For example, one participant mentioned that her clients expected that she should remember their issues, concerns and the many aspects of their lives; whereas her expectation is that she will remember the spelling and correct pronunciation of their names. Clients may expect their social worker to take their random calls and drop in visits. The social worker may expect the client to make appointments because they are too busy to cope with several unplanned client contacts in a day.

There were conflicts and contradictions regarding the expectations of public service child welfare social workers' time in a work day. These were a few examples. At times a bottom line expectation and a wish list expectation collided and a conflicting expectation was created. For example, a bottom line expectation might be, following all of the policies and getting the administrative work done in a day. A wish list expectation might be doing a thorough job with all of the clients on one's case load. The social worker may view a thorough job as including client contact. This was often not possible if the administrative paper work was to be completed and computer generated forms kept up to date. Therefore, a conflict occurred between what one would like to do and what one must do. From hearing participants comments it seemed that to continue to work in this conflicted social work environment over the long term some form of strategy had to occur. Though it appeared to have taken an individualized rather than a more collective format, participants had some interesting things to say about what "must give" in order

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service the caseload of the absent social worker.

for them to remain in public service social work.

Relinquishments.

Neufeldt and Guralnik (1997) defined relinquishment as "the giving up of something desirable, and connotes compulsion or the force of necessity"(p.1134). Staying in the profession for many years, seemed to have necessitated the giving up of some values. This was not all bad news. Whereas some values were still longed for as participants expressed under the wish-list heading described above, other values were useful to let go of as participants expressed in many of the wise proverbs described later in the response section. Letting go of a belief in clients' weaknesses, letting go of the belief that it was possible to get all of the work done in a day, letting go of perfectionism, or letting go of professional elitism were adaptive ways to get through the pressures and expectations in a day.

Several participants noted that in their earlier and more ideal days in social work they were more judgemental and less tolerant of their clients' behaviours and life styles. Participants also stated that at the beginning of their careers it was easier to believe that they as social workers, had answers and solutions to clients' problems. Clients just needed to do what was suggested to them by their social worker to get their lives in order again. These were characteristics that at least one participant had noticed were common to younger social workers she worked with now. One participant said:

> I think that as I've gotten older, and as I dealt with my own family situations, ... I think what has happened is that I've become much more accepting of the variety of problems that people have and less judgemental about them, so that I'm less likely to be confrontive with them. I think that when I was younger, I was much more judgemental.

Participants said that letting go of some of these types of values increased tolerance and changed the expectations they now had for both themselves and their clients. In turn more and smaller successes were noticed.

One participant referred to this concept of relinquishing as "no longer being on a white charger out to save the world." She now believed that it was clients themselves that do or do not accomplish change in their lives, rather than social workers who succeed or fail in changing people. Learning how to let things go, learning to successfully deal with

losses, learning to accept one's self throughout the aging process was described in positive terms by participants. Participants expressed pride in the accomplishment of these skills, having found ways to work smarter rather than harder. Less positive, was the necessity of letting go of standards due to workload. When participants talked about this type of letting go it was with great concern for client safety and fear for their careers due to lack of support from their organization. Some types of letting go were less constructive than others. For example, when a social worker must cover for an absent colleague or two, plus manage her own case load, standards had to be lowered to meet this expectation. It was not in a social worker's power to bring in an extra worker, so staying in the job, sadly, required an acceptance that not all would be done the way one would like or that the standards expect. This type of letting go was problematic and seemed to be a price of remaining in the job. It likely contributed to the culture of fear since over years the odds that something would go wrong with a case on one's case load would increase and the possibility that not all was done to standards would be there.

Letting go of a belief that the individual social worker must solve the problems created by the system was much harder for participants to accomplish even when the concept was understood. In a busy day this seemed too big, solving the current problem too automatic. Participants did take some individualized actions to stop "bailing out the system." Since several participants mentioned similar activities there may have been more discussion and acceptance of these practices among social workers than was articulated. Some participants had decided at this stage of their work lives to avoid taking personal responsibility for lack of resourcing. They had decided not to give untold hours of free labour. Unless the general work site is supportive, however, even this attempt creates pressure on the practicing social worker, according to participants. It is hard to be supportive when there is a fear that more work will fall to those supporting another's choice to not overwork.

Summary of Expectations and Pressures

Several kinds of pressures and internal and external sources of expectation were expressed by the participants of this research project. Some expectations conflicted with others creating a difficult situation for the social worker, requiring discretion in choosing

which expectation to follow when, and in what order to avoid harm to clients and self. Expectations expressed ideals and a set of practice values that social workers, perhaps tacitly, held as a goal to strive for, thus encouraging good practice, hope and maintenance of the work culture. Expectations rippled throughout the system especially the bottom lines ones. When achieving these key bottom-line expectations could not be accomplished, stress and self-doubt crept in for the social worker. Finally, the path to surviving in the system for many years was achieved by learning how, when and what expectations to let go of while still retaining integrity, enjoyment of the work and competency as a social worker.

Evaluating Pressures and Responding to Expectations

Once more I found it difficult to separate pressures and expectations in participant social workers' days at work, from their reactions or responses to those pressures and expectations. In addition, in spite of seemingly untenable pressures and expectations, I noticed a sense of pride and resiliency within these women participants. Proof of pride and resiliency was to be found both in the performing of caring social work in a difficult environment and in surviving for so long within that environment, still wanting to do social work.

To organize the participants' evaluations of and responses to experienced pressures in their work days, I have created three subsections: 1. ways of evaluating pressures in a social work day; 2. kinds of impacts; 3. results of being a mature female social worker.

Evaluating Pressures in a Social Work Day

Ways of evaluating pressures in a day is divided into the categories of pride, easy or satisfying parts of the job, decisions that must be made, difficult parts of the job, and ways to prioritise competing work demands.

Pride.

In spite of or, perhaps because of the many obstacles that the participants encountered in the course of a working day there were several areas of their work in which participants expressed pride and self respect for their abilities. One participant stated:

By the end of my day, every kid is as safe as *can* be, nobody is in crisis, my clients'

> health and welfare needs have been met, and nobody is in immediate danger. In over 20 years of work, no harm has been done.

Given the number of caseloads she was overseeing, and the frustrations she outlined to me in the first interview, this was an incredible accomplishment.

Another participant expressed great pride in her profession saying "I think a lot of good can be done by our profession." This participant was also proud at what she has learned through her life experiences. She said "My life experiences have given me a certain amount of knowledge, skill in dealing with people and expertise about myself." Another participant expressed pride in being effective with her clients and their families. She worked with handicapped adults and said" The grief that goes along with having a child with a disability, whether they are two or whether they are sixty, it's still there." She sees it as part of her job to help bring "celebration into that", [a life with a handicap]. Her work in this area is a source of pride to her. Another participant said that for her "Each year over 40 as a social worker has taught me a great deal.

Several participants noted a sense of pride and accomplishment in learning their own limits. This achievement was seen as key to being able to remain a social worker over the long term. One participant said:

> When I was younger and less experienced, I had higher expectations of myself but probably achieved less … I think by not getting panic stricken [with] all the suggestions and demands coming at you ... you get used to multi-tasking. Some of the stuff gets lost on your desk, and you find it at the end of the day ... then at that point, you say to yourself, well, it's not really important now.

There was a sense of pride in learning discernment regarding the volumes of work coming across the desk. Another participant also expressed pride in her ability to "read" a situation in order to use her time more judiciously and in order not to be reactive with clients. She said, "I know better what a real crisis is versus a supposed crisis." By this she meant that her years of experience had taught her to know better when to act, when a client was presenting a situation as a crisis. Also, when to listen and when to wait before responding to the client in order to give them time to calm down.

Satisfying parts of the job.

Participants often expressed feeling satisfied with the job when they thought of their

work with clients as useful and meaningful to them. Also, there was a sense of satisfaction when they gained personal insight about themselves as a result of their social work practice and life experience.

As mentioned above, helping a disabled or developmentally challenged person and that person's family and friends to create meaning, achieve goals, and to live an active life was a source of satisfaction. I got the impression when one participant talked about bringing "a celebration of life" into her work with her clients that celebration in the face of adversity, also spilled over into her life as well. One participant talked about the satisfaction of being able to support a young mom in coping with and getting through depression, so she could become a safer and happier parent. Another participant talked about how her work taught her so much about people and therefore so much about herself. She had learned to be much more patient and tolerant of both herself and her clients. Another participant expressed a sense of satisfaction in getting to know so many people, both colleagues and people generally in the community, as a result of her work. She had met so many people that she enjoyed knowing. One participant derived satisfaction from knowing the work she did was important, that it made a difference in the lives of her clients and that she did not need someone to tell her that, she simply knew it. She would welcome acknowledgment from the system, though she said she knew better than to expect it.

Decisions that must be made.

In the first set of interviews participants indicated kinds of decisions they must make. They mentioned decisions that took into consideration, whether or not to do something. Some examples of this included: taking a child into care or not, or doing something about a presented situation versus doing nothing to see if the client could sort it out herself. Decisions had to be made about: where to place a child or whether or not to continue using a particular foster home; whether a child should come into care temporarily or on a long term basis; about whether to investigate a call in of alleged abuse, or not; whether the "safety plan" would actually keep the child safe; whether or not to spend time talking with a client or to do important paper work that may affect the client if not done. Decisions had to be made about how much and what kinds of time to spend

with clients, to spend time with one's own client or a client on a caseload being monitored for someone else. Decisions about how to involve other MCF teams such as probation or mental health or addictions services had to be made regularly.

One participant talked about the problem of being on one's own and needing to make serious decisions. Making decisions in isolation was seen as such a serious issue that decision points for discussion with the team leader were written into policy to ensure these discussions took place. Another place for continuous and difficult decision making arose when a social worker was covering more than one case load. This involved deciding hour by hour or sometimes minute by minute which case, which client to focus on. As one participant said:

> There are major life effects when kids come into care whether it's temporary or permanent ... So, how can you be making those [decisions], unless you know people well enough ... Because we are supposed to be trying to build on the strengths of people. We can't even find them [strengths] if we don't have time to get to know them [clients]

She made the point that many life affecting decisions ended up being made without *first* having had adequate time to form a relationship with the client before collecting the information needed to make the decision.

Why would participants choose to raise these as examples of decisions? Was there some thread that ran through the types of decisions that participants thought worthy of mentioning? I think there was. The thread was insufficient time, support, and resources available to the social worker. In turn this made decision making difficult and therefore memorable. This latter point leads into the next heading, difficult parts of the job.

Difficult parts of the job.

Emerging from the transcripted first interview with each participant were descriptions of difficult parts of the job. I grouped the stated difficult parts of the job into three general areas: grief, irritations, and ethical dilemmas. There were many areas of their social work jobs that participants described as difficult.

Grief. Community living services social workers spoke about grief in a way I had not encountered before in my years of supervising field social work. Other participants mentioned both anger and sadness due to years of witnessing horrible things in some

clients' lives.

In my work experience, when a client dies the worker *may* go to the funeral if there is nothing else booked in their work day. Rarely does a social worker stay for the tea or reception afterwards, rarely is team time given to the support the social worker's grief. But in the CLS team that one participant worked in, the importance of doing each of these things was understood. They were incorporated into the CLS participants' regular practice at their agency. For instance, permission and support were approved for a social worker to go home for the rest of the day after attending a funeral and reception.

I have included three comments from the CLS social work participants from the two communities, who faced the death of clients on a fairly regular basis, both of whom expressed that this was indeed a difficult part of the job. One participant said, "When a client dies the social worker is the last person anybody acknowledges as a griever." Another participant said, "Social workers working with disabled children that do not make it past ten, have some horrendous things that they have to deal with." Another aspect of grief that a participant spoke of was, "Helping parents cope with the grief that goes along with having a child with a disability." This participant further explained by saying that part of this type of grief is the loss of having a "normal" child and the loss of the culturally prescribed expectations that go along with that, such as marriages, grandchildren, and typical school events.

Irritations. Lack of resources, time, support and information caused several areas of ongoing job irritation for the participants. By irritations I mean things that participants identified themselves as annoying, pet peeves or irritations. I have labelled all of these as "irritations". "Never having a full staff complement" was the root of most difficulties and irritations for participant social workers. Lack of available staff and the resulting backlash of extra cases kept coming up in all interviews. One participant said the constant interruptions in her day because of shortages elsewhere made it difficult to get her work completed. She chose to sacrifice being a good team player in order to go home and complete work on her home computer, in peace. She considered this a survival technique. She said, "But, in order to keep my sanity, sometimes, I need to do that work at home and in doing that, I know that I'm leaving other people [team mates] behind me at

the office, short of staff." To deal with the problem of short staff and the resulting irritation due to constant interruptions, she contributed to even more short staffing and likely to others being irritated with her. A difficult decision arising out of a difficult situation.

This same participant stated that her biggest "peeve" was feeling set-up by having an impossible workload of high risk cases with no safety or support from the ministry. She said "And you're going to have a double and triple case load, and, you know, it was just like the black hole kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger." This participant was talking about why she left child protection social work, which she had loved. She chose to move away from child protection social work, "because the expectations were just becoming so unrealistic" and also before she was, "hung out to dry" due to not having enough time to do the job properly on those extra caseloads she spoke of. She said, "At some point in my life, maybe some big horrible dangerous ugly thing was going to happen and at this point in my life I wasn't wanting to be there." She said of the larger MCF system, "And if we [MCF system] don't hang you out to dry, we'll change the rules and you won't even know what they are." This comment spoke to the lack of trust which arose out of not being able to know the current rules before they were changed. The comment also expressed the participant's irritation at feeling set-up by her employer. This was particularly so at a stage in her life where she expected more respect because of her experience and "track record," and where ending up at the "end of the pointing finger" would be devastating to her career. Where do you begin again, after fifty and after potentially losing your delegation letter. Removal of the letter of delegation in this work culture is like a military stripping of rank. Aside from indicating that the organization is taking action on a serious situation which has likely "gone public," it is also an act of shaming and focusing on an individual. Not being able to know what the rules were made it difficult to do a job properly and safely. It also created role ambiguity, a lack of clarity as to what is expected, appropriate, or effective behaviour. This together with role conflict which results when incompatible or tenuously compatible demands or expectations are placed upon the social worker, may according to W. Harrison (1980), lead to personal stress and a low degree of job satisfaction. According to Lipsky (1980)

in Katz (1992, p. 49) "Lack of clarity in role expectations has been found to impair personal action and reduce worker's effectiveness."

Another participant expressed an irritation with her supervisor's lack of dealing with personnel problems on the team. This consequently left her and other team members having to cope with the unresolved problem, adding yet one more thing into over-busy days. She said, "It is difficult if a supervisor doesn't deal with individuals not pulling their weight." A social worker can talk directly to a colleague about how she or he is affected by the co-worker not carrying their own weight, but as the participant said, if nothing changes it is up to the team leader to find out what the problem is. A perception that the team leader was not dealing with this kind of issue caused irritation. One participant expressed resentment at having to do more than her perceived share of work to compensate for someone else's shortfall. When tensions were high due to too much to do in the available time, tempers flared and feelings of irritation, crept into the work day.

Ethical issues. Participants spoke of the difficulties inherent in weighing the rights and needs of clients on one hand and their responsibility to the ministry in terms of accountability and priorizing of available resources on the other. Listening to the participants, it seemed that at times they felt that there was no "right" answer and no way to satisfy all needs. Difficult professional decisions involving ethical dilemmas had to be made.

One participant talked about the need to balance the wait list and client need against a changing eligibility criteria. An example of this was removing a criterion such as having to have a 70 IQ or less to be eligible for service, only to be unable to serve the larger pool of newly eligible clients. There had been no additional workers hired to handle the increase in eligible clients. Another participant talked about the importance of supporting appropriate decision making. This involved the delicate job of supporting care givers working with handicapped clients *not* to do for clients what clients could do for themselves, and supporting clients to make efforts to do as much for themselves as possible. On both sides of this issue there was resistance. The client may want the caregiver to do things for her or him rather than struggling to do it her or himself. The caregiver may find it easier and less confrontational to do things for the client rather than

expecting her or him to try to do things for herself. The question became how far does the social worker pressure caregivers and clients on the agency goal of independence?

Another participant talked about the ethical issue of supporting the client's right to make a lifestyle decision such as using alcohol and or drugs, or engaging in unsafe sex versus the system's need for responsibility, accountability and client safety. What if the client's independence involves unsafe lifestyle choices?

Another participant raised the ethical concern about which cases to focus on when covering more than one caseload or when client issues flare up simultaneously on different case loads. According to participants' descriptions and my own observations, there is a tendency for a social worker to focus on the case from her or his own caseload because they know the case better and have a better idea about what to do. How is that fair to the clients on the other caseload who may have a more serious issue at that moment? What is the impact on clients and on the social worker's sense of efficacy? These were the dilemmas that faced the participants on a regular basis and were difficult parts of their job. This led to another aspect of evaluating and responding to the job, priorizing. When the number of tasks in a day were overly plentiful, or when there were concurrent demands on the participant's time, she had to find some way to decide what her next action would be.

Ways to Priorize Competing Demands at Work

My conversations with participants led me to look at the priorizing of guardianship and protection social work as both an individual and a team influenced process. Under this heading I have shown the responses the participants gave to the question, "How would you priorize work if there were more than one demand at the same time?" For the purpose of the descriptions in this thesis, priorizing work is not to be considered synonymous with the ordering of work in a day. The ordering of work in a day may be a part of priorizing time and work but the situation in this discussion involves concurrent demands. There was pressure to make difficult decisions about what to do now, do later and possibly not do at all in a given conflicted moment in a day. I differentiated participants' responses by their area of social work, as priorizing happened differently in each area.

Priorizing by residential resource social work participants. The resource social work participants' main job function is to recruit, maintain and develop residential resources for children and youth. This would include resources for children and youth who were temporarily or permanently removed from their parents, custodial parent or other guardian due to lack of ability, and or willingness of that guardian to care for the child or children. When asked how social workers responded to having more tasks than time or to simultaneous demands, the participant resource social workers said they would priorize their day in the following ways.

The safety needs of children and youth take precedence to all else so the first priority was to stop everything else and find a resource immediately. When presented with a case that had a sense of urgency, they looked at the need and demand and asked themselves the following questions. Is this a crisis? Is it life or death? Does the child need to be removed immediately and placed elsewhere later? The next most important activity is matching the child or youth to a home most closely suited to their race, culture, religion and other significant factors. Both resource social work participants say that their work is people driven and that "client driven stuff takes over." When the resource social work participants are confronted with several things at once, or a deadline there are a number of things they do to deal with the situation. One participant said that if pressed for time due to a pending deadline, she would cancel an annual review. Each foster home is reviewed annually. This participant said she may write "do not disturb" on the board. For her, constantly answering the phone or e-mail throughout the day when she has other things to complete was a low priority. This participant also made an effort to keep her commitments to previously scheduled appointments and meetings because these were time consuming to re-book.

Another resource social work participant expressed some of her ways of dealing with a pressured day. She said that an experienced resource worker would have the inventory of foster placements in their head and therefore could make quick suggestions. She also said that if she is already busy when asked to produce a resource she may ask an F&CS social worker or protection social worker to call a particular foster home to see if they would take the child or youth. This saved time. If there was an urgent need for a

particular type of foster home, for example for a youth or an infant, a mini-assessment could be done on an interested person and the pre-service meeting could be done earlier than planned. In other words the screening process was both condensed and hastened. This participant mentioned that if an emergency came up, a team leader or other colleague was asked to either attend or call in an apology for her if she needed to miss a meeting.

