

RELATIONSHIP-BASED CHILD PROTECTION: PRACTICE INFORMED BY  
INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES.

by

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## ABSTRACT

Relationship-Based Child Protection: Practice Informed by Indigenous Social Work Students in the Northwest Territories.

Master of Social Work, 2014

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This study explores Indigenous perspectives of relationship building and how this perspective might be adapted into a child welfare context. The study was born out of my experience working in child welfare in the community of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The theoretical framework draws from an Anti-Colonial perspective and the research methodology was adapted from critical ethnography to fit the scope of the research project. The sample includes 4 diploma of social work students from Aurora College in Yellowknife Northwest Territories as well as field notes from my personal journals from when I lived in the community and field notes from a data collection trip to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in the Spring of 2014. Findings provide community perceptions of social workers, community standards, a process of relationships-based practice and the benefits to this practice style. Barriers to relationship-based practice are also identified as an area for further exploration.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this MRP to the four social work students who participated in this study.

I cannot say their names for confidentiality reasons.....but you know who you are!

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### **My Rationale**

I worked as a child protection worker in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; during this time I thought about the effects of colonization that I saw each day. I thought about the role that I played in continued colonization through the child welfare system; it did not sit right with me and I wondered what I might do. One thing that was really striking to me was the sense of community and the strong relationships I noticed among my Indigenous<sup>1</sup> clients. I noticed that the relationship was not the same between social workers and the Indigenous community. I suspected there was a barrier and I wondered how to address it. I recognized that the power disparity in the client-worker relationship was one part of the barrier with history and current systemic issues such as racism and poverty, being others. This experience, the questions I had and the dynamics I noticed in my work are what lead me to this research.

### **The Purpose of This Research**

The purpose of this MRP is to explore how relationship-based practice can become a regular form of practice for child protection workers. I use the term relationship-based practice as a practice style, which focuses on the quality of the client-worker relationship. Several scholars, as discussed in my literature review, support this definition by highlighting the characteristics that are necessary for relationship-based practice, including trust, respect collaboration, understanding and emotional depth (Emerson & Magnuson, 2013; Bennette,

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<sup>1</sup> I often hear the term Aboriginal used as a “catch all” to refer to First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. I have been taught in several contexts this is the correct term to use. I notice that the literature sometimes uses the term Aboriginal and other times Indigenous. When I met with participants for this study I asked about their preference. The majority of participants told me that Indigenous was the most appropriate term to use. I use the term Indigenous exclusively in this MRP, despite what the literature has used.

Zubryxchi & Bacon; 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBoer & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000).

I seek to understand this from the perspective of Indigenous social work students in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The methodology used in this research draws from critical ethnography, which is grounded in redistribution of power (Madison, 2005). The theoretical framework of this research draws from Anti-Colonial thought to recognize the historical and current context of colonization and to challenge this by providing decolonizing alternatives to practice (Hart, 2009; Sinclair, 2009).

### **Social Location**

Absolon & Willet (2005) suggest that socially locating at the onset of the writing process is a way to resist colonial writing processes. In an Indigenous perspective socially locating is seen as a way of creating accountability and building trust (Absolon & Willet, 2005). Socially locating is done during introductions through sharing how one fits into the community (Lavallee, 2009). With these suggestions in mind I would like to introduce myself.

Along with my four sisters, I was raised by both of my parents in a double income family in a white middle class resort town in Ontario. For the most part our childhood was easy; our parents encouraged us to learn work ethic through paper routes, baby sitting and shared chores around the home. We had a privileged upbringing which allowed us to participate in extra curricular activities and have all of our basic needs met. I suppose I could say it was a sheltered life. I left home after high school and moved to the west coast. This was the first time I really noticed the disparity of income and opportunities between groups of people. I lived next to a reserve in British Columbia. I wondered about why the people in my community appeared to have many more opportunities than those on the reserve. I wondered why there appeared to be

different challenges in the two communities. This is when I became interested in Indigenous issues. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew it was wrong. I went on to college and then university. In my BSW I learned about colonization and was able to make connections to my previous observations. I wanted to do something about it, so I went to the North. I thought I was prepared, thought I knew what I needed to know about the colonization of Indigenous people. But I was wrong. This was when I discovered that I was still contributing to the problem. I am hopeful that this research will be used to make some positive change.

According to Kennedy, Adams, Bybee, Campbell, Kubiak & Sullivan (2012) social location is where one fits into the intersections of stratified systems, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status etc. Within each of these systems there are varying amounts of privilege, with privilege comes varying amounts of power. Heron (2005) describes that it is necessary for social location that one looks at these intersections to understand ones own place of privilege. Once we have an understanding of our privilege(s) we can begin to implicate ourselves by understanding the power that we hold in certain contexts. Within the context of this research my privileges are rooted in race, job, education, up bringing and opportunities.

I embark on this research from my social work practice experience. Because I am white I had mixed feelings about working in the North and I consulted one of my Indigenous professors. The advice that he gave me was to never forget the history of colonization of Indigenous people and the generational trauma that has resulted from it. Additionally he reminded me to continue to unpack my own privileges through understanding of my social location. This is what I did and this is how I discovered that I was contributing to the problem. I would like to note that as I entered my work in the North concerned about my whiteness, I also entered this research process with the same concerns.

## **My Whiteness**

According to Simpson & Yun (2011) Whiteness often has the following components 1) the privileges that come with race, 2) white ontology and 3) cultural practices that are generally invisible to the white person. When I worked in the North I was reminded of my whiteness on a daily basis. I did not understand community standards, child rearing practices and I had never been a subject of colonization. The discomfort that I experienced in my role was multi layered and troubled me. The theoretical colonization and generational trauma that I had learned about were no longer theoretical; they were the reality of people's lives. I contributed to continued colonization through my role as a child protection worker. I was governed by policies that in my opinion did not seem to align with some of the ways of being that I noticed in the Indigenous community. For example, I noticed that many Indigenous families would let their children play at the park; there would be several children of all ages playing together. Parents of all children would be checking up and older siblings and community members would be watching the younger children. In the social work context<sup>2</sup> that I worked in, this was not safe. I remember playing at a park with some children while my colleague searched for the parents to explain what was an acceptable level of supervision might look like.

I struggled with the demands and expectations of the job, while attempting to be what I thought was a "good" social worker. I experienced criticisms from colleagues for my practice of "letting the parents run the show", which was my attempt at trying to balance power, or practice Anti-Opressively. I worked with one family for about 10 months; there were concerns and there were also strengths. I saw a single mother who worked hard and wanted to be independent. I

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that in my experience working in the Northwest Territories the term social work is considered synonymous with child protection. This is because the vast majority of social workers in the Northwest Territories are child protection workers. Keeping within the context of this study, I also use the terms synonymously.

provided her with the support she identified she needed and I remained honest with her about my concerns. I felt we worked together and when I left she wished me well told me that she would miss me. I knew then that I had done something right, despite the disapproval from my colleague.

I entered the MSW program at Ryerson and continued to reflect on and deconstruct this experience. I continue to struggle with my power and privileges as a white social worker, the fact that I have never experienced poverty, trauma or marginalization and how I could use my privilege to the advantage of the people I serve, rather than as a tool of oppression. I wish to use my power and privileges, to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities through conducting research with a decolonizing agenda. Baskin (2005) maintains that if we do not conduct decolonizing research with Indigenous communities, then what there is no meaningful point of conducting the research.

I hope this research is viewed with my intention in mind and that Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories will realize some benefits. In simple terms, when I say “decolonizing” what I mean is to redistribute power, through challenging oppressive colonial systems. In this research I have done this in two ways 1) I consulted and learned from the Indigenous literature, community members and the participants of this study 2) I challenged the status quo of child welfare practice by including opinions of Indigenous social work students.

### **How I Challenge the System**

Several scholars discuss the child welfare system as being rooted in colonial practices, many of which are not necessarily relevant to Indigenous communities (Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow, 2002; Hart, 2002; Sinclair, 2009). This problem is historical, multi faceted and must include Indigenous perspectives. In this research I make the assumption

that culturally appropriate service provision can help to shape a new future of practice, one that moves away from the historical disparity of power in the child welfare system. I argue that one way to do this is through relationship-based child protection practice, which I explored in this study and will discuss for the remainder of this paper.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Indigenous Families and Child Welfare**

While this MRP is not specifically about the historical context of colonization of Indigenous people through the child welfare system, I think it is important to pay respect through recognition. One of the common themes in the literature that I have reviewed is the importance of this history with respect to understanding current day practices and systems. History is also central to the study design of critical ethnography (Madison, 2005). In addition, I strongly feel that exclusion of a basic understanding of this history would be a disservice to this research and to the Indigenous participants involved in this study.

Research with Indigenous communities must involve a historical understanding of colonization, assimilation and power and how these affect Indigenous communities (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Bull, 2010; Harms, Middleton, Whyte, Anderson, Clarke, Sloan, Hagal, & Smith, 2011; Lavallee, 2009; Baskin, 2003). This understanding is a key starting point for the decolonization process and particularity relevant to social workers working in child welfare with Indigenous communities (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow, 2002).

