THE REPRODUCTION OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM WITHIN CHILD WELFARE

by

Erica Ewa-Elechi, BSW, Carleton University, 2017

An MRP

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

in the Program of

Social Work

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2019

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ABSTRACT

This research study explores the reproduction of anti-black racism within child welfare. The study draws on literature that discuss the experiences of black families within care and the ways in which anti-black racism is perpetuated by child protection services. The literature also discusses the over representation of black children in care by drawing on the past and present discrimination and oppression of black folks as a primary root of such disparity within the system. This research study then moves on to introduce anti-black racism theory and critical race theory as lenses that will frame and guide the discussions on the experiences of black families within child welfare. The study includes an in-depth interview with an East African Canadian child welfare survivor whose narrative provides insight into how black folks are engaged by the system. The study found that this black family continues to face many barriers within child welfare as a result of not only anti-black racism but also the perpetuation of whiteness and white supremacy that continues to guide child welfare practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is an over-representation of black children in care and researchers as well professionals in the field of child welfare have written different literatures to try and identify the underlying issues at hand and to explain why this over-representation exists. Even though there is an over-representation of many racialized individuals in care, I will be focusing my major research paper on black children in care and not just speak to the over-representation, but to also explore the reproduction of anti-black racism in child welfare that makes black children and their families more vulnerable to the system.

The topic that I have chosen is important because black families continue to fall victim to the child welfare system more so than white families and it is important to understand why. Racism is not a new concept but continues to be veiled as to protect those who create and work within the system, hence the importance of the topic. The topic that I have chosen is meant to bring to light the presence of anti-black racism within the system and the families affected by it. Racism on its own is an important reality to be aware of as it is an act of oppression based on race/ethnic background. Racism undoubtedly is apparent in today's society and therefore it would make sense that it is present in the child welfare system. The purpose of my research is important as it is meant to bring to the forefront anti-black racist discourses embedded in the institution of child welfare in hopes to advocate for the families that are most affected by the system.

This study will consist of the narrative of a black child welfare survivor and will focus on her experiences within the system. It is important to identify this participant as survivors as she has had the experiences of being removed from her community and placed in a system that is arguably oppressive to people of colour. She is a survivor because she managed to make it out of

a system but like many survivors are often still faced with trauma that she must manage for the rest of her life. This is why this study will be guided by the participant rather than something that is forced on them. This study is meant to be used as a space where a black survivor produces knowledge, where her experiences are held with regard, and where her narrative will guide the crucial conversations about anti-black racism within child welfare.

This research study will analyze the narrative a black child welfare survivor using a conceptual framework consisting of anti-black racism as a theory and also critical race theory. These frameworks will aid in the efforts to link the stories of this black survivor to a greater systemic issue of how anti-black racism is embedded in systems of power. In order to successfully analyze this topic through a critical race lens, I will first give an introduction to critical race theory and its tenets which I will be using to develop a deeper understanding of the reproduction of anti-black racism in child welfare. An introduction to anti-black racism as a framework will also be discussed in the beginning portion of this research. Anti-black racism will play an essential role in unpacking the ways in which black people are engaged in child welfare and the subtler forms of harm towards black communities through racist ideologies in which child welfare officials operate from, through policies within the system that discount the experiences and values of black communities. Anti-black racism will also aid in guiding the critical discussion of this paper on the ways in which black bodies are surveilled at all times and the use of systems of power to do so.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this study, I will be using Critical Race Theory and Anti-Black Racism as theoretical frameworks. Two theoretical frameworks were chosen as I believe they complement each other on the basis that one talks about how the world is seen through the lens of race and the other talks about racism targeted towards black people which is the focus of this study.

Critical Race Theory is interested in studying the relationship of race and racism as it relates to power in society (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). The use of this theory is critical in the study of black people's experiences in child welfare as it will consider the race of the individuals involved, including the race of the black survivors in relation to the power of the child welfare system. Critical race theory highlights the connections between race and power and how the outcome of a given situation can be linked back to race and power. This is the framework in which this study will look at the experiences of a black survivor of the child welfare system.

Critical race theory came about through legal origins. It was and still is a way to address racism that has taken form in new ways since the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement was effective in addressing the overt discrimination against black people, but over time, lawyers, activists and legal scholars began to realize that there had been a stall in the advances of the civil rights movement and new ways were needed in order to disrupt the subtler forms of racism that has taken place (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). These subtler forms of racism are what is arguably experienced by the black community within the child welfare system which is why analyzing this topic through a critical race lens is essential for this study.

The initial ground work for this movement was done by writers Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado who were later joined by others with Derrick Bell who is known to be "the movements intellectual father figure" (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017, p. 6). It is

important to mention that critical race theory builds off of two other movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). The notions that critical race theory takes up of "legal interderminancy" comes from the critical legal studies approach which and states that not every legal case is the same therefore should be allowed to be interpreted and navigated differently from previous cases (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). Legal interderminancy is critical not just in the legalities of a situation but also when looking at how people of colour are engaged, meaning that the historical components and variations of their identities are ignored in the efforts of trying to make all people fit within one model that is arguably racist in its foundation. Critical race theory in relation to radical feminism builds off of the addressing of "patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other forms of domination" by highlighting historical wrongs (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017, p.8). In discussing the treatment of black people within the child welfare system, it is important to connect the problems of how the institution engages black people through recent narratives but also from a historical perspective. The historical perspective is essential in providing context to the ways in which black people are and have been engaged by systems of power which is why critical race theory is essential for this piece as it connects race and power through a historical lens that is just as important in understanding the systemic oppression of black people and how society has gotten to this point in its interactions with black people. The goal of critical race theory that is most relevant to the purpose of this study is that the theory does not try to just understand how society works through a racial lens, but its aim is to change it by addressing racial hierarchies. (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). Critical race theory also highlights the idea of colour-blindness as a way of refusing claims of racial discrimination (Crenshaw, 1995). One of the original claims of critical race theory came from the confronting of the legal system in the ways in which they actually engage

black people while claiming a "colour blind" agenda. To further explain, "critical race theory indicates how and why the contemporary jurisprudence of colour-blindness is not only the expression of a particular colour-consciousness but the product of a deeply politicized choice" (Crenshaw, 1995, p.28).

The tenets of critical race theory include, ordinariness, interest convergence and social construction (Delgado &Stephancic, 2017). Ordinariness refers to the idea that racism goes without being acknowledged. Instead, racism is masked with terms such as "colour-blindness" which promotes a sense of equality and silences the experiences of those experiencing acts of discrimination towards them (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). Interest convergence refers to the reality that change will only occur if it benefits the white population. Because racism works to the benefit of white people, there is no reason to address it (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017). Social construction says that race is a social construct. It sees race as categories that society has made up to group people together along lines of having similar physical features (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017) as if to say that all those people are the same. This has been done to black folks while ignoring the fact that there are many identities and intersectionalities within the social construct of blackness. Social construction is dangerous as it groups people based on what society has come to "know" about a certain group of people which is filled with stereotypes and racist sentiments.

According to the African-Canadian Legal Clinic (2002), anti-black racism is the prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-black racism highlights the subtle and more covert ways in which black people experience racism. Moving away but still recognizing the more overt ways such as slavery, anti-black racism looks at the lack of

opportunities given to black people, the lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment within the black community, poverty rates and the overrepresentation of black bodies in the criminal justice system (ACLC, 2002). Some may argue that the over representation of black children in care is a subtle way in which anti-black racism is displayed. It's important to mention that subtle in this context of anti-black racism does not mean that the ways in which it is displayed is not evident and just as dangerous but subtle meaning that although evident, these forms of racism are progressing while being masked by claims of equality and multiculturalism. This subtle form of racism can only be confronted and interrogated by those who are able to make those broader connections. To add to the topic of anti-black racism in a Canadian context, the process of carding whereby Toronto police were randomly stopping people who were "suspected" of a crime, ended up being a situation where black people were being stopped quite frequently (ACLC, 2002). An anti-black racism framework would look at this phenomenon as a way in which black people are being discriminated against in a subtler way being that the system would never openly say that they were targeting black people but their tendency to card black bodies shows their prejudice towards this specific group of people. Also, being that an anti-black racism framework is rooted in the history and experience of enslavement, this theory would also look at the more frequent tendency to card black people as a way of policing them which is founded on racist ideas around seeing black people as needing to be caged and surveilled at all times. Anti-black racism theorists would argue that the need to surveille black bodies was historically done through the implementation of slavery but has now moved into more subtle ways such as carding.

