

**The Social Implications of the Individualistic Self for the Child
Protection System in British Columbia**

by

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Abstract

Despite research, advocacy, and internal changes, the child welfare system in British Columbia continues to be described as “broken.” While most agree that ameliorating the system is hampered by inadequate funding, few assert that theoretical commitments also are impeding change. In this thesis, I argue that the individualistic conception of selfhood promoted by disciplinary psychology and adopted by child protection systems in North America is contributing to problems in child welfare. This conception of selfhood attributes what are fundamentally social problems to individuals, allowing for social inequalities to remain unexamined. In its place, I propose a communal conception of self. I defend this theoretical revision on the grounds that it properly reconceives the self ontologically, broadens the boundaries of analysis of intervention to enable distinguishing between maltreatment and social disadvantage, relieves families from the sole burden of responsibility for change, and provides a blueprint for the integration of services.

Keywords: child welfare; child protection policy; Ministry of Children and Family Development; selfhood; individualistic self; communal self

Dedication

Aos meus pais, irmãos, e irmã por valorizarem e cultivarem o espírito e o significado de família e comunidade até nos menores gestos, em todos e a cada dia. À minha filha, Georgia, por ter me proporcionado as experiências mais importantes da minha vida e por caminhar comigo a cada passo dessa jornada.

To my fiancé, Dav, for full-heartedly and unwaveringly believing in me, even when I doubted myself, and whose love and self-sacrifice motivate me to be and do better every day. To my dearest friend Mea, whose selflessness and concern for community inspire much of my collective consciousness. To my friend Deanna, for tirelessly cheering me on and measuring no efforts to help me get through the final stretch. To Dr. Susan O'Neill for the understanding, trust, and encouragement to finalize this work. Finally, to the many vulnerable children and families in British Columbia served by the child protection system, for whom the topic of this thesis is not a theoretical exercise but a daily struggle.

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Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Partial Copyright Licence	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Acronyms	x

Introduction	1
---------------------------	----------

Chapter 1. Child Maltreatment and Child Protection in Canada	6
1.1. Overview of the Child Protection System in Canada	6
1.2. Child Maltreatment in Canada	7
1.2.1. Incidence of Child Maltreatment in Canada	9
1.3. Child Maltreatment in British Columbia	12
1.3.1. Incidence of Child Maltreatment in British Columbia	15

Chapter 2. Out-of-Home Placements	17
2.1. Overview of Out-of-Home Placements in British Columbia	17
2.2. Issues with Placement Permanency	20
2.2.1. Negative outcomes associated with placement impermanency	23
Academic and Developmental Difficulties	23
Involvement in the Criminal Justice System	26
Difficulties in adulthood.	27
2.3. Addressing Placement Permanency	29

Chapter 3. The Self in Orientations to Child Maltreatment	33
3.1. Gilbert's classification of orientations of child protection systems	33
3.2. Orientations to child protection in British Columbia: Tensions between family preservation and child protection	36
3.3. The problematic Western conception of selfhood	43
3.3.1. A brief selective history of the Western conception of selfhood	43
3.3.2. The role of disciplinary psychology in the preservation of the enterprising self	50
3.3.3. The social implications of the enterprising self for child protection systems	57
The overrepresentation of children from sole-parent mothers	58
The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children	65

Chapter 4. Reestablishing Well being in Child Welfare: The Communal Self as an Alternate Conception of Selfhood in North America	70
Conclusion	81
References	83
Appendix A. Household source of income by primary category of substantiated maltreatment.....	91
Appendix B. Breakdown of Placement Arrangements for Children and Youth in Care in British Columbia.....	92

List of Tables

Table 1.1.	Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment Investigations in Canada	11
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List of Acronyms

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAP	Canadian Assistance Plan
CCO	Continuing Custody Order
CFCSA	Child, Family and Community Service Act
CIS	Canadian Incidence Study
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FDR	Family Development Response
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
OSDP	Operational and Strategic Directional Plan
TCO	Temporary Custody Order

Introduction

The question of selfhood pertains to the ways human beings think of themselves as individuals and in relation to others. Conceptions of selfhood, far from being static and universal, have varied significantly across history and geography. This is explained by Rose (2013) who points out that one cannot know oneself or the relationship of oneself to others, without a framework of meanings, language, judgments, concepts, and images that are all inherently social, cultural, and historical. Although conceptions of selfhood may be thought to be limited to the boundaries of self-reflection, in fact they also play a significant role in social governance. As Cushman (1995) suggests, ideas about what it means to be human in a particular era and place include the goals people ought (and ought not) to pursue, how they should comport themselves, and the techniques and institutions that adjudicate their worthwhileness. Therefore, conceptions of selfhood play a role not only in structuring private life but in structuring public, social life as well.

The current dominant conception of selfhood in North America—the so-called “individualistic self”—is characterized as a masterful, bounded, and autonomous self with “specific psychological boundaries, an internal locus of control, and a wish to manipulate the external world for its own personal ends” (Cushman, 1990, p. 600). In this conception of selfhood, independence, self-governance, and entrepreneurialism are at the heart of notions of individual responsibility, freedom, and choice that permeate contemporary North American society and policy (Rose, 1998). In North America individuals are viewed as in charge of their own lives and responsible for the consequences that arise from their choices and capacities for self-direction and self-control.

This Western conception of selfhood is a central premise of, and has been promoted successfully by, much of disciplinary psychology. As Rose (1998) observes, it has become impossible in contemporary society to think and make sense of oneself and others without the influence, language, techniques, concepts, and expertise furnished by

the psy-disciplines.¹ The psy-disciplines also have influenced how governments think about its citizens, devise structures and techniques to manage ourselves, and the policies that serve to regulate and judge ourselves on the basis of such beliefs. This influence and power of the psy-knowledge can be observed in the mandates of most—if not all—modern social institutions, such as education, law, health care, government, and public services.² Such expansive influence is due to the psy-disciplines’ apparatus and close alignment with contemporary political reasoning (Rose, 1998, 2013).

The Western, individualistic conception of selfhood presupposed by disciplinary psychology can be traced to the discipline’s commitments to methodological individualism. Methodological individualism regards the scientific perspective that (a) societies are constituted of individuals acting independently but in concert in institutional and informal settings and (b) explanations in the social sciences ought to be provided in terms of individuals and their properties (Udehn, 2002). Methodological individualism is based on ontological atomism, the notion that human needs, motivations, and capacities arise not from the social interactions or the social context but from within the individual (Martin & McLellan, 2013). Methodological individualism and the epistemological and ontological premises that attend it have allowed for the flourishing of the individualistic self, which presupposes further that the self is inhabited by a deep interior psychological space—where personhood, personality, emotions, and behaviours reside and develop (Rose, 2013). Under this construal, the unit of analysis of psychological investigation—and the site of intervention when psychological phenomena are “out of order” (e.g., mental illnesses, learning disabilities, trauma)—ought to be demarcated according to individuals’ intrapsychological constitution.

Following a historical and sociocultural psychological perspective, I bolster the arguments elaborated by Martin (2004, 2006), Sugarman (2010; 2013), Rose (1998, 2013) and Cushman (1990, 1995) that the Western conception of selfhood is fraught

¹ “The “psy-disciplines” refers to the psychological sciences: psychology, psychiatry, and other disciplines that concern themselves with the investigations of psychological phenomena (Rose, 1998).

² “Psy-knowledge” refers to knowledge promoted by disciplines related to psychological investigation and practices, such as psychology, psychiatry, and other domains of related clinical and social administration and intervention (Rose, 1998).

with serious problems. Using the example of cases of neglect in the child protection system in British Columbia, I argue that the *individualistic, bounded, masterful, and enterprising conception of selfhood*, on which the system is predicated: (1) individualizes social problems; (2) hinders the reunifications of children in care with their families of origin; (3) supports a reactive as opposed to proactive stance to child welfare; and (4) deflects attention from the enormous socio-economic barriers that interfere with parenting, such as poverty, inconsistent employment, inadequate housing, and poor access to healthcare and education. This argument is supported by extensive evidence that poverty is the common thread binding families in child protection systems (e.g., Russel, Harris, & Gockel, 2008). In British Columbia specifically, this is demonstrated by the observation that the two most overrepresented groups of children in the child protection system—Aboriginal children and children from sole-parent mothers—are also the two most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the province (First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013).³

Despite significant amounts of research, advocacy, and internal changes, the child welfare system in British Columbia continues to be characterized as “broken” (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008, p. 20), “dishearten[ing]” (Hughes, 2006, p. 16), and “preoccupied with crisis-management” (Turpel-Lafond, 2013a, p. 3). While researchers, child advocates, and child welfare providers consistently agree progress is impeded by a lack of adequate funding, few acknowledge that effective change could hinge on reforming the theoretical underpinnings that guide legislation and practice within the child welfare system. More specifically, few recognize that the child welfare system is predicated on an untenable conception of selfhood, which to a large extent precipitates its shortcomings. I argue that a theoretical repositioning concerning the nature of selves is fundamental in order to properly understand the issue of child maltreatment, to better intervene in instances of the problem, to generate effective change in the system, and to improve child welfare sustainably.

³ British Columbia’s poverty rate is the highest in the country: 20.7%⁸ for two-parent families—8 points higher than the national average—and 49.8% for single-mother families. It also has the highest child poverty rate in the country at 18.9%, compared to the national average of 15% (First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013).

I propose an alternate conception of selfhood to the exaggerated individual self perpetuated by much psychological and social theorizing. This alternative is a *communal conception of selfhood*, that argues that selfhood is not an individual accomplishment, but rather, a socially constituted phenomenon fostered in social interactivity, and within systems of meanings, activities, and practices that are inescapably historical, social, cultural, and political (Martin & McLellan, 2013). I argue that the advantages of this theoretical repositioning in child welfare are threefold. First, it broadens the boundaries of intervention to include genuinely children's parents and communities in order to generate sustainable solutions and to enable a clearer distinction between children in need of protection because of negligent care and children whose families are in dire need of social support to care adequately for their children. Second, it relieves children in need of protective services and their families from the sole burden of responsibility for change and, instead, places responsibility in the child's social ecology including, but not restricted to, communities and governments. Third, it provides a blueprint in which the integration of service can be better conceptualized and executed. Understanding that beliefs about what it means to be selves and persons inevitably serve to reinforce and reproduce constellations of power, wealth, and influence in society (Cushman, 1990), I submit that this ontological redefinition encourages a more critical perspective regarding the ways in which child protective services and policies utilize language, concepts, and practices that may contribute to the incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment in the province.

With this thesis I aim to make two main contributions. First, I hope to bolster the arguments made by Sugarman (2005; 2013), Martin (2004, 2006, 2013), Rose (1998), and Cushman (1990, 1995) that the prevailing Western conception of selfhood is inadequate to the proper understanding of human psychology. But, moreover, I seek to show how it is problematic when presumed in understanding and intervening in social problems. Second, I hope to highlight the negative social consequences of endorsing such an ill-suited concept specifically in the case of child protective systems and underscore the fact that subscribing to such a concept places well-intended child welfare stakeholders in the position of being complicit in the difficulties families experience in child protective systems. The critical stance I adopt in this thesis is not intended to disparage disciplinary psychology, the child welfare system, or the professionals

involved with in their functioning. Rather, it is intended to generate much-needed reflection on the assumptions that undergird our professional policies and practices and their social consequences. My ultimate goal with this thesis is to contribute to efforts to create a better child welfare system in British Columbia by offering child welfare providers with a broader framework for understanding child maltreatment and suggesting a more comprehensive and, arguably, more socially-responsive, theoretical perspective to guide child welfare practices.

Chapter 1.

Child Maltreatment and Child Protection in Canada

1.1. Overview of the Child Protection System in Canada

In Canada, the primary responsibility for the well being of children rests with parents. It is expected that children will receive from their parents the emotional, social, physical, and material support they require to develop and thrive. Unfortunately, this does not occur for a great number of children in British Columbia whose parents are unable or incapable of properly caring for them.⁴ Child maltreatment is defined as an act of either omission or commission by a caregiver, and can take the forms of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, or exposure to domestic violence (Hughes, 2006). The responsibility for intervention in such cases lies with provincial and territorial governments. Under the *Canada Act* of 1982, provincial and territorial governments have the right to legislate and operate their own child welfare systems. The only exception is federal responsibility for the welfare of First Nations children living on reserve with status under the *Indian Act of Canada* (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003).

Provincial/territorial jurisdiction over child welfare is advantageous in a couple of ways. First, it allows local governments to attend to their own geopolitical factors. Canadian provinces vary largely in terms of their geography, resources, and population compositions. A one-size-fits-all approach would most likely fail to respond adequately to the specific needs of provinces/territories and regions within them. For example, it is safe to assume that the experiences of children living in large multicultural cosmopolitan centers (e.g., Toronto, Ontario) will vary from those living in small homogeneous

⁴ Herein the term “children” refers to children and youth.

communities (e.g., Iqaluit, Nunavut). Moreover, it allows local governments to work within existing service networks and implement approaches that are consistent with their overall social welfare plans. Second, local jurisdiction allows for more prompt intervention. In the context of child protection, where problems are typically time-sensitive, having provincial/territorial control is presumably more effective than federal control inasmuch as there are fewer layers of bureaucracy standing between children in need of protection and the delivery of protective services.

Although effective in some managerial aspects, provincial/territorial jurisdiction over child welfare also presents problems. The most notable difficulty is funding. As of 1995, with the extinction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)—a funding plan that matched federal dollars to every provincial dollar invested in social programs—provincial and territorial governments were left in the difficult position to solely fund the majority of their health, educational, and social welfare programs. This and other similar federal funding cuts led to severe reductions to provincial/territorial social welfare networks, particularly those implicated in child protective services (Swift, 2011). Another equally noteworthy difficulty is the inability to obtain a full picture of child maltreatment in Canada. Researchers, policy makers, and social program developers argue that the lack of federal standards, and the inconsistencies and deficiencies in record keeping across provinces make it nearly impossible to assess the scope and gravity of child maltreatment in this country. This incapacity, they argue, severely impacts governments' ability to evaluate critically the effectiveness of their protective systems and the outcomes they generate. What is more, it may endanger children at-risk if they move from one province to another since investigations may not be equivalently transferable from province to province (Fallon et al., 2010; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003).

1.2. Child Maltreatment in Canada

Obtaining a clear picture of child maltreatment in Canada is a tall order. Differences and inconsistencies in data management protocols present researchers and policy makers with a trying task. The main problem identified by researchers is the adoption of different operational definitions within child protection systems. The very definition of “child in need of protection” varies across provinces. For example, in Ontario

and New Brunswick the maximum age of eligibility for protective services is 16, while in British Columbia youth up to 19 are eligible for services (Hughes, 2006; Swift, 2011). There are also marked differences in how the systems are organized, and who is responsible for the different levels of service within the system. For instance, in British Columbia, suspected and substantiated cases of maltreatment are investigated primarily by social workers, while in other provinces such as Saskatchewan, child protection investigations fall more prominently under the jurisdiction of the police and the criminal justice system (Government of Saskatchewan, 2006).