Several scholars have discussed current child welfare practices of apprehensions and placements of Indigenous children in out of home care, as an extension of the residential school era (Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow, 2002; Hart, 2002; Sinclair, 2009). The historical time line that is demonstrated in the literature begins with social workers removing Indigenous children from reserves and placement in residential schools (Sinclair, 2009). Residential schools were church run educational facilities that were designed to assimilate Indigenous children to western culture and religion, by extension destroying their connection to

their families, culture, language and communities (Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004). As residential schools began to close there was a shift to what became known as the “sixties scoop”. From 1960 to 1990 the general practice in child welfare was to remove Indigenous children from their biological families and adopt them into non-Indigenous families (Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004).

Today there is an over representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, and living in out of home care (Pon, Gosline, & Phillips, 2011; Baskin, 2003; Isaac & Stokes, 2009; Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004). Pon, Gosline & Phillips (2011) state that there are three times the amount of Indigenous children in out of home care today then there were at the height of residential schools. Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock (2004) argue that overrepresentation is related to a number of disadvantages, which present as risk factors (unstable housing, substance use, low income). Risk factors often present as neglect and are therefore viewed as neglect, with little space for consideration of the underlying reason for the risk factor. The large majority of Indigenous families are investigated for neglect, while the underlying cause is actually systemic poverty (Blackstock, 2009).

The child welfare system has been described as being based on White/mainstream ideals, values and child rearing practices (Crichlow, 2002; Long & Septhon, 2011) and is inadequate for addressing the issues that cause over representation of Indigenous children (Isaac & Stokes, 2009). Blackstock (2009) discusses that a fundamental difference between mainstream and Indigenous ideals is the concept of time. She discusses “seven generations” as individuals and communities learning from the wisdom of the past seven generations and considering the consequences to the next seven generations. She stated that this does not happen in a meaningful way in the current child welfare system.

Further mainstream ideals have been described as in conflict with Indigenous familial relations and child rearing practices (Crichlow, 2002; Hart, 2002; Long & Septhon, 2011). Indigenous ontology posits that healthy or well communities raise healthy children (Blackstock, 2009). Communities work together to raise children. In my experience I have noticed that mainstream child rearing is familial based, where Indigenous child rearing is community based and extended family members are actively involved in raising children. In addition Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock (2004) speak about the importance of race matching foster parents to provide some continuity and community connection for children when they are in care.

### **Colonization and Racism**

Colonization can be understood as re-arrangement, re-representation and re-distribution of knowledge, practices and goods (Smith, 1999). Colonization is responsible for the production of the idea of the “other” (Smith, 1999). Hart (2002) describes colonization as beginning with the destruction of Indigenous economic systems; this is when power was first demonstrated. The process of colonization can be described as subordination, removal of lands, children and traditional systems, effectively and intentionally destroying language, culture and traditions (Morrissette, MacKenzie & Morrissette, 1993; Hart, 2002). Colonization has created cyclical effects of economic dependency, poverty, unemployment, internalized colonization and internalized oppression (Morrissette, MacKenzie & Morrissette, 1993; Hart, 2002).

Colonization inherently creates a racialized analysis, which supports a superior and inferior way of being and doing (Morrissette, MacKenzie & Morrissette, 1993). Several scholars discuss the key role that race plays in colonization; that racism is inherent, inevitable and important to the conversation of colonization (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006; Absolon & Willet, 2005). When legislation is based on mainstreams ideals, such as

child welfare legislation, it creates space for other ways of being to be deemed as deviant. This is the foundation of racism in the child welfare system.

There is little space for a conversation of cultural norms or appropriateness. In this way, as described by Morrissette, MacKenzie & Morrissette (1993) the child welfare system in Canada is a tool to support a racist colonial agenda, which is demonstrated by the over representation of Indigenous children (Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Baskin, 2003; Isaac & Stokes, 2009) and through service design and provision that do not adequately address issues of structural poverty (Crichlow, 2002; Long & Sephton, 2011; Baskin, 2003; Isaac & Stokes, 2009; Blackstock & Trocme, 2005).

### **Indigenous Perspective on Relationships**

An Indigenous worldview is centered on spirituality, there are several pillars to this including wholeness, balance, relationships, harmony, growth, healing and *mino-pimatisiwin* (the good-life) (Hart, 2009; Morrissette, MacKenzie & Morrissette, 1993). Relatedness, or connectedness is one of the primary values in Indigenous communities (Baskin, 2005).

Relationship building is fundamental to working with and conducting research with Indigenous communities (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Baskin, 2005) and the foundation of a positive relationship is honesty and respect (Harms et al, 2012). Building positive relationships may look slightly different between cultures; however, much of the literature I reviewed identifies similarities between what defines a positive relationship, or what qualities must be present (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBore & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000).

Introductions are the first point of relationship building in Indigenous communities; including sharing how one fits into the community (Absolon, & Willett, 2005; Lavaelle, 2009;

Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011). The introduction is an important aspect of relationship building, it is an opportunity to share with one another. Beyond the introduction, clients want to be heard and to be treated with respect, dignity and honesty (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBore & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000). Relationships building in conducting research, as communities members and in work with Indigenous communities is a process of slowly building trust. Contrary to a western perspective, the relationship does not end because the work together does (Baskin, 2005).

In an Indigenous world view, the helping relationship is an important aspect of the process of helping, meaning that the nurturing of this relationship is an important part of the help that is offered (Hart, 2002). When there is a focus on relationship building it brings harmony or balance to the power imbalance (Malloch, 1989; Ross, 1996, as cited in Hart, 2002). Harmony, or balanced power can be achieved through the way in which helpers deliver help. Indigenous helpers who bring this concept of relatedness and relationships building to their help, are able to provide help in such a way that defies expectations of one who is helping and one who is helped.

### **Relationship Building in Child Welfare**

This section discusses studies I have reviewed that have provided me with some of the challenges to, predictors of and outcomes of building positive relationships in a child welfare context. This section includes studies that were done with Indigenous participants, which are indicated by “Indigenous communities/families” and studies that were with done with mainstream or a mixed sample of participants.

DeBore and Coady (2007) advise that relationship building in child welfare can be difficult and indicate that obstacles include high caseloads, unpredictability of work, paper work

and client-worker power imbalances. Additionally, anxiety, uncertainty and the sensitive subject matter work against relationship-based practice in child welfare (DeBore & Coady, 2007).

Some predictors of a positive client-worker relationship are the presence of open communication and the frequency of visits (Lee & Ayon, 2004). In Indigenous communities, key characteristics of positive client-worker relationships include respect, an understanding of Indigenous ways, deep listening, stillness, accurate understanding of events, sensitivity, communication and being spoken to in a calm and respectful manner. In addition, the delivery of adequate information in a manner that makes sense and not jumping to conclusions or making judgments have been identified as important characteristics to working with Indigenous communities. (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon; 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBore & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000).

Some of the positive outcomes of relationship-based practice can include increased honest disclosures, mutual ownership over service plans and increases in appropriate assessments and interventions (DeBore & Coady, 2007). In addition, positive client-worker relationships can work to challenge current perceptions of the child welfare system DeBore & Coady (2007) and have been associated with positive outcomes in parents ability to cope and to address the physical needs of their children (Lee & Ayon, 2004). Additionally, building trusting and respectful relationships and redistribution of power can help in the decolonization process with Indigenous communities (Harms et al, 2012).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

I think it is first important to note that I do not claim to have reviewed all relevant literature on this topic, as I do not believe is possible with in the context of an MRP. I have reviewed two types of literature for this research, theoretical literature which has contributed to

my understanding of many of the concepts discussed and studies, which have shown me what has been explored related to my topic, thus leading me to knowledge gaps. I have learned that the way this topic has been studied has produced a natural gap, which I seek to address in this research. For me the questions left unanswered are 1) *How* are relationships built in Indigenous communities 2) *what* might child welfare workers learn and implement from this.

The studies I reviewed were qualitative in nature, but did not use the methodology of critical ethnography. This may have been due to the time necessary to conduct ethnographic research. While this research does not completely fill this gap, given my own time restrictions, I was able to bring an element of lived experience in the community. Of the studies I reviewed none of the research was conducted in the Northwest Territories. It has been my experience that the Northwest Territories does host many research studies each year, however it could be that they are more related to natural sciences and health rather than social work. In addition studies I reviewed did not speak openly about a theoretical framework of Anti-Colonialism, the impact that this lens might bring to the research, or explicitly indicate a decolonizing agenda. It is important to note that several scholars discuss the importance of using an Anti-Colonial framework (Baskin, 2005; Hart, 2009; Sinclair, 2009), however was is found in theoretical literature, not studies.

The above gaps in the literature might be due to the goals of the particular studies I reviewed, the populations who participated in the studies or researchers positionality, world view and experiences. In addition there were studies that I reviewed that were not conducted with Indigenous communities which would also be relevant to consider when identifying knowledge gaps.