According to Benjamin (2003), "anti-Black racism focuses on the experiences of Black life in the context of capitalism and globalization, while calling attention to the determining

relationship of social and cultural processes that support and promulgate racist ideology" (p. 60)

It is the social and cultural acceptance of racism that allows it to persist without being challenged

which further harms black communities. Anti-black racism interrogates those processes that

support racist ideologies that would more so go unnoticed or ignored. Anti-Black racism looks at

this "capitalist dominant culture" which tries to deny racism by claims of multiculturalism and

the installment of laws such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but then goes ahead to

accommodate systemic barriers that make it difficult for black people to mobilize themselves

(Benjamin, 2003). This is a key function of anti-Black racism that will be further explored in

relation to the topic of black families and child welfare. The system that is child welfare has its

own systemic barriers that somehow lead to the over surveillance of black families and their

children. This reality can be looked at through an anti-black racism framework.

It is important to mention that anti-black racism as a theory looks at race from a non-

essentialist perspective meaning that the theory does not group any form of knowledge as

belonging to Blackness (Benjamin, 2003). Anti-black racism theory rejects any claims built upon

racist beliefs that there are genetic or biological traits that link black people to having low

intelligence or claims that there is certain way in which black people behave that is specific to

that group (Benjamin, 2003).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In discussing the topic of the ways in which anti-black racism is reproduced in child welfare, there is importance in focusing on discussions of how racialized people are engaged in child welfare, specifically black people, and also how their engagement with child welfare authorities comes to be. In looking at this, three major themes were brought out through the literature: Anti-black ideologies and practices within collaborative institutions, the power imbalances between service users and workers, anti-black racism that exists within the workplace between workers.

Literature such as Roberts (2012) examine how the excessive target on black people within the prison system, especially black mothers directly contributes to the over-representation of black children in care which adds to the anti-blackness existent in institutions directly impacting child welfare.

Anti-Black Ideologies and Practices in Collaborative Institutions

Whaley (1998) says that institutional racism is often manifested in the mental health system consciously or unconsciously as it provides inadequate clinical services to racial minorities. Whaley (1998) has revealed in his research that mental health professionals who hold strongly racialized stereotypes of black people as having an aggressive disposition will more often diagnose black people with having schizophrenia. Bringing it back to child welfare, the clinical diagnoses that are based on stereotypical beliefs can result in higher rates of referrals and placements of black children into foster homes (Whaley, 1998). Some teachers also exhibit racism when it comes to the differential treatment they give students (Hill, 2004). A teacher's racial stereotypes about a black student being more violent or more "unruly" can cause that

teacher to keep a close eye on that child, more so than any other child. As a result, the child and their families may become a target for school officials and depending on the situation, the school may in many cases, bring in child welfare authorities to further investigate as they feel as though the child's misbehavior stems from inadequate parenting. Even though the getting into "trouble" at school is not a ground to identify families as being unfit to parent, the child's constant negative encounters with the school may lead to school authorities unfairly monitoring the child and the family until they do find reasonable grounds to report to child welfare agencies.

Aversive racism can be defined as discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that are exhibited in individuals with liberal views (Whaley, 1998). Aversive racists will try to rationalize their discriminatory behavior and stereotypical attitudes on "nonracial" grounds (Whaley, 1998). This means that they will use other explanations to justify their differential treatment towards black people. According to Whaley (1998), such explanations may include poverty, parental absence or perceived aggressive behaviour as a way to explain their discriminatory treatment of racialized individuals. Unfortunately, parental absence in many black families especially in the US comes from the over incarceration of black bodies in the prison system (Roberts, 2012). The study done by Whaley (1998) which discusses racism in the mental health system follows a critical paradigm as its main aim is to deconstruct the racist structures and ideologies apparent in the mental health system. A critical paradigm stresses the fact that the knowledge on a specific issue is often hidden structurally and has to be critically examined in order to find the root. Whaley (1998) does this critical examination by first acknowledging that institutional racism exists and then goes on to talk in depth about the racist ideologies that mental health professionals hold when they are interacting with black service users. In the study, it mentions that there is an over-population of white professionals in the mental health system which

contributes to the perpetuation of white supremacy within the institution. The lack of black professionals in the institution can be a result of racial discrimination that exists on a structural level within the hiring process which can only be determined through using a critical paradigm which aims to expose hidden structures that lead to a phenomenon. It is also mentioned in the study that even the clinical diagnoses given often screen in black patients as having illnesses and screening out white patients because of the fact that these tools of diagnostics are contaminated by racial stereotypes and prejudices. The analysis of the ideologies and tools of assessment within an institution follows the critical paradigm of exposing hidden inequalities within an institution on a structural level.

Hill's (2004) study also follows a critical paradigm as it uses similar tactics as Whaley (1998) in order to expose the aversive racism that is present in the education system. The study finds that teachers operate through anti-black sentiments when working with black students. Racial stereotypes that are held by teachers, contributes to which students they decide to monitor in a classroom setting. Instead of looking on a micro level through interactions of people within the child welfare system, these studies take it to an institutional level and examine racist ideologies within neighboring institutions that directly affect the child welfare system. In the studies done by Whaley (1998) and Hill (2004) which spoke to structural powers in large institutions such as mental health and education and its relation to racism in child protection, they utilized critical ethnography as a methodology to examine the social aspect of institutions leading to the oppression of certain groups. Institutional ethnography is the methodological approach to these studies because it looks in depth at larger organizations. Institutional ethnography studies the processes and procedures that exist within these larger institutions (Soyini Madison, 2005). Whaley (1998) touches on the processes that exist within the mental

health system in which professionals abide by, which happen to perpetuate anti-black racism and other forms of oppression against racialized service users.

Service User/Worker Relationship/Power Imbalance

The second theme that emerged from my literature review is the way in which anti-black racism is rooted in the child protection system, particularly the relationships between the service user and worker. In Hughes et al. (2016), they noted that participants say that workers should come across as friends to the parents rather than authoritative figures that they normally personify. They assert that it is important that the parent be able to trust the worker, especially if the worker is coming into the family's life uninvited. Hughes et al. (2016) state that racialized families often have a distrust for child protection agencies which can cause them to act with anger in their interactions with workers for the simple fact that they do not trust them, especially white workers; there is a long history attached to the fear of white social workers. The idea that whites are superior to blacks is a history that is embedded in the child protection system and is brought to life through the negative relationships that these workers often establish with racialized families. Dumbrill (2009) conducted a study with refugee parents living in Canada who have had unfortunate encounters with CAS. What this study had outlined is the lack of empathy that workers had towards refugee families who have already escaped war and traumatizing experiences. This lack of empathy or disinterest to want to understand the hardships already faced by black/minority families living in a white dominated system, is a constant racist practice in child welfare agencies that continues to keep refugee families at a disadvantage. Dumbrill (2009) states that workers' service delivery can come across as negative and prejudicial towards refugees, which has an effect on how these workers handle these refugee families.