Another critical difference across provinces/territories is the use of child-based versus event-centred documenting systems. Child-based systems keep longitudinal records of children who come in contact with child protective services. Event-centred systems on the other hand, as the name suggests, keep track of all events that result in a child entering the system. Event-centred systems—which have been increasingly phased out—have been criticized mainly for their inability to differentiate between a child who enters the system twice in a given year, and two children who enter the system once in the year, overinflating successful reunification rates and mischaracterizing the trajectory of children’s passages through the child protection system. For instance, multiple exits from the system may be regarded as successful reunifications, when in fact they may be connected with unsuccessful reunifications with the family of origin and/or multiple unsuccessful foster care placements (Hughes, 2006).

Lastly, variability in the breadth of data collected is notable across provinces. Some provinces collect data exclusively on the child and the socio-demographic characteristics of the caregiver under investigation. Others collect data on all aspects of the child’s life, including heritage, school history, home and community environment, as well as thorough information about the lives of parents; especially, if the parents had been in care themselves (Hughes, 2007; McKinnon, 2006). It is important to consider that the quality of services and outcomes can only be as successful as their documentation. As the Representative of Children and Youth in British Columbia explains, documentation is essential to the well being of children in care:

Unlike children who live in their birth homes, children in care rarely have the same parents for their entire duration in care. Typically, they are moved and raised by a succession of parent figures or group home staff,

and their social workers change from time to time. Therefore, for children in care, the Province has an extra duty that requires accurate and comprehensive record-keeping, with the attention to detail that tells the story of that child and lays out a plan with their goals for the future and the supports required to achieve those goals. (Turpel-Lafond, 2013, p. 6)

The significance of the problems discussed in this section becomes more apparent when we consider high profile cases of children who have died under government care. The case of Matthew Vaudreuil in British Columbia exemplifies the perils of poor documentation, variations in practices, and poor integration in child protection systems. Matthew was placed under government care as an infant in Nova Scotia. The next years of his life were marked by constant moves, apprehensions, placements, and reunifications with his mother, who struggled with substance addiction. At age six, Matthew was murdered by his mother by asphyxiation, during a visitation. His death caused a public uproar, sparking the influential Gove Report. The Gove inquest aimed to examine how such an event could happen to a child under government protection. The inquiry revealed that Matthew fell prey to a series of critical failures. Matthew's case plans were disjointed and incomplete. His file was seldom updated, reviewed, or transferred to the proper agencies. There was confusion as to the roles of social workers in the different agencies, as well as confusion as to how to proceed (Gove, 1996). This case highlights the necessity of consistency in record keeping and integration amongst protective agencies to properly protect children in care.

1.2.1. *Incidence of Child Maltreatment in Canada*

Currently, “[t]here is agreement only that the true extent of child maltreatment is unknown” (Fallon et al., 2010, p. 70). There is little consistent information about the duration of stays in care, the number of moves while in care, the reasons for placement impermanency, the quality of the assistance children and their families receive while in care, and outcomes upon leaving care (Fallon et al., 2010; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Trocmé et al., 2010). There have been few federal initiatives to examine child maltreatment in Canada. Although Statistics Canada did collect data on children in private residential foster care in 2012, this census was limited. Data were not obtained on youth over 15 years old, living in group-homes, living with kin, living independently (i.e., under Youth Agreements), undergoing tertiary care, or placed in unstable

placements.⁵ The most reliable Canadian source of federal data on child maltreatment is the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS), now in its third cycle. The CIS-1998-2003-2008 aimed to examine the prevalence of child maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families who come in contact with the child protection system (Trocmé et al., 2010). Despite the limitations of the study—namely selected samples and social worker self-reports—the CIS yields an invaluable glimpse into the scope and gravity of child maltreatment in Canada (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Gough, 2007). The importance of this study cannot be overstated, especially in that researchers believe at least half of maltreatment cases are not reported to child protection authorities (Fallon et al., 2010).

The CIS-2008 tracked 15,980 child maltreatment cases in 112 Child Welfare Services organizations in all thirteen Canadian provinces and territories. It estimated that 235,842 child maltreatment investigations were conducted in 2008 in Canada. Seventy-four percent of these (28.97 per 1,000 children) pertained to abuse believed to have happened, and 26 % (10.19 per 1,000 children) pertained to risk of future maltreatment. Thirty-six percent of the cases were substantiated. Eight percent or 19,599 cases (3.26 per 1,000 children) resulted in a change of residence for the child with 4% moving to informal arrangement with relatives, 4% moving to foster care or kinship care, and less than 1% moving to group homes or secure/ tertiary care (Trocmé et al., 2010).

Table 1 presents the incidence of substantiated maltreatment in Canada. CIS's child maltreatment typology consists of five primary categories: 1) exposure to intimate partner violence, 2) neglect, 3) physical abuse, 4) emotional maltreatment, and 5) sexual abuse. From the estimated 85,440 substantiated child maltreatment investigations, the two most frequently occurring categories were exposure to intimate partner violence and neglect, constituting 68% of the cases (Trocmé et al., 2010).

⁵ The Stats Canada 2012 census reported there were 29,590 children aged 14 or under living in private foster care in 2011.

Table 1.1. Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment Investigations in Canada

Primary Category of Maltreatment	Number of investigations	Rate per 1,000 children	%
Physical abuse	17,212	2.86	20%
Sexual abuse	2,607	0.43	3%
Neglect	28,939	4.81	34%
Emotional maltreatment	7,423	1.23	9%
Exposure to intimate partner violence	29,259	4.86	34%
Total substantiated investigations	85,440	14.19	100

A thorough analysis of CIS-2008’s findings is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I concentrate on cases of neglect and exposure to domestic violence by virtue of their high prevalence rates and associations with socio-economic factors. In the chapters that follow, I make the case that socio-economic factors are more than merely influential in the substantiation of cases of neglect and exposure to domestic violence. I argue that caregivers’ cultural and socio-economic status are often at the heart of the difficulties that lead children and their families into the protection system. This claim is congruous with CIS-2008 data showing that Employment Insurance or other benefits are the main source of family income in most substantiated cases of neglect (see Appendix A). This claim is further supported by CIS-2008 findings that families investigated for neglect regularly run out of money for basic necessities and lack social support (Allan & Lefebvre, 2012).

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child protection systems is one of the main challenges facing child welfare in Canada.⁶ The CIS-2008 reported that the

⁶ Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution recognizes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis as Aboriginal people of Canada. Although the term “Aboriginal” is used almost synonymously to refer to people who identify themselves as descendants of the original inhabitants of the land now called Canada, the term “Indigenous” is sometimes preferred because it conveys resistance against imposed colonial naming and in that it is more widely recognized in global advocacy movements to promote Indigenous Peoples’ rights, development, and equity (Ball & Le Mare, 2011). For the sake of consistency with terminology employed in policies and research findings the term “Aboriginal” will be used in this thesis.

rate of maltreatment substantiation was four times higher for cases involving Aboriginal children than non-Aboriginal children; 46.69 per 1,000 Aboriginal children compared to 11.85 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal children. Twenty-two percent of substantiated investigations in the CIS-2008 referred to Aboriginal children; eighteen percent involved First Nations children (15% First Nation status and 3% First Nations Non-status), followed by 2% of children of Métis heritage, 1% of Inuit heritage, and 1% with other Aboriginal heritage. The overrepresentation of First Nations children in child protection has been corroborated by numerous studies across Canada (Trocmé et al., 2010). It is estimated that First Nations children are nearly five times more likely to be investigated, and 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care than non-First Nations children. In some provinces, Aboriginal children represent more than 80% of children in foster care (Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin, & Blackstock, 2010).

1.3. Child Maltreatment in British Columbia

In British Columbia the responsibility for children and youth up to 19 years old experiencing or at risk of maltreatment falls under the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The MCFD service delivery system consists of 200 ministry offices in five regions: Fraser, Interior, Vancouver Island, North, and Vancouver Coastal. In addition, 24 Aboriginal delegated agencies provide services to Aboriginal children.⁷ Aboriginal agencies' jurisdiction varies from providing support services to Aboriginal children and their families to sole jurisdiction over child maltreatment investigations and child protection (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2010). As of 2006, following the Hughes Review, the Representative for Children and Youth—an

⁷ Twenty-one out of the twenty-four agencies receive funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada for the provision of services on reserve, and three receive funding solely from the MCFD for services to two urban communities and one Métis community in BC (Gough, 2007).

Independent Officer of the Legislature—oversees MCFD operations to improve services and outcomes for children, youth, and their families (Turpel-Lafond, 2012b).^{8,9}

Under Canadian law anyone who has reason to believe a child is experiencing abuse or neglect is required to report it to the authorities. In British Columbia, reports of maltreatment or suspected maltreatment undergo a screening process, where intake social workers assess the nature and risk associated with the report. Social workers are given 24 hours to respond to cases assessed as high-risk and five days to respond to low-risk cases. One of four outcomes typically ensues from the report. First, if the report is unsubstantiated and there is no reason to believe the child is at risk, the intake worker may take no further action or recommend family or youth services. If maltreatment is suspected, the social worker may take one of three courses of action. One option is that she may open the case and upon investigation conclude the claims are unsubstantiated, in which case no further action is taken and the case is closed. A second option is that she may assess the child as at low or moderate risk and work with the family to reach a resolution. Interventions such as the Family Development Response (FDR), which aim at keeping the family together and support parents to properly care for their child at home without a full investigation, are typically put in motion. A third option is that she may assess the child as at high risk of maltreatment, in which case a full-investigation follows. The fourth option occurs in high-risk cases, where the child typically is removed from parental care and placed under guardianship of the government (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013).

Social workers abide several mandates in making decisions about the children and families that come into contact with the child protection system. In British Columbia, child protective practices are legislated mainly by the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA). The guiding principles of the CFCSA are:

⁸ The Representative independently monitors and reviews government agencies that provide services to children and youth, investigates deaths and critical injuries of children and youth under governmental care, and conducts audits that uniquely focus on the child welfare system (Representative for Children and Youth, 2013).

⁹ In 2006 The Honourable Ted Hughes conducted a review to examine how to improve the child protection system in British Columbia. His review resulted in sixty-two recommendations, including the creation of an independent office to oversee the practices and services administered by Ministry of Children and Family Development.

- (a) children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm;
- (b) a family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents;
- (c) if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided;
- (d) the child's views should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made;
- (e) kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible;
- (f) the cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved;
- (g) decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013, para.1).

The CFCSA Section 4 describes the factors to be taken into account in determining what is in *the best interest of the child* in the context of an investigation:

- (a) the child's safety;
 - (b) the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development;
 - (c) the importance of continuity in the child's care;
 - (d) the quality of the relationship the child has with a parent or other person and the effect of maintaining that relationship;
 - (e) the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage;
 - (f) the child's views;
 - (g) the effect on the child if there is delay in making a decision.
- (2) If the child is an Aboriginal child, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests.

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013, para. 3).

The MCFD stipulates that child protective interventions must be conducted under the least restrictive approach, working to involve and preserve the children's families and communities (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013). In addition to the CFCSA, the MCFD has been acting under the principles of an action plan called

Operational and Strategic Directional Plan (OSDP). This action plan is built around three strategic themes:

1. Achieving excellence across MCFD's service lines and increasing the value of services for children, youth and families;
2. Optimizing the use of available resources for children, youth and families;
3. Pursuing continuous learning to improve services

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013).

Taken at face value, the mandates of the CFCSA and the OSDP seem to place a great deal of emphasis on strengthening families to prevent maltreatment and also on supporting parents who come in contact with protective services towards a goal of reunification. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I will question the extent to which family support mandates are applied and reinforced. The negative experiences of and outcomes for children who experience multiple placements in care, the minimal involvement and support provided for parents to remain in their children's lives after apprehension, the low rate of successful reunifications, and high number of children aging out of care suggest there are prominent discrepancies between what is mandated by the CFCSA and what often happens over the course of care.

1.3.1. Incidence of Child Maltreatment in British Columbia

In the last five years, cases of child maltreatment in British Columbia have been in decline.¹⁰ Nonetheless, as of 2012, about 10,200 children had residential agreements organized by the Ministry, and about 8,052 are in-care (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012).¹¹ According to the Representative of Children and Youth, in 2012, 4,549 or 56.5 % of children and youth in care were under a Continuing Custody Order

¹⁰ The proportion of Aboriginal children in care has increased from 38% in 2001/02 to 56% in March 2012. The actual number of Aboriginal children in care increased from 3,876 to 4,528 while non-Aboriginal children declined from 6,415 to 3,524 in the same time period (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012).

¹¹ Children under non-restrictive kinship care and youth between ages 19-24 are not categorized as being "in-care" (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012).

(CCO)—an order that permanently removes a child from the custody of his/her parents and places them under the guardianship of the Director of MCFD. Nearly 70% of these children were 10 years or older, with 40% were between the ages of 15 and 18 years (Turpel-Lafond, 2012b). Nearly 1,330 were under a Temporary Custody Order (TCO), which removed them from parental care for a determined amount of time (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012; Turpel-Lafond, 2013).

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system continues to be a great concern in Aboriginal communities and to child advocates. Despite comprising about 8% of the child population in British Columbia, approximately 56% of children under government care are Aboriginal, and 62% of children and youth under a CCO have Aboriginal ancestry. Equally alarming is the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in the criminal justice system. Aboriginal youth comprise one third of the population involved in the youth criminal justice system, and are five times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal youth (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013; Turpel-Lafond, 2009).

The typology of neglect in British Columbia does not align entirely with the Canadian Incidence Study, where exposure to domestic violence is treated as a discrete category; in British Columbia it falls under the category of neglect. BC Stats data suggest that in 2008, 49% of maltreatment cases were substantiated on the basis of neglect, where a parent was unable or unwilling to care for the child; in 45% of these cases, neglect was accompanied by physical harm or likelihood of physical harm, and in 11% a parent neglected to protect a child from abuse (Parker, 2010).

Chapter 2.

Out-of-Home Placements

2.1. Overview of Out-of-Home Placements in British Columbia

In British Columbia, child maltreatment interventions are expected to abide by the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA)*. This Act mandates that the child protection system operate under a “least-intrusive” model. The premise of this model is that the best environment for a child is with his/her family of origin, with minimal but supportive state intervention. Under this principle, it follows that the removal of children from their families only should take place when all other alternatives for keeping the family together under safe conditions have been exhausted. The CFCSA also mandates that child protective agencies act in the “best interest of the child” and that children and families are encouraged to participate in all decisions that directly affect them (Government of British Columbia, 2013; United Nations, 2012). Over the course of this thesis it will be demonstrated that the alternatives typically considered by child welfare agencies are quite narrow, falling short of the necessary interventions families require to address child maltreatment effectively or sustainably.

In Canada and many other countries the placement of children outside the home is regarded as the hallmark of child protection. This is evidenced by the number of children removed from their homes upon contact with child protection systems. In Canada over the past two decades the rate of out-of-home placements rose from 4/1,000 to 9.7/1,000 (Swift, 2011). In 2011 in the United States, about 400,000 (10/1,000) children under government care were living away from their parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). In the same year in British Columbia, the MCFD made residential arrangements for about 10,200 children, placing 8,052 under government care (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012). The

premise of removals rests on children's basic human rights. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Canada is a signatory, every child must have their needs of safety, shelter, nourishment, and socio-emotional development met (United Nations, 2012). When parents are unable to meet these needs of their children, alternative plans ought to be made, for "all children need permanent families who provide safe, stable, nurturing homes and lifelong relationships" (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012, p. 9).