I noticed that there is a lack of Indigenous service users perspectives regarding what is considered a positive relationship within a child welfare context, as much of the research I found specifically about this was conducted in white/mixed race communities. This could be a consideration in future research endeavours.

The literature provides us with characteristics of what a positive relationship looks like from the perspective of non-Indigenous service users (Dale, 2004; Platt, 2008), and experienced Indigenous social workers (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Bessarab & Crawford, 2010). The literature provides an Indigenous perspective of the knowledge that social workers should have regarding colonization and cultural relevance (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow, 2002). I have not discovered literature that specifically addresses how social workers can understand an Indigenous perspective of relationships and relationship building, what the importance of relationships are to Indigenous service users/communities and what steps can be taken to include this perspective into regular child welfare practice.

I think that my study fills this gap by including the perspective of Indigenous social work students in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. I think this is a unique population because in addition to their Indigenous perspective, they have lived in communities where social work is widely known and negatively viewed, coupled with their social work lens. I also think that my study fills this gap because my research question is concerned with exploring how front line workers can begin to build positive relationships that are relevant to the community they serve. Through the theoretical lens and my personal lens draw from Anti-Colonialism, coupled with a critical ethnography methodology, I seek to challenge power and assume that due to this historical context, power is a barrier to relationship-based practice.

## **Importance and Relevance to AOP**

Anti-oppressive practice is concerned with subordinate/dominate power relations in social relationships (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Anti-Oppressive Practice calls for a focus on creating spaces that promote empowerment and working in partnership through practice and knowledge production (Poole, Jivraj, Arslanian, Bellows, Chiasson, Hakimy, Pasini, & Reid, 2012). Through recognition and challenge of power imbalances Anti-Oppressive social workers are described as those who embody a person-centered philosophy with a focus on power sharing, egalitarian values and challenges to the status quo (Poole et al, 2012; Larson, 2009). Anti-Oppressive social work empowers clients to become aware of the wider oppressive social systems and gives voice to oppressed groups to affect both personal and social change (Payne, 2005). Social workers working in Indigenous communities have a responsibility to understand and consider the impacts of colonization, privilege and dominant culture (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Harms et al, 2011) . Payne (2005) argues that the understanding of social injustice is a key component and starting point of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Within the context of child welfare in Indigenous communities, social workers need to understand the historical context and actively seek to challenge the systems of continued colonization in collaboration with the community. In the context of this research, the relevance to Anti-Oppressive Practice is the discussion of historical and contemporary colonization, understanding the Indigenous perspective of relationships building and providing practice recommendations based on this perspective. In addition this research helps me to nurture my own Anti-Oppressive Practice through personal transformation in how I will conduct my work going forward. With this in mind, social workers and researchers are important aspects of the decolonization process (Baskin, 2003).

I take the position in my MRP that decolonization is an important aspect of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Challenges to continued colonization of the child welfare system through a critique of service delivery fits in with an Anti-Oppressive Practice agenda of addressing social injustices. By including Indigenous voices to propose an alternative way of practice I critique the current practice standards. Further Anti-Oppressive Practice seeks to redistribute power and critique power relations which are central to this MRP, and become visible through the goal of suggestions for collaborative practice. It is in this context that this research is important to Anti-Oppressive Practice because it challenges the status quo of the child welfare service provision and seeks to understand how it can be more relevant to Indigenous communities based on Indigenous perspectives.

Through the theoretical lens and the methodology of this research, I bring attention to unequal power in the child welfare system; I seek to challenge power by understanding how to build positive collaborative relationships where power sharing is central. That said, I recognize that this study is small, and is a starting point to understanding how to build relationship-based practice.

Razack (1998) challenges the idea of innocence and states that it is necessary to implicate oneself in the systems of oppression and ask how we are complacent. I think that it is important to Anti-Oppressive Practice that as researchers/social workers we implicate ourselves. I have been transparent in this MRP about my role in the child welfare system, the discomfort I experienced with being an agent of colonization and my suggestion from the field of how this might be addressed. I think this study is important because it is not a theoretical concept; there is a real problem in child welfare service delivery that is currently affecting people's lives. I also think this research is important because through my community consultation I have been advised

that the community is in support of this research and research like it, as it is viewed as helpful to the process of decolonization and Self Governance.

Furthermore, Anti-Oppressive Practice has been criticized for the lack of recognition of the intersections of racism and the racist colonial agenda (Pon, Gosline & Phillips, 2011; Absolon & Willet, 2005), in this research I push the boundaries of Anti-Oppressive Practice through my methodology, approach and the theoretical lens and personal lens I bring to this research.

## **CHAPTER 3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Personal Connection**

This research draws from concepts of Anti-Colonialism. I will describe the theoretical framework, and the significance of it to this project, but first I would like to take a moment to describe the significance for myself. It is important to me that I am transparent with my experiences, personal lens, assumptions and values with regard to social work and this research.

From my work experience in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and my training as a social worker, I have developed a strong belief in the resistance of colonial forces and the ongoing affects and practices of colonization. On several occasions I felt I was a “contradiction” of this in my role as a child protection worker. Concepts of power, decolonization and solidarity with the Indigenous community are important to me on both a personal and professional level. My personal lens is what has guided my selection of critical ethnography as the methodology and Anti-Colonial influence for my theoretical framework. These were purposeful choices that I selected as I felt they were respectful and supportive of the Indigenous community.

### **Anti-Colonialism**

The intention of this framework is to 1) recognize the ongoing affects of colonization, 2) to recognize the very important and troubled history of oppression of Indigenous people in Canada, 3) and to challenge oppressive systems of power and privilege in an act of resistance and decolonization.

I draw from concepts of Anti-Colonialism and I understand it as stated by Hart (2009), that Anti-Colonialism is a social, political and cultural stance. Anti-Colonialism challenges current oppressions rooted in a colonial framework by critiquing the historical and contemporary oppression of Indigenous people (Sinclair, 2009). Further, Anti-Colonialism supports resistance,

decolonization and the reclaiming of culture and rights of Indigenous people. In this view Anti-Colonialism enables and supports Indigenous centered practice (Sinclair, 2009).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Anti-Colonialism questions institutional power and privilege (Hart, 2009). When considering the child welfare system, Anti-Colonialism provides the platform to question the relevance of specific legislation such as the Child and Families Services Act, the governing body that delivers child welfare services and within the context of this research specific practice styles of front line child welfare workers. A strength of Anti-Colonialism in this context is that it allows me to consider what influences front line practice such as practice standards, legislation and top down directives. While this research focuses on the individual practice of front line workers, I understand that practice style is largely influenced from the “higher” powers. Anti-Colonialism in this context would look at the big picture of child welfare, the rules and regulations, not the nuisances of individual workers. The limitation to this is that Anti-Colonialism does not provide me with a platform of what individual frontlines workers bring to the work, as such through the Anti-Colonial lens I understand workers to be “doing what they are told” by a predetermined set of expectations. My hope is that recommendations from this research for front line work would be taken up by policies that inform practice standards.

### **Anti-Colonial Assumptions and Perspectives**

Razack, Smith & Thobani (2010) state that colonization is the beginning of the rise of the exalted nation subject, or what they refer to as “the citizen”. Lawrence & Dua (2005) remind us that the history of colonization must be present in our minds as current day experiences are a product of nationalism. Lawrence & Dua (2005) state that if we treat the past as something that has ended, we then treat Indigenous nationhood as something of the past; this leaves Indigenous

people in a place whereby they are forced to embrace the prescribed national identity, or remain on the margins of settler nationhood.

The exalted national subject as described by Thobani (2007) is an ideal that a certain person, or group of people, embody specific characteristics. Thobani (2007) describes that those who do not appear to represent these characteristics are categorized as “other”. She describes “othering” as the blame for ones failure in society, which is further exemplified by the success of a few. This could imply that those who demonstrate more White or mainstream characteristics are more successful than those who do not. This allows the mainstream to continue to be successful at the expense of the “other”, and to continue to believe that they have inherent worth that the “other” simply does not. Similarly, Fee & Russell (2007) note that Whiteness can be attributed to a specific set of behaviours, that are historically variable, contested and often unknown to the white person.

If we look at child rearing and the child welfare system in the Northwest Territories, we might apply this thinking. In my experience there was an over representation Indigenous families that were involved with child welfare. My estimation based on my experience is that approximately 90% of families were Indigenous, while the population of Indigenous people in Yellowknife is approximately 30% (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2011). With the idea of Nationalism in mind we might suspect that the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is because child rearing in Indigenous communities differs from that of the dominant culture, or the regulations outlined in the child welfare legislation. This is one example of continued colonization and through the lens of Anti-Colonialism I see the problem of governance and legislation as rooted in these ideas of nationalism.

Pon, Gosline & Phillips (2011) discuss the rise of the exalted white social worker as a representation of these desirable characteristics. White social workers positioned themselves as being moral, caring and kind, and juxtaposed this to Indigenous mothers as deficient and impaired. This served as a rationale for white social workers to “save” Indigenous children during the residential school era and continues today by placing them in out of home care through the child welfare system. In this way social work is implicated in supporting the colonial agenda through the child welfare system (Baillie, 2009).