Priorizing by the under-12 social work participant. One participant was very succinct in how she priorized her day if confronted with time and work pressures, so I will similarly number the order of her decision making from most to least important.

1. Child protection and immediate safety, as per the policy,
2. Immediate crisis situations such as a family fight, a parent threatening a child, a foster placement breakdown, a child running away, violence or extreme acting out behaviour of a child,
3. Regular appointments,
4. Paperwork,
5. Lunch or coffee break.

File audits were done on an ongoing basis throughout this province. An impending file audit created a great deal of pressure for a social worker because time simply must be found where it does not exist, in order to get the paperwork in the file up to date and in order. Some participants commented that files should be left as "they really are" so the system could see the actual situation. However, though many social workers feel that way, most agencies put pressure on their staff to "get ready" for audits. Most social workers complied because they did not want to have their work or their reputation devalued due to incomplete paperwork. This was an indication of the significance placed on administrative work by the organization. It was one indication of how those working within this organization/ministry "buy into" this focus. There may be irritation but there is also compliance or a least a strong attempt at compliance. This attempt at compliance influences how the social work participant shapes her day.

Priorizing by community living services (CLS) participants. These participants experienced medical emergency pressures with their client group and they certainly experienced workload pressures. However, there were relatively few comments about

how they priorized work in a pressured situation. One participant said she planned ahead by setting up meetings and personal service plans well in advance. This participant also made a comment about the importance of not cancelling meetings since several schedules have to be considered and re-booking is very time consuming. She said that if a crisis did come up when a meeting had been planned, the team leader was asked to attend or to make calls to cancel the meeting. I called one CLS participant to ask her if she had yet had the chance to write anything about some questions I had sent her. Her response to me, aside from the answers to the questions, gives the reader some idea of the kind of pressure this participant experienced in her day, even in this supposedly less pressured area of child welfare social work. I have included here, her written comment to me:

> Things have been **insane** [her emphasis] around here, and for the last few days I have been trying to switch rapidly among, five count them five hats, as we are short a social worker and I have had to put out fires on her caseload, while simultaneously covering the roles of team leader, the At Home regional contact person and worksite Safety Rep., and, in my spare time, attending to the most pressing needs of my own clients.

She apologized to me for not having remembered to send the information I had asked her for by the date I had requested it. I would have liked to ask her more specifically, how she went about priorizing the above mentioned mountain of duties but I chose not to add another task to her day.

<u>Priorization by assessment & investigation social work participant.</u> The A & I participant outlined what I understood was a standard priorized format for most A&I social workers. This area of social work is the most prescribed and highest pressure area. How priorizing must be done is written into the *Practice Standards for Child Protection.* This participant said that safety is a primary motivator for what would be on top of a priority list and her following list of higher or lower priority tasks shows this. I have included here the list as she gave it to me:

1. Does the call need investigation?
2. Level of concern is assessed, immediate, twenty-four hours, or five days for a removal [of a child or youth from their current living situation]
3. A "safety plan" for these time frames must be put in place
4. Removals are a priority, once a removal is made, a "care plan" must happen that day

5. Court appearances are a must if a child is removed; the intake (A&I) worker has seven days to prepare for the court hearing to make a case for the removal;
6. Changing safety plans must be put in place and monitored depending upon the current living arrangement for the child or youth;
7. A case may be priorized because it is before court;
8. If a safety plan is done and the youth or child is okay for that day, the case may not be dealt with that day even if it is important;
9. Completing existing assessments and investigations is less of a priority when safety planning has already been done.

Depending on the type of team, and on the individual social worker, the pressures created by the need to complete a multitude of tasks in a limited time frame, were handled differently as indicated above. What was not different however was that the stated top priority for each type of team and each individual social worker was the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults. Anything that threatened this "prime directive" caused stress for each individual and the entire system. There *were* such impactful threats and resulting stress and pressure. Ironically the administrative processes set up to ensure "efficiency and effectiveness" such as risk assessments, file audits and so on, often took what participants considered a dangerous amount of time from direct client work.

Pressures such as these that build up in one area of a participant's work day have an impact on other parts of their work and after work day. There are also impacts from the after work day on the participant's work, though over the years these had greatly diminished mainly due to children no longer living at home. The interconnected impacts of pressures on the day are discussed under the next heading.

Kinds of Impacts of the Pressures on Social Workers

The focus of this research was the paid work day, and participants described how parts of their work day and work culture affected other parts of their work. They also described how their paid work impacted the other parts of their days and how the other parts of their days impacted on their work days. Looking at impacts such as those that follow, are a way to understand how stress and pressure form in the participants' day and how inter-related one part of their day is to another. One thing impacts on another until

finally an amorphous stress or pressure is experienced. Participants have commented that they have no time in their days to reflect or "think" making it difficult to identify where the discomfort originated or even if there was a particular origin. The last section of this chapter on expectations, pressures and responses looks at the kinds of impacts that happened in the participant social workers' day and how these impacts influenced their responses to their works.

In asking participants the question, "How does your work life impact on your home life, your home life on your work life?" the responses they shared with me formed the domain and taxonomy "kinds of impacts". In this section participants described responses to their work through describing kinds of impacts on their day. These impacts fell into three areas: the impact of home on work; work on home; and work on work. The first area was much smaller than the other two, due perhaps to, as one participant mentioned, no longer having small children at home. None of the participants for this research project had young children at home, and this impacted on their home and work lives. In this regard their comments on home, children, family and work pressures differed from those made by some of the women interviewed by Hochschild (1997). In her work there were frequent expressions from respondents about work providing an escape from the frustrations, demands and parenting guilts waiting at home.

Impact of Home on Work

Participants expressed various ways in which their lives outside of work impacted upon their paid work. The category of "home on work" also included activities outside of paid work that did not necessarily originate "at home". This category more accurately referred to the impact of any activities outside *of* paid public service social work *on* paid public service social work. Within this category, participants' comments further fell into five areas: the impact on work of people outside of work asking for confidential information; the impact of family on work; impact of doing personal tasks during work time; the positive impact of outside activities on work; and the impact of juggling home and work.

One participant said she was approached occasionally by acquaintances outside of

work who asked for insider information about other community members that the participant knew by means of her job. She did not share this type of information with such requesters. However, the need to be vigilant in her professional ethics and not share confidential information had an impact on her that followed her into work. Some people, she realized, would seek her out privately for the information she has access to through her job.

Another participant said that at times she knew information about people or professionals that she had met outside of work which made a formal work relationship with those individuals difficult. This same participant said that sometimes a person she knew outside of work would apply to be a foster parent. Information she knew about them from the context outside of work would make them an unsuitable foster parent and this placed her in a difficult situation. She was torn between ensuring the safety and well being of children and youth and the use of unofficial information to make a safe decision at work.

Another participant said that some of her volunteer activities have some of the same clients, in the same situations that she encountered at work. She was aware that doing similar or the same type of work in the volunteer sector as in her public sector work placed her in a potential conflict of interest situation as laid out in the *Standards of Conduct for Public Service Employees* (Outside Remunerative and Volunteer Work). Outside volunteer work could in a case like this, have quite an impact on the social worker's paid work.

Another type of impact of home on work was personal situations from home that spilled into the paid work day. One participant said that as a single parent she may have to leave to deal with her child, for example if the school calls. She said that she asked for and receive support from colleagues in dealing with difficult parenting situations. Another participant gave the example of getting a personal call from a family member asking her to pick up milk or some such thing on the way home. These calls were rare, took little time from her work day and in her opinion had little impact on her work day. Another participant also said that there was very little impact of home on work because her family had been "trained not to call at work". At times personal tasks got done during

the work day such as to leaving work to attend a doctor, dentist or a banking appointment. Conversely another participant expressed frustration at not being able to get away to attend such appointments and at having had to cancel medical appointments, even to specialists. A work situation involving the safely of a child must take precedence over a personal appointment and there is no way to predict when such a safety issue will arise.

One participant talked about the positive impact her morning routine at home had on her work day since it helped her prepare for work. Several participants had morning routines that allowed them to start off their work day in a positive way. One woman did yoga; one spent time reading a novel, watering her plants, wandering around drinking her coffee and puttering in her house; another woman had a bath and got her day arranged in her head before leaving for work; another woman spent time talking to family and friends on her home e-mail or doing other computor wandering. A participant summed things up by saying, "Home-work, work-home, is a juggling act." There are fewer comments about the impact of outside or home life on work life than the reverse. When I first asked this question, many participants could not readily think of impacts their "other" life had on work.

Impact of Work on Home

Work impacted on participants' other life in a number of areas including: the family impact of bringing work home; negative personal and emotional impacts from aspects of daily public service social work; negative health impacts; and positive impacts of work on home and personal life.

Though there is a union-employer negotiated contract that lays out the expected hours of work, and criteria for overtime, there also appears to be a cultural norm that allows for and quietly encourages participant social workers to work beyond the contract boundaries. According to participants, when they worked beyond the contract boundaries, there was an impact on their "outside work" life. In this research project, simply talking about the topic created some realizations for various participants.

One participant said, "Now that I live alone, I bring work home." She feels freer to bring work home, because she does not have to worry about either client or family confidentiality. This participant prided herself on having a clear boundary between work

and home. In talking with me about bringing work home, she had a very uncomfortable realization that she brought much more work home than she had been aware of. She was concerned about the hole she will experience in her personal life when she retires in a very few years and *cannot* bring work home.

Another impact on home life involved after hours (after 4:30 p.m.) requests from clients which had to be re-routed. The Help-line may call a social worker at home to respond to a client who has called the provincial help-line. Or, a client, who cannot be rescheduled, may come in at the end of the work day. This required the social worker to stay behind and either connect the client with another service if there was one, maybe with an after-hours social worker, or deal with it herself either before she goes home or later that evening. The social worker may in theory be able to refer the client to the duty or after-hours worker, who will not likely know the client. One participant said she may decide this was not in the client's best interest or decide that it would cause more work in the long run, so instead she would deal with the call herself. The impact on the family in this instance is a late dinner, a hurried dinner or an evening in which she as parent or spouse is away or on the phone talking with an upset client. She is unavailable to her own family. I did not interview family members to discover what their views were regarding their family member working late. The comments in this research reflect the participant's beliefs.

One participant mentioned that when she was on after-hours duty[21]"I was afraid to answer the phone at 2:00 in the morning." The impact on home life in this instance was a disruption to the social worker and her family when a work call came in. Family members were also awakened by the phone ringing, by their parent or spouse collecting data, and by their parent or spouse possibly getting ready to go out into a potentially dangerous situation. Getting back to a restful sleep may not always be possible even if the family is

[21]After-hours duty exits in social work agencies that do not have a designated after-hours worker. When there is no designated worker, the day shift social workers are required to take turns being on call through out the evening and early morning (after mid-night). The on-call or duty" worker must respond to any calls made to them by the Help-line. The 24 hour shift can be viewed with dread by the social worker. This is because it can be exhausting to respond to often emotionally charged and dangerous calls after having worked all day. It is also stressful waiting for the phone to ring. Advantages to the social worker of being on duty include the chance to earn overtime in either time or money, and to gain experience in protection social work.

used to this type of situation.

Another participant describes her particular boundaries about taking work home. She said, "Doing computor work at home was okay but phone calls and direct people work that interferes with family time is not okay. Occasionally there is planned evening work and that is okay." Planned evening work might involve a home study that could not be done at any other time, a meeting, or a planned event none of which are viewed by this participant as crisis driven or potentially volatile. In this participant's point of view, as long as it was planned, evening work was not seen as disruptive to the family. Another participant said, "Not getting out of the office until 6:00 p.m. impacts on the evening." She explained how after picking up milk, bread or whatever on the way home, feeding her animals and getting dinner prepared, eaten and cleaned up, it was bedtime. Too many days in a row like this left her feeling like she had no life and like she participated little in her own family life. One participant said that when very late getting home or completely exhausted from the days work, family members got upset at seeing her affected that way.

One participant talked about the impact of work benefits that were geared to younger parents rather than mid-aged women. These benefits included such leaves as parental leaves, and child sick leaves. There were no provisions to take a leave to accompany a spouse someplace for a period of time. If needing to be away for more than a year a worker must quit her or his job thus losing all seniority. If the person comes back to work for the ministry again, it is as a newly hired worker with no seniority. This meant reduced holidays, an interrupted pension plan, being at the bottom of the pecking order in decisions based on seniority, such as choice of holiday dates, choosing an office, right to posted positions if there is an equal score on a panel,[22] and so on. For this participant in particular she has in the past felt forced to choose between her job and her marriage. She believes her reason to be granted a leave of absence is as valuable as those for other approved leaves to support families.

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[22] A panel is an interview usually with three ministry representatives and if desired, a union representative as a witness and an applicant or series of applicants. The job applicant applies for the posted (advertised) position and if there are several other applicants, will either be chosen to be on a "short list' or not. Those on the short list are interviewed by the panel committee. Questions based on knowledge, skill, and suitability are asked and each question is given a score. Each set of scores are added. The applicant with the highest score wins the panel. If the top two applicants have the same score the decision is then based on seniority.

Not only was there an impact on the family when work comes home but there were personal and emotional impacts as well. A participant said, "An emotionally exhausting day means I have to have a small nap to recuperate when I get home." Another participant said, "The impact of witnessing painful things with clients and colleagues follows one home after work, and ... work permeates one's thinking at times." Another participant said that she had to get a private phone line due to a, "harassing abusive client." She lived alone therefore the calls and her reaction to them did not affect other family members. However, since she lived alone there was no immediate support for her while she paid the emotional price that happens when one's home life is invaded by a client who is angry and threatening. Several participants mentioned that in a mid-sized town one can run into clients "everywhere after work hours." An impact of coming face to face with a client, past or current, was that it was the social worker who must ensure appropriate boundaries. A client may not think about or even want to be discrete and may try to solicit support, goods or services, share confidential information of their own or about someone else, take the opportunity to focus anger with the system onto the social worker, argue about ministry decisions, want to create a friendship and so on. It is hard for clients to see their social worker as a person with another life outside of work. Sometimes it is hard for family members to see their parent or partner as a social worker.

When there is constant pressure and stress at work, there may not only be family impacts, or personal and emotional impacts, but there may be a health cost as well. That was what several of the participants in this project said they experienced themselves and observed in their colleagues. One participant said, "Long term stress from work can cause asthma and migraines." Some other illnesses that participants believed occurred due to work pressure and stress included diabetes, high blood pressure, and back problems. However, not all of the impacts of work on "outside of paid work life" that participants mentioned, were negative.

Some of the positive impacts of work on home life included knowing more people because of working in the community as a social worker. One participant said that she has met so many "delightful and interesting" people in the course of her work and some of them have become friends over the years. In saying this she referred to colleagues both

in the ministry and in the community, various service providers, volunteers, foster parents and business people. She believed that if she was at home or in some different type of work, she may not have met them. Another participant felt that her work helped her to develop insight into herself, into others, and of life in general. The overall result of this made her more tolerant of her own "faults" and of those of others.

One participant talked about the positive side of living in a mid-sized town in regard to being aware of what clients are doing. She said, "The grape-vine in a mid-sized town lets you know about a vulnerable client before things get out of hand." I asked her how this grapevine worked. She described a network of care givers, other clients, relatives, and colleagues that may be aware of the client, his or her associated problems, ministry concerns and the client's current behaviour. These behaviours included such things as leaving young children on their own for too long, allowing dangerous "partying" to go on without making safety provisions for children, spending time with persons they have been asked to stay away from or a tendency to violent outbursts directed at children. Any of those in the network who observed the client or client's parent engaging in these behaviours may well pass on the information to the social worker. Through professional codes of ethics *Child Family and Community Service* Act our society says that sharing this information is a violation of an individual's confidentiality, if it is not related to child and youth safety issues or public safety. Hearing information from the "grapevine" could be tricky so the social worker has to ask clear questions which focus on child safety concerns. This particular participant prided herself, at this stage of her career, in being able to help clients stop small problems before they became bigger ones and the network that can exist in a mid-sized community was helpful to that end.

I have looked at participants' responses to pressures and stresses in terms of the impact of home on work, and work on home. Another area of response to pressure and stress that participants' disclosed was that of the impact of work on work. What this means is that at times things that happen at work cause pressures and stresses that impact on other aspects of work.

Impact of Work on Work

This category captured participants' comments about how work pressures in one area

of social work impacted on other areas of social work. This category was further divided into three areas: emotional responses to the impact of stress, pressure at work, and negative reactions to work expectations. Several participants talked about reactions they either experienced themselves or observed in colleagues when work stress and pressure continued too long. A social worker may, "be apathetic at work," "may be near tears or crying throughout the day," may sit in their office - in the dark," "may have a negative attitude at work," "may leave work early, "may not do a responsible number of tasks in a day." These examples that I have quoted were reactions that social work participants observed at their work places at the time of the first interview. These reactions were either in response to a particularly traumatic work event or the result of long term unresolved pressures and stresses such as continuous changes in protocols or staff, unfilled staff complements, cumulative witnessing of client and colleague difficulties, or a sense of not being supported by a variety of levels of the ministry.

Participants also talked about a number of negative reactions that they experienced due to the impact of "constant pressures of too many demands and too little time." Several of these responses have come up earlier in other sections of this thesis. There was a repetition of the kinds of situations that caused the participants to talk about the pressures in their work days and their reactions to those. One participant said she was, "...always in catch-up." Her reaction to this constant state was to feel incompetent in spite of her years of experience. Another participant said she did not feel understood by managers, the higher organization and the public ..."in terms of the kind of stress we're under." One participant was frustrated with her colleagues due to their constant interruptions and what she called the "I know you're busy ... but ... syndrome." She had a theory about why people continued to ask a colleague to do things when they knew she or he was more than busy. Her theory was, that because the requester was as busy as their queried colleague and had become used to not acknowledging their own work-overload, they were unable to acknowledge that their colleague was too busy and could not take any more work on. Another participant lamented that, "Social workers can't do much as a profession due to being tied down with the needs of the system, at the cost of serving our

Figure no.7 :Specification of Aspects and Results of Being a Mature Female Public Service Social Worker

Dimensions of Contrast →	Receive more and complex cases	Spend less time learning basics	Improved practice	Less need for external validation	Desire to mentor	Can think more globally therefore individuals are less frustrating	Can use self-talk to get through things at work	Have learned many ways to avoid burnout	No longer need to be a perfect-ionist	More com-fortable talking to authority figures	Notice that others have assumptions about mid-age female SW	Can tell colleagues thoughts and opinions of them
Contrast Set↓												
A qualitative difference in knowing the profession	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
More efficient	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	partly	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Less reactive	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	yes	partly	no	yes	partly	yes
Internal belief in the work	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	partly	partly	partly	yes	yes	yes	yes
Important to pass information and humour on to new S.W.s	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	yes
Belief in client's capabilities	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	partly	yes	yes	N/A	no
More self-aware	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Expect to be respected	partly	N/A	no	no	yes	partly	partly	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Training and experience have come together	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes
Things are easier since children are older or have moved out	partly	no	yes	no	yes	partly	partly	yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A

* adapted from Spadley (1979)

client's needs. That is discouraging." One participant was concerned that there were so few social workers over the age of 55 still working in the ministry. She wondered why this was so, and felt that the profession missed the wisdom of those who have seen and learned so much. She thought that in other professions like teaching, law, and medicine there seemed to be more people still working into their sixties.