In British Columbia, when a case of maltreatment is substantiated, the decision to remove a child from parental care is made by a judge under the recommendation of the social worker assigned to the case. Coming to such a recommendation, however, is by no means unproblematic. First, social workers' ability to spend the time required to investigate cases adequately is severely limited by ever-increasing caseloads, increasing responsibilities, and restricted staffing support. Second, social workers are often faced with the challenging task of piecing together imperfect and fragmented information about the child, the family, and the event that led to the report. Third, recommendations need to comply with inconstant funding and services. Lastly, recommendations should conform to legislation and the Ministry's approaches that periodically fluctuate between "family preservation" and "child protection" (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Hughes, 2006; Sweetman, Warburton, & Hertzman, 2007).

In British Columbia, children removed from parental care will experience at least one of following placement options:

- (a) *Kinship Care* is an "out-of-care" placement option where children are placed with relatives or someone with whom they have a significant relationship. Under this arrangement, children are not considered to be "in the Ministry's care" and the caregivers do not receive remuneration for the placement. Kinship care also includes *Restricted Foster Care*; this remunerated "in-care" option refers to instances where children are placed with extended family or other significant adults.
- (b) *Foster Care* refers to third-party family-based care. In this category, remuneration increases with the level of specialization caregivers are able to provide. *Regular Family Care* refers to basic foster care and *Specialized Family Care Level 1, 2 & 3* refers to care for children with special needs (i.e., behavioral/ emotional issues), which can range from moderate to extremely high.

- (c) *Contracted/Staffed Residential Care* refers to short-time care provided by contracted, agency-based and staffed residential services (i.e., group homes and shelters). This option also includes contracted family-based care models of residential services,¹² where foster families and children receive ongoing support through supplementary staffing and programming.
- (d) *Tertiary Care* refers to situations where children receive intervention through mental health hospital-based facilities designated under the Mental Health Act and youth custody centres directly operated by MCFD.
- (e) *Independent Living* refers to instances where youth receive an allowance and live independently under a Youth Agreement.

Foster care comprises 50% of the placements in British Columbia (or 5,140); kinship care 17% (or 1,755); independent living 13% (or 1,029); and contracted care 10% (or 1,019) (see Appendix B for entire breakdown of placement arrangements) (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2009; 2012).

According to the MCFD foster care placements are intended as a temporary solution. The MCFD manual for foster parents reads: “[f]ostering is caring for children who cannot live with their families. The goal is for children to return home when their parents are able to care safely for them” (Ministry of Children and Family Development, n.d.). The MCFD Residential Review Project (2012) states:

out-of-home residential placements are critical bridges between the time a child has to live away from their parents and when they return to them, or if reunification is not in a child’s best interests, until the child is in a permanent home with relatives or another family. (p. 9)

The latest numbers from this very review however, suggest otherwise. The Review reports children leaving a CCO in 2011/12 spent an average of 7 years and 8 months in care, a substantial increase from the 6 years and 8 months in 2005/06. Aboriginal children were again reported at disadvantage, experiencing about 43% longer stays in care than non-Aboriginal children/youth. As for children leaving a TCO in 2011/12, the average stay in care was 1 year and 3 months, compared to 1 year and 2 months in

¹² According to the MCFD, although this type of placement shares elements with MTFC- Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care described in the literature, it is not the same as MTFC (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012).

2005/06. Evidence also suggests that a great proportion of children who enter care will not return to their families. In fact, there is a high likelihood that children entering the system after the age of 13 will age out of care (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012). These figures contradict the notion that out-of-home placement is a temporary solution; eight years of one's childhood/youth can hardly be characterized as "temporary."

On the surface, spending a long time in care may appear unobjectionable, particularly when children do not have the option of a safe home to which they can return. "While child protection is clearly an antecedent to wellbeing, the research on foster care and other out-of-family placements is not encouraging. It is not clear that children who are removed from a family do better" (McKinnon, 2006, pp. 12-13). Critics argue that current problems in the child protection system in British Columbia are outweighing the gains that foster care can provide, in many cases further disadvantaging the children the system is intended to protect (Doyle, 2007; Hughes, 2006; McKinnon, 2006; Sweetman et al., 2007; Turpel-Lafond, 2012b, 2013). Addressing the entire range of problems identified by critics is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here, I will concentrate on the chief issue attached to out-of-home placements, that of *multiple placements*. This focus is warranted by a body of research indicating that lack of permanency in placements is the main explanatory factor in a number of enduring deleterious academic, psychological, and social outcomes for children in care. This focus also is justified by research showing persistent associations between multiple placements and negative outcomes for adult foster care alumni (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2011; Knorth, Harder, Zandberg, & Kendrick, 2007; McKinnon, 2006; Ministry of Children and Family Development Service Plan, 2012; Sweetman et al., 2007).

2.2. Issues with Placement Permanency

Ensuring placement permanency for children and youth in care has been a major challenge for child protection systems in British Columbia and elsewhere. Placement breakdowns are attributed to many, often interrelated, factors: high needs of children coming into care, lack of or tardy specialized supportive services for children in care, placement shortages, low remuneration for foster care families, problems in retention

and training of foster care parents, poor communication and collaboration between foster care parents and agencies, and failure to provide foster care parents with a full disclosure of the child's characteristics (e.g., special needs, designations) prior to placement (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). In the U.S. it is estimated that 65% of children in care experience an average of seven or more moves while in care (Pecora, 2012). Although the average number of moves in Canada is unknown, provincial and territorial data yield a similar picture. In British Columbia, the Ministry's Residential Review Project (2012) provides the most comprehensive data on placements. This review reports that 40% of children leaving care with a CCO in 2011/2012 experienced four or more moves while in care and 11% experienced 10 or more. In 2005/06, those numbers were higher; 44 % of children leaving care with a CCO underwent four or more moves and 15% experienced 10 or more. The Review also reported that in 2011/12, even children leaving care with a TCO experienced multiple moves; 5.5% were reported to have been moved four or more times (but no more than 10), compared to 7% in 2005/06 (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012). Although these numbers show a trend of reduction in number of moves over the years in British Columbia, there is little to be celebrated. These numbers convey that child protection services are systematically failing to plan for and afford the stability they once faulted parents for not being able to provide. For about half of the children removed from parental care in British Columbia, an unstable home environment does not cease to be a reality.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is responsible for planning for the children in its care and must fulfill this responsibility in order to ensure the most positive outcomes possible. This planning is neither an option nor a luxury, although...it often seems to be treated as both by a ministry continually preoccupied with crisis management. (Turpel-Lafond, 2013, p. 7)

As the Representative for Children and Youth points out, planning is at the heart of permanency. The results of an audit published in 2013 reveal that only 52 of 100 cases reviewed for Comprehensive Plans of Care (POC) were current, and only five met the expected review standards. The Representative underscores that planning is paramount to the goals of stability and permanence in that a lack of planning contributes to the "drift

effect” observed in the foster care system, where children experience multiple placements over extended periods of time (Turpel-Lafond, 2013).

The experience of multiple placements creates a condition in which it is difficult, if not impossible, for children in care to form long lasting and meaningful relationships. As a consequence, children who experience multiple placements tend to have reduced social support from both adults and peers. It is believed that as the number of placements in care increases, children experience more socio-emotional turmoil which, in turn, can further hinder their ability to form meaningful connections and achieve placement permanency in a foster home (Barth, Weigensberg, Fisher, Fetrow, & Green, 2007). This suggests that meaningful relationships, or the lack thereof, are central to the findings that multiple placements present a major obstacle to achieving placement permanency. This sense of isolation and emotional detachment experienced by children in care is captured in the narratives of six foster care alumni who participated in the Representative for Children and Youth 2013 Summit.

The youth attending this summit talked about the profound impact of multiple moves on how they perceive relationships and conduct themselves through life. Although not all moves were deemed negative and some were indeed acknowledged as necessary and beneficial for the youth’s well being, these only referred to moves to an ostensive stable placement (e.g., adoption by a foster family with whom the youth had achieved a sense of permanency or successful reunification with family of origin). In the vast majority of accounts, moves in placement were equated with periods of severe emotional turmoil and psychological distress. The participants disclosed their resistance and, at times, inability to form relationships with new foster care families, new classmates, and new teachers due to fears of future removals. They also spoke of social workers’ and foster parents’ high expectations of seamless adaptations. They described the difficulty of repeatedly having to adapt to the idiosyncrasies of the “new family” while trying to make sense of yet another—often unexpected and involuntary—loss in their lives.

They expressed painful feelings related to loss of their family and community of origin, as well as the loss of their cultural identity. They recounted pervasive feelings of loneliness and a lack of sense of belonging that permeated all aspects of their lives.

They shared the grief over being forced to leave dear teachers, school counselors, and classmates behind. They mentioned people and places they never got to see again. They explained how being a “good kid” often meant not expressing their feelings.

They also spoke of depression, helplessness, suicide attempts, and anger towards their caregivers, social workers, and the Ministry. They shared their struggles with self-identity, self-worth, and self-destructive behaviours; where drugs, cutting, and alcohol were seemingly the only way to obtain relief (Pecha Kutcha Youth Group, personal communication, April 24, 2013).

These stories of these youth illustrate not only the devastating effects of maltreatment children in care experience prior to coming to care, but also, the insidious effects of lack of placement permanency in the child protection system in British Columbia. Given these children’s profound fragility and histories of adversity and trauma, it is troubling that they and others like them, continue to encounter instability in care; not only once, but multiple times.

2.2.1. Negative outcomes associated with placement impermanency

Academic and Developmental Difficulties

As a group, children in care have been found to be the most academically vulnerable. Educational outcomes typically are evaluated in terms of grades on standardized tests, particularly in reading and mathematics. Outcome assessments also take into account age-appropriate grade level, grade retention rates, attendance rates, special education referrals, and graduation and dropout rates. Some also consider the incidence of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsion rates. Educational outcomes are of special importance given the persistent links between low educational achievement and unemployment, poverty, homelessness, welfare assistance, single-parenthood, substance abuse, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Guibord, Bell, Romano, & Rouillard, 2011; Harper & Schmidt, 2012; Pecora, 2012; Swift, 2011).

Although research on the academic outcomes of children in care is not extensive, what there is indicates that children in care fare significantly worse academically compared to the general population. The “Looking After Children” initiative, implemented in 15 countries, showed that 53%-57% of children in care were characterized as having learning difficulties, a rate that is twice as high as that found in the general population. A quarter of children in care lagged behind in grade-level attainment, and 41% (compared to 9% of the general student population) repeated a grade. Youth in care were also six times more likely to obtain a General Educational Development (GED) than to obtain a high school diploma (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012).¹³ In British Columbia, the MCFD’s educational report on the academic outcomes of children in care presents similar results. Based on data from the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), the report showed that children under a CCO were seven times more likely to be in a special program (excluding gifted programs) than all other students (49% versus 7.5%). It also found that children under a CCO were more likely to have been the subjects of intensive behavioural interventions (28% versus 14%) and three times more likely to have chronic health impairments that affect learning (40% versus 13%) than their non-fostered peers. Children under a CCO were also less likely to be in age appropriate grades (79% versus to 95%) and, on average, 20% less likely to “meet or exceed expectations” than all other students, particularly for numeracy and reading comprehension. The report also conveyed that youth under a CCO graduated at a 10% lower rate than all other students (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2011). While it is clear that children in care are at increased risk for poor academic performance, the nature of the relationship between being in care and academic achievement requires further investigation. Arguably, there is a mutually reinforcing reciprocal relationship between being in care and school performance. That is to say, children with special needs that impact learning may be more likely to be placed in care than typically developing children—in that parents lack the resources (psychological and material) to deal with the challenges

¹³ GED is a test that comprises areas of language arts writing, language arts reading, social studies, science and mathematics. Research indicates that youth graduating with high school diplomas are 1.7 time more likely to complete and AA degree; 3.9 times more likely to complete a BA degree; and more likely to have higher incomes (Pecora, 2012).

presented by these difficulties—and, once they enter care, their difficulties are further aggravated by lack of placement stability and all that it entails.

Although schools must improve administrative practices such as transferring children's files and promptly designing and implementing academic plans, the educational progress of children in care is hindered primarily by improper intervention for their high needs and multiple moves (Pecora, 2012). In addition to, and at least in part, because of, a history of trauma associated with maltreatment, the majority of children in care present problems with psychological functioning. Evidence suggests that 37% - 54% of children and youth in care in the U.S. meet the definitions of at least one psychiatric disorder and about a third of them receive psychotropic medication. Attentional disorders (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder—ADHD, Attention Deficit Disorder—ADD), anxiety disorders (e.g., Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—PTSD, Generalized Anxiety disorder), and mood disorders (e.g., Major Depression Disorder—MDD) are among the most commonly observed (Guibord et al., 2011; Harris et al., 2010; Pecora, 2012).

The CIS-2008 estimates that in Canada, 11% of children in care struggle with an attentional disorder (e.g., ADHD/ADD); 11% with intellectual and development disabilities; 14% with attachment issues; 15% with aggression issues; 19% with depression, anxiety and withdrawal; and 23% with academic difficulties (Trocmé et al., 2010). In British Columbia, the MCFD reports that 30% of children in care receive intensive behavioural interventions for a serious mental illness and approximately 7% receive moderate behavioural support for a mental illness (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2011).

Few studies have been able to disentangle the effects of prior psychological functioning and the impact of being in care on the educational performance of children in care. What has been amply supported, however, is that multiple moves intensify both negative psychological functioning and poor educational outcomes. Multiple placements affect attendance, disrupt the delivery of academic and psychological interventions, and interfere with the socio-emotional development of children (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Meloy & Phillips, 2012; Turpel-Lafond, 2009). School changes hinder the instrumental value educational interventions can provide (e.g., employability, career advancements)

and deprive children in care of a much needed sense of social stability since teachers, school counselors, and classmates are important members of children's support systems (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Guibord et al., 2011; Pecora, 2012). Perhaps the most poignant example of the menacing interaction among educational outcomes, mental health, and multiple placements in British Columbia is provided by the Representative for Children and Youth Suicide Report. This report reviewed 89 cases of youth who either ended (15) or attempted to end their lives (74) between 2007 and 2010. The report found that lack of stable living arrangements was a major factor in self-harm. About 50% of the youth described in the report experienced between 10 and 20 moves while in care; 5 were moved more than 30 times (Turpel-Lafond, 2012a). The report also found that 50% of the youth attended school only sporadically or had stopped attending school altogether. Of the 89 youth reviewed in the report—58% of which were Aboriginal—mental health issues were identified in 64, behavioural issues in 48, and learning challenges in 45 (Turpel-Lafond, 2012a). Although the report was not able to pinpoint cause-effect relationships, it clearly illustrates the complex and mutually reinforcing relationships among children's poor psychological functioning, multiple placements, and poor academic outcomes while in care; highlights the moderating effect of schools; and, importantly, draws attention to the potentially dire repercussions of failing to provide children in care with stability:

As they were growing up, these youth had lives rife with unpredictability and they regularly had to cope with adversity. For most of them, their personal histories were lost in the chaos of constant change, including a parade of caregivers and service providers coming through their lives. What could they see as a future for themselves? For some of the youth, there was not enough hope to keep them going. (Turpel-Lafond, 2012b, p. 66)

Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

For youth (12-19 years old) in care, psychological functioning, multiple placements, and academic outcomes are implicated in yet another major issue—contact with the criminal justice system. While out-of-home placements may serve as a protective factor against delinquency, multiple placements increase the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. In 2009, the Representative for Children and Youth reported that the vast majority (76 %) of children and youth in care involved with

the criminal justice system in British Columbia were placed in care prior to their first formal involvement with the youth justice system. The Representative for Children and Youth also reported that a higher proportion of youth in care were becoming involved with the youth justice system (35.5 %) than were graduating from high school (24.5%).¹⁴ The report showed that by the age of 21, 41% of youth in care (compared to 6.6 % of the general population) had been involved with the justice system. The report also revealed that more youth in care had been recommended for charges in the justice system and that there were more charges per individual than for youth not-in-care (Turpel-Lafond, 2009).¹⁵ While involvement in the criminal justice system seems more prominent amongst particular subgroups—males, older youth, youth with a serious mental health designations, and youth with histories of domestic violence (Doyle, 2007; Turpel-Lafond, 2009)—the number of moves a child experiences in the child protection system is believed to play a crucial role in the likelihood of youth coming into contact with the criminal justice system; as the number of placements increase so do contacts with the criminal justice system and the seriousness of charges (Jonson-Reid & Bard, 2000; Sweetman et al., 2007; Turpel-Lafond, 2009). Perhaps much like the relationship between multiple placements and poor educational outcomes, the upheaval generated by lack of permanency in youths' lives intensifies behavioural problems that are at the heart of the ingress into the criminal justice system.