White female social workers are further able to distance themselves from the status of exalted national subject as Razack (1998) describes that white women are able to retreat to a position of subordination in their status as women, and therefore are unable to be oppressors. Fee & Russell (2007) describe “innocent ignorance” as white female social workers who have continued permission to conduct oppressive activities, as we are able to avoid implicating ourselves in the systems of oppression.

Overall the issue is large and historical, the problem is that there is an over representation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system, which is comprised of many non-Indigenous social workers, policy makers and policies. Anti-Colonialism is concerned with challenging a larger institutional agenda, and for purposes of this MRP I see this process as beginning in front line work. Top down change is inaccessible within the scope of this research, so I look to the front line of service provision to attempt to affect change. If Indigenous social work students can make recommendations to improve front line practice than perhaps practice standards will draw from these ideas.

## **Anti-Colonial Influences**

This project was designed from my personal desire to conduct research that is decolonizing. This desire comes from my past work experience and the inner conflict I experienced while working in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. I recognize that I am white and I am conducting research in Indigenous communities that have historically been exploited in this context (Brown & Strega, 2005). Recognizing that my scope and opportunities for decolonization are limited I decided the design of this project needed to be specific and the first aspect is to be transparent. I have been transparent in my writing and communications with the community. I made every effort to create a “level playing field” during my interactions with participants. As I am studying relationship building, I attempted to build relationships with participants, through the presentation, the face-to-face interviews and the opportunity for transcript review. Additionally, the community will remain informed through to dissemination of this study.

## CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

### Critical Ethnography

In this research I have used a modified version of critical ethnography. I will begin by discussing critical ethnography and how I used it through this research. I will then discuss the specific modifications I have made to fit in with the scope of this MRP.

Critical ethnography includes recognition of the current and historical local context (Madison, 2005) and begins with a responsibility to address social injustice within a particular context. The goal of critical ethnography is to challenge the status quo of dominant powers within the context of a specific society (Oladele, Richter, Clark, & Laing, 2012; Madison, 2005; Fassin, 2013). With a focus on challenging power and oppression, critical ethnography has been described as “doing” critical theory (Madison, 2005). Critical ethnography emphasizes the importance of social position, of both the researcher and the participants as a way to understand subjectivities, power and privileges of the researcher (Oladele, Richter, Clark, & Laing, 2012).

During my data collection, I considered my position as a researcher and as an individual who had practiced within the community. I intended to create an equal space in all of my interactions with participants. One of the ways that I did this was through the way I conducted interviews, as discussed in the data collection section.

Ethnography focuses on a culture group, generally the group is large but according to Creswell (2007) sometimes this group may be small. Ultimately this research focuses on Indigenous community members as a culture group, however the perspective is limited as it is represented by a small group of Indigenous social work students and my self as a non-Indigenous child protection worker. Ethnography looks at patterns within the culture group of shared values

and beliefs (Creswell, 2007). Ethnography includes the use of participant observation, described by Creswell (2007) as the researcher immersing themselves into the day-to-day life of the culture group while making observations. While I did not immerse myself during the time I conducted this research, I did immerse myself when I lived in the community. For this reason my participant observations will consist of what I learned during the year that I lived in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories by looking at my journals from this time as well as my undocumented experiences of what I learned while living in the community. The knowledge that I gain during this time is what guided my interactions with participants and also how I was able to gain access to the community.

Creswell (2007) states that an ethnographer gains entrance into the community through a gatekeeper or key information. In the case of my study I was able to gain access to the social work students through an instructor at the school of social work at Aurora College in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The instructor was introduced to me from a previously developed relationship I had from when I lived in the community. The instructor distributed my recruitment flyer to students and provided me with a room for my recruitment presentation.

Ethnography selects specific themes to observe and discuss with participants (Creswell, 2007), and in my study additional themes I looked for in my journal. In the case of my study the general theme is relationship building, which is broken into subthemes of cultural norms in relationship building and how this could be adapted to a child welfare context.

Creswell (2007) identifies reciprocity and respect as vital to conducting critical ethnography. He further mentions that presenting the research to the culture group as a way to provide information on the research and as an opportunity to share information about the researcher. Respect and reciprocity are both important aspects of relationship building. In my

interactions with participants I attempted to demonstrate that I did not know the answers and that I valued participants thoughts and experiences. I paraphrased, used clarifying questions and gave opportunities for people to share what they thought was important outside of the question guide. I explained to participants that I wanted to fully understand their meaning, rather than attempting to create my own meaning from their words.

### **Modifications**

Because this research project was born out of my experience in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, I bring my past into this MRP. I recognize that this project may vary from a typical ethnography, due to the forms of data collected and the constraints of time. In a typical ethnography the researcher would spend long periods of time in the community they are researching. Time was a huge limitation for me in this research, so I draw from my previous experience of living in the community. This research includes my personal journals and observations from the year I lived in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, which for purposes of the MRP I call field notes. This past spring I was lucky enough to be able to visit Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to collect further data for this research. Again due to the limitations of time my exposure to participants was limited. I collected data through participant interviews as well as observations which I refer to as field notes. In a typical ethnography researchers might have several conversations with each participant, in my study my conversations were limited to one interview and email correspondence. Sample size has been modified to meet the scope of this project to include four participants in addition to my field notes. In addition I collected field notes from my recruitment presentation and interactions with my key informant/gate keeper.

## **Sample**

As previously discussed I used past and present field notes. For the past field notes, I read through the personal journal that I kept when I lived in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to pull out themes that were relevant to my work in child welfare and my experience in the community. In addition to this journal, I draw from my experiences that I did not document that have influenced my perception of child welfare and the community. For example, I began each interview with sharing with participants that when I lived in the community I observed that families and community members appeared to be very close and helpful with one another.

For present field notes, I made observations during my presentation and my interactions with participants. Included in these interactions, are my face-to-face interactions, such as individual interviews and my email correspondence with each participant.

In addition to the mentioned field notes, I collected data through the use of qualitative interviews. This sample of participants was recruited through the use of criterion sampling, described by Creswell (2007) as all participants meeting a specific pre-determined set of criterion. For this study inclusion criteria includes self-identity as Indigenous and self-identify as a student in the social work diploma program at Aurora College in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. As I will discuss further, I recruited participants from a presentation or lay summary that I held in the school of social work at Aurora College in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. For confidentiality reasons I will not be specific about the gender, the Band or the community participants identified with; I will say participants shared a range of background and identities with me. In total I conducted four 1- 1.5 hour interviews with four participants, making a total of four interviews.

## **Recruitment**

A recruitment flyer discussing the basic goal of the research and the time and location details of the presentation was sent to my key informant/gate keeper who then distributed it to all social work students via email and hung flyers throughout the school of social work.

A Lay Summary is what Madison (2005) describes as an opportunity to share with participants who you are, what your interests are and your personal rationale for conducting the specific research. In my study the lay summary could be considered the recruitment presentation that I held and invited all social work students at Aurora College in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; this was my primary recruitment strategy.

The lay summary began with an introduction of myself, my experience working in child welfare in the community and an explanation of my MRP and requirements of the MSW program. I included a brief overview of the literature reviewed specifically the importance of relationships in Indigenous communities and the over representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. I provided a brief overview of critical ethnography and the Anti-Colonial theoretical framework and my rationale for drawing from these in this research. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss what they had learned in their classes, as related to the general discussion of the research. I explained what I was asking of participants including 1 interview lasting approximately 1 hour, that the interview would be recorded, transcribed and they would be given a transcript review period. I explained the informed consent process including the opportunity to review the consent form prior to meeting with me and that the interview would begin after we had gone over the form together, signed it and were each given a copy. I provided instructions of how to contact me and how long I would be in

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. I also explained that I would provide a \$20 honorarium to demonstrate my appreciation of their participation.

There was a light lunch provided to all who attended the lay summary, which was provided in collaboration by the instructors in the school of social work and myself. There were approximately 15 people present for the lay summary including 3 instructors.

### **Data Collection**

My past field notes were gathered from my personal belongings. In addition I used present filed notes, which were collected during my visit to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories including the lay summary and my interactions with participants.

Data was also collected in the form of individual interviews with social work students. Interviews as described by Madison (2005) are a dialogue where questions are used as a guide to an open dialogue for a conversation style interview. Interview questions were based on two themes. 1) The meaning and cultural significance of relationships, and how relationships are built and nurtured in the community, 2) How might this understanding translate to child welfare; what views and values social workers must hold and what steps social workers might take toward this.