In these examples above, there were instances reported by the participants who showed that when there were unrelenting, unrelieved stresses and pressures in one area of work, the resulting worker reactions may affect other areas of work.

Results of being a Mature Social Worker

A visual summary, *Specification of Aspects and Results of Being a Mature Public Service Social Worker* is presented in Figure 7. The "contrast set" shows a number of beliefs that participants have of themselves at this stage of their working lives such as beliefs that they now have; *"a qualitative difference in knowing the profession" or "more self-awareness"* or that *"training and experience have come together"* The impact or results of these held beliefs show up in the "dimensions of contrast" such as *"receiving more and complex cases"* or *"have learned many ways to avoid burnout"* or *"improved practice"* Interviewing women social workers who are over 40, uncovered both a wealth of wisdom and coping strategies as well as some less optimistic modes of operation. In the next section I will describe some of the responses from the domain and taxonomy "results of being a mature social worker".

The participants' responses are described in four areas; age and work, age and knowledge, wise proverbs, and age, self-awareness and attitudes. At this age the lessening of home pressures allows them to deal more easily with work pressures. Experience can compensate for the natural waning of energy of mid-age. We can see how resilient they have become over the years, yet how they fall or are led into a stereotypically individualized and isolated manner of dealing with problems not of their making. We see how women have "talked themselves" into surviving and want to share what they have learned with other, particularly younger, social workers. Lastly, the following section points to how experience of the women social workers has been used by the ministry but without acknowledgement, another invisible role for working women

in our society.

Age and Work

There were some advantages to participants of being middle-aged, no longer having younger children to parent. One participant said, "My children are older, things are easier." Another participant said that now that her children have left home she can lead a less routine life at home and now she, "... doesn't have to keep a regular schedule." As one participant has said, living alone meant being able to bring work home without worries about confidentiality or of impact on the family. Being older and more experienced also meant things were different at work. One participant said she had become "... better at picking and choosing what needed to be done at work." Another worker thought she had become more efficient and quicker at getting things done because she knew more. Two other participants said that now that they were more experienced they were better at taking less work home and at working fewer late hours. They maintained that they could do this while still getting the same amount of work done that would have taken them much longer when they were younger.

As has been mentioned, however, a downside of being experienced meant receiving more "horrible" and complicated cases. Seniority did not save participants from having easier or less pressured work. Instead their unacknowledged but utilized years of experience brought expectations from their employer. Expectations that they would unofficially oversee less experienced social workers and that they would take on more difficult cases. To some extent participants "bought into" this thinking. They expressed the appropriateness of helping less experienced staff, and that they enjoyed challenging cases. They *did* think that in return for doing these things there should be some acknowledgment from the organization such as reducing their case load size.

Age and Knowledge

Knowledge gained with years of experience and a deeper understanding of the profession improved strategies for getting the job done, and being able to offer the next generation both relevant and playful information were all benefits that had come to the participants with age. One participant said her life experiences provided her with knowledge and skill in dealing with people, and expertise in knowing herself. She said

she "... can think more globally now which make the individual less frustrating." Another participant said that with experience she now"... knows better what constitutes a real crisis versus a supposed crisis." What this meant for her was that she had a better sense of knowing when giving a bit of time before responding to a client would allow someone to solve their own problem. Similar to this comment was a comment from another participant who said she could "... better catch and deal with little fires before they became big fires." Another participant stated "...getting a BSW over 40, allowed for life experiences and training to come together." She thought that this had improved her practice; she could better apply theory tempering that with an improved understanding of the "human condition" having gone through her own life's trials. Now near retirement, she concluded that there was a qualitative difference in her ability to learn about her profession due to the combination of age and knowledge gained thus far.

Along with pulling life experience and training together over the years, and gaining a better overall sense of the profession and those who work in it, maturity in practice also brought with it strategies for getting the job done. One participant said "Over the years, knowledge and awareness of how best to do the job evolve." One example of this was the story she told me about trying to arrange planning meetings that both caregivers and clients would be attending. Through trial and error she finally came to the conclusion that instead of repeatedly phoning caregivers to determine the best time for them to attend a "personal service" planning meeting, she instead decided to find out the best time for the client. She then simply informed the caregivers and other involved workers when that time was. This new idea proved successful immediately, saving her time and meeting the clients' needs simultaneously. Another participant said that at this stage of her work career she knows the job requirements better than when she was younger. She said "A larger baseline of knowledge means spending less time learning basics." This participant thought that this larger baseline of knowledge helped her to make more appropriate safety decisions regarding children, youth and adults. Other strategies that participants mentioned included learning who to pass information on to and who not to, and picking winnable battles in order to conserve energy. Both of those involve an understanding of agency and community "politics" learned through trial and error over time. I did not ask

the participant how she determined what would constitute a “winnable battle”. Time permitting this would have been a good question to ask to discover more about how workers "fight" for things within this work culture.

Some participants mentioned wanting to pass on the torch to younger social workers. One way they envisioned this was to act as a mentor to younger social workers. Another way was to pass on humour. A participant remarked playfully "I've got jokes that the younger generation have never heard."

Wise Proverbs

When I ask one participant in her first interview if there was a question she thought I should ask her, she asked “Where are all of the social workers over 58?” Many of them have retired. There is a public service pension plan which allows full retirement benefits for those whose age and years of service equal 85. This created an opportunity for public servants to retire early (before 65). However, her question prompts curiosity about how social workers remain in their profession over the long term. There are not many social workers in public service beyond late middle-age. Even though many social workers retire from their chosen profession before the age of 60, it seems that to stay in public service even that long requires some strategy.

The participants of this research study wanted to share their survival skills with the readers of this research and particularly with younger social workers. Part of their hard earned wisdom was described to me in the form of survival sayings or “wise proverbs”. Participants know tacitly that the system they work in has many expectations of them. Longevity as a public servant social worker in their case, required the acquisition of certain self expectations. These expectations named here as “wise proverbs” include the following:

1. Deal with stress through good self-care.
2. Find your own comfort level with the work.
3. Do what you can realistically do.
4. Do not expect to have everything perfect.
5. Know that given the tools and skills, people can handle their own problems.
6. Know that your work is important.

7. Do not expect anyone to tell you that it is.
8. Do not make anything worse.

Coming to these conclusions over the years involved a relinquishment of various judgements, values, ideals, and even standards. They also indicate some things about the work environment notably that this work is a solitary business in which you had better learn to take care of yourself and affirm yourself since no one else will. These sayings also suggest that remaining in the job requires a pragmatic approach accompanied by a belief in resiliency both of oneself and of one's clients. Doing one's best may end up simply causing no further harm. This work environment appears to foster an individualized approach which reinforces the solitary nature of the work thus keeping both clients and social workers from taking a more collective approach to problem solving systemic issues. A solitary approach allows for the social status quo to remain in place, for women in particular,

Age, Self Awareness and Attitudes

Self awareness, as the participants described it to me, appeared to fall into two areas, self-care and attitudes. The first area, self-care included many truisms and a type of daily affirmation which seemed to allow participants to continue in their work. This worked by providing tinder for a self-talk that helped minimize some of the negative factors of the work and work place. The second area, attitudes, included the attitudes that participants accrued about various aspects of their work and the attitudes that others had of them at this stage in their careers.

Participants seemed to have learned over the years to do, "self-talk". This "self-talk" took the form of several catch phrases that participants said to themselves, to each other, to clients and to me when I interviewed them. There is some cross-over with the "wise proverbs" but these are a bit more detailed and practical.23 The saying could be described

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23 I pass the following self-talk phases on to the reader without comment: know what is too much; know when it is time to be alone and when it is time to be social; be gentle with yourself at home; know when your low energy time of day is; and plan your work day accordingly; avoid thinking about work after work; allow for some grieving time over sad events; learn what your limits are … or leave; talk regularly with your family members; have some friends that are connected to work, so they understand; have some friends not connected to work, to prevent thinking of work; get involved in your community; going back to school is therapeutic regardless your age; read; use your home computer for fun not work; treat insomnia with a bubble bath; knowing oneself improves with age; and, pass on to others favors that were offered to you over

as trite, and certainly participants did not achieve all of these seemingly simple yet lofty goals of self preservation. They served an important purpose in this work environment, however, as a way to remind or give permission to self and others to seek self care and balance in a system that seemed to come up short on encouragement and support. Openly discussing and sharing these saying were one way participant did break through the isolation barrier. As individualistic as this system would appear to be, it would be a mistake to think this was absolute. These sayings were "short speak"; quick and easy to pass on, and a way to identify both membership and support in a shared difficult situation; a common everyday method of isolation busting.

The participants have worked in their profession of social work and jobs as protection and family and child service workers, community living service workers and resource workers for many years. It was useful to hear what they said to themselves to allow them to keep going given the many stresses and pressures that they also described. Along with the isolating work and the self-care, participants had developed attitudes about many factors of their work world over the years. In listening to participants about being a mature social worker, the attitudes that participants described show some of the ways that they viewed their work world and some of the ways they thought their work world viewed them. This provided insight into the work culture of the participants. I broke the kinds of attitudes into four areas: a belief in the importance of the work; a belief in clients' capabilities; a belief in self; and the beliefs others have about mature social workers.

Several participants expressed a belief that the work they did was important. Some had waited many years for the ministry to acknowledge their work, experiencing disappointment when that did not happen. Eventually, according to several participants, a social worker must come to her own belief that her work has merit. One participant said "It doesn't matter what others think about the job, it matters what the social worker that is doing the job thinks."

Another belief which several participants described arriving at over time was a belief that clients were capable. One participant described this as no longer being "... on a white

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your career.

horse." She found that eventually she had learned to be less enabling and she was now aware of her proper role with clients. Another participant said that she "... can avoid entanglements with clients better now." One participant said that she "believes that people, clients included, can figure out things for themselves." Another participant said that she "... no longer needed to be a perfectionist. I have more realistic expectations of myself, clients, foster parents etc." She described herself as having gained an increased awareness of her personal tolerance points.

Participants commented on an increased belief in themselves as they got older. This manifested in an increase in self confidence perhaps offsetting some of the blows to confidence that participants expressed when they could not get all their work done in a day, or when they did not feel supported in their work by MCF. One participant said that at this stage of her life she was "... more comfortable talking to authority figures like team leaders or managers." Another participant said "I don't get as flustered as I did when I was younger." She said this in relation to her work with clients who are in crisis. One participant stated that at this stage in her life she "... can more easily tell colleagues her thoughts and opinions of them." Generally, it appeared that an increase in comfort with one's self in turn seemed to make interactions with others easier, particularly more complicated ones. Speaking up more in these situation, indicated that women participants at this stage of their work lives were less inclined to silently accept things that bothered them. Further research in this area would be useful to discover if increased comfort with directly discussing complicated issues with colleagues is generalizable to other mid-age women in the paid workforce.

Participants expressed their experiences of others' attitudes towards them. One participant thought that on one hand people expected an older social worker to be reticent about discussing sex or sexuality, and on the other, some foster parents for example "... were more comfortable talking about sexuality issues with an older social worker." One participant thought that younger social workers did not respect older social workers. Some non-protection social work participants thought that others did not perceive their jobs to be as important or as pressured as protection social work jobs. There was a belief expressed that others see resource or CLS social workers as burned out or as coasting into

retirement. These participant perceptions of others' beliefs about them were not followed up by interviews to determine what those others may say themselves. These were simply the participants' stated beliefs about the attitudes that others may have of them. What is striking about these comments is that they show that participants generally do not believe that others have a positive view of them.

Summary

In this chapter I first examined the kinds of expectations, stresses and pressures as participants tried to juggle the often conflicting administrative expectations with their own expectations to deal directly with clients' needs. There were both external and internal expectations which were often in conflict. Such conflicts included keeping clients safe but completing all of the administrative work or not working overtime but getting all of the work done. Participants were proud of the knowledge and experience that they had gained over the years. They were willing to take on complicated work but this had become both an expectation of the organization and an unacknowledged contribution evidenced by no lessening of other duties in compensation. There was stress related to experiences of loss. Loss included both inadequacies in the work environment and grief connected to the loss or death of a client or colleague. Another stress and pressure was the lack of support from the ministry which contributed to a sense of being invalidated, of being insignificant, of not being trusted, of not being understood or of being backed-up. There was fear of the pointing finger of blame which included; the sense of being watched by many different "watch-dogs," the fear engendered by too much to do and too little time to do safe practice, the fear of being the "fall gal" because of this, and the concern of having to let go of quality, standards and safe practice in order to survive.

The second part of the chapter examined how the participant evaluated and responded the expectations, stresses and pressures of their daily work. These findings showed how participants still had pride and satisfaction in the work that they did and how they had to make serious life changing decisions often with sufficient information, time or support. The findings revealed how participants had to face many difficult things in their daily work such as grief, irritation, and ethical dilemmas, and how they had to

priorize and re-priorize continuously throughout the day to keep on top of an ever changing work landscape. There was an examination of the kinds of impacts that participants experienced in their days. There was the impact of home on work, more minimal now that children had grown and left home. There was the impact of work on home, more profound in that work could spill into home in many ways. Those ways included for example, exhaustion from the work day affecting physical and emotional health, perseveration about work issues while at home, or being called away or delayed from arriving home until late. There was the impact of work on work which looked at how work pressures in one area of social work could affect work in other areas of social work.

Finally, this chapter examined the results of being a mature female social worker which looked at some of the advantages and disadvantages of being mid-aged in this work environment and how age and knowledge combined to create a depth and efficiency in practice. Age, self- awareness and attitudes helped increase awareness, comfort with self and inner self-sufficiency that provided one of the few avenues of breaking the isolation endemic to this work, including a desire by the participants to pass on "wise proverbs" and sayings to their younger colleagues

The next chapter analyses and discusses the three cultural themes which evolved out of the examination of work expectations and pressures. These themes include: tough complex yet devalued jobs; positions that are filled but no one is in them; and fear and the pointing finger of blame. The themes reflect the work pressures faced by the participants of this study and their responses to that pressure. A flood of description, information and emotion from the participants resulted in the formation of these themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Swimming in an Endangered Estuary: Living Survival Social Work

By asking about work pressures and expectations and how these were responded to, this thesis discovered study participants were engaging in survival social work carried out in a culture of fear. Further, the evidence was such that those details of pressures, expectations and paradoxical themes were so problematic that as the metaphor in the title suggests swimming in the midst of fresh and salt water may still happen, as workers need the job, and clients the service, but the estuary is in danger, and thus so are those that must swim and forage there.

As an estuary is rich with variety, there are also many kinds of social work teams each with a special place in the social work "eco-system". Study participants worked in the various areas of guardianship and child protection social work, resource social work, family service social work, and community living services social work. The findings were based on multiple interviews with six mid-age female, experienced and professional social workers in two small western Canadian towns during the spring of 2000. In previous chapters, specific work activities, aspects of doing a complex job, experienced pressures and ways of responding to them, kinds of expectations, and results of being a mature social worker were presented based on taxonomic and componential analyses. Those forms of analyses provided details about the participants' work days and captured various relationships between different and similar details as participants defined and confirmed them.

Finding cultural themes is the fourth and final level of analysis in Spradley's (1979) Developmental Research Sequence Method (DRS) model. Cultural themes provide insight into the cultural setting of the participants. Earlier, I defined a cultural theme as "a repeating thread of thought held tacitly or openly by many members of a culture and which impacts on the behaviours and perceptions of both themselves and others." Three cultural themes or repeating threads of thought emerged in this research: (1) tough, complex, devalued jobs; (2) positions are filled but no one is in them; and (3) fear and the pointing finger of blame.

In this chapter I have moved beyond the collision and contradiction of dual worlds, the clash between managerial structural processes and personal, agency processes, to show from the data that there was evidence to suggest that social work, social workers and their clients are splashing about in a fouled "estuary" that may not be able to sustain its inhabitants much longer. A participant in the opening quote of Chapter One said "The "system" is spiralling down to entropy at a spanking pace …" This comment revealed an awareness that was peaking through the surface, a dawning unpleasant realization that something was seriously wrong with the larger environment in which social work is practiced. This unwanted realization was punctuated by hasty retreats to the many denials and survival techniques needed to keep going.

Each of the three themes actually captured a paradox or puzzle and together they described the experience of having to practice survival social work within a culture of fear. In the first theme, the job is complex, yet it is devalued. In the second theme, teams may have an "appropriate" number of positions allocated to them, with social workers hired to fill the positions yet, positions may remain unfilled. In the third theme, problems are portrayed as systemic, yet experienced as individual ones, creating fear of blame and reprisal in individual social workers. Woven within these themes was another continuous thread. The wisdom, tenacity and experience of mature social workers were used to help keep the field functioning, the dysfunctional status quo in place, but there was no formal acknowledgement of its existence. I have employed the paradox inherent in each theme to provide a chapter summary highlighting what was discovered about the work culture of the participants.

The Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) as of April/May 2001 called the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) was born out of the aftermath of the Gove Inquiry. Though fear of blame persisted in the predecessor Social Services Ministry, participants noted that things became worse "after Gove". B.C. is not the only province or Canada the only country where the inquiry process and media coverage created negative public opinion towards public servant social workers. This negative public opinion, for social workers in B.C. has been instrumental in forming a work environment steeped in fear evidenced both in the literature and in the data of this

research. Forming the new Ministry for Children and Families and implementing the ponderous administrative changes had increased the culture of fear rather than reduced it, even for those social workers not directly doing protection social work. One participant said:

> Social workers [are] frequently singled out to respond to complaints or reviews. [This] involves hours, days. Weeks of extra work without coverage or assistance. [This] creates a set-up for less than adequate work performance on other cases if time [is] absorbed on the case in question being reviewed. e.g. How is that resolving a real or perceived lack of comprehensive planning or work on a case by case basis? Like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

The frustration in this participant's comment is apparent. This guardianship social worker saw her everyday work suffering in order to supply information about a particular case, to a watchdog body whose mandate it was to ensure the quality of the everyday work. It was also clear that her main frustration was lack of provision of coverage and assistance to cover off the time such a review required.

Tough, Complex, Devalued Jobs

> I'm realizing that I'm less of a person to them [MCF] than a number on a box, and I feel that all employees are the same way because I've never seen anything to the contrary. So I guess that's part of my stress and part of the stuff that I'll have to work through over the next couple of years. I'm set to retire in the next three years.

Using Spradley's (1979) DRS model, levels of analysis are built with an end goal of revealing a cultural picture based on participants' descriptions of the pressures and expectations in their work days and how they had responded to them. In searching for repeating threads of thought in the language of the women who participated in this study I reviewed the transcripts for specific quotes. I also reviewed the taxonomic and componential analyses which had systematically catalogued participants' language for cultural details and semantic relationships which showed how things worked. Participants had several opportunities to verify the cataloguing to ensure that I had correctly understood what they had said. By referring to the various Figures in previous chapters of this thesis I specified where the repeating threads of thought were drawn from which indicated the three themes, in this case the theme "tough, complex, devalued jobs".