Difficulties in adulthood.

Unfortunately for many foster care alumni, the difficulties associated with being in care do not end when they transition out of the child protection system.¹⁶ This is particularly the case for youth who age out of care without being provided with placement permanency (Avery, 2010). These youth are particularly prone to leaving care without meaningful adult supports, supportive services, and the professional and educational tools to become productive, self-sustaining adults (Avery, 2010; Jackson et

¹⁴ Upon entering the youth justice system, the likelihood of graduating from high school drops to a startling 13% (Turpel-Lafond, 2009).

¹⁵ Charges typically involved property-related offences, assault, substance use, and administrative offences (e.g., breaching supervision or probation conditions)

¹⁶ "Foster care alumni" refers to any child or youth who at some point in their lives were under government care, not only those in residential foster care.

al., 2011; Harris et al., 2010). A powerful description offered by a foster care alumni regarding the transition out of the system was framed as follows: “imagine being a sole goldfish in a fish bowl, then on your 19th birthday, you are told you going to transition out of care, to another bowl. When your birthday rolls along, you realize you’re being flushed out of a toilet bowl” (L., personal communication, April 25, 2013). This account is symbolic of the confusion, helplessness, and grim prospects that await young foster care alumni exiting the system.

Researchers and child advocates have become particularly interested and increasingly concerned with the poor vocational and self-supporting skills that foster care alumni display upon exiting the system. Authors of a large American study found that just over half of foster care alumni graduate with a high school diploma, and only 3% (compared to 11% of the general population) go on to complete an undergraduate degree. They also found that about half of youth aging out of care are underemployed with mean earnings below the poverty line (i.e., average of less than \$6,000/year), and 15-30% are unemployed after 2 years of leaving care (Harris, et al., 2009). Further, this research revealed that at age 21, 22% of foster care alumni had become homeless for at least one day after emancipating from foster care (Pecora, 2009). Another study on three large shelters in New York City found that 60% of the clients attended to by the shelter had been in the foster care system. What is more, 77% of the clients had at least one child with a history of involvement with, or being under the care of, a child protection agency (Avery, 2010). These studies highlight the bleak individual and intergenerational outcomes that have become increasingly associated with being in care. Consistent with these findings, the Representative for Children and Youth’s Suicide Report indicated that 24 of the 89 youth studied (27%) had parents who themselves had been in care of the Ministry as children or youth. What these findings suggest is that out-of-home placements, as well intended as they may be, present systematic failures, particularly in regards to permanency, which serve to disrupt the healthy socio-emotional development of children and hinder the possibility for successful reunification with the family of origin.

2.3. Addressing Placement Permanency

Achieving placement permanency is undoubtedly both the major obstacle and the major goal of child protection systems in Canada and other countries. In British Columbia, placement permanency has been a top objective of the Ministry's Service Plans for years, yielding modest to meager results. Child advocates and researchers have long brought the issue of placement stability to the forefront (Turpel-Lafond, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a). In 2011 the MCFD responded with a large comprehensive review of all residential services provided to children and youth in care in British Columbia. The review was conducted under the following guiding consideration:

The intention (is) to ensure that children and youth receive high quality residential care and treatment, experience as few placement disruptions as possible, achieve permanence as soon as can be safely arranged, and when necessary, are prepared and supported for the transition to adulthood...[t]he Federation and MCFD began this process with a number of concerns and questions about residential services and a shared belief that services can and must be improved.¹⁷

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012, p. 9)

The review culminated with the release of a final report in June of 2012. This document outlines seven *strategic directions* and 32 recommendations that are considered central to bringing about the desired changes and improving the experiences and outcomes of children and youth in care. The seven strategic directions are:

1. Achieving Permanency - Embed permanency as a key priority throughout the residential care delivery system. Achieving permanency through reunification or placement with an alternate permanent family needs to be the organizing principle around which residential services are provided.
2. Enhancing Kinship Care - Give priority consideration to placement with relatives and other significant adults who have an established relationship with a child or have a cultural or traditional responsibility toward a child.
3. Strengthening Foster Care - Realign and strengthen foster care services and supports to better achieve permanency and stability.

¹⁷ Referring to the Federation of Community Social Services of British Columbia

4. Planning and Developing an Accessible Array of Residential Care and Treatment Services, which addresses three sub topics:
 - a. Building a planned system of residential care and treatment services based on research and best practices.
 - b. Building a planned system of intermediate residential care and treatment services based on research and best practices.
 - c. Addressing the key gaps in tertiary care and treatment services.
5. Addressing Youth Interests in Permanency and Transitions
Pursue permanency options for youth aged 16-18 and improve preparation for transitions to adulthood including strengthening post-majority supports and services for 19-24 year olds.
6. Working Together Effectively - Enhance the working relationships within the residential care system as an essential foundation for implementing the recommended actions across all of the Strategic Directions.
7. Enhancing Accountability in Residential Care - Build accountability and continuous learning into the process of implementing the recommended actions across all of the Strategic Directions for residential services.

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012, pp. 29-30)

Whether these recommendations will come to fruition as intended remains to be seen. Nevertheless, they signal greater commitment from the MCFD to improve the quality of the experiences of children in care. While many of the issues explored in the literature as impediments to permanency (e.g., placement shortages, training for social workers and foster families, cultural fit between foster care family and children in care, special needs of children in care, planning, inter-agency communication) are addressed in these recommendations, reunification with the family of origin remains treated as a secondary objective in that no concrete provisions are made in terms of significantly improving the condition and support for families of origin. Consider this passage regarding reunification in *Strategic Direction #1: Achieving Permanency*:

Planning for permanence must be a priority that starts from the point of first placement, with a focus on family reunification, and at the same time includes consideration of alternate legally permanent options such as adoption, custom adoption and transfer of guardianship. (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012, p. 30)

Though the wording of this strategic direction seemingly gives precedence to reunification over other interventions, the actual recommendations orient to legislation

considerations and shifts in mindset that apply almost exclusively to social workers and foster care families. The only mention of birth families concerns making more use of existing practices such as family group conferences, mediation, family case planning conferences, and family circles. While better use of such practices is certainly a positive way to engage birth parents, they are insufficient to address the obstacles that stand in the way of reunification, such as poverty, inadequate housing, and substance abuse. In Chapter 3, I will address these obstacles in greater detail. For now, acknowledging that “families living in situations in which child protection is an issue are as much in need of support services as they are of child protection programmes” (Léveillé & Chamberland, 2010, p. 931) should suffice for the purpose of this chapter.

Furthermore, while it may be wise to plan multiple intervention options, it is challenging to envision how overloaded social workers will manage to achieve designing “multiple” comprehensive plans of care. More troublesome is envisioning how the competing objectives inherent in “dual planning models” will be resolved, particularly those of reunification and those that permanently remove custody from parents (i.e., CCO, adoption).¹⁸ Arguably, the course of action in a plan of care with “adoption objectives” will compete with those with “reunification objectives.” It is widely known that family-centred practices are often supplanted by calcified child protection practices and legislation (Avery, 2010), particularly in that legislation is often ambivalent about child protection and family preservation. This finding is supported by evidence that if reunification is not established as an initial goal of care, birth families are seldom considered as placement options over the course of care (Avery, 2010). Furthermore, research consistently shows that the longer children stay in care in out-of-home placements, the less likely they are to have contact with their birth families (Jones & Kruk, 2005). In British Columbia, this point is made poignant by the fact that for children in care under a CCO, family reunification is the goal of care in only 16% of the cases, independence (under a Youth Agreement) is the goal in 18% of the cases, and adoption is the goal in 30% of the cases (Tupel-Lafond, 2013).

¹⁸ In the United States, with the Introduction of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the “Dual Planning” models that planned for family reunification as well as adoption became largely encouraged and adopted by American child protective agencies (Trocmé, MacLaurin, and Fallon, 2000).

The evidence presented thus far suggests the child protection system in British Columbia has failed to fulfill two core mandates of out-of-home placements; namely, being temporary and least-intrusive interventions. In the absence of legislation that clearly establishes the precedence of reunification over other goals of care, concrete guidelines to support parents in reuniting with their children, and effective programs to rehabilitate families of origin, there is minimal reason to believe that the *modus operandi* of the child protection system will change towards a more family supportive approach in any significant way. Failing to acknowledge the fundamental tension between child protection and family services in British Columbia undermines any attempt to reconnect birth families and children in care. Furthermore, the “new strategic direction” outlined in the Residential Review Project 2012 is hardly different from the guidelines social workers currently utilize (i.e., CFCSA) where out-of-home placements and moves while in care “should” only occur as a last resource and the child’s best interest in mind.

Analysis of the competing objectives between family preservation and child protection typically revolve around the feasibility of parents’ rehabilitation, parents’ deservingness of support, social workers’ qualifications and training, and available funding. Discussions regarding the theoretical foundations that guide the legislation and practice of the child protection system in B.C seldom gain centre stage. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how such discussions are crucial to generating improvement and change in policies and practices in the child protection system. More specifically, I will elaborate how the individualistic concept of self assumed by the child protection system in British Columbia undergirds much of the tension between family preservation and child protection goals of care in ways that obstruct significant reform.

Chapter 3.

The Self in Orientations to Child Maltreatment

The debate over the responsibilities of governments and parents in child welfare systems is as complex as it is interdisciplinary, dealing with legal, economic, sociological, psychological, and political issues. Achieving a balance between protecting children and supporting families in instances of child maltreatment is a conundrum for policy makers in Canada and elsewhere. Predicaments over authority, responsibility, legislation, and practice inspired a massive pioneering international comparative study in the mid-nineties to explore how nine countries responded to child protection.

3.1. Gilbert's classification of orientations of child protection systems

Neil Gilbert's first study, published in 1997, investigated social policies and professional practices along four main dimensions: how child maltreatment was framed, how intervention was administered, the relationship between the state and parents, and the practice of out-of-home placements (Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011). The study revealed two main orientations to child welfare from 1977 to 1997: a *Child Protection Orientation* and a *Family Service Orientation*. Gilbert observed that the framing of the problem determined the course of the intervention, the nature of the relationship between the state and parents, and the character of the out-of-home placements.

The U.S., Canada, and England were characterized with a child protection orientation. This orientation—also referred to as the *Liberal* or *Anglo-American Orientation*—framed child maltreatment primarily along the lines of parents' deviant malevolent behaviour and dysfunctional parenting. Intervention was characterized as predominantly investigative and legalistic. The state was observed to assume a highly

adversarial stance toward parents, making use of coercive powers to involuntarily remove children from parental care and/or to terminate parental rights.

Approaches in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland—also referred to as the *Social Democratic* or *Nordic Orientation*—and Germany, Belgium, and The Netherlands—also known as the *Conservative* or *Continental Orientation*—were characterized as following a *family service orientation*.¹⁹ This orientation framed maltreatment as a manifestation of psychological stress due to socio-economic and family-related (e.g., marital) problems, all of which were believed to be highly responsive to help. Intervention was based on needs assessment and therapeutic and social support. The state assumed a partnership relationship with parents, building on parental strengths and providing a wide net of social services to strengthen family relations.

Out-of-home placements happened at comparable rates in countries with both orientations described by Gilbert. Their character however, was qualitatively different. Family service oriented placements were mainly (70%) voluntary and temporary, while child protection oriented placements (mostly in North America) were largely involuntary and involved legal action to reduce or revoke parental rights (Gilbert, 2011). The study also showed that adoption rates varied dramatically between orientations. In family service oriented countries, adoption was disfavoured as family preservation constituted the primary goal of care; while in child protection-oriented countries, adoption was amply implemented. For instance, in Nordic countries such as Denmark, adoption was rare; in Finland, disallowed; whereas in the U.S., it increased by 50% with the Adoption and Safe Family Act.

Although neither child protection nor family service systems were free of problems, there was consensus that child protection orientations were significantly less effective in assuring the well being of children and preventing children from re-entering the system, mostly due to the high incidence of interruptions in academic, familial, social, and mental health-related plans that incur from placement changes and instability. As a result, researchers and policy makers began to explore ways to promote family

¹⁹ Nordic and Continental countries family-services approach differed on policies of the mandatory reporting of maltreatment.

participation, prevention, and support; that is to say, to move away from a child protection orientation towards a family-service approach (Gilbert et al., 2011).

This shift is detectable in Gilbert's follow-up study 20 years later. The follow-up study reveals that in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. early support for at-risk families and family oriented practices have increased, and so have expenditures on family policies. In the U.S., the number of children receiving preventive services increased fivefold. In Canada and the U.S., interventions that shift the priority from investigation to intensive and timely support services for families have become more prevalent for low-risk cases and a main strategic consideration of child welfare providers (Gilbert, 2011; Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013). Nordic and Continental systems also present differences. Gilbert observes that economic pressure and political changes associated with globalization and the European Union, has led countries that formerly subscribed to a family service orientation to incorporate child protection oriented practices in their systems. For instance, Finland and Germany established stiffer mandatory reporting policies that evoke the adversarial and legalistic approaches of North American countries; investigations gained central stage and decision-making became more bureaucratic and less collaborative with parents (Gilbert, 2011).

The new study concludes that after two decades, the two once clearly distinct approaches can no longer be observed as such. All systems now present some mix of family-service, child protection, and a third orientation called the "child development orientation." This newly introduced category emerged as a result of two interconnected factors: the 1989 U.N. Convention of Rights of Children, which highlights children's social, political, and legal rights, and modern social welfare. Modern social welfare is characterized by investment in human capital as a way to enhance national competitiveness. Gilbert explains that supporting a healthy childhood is a main strategy to secure the benefits of governmental investment and *defamilialization* is a key mechanism to achieve it. Defamilialization is a process where individuals, particularly those in adverse home environments, are provided with state support through policies that reduce individuals' dependence on kinship and capitalize on notions of individual potential. This emergent category of child welfare focuses solely on the child, removing parents from the framing of maltreatment as well as the intervention. Intervention is heavily based on early individual assessment, with children receiving support or being

removed at the suspicion or earliest signs of maltreatment. The state assumes a paternalistic stance towards parents, taking full parental responsibility for the care of children in the system (Gilbert, 2011).