The answer in solving this problem could be to better the process of racial matching whereby black families are matched with black workers etc. Perry and Limb (2004) did a study on the racial matching that exists within the child welfare system in California and revealed that the efforts of proper racial matching do occur in the system. The problem however was that although the matching of African American workers to African American families was high, the matching of white and other racialized workers to black families was also significantly high (Perry & Limb, 2004). This raises a concern as it shows that the over representation of black children in care and the under representation of black workers to take on these cases is affecting the successfulness of racial matching leaving child welfare agencies with no other choice but to align with white workers who often perpetuate white privilege and anti-black racism. Within the literature talking about racism in the child protection system, it seems as though the literature followed a similar paradigm and theoretical framework. Because the literature is talking about child protection and the experiences within that system, literature such as Hughes (2016), Dumbrill (2009) and Roberts (2012) follows an interpretive paradigm. An interpretive paradigm is a paradigm that aims to get a deeper understanding of how people feel towards a phenomenon through interpreting their experiences. Hughes (2016) uses an interpretive paradigm as it explores the relationship between child protection workers and mothers who are involved in the system by using their personal experiences and trials they went through in order to give recommendations for how to better the relationships between workers and service users. One of the implications of the use of an interpretive framework is that researchers can overlook other ways in which a participant's story can be interpreted (Hunter, 2002). At the same time, Hughes (2016) also uses a feminist paradigm as it focuses on mothers and their thoughts towards navigating the child protection system. The study can be seen as a tool to empower women to not

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only speak to their trials and tribulations within the system but also empowers women by giving them a platform where they can be the advisors and the knowers of how to better the system rather than a situation where they are constantly being told how to navigate their lives and their families.

The study done by Roberts (2012) also operates through a feminist paradigm as its study is based on the target of black women in the prison system leading to their families being taken over by child protection authorities. Similarly, Dumbrill (2009) follows an interpretive paradigm as the study also consists of accounts given by refugee parents who have been involved with child protection. The study takes the format of messages to child protection workers and policy makers from refugee parents. The important thing to note about an interpretive paradigm is that values are an essential part in the research following this paradigm. Both Dumbrill and Hughes's studies follow this axiology whereby they highlight the values of the participants. The study done by Perry and Limb (2004) which examines racial matching of workers and service users in child welfare agencies in California, is different from other literature examined as it operates through a positivist paradigm rather than a qualitative approach. Findings and conclusions are drawn from numerical data that was collected on the numbers of racially matched cases that existed. The conclusions from this study are drawn from data that has been measured and uses numbers to support conclusions.

Anti- Black Racism in the Workplace/Power Imbalances Between Workers

In speaking on the topic of the ways in which anti-black racism is rooted in the child protection system, a theme in the literature noted was the racism that is apparent in the worker to worker relationships between racialized and white workers within the child protection system. Kikulwe (2016) examines the experiences of child protection racialized workers in Ontario

which finds that racialized workers, often immigrants, experienced issues of racism including devaluation by their supervisors (Kikulwe, 2016) and disempowerment as it pertains to their participation in their matching of families. One of the biggest problems that specifically black workers have to undergo is having to work within a system where white normed policies reign (Gosine & Pon, 2011). It's also important to note that the ways in which white workers perceive the workplace and work relations to be is often very different from the racialized/ black workers' perspective. In a study done in Sweden, it is noted that white workers describe their institutional environment to be successful in its integration of cultural differences and they minimized the roles that racism played in their policies and practices (Eliassi, 2017). When white workers are confronted with their inheritance of white privilege and the actuality of racial inequality in the workplace, they found it challenging to accept (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015). The white workers' inability or refusal to admit to the cultural and racial oppressions of their colleagues within the child welfare institutions is an example of the ways in which white privilege manifests within the workplace. Kilkuwe (2016) and Gosine & Pon (2011) use an interpretive paradigm and provides racialized social workers working in child welfare the opportunity to speak to their experiences in the field and to have their personal thoughts and perspectives be used as sites of research. These studies highlight the realities that racialized workers face in the workplace which falls in line with the mission of an interpretive paradigm, that people's realities are a valid way of making meaning of a phenomenon.

Going back to the idea that an interpretive paradigm is one that aims to get a deeper understanding of how people feel towards a phenomenon, one can see that the studies conducted by Eliassi (2017) and Davis and Gentlewarrior (2015) do just that. Davis and Gentlewarrior (2015) is profound as it looks at the reactions of white workers when confronted with the idea

that racial inequities do in fact exist in their workplaces. The study aims to create reflection amongst racialized and white workers within child protection on notions of white privilege and anti-black racism that occurs in such institutions as child welfare. These reflections hold a lot of weight in the general analysis of the study which leans more towards an interpretive framework. Sweden has a reputation in Europe of being progressive in its anti-oppression and racial integration in their child welfare system (Eliassi, 2017). The perceived goal of Eliassi's study is to deconstruct the idea that Sweden is progressive in these practices by using immigrant workers in Sweden as a site for knowledge of whether this kind of integration and stance on anti-racism really occurs from their personal accounts and experiences.

Anti Black Racism in Reporting/ Racial Profiling

Another recent report that is necessary in its discussions of the over representation of black children in care is the One Vision One Voice (OVOV) report. This project/report set out to create a guide to better practice for child welfare agencies especially in how they engage black communities by calling out patterns of anti-black ideology and practice and enforcing critical practice amongst child welfare agencies. The report highlights the historical components of black life, the ways in which black people are treated within systems of care now and a guide in moving forward to decrease the disproportionalities of black bodies in care. OVOV (2016) states that "African- Canadian children and youth are 40% more likely to be investigated compared to white children" (p. 22). This shows an evident racial bias in the reporting that is being done that leaves black children more vulnerable to the system. The report also states that "African Canadians were over-reported for child maltreatment compared to their representation in the population" even though rates of child maltreatment in black homes have shown to be lower than the rates of child maltreatment in white homes (OVOV, 2016, p. 23). Literature also discusses

how the different ways certain cultures parent their children is often wrongfully attributed as child neglect and abuse by those who are reporting to child welfare. Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services (2010) states that "some apparent signs of neglect or abuse could be the result of traditional cultural practices." (p. 1). Discrepancies like these in reporting arguably results in many black children being removed from their homes, "experience out of home placements and remain in care longer and are less likely to be reunited with their families" (Clarke, 2010, p. 275). Clarke (2010) also goes on to state that the racism in which black folks face leads to the high poverty and high unemployment rates within the black community which then results in more negative attention from child welfare agencies.

My literature review revealed that narrative inquiry is commonly used as a qualitative research methodology in child welfare. Narrative inquiry uses stories and personal accounts of participants to conduct research. The implications of using narratives as a methodological approach is that the question of who gets to tell the story is at the forefront. Is it the individual sharing their experiences or is it the researcher that must interpret these stories in their research? The practice of reflexivity and fact checking with the participants have to be constantly upheld in order to limit these implications. Reflexivity is the researcher's ability to position themselves in the research by reflecting on their own personal biographies and social location (Fitzgerald, 2004). The common method used in literature following a narrative methodology were interviews. For example, the study done by Hughes (2016) used interviews as a method of inquiry. This study interviewed 64 women who had been involved in child protection and a large percent of those women were Aboriginal. The question these women were asked was to describe their experiences with child protection workers and the system (Hughes, 2016). Gosine & Pon (2011) and Davis & Gentlewarrior (2015) used narrative inquiry as a methodology but used

focus groups as the method of collecting data. The implication of the use of focus groups as a method is that participants' stories or whatever they choose to share in such groups could conflict with what others have experienced leading to one either doubting their own experiences or doubting the experiences of others.

From exploring and critiquing relevant literature, I have observed that the knowledge that has been gathered on the anti-black racism that is rooted in the child protection system, comes from racialized and white workers, and racialized families who have been in contact with the child protection system. It was surprising to see that some of the literature examined really focused on the perspectives and experiences of white workers in the workplace such as the study by Davis and Gentlewarrior (2015) where a large majority of participants gathered for these studies were white workers. Although it is understood that the purpose of this selection was to highlight the extent to which white workers were dismissing the idea of racial inequities, it still has an impact on what knowledge arises from the topic. The impact of confronting a large sample of white workers on the oppressions of racialized workers and families that they are inherently involved with, is that these workers can automatically begin to feel guilty or sad in the moment without any urgency for transformative action which will in turn diminish the real and vivid traumatic experiences that racialized bodies are confronted with.