During each interview I asked opened ended clarifying questions, paraphrased and asked participants if I understood their meaning correctly. This was important to ensure I accurately understood, to provide participants with space to correct me and to gain their confidence of my understanding of their story. Through the way I asked questions, the manner I conducted myself, and my intention of learning from participations I attempted to create a collaborative space for sharing knowledge. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and participants were given a two-week period to review the transcript and request segment exclusions prior to data coding. This

was done to ensure that participants had adequate opportunity to convey what they wished and to ensure that I understood them. I emailed the transcript in a passcode protected document to the participants with clear instructions regarding their two-week period. I explained to participants that if they did not send me an email by the required date I would consider that they were in agreement with the transcript I presented to them. One participant responded that they had read the material and were ok with it, one responded that they did not read it but were ok with what had been discussed and two participants did not respond at all.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was coded using clustering, where data is grouped into large general themes, or high level coding (Madison, 2005). From the large general themes, concrete themes, or low-level themes emerged; these themes guided the analysis (Madison, 2005).

I began by reading through my past field notes and collecting large general themes. I wrote out the themes on pieces of paper and using post- it notes I took quotes from my journal with each corresponding theme. I then went through this same process with my present field notes and included them to the existing themes and created new themes.

As I conducted interviews I began to notice themes. I was very aware of this and made every effort to not focus on these themes, but to allow the interview conversations to naturally take shape. I was very careful in the interview not to be guided by the emerging themes I was noticing.

Transcriptions were the second method of noticing for themes. I was also aware during this time that the data could change as a result of the two-week review period. Once I had received approval, or inferred approval I listened to each recording again and wrote down all of the themes that stood out to me. For each participant I assigned a coloured highlighter and I drew

a line down the page. I then read through each transcript again and highlighted quotes that appeared to correspond with the themes, and in some cases new themes emerged. I then cut each of the highlighted sections and piled them according to each theme.

Creswell (2007) describes interpretive perspective as a method of analysis whereby the researcher searches the previously developed clusters, or themes, to identify irregularities or commonalities. I selected the themes that I had identified from both the interviews and my field notes and I began to compare and contrast them among one another.

According to Fassin (2013) there is an important connection between the researcher and the participants that reoccurs during the writing process. This concept is important for this research project to allow the voices of the participants to come through in my analysis and writing. Interestingly, during data analysis I imagined the sound of participants voices while I was analysing the data. In this way participants helped to guide the analysis because I could remember the stories that they accentuated. Interpretation is in collaboration, which is a distinguishing aspect of critical ethnography Fassin (2013), and what Oladele, Richter, Clark, & Laing, (2012) refer to as “merging of voice”. Creswell (2007) describes a cultural portrait as when the views of the research (etic) and the participants (emic) are incorporated together. Because I was careful to understand participants to the best of my ability within this scope, the merging of voice, or cultural portrait is somewhat achieved. One limitation to this is that there was far too much data and far too much that participants expressed as important for me to actually fit into the page limit of this MRP. For this reason I had to choose the themes that were either discussed at length by participants or most strongly emphasized by participants.

Additionally, data analysis included a critique of the research process and the study design, as well as a reflection of how the research experiences have affected the researcher (Creswell, 2007) as discussed in the discussion section.

## CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

### **Too Much Data!**

It is important to note that during this research I collected enough data to write three papers, as such I had to limit the data used here to the perception of social work<sup>3</sup> in the communities, how participants suggested positive relationships might be fostered and what the benefits of this might be.

I begin by painting a picture of how participants described the perceptions, stigma and general outlook of social workers and their role in the community. Through discussion with participants and later through my data analysis, it became clear to me that there is much overlap between the way the participants described the functioning of their homes communities and the advice they would give to social workers working in their communities. For this reason I have decided to weave the themes that emerged through discussion about community standards and social work practice together to develop a process of relationship building. The process of how relationships are built is rooted in community standards and translated to a social work context. These findings will be presented next and followed by what benefits might be seen from relationship-based practice in child welfare and the potential problem to implementation.

Before I detail the mentioned findings, I would like to briefly highlight some other important themes that came up. The reason I noted these as important themes is because they were discussed by participants at length and are consistent with the literature.

### **Supported By the Literature**

Firstly, as supported by literature (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Bull, 2010; Harms et al, 2011; Lavalley, 2009; Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline, & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow,

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<sup>3</sup> In my experience and conveyed to me by participants, the majority of social workers in the Northwest Territories are child protection workers and many of these social workers are not from the Northwest Territories.

2002), and as outlined in my literature review a solid understanding of both the historical and contemporary context of colonization was considered by participants to be critical to working in the North. This included the role social workers have played, the connection that all people have to residential schools and the generational trauma that exists as a result of colonization. In addition to the larger historical understanding, social workers need to demonstrate some level of understanding of the specific community and family they are working with.

“History for sure....to understand the impact of what happened. If you came to the NWT not knowing about residential schools you came to the wrong place! You really need to understand the community that you work with” (P2).

This would include having some background information on the family, but also being opened minded to learn about the family from the family. Not jumping to conclusions about what the problem is, rather, asking the family what is going on and what they need.

“ The best way to get it [background information] is from the client. You need to be willing to listen, ask them questions about their life” (P2).

When workers are new to the community it is also helpful to get a full picture of the family history from other workers before acting. A participant shared a story with me that was about a nurse who was new to the community who did not understand the family and made a report to child protection. As a result the options that were presented were unhelpful to the family.

“ The situation, really understanding what is going on....I think if you have the understanding before you go into a meeting if this is the option you want to present” (P3).

Secondly, participants shared community standards of respect, helping and support, sharing, collaboration, choice, and trust and truthfulness. These community standards were described to me as necessary qualities of the relationships that participants have observed and developed in their home communities. These were also considered by participants to be the

qualities that are necessary for social workers to build positive relationships with community members and families. Many of these qualities are also supported in the literature I reviewed (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon; 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBore & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000).

“Respect, respect your elders, respect people belongings...if someone needs help you help them” (P1).

“Collaboration is you are hearing them out, listening, respecting what they are saying and then you are expecting them to hear you out” (P2).

### **Community Perceptions of Social Work**

Generally the relationship between social workers and Indigenous communities is strained and negative. This understanding comes from my own experiences and was confirmed by participants. According to participants there is a belief that social workers are only there to remove children and that people from the South are taking jobs away from people from the North. Participants shared that in their communities they have observed a negative relationship and suggest that it is rooted in the difficult historical experiences of Indigenous people with social workers. The stigma that the objective of social workers is removal of children is seen as a judgment to childrearing practices, which perpetuates the power that social workers hold.

“All the bad stuff they [social workers] did in the past, I think it carries over. It has just carries over and over” (P1).

“ It all goes back to history and residential schools” (P3).

Every participant was very familiar with the stereotype that social workers are there to take children away. Participants shared what their friends and families said to them when they decided to train to become social works.

“There is always that thought that social workers are evil” (P1).

“There is a bad stigma...when I told people that I was going into the [social work] program they said no one will be friends with you, you will be taking children away” (P3).

Raising a family was described as one of the most important life experiences. The way one raises a family is based on their teachings, their own upbringing and their personal and familial values and beliefs. It is considered unacceptable in the community to question child-rearing practices, particularly without having an understanding of the person, where they come from, how they have been raised, or how they have come to make decisions. If social workers are seen as making judgements on child rearing and familial practices it could be a fundamental tension between social workers and the way they are perceived by communities.

“What do you know about my family or the way I was raised...they think of social workers as during the residential schools, they will see that same cycle of how they treat people, how they come into their home and say you are doing this wrong” (P1).

“You don’t criticize the way that people choose to raise their families or the way they do things around their home...its their choice” (P2).

Participants shared their own personal experiences with involvement with the child welfare system. In my field notes I indicated that I “got the sense that participants had experienced some difficult times in their lives connected to the child welfare system, that what they had to share was so relevant to this research and that they wanted their voices to be heard”. I also noted that one participant in particular seemed to me “to want to challenge the system and affect change in the North”.

## **Education**

All participants stated that there is a lack of understanding regarding the role of social work and the services available. This lack of understanding was explained to me as a contributing factor to the negative stigma of social work. Community members are hesitant to seek help from social workers because they fear having their children removed. As a result of

this people are not accessing services when they may greatly benefit from them. Participants determined that the community needs to have a clear understanding of social workers, what their role is, when they might need to apprehend and what other support social workers can provide. Participants shared it would be best for social workers to go into the community and hold educational events that would both provide the information and serve as an opportunity for community engagement.

“The only thing that could bridge the divide is education”(P1)

“I think that the whole community needs to be education about what social work really entails. What they do to get over the stigma of the old” (P1).

Education regarding what social workers should know about the history of Indigenous people came up in interviews as well as during the lay summary. In the lay summary we spoke about colonization, residential schools and the over representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system in the Northwest Territories and in Canada. These were topics that the students were learning about in their classes and for the students who grew up in the North a history that they are very familiar with. My field notes also indicate that students were interested in my educational journey. Students presented questions to me about the process of BSW and MSW, and afterwards one student asked me for additional details about the process.

### **The Process- Community Engagement**

Basically participants confirmed what was evident from my own observations in the community. There is a negative perception of social work, which makes it very difficult to build meaningful or positive relationships with the community and with the families we work with. I was interested to see what I might learn from my participants for the next time I work in a similar setting, or how other social workers might learn how to challenge these negative experiences and perceptions. Participants provided me with a process of how relationships are

built in their communities and suggest that this process must be the same for social workers.