3.2. Orientations to child protection in British Columbia: Tensions between family preservation and child protection

Gilbert's classification of child welfare systems is valuable in that it allows us to trace the different rationales behind common practices and policies in child protection in British Columbia. The guiding principles of the CFCSA clearly reveal the mix of the orientations Gilbert describes. Principle 2(b) of Part 1 of the *CFCSA*, which establishes the guiding principles of legislation and practice, states: "a family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents" (Government of British Columbia, 2013, para. 1). This mandate aligns with the family-service orientation where families of origin are understood as the most suitable environment for the healthy development of children. Principle 4 (b) can be said to align with the child development orientation. In it, the best interest of the child is determined according to "the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development" (Government of British Columbia, 2013, para. 3). Lastly, section 2(c) of the *CFCSA*, can be said to be in line with the child protection orientation, where the notion of parental deservingness (and malevolence) is central to parental participation and maintenance of parental rights: "if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided" (Government of British Columbia, 2013, para. 1).

The consequences and effectiveness of the convergence of these three orientations in child protection systems have been debated. Some see the intermingling of these orientations as unproblematic. Most often this stance is justified and defended on the grounds of practicality since the implementation of small changes to existing practices and structures do not require the broad political initiative, substantial funding, and extensive ideological agreement that structural changes do. Nonetheless, as useful, practical, and uncomplicated as it may appear to blend orientations to child welfare, the

changes these can effect are often limited and superficial. These orientations at times present profoundly incompatible ideas, which deeply compromise the establishment of clear directives and the assessment of efficiency and accountability, in turn presenting serious challenges for legislation and practice. To illustrate this point, let me consider the fundamental tensions between family preservation and child protection in the Differential Response intervention in British Columbia.

The MCFD introduced the Family Differential Response (FDR) in 2004 as a way to address the limitations and unintended negative outcomes associated with child protection oriented practices, such as unnecessary or involuntary removals, placement impermanency, and loss of cultural identity amongst Aboriginal children. The Ministry's brochure states that "at the heart of FDR is moving from a reliance on investigation and removal as the primary response to keeping children safe, to a range of responses and community based options to keep children safe within their families and communities" (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2004, p. 4). A number of notions cited in this document orient to the collaborative model of family service systems:

- "a shift away from a high reliance on investigation";
- "[families] are no longer left to manage alone";
- "engaging the community to support families";
- "providing intensive, meaningful and timely services to help families";
- "[t]he approach is collaborative and solution-focused";
- "services will be community based and provided in partnership with other child serving agencies"

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2004, pp. 3-6).

The acknowledgement that families served by the child protection system in British Columbia may have been "left to manage alone" and require more governmental assistance to parent their children seems to imply the deep sense of understanding implicit in family service orientations that the welfare of children is intrinsically connected to the welfare of their parents and their society. Unfortunately, the Ministry's claim that the FDR represents a "transformative initiative" away from the child protection orientation does not withstand closer scrutiny.

An observant reader will detect that notwithstanding the language, the framing of maltreatment, intervention, and the relationship between parents and state remain centred around child-focused approaches (i.e., child protection and child development orientations). Consider this statement: “the FDR is available for parents *willing to cooperate* with the social worker to develop a plan that addresses *the child’s* needs and demonstrate an ongoing *willingness to accept* and make use of services necessary to support this plan” (p. 4). While it is true that willingness to cooperate and compliance with a given plan are necessary conditions for familial interventions to work, this statement reveals several interrelated and mutually reinforcing points of discord between the FDR and family service orientations.

First, unlike family service orientations, where all families receive broad access to services prior to, and upon coming into contact with, the child protection system, the provision of services to families through the FDR is restricted to parents of a particular profile; namely, cooperative, accepting, and abiding to the Ministry’s evaluation and plan. This approach sets collaboration as a precondition for eligibility of services, while in family service orientations parental collaboration is something to be forged *through the interaction and support* of social welfare services and providers. Families only cease to receive support if cooperation breaks down *throughout* the process of family intervention (Coccoza & Hort, 2011).

Second, and in a related manner, in creating a particular profile for eligibility of family services, the FDR alludes to the child protection oriented notion that maltreatment can be attributed to parents’ malevolent behavior, thus requiring differential treatment from the outset. That is to say, some parents deserve to receive family services because they are “good” and others do not, because they are “bad.” While it is true that some parents may in fact be malevolent and rehabilitation may be difficult due to their personal characteristics and behaviours (e.g., addictions, mental illnesses, personal struggles), all parents ought to be provided with genuine opportunities and support for change. Family service perspectives refrain from attributing maltreatment solely to parental individual characteristics. Rather, they situate it in the parents’ personal, relational, and socio-economic context. Thus, from a family service perspective, better parenting should ensue from interventions that address the larger familial and social context. For instance, interventions may involve a combination of individual services (e.g., psychological, legal,

and employment counseling, financial assistance), familial services (e.g., family counseling, integration into the community, community daycare), and broad societal initiatives (e.g., legislation and funding to support accessibility to housing, health care, education, and employment).

A third related disagreement between the FDR and family service orientations refers to the unit of analysis and hierarchy of needs it adopts. The FDR continues to place parents as coadjutants in the process of child protection. As mentioned above, parents are eligible candidates for the FDR if willing to collaborate, accept, and support the plan that addresses the *child's* needs. The needs of parents are placed at a secondary plane, when considered at all. If one takes into account that the majority of parents whose children have been removed for neglect, struggle with the effects of poverty, the decision to focus solely on the needs of the child certainly seems short-sighted and oblivious to the plight of so many well-intended parents involved in the child protection system. Because family service orientations adopt a larger lens, they are able to consider the needs of children and parents concurrently.

It is important to highlight that providing broad familial assistance and creating conditions for reunification is not synonymous with refraining from removing children from parents identified as neglectful; nor is it synonymous with compromising the safety of children to keep families together physically. Physical separation (i.e., out-of-home placements) may be a necessary step to the recovery of families. Physical separation may be an important factor in gaining perspective and providing relief to a stressful situation. But, ideally it should not create emotional distancing amongst family members. When children are placed outside parental care in family service orientations, social welfare providers work with parents to elevate family functionality, providing them with services and support necessary pre-conditions for reunification and avoiding that families become fractured in the process. To that end, parents continue to have access to their children, to participate in important aspects of their lives, and to have parental rights. Family preservation goals drive family service orientations to look for more diplomatic, cooperative, and less traumatic ways to rebuild the family unit (Cocozza & Hort, 2011). Evidence of such is the fact that despite similarities in incidence rates between child centred and family service approaches, the majority of placements under

family service orientations are voluntary and much shorter in duration compared to placements in child oriented systems.

Unfortunately, the FDR offers a quite fragile spirit of cooperation towards parents, where the lingering oppositional and correctional inclinations can be observed. For instance, the FDR's brochure assures taxpayers that "the FDR is not a 'soft' response to children at risk of abuse and neglect" (p. 6), underscoring that unfavourable response to this intervention will be followed by investigation. As Alpert and Britner (2009) sharply observe:

the foster care system is inherently punitive. The unwavering presence of the state power, characterized by the threat of having their children permanently removed, pervades the foster care process for parents. It is in this environment that caseworkers are expected to communicate empathy and respect for parents, gain their trust, highlight their strengths, and improve their skills and resources. (p. 136)

As this quote suggests, there is great discrepancies in what is meant by particular interventions and providing the necessary requirements for such interventions to come to fruition. The FDR is a case in point in the child protection system in British Columbia, where family preservation objectives compete and are hindered by child protection oriented legislation and practices (Farris-Manning and Zandstra, 2003; Hughes, 2006; McKinnon, 2006).

A body of evidence corroborates the claim that the child welfare system in British Columbia is more aligned with child protection than family preservation goals. The first piece of evidence is the system's child centredness. As the term suggests, the primary concern of the system lies in assuring the *child's* safety and well being. Interventions are designed along the child's individual potential, individual rights, and the promotion of independence of children in care from their family origin (e.g., foster care, group homes, youth agreements) (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). This assertion is substantiated by the fact that reunification with the family of origin is declared as a goal of care less often than the goals of independence and adoption. In keeping with the North American trend where only less than half (48%) of children who leave foster-care in any one year return to their family of origin (Wells & Marcenko, 2011), in British Columbia, family reunification is the declared objective for only 16%, of

children in care; behind independent living under a Youth Agreement and adoption, which comprise 18% and 30% of the objectives of care respectively (Tupel-Lafond, 2013). What these numbers suggest is that more efforts are made to find a new living arrangement for children and/or to create the conditions for independent living than to rehabilitate the family of origin and strengthen familial relationships.

Little emphasis is placed on return planning once a child is taken into care. Parents reported that they are given little direction in terms of what is expected of them before their children can be returned. In other cases, the resources needed to fulfill the expectations are not available or have long waitlists. The ambiguity in the Ministry's expectations and the inordinate delays involved in communicating with social workers lead mothers to lose hope that their children will ever come home. (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008, p. 3)

The fact that the majority of children placed in care over the age of thirteen, age out of care, often after multiple moves (Tupel-Lafond, 2013a) ratifies this statement. Aging out of care means that attempts at reunifying children with their families of origin failed. It also means that children leave care without having experienced a strong and/or stable sense of family. This evidence is compounded by the fact that programs towards reducing the risk of harm for children, programs aimed at keeping families together (e.g., FDR), respite care, and shared parenting are less prevalent in British Columbia than in other jurisdictions (Kruk, 2012).

The second piece of evidence that attests to the de-emphasis of family preservation goals in British Columbia lies in the fact that third-party placements significantly outnumber kinship placements in the province—5,140 and 1,755, respectively (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012). This means that more often than not, children become distanced from their extended families, communities, and culture once in care. To make matters worse, there is robust evidence to suggest that the family of origin of children in care often become uninvolved or estranged from their children (Jones & Kruk, 2005). This is particularly problematic for Aboriginal children, who despite the CFCSA's mandates, continue to be placed outside their cultural traditions, encountering discrimination and loss of heritage and identity (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008).

In British Columbia there is a large gap between the mandates for familial integration and support and the experience of families in the child welfare system. Child protection and family preservation are often placed in opposition of each other, which causes objectives of care to be polarized. Families are seldom described as integrated systems within the larger sociocultural context. Therefore, family and community interventions are deemed secondary or unnecessary as far as the best interest of the child is concerned. In interpreting the well being of children as ultimately separate from the well being of their families and communities, and the role of families and communities as merely influential rather than constitutive of one's life, the decision to place children outside the family (e.g., foster care)—one or multiple times—is deemed not only sensible, but also thoroughly comprehensive. Moreover, the negative outcomes that ensue from multiple placements and the dissolution of families are treated as collateral damage.

Arguably, tensions between family preservation and child protection are typically firmly grounded on theoretically blended approaches. These approaches, as well-intended as they may be, often produce ambiguous and contradictory objectives which, in turn, affect the ability of child welfare stakeholders to generate significant change. Theoretical orientations to child welfare are at the heart of legislation, practice, and most importantly, the conditions set for families who come in contact with the child protection systems. Thus, while practicality is certainly a critical factor in decision-making in child welfare systems, so is theoretical consistency, or the lack thereof. While there is some acknowledgment that the convergence of different orientations to child welfare is challenging on philosophical grounds, discussions usually revolve around countries' financial power and disparities in political-economic philosophies (Gilbert et al., 2011). The conceptions of selfhood that undergird the different child welfare systems are seldom considered. To be specific, the fact that the conceptions of selfhood presupposed by child centred orientations (i.e., child protection and child development orientations) and family service orientations are largely antithetical, is ignored as a source of difficulty by child welfare stakeholders and researchers alike.

3.3. The problematic Western conception of selfhood

3.3.1. *A brief selective history of the Western conception of selfhood*

As the previous section suggests, despite claiming otherwise, the child protection system in British Columbia remains largely centred on a *child protection orientation*, which presents challenges in effectively supporting families to achieve successful reunifications and preventing families from becoming involved with the child protection system. In this section, I advance that the challenges associated with the child protection system in British Columbia can be mapped onto the problems associated with the so-called “individualistic” conception of selfhood that has proliferated in North America. I will begin with a brief overview of the history of the Western conception of selfhood. This selective summary is intended to accomplish several goals. First, it is intended to demonstrate that beliefs regarding the nature of selves are particular to place and time, being inherently historically, culturally, and socially situated (Sugarman, 2013). Second, it is intended to provide an overview of the origin and trajectory of some of the key aspects associated with selfhood in contemporary advanced liberal democracies; namely, autonomy, freedom, and self-governance. Third, it is meant to supply the backdrop for the discussion of the role of disciplinary psychology in fashioning and maintaining the current configuration of selfhood in contemporary society. Lastly, it is intended to provide the foundation for the main argument of this thesis, that the current, individualistic, enterprising conception of selfhood we currently hold is ontologically unsound and unsuitable for the understanding and investigation of issues concerned with child maltreatment.

Conceptions of selfhood—as well as what is believed to constitute them—are not universal, fixed, or continuous. They are contingent on grids of meaning, language, and judgment that are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and social ecologies (Rose, 2013). The prevailing Western conception of selfhood as a masterful, bounded, autonomous self, equipped with “specific psychological boundaries, an internal locus of control, and a wish to manipulate the external world for its own personal ends” (Cushman, 1990, p. 600), is a relatively recent notion of selfhood, emerging—by many historians’ accounts—in the sixteenth century. Prior to the sixteenth century, most conceptions of selfhood

were fundamentally communal, which, in subsequent centuries, have grown more individualistic with the gradual loss of community and tradition (Cushman, 1990). What is meant by a communal account of selfhood is the notion that individuals do not exist as ontologically separate and divorced from others and their socio-historical environment, but rather, are constituted as psychologically capable individuals within and through the practices available in their historical, social, and cultural contexts

From Ancient Greece up until the Middle Ages, one's environment was considered central to one's existence. The divine world, the material world, family, community, and society were not considered external or optional aspects of one's existence. Rather, they were regarded as the very substance of one's constitution (Martin, Sugarman, & Hickinbottom, 2010). In pre-Socratic philosophy, for example, individuals understood themselves as embodiments of the thoughts and feelings of gods and also of their societies. In the *Iliad* (eight or ninth century B.C.E.), Achilles' address to his army conveyed the words the goddess Hera had placed in his mind (Martin et al., 2010). In *Oresteia* (fifth century B.C.E) murder and revenge were condemned on the grounds that individuals were not to destroy part of what constituted them, the citizens of the city-state of Athens. This communal and inclusive conception of selfhood was also visible in Hebrew ancient societies, where the boundaries of the individual and Yahweh—the Hebrew God, and the individual and the tribe are at times indistinguishable in passages of Genesis (Cushman, 1995).²⁰ In Classical Greek philosophy, self-knowledge—as conveyed in Socrates and Plato's writings (fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.)—was not self-generated or even possible in inner isolation. Rather, it rested on understanding one's place in the pre-existing cosmological order and their function in maintaining it (Martin, et al., 2010).

By 401 C.E., with the collapse of the Roman Empire, the self—as portrayed in Augustine—was sketched as anguishing in confusion, emptiness.²¹ This inadequate,

²⁰ Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament.