An essential group that I believe has been excluded in constructing the knowledge on anti-black racism within child welfare are black children as they are the ones who are physically apprehended from homes and displaced. Therefore, their personal stories and experiences should hold a lot of weight in a discussion such as this. Although it is understood that research done on children poses some threats ethically, the lack of studies done on those children who have been apprehended in their life time impacts what we know about racism in child protection because

apprehended children hold the first-hand experience in child protection that could reveal important insights. If anyone is to have long term damage from the racism in the system, it is the children, especially the ones who are labeled as crown wards and therefore often have to navigate through life with that label attached to them.

Looking at the epistemological errors that I have observed in the literature, I will conduct my own research in responding to these shortcomings. Although, the purpose behind having a sample size containing white child protection workers can be beneficial to the overall production of knowledge, I believe that the risks of having the thoughts of white workers speak to a topic of anti-black racism in child welfare, poses more risks than benefits to the overall production of knowledge. Therefore, for my own research, using critical race theory and anti-black racism theory, I will use only participants who self-identify as black and use a narrative approach as my methodology to obtain the stories of racial inequities that are experienced in child welfare through the narratives and perspectives of black child welfare survivors. I also would like the voices of survivors (over the age of 18) who have experienced being apprehended by CAS to be made known in my research as I observed it to be scarce in the literature reviewed. There is limited research done on the experiences of the black child welfare survivors, especially African children, who are/have been involved with child protection services (Bernard & Gupta, 2008). I would like to make known their experiences with racial oppression in the child welfare system and how it has/or has not, contributed to the realities they have to now live.

Chapter 4: Methodology

A narrative approach was used in this study. This study allowed a black child welfare survivor to tell her story, a story that has often been told for them without their involvement. The hope is to create an opportunity for the participant to give insight on the issue of anti-black racism within child welfare through her own experiences. Being that the personal can be political, her personal narratives of navigating through child welfare is an essential piece to discussing the reproduction of anti-black racism within child welfare and cannot be done without the voices of those who experienced the system.

Narratives are also a component of critical race theory. Critical race theorists ground themselves in the power of using storytelling as a way to understand how Americans see race (Stephancic & Delgado, 2017) in the context of America. Critical Race Theory legitimizes storytelling as an essential component of understanding racial interactions and tensions. To look back in history, storytelling was used by black slaves to describe and unmask the realities of the conditions on white plantations (Stephancic & Delgado, 2017). One of the powers of storytelling is it serves as a tool to unmask and understand systemic oppressions and violence, while regarding the storyteller as an expert and able to take us on a descriptive journey that is grounded in factual and real-life experiences.

Narratives are important as they can be used as a tool that brings to light one's own epistemology, meaning how they have come to know what they know. Just as it is of value for the purpose of this study to honour the participant's knowledge as having lived through the child welfare system, it is also of value to bring to light how they have come to gain this knowledge through the stories that they choose to share. Epistemology can be further defined as a journey of knowing and for the purpose of this study, the narrative of the participant will be encouraged by

way of taking me as an outsider on this journey of deconstructing the child welfare system. Even though I identify as a black person, I have never experienced the process of being apprehended from my family and placed in the child welfare system which makes me an outsider to the topic of anti-black racism within child welfare. Because I have recognized that I am an outsider, meaning that my work involves me looking into another group of people for knowledge through their stories, I feel that it is important for me to leave space to share my own epistemology through my narrative in how I have come to see race and what pushes my eagerness to discuss the topic of anti-black racism within a Canadian context. The hope of bringing forth my epistemology is to hold myself to the same standard of sharing and to also further legitimize this study by placing myself within it.

The strengths of my personal epistemology are that my journey of coming to know what I know has opened my eyes to the other side of the black experience in Canada that is often times masked by notions of inclusion and multiculturalism. This arguably false notion that Canada stands by is what keeps many of us as black people from being able to articulate and/or express the difficulties and oppressions that we actually face. The idea that every race is given an equal opportunity to succeed on this land is what often causes the harboring of feelings of failure amongst racialized people. Racialized people tend to individualize what happens to them as a result of the notion of "multiculturalism in Canada" which discourages people from being able to blame/interrogate systems of power that actually oppress racialized people. Individualization can be defined as individuals taking on the responsibility for their own performance level in a given situation and also taking on the consequences of not being able to perform up to standard as their own personal deficiency (Bauman, 2002).

Part of the goal of this study is to dismantle the cycle of individualization that may be experienced by child welfare survivors by holding institutions of power accountable for their actions towards black communities. I as a young black girl in a predominantly white neighbourhood/school fell victim to individuation as I attributed all my many failures in academia and in creating meaningful relationships with school professionals back to myself and my inability to perform until I reach a certain age where I could interrogate the racial discrimination that exists even in high schools and understand that a system like that was always set up for my failure and had nothing to do with my abilities to perform. This element of my personal epistemology acts as a strength because now I am able to add to the work that is already being done by racialized scholars to shift the focus from the individual and back onto an oppressive society that upholds racists ideologies which continues to harm certain groups of people.

This notion of a multicultural society that Canada claims to be is what shuts people down from speaking out on issues relating to racism. My personal epistemology is seen as a strength in all this because I am now able to know a truth that has been hidden which is that segregation still exists, and that racialized/immigrant bodies must fight a great battle just to be recognized and given a platform to succeed in this land. Because of this insight that my epistemology has granted me, I can advocate for other black people who may not be able to articulate the oppressions that they face as I was once that person who couldn't either. I can use my knowledge to inform research that gives silenced black voices a platform to speak of their narratives and follow a similar transformative paradigm of "African self-identity narratives" which acts as a "tool in transforming communities and giving them back their histories, their identities and

enabling healing from cultural violence that resulted from academic imperialism" (Chilisa, Major & Khudu-Peterson, 2017, p. 334).

The topic of my MRP is on anti-black racism that is reproduced in child welfare. The implication of my personal epistemology on my MRP is that I am already engaging in research on the fact that anti- black racism has personally affected me. This can cause for a biased idea that every black person living in Canada has a story such as my own whereby they have struggled with similar racial tensions. The problem with approaching my research with these already preconceived views is that I already have an idea or an expectation of what my participant's story should sound like. The implication is that if I am confronted with a participant who does not see race the way I do in their experiences in child welfare, then I will struggle with overcoming my personal biases which can affect my ability to honour my participant's opinions, if I am not careful. This ended up not being the case in my discussions with the research participant. Her narrative was one that was filled with many instances of being confronted with anti-blackness that she was able to call out during the interview.

Although I am choosing to study the experiences of black people and I as the researcher am black, I have to constantly be aware that our experiences as black people are still diverse with different interpretations depending on the individual. Although grounded theory is not the main approach used in this study, the theory can aid researchers in maintaining this awareness that the participants are the knowledge holders, therefore, the researcher must constantly reflect on their positionality throughout the research process so as not to impose their own views on the data (Charmaz, 2017).

This study is meant to highlight the in-depth experience of a black child welfare survivor in attempts to explain the research question which is "how is anti-black racism reproduced in

child welfare?". The primary methods used for this study was an with a black child welfare survivor. The potential benefits of this method are that I was able to obtain first-hand experiences to answer the question of the ways in which anti-black racism is reproduced.

Generally, the risk was minimal to the participant in this study. The potential risk is that traumatic memories may have resurfaced and revisited by using this survivor as a participant. The risk management procedures that I used were briefing with the participant on the kinds of questions that will be asked of them, and to make them aware of their memories possibly being resurfaced. I informed them of the general nature of the questions that will be asked. Throughout the interview, if emotional responses or triggers are observed, I offered her a break from the interview. The participant was also allowed to skip any questions that made her feel uncomfortable or uneasy. A list of support resources was also provided to the participant for her to access if she so wished.

In order to recruit participants for research I contacted by email individuals from my personal networks and who fit the inclusion criteria. Because I have already been in contact with them previously for matters unrelated to research, I had access to their email and phone numbers. Inclusion criteria for the selection of participants includes: child welfare survivors, meaning people who have gone through being apprehended but are no longer in society's care, over the age of 21, self-identify as black (could be mixed race as long as they self-identify as black).