There are some basic steps to relationship building that participants maintain can apply to social workers working in child protection with Indigenous communities.

The process begins with community engagement. I shared with participants that when I worked in Yellowknife I was afraid to attend community events, such as the drum dance, for fear of being recognized as a social worker and ruining the event. I was told by participants that was my first mistake. I should have gone and participants encourage all social workers to do so. It provides the community the opportunity to see social workers outside of the work setting, the chance to engage with them in a positive setting and it sends the message that social workers are interested in getting to know the community in a more meaningful way. It demonstrates to the community that you are there to do more than your required job and that you are open to learn something new.

“I feel as though they should go...in my upbringing you want to show that you are a part of the community. By attending and doing things in the community you show that you are one of us” (P3).

My lack of attendance at community events was based on what I learned while I lived in Yellowknife. It seemed like it was an office norm that situations that might involve clients when off duty was avoided. I am not saying it was openly discouraged to attend events, but in Yellowknife I did not hear about events that were attended by social workers. I did however speak with workers in other communities who regularly attended community events. While I did not share this with participants, one participant did bring up their perception of workers in Yellowknife with regard to community events.

“Just hearing about how they do work in Yellowknife, that is the case...you are almost kind of told not to [attend events] for fear of getting on better with families and creating divides. I think this is the important part of having healthy boundaries” (P4).

Not only did I not attend community events, I spent most of my free time with other social workers. I found that we had our own little group and work and social life became a mix of the same people. One participant shared with me that they had seen this happening in other communities, and that it was not only social workers, but all professionals sort of stuck together and did not engage in community events.

“Then again, you also got white social workers hanging around the white RCMP and white nurses, they have their own little clique” (P1).

The problem with this is that when social workers, or other professionals isolate themselves by only engaging with one another they solidify their status as an outsider, which creates a barrier to providing a service that is viewed as helpful to the community and perpetuates the negative community perception.

“Like an outsider. There is no feelings, sense or need to want to connect with anyone on any level that is going to be helpful”(P4).

### **The Process-Connection**

Connection is a community norm that begins in the first introduction; it is about determining how you can relate to one another as a starting point in relationship building. This idea of connection is consistent with the literature explored in my literature review. Establishing a connection was described to me as the root of the relationship, from this openness, honesty, trust and collaboration can grow.

“When you meet somebody you generally ask their name and who their mother is to make a connection of how they know you” (P3).

Sharing with somebody where you are from tells them “what your foundation is, who are your grandparents, where are your roots, and how you relate to me....“In Aboriginal communities, connectedness is a huge thing” (P4).

This is one of the reasons that community engagement is so important. Participants told me that it gives the community the chance to see you as human being, to see you as someone with whom they might find some common ground. Connection can happen by determining what commonalities people might share. I was given examples such as sports or other common hobbies as ways to relate to one another if you do not have common heritage. The majority of participants did not think that racial identity was critical, but I was told that it is certainly helpful if you identify as an Indigenous person.

“Yeah being Aboriginal is a big one. . . . The majority of it is having a lot of commonalities or being in touch with the person” (P1).

While one participant stated that being Indigenous helps, I found it interesting that another participant firmly believed that it does not matter where you are from, rather the important piece is that you are willing to share this with people.

One participant told me that in their Anti-Oppressive classes they trouble the question of “where do you come from”, I shared that we had the same conversations in my Anti-Oppressive classes. We discuss that this question is considered inherently suggestive of “otherness” from an Anti-Oppressive perspective. Contrary to the Anti-Oppressive understanding of this question, the meaning from an Indigenous perspective is about discovering connection. I felt that this participant eloquently challenged the idea of implied “otherness” in this question, and the idea that it is necessary to identify in the same way as another person to make a connection.

“Ok so you as a white women. . . . Its not about you being an outsider, its about where are you from, what are your beliefs, how do you go about your day. . . . Its not about you are something else, its about how do I relate to you” (P4).

Establishing a connection was discussed in a historical context. Participants discussed how their ancestors were nomadic; in their travels they would meet people along the way. Discussions of family members, geographical regions, genealogical ties, served as a way for

people to understand how to relate to one another and how they might discover commonalities such as family members.

During interviews I was purposeful in my attempt to create a space that was collaborative. I shared stories with participants about my experiences and in turn they shared stories with me. At the time I did not completely realize what was happening, but during analysis of my field notes I realized that this exchange was the initial stage of making a connection. My field notes indicate that I felt a particular connection with two participants one I described as “feeling a connection with because conversation seemed so easy and natural between us”. The other I documented how vivid their stories felt for me and how I felt I was getting to know them and their family, I described that “I could almost imagine their mother, and I felt genuine warmth from both the participant and their mother”. These two participants followed up with me via email after the transcription process and I was able to extend my offer of providing future social work support, which might suggest these relationships are moving beyond the connection.

### **The Process-Beyond The Connection**

Once a connection has been established you are encouraged to take some time to talk and learn about one another. This was described as beginning at a conversational level and evolving to a deeper personal level. This process of sharing and learning requires honesty and openness; it also creates a safe space for trust to blossom.

“First you would have to get comfortable, talk on a conversational level....then after that you would have to be trusting enough to open up a bit, and if they can open up and you can open up, then you get that little bond or tie” (P1).

“Open and honest, willing to learn about people, their values in life....what they want out of the relationship, how it is going to benefit them” (P2).

When you are able to learn from someone about who they are, what they believe and what their needs are, you are then able to show the support you have to offer and that you care.

Showing support and effort in the relationship helps to develop trust. Trust is not easily earned, particularly give the historical relationship of social workers and Indigenous communities.

“After that you have to show that you really want to support them and talk about that and help them”(P3)

“Trust is one of the hardest things to earn....after they see that you are serious about it [the relationship] they will start trusting you “(P2).

The process of building trust and building a relationship can be lengthy and take dedication. In my experience I noticed that families are moved from worker to worker as a result of worker retention or agency demands. I learned that this becomes an issue for families who have also put much effort into trusting a worker and building a relationship with them. Families can become discouraged when they build a trusting relationship with one worker and then have to begin the process all over again.

“All the effort and work they did to build trust with one worker, when a new one comes in who is not the same person, are they gonna do it again, when that worker is just gonna go out too”(P2).

Relationships are a collaborative equal effort process; while I was learning about this process I was also engaging in it. Again it was not clear to me at the time, but I wanted to approach this research in what I thought would be respectful and meaningful to the community. This of course was based on my own assumptions, but I decided to meet face to face with participants and I was told that this was a very important decision for me to make, this helped me to make a connection and to begin to build trust. I provided participants with space to share what they thought was important, and gave them time for transcript review. These demonstrate that I wanted to learn, that the agenda was not already set and that I was open to where the research might take us. Finally as I can relate to what it is like to be a social work student, I told

participants that they were welcome to contact me if they needed any social work support. I think this demonstrated that I wanted to earn trust and build a relationship beyond the research process.

### **Take Some Time**

Time was seen an important aspect to the process discussed in a couple of different ways. While participants understood that social workers are often very busy, with heavy case loads and limited time, they advised against rushing people. Participants shared that if someone has the courage to seek help, particularly given the current community perception of social workers, that giving time is critical. Social workers should avoid giving off the perception that they do not have time to help, even if this might be true. Taking the few minutes to hear somebody out can demonstrate help and support which is necessary to relationship-based practice. Time was also discussed in the context of relationship building. It takes time and dedication to prove to someone that you want to help, to challenge their perceptions of social work and to learn how you can most effectively help them in a sustainable way.

“When there is time to build and support and understand our different background, things would be totally different” (P2)

“ I know going into child protection in Yellowknife, having to speak to someone who is very time crunched, its like being at the doctors office. I think if you just take the time to speak respectfully you someone its huge” (P4)

One participant shared a story about their experience dealing with child welfare and described the worker as being time crunched. The participant shared what they would have done differently had they been the worker.

“I would have wanted to meet to talk about it, and then reschedule another meeting to discuss what might help.” (P3)

This participant shared that the suggestions of the worker were not helpful and perhaps had the worker had more time to learn and understand the needs of the family, together they

might have developed more appropriate solutions. The worker in this case was only able to offer apprehension which was described by the participant as very unhelpful to the actual problem. The participant shared that they were able to work out the problem on their own, though it would have been helpful to have more support.

### **Beyond the Family**

Finally the process of relationship building was discussed in terms beyond the dynamic of social worker and family, to the dynamic of Indigenous community and white community on a Territorial and National level. I wondered if Anti-Oppressive social workers that hold dedication to challenging power imbalances and social injustices might serve as a support in a larger context. Again I received a conflicting message here as to whether or not social workers might be seen as allies to the Indigenous community.

“ I think we are realizing the only way to make change is if we work together [Indigenous community and white community]. Some people are very reluctant to be open-minded. They know that it is a Eurocentric western view that is very oppressive”(P2).