²¹ Although the term "self" is being used here, it only enters the English language in the fourteenth century, albeit in a different configuration of the one understood today. The 'self with a deep psychological interior begins to emerge in the sixteenth century (Martin et al., 2010)

meaningless, greedy, and lustful self was described as in need of external intervention to save it from itself. This self was ultimately described as an empty vessel for the soul that only could be filled by God. This self, that derived meaning from fidelity to God, is the one that prevailed in the Middle Ages (778 C.E.), fostering the prosperity of the Church and the belief that men ought to live and die in the name of religious faith (e.g., crusades). In the late Middle Ages, however, this conception of selfhood started to falter. Church corruption, discontentment over oppressive feudal systems, and increasing violence (e.g., towards heretics and Jews) began to signal the end of selfhood as given by divine truth and divine will, giving rise to a new self, motivated by freedom.

The deterioration of the feudal system, the decline of the power of the Church, and the inception of mercantile capitalism introduced individuals to unprecedented religious freedom and opportunities for social and geographical mobility. Individuals began to explore new configurations for earning a living and being. This transition from restriction to freedom however, was not a fluid one. This particular time in history was marked by a lack of moral guidance in regards to this new way of being. The new self was free from God and the land yet continued to be bound by family, community, and centuries-long traditions and beliefs. Without the authority of the Church and hold from feudal oaths, there were many questions as to how one was to live life, to determine right from wrong, and most importantly, what it meant to be a human being and gain fulfillment. These questions resonated with a group of thinkers and writers concerned with questions of knowledge and truth. These thinkers, such as Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant contemplated the types of knowledge that could and should be pursued by individuals in the “new society,” how knowledge could accurately be obtained, and what constituted accurate knowledge in a “disenchanted world” (i.e., no longer governed by supernatural thinking). This new inquisitive attitude supplanted confusion with a sense of optimism that rationality and the sciences could yield the techniques, justifications, and the moral guidance the new era necessitated (Cushman, 1995).

It is in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century that the self takes a decidedly individualistic turn and begins to embody the current Western conception of selfhood we hold today. The modern individualistic self arises particularly from the contributions of many Enlightenment thinkers, such as Descartes, Locke, and Kant. Descartes (1596-1650), who is considered by many as an important precursor of

modern psychology, established the idea that selfhood consists in the solitary individual thinker, who can come to knowledge and truth through the application of methods of reasoning. Locke (1632-1704), following Descartes, proposed a self defined by its self-consciousness and capable of self-objectification and self-evaluation. While Hume (1711-1776) denied the existence of the self, Kant (1724-1804) believed it was a necessary condition for psychologically coherent existence. The self, Kant asserted, was that which synthesized the unity of experience. Rousseau (1712-1778) contributed the proposition that selves are not only separate, but also unique, and that the individual's purpose in life was to explore his or her unique potential (Martin et al., 2013).

The bourgeois self of the 1800's started to shift from the optimistic, vigorous self of the Enlightenment, to a divided, sexually conflicted self. As social conflict rose in the Victorian era with increasingly compartmentalized and alienating work, uprooted rural societies and poorly structured urban areas, polarizing and restrictive gender roles, increasing class and power inequalities, and outbreaks of "illnesses of the self" such as hysteria and neurasthenia, the self was filled with self-doubt. Freudian notions about the unconscious, and potentially dangerous instincts reflected and aggravated individuals' internal conflict. It was against this background of uncertainty and concern, that the self turned further inward, and started to display a higher degree of self-vigilance and self-constraint (Cushman, 1990, 1995). The self of the Victorian era—characterized by moderation and self-restraint—presented obstacles to the ever-growing demands of capitalism however. As a result, a new self started to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century: a self determined to be "cured."

It is in the twentieth century that the so-called individualistic conception of selfhood we currently hold materialized. Driven by a growing advertising industry and influence from disciplinary psychology, consumerism became equated with the construction of one's personality and identity in the 1900's. As early as 1920, products began to establish themselves as the means through which individuals were able to construct their social image, improve their personality, and "magically transform" themselves (Cushman, 1990). After a punishing depression period between World Wars, as the Western world struggled to generate economic development, consumerism was intensified. Following the Second World War, corporations and governments redirected their focus from the war towards economic growth. In the United States, this new

direction translated into the “American life,” a national consciousness, and a sense of power and affluence that hard work and a strong economy—generated by large production and large consumption—could conquer all difficulties. During this period, individuals were encouraged to explore, pursue, and express their *individual* objectives, needs, and desires. Individuals began to live more secluded and secular lives, reduce and forsake the nuclear family, and engage vigorously in individual quests for self-actualization, personal fulfillment, and self-sufficiency—all fueled by an ever increasing media presence, aggressive advertising campaigning, and the facilitation of credit (Cushman, 1995). Soon, the effects of this hyper self-focus, consumerist model of citizenship, and the loss of family, community, and tradition led to what Cushman submits is the essence of current Western conception of selfhood, that of “the empty self” (1990, 1995). This “empty” self, severed and evacuated from the communal traditions that once provided orientations to what constituted a meaningful and fulfilling life, now looked to obtain meaning and fulfillment through acts of consumption. It sought soothing for its emptiness and a sense of meaning and cohesion by becoming “filled up” with consuming goods to compensate for what has been lost. Despite being empty and separated from the sociocultural sources of meaning within which and by which it is constituted, the empty self is expected to be masterful and bounded, with a strong sense of personal conviction and ambition, strong interiority, in charge of itself, and formulating its own self-determining ends.

Cushman’s empty self is consistent with Rose’s *enterprising self*. The enterprising self—inspired by Foucault’s analysis of enterprise culture—depicts individuals as entrepreneurs of their own lives, in charge of strategizing and exercising their choices in ways that yield the most rewards and avoid the greatest risks, concerned with investing and improving themselves for their own advantage, and fully responsible for the outcomes of their investments (Rose, 1998). This conception of selfhood, formulates the pursuit of a meaningful life on principles of individual responsibility, freedom, and choice. Rose (1998) submits the enterprising self is intrinsically attached to advanced liberalism, a style of governance where political power is exerted “*through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them” (p. 155). Sugarman (2013) explains neoliberalism arose as a consequence of several shifts from classical liberalism in the nineteenth century. Despite being defined by the separation of state

responsibility from civil society and private life, the liberalism of the first half of the nineteenth century displayed a social approach to welfare. Individuals were described as having social needs, rights, and social obligations. With the support of philanthropic (e.g., churches, charitable organizations) and external non-governmental institutions (e.g., trade unions), the state assumed limited responsibility for the welfare of its citizens under a discourse of solidarity and social citizenship. But as the needs of citizens began to surpass the resources of philanthropic and other non-governmental institutions, the state was forced to expand its reach, absorbing more responsibility to address the needs of citizens. This is evidenced in the creation of a number of state structures and services concerned with social welfare (e.g., child welfare, universal education, healthcare, and public forms of entertainment and broadcasting). In the 1970's, classical liberalism began to encounter fierce opposition in North America, Britain, and other Western Continental countries (e.g., France). The liberal state was charged with being inefficient, patriarchal, bureaucratic, patronizing, and infringing on human rights, which led to its demise by the mid 1980's. In the face of mounting criticism and a deteriorating social welfare system, Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the UK responded with economic policies of what has been termed advanced liberalism (or neo-liberalism) (Rose, 1998; Sugarman, 2013).

The new enterprising government rationality allowed “the state to divest itself of many of its obligations, devolving those to quasi-autonomous entities [citizens] that would be governed at a distance by means of budgets, audits, standards, benchmarks, and other technologies that were both autonomizing and responsabilizing” (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 91). In the next section of this chapter I explore the role of disciplinary psychology as one of such technologies. For now what should be observed is that the culture of enterprise forged a new alliance between the state and the citizen, where citizens were recast as consumers, consumption was elevated to an active expression of citizenship, and goods (e.g., cars, houses) were infused with meanings attached to the pursuit of a fulfilling and meaningful life, which could be achieved through entrepreneurship. Under neoliberal governance, citizens are no longer governed by interests of production and control. Rather, they are expected to use their freedom responsibly and align their choices alongside the norms, ambitions, and activities of social institutions—which referred mostly to lifestyle choices (e.g., family life,

work, leisure, and personality) (Sugarman, 2013). As can be inferred from this description, much like Cushman's empty self, enterprising selves are to interpret their reality and fate as a matter their individual autonomy, responsibility, and acts of choice, independent from others, government, and society (Rose, 1998).

Cushman's empty self and Rose's enterprising self yield what is understood as the "individualistic self" of Western societies. As has been implied previously, this view of selfhood is particularly problematic for child welfare in that it engenders a sense of historical, sociocultural, and political indifference towards families involved in the system. For at the heart of the expectation of individuals as autonomous, bounded, and masterful without, and completely independent of, the social and cultural resources that constituted them, lies the notion that individuals are the ones in control of their lives, and therefore responsible for their own problems. In the context of child protection, this view of selfhood is largely manifested in child protection oriented approaches where child maltreatment is mainly attributed to problems of individual parents, their unwillingness or inability to make good choices, irresponsibility, and lack of capacity to provide their family with a fulfilling and meaningful life. Although the focus of this thesis largely is concerned with the impact of enterprising culture on parents, the enterprising attitude is also extended to children. As reported by foster care alumni youth in Chapter 2, there are expectations that children in care will adapt seamlessly to new placements, that great efforts will be made to make children independent (e.g., youth agreements), and that children can overcome their difficulties by improving themselves (e.g., attending therapy). While these expectations may not be negative per se, what is problematic is the understanding on which they are founded; that is, of individuals as ontologically separate, entirely self-sufficient, and self-governing. This ontological perspective dismisses the enormous background of social disadvantage typically associated with parents (and children) involved in the system, over which they often have limited control. Speaking from a perspective of psychotherapy, Cushman (1990) captures this notion positing that the individualistic self (i.e., empty self) presupposed in North American societies has not only impoverished the landscape of human existence, but also misinformed practices devoted to helping individuals. He submits that professional approaches regrettably attempt to treat individuals by reinforcing the very qualities that have initially caused their problem. In his words

The patient is diagnosed as empty and fragmented, usually without addressing the sociohistorical predicament that caused the emptiness and fragmentation. Thus, through the activity of helping, psychology's discourse and practices perpetuate the causes of the very problems it is trying to treat. (p. 601)

Cushman's analysis can be easily extrapolated to child protection systems in North America, who also are in the business of "helping" families. Much like clients in psychotherapists' offices, parents in welfare offices are typically viewed as "broken" and deficient in the abilities that qualify them to parent their children appropriately. Also, much like the psychotherapy Cushman criticizes, parental interventions in child protection focus on trying to "fix" parents by equipping them with the proper individual tools to enhance their autonomy, responsibility, and self-mastery (e.g., parental and job skills courses, individual counseling, time, nutritional, and anger management courses) while the problems that caused the issues that led to involvement with the system in the first place (e.g., poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, domestic violence) remain largely unchanged.

3.3.2. *The role of disciplinary psychology in the preservation of the enterprising self*

Rose (1998) has dedicated much of his scholarship to investigating the role of the psy-disciplines in the functioning of advanced liberal democracies. Rose's starting point is the observation that one's self-beliefs and experience of oneself can only take place under particular descriptions available in a given society which, in turn, are connected to specific social arrangements and institutional practices (Sugarman, 2013). Rose is particularly interested in exploring how the psy-disciplines shape self-understandings that promote normative ideals for living. His interests rest on the fact that the psy-disciplines, more than any other branch of social scientific disciplines (e.g., economy, anthropology, political science, sociology), have established themselves as powerful technologies of the self, providing the language, techniques, concepts, and norms by which human conduct is rendered intelligible and judgeable in contemporary societies (Rose, 1998). Rose attributes such authority to two main interrelated factors. The first factor concerns the discipline's psychological apparatus, and its ability to observe, differentiate, classify, and administer individual variability in ways that are

intelligible to the vocabularies of governments (Sugarman, 2013). As Martin and McLellan (2013) elaborate:

By individualizing humans through measuring their capacities, classifying them on the basis of such calibrations, and inscribing and recording their attributes, deficiencies, individuality, and variability, disciplinary psychology has emerged as an influential technology of the self in Western societies. The effect of such psychological practices is to lend a visibility, stability, and seeming simplicity to aspects of persons that otherwise might remain hidden, shifting, and mired in complexities. And, through these methods, the phenomenal world also is normalized, so that individuals whose personal attributes and characteristics deviate from values deemed normal are made to stand out to themselves and others. [...] Moreover, with such categorizations come expert interventions and the promotion of professional services to society at large through its existing institutions [...]. (pp. 9-10)

The second factor refers to the psy-disciplines' close alignment with contemporary political reasoning, for it is in "furnishing particular conceptions of selfhood and techniques for achieving and acting in accordance with these conceptions (within both institutional, public and personal life) that psychology has aided and abetted forms of subjectivity amenable to self-governance within liberal societies" (Martin & McLellan, 2013, p. 13). More specifically, the psy-disciplines facilitated "government at a distance," (Sugarman, 2013) functioning as the intermediary between political authority and citizens to promote a particular way of being, which in advanced liberal societies, is defined in terms of one's freedom and responsibility to be and choose in line with the neoliberal socio-political structures. In Sugarman's words:

The fundamental issue for this style of governance [advanced liberal democracies] concerns provisions for making these kinds of persons, who express their autonomy and freedom by seeking to fulfill themselves in the domains of daily life, responsible to government through their choices. This is accomplished by the shaping of a field of action in which persons are reconfigured by an economized conception of enterprise that alters previous understandings of freedom and autonomy. In this way, individual autonomy becomes not the antithesis or boundary of advanced liberal governance, but rather, the very target and instrument of political control. It is not merely that we are free. In enterprise culture, we are obliged to exercise our freedom by understanding and enacting our lives specifically in terms of our autonomy, responsibility, and choice. (p. 95)

However, the psy-disciplines' apparatus and authority presents problems. The problematic apparatus of the psy-disciplines is reflected in and buttressed by epistemological commitments to methodological individualism. Methodological individualism is a scientific doctrine that rests on two basic tenets: 1) society is constituted of individuals acting independently, but in concert in institutional and informal settings; 2) explanations in the social sciences can or ought to be provided in terms of individuals and their properties (Udehn, 2002). Methodological individualism is connected to ontological atomism, a notion that holds that needs, motivations, and capacities arise not from social interaction or the social context, but rather, from within the individual (Martin & McLellan, 2013). Such ontological and epistemological views are implicated in what Martin and McLellan (2013) submit are four main critical concerns of the conception of self currently presupposed in disciplinary psychology: *individualism, psychological interiorism, reductionism of persons and context, and manipulation*.

Speaking in the context of educational psychological research, Martin and McLellan (2013) observe that as of 1960's the unit of analysis of psychological investigation turned sharply to the individual and internal properties presumed to be part of their self-structure and that exerted causal influence on their thoughts, actions, and experiences. Concepts such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulation began to occupy many areas of psychological investigation. Individualism was also extrapolated to social life where cooperation and responsibility were comprehended in terms of individual psychological features such as positive self-regard. A main repercussion of individualism, as Martin and McLellan (2013) note, is that it does not lend itself to social commitment and engagement, for when individuals are focused on understanding, enhancing, and correcting themselves, their interest in, and attention to, social, political, and cultural contextual factors begins to fade. The social disengagement that results from the view of individuals as ontologically real and distinct, but radically separated from each other is also decried by Taylor. Taylor (2003) posits individualism is one of the three malaises of modernity in that it engenders harmful self-centredness and political apathy: "the dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (p. 4). Such impoverishment is reflected in the high prevalence of what

Taylor describes as “abnormal and regrettable self-absorption” (p. 4) in forms specific of a permissive society, the “me” generation, and narcissism.