This research study was intended to discuss anti-black racism within child welfare through the narratives of multiple child welfare survivors. Due to limited time in which this project must adhere to, the recruitment process allowed for the recruitment of one research participant. The findings of this study demonstrate the narrative of an East African girl as she and her family struggled through the system of care. The findings highlight how her family was

flagged by child welfare, the discrimination endured throughout their experience in care and how such experiences have impacted her black identity. The participant's narrative demonstrates how anti-black racism is reproduced in ways that are overt but also covert through the interactions with child welfare officials and also through a system that, through the participant's experiences, continues to surveille black families.

Findings were derived from a face-to-face interview with the participant. Before the interview, the participant was asked to be audio-recorded to which she agreed to. The interview was audio-recorded for the purpose of being transcribed later. Findings were arrived at through the coding of the interview transcript by means of highlighting repeated/ emphasized ideas during the interview which were then organized into key themes which is presented in the findings and analysis section of this research.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

Mona is East African, identifies as black and is 24 years old at the time this interview took place. Mona was born in Kenya and spent most of her younger years there before migrating to Canada with her family. Mona was 12 years old when she moved to Canada from Kenya with her mom, dad, and siblings. Upon moving to Canada, they settled in Hamilton, Ontario where she continues to live to this day. Mona considers Hamilton to be her hometown. It is the first city she landed in upon arriving to Canada; it is where she went to school; it is where she has her childhood friends. Mona speaks Swahili, English and her native tongue, Kikuyu. She is also in the process of learning French. Mona's mother is a stay at home mom and her father is a truck driver.

At a point in time after moving to Canada, Mona's parents had separated for some time, leaving Mona's mother to care and provide for her and her siblings. It was during this time of separation that what was meant to be a new life in a new land was turned into a life altering battle between Mona's family and CAS. This battle resulted in the apprehension of Mona and her siblings from her home and later led to Mona becoming a crown ward resulting in her mother losing legal rights to her. The timeline and narratives of Mona's experiences with child welfare will be described further in this section.

While the conversation and sharing of Mona's experiences is essential to the understanding of how black families are engaged and treated by child welfare, it is important to note that these traumatic events which took place were inflicted by a system of power that some may argue was never made for the benefit of black communities and has had permanent effects on Mona's life and the lives of her family.

In listening to Mona's narrative there were five themes that stood out in our conversation that I will bring forward in discussing the reproduction of anti-black racism within child welfare. The themes are: 1) discrimination and cultural insensitivity leading up to apprehension, 2) anti-black racism while in care, 3) experiences within foster care, 4) lack of representation with workers, and 5) impacts of CAS on black identity.

Discrimination and Cultural Insensitivity Leading up to Apprehension

The initial conversation with the participant started off with her trying to unpack the timeline of events that led to her apprehension from her home: "Okay, I think what happened was, because still to this day, that's still something I always like, wonder how they kind of got in with us."

In telling her story about what happened that led to CAS's involvement in her home, discrimination and cultural insensitivity became a theme in Mona's story. Mona mentioned that when her parents separated from each other and her father left the home, her mother and her and her siblings had to find government housing as her father was the breadwinner of the home. During this time, while still being new immigrants from Kenya and having to raise five children, Mona's mother was trying to get back into school to pursue a degree in nursing to be able to support her family. Because Mona was the oldest, she had to take up more responsibility while her mother pursued her education:

> So, there are days, I would miss school because of my two little brothers because I had to help take care of them. And I think it started becoming like a chronic absences, where the teachers kind of flagged it, and they kind of brought it to let the social worker know. And from there, then it was a conversation of where the social workers started coming into the home, into the school, to kind of inquire why I have been missing school and then there are so many gaps in there, my

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grades are still good, I still was still a great student. But there was concerns as to

why I was missing so much school and also with my brother and sister sometimes

they also had to miss school, but not as frequent as I did.

In this conversation Mona made known that she felt like the social workers were able to

invade their family the way they did because they were black new immigrants from Kenya,

therefore, their English wasn't the best and they thought they weren't going to be "critical

enough" to fight back. From the school flagging her family's situation, CAS got involved and

from there Mona described her interactions with CAS as them becoming more hostile towards

Mona's mother:

They kind of put like an ultimatum to my mom. They told her if this kept on

happening like it was only gonna get worse. But they also did not understand.

They also put some expectations that were unrealistic, especially for a single mom

who has to take your five kids to go find a babysitter like I was telling you I was

also trying to get over the language barrier and the culture barrier.

Mona mentioned that her mom had to drop out of nursing school after the social workers

flagged their situation in order for Mona and her siblings to go back to having regular school

attendance. However as Mona described, it was not the end of child welfare involvement as the

school still found reasons to raise concerns about Mona and her siblings. From attendance, it

became a conversation about food and them not eating the "typical western food" that the school

was used to. Mona's mom would pack her and her siblings African foods that were just as filling

but the school disregarded their cultural upbringing and from Mona's narrative, flagged their

family once again:

The school lunches we had was not the school lunches that every other kid in

elementary school had. So, they started noticing they were like, well, they didn't

have snacks. Mind you we were also on a budget too. So, my mom is doing the

best that she can. So, they were concerned that there weren't enough snacks.

There weren't enough healthy foods either. However, I wouldn't say that my mom

bought like an unhealthy stuff, but it was culture food. I feel like if it didn't make

sense to them, then it was just unhealthy.

From there, the CAS workers started to enforce healthy food guidelines on Mona's

mother when she was making the kids' lunches. Mona described this situation as offensive to her

mother as it insinuated that she did not know how to provide for her own children. Being new

immigrants from East Africa, Mona expressed that it perpetuated this western idea that

black/African mothers don't know how to parent and need help from the system, when really it is

the system refusing to acknowledge a culture different from their own. Mona went on to say:

When you look at the numbers, and you look at some of the stories and the

testimonies, you can tell [that there] are kids that do not need to be in care right

now and that's because of one stupid screw up of somebody that didn't do their

due diligence, and make that extra effort to really see and connect with culture.

From all the blatant attacks on Mona's mother's parenting abilities, it led to her mother

stopping all engagement and interactions with CAS. Mona expressed that the interactions began

to affect her mother's mental health. Mona explained that because her mother cut off all

interaction with CAS, they started to become more concerned with what was happening in the

home and from there, the agency was able to obtain a warrant to apprehend Mona and her

siblings from their mother.

Anti-Black Racism While in Care

Mona went into detail and explained many of the traumatic incidences that happened while she was in care. Her and her family were forced to go through humiliating tests while she was in care which Mona described to be attacks on their blackness. She went on to unveil that "in some of those reports that they fabricated there was a concern for us that we had AIDS." I then asked Mona why she believes they would assume something like that, to which Mona responded, "because we were black."

> And so they made my mom do a test for AIDS because my mom at that stage was willing to do whatever it took to get the kids back; she did the test only for this results to come back negative because we never had AIDS in the first place. Like I don't even know where they would even get that type of thinking.

Mona described the accusations to be "a direct attack on her mom as a black woman" and to be a humiliating experience for her mother having to offload her sexual life to strangers and all this was happening while they were already in care and her mother was doing everything possible to get them back:

> And I just remember thinking about some of the backwards mentality that some people actually will think that, Oh, my God, they attribute AIDS to Africa. So, anybody who's from Africa, may have AIDS, not today's Ebola, but back then it was AIDS. It was one of the most degrading things.

From there, it went to CAS having concerns about Mona's brother not reaching his developmental milestones for his age which again was an attack on Mona's mother's ability to raise children. Mona described this situation as complete ignorance of the fact that they were still

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new to the country from Africa, therefore, their language development was not one that should be measured with the same tools they use on Canadian-born children:

> They stated that my brother had speech problems like he wasn't ahead as his age development. So again, that's where lack of cultural sensitivity and like not knowing how to work with African families played a role because they couldn't understand that the reason you couldn't speak in English was because in our culture, the child learns the mother tongue first, and then English comes second. So those two boys grew up learning the mother tongue. So, when you put them in a white family, where all they hear is English, English, it's a foreign world to them that is so hard for them to understand.