“I don't know. I don't think so its just that social work has such a bad rep. You talk to anybody and they just don't like them, they don't want to go to them”(P1).

### **Benefits of Relationship-based Practice**

Once I had an understanding of what the process of what relationship-based practice might look like, I wondered what would be the point of doing it. I asked participants if they thought there would be any benefits if social workers developed this as standard practice. I was informed that the benefits would be great on a person, familial and community level.

Interestingly I made the assumption that collaboration would be a by-product or a benefit of relationship-based practice, but I learned that it is actually a requirement.

“You would see a lot of lives change for the better if this practice perspective [relationship-based] was embedded into social work practice in the North. Like Southern

social workers, awesome that they are coming to the North, but I don't think they know what they are getting themselves into"(P2).

"You develop positive regard for each other and mutual respect... "You show that you are a human being, not a little grim reaper" (P4).

The participants in this study believed that the benefits on a personal level would include development of positive self-esteem, in turn individuals would see the world more positively and they would make more positive choices. A social worker who demonstrates relationship-based practice would be viewed as a good role model. This would be seen in the community and people would be encouraged to take their lead.

"Yeah, I think that a positive relationship, you as an individual you have a positive outlook, you will do things, you will get things done, you will make accomplishments, you will live a healthy life style. Your outlook, how you treat others will be in a positive way. Like I think relationships are important because if you don't have that in your life you are gonna take things from people, you are not gonna treat yourself with respect" (P2).

One participant shared a story with me about a mother who had gone to a social worker and was received in a positive manner. This treatment of respect and support demonstrated to the mother that this worker was willing to help. The participant stated....

"She came back and took us up on the offer to get child care" (P3).

When individuals have pleasant experiences with social workers they are more likely to go back for help when they need it. They are also more likely to encourage others in their lives to seek help. Healthy individuals or families make healthy communities.

I think you will see a decrease in alcohol, crime, things that are working against communities" (P2).

The end result would be a healthy family. I think that would be the ultimate goal. Their kids are gonna grow up maybe a bit more healthy, and then it will go back to the way it was where everybody respects each other and we have a healthy community again. There is no animosity between each other"(P1).

## **Possible Challenges**

Once I had an understanding of how social workers might build relationships with the community and their families, the next piece is how this might be implemented or how to create a practice that emphasizes relationship building; this is what I have referred to as relationship-based practice. Perhaps this step might appear a natural transition, except during analysis I noticed a possible barrier to implementation. I do recognize that this is of course based on my own experience, and as previously mentioned part of my own therapeutic process. I encountered themes that suggest that we social workers do not have a relationship-based practice with one another, which leads me to wonder if we can actually implement this with our clients. Themes that came up in my field notes were feeling overwhelmed, underprepared for the work and unsupported by colleagues. Some excerpts from these field notes include:

“The office dynamic has become strongly noticeable.”

“Peer support is lacking....not the best in this type of work.”

“I had a break down this past weekend. I’m exhausted, overwhelmed and honestly sick of this work.”

I also remember being told my colleagues that “you either sink or swim in this work” and I was given the feedback that I was “letting the parents run the show” in my attempt to practice Anti-Opressively. These did not feel like supportive words at the time, and in hind sight I think contribute to a larger culture of “adapt to the status quo of current practice or be judged for your differences”. While this is not the point of this particular MRP, I think it is worth mentioning as a potential conflict to relationship-based practice. This is also perhaps an area that might be further explored in another study.

## **Reflections**

I entered this research with hesitance, in part due to my whiteness. I felt so concerned about “doing the right thing” assuming all responsibility without considering the actual scope of work and how it was perhaps fundamentally flawed. I regularly had to be reminded “this is an MRP, not a PhD dissertation”. Had this research been larger scale I would have spend much more time in the community, I might have traveled to other communities and spent time with Elders, community members and other Indigenous professionals to develop a more broad perspective. That said, I did receive feedback that indicated that I had done the “right thing” in more of the subtle aspects of the research. I was told that I approached all social work students in such a way that demonstrated I valued their opinions and did not view myself as the expert. I created open spaces for people to speak, share and challenge me. Spending time in person demonstrated that I care. I received support and positive feedback from community agencies that I engaged with through the research licensing process.

This was my first experience as a researcher and it was scary, but everyone I encountered through this process contributed to me feeling inspired and empowered. I am truly grateful for what I have learned from this process with regard to conducting research, working with Indigenous communities and my own social work practice. I have critiqued my practice through this whole process, I have identified areas of strength and weakness. I feel much more confident that this knowledge will allow me to do better while I continue to strive to “do the right thing” when I return to the North.

## CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

### **My Thoughts**

It is unlikely that this research will affect large scale change with respect to how child welfare workers conduct their practice. This process has changed how I approach my practice and it will be very helpful to my work and my clients when I return to the Northwest Territories. I also hope that this research has contributed to the Anti-Oppressive thinking of the students and participants who were involved in this research. As the majority of students at Aurora College will find themselves working in child welfare, I hope these discussions serve as a compliment to their developing practice.

### **Education is Prevention**

My findings demonstrate that communities in the Northwest Territories require much more education regarding the role of social work and the supports available. I would like to note that I do not believe this lack of understanding is the fault of the community, rather it is the fault of social workers and regional health authorities. In my opinion it is the responsibility of social workers and health authorities to develop strategies to engage with the community in such a way that the community is educated on the services available and what they should expect with these services.

This research has demonstrated that the community does not know the role of social workers, which indicates they do not know the full potential for help and support they might seek. This demonstrates to me that there is much more potential of prevention work in the Northwest Territories, which may assist with limiting the amount of children and families who are involved with social services under a protection status.

Blackstock & Trocme (2005) discuss that Indigenous families have significantly less access to child welfare related supportive services, which may address issues of structural poverty and substance use. If social workers share with the community more information regarding supports available, housing advocacy, treatment plans, access to counselling, financial support, to name a few, we may increase the access for the families we work with and the community as a whole.

### **A Solution and A Problem**

The most obvious important aspect identified in this study is a concrete understanding of the process of relationship building. I think this study highlights a basic step by step of relationship building. 1) Making a connection based on commonalities, through community engagement, education and individual interactions 2) building mutual respect and trust through a collaborative process of sharing information, needs and exploring options, 3) taking time to understand one another, demonstrating support and collaboratively developing service plans. The fact that this step by step process is completely rooted in cultural norms makes this so important to work in Indigenous communities.

Additionally I made a discovery that a potential problem to implementation of relationship-based practice could be differing practice styles among front line workers which may contribute to the level of worker to worker support that is made available. Because I have identified this based solely on my own experience, I do not suggest that it is common place, rather I suggest there could be benefit from further exploration.

### **Supported by the Literature**

Common themes between my findings and the existing literature were found in the understanding of colonization through residential schools, the sixties scoop and current child

welfare practices of over representation of Indigenous children (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Bull, 2010; Harms et al, 2011; Lavallee, 2009; Baskin, 2003; Pon, Gosline, & Phillips, 2011; Crichlow, 2002). The understanding that social workers need to have regarding this history was consistent in my findings with the literature . Much of what I found in terms of the qualities that social workers need to have in order to practice relationship-based social work is consistent with existing literature. Qualities such as trust, honesty, openness, collaboration and non-judgement are commonly discussed in the literature as was the case in this research (Bennette, Zubryxchi & Bacon, 2011; Dale, 2004; DeBore & Coady, 2007; Platt, 2008; Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000). I previously had some understanding of the Indigenous connection (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Lavallee, 2009) in relationship building, though through this research process I gained a much deeper understanding which will be continually developed through my social work practice and life.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice and AOP**

There are two aspects of this research that I think are of particular importance to Anti-Oppressive Practice. The first is the perceived benefits that could emerge from relationship-based practice. Participants thought that positive changes would be realized on a both a personal and community level. Historically social workers have been seen as a power over group, this research demonstrates that this view is still widely held in the Northwest Territories. Relationship-based practice as demonstrated in this research might serve as a way to redefine current experiences between social workers and the community. If relationship-based practice is more widely embraced perhaps Indigenous communities and leaders might be able to consider the possibility of social workers as advocates and allies. The ideas and process of developing

relationship-based practice presented from this research are something for Anti-Oppressive social workers, educators and policy makers to consider.

The second aspect of this study that is important to Anti-Oppressive Practice is the consideration of how social workers learn to support one another. Through this study, and my experience I have learned that social workers could improve their peer support. Something to consider is that the Anti-Oppressive classroom is the starting point of a developing practice. We deconstruct theory, we analyze systems, we are told to implicate our self in the larger systems of oppression. It seems a flawless transition to deconstruction the child welfare system, to then deconstructing a colleagues work. Perhaps we need to consider how we might benefit from turning off our deconstructing lens at times, and rather than focus on our different practice styles focus on how we might support one another through our challenges.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I had ethical concerns regarding myself as a white researcher throughout this MRP process. I have had these concerns throughout my social work career working with Indigenous communities, as discussed previously (p3-5). I was asked during the lay summary how I identify. I responded that I identify as white, while making it clear that I do recognize my place of privilege and I seek to challenge the system through this research and my practice as a social worker.