Individualism is also detrimental in that it paves the road to psychologism: the interiorization of psychological phenomena. Interiorism concerns the attribution of primary causes of individuals’ knowledge, experiences, and actions to individuals’ internal cognitive processes and structures. The main issue with interiorism is that it implies an exaggerated mentalistic conception of self, something akin to a homunculus operating behind the scenes of the mind, guiding, monitoring, and determining mental capacities and behaviors. Although various components of mental capacities (e.g., self-regulation) are largely associated with internal mental states and processes (e.g., attention, memory, perception), executive or regulatory systems do not, and would not, work by themselves in the absence of other persons and the external world (Martin and McLellan, 2013).

Interiorism is related to another problem, namely, the reduction of persons and contexts. Reductionism concerns the reduction of psychological phenomena to what are presumed to be more basic phenomena that compose the one under investigation. Reductionism, which is amply implemented in the natural sciences (e.g., chemistry, biology, physics), is a point of contention in psychological research in that maintaining the integrity of the phenomena under investigation in psychology proves particularly difficult when reductive strategies of study and explanation are invoked. Unlike tissues or molecules, the integrity of psychological phenomena seldom remains intact after reductions. As Martin and McLellan (2013) state, reductionism is particularly problematic in that it invariably decontextualizes the phenomena under investigation, producing findings of little value to explaining problem that inspired investigation in the first place. For example, it is questionable whether the administration of computer attentional performance tests that require participants in a laboratory to identify computer-generated stimuli (e.g., red dot, blue cross) can confidently produce any kind of insight into one’s ability to avoid car accidents. In the absence of the real conditions in which driving takes place, and the “external” factors that may constitute it, (e.g., tasks performed concomitantly with driving, weather, road, and car conditions, driving experience, behavior of other drivers, etc.) any knowledge such tests can produce appear limited in significance.

Martin and McLellan (2013) conclude that individualism, interiorism, and reductionism contribute to the main mechanism responsible for keeping liberal democracies afloat: manipulation through self-governance. They explain—in a manner consistent with Rose (1998) and Cushman (1995)—that in conceiving individuals as ontologically discrete and detached from their sociopolitical, cultural, and historical environment; in locating psychological explanations of individuals' action and experience inside individuals; and in reducing complex psychological phenomena to parts, disciplinary psychology contributes to the language that directs the focus of psychosocial phenomena to the internal world of the self and away from the socio-cultural context that constitutes them.

When we become convinced that that such [internal] selves exist and motivate our everyday actions and experience, it seems reasonable, even essential, to turn inward to understand why we act and feel the way we do. When this tendency of “looking inward” is firmly in place, whenever we encounter difficulties in our attempts to understand our functioning and experiencing, we are more than ready, even anxious, to accept various forms of psychological expertise to help us feel better about our lives, our inner lives in particular, and to manage our lives in general. In doing so, we open ourselves to the theories and ministrations of psychologists by framing our difficulties in ways amenable to their ideas and practices. In effect, we become convinced we need to understand and govern ourselves in psychological ways. And with such convictions, we readily and uncritically accept that treating and managing ourselves as inward-looking psychological beings is in our best interests. (Martin & McLellan, 2013, pp.160-161)

As Martin and McLellan's quote suggests, the psy-disciplines are prominent instruments of institutional control in contemporary societies. Their expertise, authority, and practical technologies advance particular ways of being and acting in the world that are indispensable to governmentality in advanced liberal societies (Sugarman, 2013). Despite such a prominent role in governmentality, the psy-disciplines—like many other bodies enlisted in government at a distance—are viewed as somewhat removed from the formal political institutions of government and, therefore, as politically neutral (Rose, 2000). Such neutrality is unfounded however.

Foucault's body of work examines the vast normative power of institutions that bear on one's personhood. He vociferously advocated the importance of unveiling the

political power of institutions, stressing that the failure to do so puts societies at risk of perpetuating potentially oppressive systems of power. Foucault stressed that all institutions (e.g., educational, health, religion) play a role in maintaining what is considered to be “true,” the systems of obligations (e.g., laws) that evaluate “the truth,” and what those “truths” mean to the self and others (with Defiance, 2013). To illustrate the point that contemporary social institutions are in fact part of the neoliberal system of governmentability at distance, that social institutions do play a role in maintaining and adjudicating what is believed to be true, and that these truths—such as the ones imparted and purported by the psy-disciplines—impact the self and others, I consider Oldani’s psychiatric ethnography about the logic of prescribing psychoactive medication to Aboriginal children in a Canadian community.

Oldani (2009) spent a considerable amount of time shadowing physicians and interacting with elders, parents, and children in multiple sites of a community in Manitoba to produce what I believe are insightful observations that speak directly to Foucault’s point. The first describes the story of an Aboriginal woman and her long struggle to keep her two younger sons in school after refusing to accept administrative psychological designations (i.e., applied at the school-level, without formal medical diagnosis) and later turning down medical advice to use psychotropic drugs for her son’s “condition.” The mother recounted the multiple moves her family endured as an attempt to escape the designations assigned by the school. She also described the ostracism that ultimately led to her sons no longer being welcome in schools and unable to receive an education.

Oldani (2009) also reported different diagnoses Aboriginal and “white mainstream Canadian children” receive for similar symptomatology; namely, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and ADHD respectively. Oldani noted that the former diagnosis was typically interpreted as a highly stigmatized “life sentence” of mental, learning, and social struggles, while the latter was perceived as a largely treatable and manageable disorder of modern childhood.

Finally, Oldani (2009) described the extremely liberal attitude of general practitioners to prescribe psychoactive medication for Aboriginal children as a way to provide “much-needed behavioural manageability” to keep families “in harmony” and away from the child protection system. Ethnocentricity and racialization aside, these

examples provide a glimpse into the decidedly normative power of psychological categories in the establishment of “truths” (e.g., the criteria by which an individual is deemed learning or developmentally disabled) in institutional practices (e.g., schools, clinics), the role of practitioners (e.g., teachers, doctors, principals) in upholding the system that judges the truth (e.g., by administering tests, prescribing medications), as well as the consequences incurred by those who fail to comply with the “truth” (e.g., forced to change schools, provided limited access to education).

Oldani’s example provides support for the claim that psychological categories are not solely epistemological, theoretical, or disciplinary. Rather, they have profound social implications in that they promote particular ways of being and disavow others. Although refusing to live under the categorizations provided by disciplinary psychology may be possible, it is a luxury many cannot afford. What is worse, at times they result in deep, real, lasting, and potentially devastating social consequences (e.g., diminished chance employability for lack of proper education). Oldani’s example also alludes to the fact that psychological characterizations are not neutral or apolitical. Rather, they encourage ways of being that meet political objectives and are amenable to neoliberal governance. In the case described by Oldani, it was expected that children would receive medications to make them more manageable. There was no mention, as Oldani notes, of the context of poverty and overwhelming social disadvantage of the children by teachers, directors, and doctors, other than the allusion that poverty was a problem they—the children—would have to overcome—largely by individual self-improvement, which began with chemically altering the biochemical functionality of their brains. Finally, Oldani’s example encapsulates Foucault’s warning that failing to scrutinize the power and implications of disciplinary concepts and scientific practices puts well-intended professionals, researchers, and policy makers in the position of being ommissive or complicit in the risk of perpetuating social inequalities and/or furthering the difficulties of individuals already at risk. Generally speaking, it is safe to assume that teachers, researchers, physicians, and others involved with child welfare have the best interest of the children at heart. Unfortunately, the notions of enterprise maintain the status quo by adhering to practices that adopt a neoliberal doctrine that by and large ignore the social context in which problems occur. Although technologies of the self, such as psy-knowledge, do not originate with the state, they provide the mechanisms of governance by which social,

economical, and political goals are advanced in contemporary advanced liberal societies. The power of psy-knowledges cannot be ignored as it translated into in a plethora of prescriptions about being and acting in the word that are largely employed in the governance of subjects (Rose, 1998).

North American child welfare systems are premised on a conception of strong individual responsibility, freedom, and choice where parents are made responsible for their own lives and their children's. This notion of individual responsibility, in turn, presupposes a particular understanding of selfhood in which persons and selves are ontologically self-contained individuals. Under the assumptions of individualism and the good of enterprise culture, it follows that when parents behave irresponsibly, remediation should take place at the individual level. Given the child-focused approach of the child protection system in British Columbia, this is typically translated into interventions aimed primarily at remediating the effects of maltreatment in children, often by removing the child from parental care. While it is undeniable that parenting ought to be founded on positive and responsible choices, framing child maltreatment strongly around notions of individual responsibility and individual choice discounts contextual factors that are integral to the problem of child maltreatment. In the next sub-section I address these contextual factors in detail to demonstrate that the individualistic, enterprising conception of selfhood on which child-centred protection is predicated, is at the heart of the difficulties of child welfare in that it dismisses the significance of the historical, cultural, and socio-economic context associated with families who come into contact with the system, neglecting their social disadvantage and allowing for the social factors that contributed to their involvement in the system to remain unexamined or unchanged. To illustrate this point, let us consider two groups that typically are overrepresented in the child protection system in British Columbia and in Canada: children of sole-parent mothers and Aboriginal children.

3.3.3. The social implications of the enterprising self for child protection systems

As an advanced liberal democratic institution, operating under an enterprising culture, it is perhaps not surprising that child protection systems in North America are largely predicated on an individualistic, enterprising conception of selfhood, in turn

predicated on notions of individuality, independence, and self-governance. The historical, cultural, socio-economic, and relational context associated with families who come into contact with the system is often considered peripheral or extraneous to the problem of maltreatment. In this section I argue this conception of selfhood is unsound and unsuitable for the understanding and investigation of issues concerned with child maltreatment in that it: (1) individualizes social problems; (2) hinders the reunifications of children in care with their families of origin; (3) supports a reactive as opposed to proactive stance to child welfare; and (4) deflects attention from the enormous socio-economic barriers that interfere with parenting, such as poverty, inconsistent employment, inadequate housing, and poor access to healthcare and education. This argument is articulated in the context of the two most overrepresented groups of children in the child protection system in British Columbia—Aboriginal children and children from sole-parent mothers—who are also the two most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the province (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013).²²

The overrepresentation of children from sole-parent mothers

In Canada as well as in the U.S., the likelihood that children placed in care will return to their families of origin is to a great extent contingent on their mothers' marital status. Studies on reunification consistently have found that children from single-parent families are less likely to return to their homes than children from two-parent families. This is significant in that in the U.S., unmarried biological mothers comprise two-thirds of the caregivers involved in the child protection system (Wells & Marcenko, 2011). Similarly, in Canada, it is estimated that 86% of the investigations of maltreatment refer to mothers. Child maltreatment mostly is attributed to mothers' parental dysfunction due to poor mental health and substance abuse. Studies suggest mothers identified as neglectful are twice as likely to struggle with depression-related difficulties and four times as likely to have a substance addiction than mothers in the general population (Marquis et al., 2008). However, while maternal depression and substance abuse present great

²² British Columbia's poverty rate is the highest in the country: 20.7% for two-parent families—8 points higher than the national average—and 49.8% for single-mother families. It also has the highest child poverty rate in the country at 18.9%, compared to the national average of 15% (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013).

hurdles to positive parenting and the well being of children, maternal depression and substance abuse alone have not been found to strongly predict out of home placements (Brownell et al., 2011). Studies have revealed that financial disadvantage, low maternal education level, and previous family contact with the child protection system are strong predictors of apprehension by the child protection system (Brownell et al., 2011; Schumacher et al., 2001).

While some theorists have tried to identify characteristics that are particular to neglectful mothers (e.g., poor judgment, motivational problems, or lack of parenting models), the overrepresentation of women as perpetrators of maltreatment is a reflection of the fact that women bear the primary, often sole, burden of parenthood, often with minimal support from a partner, family, or government agencies (Russell, Harris, & Gockel, 2008; Schumacher, 2001; Trocmé et al., 2010). This is consistent with research in Canada that has found that the majority of women under a child protection investigation bear the brunt of parenting. The CIS-2008 also reported that in 39% of substantiated maltreatment cases in Canada, the main risk factor of the caregiver was “having few support groups;” while risk factors commonly identified as “lifestyle choices” such as alcohol abuse and drug abuse were the main risk factors in 21% and 17% of the cases, respectively. In over 30% of investigated substantiated cases of maltreatment, the household source of income was more likely to come from Employment Insurance or other benefits and less likely to come from full-time employment. In 27% of substantiated neglect investigations and 24% confirmed risk neglect investigations, the household regularly ran out of money for basic necessities (Allan & Lefebvre, 2012).

The strong association between social disadvantage and involvement with the child protection system makes British Columbia’s poverty rates all the more disconcerting. As mentioned previously, British Columbia’s 2013 Child Poverty Report Card indicates that British Columbia has the highest overall rate of poverty of the country at 18.6%, the most unequal distribution of income between rich and poor, and the highest child poverty rate for two-parent and single-parent families. The most alarming finding of the report is that 49.8% of children from lone-parent mothers live below the poverty line, with an average income of about \$20,000 a year (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013). Therefore, to attribute child maltreatment in these families solely to mothers’ poor choices (e.g., substance abuse, staying in an abusive

relationship), lack of responsibility, and/ or lack of initiative to be good a responsible parent is unreasonable. Such an attribution discounts the complexity and range of challenges sole-parent mothers encounter in trying to balance the need for employment outside the home and raising their children, while receiving minimal support for their dual role (Russell et al., 2008). Challenges such as the cost of transportation to and from work, access to daycare services and child supervision, or lack thereof, educational and professional under-qualification, employment instability, and unsafe and unaffordable housing are challenges that mothers face, and mostly have little ability to change without support (Wells & Marcenko, 2011). The overrepresentation of sole-parent mothers in child protection systems ought to be interpreted as a marker of their vulnerability as a group.

The overrepresentation of mothers in child protection systems in North America is also associated with high rates of involvement for exposing their children to domestic violence (DV), which often falls under the neglect category of maltreatment. The CIS-2008 reported that in Canada, almost half of the caregivers involved in investigations of maltreatment had been victims of DV. While DV comprises a serious and hazardous environment for the development of children, placing responsibility on mothers for failure-to-protect when they are themselves victims and in danger, is both controversial and complex. As Friend and colleagues (Friend, Shlonsky, & Lambert, 2008) point out, battered women may refrain from leaving an abusive relationship for a number reasons, including immediate danger to the family and themselves (e.g., death threats or threats of harm), immigration status concerns for themselves and their family, cultural and religious sanctions against divorce, minimal educational or professional history, minimal command of language, and lack of family, financial, or moral support to make the transition. Paradoxically, many women choose to sacrifice their own well being to have the financial means to care for their children. As one participant in a study reports: "I would rather take a couple of hits once and while...to make sure I was able to care for my son" (Russell et al., 2008, p. 90).