Figure 2, a componential analysis of "Doing a Complex job" and Figure 3, a componential analysis of "Specification of Activities by Participants, With Whom, What and When" showed many different types of elements of the job which formed an involved collection of activities expected of the participants and illustrated the complexity of their jobs. Along with these expected activities were other types of expectations, such as keeping clients safe, getting all these activities done in a day, making no mistakes and not ending up "in the public eye." According to participants these activities and expectations were compressed into too little time to be able to complete them, or complete them adequately. One participant said:

> I feel there are too many demands on too little time that you have to spend ... and although a lot of people realize that, they say 'I know you're very busy but'... And it's that *but* that always gets me.

Consequently participants felt pressure and invalidation. Participants believed that if harm or neglect happened to a client in this pressurized system, the result would be blame not support for the social worker. This was one measure of how participants felt devalued by the ministry. One participant said "... common sense has gone out the window, and cover your butt is the reason for good casework, not because it benefits the family/children."

Figure 4 a taxonomy, "Kinds of Activities" and Figure 5 a componential analysis, "Specifications of Pressures Experienced in a Work Day and Ways of Responding To Them" provided a visual representation of how little time was spent directly with clients compared to the other required duties or activities of the job. Again participants described the pressure of too much to do and too little time, in particular too little time to spend getting to know their clients. One participant said:

> ... all we could really come up with was just to at least provide a synopsis of each case, put it on the file, sign to it, date it, but again, people don't live in that world. They are not living in ours files, they are out there ... and you know, they are doing whatever they are doing.

Another participant said:

> And you're going to have a double and triple case load ... it was just like the black

> hole kept getting bigger and bigger ... because you don't have time for people. You see, I am back to my pet peeve. If you don't have time to get to know your families, how can you make those god-like decisions that will affect them for the whole rest of their lives and maybe ruin every human relationship they have? There are major life effects when kids come into care whether it's temporary or permanent. So how can you be making those [decisions] unless you know people well enough. If you don't have the time to go out there and get to know people and work with the people who maybe know them a bit better ... how do you then really do your job?

The pressure and concern that these participants experienced was palpable. The componential analysis shown in Figure 5 illustrated several pressures which contributed to the complexity of the job and some ways participants chose to deal with the pressures, so often the result of conflicting expectations. These conflicts revealed the paradoxical nature of their day to day work. For example, clients' needs and safety were considered by all levels of the ministry to be a bottom line priority but, so were the ponderous administrative requirements. Given that there were too many things to do participants were torn between "living breathing clients" and seemingly inanimate yet potentially volatile paperwork. It was the paperwork that audit teams examined not the "living breathing clients." One participant said "The only way the role is valued is by generating the correct paperwork to satisfy the system, and no information reaching the public by the media." To add another dimension to the pressure, participants said their union expected them *not* to work overtime. How then to get everything done? Even though participants understood this union request was in their best interest, it added to rather than reduced the expectations and therefore the pressures on them.

One participant stated:

> ... the union's expectation is that we don't work more than the stated hours or work in our Hours of Work Agreement . But somehow we must manage to complete all our own work and other people's work when they are away because no one is supplied to provide backfill.

Some participants made attempts to keep to their contracted hours of work but most worked unofficial overtime or "magic-time" which was not always redeemed with compensating time off. Both participants' time and the content of their work were thought by them to be devalued by the ministry.

Figure 6 is a taxonomy illustrating the "Kinds of Expectations" participants

experienced in their work day. Just as there were several conflicting external expectations from the ministry, the union, from clients and the public, there were also conflicting internal expectations. Together both types of conflicting expectations added to the complexity of the job. Participants' had high self expectations and a desire to engage in "ideal" social work practice, meaning more time spent with clients. They also had the sense of never being able to catch up which necessitated letting some things go. Due to the flavour of requirement in the "letting go of something desired," I named "letting go" "relinquishments" in the taxonomy. Relinquishments encompassed the duality of lessons learned over the years and resignation brought about by the sheer exhaustion of high workload and low validation, the core concept of this theme.

Participants described learning over the years that like themselves clients had both strength and resiliency in spite of the difficult circumstances they were trying to survive within. One form of letting go therefore was letting go of a focus on clients' weaknesses or as one participant said "getting off of the white charger". By this she meant that she no longer believed that she had to race into clients' lives and "fix" them. At this stage of her career, she had come to believe that clients had their own answers and that what they needed was support and assistance to pursue them. Not unlike what participants longed for but dared not expect from their ministry.

Some "relinquishments" were acts of survival in a tough work environment. One of those was letting go of the belief that it was possible to get all the work done in a day. Another was letting go of high standards when covering more than one caseload. Those survival methods contradicted both MCF's requirement to adequately follow all standards and participants' own wish to do "ideal" social work. Lastly, some participants spoke of relinquishing their youth. This was an acknowledgment that they had less energy at this stage of their lives, and that they did things differently than they had when they were younger. They did things differently than their younger colleagues did. For some participants, aches and pains had set in and these required frequent movement. Affected participants had built frequent movement into their work day such as going out to the front office or file room several times a day to pick up messages or information from the centrally located printer or putting their own files away. But having to sit through

frequent and long meetings, or sitting at the computer for long periods of time was truly a painful experience. These activities were becoming more a part of the job resulting in energy draining discomfort for some and just one more way age was unacknowledged or respected.

Staying in this type of public service work for so many years required an attitude that allowed the individual not to burn out completely and also to feel okay about the caring work she did. This was complicated since participants also illustrated that they were well aware of the many conflicting or contradictory expectations of them on what seemed like a continuous basis. There were also tacit contradictions for example, within the same interview a participant would both say that at this stage of her career she was able to keep up without burning out because she was working "smarter not harder" and also that it was not safe to speak out about work overload for fear of being seen as "weak or whiner". In this uncertain, ever changing world perhaps reality had to look different on a moment to moment basis with those moments often being in contradiction. This was a contrary work environment engendering survival social work.

Figure 7, "Results of Being a Mature social worker" was a componential analysis which illustrated the bitter-sweet aspects of having survived in this work over the long term, still swimming and swinging. As participants matured they reported feeling more comfortable talking in an assertive manner to both colleagues and authority figures. The irony of finally becoming assertive enough to speak out only to discover no one appeared to be listening was not lost on most participants.

Participants spoke of feeling generally de-valued as a social worker and particularly unacknowledged for their combined years of education and experience. Participants said they were under surveillance by such "watch-dog" bodies as the Children's Commission, the Child Advocate, the ministry Audit Team, the media, and the public. Participants felt invalidated and insignificant because when *they* described unsafe situations and expressed fears that harm could happen to clients due to work overload, this was ignored. Concerns for safety were ignored when they were brought up individually and ignored collectively when the union raised the issue of work overload on a provincial basis.24 Participants,

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24 The workload evaluation project was undertaken as a joint union/management initiative to determine an

because of their experience, were asked to take on more of the "horrible" or complicated cases.25 There was no compensating reduction in other work to allow for the necessary time to deal with such cases which were usually more labour intensive than others. Another example of the lack of acknowledgment of safety concerns due to work overload. The above instances of lack of acknowledgement of the complexity of the job, conflicting expectations, volume of work and lack of support in difficult situations led to apprehension and stress when participants considered taking any kind of leaves. They were held accountable even when they were not there. One participant was preparing to move to another team but with no one to replace her and take the cases she left behind. She was aware that she would be held responsible if anything happened to those clients in the gap between her leaving and someone else taking over her cases. She nervously said:

> … there's also a concern for me to have things half finished but with my name on them, and no plan of who is actually going to take the particulars of the assessments and complete them. In other words, I will walk away and there will be a caseload of maybe 20 assessments. Who's going to take that responsibility to attend to what needs to be attended to?

A survival technique that several participants had developed was a self-talk that counselled balance and staying hopeful. These strategies had helped participants remain in their jobs over the long term but they also acted as a way to medicate work environment distress keeping it artificially under control. Not keeping the reality of work environment distress in the forefront of their minds allowed for the necessary denial that kept participants trying to re-knit the unravelling safety net. How would they continue in the necessary job and loved work if they were to really admit how increasingly untenable social work was becoming in this devaluing environment? Their desire to survive was so understandable and it was quietly used against them by the ministry to maintain the illusion that everything was fine.

The Gove Inquiry's statement that safety problems arose due to lack of supervision

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appropriate workload per social worker. It did not consider the multiple case loads that social workers monitored off of the side of their desks at times. Since this research data was collected the B.C. Government Employees Union (BCGEU) has stated that it had abandoned this avenue of addressing front line work overload due to a lack of good faith on the part of the employer.

25 "Horrible" in this context means the type of case where social workers listen to and witness painful situations, where the case is complex involving many people, there is little expectation that the situation will

and training appeared to be received and treated literally by MCF. According to some participants the ministry's solution to "safety issues" and "practice problems" was more and prescribed trainings, ironically with no "backfill" supplied to ensure client safety in the absence of the social worker. The knowledge gained by having earned a social work degree was ignored while training on how to conduct specific and prescribed administrative processes became the educational benchmark.

Though participants expected to receive and generally did receive support from their colleagues, not one participant voiced an expectation that support would come from the ministry. Given the emotionally painful, occasionally dangerous and potentially controversial nature of their work, that participants no longer entertained an expectation that they would receive support from the ministry indicated how neglected participants were in this environment. This provided a clue as to how social work and social workers were viewed by MCF. It seemed that participants in many ways identified with their clients in their common struggle for survival in an oppressive environment. One participant said "At the bottom of this clearly hierarchical organization, are myself and my clients." Would clients likewise identify with social workers if they engaged in a collective effort to publicise and stand against the oppression they experience in this organization?

High workload and low validation was the core concept of this theme. By listening to how participants described their pressurized work environment, and how they tried to satisfy impossibly contradictory expectations, a picture emerged of a work environment where participants could see clients in need but could not quite reach them unless they stretched and stretched due to administrative and resourcing entanglements. One participant said "I'm a member of a helping profession and somehow the word help hasn't entered into any of this." Participants lived survival social work in tough, complex devalued jobs trying to provide service to clients who lived tough, complex, devalued lives.

The next theme "positions filled but with no one in them" describes in more detail, how lack of resourcing and too much work to do have created a sea of continuously

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improve, or where there is a pattern of generational dysfunction. It does *not* refer to individuals.

moving social workers who have been spread paper thin. There are resulting safety concerns which the ministry, participants and their colleagues have tried to ameliorate by moving into and out of "hot spots." Participants described an environment in which survival social work was the name of the game.

Positions "Filled" with No One in Them

> We have been down .5 of a social worker since [name removed] went on sick leave last December. There was no extra coverage over the summer for vacations. At the end of August, a full time social worker, went on secondment to HQ [headquarters] for at least six months. We have .5 of an FTE to backfill her extremely busy caseload …Last week the one remaining full time adult service social worker went on vacation duly booked last February or whenever we had to make those choices. This left me with two half time workers and me covering three full time positions. It was not possible to achieve effective coverage, you will be amazed to learn, and this creates great pressure on all of us, including the worker who felt guilty for taking her vacation.

Another "repeating thread of thought" in this study was "filled yet currently empty positions." I will describe how this concept works according to MCF administrative structures. It is quite confusing to read, to work within and to understand as a client or an observer. As in the previous theme I have referred to the taxonomies and componential analyses as illustrated in the various listed Figures to show how this theme was connected to the data. The root data for this theme provide further evidence of survival social work and a work environment in distress.

The term "FTE[26] allocation" meant that there was a funded position into which a qualified person could be hired. There may or may have not be a person filling that position even though there may have been a caseload attached to it. Also, the position may be temporarily absented for a number of reasons, including vacation, training, sick leave (which included "stress" leave since "stress" leave was not to be

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26FTE stands for "full time equivalent" or one full time position. When there is a half, three quarter or two thirds position, it is described in decimal points of a full time position such as a .5 FTE or a .7 or a .6 FTE. When there an extra full time or part person hired with no legitimate FTE allocated, it is said to be "over burning" the FTE allocation, or going over budget. When an FTE position is allocated but not being used by a person, it is said to be "under burning" the FTE allocation, or not currently spending budgeted money. Each FTE has a number assigned to it. The number is attached to the FTE where ever it may be allocated or reallocated. Each employee also has a number assigned to her or him at the point of hire. This number always remains with the employee where ever she or he may move within government service. The two numbers are distinct, one tracking positions and one tracking persons.

overtly referred to), temporary assignment elsewhere such as rapid response work and so on. Though a social worker may have had a permanent position with the ministry (MCF), she or he was not necessarily seen as having a permanent location. Teams would be allocated a certain number of permanent positions. These positions could be full or part-time. The number of positions could change as needs and beliefs of the organization changed. Since both individuals and positions were assigned numbers separately, having an allocation of positions did not mean that a particular person was allocated to a particular position, but it *could* mean that a person was "assigned" to a position. What did all of this mean aside from tentative and confusing sounding language and proof of one participant's concerns that employees were seen as no more than a "number in a box"?

It meant that allocation or existence of a position was only *half* of the story. Whether or not the allocated position was "filled" with an actual person was the other half. It meant there was a dearth of constantly filled positions and because of that the system was in a perpetual state of stretching too few social workers over too large of a client territory. One participant also told me that she was concerned for the safety of her caseload in her absence. When she had to oversee more than one caseload, she spent more time with her own, more familiar caseload, assuming other colleagues did likewise. Focusing on the familiar when there were too many cases to pay proper attention to was another survival strategy for many participants.

Looking at workload, Gove stated:

> At any given time during the 1993-94 year, a Family and Children's Services social worker carried an average of 39 cases ... Workloads have declined steadily since 1989-90 when workers carried an average of 66 cases. However, these statistics do not account for the increasing complexity and difficulty of cases that workers now manage. These caseload averages are far in excess of the Child Welfare League of America's recommended standard of 20 cases per worker on average (1995, Vol. ll, p.36).

Notice that there was no mention in this quote of covering *more* than one caseload. Social workers in the ministry, the BCGEU (British Columbia Government Employees Union) and the *Gove Report* have stated that the Ministry For Children and Families (MCF) needed to hire more social workers. But even without that step, if the step to

"backfill" currently allocated positions was taken there would be an immediate shift in the quality of work for both social workers and clients at the field level, reducing a substantial amount of workload pressure and increasing safety for clients and social workers. Why then was this not being done? Though client safety was stated as the mission statement, the real bottom line was a belief in managing to the bottom line and that influenced many policy decisions.

"Unfilled" positions and "filled" positions with no one in them caused participants to be taken out of their current caseloads by both management and themselves to fill more serious staffing gaps elsewhere, or to move to a better situation. In either case there was little recognition of the impact on clients. Trying to protect the *most* vulnerable clients by priorizing the seriousness of a staffing gap and moving a social worker to that location, caused disruption to clients deemed by this process to be less at risk. Since all clients had at some point been assessed and had passed stringent eligibility criteria as being in need of service, what were the implications of them temporarily or permanently loosing access to their social worker? What caseload could uniformly be deemed to be at less risk, when each case was so different? Workers with no background on the "at risk" caseload they had been assigned to had to hope for *some* information to be available to them on the cases. One participant said:

> When positions in theory are filled but no one is actually there doing any work, it creates pressure for other team members as they have to deal with emergency and crisis situations without knowing the background or family history. This means that the person dealing with intakes for other worker's files could make the wrong decision easily because they are not aware of the full picture.

Another participant spoke in frustration of being sent help unfamiliar with the type of work on her protection case load. Her team, a protection team had been missing workers for some time. She said:

> I think there might have been two or three weeks [that year] when we were what we call full complement. The rest, we have been down at least one worker, and more often two, and a team leader.

A colleague from another type of team had been sent to her team to help. That sounded hopeful but in reality someone coming in without being familiar with the specific type of

work actually created more work. The participant went on to say:

> …if one of my team members was asked to take this, that and the other, then it would rarely come back to me. You get into appreciating that there is an attempt to help, and feeling like you are being done a favour, which is great. But on the other hand, it is just difficult because it is like you might as well just plan to be on duty [do the work yourself].

The double bind here was that this gesture was no real help but rather an optics exercise. The system could be *seen* to be dealing with this high-risk gap. A social worker from elsewhere had been "deployed" to cover the gap leaving another gap elsewhere. Nothing of substance came of this shuffling of social workers from one filled position with no one in it to another except that the participant felt obligated to feel gratitude. This was an example of "management by guilt."

Unfilled positions and filled positions with no one in them created dangerous work overload for remaining social workers, causing as one participant commented, some to leave the type of social work they "really liked" in order to find safer positions. One participant related:

> It wasn't heading off into things that I particularly liked to do. It was actually leaving behind things that I really, really liked to do. But, how long can I do it in an unreal, 'We'll hang you out to dry' situation. And if we don't hang you out to dry, we'll change the rules and you won't even know what they are.

Lack of organizational support for social workers in vulnerable work situations left participants with little choice other than leaving those situations if they were able. Often the work was passed to those with less seniority and experience. There was no explicit organizational acknowledgement that allocated positions were unpopulated at times and needed to be either "filled" or "back-filled[27] no matter why they were vacant. It was as though there was an attempt to foster the belief that the social worker was still there to deal with the caseload, even when she was gone. This "crazy-making" belief system left participants to make sense out of nonsense.

The opening quote to this theme was from a participant who had been covering her

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[27] Reminder to reader. "Backfilled" is a native language term. It refers to the temporary replacement of a vacated position otherwise considered "filled". Currently there are limited criteria for which a vacated "filled" position can be "backfilled." These are economically based criteria.

caseload *and* three others. Her words were representative of this theme. On this person's team only one out of three empty positions was "backfilled" with a .5 FTE (half time position). It was plain that the workload and pressure for this team was increased and client safety decreased due to "filled positions with no one in them". According to participants all social workers covered extra caseloads from time to time. This was a stress producing practice.

All of the women participating in this study described struggling to care for their clients, and for their colleagues, filling in for each other and doing the best they could in a situation in which they were required to take on heavier work loads, more responsibility and work at a more pressurized pace. Many participants believed the potential for something going wrong in this pressurized environment was not an "if" but a "when". Therefore if you had an opportunity to leave a situation before the "inevitable" happens, you did.

Figure 2, a componential analysis of "Doing a Complex Job" in Chapter Three showed that participants saw covering for absent or missing staff as one of the contributing factors to job complexity. The results of these individualized efforts of participants to deal with systemic problems were feelings of lack of efficacy, frustration and even of guilt for taking earned time off. Figure 3, a componential analysis of "Specification of Activities by Participants: With Whom; Where; and When" in Chapter Three showed that participants listed as part of their expected activities, "covering for missing or absent colleagues" during core hours, flex hours, official and non-official overtime. Figure 4, a taxonomy in Chapter Four of "Kinds of Work Activities" showed that a negative consequence of covering for a colleague was the difficulty of keeping ones own work up to date. Since it was seen as important to keep ones work up to date in case of needing to be away oneself, covering more than one caseload created a high degree of pressure and stress. Not backfilling absented positions allowed the ministry to say the cases were covered without needing to hire more social workers. The ensuing pressure and stress as participants and their colleagues frantically stretched themselves in an effort to avoid harm to clients and drawing the attention of watch-dog bodies, created a work ethic of overwork and contributed to survival social work.

One participant pointed out that the smaller the team, the more devastating the absence of each social worker. Midsize and small rural communities can lose 50% or 100% of a team if just one social worker takes a leave of any kind. She said:

> When there hasn't been full coverage on the Resource team it has also led to confused communication and a breakdown of various organizational systems that were in place. It's hard to be organized when you don't have your full staff complement[28] of people. The Resource team is a small team (2 1/2 FTE's) so if one person is gone it is very significant.