In conclusion, the "concern" that Mona and her family should be tested for AIDS is the more overt form of anti-black racism as there was no reason that led to CAS's accusations other than the dangerous and racist ideologies that link African people to having AIDS. The attack on Mona's brother is also a way in which anti-black racism was manifested in the form of white-supremacy as it associated her brother's fluency in his mother tongue and inability to speak English as a form of a developmental disability.

Experiences of Whiteness Within Foster Care

When Mona and her siblings were apprehended, they were separated. Her two youngest brothers were sent to live in a white foster home and Mona and her younger brother were sent to live in another white foster home. Coming from an African home where everyone shares your experiences and now living in an isolated community with white people was a situation that Mona described to be difficult for her. A topic that kept coming up in her experiences while in

her foster home was the topic around black hair which meant a lot to her. Mona explains that her foster family used to describe their hair as being "unkept" even though it wasn't:

> And when we'd asked for money, they would only give us $20. Anybody knows our black people? You know? I don't know what kind of hairstyle you were doing with only $20. Twenty dollars won't even get you a shampoo, honey. It's like what were we supposed to do with our hair? We pride ourself in our upbringing and the way we carry ourselves. Every time my mom would see us like she always breakdown in tears because we looked like the way they portrayed kids on World Vision.

Mona explained the contradictions of CAS in which they were taken from their home with their caring mother just to end up looking like kids without a home or like they were not being take care of. She explained:

> The irony of it all is we're supposed to be in a safe space, but yet we're out here looking like homeless and I remember thinking my mom would never allow us to be walking around like this. But even our hair went through a lot of struggle, because they only took us to white hairdressers that didn't know what to do with black hair…. like when I went to graduation, I went in tears because they damaged my hair with so much chemicals.

While in her foster home, Mona explains that she felt isolated from her African heritage and the black community in which she grew up in:

> I just felt like even cultural activities like I never went and they never at some point came and asked me hey, there's a Kenyan event going on. They never gave us that space to really even have those type of celebrations in our life. So, we

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celebrated white celebrations, but never black celebration, even Black History

Month was not something that we did. Even where I come from, from East

Africa, Kenya, specifically, we have our own holidays that were never recognized

or celebrated. And I didn't feel comfortable even celebrating them. Because I

didn't feel comfortable with the people that surrounded me, it was not a safe space

for me.

Lack of Representation of Black Workers

From Mona narrating her experiences in the child welfare system, it was clear that all the

workers her family interacted with were white including her foster family. She stated: "In that

span, it was three workers that we worked with, well, personally for me, and they're all white."

When asked if she ever spoke to or interacted with a black worker being that her and her family

are black, she responded "No, not in my time there. I saw black workers because I would go into

the office, but none of them were ever assigned to us." This started a conversation to which

Mona began to speak about the lack of diversity amongst CAS workers and the tendency to take

one black person and use them as the black token in the agency to whom they bring all their

"black issues" to. She went on to say:

> There is a need for more diverse workers and I only say that to say that, that it
>
> shouldn't be taken that just because we have diverse workers that that is a cure to
>
> the problem, because oftentimes, what I've seen is, as long as there's a black
>
> person, a white person will think that this black person knows every issue, which
>
> is the most saddest thing that you could ever do. And for every black person that's
>
> in that position, I would hate for them to sit in there and actually be utilized as a

puppet. Because you do not represent all cultures who are all black. But we come

from different cultures, we have different ways of doing things.

Impacts of CAS on Black Identity

The last theme observed through Mona's narrative was how CAS involvement in her

family affected their identity as black people, specifically as Africans. Mona spoke a lot about

how the accusations and degradation that they put her mother through began to affect her

mother's mental health but it also made Mona's mother question her own motherhood:

> So, I guess this really started affecting my mom's mental health too. And she
>
> started like, so she started isolating herself even more, because there was this fear
>
> that if I don't let go of my culture and do what the agency says, I might lose my
>
> kids.

From what Mona describes, CAS made her mom question her abilities to be a "good"

parent as she had lost her children to the child welfare system:

> So, um, when I left the foster home, I left only because I aged out because when
>
> they went to court, they had made sure to put an injunction on the court order to
>
> say I was a crown ward without access, but I could no longer go home even if I
>
> wanted to. So that was purposely done because looking back, I was like they had
>
> made it out for my mom that she was never going to get us like, my mom had lost
>
> her parental rights to the state. So, no matter how much my mom had done the
>
> parenting class, she never stood a chance.

CAS involvement also affected Mona and the ways in which she identifies herself as a

black person after being in a system that enforced whiteness on her and tried to wash her of her

blackness:

Because I went into a predominantly white school, I always questioned who am I as a black person. So, there was a lot of insecurity that I hovered on because of these experiences that I had to deal with. It took me time to realize how toxic that environment was. I internalized a lot of problems. I kept those things in inside me and in turn it would manifest into a lot of insecurities. So, it was this vicious cycle.

Analysis

In the beginning of the interview, Mona spoke about school and how her school was the initial point of contact between her family and CAS. When narrating the time line of events of how CAS became involved with her family, it had much to do with the school and their perception of Mona and her family. It is clear that the discrimination towards a black family who was new to the country raised concerns that they felt the need to bring up to child welfare officials. At a point in our discussion, Mona explained how her mother was unemployed for some time after separating from their father. Literature such as Clarke (2010) explains how unemployment rates that affect the black community, further brings the attention of child welfare agencies. Clarke (2010) mentions that the struggle brought on for many black people to find employment is a result of the continued racism and oppressions that black communities face. Clarke (2010) then uses these oppressions in the job sector to explain why many black families are then targeted by child welfare on the grounds that they cannot provide for their children. This seemed to be the case for Mona's family because when Mona had to step up and take care of her siblings while her mother was working hard to provide for them, school officials viewed it as concerning which resulted in a report to CAS.

The literature review spoke to how discrimination in collaborative institutions such as schools play a part in the apprehension of black children from their homes and this was what happened in Mona's case. Hill (2004) talks about how teachers and school staff tend to monitor black students more so than other students which results in them being able to flag them for various things. Mona describes how her attendance at school was an issue because she had to help out with her siblings at home while her mother was at school. Even after CAS became involved and Mona's mother dropped out of nursing school to be able to comply to CAS instructions, Mona explains that she still felt that even after the attendance situation was handled, the school social workers and staff were surveilling her and her siblings in the school, waiting to find something else to pick on them for. She felt as though the school was watching her, waiting for her to say something or do something that would result in a child protection investigation on her family.

During the interview, Mona continued to refer to the fact that she felt as though because they were black kids missing school raised more concerns than it would have if it were any other kid. The situation regarding school lunches that were described in the findings is also a way in which the school used their power to further discriminate against Mona's culture and the identity of her and her siblings which resulted in child protection feeling the need to intervene in her family. The fact that Mona's mother would pack Mona and her siblings' African dishes for lunch and then be accused by the school of not packing healthy lunches for her children and raise the concerns to CAS can be seen as blatant anti-black racism. When Mona described the situation, she explained it as an attack on her African heritage. For many black folks, their identity is directly attached to their culture and in Mona's case her African culture. Being told that her African food was not welcome in that space is a way in which black/African culture is shamed in

this society. CAS took it a step further to confront Mona's mother with healthy food guidelines and what she "should" be giving her kids to eat which only perpetuated the shaming of African culture.

Mona mentioned that at the beginning, Mona's mother agreed to do everything CAS was saying because she did not want to be seen as non-compliant, even though they were continuously attacking not only her culture but her ability to provide for her kids. Looking through an anti-black racism lens, it is very easy for a black woman to be seen as non-compliant even when they are only defending themselves. Therefore, black women are often forced to sit through dehumanizing situations in an attempt to not be labelled as "angry black women." There were times when Mona's mother would have been justified in defending herself but as Mona explained, she saw CAS as being powerful and was afraid to lose her kids. Therefore, she chose to pander to the ignorance and discrimination of white folks which black folks often have to do in order to survive.