Another ethical consideration is that I conducted research in an Indigenous community without speaking directly to the community where I conducted the research. What I mean by this is I consulted the Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories on a organization level, and received approval, but I was unable to speak with community members, outside of the participants. This is also a limitation of the study.

Lastly, some readers may feel that an ethical consideration could be the fact that I engaged in the process of relationship building with participants. While it might be considered unethical that I told participants they could contact me in the future, I felt it was appropriate in keeping with the intention of this study. Boundaries regarding relationships between researchers and participants is considered a western perspective and may be in conflict with Indigenous research methods (Baskin, 2005).

### **Limitations**

Because I have used critical ethnography and altered this methodology to fit the needs and scope of this study, this could be seen as a limitation as my past field notes were not done with the intention of using them in research. Additionally the small sample size, limited time in the field, and limited interactions with participants are limitations due to the scope of this project. Another limitation to this study is that I was unable to consult with Elders and general community members, which excludes a rich collection of data that could have contributed greatly to this study.

### **Dissemination**

I have applied for travel funding through the Canadian Polar Commission. One requirement of this funding is submission of a small report of the study and the findings. I will provide this report to the relevant community organizations in the Northwest Territories. This report will also be provided to participants, and serve as communication to keep participants informed of the research process and findings. I will submit the MRP to Ryerson University as partial requirement of the MSW program. The Northwest Territories Métis Nation have requested a full copy of the final MRP. In addition I hope for the opportunity to publish in a child welfare/social work related journal.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This study provides an understanding of the community perceptions of social workers in the Northwest Territories, a process to relationship-based practice that is based on community standards and highlights the benefits to this practice style. My understanding of these come from a combination of my experience and the experiences of four social work student participants in Yellowknife. Participants provided a concrete step by step process of how social workers might develop a relationship-based practice with their clients and the community. This process includes community education, community engagement, making connections and building trust and collaboration. This study outlines the expected benefits of relationship-based practice including self-worth, healthy communities and a collaborative road to Self Governance. This study was conducted using a critical ethnography methodology and Anti-Colonial framework, which allowed me to conduct a critical analysis of relationship building within a child welfare context.

Through exploration of what this process might look like, a potential challenge emerged. This challenge is the possibly that social worker peer support might discourage social workers from developing a practice that is viewed as a challenge to the status quo, as was my experience. I make the suggestion that social worker peer support should begin in the Anti-Oppressive classroom. I think if we can learn how to implicate ourselves in the systems of oppression we can learn how to implicate ourselves in office politics!

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR  
RESEARCH IN: *Relationship-based Child Protection  
Practice.***

I am a MSW student at Ryerson University I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study for my Major Research Paper.

This study seeks to understand how child protection workers can build positive relationships with Aboriginal clients. And how Aboriginal values and beliefs might inform relationship building in this context. This study would like to include those who identify as Aboriginal and as current social work students at Aurora College in Yellowknife.

**You would be asked to:** To take part in 1 individual interview, which may last approximately 1 hour and to review data from your interview, which may take 1 hour.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive  
\$20.

*Your identity, beyond the inclusion criteria of this study, will be kept confidential.*

A information session regarding this study will be held at the school of social work at Aurora College in Yellowknife on **April 8, 2014 in Room 308 at 12:00pm-1:00pm**. For more information about this study, or to volunteer for

this study,  
please contact:

**Tasha Lake**

*School of Social Work Ryerson University*

Email: [tasha.lake@ryerson.ca](mailto:tasha.lake@ryerson.ca)

## APPENDIX B

### **Interview Guide**

1) Behaviour or experience questions-address something the researcher has noticed (Madison, 2005)

When I worked in child protection, I noticed that many of the families I worked with had strong extended family and community relationships. Can you tell me about how you have experienced this throughout your life? Can you tell me about how you have experienced relationships between families and social workers and communities and social workers?

2) Knowledge questions- how is this knowledge gained (Madison, 2005).

What are the historical roots of relationships in your community? Is there cultural significance with regard to relationships? What is the process of relationship building in your personal view, or community view? What do you think is important for social workers to know about this? How do you think that social workers can build relationships with families and communities?

3) Opinion or values questions address a judgment or belief toward a particular phenomenon (Madison, 2005).

What do you believe are the benefits of viewing relationships in this way?

What do you believe social workers and communities would gain from social work viewing relationships in this way? OR If social workers held the same value of relationships as you do, how do you think they and the community would benefit?

4) Feeling questions-address emotion, passion or sentiments (Madison, 2005).

How do you feel about the importance of relationships in your life? How do you feel about the importance of relationships with your clients as a social worker? OR How do you feel this understanding of relationships would translate to your role as a social worker? OR Do you feel as though this is compatible with your role as a social worker?

5) Advice questions (Madison, 2005).

What advice would you give to social workers who do not have the same understanding of relationships as you? How would you guide a social worker to build relationships in a way that benefits or is relevant to the community?

## APPENDIX C



### **Ryerson University Consent Agreement Relationship-based Child Protection: Practice Informed by Aboriginal Social Work Students (Working Title at the Time)**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:** Tasha Lake, BSW, MSW candidate, Ryerson University, Social Work Department. Lisa Barnoff, PhD, Supervisor, Ryerson University, Social Work Department.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to understand the significance of relationships from an Aboriginal perspective, the relevance to the child welfare system and how child welfare workers can develop positive relationship with the Aboriginal community and clients.

**Description of the Study:** You will be asked to take part in 1 interview, involving questions related to significance of relationships in your life, how you describe positive relationships and what you consider to be meaningful in a relationship, in addition to your opinions of relationship building with child welfare workers. Interviews will last approximately 1 hour. Interviews will be voice recorded and transcribed by the researcher. You will be asked to review the transcript from your interview prior to data coding. You will receive the transcript within 2 weeks of your interview via code protected email and will be given a period of 2 week in which to review and request any changes. This means that should you wish to have specific segments of the interview excluded from the research, you may request this during this 2 week time frame. A non-response will be treated as though you do not wish to have anything excluded. Requests for exclusions will not be accepted after this 2 week period.

#### **Risks or Discomforts:**

Due to the personal nature of the questions that are asked, you may experience unpleasant memories during the interview. Should uncomfortable feelings arise you should determine if you would like to discontinue the interview either temporarily or permanently. Please note this document contains a list of community resources you may wish to contact should uncomfortable feelings arise.

#### **Community Resources:**

Resources assessable through NWT Health coverage (NSIB)

**Aurora College Counselling Services**-Joanne Erasmus (867)920-3004

**Community Mental Health (YHSSA)**- Central intake (867) 765-7715

Additional Services, fee for service or EAP coverage

**D Bruce Smith and Associates Psychologist-** (867) 669-0621  
**Family Counseling Division** - phone (867) 920-6522 fax: (867) 873-9032  
**Life Works-** phone (867) 920-2391 fax: (867) 873-8800  
**Northstar Centre for Counseling and Psychological Services**  
Yellowknife (867) 873-3600 fax: (867) 873-8345  
**Psychiatry Services Program** - (867) 873-7042  
**Somba Ke Healing Lodge-** (867) 669-0699  
**Stirling Counseling Services-** (867) 873-6004

**Benefits of the Study:** The findings in this research may inform relationship-based child protection services in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Additionally, this research might be a resource to child protection workers working in Aboriginal communities.

You may benefit by sharing your knowledge of relationships building to help inform your future child protection practice as well as the practices of others. You may not realize any direct benefits from participation in this study. Community members may benefit from child welfare practices that are informed by Aboriginal perspectives.

**Confidentiality:** Interviews will be recorded using a participant number code. Recordings will be stored by the researcher and be accessible only to the researcher, for the duration of the research process. All interviews will be transcribed and stored on a pass code protected computer, accessible solely by the researcher. If at anytime a USB is necessary, it will be pass code protected. Transcribed data will be sent to participants in the form of a pass code protected email, participants will be provided with this pass code in a separate email. This revision process will be available for a 2 week period of time prior to data analysis. Identifying information will not be included in disseminated reports to protect the privacy of participants. All data will be stored for the duration of the research project though to dissemination at which point it will be destroyed.

**Incentives to Participate:**

You will be given a \$20 cash honorarium, which will be provided at beginning of the interview. This honorarium will cover any costs incurred by participation and serves as a token of appreciation for your time and knowledge with regard to this research, it is not contingent on completion of the interview.

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:**

You will be expected to provide your own transportation to the location of the interview, potential costs would be covered by the \$20 honorarium.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or Aurora College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of honorarium to which you are allowed.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Tasha Lake (MSW Student Researcher)  
[Tasha.lake@ryerson.ca](mailto:Tasha.lake@ryerson.ca)  
Lisa Barnoff (Supervisor)  
Lbarnoff@Ryerson.ca

Please note this study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042  
rebchair@ryerson.ca

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Your signature indicates that you have provided consent to recording your interview. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Consent to Audio Recording

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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