Participants expressed frustration, loss, and intolerance when colleagues left and of "always having to start over in forming working relationships." Additionally, participants expressed concern for clients and colleagues when they were not "backfilled" or replaced while on trainings, holidays or other brief absences from their caseloads as in this theme's opening quote. One participant described not having a full staff complement as "a stress on the glue that holds the team together." She also said"

> ... the emotional result of not having the full staff complement and doing other's work as well as one's own is ... you know... I try to be a good person but occasional pettiness creeps in. One resents doing things and tends to say to oneself, 'Well, humph, you know, so and so should have done such and such before going away, and then I wouldn't have to be doing it.' When I know perfectly well that I will leave stuff, and even though I think that my job is organized, that other people will have to pick up when I go away, so that is a team...the opposite of team building. Although we have a pretty good team, still, you know, we all feel pretty grumpy about the actions of one or the other workers whereas if we weren't overloaded, I don't think we would be. We'd be much more flexible and tolerant.

Like a business practice of keeping costs down by keeping inventory low, this one practice of maintaining a scarcity of social workers by not "back-filling" created a ripple of adaptations. The bureaucracy *expected* adaptation and as isolated individuals, social work participants and their clients complied, often in frustration. Figure 5, a componential analysis in Chapter Four of "Pressures Experienced in a Work Day and Ways of Responding to Them" showed that problems were portrayed by MCF as

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[28] "Full staff complement" is the native language term to say that the full allocated number of positions on a team have live bodies in them currently. Each team is allotted a particular number of positions, which varies depending on numerous factors which may or may not be transparent. When there is not a" full staff complement" it means that there are one or more "filled positions on that team with no one in it/them" currently.

stemming from lack of training and social worker inadequacy rather than from lack of enough staff to do the work. This organizational pattern of moving social workers to deal with staffing shortages or of social workers moving to avoid dealing with systemic problems such as "hot spots" revealed one more clue as to the location of social worker and client in this organization. Enforced movement indicated an organizational attitude of commodification toward those being shuffled about whether worker or client.

Albin (1995) explained that managerialist orthodoxy, which he believed many local governments were beginning to embrace, holds that governments should be more like the private sector and thus exposed to competitive markets. This may explain the business orientation being imposed on human service agencies such as the ones the participants worked in. In discussing managerialising in local government Albin wrote:

> Managerialism offers problem-solving methods used in everyday life: identify a specific problem and set up appropriate organizational responses. The dilemma is that once this process is undertaken the result is a fragmented organization which has lost sight of its purpose (p.142).

Participants indeed described a work environment that was fragmented by the continuous moving about and interchanging of social workers. Their employer appeared to have lost sight of or to have changed its purpose. The purpose had now moved from keeping the vulnerable safe and empowered to balancing a budget that had somehow been defined as "unbalanced." Identifying the budget as a problem justified the under-resourcing of this public service. Managing the current budget was left to those nearer the field and those managers nearer the field embarked on filling service gaps by moving around existing social workers to fill those gaps. This left participants and their colleagues caught between their social work values and the business oriented and objectifying values of MCF. Social workers and their clients were the losers in this transaction. Participants said that they and other colleagues reacted or adapted to this pressure in a variety of ways, most notably by choosing a similar strategy which was to become a "moving target".

Moving about by choice indicated a survival strategy by participants and their colleagues of reducing the chance of becoming a "sitting duck". Social workers were on the move either by choice or at the request of the ministry. I called this sea of moving

social workers, "public service nomads". One participant, working between two offices, described how she kept different systems straight, saying,"... I know I have voice mail over here, and I have pink phone messages over at the other office. Let me tell you, when you lead a nomadic life, you've got to be twice as organized." This social worker referred to her work life as nomadic.

"A nomad is a member of a tribe of people having no permanent home, but moving about constantly in search of food or pasture or, any wanderer who has no fixed home" (Neufeld and Guralnik, 1997, p. 920). This definition is analogous to the movement of social workers from one caseload to another, one team to another, one office to another, or one community to another. They were on the move either to search out new experiences, opportunities, safety or to serve the needs of the larger organization. The nomad-like movement of these social workers as they continuously adapted to their work landscape, both contributed to and attempted to ameliorate the problem of "filled" positions with no one in them.

Participants had moved to other work sites or areas of social work to evade unsafe work situations. One woman said "...maybe some big horrible dangerous ugly thing was going to happen and at this point in my life I wasn't wanting to be there." Participants also moved because they were attracted to learning or earning opportunities elsewhere in the organization, partially in reaction to feeling that their knowledge base was perceived by the organization as "lacking". One participant left her team for a period of time because she did not feel valued or respected there and she wanted to avoid the conflict inherent in being at odds with colleagues. Social worker initiated movement was one way of trying to solve complex problems that received little ministry support.

Nomadic movement patterns arise due "to a complex suite of sometimes conflicting behaviours"(Galvin, 1994. p. 861). For the participants of this study and their colleagues, this complexity included the contradiction of caring for clients but not being able to spend enough direct time with them to ensure safety and believing in putting clients first but feeling the need to opt for self-preservation. Participants avoided potentially volatile situations by moving elsewhere. There was also a belief in this work environment that to do better social work over the long term a social worker needed to experience other types

of teams and client populations. The potential impact on current clients was rarely examined by participants. I was unclear if the belief of moving about to become better trained, originated with the field or higher in the organization where there *was* an express belief, according to participants that, field workers knowledge base was lacking.

Participants did talk with their colleagues both locally and throughout the system about work overload and lack of preventative social work. There was no substantial systematic and collective organizing around these issues however, other than the workload measurement project between the union and employer. In this work environment participants described a stoic approach to their work and a concentration on personal survival by means of more self-care, self-awareness and moving to more personally advantageous situations for a variety of reasons. Regardless of wanting to connect with clients, a social worker learned not to get attached to a caseload that could be or must be left to satisfy organizational or personal needs. The constant in this work environment was movement, change and the need to learn how to survive. Participants had developed strong "self-talk" and wise proverbs to help them survive over the long term. These strategies helped perpetuate the status-quo as much as they helped participants cope and endure in their jobs over the long term.

Since this study began, two participants have retired, two have moved to other teams, one has taken a leave of absence and one remains in the same position but is about to face re-structuring. Every participant has a new team leader. Each one of these changes by a participant or her colleagues meant that she, her colleagues or her clients had to adjust to someone new, or her team to having one less person attending to clients at that location. For those on these teams with little seniority it made the job of social work difficult. In this nomadic work environment the role of client, social worker, or team leader was often difficult. Most of the participants of this project had several years of seniority and could generally choose to stay with their caseload and team if they wished. As mentioned, some made other choices, some long term, some short term. It was not possible for a team to count on having an intact complement of workers in order to keep workload reasonable, or for teams to count on forming long-term, in-depth working relationships and work processes with their clients and colleagues, or for clients to count on having one

social worker that would remain with them long enough to get to know and form a relationship with them (Early, 2000). Not being able to count on these things as constant factors created experiences of loss, isolation and fragmentation. This was not so very different from the struggles the participants' clients faced in their social environments. Clients were also similarly moved about, from one foster home to another.

As Figure 6, a taxonomy of "Kinds of Expectations in a Day" in Chapter Four showed, a tacit bottom line expectation of the ministry was for social workers to "learn to live with no backfill". Work was expected to be kept up to date even if the participant was legitimately away such as on vacation, at training, out of town for work related reasons and so on. MCF seemed to have an expectation for social workers to be their own backfill. This promoted an effort from participants' to keep their work as up to date as possible in case of the need to be absent or away from their case load.

Participants were busy and each move tended to be seen and dealt with as a separate and isolated situation. As participants have said there was little time to think or reflect, therefore the larger pattern of continuous movement appeared to go unnoticed. What did this mean?

Social work conducted in isolation led to feelings of powerlessness. Trying to solve systemic problems as individuals did little to convince the organization to move to the safer social work it said it believed in. Working preventatively on systemic problems such as poverty, sexism, racism and so on that contribute to the oppression of clients was not a possibility in this work environment. Public Service Nomadism was a form of adaptation to "positions being filled but with no one in them". Nomadism was a reaction to the conflicting ministry goals of managing to the shrinking bottom line and protecting the vulnerable in our society and one side effect was survival social work.

In summary, working in complex, undervalued jobs in an under-resourced and non-supportive work culture, the conditions were created for survival social work to become necessary. One of the ways participants and their colleagues survived was to keep moving, particularly from "hot spots". Management also moved social workers about to fill gaps, particularly *to* "hot spots". This constant movement of social workers hindered the creation of safe, stable environments which could foster long term relationships

between vulnerable adults with disabilities, children and youth in care and the social workers who work with them. The nomadic movement of social workers, generally to deal with "unfilled" staff complements and "filled" but currently empty social work positions, was an attempt by social workers to survive and adapt to these pressures.

In the previous two themes, the concepts of fear and blame have been briefly mentioned. These references to fear and blame arise out of a belief by participants that regardless the reason, they would be unsupported in the terrible event that something should happen to a child, youth or vulnerable adult on their caseload. The next theme "fear of the pointing finger of blame" focuses on many aspects of fear and blame spoken about by participants of this research.

Fear and the Pointing Finger of Blame

> The pointing finger is the result of a messed up political system, whereby Ministers, appointed as figureheads of an organization, discredit each other politically by pointing out the failures in each other's organization. Rather than acknowledging that we are facing some massive problems as a society (addictions, poverty, family breakdown) and that we need to re-think and re-work our social systems, the pointing finger allows us to focus on individual situations usually with a social worker holding the responsibility bag. The result of this is that common sense has gone out the window, and cover your butt is the reason for good casework, not because it benefits the family/children.

According to participants "fear of the pointing finger of blame" is experienced in varying degrees by workers in all of MCF's program areas, with protection and guardianship social workers as potentially the hottest of "hot spots". All participants of this research made reference to "fear of the pointing finger of blame" another repeating thread of thought which formed this third and final theme. It was this continuous backdrop of potential but unpredictable reprisal which was largely responsible for the creation of a culture of fear. The culture of fear impacted on how participants and their colleagues practiced social work.

As with the preceding themes I returned to the transcripts, taxonomies and componential analyses for the parts and relationships within participants' use of language which provided the roots of this theme. I have referred to Figures in previous chapters

which illustrated the various taxonomies and componential analyses. Within this context I have shown what these analyses revealed about participants' expressed fears of blame for things beyond their control. Also how they said this blaming worked. I discovered that a culture of fear had been created which impacted on how social work was done. Notably that survival social work had become necessary.

The opening quote to this theme summed up both the political awareness most participants had of their situation and what they had to say about working in a system in which they felt devalued and were left holding "the responsibility bag." The quote showed where the participants thought the focus of blame would come to rest when something tragic happened to a child or youth or vulnerable adult known to the ministry. In this work environment it seemed, everyone needed asbestos footwear. The opening quote also aptly represented sentiments from participants, about the negative impact of focusing blame on the individual. This particular participant's preference was to look at problems such as child death and maltreatment within the context of a broader societal picture, a larger organizational picture and a more generalized professional picture.

Participants' references to "fear of the pointing finger of blame" were evident in the Figures shown in previous chapters. The componential analysis "Doing a Complex Job" in Figure 2 Chapter Three, mentioned re-organizing and re-prioritising due to unexpected events as one aspect of the work which contributed to its complexity. Re-organizing and re-prioritising on demand referred to the need to quickly change direction when urgent situations emerged either with clients or requests "from above" for information. This need to quickly change direction would be combined with already too much to do and general lack of ministry support. One participant said:

> One of my colleagues today referred to "management by guilt," which I think is pretty much the same idea. However unrelenting and sometimes unreasonable the demands of work may be, the line social worker, as a professional, must be equal to the task. Although there may be recourse to methods of complaint and grievance, a professional social worker would *never* stoop to using them, but will just suck it up and keep going. After all, one does not want to be seen as weak and incompetent, does one?

The experienced women social workers taking part in this research study believed they should be held accountable for their actions as professionals. They illustrated this

belief through: detailed descriptions of their job requirements; explanations of the continuous priorizing of the work day's events to ensure the most risk oriented and time sensitive duties where attended to; and through the pride they expressed in their efforts to do a "good" job. One participant said rather defiantly "One thing I can say is that in twenty-four years of doing this kind of work, I have never caused any harm to a child." In spite of the growing administrative hurdles, and atmosphere of fear, she had accomplished a long career in which children were kept from harm. Being held accountable for things out of their power however, was another matter. One participant said "I love my job and I don't find my job stressful. I find doing two people's jobs stressful." Keeping up with the administrative requirements of one job was difficult enough, on two caseloads it was impossible and the consequences therefore fearful.

The componential analysis "Specification of Activities by Participants" in Figure 3 Chapter Three showed that all activities listed except shopping also happened during "flex hours" and official and non-official overtime. Pressure to work beyond the boundaries of the job was high but due to its often unofficial nature, safety and guidelines for the social worker were missing, they were out on a limb. Social workers were held responsible for the safety of those on their caseloads even while they were not at work. If participants worked beyond their contracted hours who was responsible for their safety? That remained unclear.

Figure 4 in Chapter Four, "Kinds of Work Activities" illustrated the many kinds of direct people work that participants engaged in. Often direct work with clients happened after hours such as attending; music or sports events, various graduations such as from school or Outward Bound programs, birthdays or even significant events to the client such as receiving a much desired set of golf clubs. At times home studies had to be done in the evenings when prospective foster parents could be available. Often children in danger were removed in the late evening as a result of out of control family disruptions. When participants were doing relationship building work with their clients it often spilled beyond the regular work day and felt at times as though doing this part of the job was "on the sly." This reflected the tacit belief that acceptable, "status quo" social work was focused more on administrative activities rather than on direct relationship building work

with clients.

The componential analysis "Pressures Experienced in a Work Day and Ways of Responding" in Figure 5 illustrated the general sense of "looking over the shoulder" that participants described. In this Figure the "contrast" element "fear of the pointing finger of blame" was to be found in every element in the "dimensions of contrast" section of the figure. This was indicated by the "yes" response under each element. What this revealed was that there was a fear of being blamed by both parties when there was conflict between MCF and the other party as in the case of the foster home placement review mentioned in Chapter Four. Standards must be met but at times they were not due to workload. This created a fear of something going wrong due to work overload. Participants spoke of the inability to monitor cases properly due to the volume of work to be done. As a previous participant quote showed, the culture of fear created reluctance to complain or undertake a union grievance regarding unreasonable work demands for fear of appearing "weak" or incompetent. Both their clients' and their own safety and well-being were at stake. But feeling insignificant participants were reluctant to call attention to themselves for fear of being seen in an even worse light, and for fear of reprisal (Burgman in Rees & Rodley Eds., 1997). Being in a profession and in a work environment where the field consists primarily of women and is monitored and administered primarily by men, there may have been an additional layer of perceived risk in speaking out even though participants professed to more comfort in doing so at this stage of their lives. In listening to participants it appeared that their voices did not tend to be represented, nor their actual work experiences to be understood in the organization's hierarchy. In this respect social work like other caring professions mirrored the institutional or traditional patriarchal family where men head the family and make key decisions whereas women under male guidance take charge of the health and welfare of its members (Baines, 1998; Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Theodorson & Theodorson, 1979). The Gove Report refers to the hierarchy in MCF but without an understanding that blame trickled down to the field in this ministry.

> Ministry social workers do not operated in a vacuum. They work in a very hierarchical system where policy is set at the top. It is the ministry's senior management which is ultimately responsible for our child protection system.

> That is where decisions are made about funding, training and staffing, and where practice standards are met (p. 188, Vol. 2).

Participants talked about social workers, mainly women, taking all the risks in working with children, youth and other vulnerable clients. They spoke about how context was seldom considered in situations involving death or serious maltreatment of children, youth or vulnerable adults. The focus was on what the individual social worker was perceived to have done wrong. The focus was not on what policies and statutes or situation a social worker was bound by at the time of an incident, for example, whether the current statute and policy trend was to remove children or to keep them in their family with supports. The statutes and policies of the day would influence how a social worker dealt with a family (Reder et al, 1993). Also, the number of *actual* cases the social worker was monitoring at the time of an incident or the actual efforts the social worker may have made to discover or ensure client safety would have an impact on the situation at the time of an incident, and there was a belief that this was similarly overlooked. An approach which did not consider these things prevented discovering what actually happened and promoted fear and survival social work practices. The belief that field social workers, primarily women, would be left unsupported should unfortunate harm happen to a client, created as one participant said "…tension and the feeling of having to cover yourself."

Related to work overload, participants expressed a desire to be able to spend more time with clients doing "ideal" social work but the sense that they could "never" catch up made doing "ideal" social work no more than a wish. Another overlooked aspect of work overload was being given very complicated cases due to experience but having no work taken away to compensate. Several high risk cases and a high workload meant less time for direct client contact with all cases. Less client contact detracted from creating trusting relationships with them. Less direct client contact and less time to discuss cases with colleagues meant there would be a higher chance that a social worker could miss some small, crucial clue about lack of safety on a particular case. Participants gave specific examples where they had caught a potentially damaging situation just in time and by chance. Preventing serious harm on a "by chance" basis was unsettling for participants.

From the ever-present fears that the problem would not be "caught in time," that media would find out and "blow things out of proportion or get facts wrong" and the knowledge that either way there would be blame rather than support from the ministry, a culture of fear evolved. Participants of this study had been impacted by the Gove inquiry and its blaming tone. Given that workload problems were not acknowledged by MCF the participants were afraid that context would be ignored and that they would be blamed for circumstances beyond their control. One participant made the following comment.

> If you don't have time to get to know your families, how can you make those god-like decisions that will affect them for the whole entire rest of their lives and maybe ruin every human relationship they have?

This participant's comment illustrated the squeeze that social workers like her faced. On one hand she was personally charged with the stated ministry mission of keeping clients safe, and the lofty expectation to make "god-like" decisions. On the other, she had organizational constrictions. The constrictions she faced included high workload, inadequate resources, and policies which must be followed even if they did not fit the situation. That social workers such as this participant would shoulder the responsibility for the well-being of clients despite organizational and societal inadequacies facing her and her clients, illustrated how she and her colleagues felt scapegoated in this work environment. The expected self-sacrifice and subordination of those, mainly women, who work in the caring professions, has created an effective barrier against speaking out as a group. Individualization of workers in these professions is therefore ensured (Baines, 1998; Morell, 1987; Cohen, 1997). Out of the fear that they would "take the heat" if there was an incident beyond their control of neglect or harm to a client, there was a sense for participants of being invalidated and of being insignificant. Participants outlined several watch-dog bodies that continuously monitored their clients and themselves such as audit teams, Children's Commission and in particular the media. One participant said:

> Children's Commission can be perceived as a 'finger pointing' arm of the government who at random request copies of CPOCs [Comprehensive Plans Of Care] without permission from the family to review, and then request revisions according to their standards, again without consent from the family.

Participants of this research study talked about not being trusted by MCF to do a

good job and that there was a "before and after Gove" culture as evidenced by the several watch-dog systems now in place. As one participant said "…since Gove workers feel more under a microscope." Periodic but forewarned audits were one example of being monitored in this work culture of fear. One very overworked participant spoke in frustration about a colleague's habit of putting paper before clients. The participant said:

> She's too much of a perfectionist to do child protection, because the paperwork drives her crazy. Everything has to be dotted and crossed and when the audit comes, her files will be 100%. But her clients don't know what she looks like."