In the interview, Mona mentioned that due to all the allegations, invasion and criticism from CAS, Mona's mother began to disengage from the child protection investigation. She began to refuse to answer their calls and no longer wanted to go along with what CAS was doing to her and her family. This seemed to be a way of empowering herself in what was explained as a dehumanizing situation. As Mona describes, the situation began to affect her mother's mental health in a way that she felt it was necessary to disengage completely from CAS and disconnect from CAS officials. Mona explained that from there, CAS began to capitalize on her mother's mental health and formed the argument that she would not be able to provide for her children because she seemed to be dealing with mental health issues as she had completely disengaged from the investigation process. From there, CAS was able to get a court order to apprehend

Mona and her siblings from their home. The tendency to label black people with mental health issues and then criminalize them for it is discussed by Whaley (1998) in the literature review. Whaley (1998) explains how discrimination/racism in the mental health field is one that is directly related to child protection and is evident in Mona's case whereby Black people are labeled and shamed with mental illness which can unfortunately lead to them being discredited as proper guardians for their children even though many of their mental health issues are directly caused by the systems of power that oppress black folks on a daily basis.

Mona describes the experience of having to be tested for AIDS while in care as the most degrading and humiliating experiences. She recognized that there was an assumption made by workers that because they were from Africa that there may be a possibility that they were living with AIDS. One can see the harm done to Mona's family by CAS as not subtle but as an intentional overt act of racism by attributing their blackness to having a sexually transmitted disease. Looking at this situation through a critical race framework which highlights the subtleties within the discrimination against black people, this attack can be seen as a in which child welfare perpetuates anti-blackness. The way the agency brought up the idea of getting a blood test as a "concern" for the family operates to hide the racist intentions behind a false attitude of "concern and care." This obfuscation makes it difficult for the family to call them out. As mentioned before, critical race theory looks at the ways in which harm to black communities is done to black folks in a subtle way making it harder to address the system or label it as racist. In this way the systems hide behind notions of inclusivity while further perpetuating anti-blackness in subtle ways. Child protection agencies promote inclusivity, equality and cultural sensitivity but on the other hand, they harm black families by putting them through degrading and dehumanizing tests as per Mona's narrative while justifying their actions as steps towards

safety for their children. Critical race theory also talks about the notions of colour blindness that systems of power claim as a way to shut down conversations of racism and harm. It seems to be the same notions that child welfare hides behind through their claims of being anti-oppressive in their mission statements.

Cases like Mona's show how what is advertised by child protection and what black families actually experience in the system are two different things. Some may question how the system was able to get away with accusations such as AIDS and force the family to go through testing to prove otherwise but it is highlighted within an anti-black framework that it is common for systems of power to be supported through such attacks on black bodies when anti-blackness is embedded within the culture of that society. Anti-black scholars such as Benjamin (2003) support the notion that it is the social and cultural acceptance of racism that allows it to persist. Anti-black racism theory would also understand the CAS request for testing for AIDS as an attack on blackness and not for any genuine reason of concern that the workers were trying to portray. The dehumanization that Mona and her family went through while being accused of being infected versus the claims of anti-oppression by the CAS organization fall in line with the ideas of anti-black racism presented by Benjamin (2003). She argues that the "capitalist dominant culture" (p. 60) will try to deny racism by claims of multiculturalism and the installment of laws such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but then goes ahead to accommodate systemic barriers that make it difficult for black people to mobilize themselves.

Mona's narrative included experiences by which she felt as though her hair was violated while in care. Being that she was placed in a white family that seemed to have no knowledge on black hair, Mona's hair suffered as a result of the foster home's lack of experience and knowledge on the upkeep and maintenance of black hair. Hair seemed to be a significant piece to

Mona's narrative but is understandable being that many of us black women take pride in our hair. The process of maintaining our hair is not just for the purpose of hygiene but to many of us it is a cultural thing whereby your hair describes your identity in that moment. The strong relationship between hair and identity with black communities is demonstrated through Mona's narrative about when she mentioned how her mom would be sad at access visits when she saw Mona and her sibling's hair looking unkept. She followed by saying "my mother would never have let us go out like this" which shows the significance placed on hair care at least within Mona's family. She also described moments in which she shed tears because of all the damage done to her hair and the times when her foster parents would only give her twenty dollars to get her hair done which shows the ignorance of what it actually cost to take care of black hair. This left Mona having to go to white hairdressers that her foster family knew to do her hair causing further damage not just to her hair but to her self-esteem. The fact that her foster family did not make an effort to locate places or people that could properly care for Mona's hair shows the tendency for white bodies to disregard or downplay experiences that are unfamiliar to them. Instead of trying to familiarize themselves with the population in which they are serving, they chose to instead, attempt to strip Mona of what was familiar to her in efforts to accommodate their white family. This tendency to ignore black experiences was also demonstrated as Mona was expressing how her foster home never recognized or encouraged black/African celebrations that were significant to her. It reached a point where Mona was not even comfortable to participate in cultural celebrations at home because she felt as though it was not a safe place being that her white foster parents never seemed to care about such things. The tendencies to continually disregard black experiences is one that persists as it is supported through white supremacy, which anti-black and critical race theorist address.

The literature review discusses the racial matching that occurs in child welfare as a way to alleviate experiences of racial discrimination. The topic of racial matching also came up in Mona's interview as she mentioned how all the workers that were assigned to her were white and how the foster families in which her and her siblings were placed in were also white. There is a possibility that the racial tensions and discrimination that Mona and her family endured could have been avoided if the agency made a clear effort to match Mona and her family with workers and families that identify from the same cultural background. Although some may argue that there is always the potential for internalized racism within racial matching, the unnecessary experiences of harm such as being tested for AIDS or the damage done to Mona's physical body could have been avoided if working with people that shared her experiences as being black.

Throughout the interview Mona shared her thoughts about how CAS workers could better work with black communities which demonstrates the similar theme found in the literature about worker and service-user relationships. She expressed that workers should familiarize themselves with the populations that they are working with. Respectively, workers should begin to see racialized families as knowers which can in turn level out the power imbalance existent and also minimize the act of forcing white practices on black families. This would involve the worker going into the situation as one needing to be taught and allowing the family to lead. It is about empowering families by giving value and space to their experiences and cultural processes. The literature review also mentions the distrust that black communities have towards white systems of power as a result of colonialism and slavery. Therefore, as Mona, along with the participants in the study done by Hughes et al. (2016) explain, it is essential for CAS workers to refrain from coming in as authoritative figures and to understand their positioning when working

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with black families as a way not to cause further violence and aggravate the already present

distrust.

Chapter 6: Implications

The purpose of this section is to connect the experiences of Mona and the discussion on the ways in which black families are engaged within child welfare to social work practice. I would like to use this as an opportunity to also bring in the theoretical frameworks used in this paper to further connect it to how we practice social work today in regard to our interactions with black families.

In looking at the way child welfare is set up and from analyzing Mona's narrative, it is clear that there are certain bodies that benefit from the system and certain bodies that do not. Because child welfare is a system of power that inherently operates from a position of white supremacy and power, it is clear that if anyone is to benefit from such a system it is those who are identified as white, leaving black folks and other racialized communities completely vulnerable to the system. It seems that in order for this system to change the ways in which it operates, ways that continuously target black families as a result of discriminations and anti-black racism, the people in power must benefit from that change. As long as they are benefitting from the over-representation of black children in care meaning that it is not affecting their stakes within the organization, there will continue to be racial disparities within child welfare that goes unaddressed. If the system in power or the white bodies who run it begin to be threatened in any way with respect to its operations, then there may be a shift in how the organization runs. This idea supports the tenant of critical race theory which is interest convergence. Interest convergence means that changes only occur when people of power will benefit from such change. It is an essential part of critical race theory as it explains change in a societal context. People of power engage different races depending on their needs at the time. In other words, black families within child welfare will only become a priority if it accommodates the needs of

white people in power. An example is how the migration to Canada by black people can be encouraged at a point of time when Canadians are in need of laborers but then shut out and ostracized when the population of black migrants gets too large or the country switches its focus to another race to fulfill its needs. One would initially see Canada's welcoming of black folks as progressive and accepting but interest convergence says that changes made to how racial minorities are engaged only happen when there is benefit, in this case, the benefit would be labour and once their needs are met, racial tensions will continue to exist.