This participant was expressing anger with a younger colleague because the colleague's unfinished direct client work would find its way to this her desk when she was already working at capacity with her own case load. This participant had also worked in the field *before* the business or managerial language of today's social work culture had permeated the day to day work to such a high degree. The participant remembered a time when clients were more of an agency priority than they were now in the more administratively focused and "butt covering" era. She believed that those social workers coming into the field now had a general acceptance of the business oriented jargon of the profession, a reflection perhaps, of how it has also been assimilated into our everyday language.

Whether subtle or more apparent to a social worker, the culture of fear discouraged client focused casework and discouraged working in the client's best interest. It apparently also fostered ill feelings between workers as in the situation above where the need to complete paperwork left unfinished direct client work to be picked up by someone else. When managerialism is the organizational model, fiscal objectives are achieved administratively. The "customer" or "purchaser of services" really being served therefore is government. Children and families, the consumers of the services or "end product" are *not* the customer (Duncan, 1995). Social work that follows massive administrative procedures, at the expense of thorough direct client work may satisfy the "watch-dog" bodies but it does not provide client centered service. Duncan (1995) refers to this need to satisfy internal and political financial agendas as "organizational introversion." This he says is the opposite of "…the outward looking, client centered attitude which would be needed for genuine improvement in service quality" (p. 163).

The participant above also questioned the validity or even the "real" purpose of the

audit procedure since everyone knew when and where a particular audit would take place. She said:

> The audits will be interesting. I really think that's a set-up too. Because if you are going to do a true audit, why on earth would you be giving us a three month ... no, two month notice.

This participant felt the audit was used more as a tool to get everyone to comply with administrative regulations than as a way to discover what was really going on at the field level. She said "I think everybody should bloody well leave their files as they are and let them get a true picture. Then we'll all be wearing it but so be it." However, she had little faith that the cause of incomplete files and undone procedures would actually be seen to be overwork. Her call for "job action" was more a reflection of her cynicism than it was a true war cry. This participant, albeit reluctantly, would also ensure her files were audit-ready. She was afraid not to. In this work environment, to be seen not doing at least one's full share of work was viewed negatively by self, team members and management alike. A strong value held by most in this culture and one which made it easier for management to impose such high expectations about volume of work.

"Kinds of Expectations in a Day" in Figure 6 Chapter Four showed that conflicting expectations led to pressures which resulted in having to let some things go in order to survive. However, there was no support from MCF to let anything go. This double bind was combined with awareness of situations where participants had observed their colleagues in other areas of the province taking the blame when the problem was not of their making. Participants spoke of situations in their system where colleagues had come under both public and organizational scrutiny and had to face the courts or a public inquiry. One participant pointed out that unless the investigation ruled in the social worker's favour the worker would have to pay their own defence fees, even if the situation had been beyond their control. She said:

> The pointing finger is often used to assign blame for any media or public complaint about a social workers actions. MCF makes it quite clear that a social worker is not supported by the ministry, and must hire their own lawyer in the case of a civil suit. Only if the worker in question wins their case will the ministry help with legal fees. we are taking all the risks and MCF is only helping if the courts find in favour of the worker.

There was a sense of helplessness and tragedy encapsulated by such examples. How does a social worker speak of the felt malice toward *them* in the face of the imminent or actual harm experienced by the vulnerable child, youth or fragile adult client in such situations?

What was so concerning to participants was that media inflamed "hot seat" situations were not particularly different from the ones they found themselves in daily. Too many caseloads to properly monitor, too much work too little time, not knowing the constantly changing rules, staff, or specialized team particulars if moved there to fill a gap, and the volatile and complex nature of many clients' lives all combined to create a potentially explosive situation. Participants had witnessed the often unquestioned blame and resulting shaming and devastation of colleagues in such situations. This made participants well aware that therefore it could happen to them.

Some of the consequences for social workers who had come under the "pointing finger of blame" included loss of delegation letters, court proceedings, inquiries or other investigations. The social workers in those situations ended up on the "hot seat" rather than those who had the authority to properly staff those agencies and who did not. They were the recipients of trickle down blame.

When an organization focused blame on an individual social worker and yet denied that it engaged in such behaviour, that worker became isolated and could not bring her fears safely and successfully into the open. This "crazy-making" became evident when I asked participants for more feedback about how the "pointing finger of blame" worked. Initially participants were wary to openly discuss the "pointing finger of blame" with me. Given that the organization refused to acknowledge the concept, participants felt they were on shaky ground when asked to explain how it worked. They were expected not to acknowledge the existence of the "pointing finger of blame." That I worked in the same system at a different location reduced some of their anxiety to talk to me about it.

Chomsky in Duncan (1995, p. 153) writes about the "...skilful creation of legitimating myths or 'necessary illusions' by powerful institutions." Whether or not the problem is real is not relevant, nor does it matter if the solution solves the "problem." What matters is the perception of reality not the reality itself. In this case the ministry

had dealt with its employee's fears of being scapegoated by creating the illusion that their fears were "a field myth". If there was nothing "substantial" to the fears of the employees there was nothing to be dealt with. No problem, no solution required. But a myth is an unscientific, fictitious, and imaginary belief or theory. Clearly there were real instances of blame that participants and other social workers saw and heard in media accounts of events, in inquiries, and in their real life experiences at the field level. These real instances contributed to the creation of a real rather than a mythical culture of fear. In Figure 6 one of the external expectations that participants spoke of was the expectation by media to provide them with information on child protection controversies that would lead to a "story." There are guidelines in the *Public Service Act* and *Standards of conduct for Public Servants* which prohibit employees discussing confidential matters and government business in a public forum. The ministry is clear that media attention on volatile cases is not wanted. When media does produce a "story" it does not usually have a positive "spin" on social workers or the ministry. The pointing finger of blame would likely come out of more that one holster at a time like this. News of media involvement or potential media involvement about a case travelled quickly throughout the social work system. There was an informal network among social workers that kept vigilant and aware of every port of call of the non-mythical "pointing finger."

Media has had a role in the formation of an atmosphere of blaming social workers. When participants themselves said workload at times prevented them from being accountable and that this was dangerous to clients and unacceptable to them, who could they press this point with? They were told there was a workload examination process between the government and the British Columbia Governments Employees Union (BCGEU) to look at the issue. The union has since given up this process as useless. Social workers and their representatives did not feel their workload and safety concerns were heard. The media could not be called on by social workers to discuss their stories and concerns, *nor* to discuss cases which go well. The front line social worker was left with no voice. The public remains uninformed of the "inside" ministry reality.

The media does not seem to find ways to discover what public service social work is about, to find stories about people turning their lives around or of being protected from

tragedy through the efforts of social workers. I mention this to point out that certain stories are more sought out by the media than others. I am not suggesting that media infiltration of the social work system is a good idea. Also, I do not mean to suggest that using the media to educate the public is necessarily the way to go. Rather the media is purposeful and selective and we must be aware of the particular selections made as this shapes public opinion and culture (Callahan & Callahan, 1997). The selection in turn further shapes our understanding of social work and service to clients. The choices media makes about portraying social workers in mainly negative terms has helped create a societal belief and self-fulfilling prophecy that social work does not work. This in turn has helped create a public sentiment that too much money is spent on something that does not work. Faltering public support for public services further reduces a government's commitment to allocating funds to human services. This has a ripple effect to further compromising the work that social workers do.

There has been discussion in the literature about the turn inquiry information takes before, during, and after commission, once in the hands of the media (Callahan & Callahan, 1997; Hallet, 1989; Hutchesson, 1986; and Stevenson, 1989). Callahan and Callahan (1997) examined press coverage of a public inquiry of a child welfare tragedy and compared it to actual inquiry testimony showing how particular and negative images of child welfare and social workers were created. They also explored the use of language in the construction of women as "good" such as those women in traditional family roles, and as "evil" such as clients, who often fall outside of traditional family structures, and the social workers who support and work with them. Hallet (1989) wrote that most of the public got their information about social work and social workers from the media. Reder et al (1993) also suggested that the media played such a role.

All participants spoke of their belief that media would portray high profile situations by casting a negative light on the social worker/s on the case; this in turn would create public anger. Distrust born out of past media reports meant that participants did not consider that media would or could act as a positive vehicle to highlight social work and social workers' concerns. Though only two of the participants were protection social workers, all participants worked providing and arranging services to ameliorate or prevent

the abuse and neglect of at-risk children and youth or vulnerable adults. And all of them expressed an apprehensive view of the media.

Public awareness of social work is nonetheless often conveyed to the public via media coverage. Other avenues open to social workers in which to discuss the joys, conundrums and sorrow of their field such as professional associations, union, and academic institutions, generally have limited access and connection with the general public. But media is not neutral about reporting of social workers and this has a particular impact on the field, notably fear of the negative public opinion that media coverage so often produces.

In a study examining press coverage to unravel the images of child welfare and social workers that are created in the press, Callahan and Callahan (1997) showed that even though the press had access to "vast amounts of information" during the Mathew Vaudreuil inquiry, the reporting was simplistic, often incorrect and damning of both the mother and social workers. Callahan and Callahan (1997) wrote that the same images and themes of sensational child welfare cases also appeared in research by Franklin and Parton (1991). From these studies, two contradictory and unfavourable images of social workers emerge, that of "wimp" and of "bully". In one instance the social worker is chastised for not acting strongly enough, against policy if necessary. In the other instance social workers are portrayed as "authoritarian bureaucrats" and "abusers of authority". Callahan and Callahan (1997) also described a third image, that of "charlatan". As "charlatans" social workers supposedly cover up their incompetence as "wimps" and 'bullies". They point out that in coverage of the Vaudreuil inquiry all three images were put forward to the public. The coverage impacted on the creation of public outcry and an atmosphere of blaming toward public service social workers in B.C. From the references made regarding the negative influence of the Gove inquiry on their current work environment, participants were still being impacted by a media created public opinion created several years ago. The blaming by media of specific social workers in coverage of the inquiry was tangible evidence to social workers that they could be similarly vilified should one of their cases "become public" If participants' accounts are any indication of a broader trend, social workers, mainly women, often internalised this individualized

focus and attempted to deal with the day to day work problems in isolation using a variety of survival techniques such as "wise proverbs" to self-talk themselves through difficult situations. Survival social work was an attempt to get by in an unfavourable work environment enveloped by a culture of fear.

. The componential analysis "Results of being a Mature Social Worker" shown in Figure 7 Chapter Four pointed out that age and experience were mediating factors in surviving the "fear of the pointing finger of blame." There were many things that participants had learned to do at this stage of their career to accurately assess where genuine problems existed. They had developed a strong base of knowledge to press into play and they had learned self-talk skills to counsel themselves on being balanced, accepting, and efficient. However, participants having logged many years in their chosen profession, feared ending up at the wrong end of "the pointing finger of blame" and consequently losing their career at this late stage. Participants nearing retirement wanted to leave on a positive note but the many potential places where things could go wrong seemed to be increasing. This produced an anxiety that caused participants to move away from volatile situations when they could.

Each of the participants I spoke with had an understanding that social workers could haplessly find themselves the "fall gal." There could be many things outside their control which could contribute to harm befalling a client. Even though participants expressed a deeper understanding of organization and societal culpability, they simultaneously believed that regardless the cause, if it was during their watch that harm came to a client, it would be their fault. Internalising blame was an indication of the complexity and messiness of social work compounded by a culture of fear.

Blaming of the individual had become a tacit cultural norm in this work environment. It seemed that with few women's' voices speaking from within the hierarchy the primarily female field social worker was seen as a safe target, mirroring women's role in the larger culture (Baines, 1998; Daniels, 1988; Ehrenreich, 1985; Kenyon, 1997; Struthers, 1987a). Historically women social workers such as Whitton and Govan who resisted the stereotype of women in social work by taking on leadership roles within their profession in the areas of social policy, administration and history, were

viewed as combative. According to Baines (1998) these two women encountered "difficulties" within their career. Both women worked on issues of pay equity. Women's being in positions higher in the hierarchy does not mean that decisions and processes would automatically be less oppressive or more supportive, but with so few women social workers traditionally in those positions of policy making and authority, it is not currently possible to know how the tone would be different. As Baines (1998) points out social work was largely made up of women but became a profession under the control of men. Male social work graduates have historically moved to administration whereas women mainly worked in the field (Gripton, 1974; Valentich & Gripton, 1978; Kenyon, 1997; Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974).

As one participant said she did not bring issues of work overload to her union because she did not want to be seen as "weak" or "incompetent." Words such as "weak" or "incompetent" place a negative connotation on "speaking out." They also appear to be value free language since they do not identify that in the main they are referring to descriptions or judgements of women's behaviour in this work environment (Callahan & Callahan, 1997; Duncan in Rees & Rodley Eds. 1995). That a participant would define speaking out in such negative terms showed that she had picked up the tacit message to keep to herself and to keep her head down. Participants consequently adopted a way of working where they focused on what was directly in front of them, and got through each issue one by one. In doing so their experience and their desire to end their career on a positive note contributed to keeping things cobbled together.

The reader will have noticed that there was some overlap between this theme "fear of the pointing finger of blame" and the first theme "tough, complex devalued jobs." They were closely related themes due to the shared sense of lack of support, and lack of validation that participants described. They differed in that the "fear of the pointing finger of blame" theme was both more specific and more ominous than the "devalued jobs" theme. "Fear of the pointing finger of blame" theme along with not being supported or validating, described a more punitory work environment experience where participants expressed feeling unsafe. A "targeted" worker could become unfairly blamed in an inquiry or investigation process; be shamed in the press, lose her delegation letter or even

her job (Early, 2000). This theme uncovered another layer of the work environment of participants where blame was more individualized and hence more individually destructive. It revealed how this organization scapegoated those at the front end, many of whom, like the participants of this study, were mid-aged women. According to participants, social workers paid close attention to what happened to colleagues who found themselves at the end of the "pointing finger." In listening to participants it appeared that fear of blame at the individual level took on such intensity because it was magnified through a lens of fear. Looking at the experiences and descriptions of the six women participants afforded us a clear view of how fear was experienced at the front line of this part of public service, how a culture of fear had been constructed and how this contributed to survival social work.

In summary, the discussion of "fear of the pointing finger of blame" showed how there is a chronic and institutionalized lack of respect for social workers in our society. This lack of respect has its roots in the support for privatization of profits and socialization of the negative consequences of that profit making. That there is a "pointing finger" is not individual social workers' imaginations on overdrive. It is not a myth though it is portrayed as such by the organization. The response of fear to "the pointing finger of blame" is palpable. It exists in a society ambivalent about its social conscience and therefore a little itchy on the "pointing finger." Are there social worker responses to this theme? Yes, there is more fear, more frustration, "covering butt," and using more time to fill out forms and fulfill administrative requirements. Creating a new ministry without making the interests of frontline workers and the clients they work with a primary focus, and without opening social dialogue on the causes and costs of our culture's social problems, continues the legacy of the "pointing finger."

Summary of Chapter Five

In each of the three themes discussed above expectations, pressures and participants' responses to them were described. There was also a fundamental paradox running throughout each of the themes revealing a contradictory, unsupportive and unsafe work environment for social workers and the people they work with. In this toxic environment survival social work had become the practice norm. The paradox of "tough, complex and

devalued jobs" in theme one, is obvious in its title. On one hand, the jobs that participants did were tough and complex. The work was multi-layered, administratively ponderous, participants deal with painful client situations that require patience, tact, good boundaries, a thorough knowledge of available resources and related systems, a detective's mind, and diplomacy. On the other hand, participants believed the ministry did not value or support their work. Participants were told that they were not trained enough to keep clients safe and that the ministry would decide what training they needed, ironically the ministry did not provide relief workers to ensure client safety while social workers were away at training. Participants believed that if problems arose with a case due to work overload, they would get no acknowledgment or support from the ministry in dealing with the problems. They could in fact "take the heat" on a particular case because their name was on it regardless that they had not had the time to monitor the case systematically or to get to know the client. Participants knew they would need to cover move than one caseload at a time with no relief, ensuring nothing went wrong that could come to the attention of the media or other watch dog bodies. Yet the workload evaluation project jointly undertaken by the union and ministry and later abandoned by the union, did not consider the multiple case loads that social workers commonly monitored off of the side of their desks. Due to constant changes participants were expected to follow rules that they may not have known about and new policies with no policy manual. Due to the nature of the work and the obvious lack of support and lack of respect from the ministry, participants believed that social work students would not see these jobs as desirable, and would not apply for them. Consequently already stretched staffing would need to stretch even further.

In theme two the paradox of having "positions filled with no one in them" is reminiscent of the classic shell game "which shell is the ball under". By stating that there were a particular number of "allocated positions" or "shells" in the ministry, it would have seemed logical to presume that this also meant those positions had a warm body or a "ball" in them. Not so. This was how the shell game began. Which position had a worker in it and which was empty? The ministry treated child welfare social workers as interchangeable "balls" in order to move the worker to the desired "shell" or position.

There were some "advantages" to this movement of social workers. One advantage was to be able to priorize staffing gaps based on levels of client safety and to then move social workers into those positions. Advantages for social workers included: learning many aspects of social work and about many client populations; clients could conceivably benefit from having a social worker with extensive knowledge of the system; by being more versatile, social workers had improved pay and employment options; social workers learned to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and most importantly social workers could move to escape "hot spots." However, the bottom line was that there were fewer social workers or "balls" than there were shells or "allocated positions" and in spite of the slight of hand movement of social workers to fill gaps, or to maximize their situation the reality was that some "shells" would simply have no "ball" in them. Empty shells were a sign that all was not well with this environment.

Social workers on the move created more gaps and more caseloads without a social worker. Remaining members of those now understaffed teams were faced with an increase in workload. Those who left often felt guilty and worried about their clients, especially if it was a temporary leave such as for training, holidays, illness, brief fill-in on other teams, or court in another community. Having had to cover caseloads themselves, they were well aware of the lack of proper attention theirs would receive. Clients were impacted by lack of consistency, particularly when the leaves were longer term or permanent such as leaves of absence of up to one year, parental leave, long term illness, taking over someone's position elsewhere for an indeterminate period of time, leaving to take on another position, quitting, being fired or dying. Both team-mates and clients had to start over forming new relationships if a social worker was replaced for any length of time or permanently. Participants faced both the pressure to remain with their caseloads and the pressure to temporarily or permanently go elsewhere to save themselves. The paradox within this theme set up the kind of pressures and contradictions listed above. Participants responded to the pressures by "butt covering", by moving out of the line of fire and by being afraid to speak out about too much work. Even though participants had become more comfortable speaking out to colleagues, team leaders and managers at this stage of their life, speaking out about volume of work and client safety appeared to still

be a taboo area.

Though expressing a great concern for clients and their well being participants described leaving their case loads for a variety of reasons, some to benefit clients and some to benefit themselves. Whatever the reasons, clients were left behind with either no, limited, or less experienced service. Or, clients had to get to know another social worker. The current system made consistency for clients very difficult for social workers to provide. Participants said there was too much work to do and too many expectations of them, yet they hesitated in bringing this up to their union or team leaders for fear of being seen by colleagues as incompetent or as not being able to keep up. Participants had internalized the organization's devaluing and individualizing attitude onto their own work.

In theme three "fear of the pointing finger of blame" the paradox was that systemic problems were portrayed and viewed as individual ones, and systemic blame transferred to individual social workers. Understanding this individualizing of systemic problems as most participants did, only served to increase their frustration, disappointment and fear. Participants were well aware that society, influenced by media, was sceptical about public service. They were aware that from that departure point the pecking order of blame took the form of ministries pointing out each others' failures to justify themselves, ministries pointing inward at their own employees to deflect political heat, and field staff blaming each other, themselves, and sometimes their clients in an attempt to justify why they had been asked to prevent or solve problems that had systemic roots and that were so far beyond them.

As a result of living with conflicting expectations and the resulting pressure and fear, participants had developed survival skills. Those who had survived in the ministry over the long term had developed an internal locus of control through developing strong and affirming self-talk and better boundaries. Those who had accrued seniority used it to protect themselves. Conversely, due to the silencing effect of an atmosphere of fear and blame, the system did not hear or understand the real problems and concerns for client safety understood at the field level. There were also serious retention and recruitment problems due to the atmosphere of fear and blame.

In coping with feeling ignored, devalued and yet used, participants had experienced both strengths and survival skills. Not getting respect or acknowledgement from the organization created reliance upon themselves for affirmations and positive self-talk. Participants found ways to combine knowledge, skill and experience to compensate for waning energy levels. They developed better boundaries such as knowing where and when to draw the line both with clients and with how many hours they were willing to work in a day. Not having young children or any children living at home allowed for more focus on work and less overall drain on their energy. At this stage participants reported feeling less intimidated by authority. Participants were able to use their seniority to enable them to either stay in a particular work area or to move. There were difficulties that participants experienced in being ignored. Respect and acknowledgement from the system were missing as were opportunities for advancement and for having an impact on policy and practice issues. These losses led to a heads down approach to social work where skills and knowledge were quietly pressed into use handling the greater responsibilities. Although the need for self-respect was in part met internally, there was also an expressed desire for respect from colleagues. Ironically, there was a belief that to gain collegial respect one must be seen as a "hard worker". The need to be seen as competent and capable by ones peers created high self-demands for overwork not unlike expectations from the employer. In spite of the claims to have better boundaries and to be working smarter not harder, participants were caught up in a work ethic of overwork.

In listening to how the participants identified and mediated the pressures and expectations of them in their social work jobs the pride, creativity, wisdom and tenacity were evident and so was their anger, frustration and resignation. The messy, convoluted and contradictory truths that they survived in order to work in this environment became apparent. Even when participants were aware of the bigger systemic picture, they felt compelled to work as individuals on individual problems because that was what was in front of them. Often they ended up expecting of themselves what their organization expected of them. Each participant that I talked to had a vision or a wish list of how social work could and should be done in a supportive system. Participants described many instances of doing wish list type social work, on a "sneak" or "rebel" basis but

clearly these had become exceptions.

In an ethnography of social work practice, deMontigny (1989) writes

> Professional work at hand is articulated to organizational courses of action as schematically outlined in legislation, policy manuals, operational directives, and so forth. By articulating presently constitute practices to a documentary reality front line social workers struggle to professionally transcend the equivocal, conflicted, and messy worlds presented by clients. Social workers' participation in a textually mediated discourse is essential for generating a practice which appears to be ordered, managed and controlled, in a work, professional (p.65).

He believed that due to the imposed administrative requirements of the employing institution, social workers became an instrument in the oppression of clients to a capitalist society that has a stake in some citizens remaining oppressed. In the quote above, deMontigny is saying that agency social work was largely prescribed through legislation. The resulting interpretive documents obliged a particular course of action deemed ordered, managed and controlled and therefore, "professional." This professionalism which social workers must struggle to achieve is meant to override the ambiguous, conflicted, messy and real situations presented by clients. Though I agree with his analysis, I do not believe that most social workers are explicitly aware that they are taking on such a role. Instead I see many social workers like the participant above, wanting to do a good job and feeling very frustrated that they are so hampered in its accomplishment. Most participants and their colleagues understood the created role they were playing out and felt powerless to change the steam roll of administrative demands that were created without meaningful consultation and concrete input from the field.

Participants were treading water in an estuary choked with administrative tasks. Reminiscent of the weed Purple Loofstrife, to those focused on optics, it looks beautiful. Those who understand its biology know it has the potential to utterly take over. The women who participated in this study floundered in a brew of debris created by incredible cutbacks and inattention to what was needed to do the work. This brew was further poisoned with a seasoning of inquiries, reviews and media watch. The participants' tenuous and increasingly unpopular work environment had created a culture of fear which endangered social work practice, leaving the future bleak for social work, social workers and those who required their service.

The final chapter concludes with limitations of the study, implications and recommendations for public service social work and directions for future research.

CHAPTER SIX

Concluding Comments

In this study I set out to discover what mid-aged protection and family services social workers in public service had to say about their everyday paid work experiences, specifically about expectations and the relationship between work and available time to do it. In the first semi structured interviews when asked how they made sense of their workday, its activities and its expectations, all participants talked about the pressures in their day. Exploring pressures, expectations and the women's reactions to them, became the focus of the study.

Ethnography places an emphasis on cultural meaning systems which demands an exploration not only of the inner structures of experience, but also of the outer structures influenced by cultural learning and expectation. I have used Spradley's ethnographic *Developmental Research Sequence Method* to conduct this research study. As the name suggests it is a sequential approach, where "some tasks are best accomplished before other tasks" (Spradley, 1979, p.v). Domain analysis, taxonomic analysis and componential analysis are steps of increasing analytic complexity allowing the researcher to learn from participants what the skeleton of their cultural niche is and then with their help to find out how the pieces interact to form the basis of their culture. In the case of this study a particular work culture. This process incorporates a high degree of participant validation.

In the case of this study, participants provided an end-point view of how the larger culture's values filtered into and impacted on their practice by describing the pressures and expectations in their work world and how they made sense of them. They were "canaries in the field." The social work profession acts as a "canary" providing a bell-wether to the value our society places on providing a social safety net. Social work is a political profession in that it serves those most vulnerable to and affected by the for profit sector in this society. It is a profession whose understanding by the public is delivered through the filtered lens of media, a media influenced and financed by corporate capital (Callahan & Callahan, 1997: Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McQuaig, 1995). The social

safety net delivered by public service is currently up for review in our society (Teeple, 1995). The location in the net of the three traditional female professions, social work, teaching and nursing is coincidentally where the unravelling has begun in earnest.

Through the women participants' descriptions and stories a clear picture of their work culture emerged. According to participants, theirs was a work culture of fear. This culture of fear was formed in part through the devaluation and lack of support of professional ministry child welfare social work employees. It was formed in part due to slight of hand resourcing that made following the post-Gove inspired administrative requirements impossible to complete without reducing direct work with clients. Underlying fear caused participants' activities to be conducted while simultaneously "looking over their shoulder." Not conducive to focus of practice, fear caused participants to attempt to avoid ending up in situations where they could be blamed for harm and neglect that was out of their control to prevent. One by-product of a blaming work atmosphere was moving away from "hot spots" such as child protection. This was a fear based culture that encouraged survival social work, often done as a moving target. Another by-product of a blaming work atmosphere was trickle down finger pointing. Participants described a system that dealt with public pressures by pointing to them if things went wrong. They in turn would at times point at each other's foibles as a way to let off pressure. Blaming was a tacit cultural norm. No participants even expected support from the ministry, though all longed for it. Both finger pointing and lack of support contributed to the creation of the culture of fear that prevailed. Some participants saw themselves and their clients as equally powerless in the larger organization. Due to the crazy-making inherent in their culture of fear, there was a disjuncture between the ministry and social worker stated goal of client safety first, and the day to day reality of practising survival politics and survival social work never far from a watchful media.

Since they had been in the field for many years, participants remembered a time when flesh and blood rather than documentary clients seemed more important. When time spent directly with clients was more validated. That was their memory at least. Now it seemed that "i-dotted and t-crossed" documentation had become the main expectation that participants faced. These requirements were developed in part as a

response to the Gove Inquiry but also in response to a management strategy of putting paper regulations in place to "protect" clients without concurrently committing enough resources to carry out safe social work practises.

Standing with a foot in the past, and the present, and still needing to walk into the future social work world, created both a sense of pride and stress for mid-age participants. This unique three-world perspective also provided them with a depth of vision. There was some impatience and regret expressed that younger social workers did not value the lessons already learned by their older colleagues, although there was also recognition that these were lessons that must be learned over time as life's humbling experiences unfolded. Though they yearned for the energy of youth as they experienced the waning energy inherent in middle age, they were also aware that over the years they had learned to work "smarter not harder." This wisdom came in part because they had accumulated a large knowledge base and in part because at some point along the way either their family rebelled, lack of appreciation finally got the better of them, or because they simply ran out of steam. Participants said they were aware of the need to take care of themselves and had taken steps to do so. However, work invariably crept home, in mind if not the briefcase or diskette. Extra hours were often spent in direct client contact such as birthdays, graduations from school or programs and other life events. At times the awareness was there, the practice was not. Most participants no longer had children at home and the lessening of energy drain there was used to deal with working longer hours to participate in the client's lives.

Participants spoke of workday concerns, which could have led to client harm, and of ways this could have been ameliorated. However, the organization did not have a mechanism to discover what their experienced and mainly female field workers saw as problems and solutions in the delivery of safe service to clients. One participant lamented "clients don't live in the files." Yet, harm reduction meant passing a file audit, not working preventatively with clients so that harm was avoided. This violated the sense of ideals that participants described as "wish-list" social work. de Montigny wrote (1989, p. 450)"What counts as proper social work within some organizations has moved away from professional versions of social work practice." This "rupture" he pointed out, resulted in

alienation. If alienation involves a sense of isolation from values and norms, a feeling of powerlessness, and the sense of being unable to control ones own destiny or to have any significant effect on the important events in one's work world. I would say that given what participants spoke to me about, they were experiencing feelings of alienation (Arches, 1997; Keefe, 1984; Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969)

Though this study was not comparative in nature, I did enter into it wondering if participants would relate experiences that sounded similar to those I had observed at my own work site. Not only was this the case but two other qualitative studies, one done in B.C.'s Lower Mainland (Early, 2000) and one in Southern Ontario (Aronson & Sammon, 2000) described similar participant experiences. These three qualitative studies looked at various aspects of described experience of front-line social workers in Ontario and B.C. One study took place under a Conservative government, one an NDP government and one spanning an NDP and a Liberal government. Front-line social workers report similar experiences regardless of the province, size of community, age range or gender of participants, type of social work, or provincial political party in power, suggesting that the expectations and pressures being experienced at the field level have a common root reaching beyond governments. These experiences included fear of blame, frustration at the ponderous administrative requirements that take so much time away from direct client activities, and too much work due to lack of adequate resourcing and dismantling of programs.

Early's (2000) participant group of ten represented a wide range of age and experience within child protection social work. The study looked at participants' experiences of the work changes since the implementation of recommendations from the Gove Report. Aronson and Sammon's (2000) participant group of thirteen women and one man, ranged in age from late twenties to mid-fifties. They had between four and twenty years of experience in the current settings, had a mix of practice and teaching backgrounds and occupied a range of line and supervisory positions. The study sought to explore changes in the context of work in the last five years and changes in the worlds of the clients that they served, and the impact of the changes on their practice, health, and well-being. Regardless of the government party in power in our current economic

system, there is a visible move to reduce and perhaps eliminate the public service social safety net. The differences in party politics appear to be in how quickly or slowly this process proceeds as can be seen in this study, Early's (2000) study, and Aronson and Sammon's (2000) study.

In our everyday depoliticised "just getting by" world we are growing increasingly less comfortable with supporting those who stand up against oppression as they are portrayed to us as "bad" protesters, terrorists or vilified as incompetent, evil, lazy…undeserving. Social workers who tread into private territory to protect the vulnerable among us, or who offer services to those who do not fall within traditional roles or family structures, or who speak out, educate and organize against oppression, fall into this uncomfortable spot in our society. It is not a stretch for media to assist in the creation of our moral outrage towards social work and those who do it. Media can play a powerful role in helping to create the appropriate public attitude in which to bring reforms to a close in the public realm. Callahan and Callahan (2000, p. 55) suggest that social workers as a profession should "…analyze press coverage and find some ways to expose others to media bias and misinformation." Social workers could take up this task through their unions and professional associations and in the variety of groups in their communities such as Social Planning Councils.

Given the pressures and expectations that participants of this study experienced from within the currently tearing social safety net, it is likely that as the net tears further these pressures and expectations will increase. It will be difficult for front line social workers such as the women who participated in this study to discuss the economic structure that fosters this strategy while just trying to survive. However, this may be the time to gather and share whatever insights the field can offer its professional associations, unions and professional educators to develop whatever collective strategies we can.

Relevance

There are several reasons why this research study has relevance at this point in time. First, given the onerous regulations, procedures and administrative requirements, intense supervision and watchdog bodies in this particular work culture, I saw a work ethic of overwork in this study and in my own work world during the last few years. The work

ethic of overwork was created by the many demands connected to a social position combined with the lack of support and validation that participants and other social workers have expressed. Together these fostered a "try harder" attitude or belief system. This involved the pressure of trying to live up to both self and ministry expectations of having all of the paper-work completed properly, keeping client safe, monitoring extra caseloads, working extra-time without being seen to work extra-time, not "being a whiner" by complaining about too much work and so on. Several participants expressed the frustration that there was no time to think or reflect, just to act. There was a tacit belief among participants that as professionals, public service child welfare social workers were autonomous managers of their own time, originators of the expectations upon them and ultimately to blame if things went wrong, even when they "kind of " knew and could even articulate otherwise when given an opportunity. The belief in autonomy created a smoke screen of seeming control over the workday. This belief left social workers desperately trying to live up to the internalized ideals and expectations of the system and as a consequence pushing themselves to work harder and harder. This is one way a work ethic of overwork can be maintained in a work culture.

Secondly, little is written about paid work and mid-aged women, the profession of social work being no exception. Though social work has traditionally been a female profession, studies have revealed that despite comparable levels of education and experience, women social workers have less status than men with respect to positions, and rates of promotion and salaries (Baines, 1998; Valentich & Gripton, 1978). With help of unions and movement for pay equity women and men social workers receive equal pay in equal positions within their collective agreements. However, though comprising greater numbers, experienced women at the field level have far lower rates of promotion than do their male counterparts. This is curious and points to an existing sexism within the profession, a reflection of the larger culture. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974, p 15) wrote that our own culture is "…characterized by an ideology dictating that women's lives are relatively uninteresting." There is a need therefore to illuminate the work-life stories of mid-aged women social workers, the contributions they quietly yet boldly make, and the impropriety of the inequities they face within their profession and

within the larger society. The seemly unassuming yet pernicious oppression signals a potential economic turn of capital and bears intense, close scrutiny at this point in time. This study provides a venue for six mid-aged women's experiences of their social work days to reach beyond their work place. It suggests a micro-macro link between the experienced pressures and expectations at the field level, and the turn in direction of capital on a global basis (Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996).

Limitations

Most of the limitations of this research were methodological and discussed in chapter three. For example, the sample size could ideally have been larger, though the range of child welfare social work roles represented by the participants was diverse. However, as I conducted the research study and analyzed the findings I found myself wishing I had some additional information to increase the depth of the findings by adding and comparing other layers of descriptions to this work culture.

This research area would have been appropriate for an institutional ethnography. This study concerned itself with discovering what the participants had to say about expectations and pressures in their social work day. The women's experiences of pressures and expectations could have been used as an "entry" into the social relations and daily and documentary activities of the setting, and how their daily and documentary activities are bound in the ruling relations of the ministry, or institutions that they work for and beyond into the larger culture. There are elements of institutional ethnography evident in this study indicating that a stretch could have been made to explore this methodology further. The study would have also been appropriate for a participatory action research method, which would have allowed an opportunity for the women to meet each other and discuss their views and ideas for possible action. This would have created avenue for reflection and breaking the isolation of an individualized way of working.

Recommendations

Out of the three themes that emerged in this research a number of recommendations can be made that speak to field social workers, their employers, their professional associations, unions and to social work educators. Since the three themes overlap somewhat the recommendations can also be cross referenced.

Out of the first theme "tough, complex yet devalued jobs" came awareness that though very complex work, social workers felt that their expertise was not respected or supported. They wanted to share their experience with their younger colleagues. It seemed too big to participants to solve practice and resourcing problems on more than an individual moment to moment, day to day basis. This was connected to their concern that they had no time to think. Some participants used a return to academic upgrading or leaves as a way to achieve reflexive opportunities. As a recommendation, the ministry could encourage those social workers who returned to academic upgrading, to share their learnings and reflections with their colleagues. This could be actively supported by the ministry by providing incentives to do so, such as travel cost to give talks to neighboring communities, a "buddy" or apprentice to help with caseload in exchange for information dissemination or workshops provided to social work staff. Opportunities need to be created to meet with managers and policy makers to share ideas gained in the course of upgrading and from colleagues in the presenting of information. The ministry could support and encourage field social workers to attend such information sharing opportunities in part by keeping caseloads at a reasonable size. Clients could be included in information or workshop sessions. Are there ways to allow employees to actually use their 10 educational days per year as stipulated in the collective agreement? Most participants as well as child welfare social workers in other work sites feel "guilty" even asking about using these educational days. There is a tacit cultural belief that it is not okay to access them. Can this be creatively changed to encourage and ensure social workers to use these days as opportunities for reflectivity in their practice? This could be accomplished for example by meeting together to discuss practice issues, or arranging a course on ethics, team building, or working with clients in different ways.

Out of the second theme "positions filled but with no one in them" come the following recommendations which suggest possible ways to create a more stable effective environment for both clients and field social workers. Ministry social workers could raise with their employer and union the need to create a work environment within the ministry that ensures client safety, true professional discretion and judgment and task efficiency. This could be accomplished by such practices as: ensuring caseloads of not more than 20;

providing incentives to allow social workers to have a long term commitment to a caseload; continuous back filling of caseloads, in order to allow the social worker to have more direct contact with her clients; and examining pressure points such as filling vacant positions and ensuring that every case load has a social worker attached to it at all times, since there are children and vulnerable clients in those caseloads who need a social worker. This would mean back filling *whenever* a social worker had to be away. This would require having a pool of social workers specifically assigned to back filling. Perhaps a buddy system could be set up so that teams or caseloads had a "buddy" back filler. This would ensure that the clients would know the "buddy" and the "buddy" would get to know a handful of caseloads. I actually piloted this idea calling the position a "rover." For brief absence this works well for all concerned, though longer absences require someone dedicated to that one caseload. For example, collective agreements could include limits on caseload size and avenues for reporting with evidence and without individual repercussion, unsafe, unethical work conditions which affect safe practice. Another approach might be to revise the *Employment Standards Act* to include recognition of overwork as "unsafe and unethical" practice.

The third theme "fear of the pointing finger of blame "uncovered a culture of fear that impacts on safe and ethical practice. This recommendation focuses on bringing "out of the closet" the mechanics of the creation of a culture of fear. Social workers must work to reform practice policies and social policies. To do this requires collective action and action in concert with those of common interest such as client and community groups. For example, to deal with organizational denial of the field's fear of the pointing finger of blame, social workers could get together with support from their unions and professional association and clients to expose the culture of fear and its causes. This focus could bring unions and professional associations together around a common goal of supporting social workers in a highly pressured work environment. This focus could allow clients to speak out about the way this culture of fear trickles down to them providing a venue for social workers and their clients to regain a sense of empowerment. Standing together with the support of unions and associations versus remaining isolated and individually vulnerable makes it much harder for an organization to encourage

silence.