I believe it is important to relate the idea of interest convergence within child welfare back to social work practice in regard to how back people are treated. From evaluating the recent changes made to child welfare in regard to funding and through my experience working with the vulnerable populations, I have observed that there have been some changes made to how the child welfare system intervenes in families. This means that there is an observed pushback from certain child welfare agencies to apprehend. From further analyzing these changes and keeping interest convergence in mind, I can see that these changes were not purely a result of great advocacy by black communities and their allies, but rather, these changes were made because there had been a shift in profit/funding which then lead to the system having to engage black people in a different way than they had been doing in the past. According to CUPE (2018), "CCAS has had its funding cut by $8.5 million in the last five years." One can argue that a cut to funding leads to a decrease in the number of children the Society can afford to have in care which then results in a more delayed action of apprehending black children; whereas before, the funding permitted the excessive apprehension of children into care. An example of such change is the recent shift that I have observed in Catholic Children's Aid Society and the ways in which they apprehend and investigate cases. It used to be that most cases reported would at least

involve an investigation by CCAS but now while doing my placement in the school board, I have seen that there is in fact a push away from CCAS to want to engage in an investigation let alone an apprehension unless the child is assessed to be in "imminent danger". Cases that could have been seen as "imminent danger" and involve an apprehension are now not being seen and handled the same way. This takes the focus back to Mona's case of being flagged and investigated by CAS based on school lunches and absences. In the climate of CCAS in this current time whereby drastic funding cuts have been made, Mona's case probably would not have been seen as imminent danger and therefore may not have resulted in an investigation and apprehension.

For black communities, this is great news being that we have been advocating that CAS develop a more hands-off approach as they were causing more harm than good for our families. As I observed the push back to apprehend, I too was also convinced in the moment that CAS was finally hearing and listening to what we were saying but as I began to learn about interest convergence, I started to ask different questions. I began to wonder why in fact is CCAS pushing back on apprehending children? Is it because of the multitude of reports on over representation of black children in care? Or the multitude of child welfare survivors coming out to say that the system is harmful? Or, is there in fact, some kind of benefit that the system is gaining out of not apprehending at the rate they were before? After doing some research, I realized that everything had to do with funding. Because the funding that CCAS receives is at risk due to current government shifts, the ways in which they distribute their funding must also change. This means that they actually no longer have the funding to keep as many kids in care as they did before which explains their push back to not want to apprehend even children that should have been deemed "at risk" by their standards. Because of this shift, black communities actually have a

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better chance of keeping their children when encountered by CCAS but it is not because they care about black liberation but because they care about their funding. This is an example of how critical race theory and interest convergence would explain this shift in how a system of power changes the way they interact with specific racialized communities.

From analyzing Mona's narrative especially her experiences of being isolated from her black community and put in a white community that gave no meaning to the things that were important to her as a black person such as her hair and cultural celebrations, one would agree that a space to connect with other black people while being in care would have changed the trajectory of Mona's experiences at the time. Throughout her narrative it seems as though she felt voiceless, like what was important to her did not matter to the system. In thinking about recent initiatives made by CAS to honour black people and their experiences while being in care, I think of the recent HairStory event that was hosted by the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The event is for children who identify as black and have been involved in the province's system of care. It is an opportunity for black youth to speak up about their experiences and give their views on why there is such an over representation of black youth and blacks in general in these systems. Giving a voice to these youths was supposed to help figure out the actual roots of why the issue exists; making it easier to address them. During this event, there is an opportunity for youth to give their recommendations for how these systems of care can be improved. Part of the "HairStory" dialogue is to discuss the roots of the problem by allowing youth to open up about their lived experience. Initially, when hearing about the initiative, I was hopeful that child welfare was finally hearing black communities and wanting to make a positive change to the system to support black liberation. Now using a critical race theory while keeping interest convergence in mind, one can see this event as a way for the people in

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power to benefit off of the stories of black folks not as a way to initiate liberation but as a way to mask their perpetuation of anti-black racism by advertising a space for black communities. This is intended to show the "progression" in a national climate that is rightfully calling out anti-black racism within institutions of power led by groups such as Black Lives Matter that have taken a strong stance especially in Toronto. The truth is that if ever the call out culture of addressing anti-black racism changes, systems such as child welfare will confidently remove their hands from any initiative that supports black communities as they no longer will have a population holding them accountable.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to discuss how anti-black racism is reproduced in child welfare. The findings were based on the childhood experiences of an East African woman and her family and how they were treated by the child welfare system. Bringing forth the narrative of an African-Canadian that experienced being apprehended as a child from their home can be beneficial to the present discussions on anti-black racism in Canada as there seemed to be limited research that focused on the experiences of African communities. The findings presented illustrated the ways in which black people are flagged and made targets by the system but also the ways in which black people are then engaged by that same system. While the interviewing of one participant provided insight into the experiences of black families in child welfare, the lack of viewpoints from other survivors creates a limited analysis of the situation. The findings supported many aspects presented in the literature review such as how anti-black racism is embedded within schools and mental health contributes to the reason why black families are continuously targeted by child welfare authorities. The findings also supported the fact that there is still a lack of diversity amongst CAS workers and a lack of willingness for white workers to understand their own privilege that inevitably perpetuates anti-blackness so long as they choose not to address it. This was seen through the ways in which the participant's workers disregarded her even when she brought to their attention the things that she was experiencing in her foster home. The findings also made way for new discussions that were not presented in the literature review. Discussions around how the physical body of a black person was violated due to the disregard for the values and experiences of black people by white people raises the question if racial matching within child welfare should and is being taken seriously. The narrative of the participant reveals that there were numerous attacks on her culture and black identity that led to

the apprehension of her and her siblings from her mom. It seemed to be the unwillingness of CAS to familiarize themselves with the values and practices of African culture and inabilities to critically reflect on their positions of power while working with a black family that unfortunately shaped the negative experiences that the participant had while being in care. The topic of white supremacy within child welfare is connected to anti-black racism, but it is also an area of research that can be developed further on its own as a way to interrogate the ways in which different races are judged and discriminated against by child welfare in a society where western culture prevails.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

This study is being conducted to look at the reproduction of anti-black racism within child welfare. You as the participant will be providing your own knowledge of the topic which will be a critical part of the research study. You will provide this knowledge through answering the interview questions. Before beginning the interview, we will go through the consent form and the form will require a signature before the interview can commence. Your participation in the interview and overall research process is voluntary therefore you can withdraw from the process at any time. A list of supports for distress will be provided to you if any traumatic memories resurface at any time in the research process.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
    a. Where you were born?
    b. How old you are?
    c. Where you grew up?
    d. What languages you speak?
    e. Your gender, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual background etc.?
    f. What do your parents do for a living?
2. Tell me about what initiated CAS involvement in your family?
3. Describe the events that led up to your final apprehension from your home?
4. What is your family's ethnicity or racial background?
5. What was the ethnicity or racial background of your CAS worker?
6. Did you experience any racism from the workers leading up to your apprehension? If so, can you describe those events?
7. What were specific events that took place to make you believe that your culture/race was and/or was not being considered?
8. Describe the kind of relationship you had with your worker?
9. Did you experience any racism while you were in care? If so, can you describe those events?
10. Tell me about the impact of being removed from your home on your childhood.
11. How has being in the system and the experiences you had shaped your adulthood?
12. What advice would you give to workers working with black families in child welfare?

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