As part of dismantling the culture of fear, employers need to ensure that in the terrible event of harm to a child, youth or vulnerable client, the ensuing examination is conducted in such a manner that the culture of fear is *not* further entrenched. In order to do this, context would have to be a part of any investigation. This would include such factors as: placing the investigation within the operating statutes, standards and procedures current at the time of incident; efforts made by the social worker to ensure client safety; and the number of cases and caseloads being supervised by the social worker at the time of the incident; and a note made of any structural impediments to ensuring safety.

Questions for Future Study

As I conducted this study several questions popped up leaving me wondering how the answers would impact on the generalizability or uniqueness of the findings of this study. Though tempting it was not possible to stay focused on the research questions at hand yet follow those inquiry side trails. Instead I have listed those questions for future study here hoping that they will provide fodder for future companion research. The questions are as follows:

1. How long do mature social workers stay with their caseloads compared to length of time younger or less experienced social workers stay with their caseloads? Are there similarities or differences between male and female social workers regarding length of time staying with a caseload?
2. What can social workers teach us about the populations they work with? How can social workers raise awareness of poverty, sexism, racism, ableism etc without being the persecuted messenger? By looking at media reactions to these types of issues can we learn more about our capitalist economic system and of the state of the social safety net?
3. What are the pressures and expectations being experienced by male social workers? Are there similarities or differences to the experiences expressed by the women participants of this study? What are the pressures and

expectations being experienced by younger male and female social workers in this same work culture?

4. At this point in time how is social work in the private sector experienced by vulnerable clients?

5. What is the impact on children of moving workers due to "positions filled but no one in them? What is the impact on children of moving them from foster home to foster home?

The complex world of protection and family services social work is more than a set of administrative acts. This complex, messy world requires more than tightly prescribed procedures for ensuring client safety. The inter-relationship between client and social worker is where the "real" work with families is done. To create a system that severely limits this aspect of the work is to increase the likelihood of harm to clients, as participants have told us. When I was first contemplating this research I asked myself a number of general questions which I now think I have some answers to.

The overwork ethic and culture of fear of the participants springs from many sources, their culture, their family values about work, and the expectation of the ministry which in turn are influenced by larger corporate interests. Capital interests promote a managerial approach to government and service delivery dictating a do-more-with-less bottom line. The current work ethic of over-work is maintained by participants through a belief that autonomy exists, through a dogged attempt to meet ministry, client and self-expectations in spite of time, resource and pressure constraints. The work ethic is also maintained by a desire to be seen as competent by colleagues. Individualized social work means that both solutions and problems are laid at the feet of individual workers. This creates a heads down situation where one does what comes ones way.

The beneficiary of such diligence is the employer, with both clients and workers bearing the brunt of the burden of keeping the system going with increasingly few workers and more exclusionary criteria for service. When the job is so overloaded that it can not be done properly, it is the social workers and their clients who take the blame or bear the price. With waning interest in propping up the social safety net the government and those who influence them, need to justify this pulling back to the tax payers and

voters. By dismantling the social safety net to the point that it is not effective and by creating a myth in the public mind that public service is a frill that can no longer be afforded by a financially responsible government, a palatable reason has been constructed with which to re-examine the value of the work that public service, and specifically social workers do. Whom of value do they serve anyway?

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Appendix A

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS TO TALK ABOUT MID-AGED FEMALE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL'S RESPONSES TO WORK PRESSURES

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in this master's thesis study conducted by Sam Sommers, mature graduate student and social worker of 20 year's experience, under the supervision of Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, and thesis committee members, Doctors William Carroll and Elizabeth Bannister. The researcher can be reached at (250) 339-0073 evenings, and 250-334-5850 days. Dr. Reitsma-Street can be reached at (250) 721-6468.

The purpose of this study is to explore the work culture of mid-aged female social workers in their various public sector human service settings. It is hoped that some tacit themes can be made explicit regarding the experiences of mid-age women social worker in their work places.

Participant selection will be based on the first six willing women social worker over 40, working in public services, who contact the researcher.

If you join this study, you will be asked to talk about what you do in a work day; about work pressures and expectations; about how you meet expectations; and about how these expectations are reinforced at your workplace. There will be two interviews taking about 3 to 5 hours in total. Before the interviews are set up, you will be asked for some demographic information, i.e. ethnic origin, age, number of dependents, type of social work, hours of work.

The interviews will be conducted in a quiet and private place of your choosing. To recall what you say in the interview, the researcher will audio-tape record the interviews. To help you recall your day for the interviews, you may want to bring your day timer. At a later time, what was recorded on the tape will be typed with your name and identifying information transformed into pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality. While the study is in progress, the tapes and papers from the study will be kept in a locked file where only one researcher, Sam Sommers, and her supervisor, Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, will have access to the data. Furthermore, once the study is complete, all forms of documentation (tapes, papers, records) will be kept in a locked drawer and will be destroyed one year from the completion of the thesis. No one will be told that you were in the study or where the interview(s) were held. When the researcher publishes the results in a thesis or talks about the results at a meeting, your name will not be in the report. If the researcher uses anything you said, it will be written so that no one will know it was you who said it. Also, the location of your work will be referred to only as a "western community".

I will spend one-half day at your work site to look at any documents and other written materials you think are relevant for me to see, and to get an understanding of how you conduct work at your site.
Joining the study is up to you. You may refuse to be part of the study. Even if you agree to be part of the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw while the study is going on, the researcher will destroy any written or audio-taped information that has been obtained from you during the study. If, as a result of the interview (s), you have any concerns, the researcher will debrief the session with you. If you would like further debriefing, you can access your employee assistance program or the researcher can refer you to appropriate local resources.

If you have any questions, you may ask them at any time. You may ask the researcher at the time of the interview or you may phone her directly. Her telephone number is at the top of this form, as is the name and number of her supervisor. You may also call the Office of Vice-President, Research, Dr. Howard Brunt, Associate VP Research, at (250) 472-4362. You may not benefit directly from the results of this study, but the researcher hope the results will help create an awareness of the work culture of mid-aged female professional social workers in public service and of any themes, issues or concerns that may emerge. You will receive a summary of the research findings when these are available. There are no known risks anticipated in your participation in this study.

Signing this form means that I have been told about what will happen in this study and what I am supposed to do in the study. All my questions have been answered about the study. I give my consent freely to take part in this study based on the fact given to me.

____________________________________ -

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

____________________________________ -

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER DATE

ONE COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM WILL GO TO THE RESEARCHER, AND ONE COPY WILL GO TO THE PARTICIPANT

Appendix B

RESEARCH NOTICE

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

FOR A STUDY OF THE WORK EXPERIENCE OF MID-AGED WOMEN SOCIAL WORKERS (AGES 40-60)

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES? THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO DESCRIBE THE WORK CULTURE OF MID-AGED (AGES 40-60) WOMEN SOCIAL WORKERS IN THEIR VARIOUS PUBLIC SECTOR, HUMAN SERVICE SETTINGS.

IF YOU JOIN THE STUDY YOU WILL BE ASKED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DO IN A DAY AND YOUR RESPONSES TO YOUR WORK DAY. THERE WILL BE 2-3 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW IN A PRIVATE LOCATION OF YOUR CHOOSING REQUIRING 3-5 HOURS OF YOUR TIME IN TOTAL. ALL INTERVIEWS WILL E CONFIDENTIAL AND YOU MAY WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:
SAM SOMMERS, MATURE GRADUATE STUDENT, WITH CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK BACKGROUND AND 20 YEARS OF SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE.
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

UPPER ISLAND NUMBER (250) 339-0073 - EVENINGS OR (250) 334-5850 - DAYS

Appendix C

MID-AGED FEMALE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL, DEMOGRAPHIC DATA:

Date: ______________________

Location of the interview:

____

Assigned Code Name:

____

PART I: Demographics

1) Age: ______________

2) Self Defined Ethnic Origin:

____

A. Number of dependent children?____

B. Number of dependent children living with you?

____

C. Any other dependents living with you?

____

D. Number of persons in household?

____

4) Relationship Status:

____ Married ____ Common-law (includes same sex couples)

____ Single ____ Separated

____ Divorced ____ Other

5) Tertiary Education: (check all that apply)

____ College Program ____ BSW

____ MSW ____ DSW

____ Other

PART II: Employment

6) Type of Social Work that you currently work in?

_____ Child Protection / Guardianship

_____ Clinical type ________________________________
(i.e. mental health, addictions, psychiatry)

_____ Community type ________________________________
(i.e. alcohol & drug prevention, public health)

_____ Hospital type ________________________________
(i.e. discharge planning, psychiatry)

_____ Other type ________________________________

7) Place of employment: ________________________________
(place of employment will be replaced in any written materials or discussion with a code)

Assigned Code: ________________________________

8) Union Affiliation: ________________________________
(Union Affiliation will be replaced in any written materials or discussions with a code)
Assigned Code: ________________________________

9) How long have you been a professional social worker? ________________

10) How long have you worked in your current position? ________________

PART III Contracted Break Times

In the following section, write on the back of the sheets, if you need more space to make comments.

11) How many minutes or hours do you take for the following:
Coffee ________ Lunch ________ Other ________

12) Number of holiday days per year (not including statutory holidays) ________

13) Is there a sick leave provision in your contract? ---- yes ---- no

14) If yes, how does it work?

____

15) What would be an average number of sick days (if any) that you might take in a year?

____

16) What other types of leaves are possible in your job? (for example, maternity leave, educational leave, family illness or death , adoption leave).

____

____

17) In the past decade, have you taken any types of leave? ____ yes ____ no

If yes, what types of leave have you taken?

____

18) Is there paid overtime at your workplace? ____ yes ____ no

comments:

____

____

19) Can overtime be compensated with time off? ____ yes ____ no

comments:

____

____

20) Are people expected to do unpaid or volunteer time at your work place? ____ yes ____ no

comments:

____

____

21) Is there an informal overtime process: ____ yes ____ no

If yes, can you describe it?

____

____

22) Have you worked overtime in the last month/year/decade in any of the above ways?
____ yes ____ no

If yes, which ways/s and when?

____

____

23) Are there any additional comments you wish to make about breaks, leaves, overtime, other?

____

PART IV: Work after Work

24) How many days in the last two week have you:

A. Made work calls in the evening from home? __________

B. Worked after 7:00 p.m. in the office? __________; at home? __________

C. Stayed at work past: 4:30 p.m. ________ 5:30 p.m. ________ 6:30 p.m.________

D. Worked on a weekend day? __________

E. Make work phone calls on a weekend day? __________

F. Make work phone calls from home before going to work in the morning? __________

G. Been thinking about work and planning your workday before you start your morning commute to work? __________

H. Been thinking about work issues in the evening? __________

I. Been thinking about work issues on a weekend day? __________

Thank you.

Appendix D

Community Agency

Date: ___________________

To whom it may concern:

Re: Proposed study entitled: Mid-aged Female Social Work Professionals: Responses to Work Pressures.

I am a mature graduate student from the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria, supervised by Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, DWS. After years of working as a social worker, I am using this master's research thesis to explore: what female social workers do in a day; about what work pressures and expectations they experience; how they meet work expectations; and about how these expectations are reinforced.

The intent of this research project is to analyze the work culture of six mid-aged, female professional social workers in their various public sector human service settings. By conducting the ethnographic interviews, and exploring agency documents such as job descriptions, collective agreements, mission statements etc. I will examine professional and/or agency "sayings", stories, mottos, proverbs, myths and recurrent expressions for themes. In particular the research will look at those themes which reinforce certain attitudes and expectations about acceptable levels of work, and which tell about possible work pressures.

From the results of this proposed study I hope to provide a voice for mid-age women in their social work profession. I also hope to make some of the tacit themes that emerge, explicit in order to raise awareness of social work and the systems within which social workers work. Since their is little literature on mid-age women and work, it is also hoped that this study can add to the literature.

I have submitted my proposal to the University of Victoria Human Ethics committee and have received approval to conduct this study. A copy of the consent will be available at your request. A letter of support for the research from your executive director, is enclosed. Also enclosed is a copy of the letter of consent that I plan to have each participant sign and a notice that would be used to let mid-aged women social workers know about the proposed study.

I would like to ask you to support this research by posting the notice in your agency and by mentioning the notice to your staff. Care will be taken o keep the identities of any participants confidential and anonymous. I would also like to ask your permission to spend one half day at your agency looking at documents.

I would be willing to meet with you to discuss the study and to address any questions you may have. Please let me know if you require any additional information about the proposed study. I have included both mine, my supervisors, and Associate VP Research phone number for your convenience.

Thank you for your attention and assistance to this matter.

Sincerely

Ms. Sam Sommers
Mature Graduate Student

Ms. Sam Sommers (250) 339-0073 - evenings, and 250-334-5850 - days.
Dr. Reitsma-Street can be reached at (250) 721-6468.
Dr. Howard Brunt, Office of Vice President, Research, Associate VP Research (250)472-4362.

Appendix E

Executive Director

Date: ______________________

To ________________________,

Re: Proposed study entitled: Mid-aged Female Social Work Professionals: Responses to Work Pressures.

I am a mature graduate student from the School of social Work at the University of Victoria, supervised by Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street. After years of working as a social worker, I am using the research thesis to explore: what female mid-aged social workers do in a day; about what work pressures and expectation they experience; about how these work expectation are met; about how these expectation are met; about how these expectations are reinforced.

The intent of this research project is to analyze the work culture of six mid-aged, female professional social workers in their various public sector human service settings. By conducting the ethnographic interviews, and exploring agency documents such as job descriptions, collective agreements, mission statements etc. I will examine professional and/or agency "sayings", stories, mottos, proverbs, myths and recurrent expressions for themes. In particular the research will look at those themes which reinforce certain attitudes and expectations about acceptable levels of work, and which tell about possible work pressures.

If any women social workers who meet the above age criteria volunteer to participate in the study, each will be asked about her responses to her work day in 2-3 individual interviews of approximately 3-5 hours in total. These interviews will take place in a private setting of the participant choosing. Care will be taken to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. I would also like to spend one-half day at each participant work site to look at any documents etc. she things would be relevant for me to see as well as to get an understanding of how she conducts work at her site.

From the results of this proposed study I hope to provide a voice for mid-age women in their social work profession. I also hope to make some of the tacit themes that emerge, explicit in order to raise awareness of social work systems within which social workers work, it is also hope that this study can add to the literature.

I am submitting my proposal to the University of Victoria Human Ethics committee for approval to conduct this study. A copy of the consent will be available at your request. Attached is a copy of the letter of consent that I plan to have each participant sign. I have enclosed a notice that would be used to let mid-aged female social work professionals know about the proposed study, and a copy of the letter to the agencies introducing myself and requesting their support. This support would include posting the research notice and allowing me to spend one half day at their agency reviewing documents.

I would like to ask for your support for this research project in the form of a support letter indicating your approval for the researcher to contact agencies in your jurisdiction. The researcher will give copies of this letter to agency directors and to the University of Victoria's Ethics Committee. The researchers mailing address is 936 Sand Pines Crescent, Comox, B.C. V9M 3V2.

I would be willing to meet with you to discuss the study and to address any questions you may have. Please let me know if you require any additional information about the proposed study. I have included mine and my supervisors phone numbers below for your convenience. Upon your request a summary of the findings will be sent to you.

Thank you for your attention and assistance to this matter.

Sincerely

Ms. Sam Sommers
Mature Graduate Student

Ms. Sam Sommers (250) 339-0073 - evenings, and 250-334-5850 - days.
Dr. Reitsma-Street can be reached at (250) 721-6468.

Appendix F

Mid-aged Female Social Work Professionals: Responses to Work Pressures

Guide to Interview Questions

PART I: First Interview

Not all of the following questions may be used in our interview. Rather they will serve as a guide. I see you as the expert of your own experience. I'd like to give you the opportunity to talk about the work that you do here, your everyday experiences and expectations, and the relationship between work and time.

1) Could you pick one work day from this or last week that stands out for you? Can you list the things that you did in this day? How does this day compare to most days? Feel free to look at your daytimer as a reminder, or to journal a workday, ahead of time. Is there anything else you want to say about this day?

2) Let's talk about expectations. What are the expectations of you in a typical work day? Where do these expectations come from?

3) How do you make sense of your day and its activities and expectations, when you are talking with a] close colleagues, b] with supervisors? How do you think other social workers here make sense of their work day?

4) How would you priorize work if there was more than one demand at the same time? Is this the same way you would have done it when you were a younger/less experienced social worker.

5) In question one, I asked you if you could pick one workday that stands out for you and to list the activities in that day. Now I would like to ask you to list the activities you would do in a whole day, from sun up to sun down. It may be the same day that you mentioned earlier or it may be another day that stands out. How does this day compare to most days? Again, feel free to use your day timer or to journal a whole day ahead of time. Is there anything else you would like to say about this day?

6) How do the unpaid activities in your life impact on your paid work here, and visa-versa?

7) Are there any questions or comments you think I should be asking you or hearing from you, that I haven't?

I may ask questions about the number of tasks that you can get completed in the contracted work hours in a day, about how contracted break times actually work, how much work time is organized through computer etc. if these things don't come out through the other questions.

PART II: Subsequent Interview

Most questions for the second interview will originate out of the first interview, thus these questions are only sample/example questions.

1) In our last interview you told me about the list of things you do in a workday. I would like to show you these cards on which I have listed these things separately. Can you group any of these together? Can you show me which of these activities are alike and which are different? How are they alike or different?

2) In the first interview, I asked you about kinds of expectations of you in a typical workday. I have put the kinds of expectations you have told me about onto separate cards. I would like to ask you to cluster the cards into categories. Which of these would require more time? Which are essential? Which are the social worker's priority? Which are the agency's priority? Which are the community's priority? Can you think of other categories to sort the cards into?

3) In the first interview you told me about the list of activities you would do in a whole day. I have listed these things separately. Can you group any of these together? Can you show me which of these activities are alike and which are different? How are they alike or different?

Appendix G: Specification of Parts of the Jobs and Ways of Responding to Them

Dimensions of Contrast →	Supervise more than one caseload	Deal with losses-colleagues, clients	Priorize competing work demands	Desire to pass on wisdom	Fear of blame and inquiry	Loss of confidence and self-esteem	Deal with "horrible" cases	Become more tolerant of self and clients	Come to know that what you do matters	Fear of being seen as incompetent	Become ill: emotion-ally and/or physic-ally	Fear of harm to client	Belief in clients capabil-ities
Contrast Set ↓													
Using accumulated knowledge and wisdom	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	partly	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes
Moving to different situation or quitting	sometimes	sometimes	no	no	yes	sometimes	rarely	no	no	yes	yes	yes	n/a
Relinquishing ideals and attachments	yes	yes	yes	no	often	sometimes	sometimes	yes	yes	yes	no	rarely	yes
Satisfying parts of the job exist	no	no	no	yes	no	no	rarely	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
Noting difficult parts of the job	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	rarely
Covering your butt	yes	no	yes	some-times	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Not having enough time or resources	yes	yes	yes	often	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Taking care of self	yes	yes	yes	partly	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
Lack of organizational support	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	partly	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no

* adapted from Spadley (1979)

VITA

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Title of Thesis:

Swimming in an Endangered Estuary: Female Social Work Professionals' Responses to Work Demands

Author

Charlette Dawn Sommers

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