This paradox is perhaps better understood when acknowledged in the context of the operations of the agencies in charge of processing claims of DV and exposure to DV. DV claims typically are processed by police departments and connected to women's outreach agencies, while exposure to DV claims are processed by governmental child

protection agencies. Both child welfare agencies and DV agencies assume a “primary victim protection mandate;” the former being concerned with the well being of the child and terminating the child’s exposure to violence, and the latter being concerned with preventing the victim (i.e., mother) from suffering further abuse (Friend et al., 2008). Because these two agencies have their protocols for individual protection, and women who leave abusive relationships are typically not able to establish themselves right away, separations of mothers from their children once the abuse comes to light are common (i.e., placement of children in foster care). Unfortunately, such separations are not always temporary. The following—unaltered but abbreviated—candid written testimonial of one mother’s involvement with the child protection system is helpful in contextualizing and appreciating the complexity of issues involved in maltreatment, apprehension, and the potentially devastating effects of narrow individualistic approaches couched on notions of autonomy and choice.

I fled a abusive relationship. I packed 2 car's of as much as my children's essentials as I could and left while my now ex was at work; being the only way I could get away safely with my children. I was in this relationship since I was 18 having 3 children [...]. A week after 2 social worker's knocked on my door saying the had a report of my son playing outside on his own in his pj's without sock's. I explained what had happened and what I was going through, I needed help getting everything together. I explained I was isolated for a long time, my kid's have seen a lot of violence toward's me. My daughter needed dental work, my youngest was born at 28 week's barely 3lbs and was in the hospital from September - December coming home at 4lbs [...]. The ministry started by demanding me take my youngest to the doctor because he was so small [...]. They then got someone to help me get my Id's and help me cart my kid's around. I was unable to get income support without my Id's. They then started to harass me telling me to put my kid's in voluntary care because of all the catch up needed and because I did not drive. After being harassed and promised it was just till I got onto my feet I agreed reluctantly. I wanted my son's who both needed extra care to get all the help they needed as fast as possible even though it broke my heart and I have never been away from my children for a extended amount of time [...]. I had to sign the voluntary care agreement or they'd take me to court. They said they were picking her [the daughter] up at daycare and it would be less traumatic for her if I was not there to say goodbye I disagreed and argued but they beat me down till I felt flat as a pancake. So without my children I found out I could not get income support, nor was I getting any other kind of benefit [...]. The ministry then put my kids under supervised visits and cut my visits down to 2 hours twice a week. I was devastated but stayed strong for my children. They did not understand asking me if they could stay with me, telling me how much they missed me [...]. This

went on for a year I did everything I was supposed to counselling, parenting courses, my visits, and my kid's appointment's. I was unable to find a job having such a big gap in work history and having to be always on the go to do what the ministry asked. I then got a new social worker who did not want to talk or be even human to me. Her stand was my kid's were going to be given up for a adoption so it did not matter any way's. I fell more and more behind being financially stretched using up my early inheritance just to get by. There was no way I could get everything I needed clothes, furniture, extra savings for before I get benefit's to get my kid's back in my care [...]. Around my birthday in December I got a call telling me they had a adoptive parent for all 3 of my kid's in upper BC. That they did not want a open adoption. I was devastated there was nothing more I could do [...]. I was told that the next visit would be my last. And also that no one had told my kid's they would not see me anymore. I got everything together I wanted my kid's to have, I felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter [...]. I since have been a basket case, seeing families together makes me cry, and everyday has been an emotional struggle. I was told by the ministry before our last visit to give myself time to grieve. I do not understand how this was better than to just help me get on my feet. If I had money, a car, and family support this would not have happened. They payed the foster parent's around \$803 from my research for each kid my oldest being over a \$1100 for being special needs. If even half of this had been given to me the parent to help me get on my feet this would not of happened. (Heather H, 2013; Parents Injustice)

This testimonial helps convey the complexity of the problems of parents involved in child protection. It also helps illustrate that individual autonomy, individual responsibility, and choices—tenets of the enterprise culture—are highly contingent upon context. Adopting a socially situated approach, one would be better able to recognize that this mother's choice, autonomy, and responsibilities were constrained and impeded by several factors over which she had little control. For instance, the "choice" of leaving the abusive partner was often complicated by fears of her inability to be financially independent and for her own and her children's safety; that her "autonomy" to establish herself financially after fleeing her abuser was largely impeded by bureaucracy, insufficient education, and insubstantial work history. One would also be able to recognize that her "choice" of placing her children in care "voluntarily" resulted from the threat of being sued by the Ministry and the fear of losing visitation rights. Finally, one would also be able to observe that her "lack of individual responsibility" had little to do with her individual characteristics (e.g., lack of warmth towards her children). Rather, it is associated with not having the material means to meet the demands of the Ministry (e.g., not having a car; not being able to get a flexible job that allowed for the frequent

interruptions of legal proceedings of the Ministry). What this example conveys is that the treatment of freedom, individual responsibility, and choice as established facts, in the absence of adequate consideration of the circumstances in which actions take place can have crippling effects, particularly for families living in social disadvantage. This mother's account clearly reveals the weight of expectations that are placed onto individuals in enterprising cultures, where the burden of change is placed onto individuals without concern for the "external" factors to which one might have little control of changing without support

As biased as this testimonial may be, this personal account is consistent with many issues explored by researchers, such as the low socio-economic status of parents involved in the child protection system, the challenges parents encounter with job stability and proper qualification, the culpability for neglect in instances of DV, the often adversarial stance of the Ministry towards parents, the lack of access to familial social services prior to removal, the limited parental participation after placement in care, and the de-emphasis of family reunification objectives over foster care placements and adoption objectives. This mother's account illustrates the problems of systems that understand persons as separate entities divorced from their familial and community contexts, and the implications these have for personal and social welfare. For it is only under an enterprising discourse, where individuals are understood as ontologically separate and independent from each other, divorced from their social context, and equipped with freedom, choice, and autonomy that is immune from socioeconomic and political circumstances, that coerced separations between parents and children, dissolution of the family unit, and punishment of parents experiencing hardship as a result of attempting to flee abusive relationships, can be made palatable and logical. Heather's experience is evidence that the individualism that pervades Western conceptions of selfhood fails by omission, in that it engenders a sense of indifference towards families involved in the child welfare system. In privatizing social disadvantage, that is to say, in individualizing poverty as a lack of entrepreneurial spirit or ability, governments are freed from the responsibility to engage in comprehensive (and expensive) social reform, placing responsibility on individual parents for their social welfare:

Although poverty is not a legally-justifiable reason for placement of children in foster care, ill-defined concepts such as “child neglect, “parental incapacity to earn an income”, and “parental failure to take responsibility for one’s children” are, and these concepts are enshrined in the statutes of many states. (Vaneski, in Wells & Marcenko, 2011, p. 420)

Treating social problems as individuals’ issues aligns with the emergence of individualism in Western societies. Social disadvantage and the removal of children from families have long been connected. Frame (1999) found that early in the 1900’s, parental poverty and single-parenthood—particularly for single-parent mothers—were already closely related to the removal of children. The issue of child apprehension from impoverished families became so prominent that in 1909 the White House called the first Conference on the Care of Dependent Children to discuss criteria for distinguishing between families in need of economic support and parents who were abusive. Frame notes that almost over a century later “the exact role of poverty in the ecology of maltreatment is still debated and parental behavior remains entwined with family economics in the language of social policy” (p. 722). In the United States, the risk for identification as neglected for children from of low socioeconomic status (SES) is at least five times greater than for their upper SES counterparts.

Although jurisdictional issues hamper a clear picture of the association between SES and involvement in the child protection system in Canada, a recent review suggests a similar picture. This review found that in the past 25 years, child poverty and economic disadvantage have been identified consistently as the main social factor associated with child apprehension (Boer, Rothwell, & Lee, 2013). A multi-level analysis of neighbourhoods also revealed that structural factors are significant predictors of contact with the child protection system, in that living in impoverished, unstable, and isolated neighbourhoods presents parents with numerous and sometimes insurmountable challenges, such as controlling negative ecological risk factors as criminality, involvement in gang activity, and substance abuse; and having reduced access to community social resources such as low quality educational and recreational services and facilities (Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999).

On an institutional level, this individualization of social problems is problematic inasmuch as it limits the system’s ability to properly distinguish between children in need

of protection versus children in need of familial social support. As child advocates observe, the child protection system is often the point of entry for families to obtain access to much-needed social services (Rutman et al., 2002). Some go on to argue that

[c]urrent funding does not encourage reunification with adequate supports, or permanency with adequate supports, or prevention of child welfare placements in the first place. In fact, current funding frameworks create an incentive to bring children into care. In an era of reduced community social supports, often services are inaccessible to children and their families until they come into care. (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003)

The individualization of social problems by disregarding the burden of social advantage of families involved in the child protection system is also problematic in that it fosters a reactive institutional stance to child maltreatment. This reactive stance is captured in a review by the Pivot Legal Society in which they describe the lack of preventive familial and community support as “indicative of a short-sighted, crisis driven style of child protection” (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008, p. 23).

The individualistic focus that guides the actions and legislation of the MCFD engenders a dismissive attitude toward the social challenges of families being investigated, particularly for families being investigated for neglect. As Heather’s story illustrates, some parents are faulted for their inability to lift themselves out of social disadvantage and change aspects of their personal lives over which they often have limited control. Unfortunately, many well-meaning parents involved in the system lose their children not for their inability to parent, but rather, for their inability to adapt quickly to adverse changes in their living and economic conditions. If Heather’s story is representative, then it is reasonable to assert that if the socio-economic problems that lead families to be involved in the system remain unaddressed, reunifications will be unlikely or short-lived.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children

In Canada, the second, and most gravely overrepresented demographic group in child protective systems is Aboriginal children. Several events point to a growing awareness of, and progress in meeting, the numerous challenges associated with the welfare of Aboriginal children in Canada. These include the 2006 Truth and

Reconciliation settlement about the long-term impact of residential schools, the 2007 parliamentary support for the Jordan's Principle which seeks to ensure no delays or disruptions in services caused in instances of jurisdictional disputes, the human rights complaint lodged by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) against the federal government for systematically underfunding child welfare services to on-reserve First Nations by \$109 million dollar per year, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2008 formal apology to residential school survivors (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Nevertheless, CIS-2008 reports that the rate of substantiation of maltreatment is four times higher for Aboriginal than for non-Aboriginal children—49.69 per 1,000 versus 11.85 per 1,000 children (Trocmé et al., 2010). Equally disturbing is the fact that despite being less likely to experience four out of five primary types of maltreatment (i.e., sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and exposure to domestic violence) than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, Aboriginal children are still six to 15 times more likely to be placed in foster care (Blackstock, 2010; Galley, 2010).

The preponderance of evidence supports the claim that child maltreatment amongst Aboriginal communities essentially refers to neglect driven by poverty, inadequate housing, racial discrimination, and substance abuse. The CIS-2008 bolstered this claim when it reported that neglect represented the largest category of maltreatment investigations for Aboriginal children. The authors attributed this disproportionality to differences in key risk categories between investigations involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Caregiver's low income was deemed a main risk factor in 53.6% of investigations involving Aboriginal children, compared to 31.8% involving non-Aboriginal children.

The rates of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children placed in care varies widely across provinces, as does the proportion of the population that is Aboriginal (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013), in some provinces reaching up to 80% of children under government care (e.g., Manitoba) (Brown et al., 2009). In British Columbia, where the Aboriginal population is the second highest Aboriginal population among provinces at 1.18 million, 52% of children under the guardianship of the Director of the MCFD are Aboriginal, despite making up only 8% of the child population in the province. British Columbian Aboriginal groups have fought long and hard to gain control over their child welfare practices and alleviate the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the

system. There are now 30 Aboriginal child welfare agencies that provide support and voice to Aboriginal children, families and, communities who come into contact with the MCFD (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013). Such advocacy is crucial to diminishing the enormity of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care in British Columbia (Isaac, 2010), given the fact that Aboriginal children are 9.5 times more likely to be in care than non-Aboriginal children (Hughes, 2006).

According to Aboriginal advocates, the explanation for the high incidence of Aboriginal children under child protection is overwhelmingly social and historical. Up until the European settlement, Aboriginal families and communities were self-reliant, caring for their children in accordance with their cultural practices, laws, and traditions. Following colonization, Aboriginal traditional systems of care became suppressed and Aboriginal peoples were forced to assimilate Eurocentric values and beliefs.

Starting in 1879, the Canadian government systematically began to separate tens of thousands of Aboriginal children from their families, placing them in residential schools. In addition to “educating” children, residential schools were believed to “protect” Aboriginal children from “abusive and neglectful” parents. In 1920, an amendment to the Indian Act of 1876 made attendance at residential schools mandatory. Attendance was enforced by Truant Officers, who were entitled to pursue, arrest, and convey truant children to school. These schools were marked by overcrowding and underfunding. Living conditions in residential schools were so poor that about half of the children who attended them in the early 20th century, are believed to have died as a result of the spread of disease. Equally disturbing was the prevalence of severe emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, the demise of residential schools, in the second half of the 20th century, failed to end the legacy of poverty, family trauma, cultural destruction, and removal from the land that permeate the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Aboriginal advocates argue that residential schools served as the initial mechanisms for state-sponsored Aboriginal child welfare, and the child protection system became the new tool of assimilation. Critics argue that much like the “sixties scoop,” where an unusually high number of Aboriginal children were apprehended and adopted by non-Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal children continue to be taken from their parents and

overrepresented in the child protection system (Blackstock, 2010; Hughes, 2006; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Blackstock (2010) observes that the current Canadian child welfare systems retains many vestiges of the colonial attitude held towards Aboriginal peoples in that non-Aboriginal values continue to be imposed on Aboriginal peoples and there are very few mechanisms for self-reflection on its injurious practices. In her words:

I argue that the evidence suggests the system is overwhelmingly failing Aboriginal children, and here is why. The child welfare system was built by non-Aboriginal peoples who constructed its principles and assumptions on the bases of their values and beliefs. It was then applied wholesale to Aboriginal peoples in Canada with neither acknowledgement of existing Aboriginal systems for ensuring safety nor critical analysis of the differences between the two populations. (p. 5)

She concludes:

We are overrun by good people who think they are doing as much as possible for Aboriginal peoples. The problem is not with the good people but with the presupposition that what it is good for them, and the system they work for, is also good for others—no matter how different their reality or situation. (p. 6)

Blackstock's statements orient to the enormous cultural gap that separates the individualistic enterprising culture of neoliberal democracies and the holistic and communal Aboriginal culture. They also allude to the illusory notions of freedom, autonomy, and credited to Aboriginal communities in absence of legitimate Aboriginal jurisdictional powers, socio-economic reform, and cultural discrimination. Blackstock's stern assertions are justifiable in face of the poor status of Aboriginal welfare across the country.

The standing of Aboriginal children in British Columbia is akin to the rest of the country. In British Columbia, Aboriginal children fare worse than their non-Aboriginal counterparts on all indicators of well being: health, learning, safety, family economic well being, family, peer and community connections, and behaviour (Turpel-Lafond, 2007), and topping the child poverty rate in the country:

Recent reports show the average child poverty rate in B.C. for non-Aboriginal children is 17 per cent, the poverty rate for Aboriginal children is 28 per cent and for Status Indian children it is 48 per cent – nearly

three times the average for non-Aboriginal children. (Turpel-Lafond, 2013, p.17)

In British Columbia, Aboriginal children are also four times more likely to live in a crowded home, three times more likely to live in improper housing, and twice as likely to live with a single parent than non-Aboriginal children (BC Aboriginal Care Society, 2010). Aboriginal youth are five times more likely to be incarcerated or involved in the justice system than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and significantly more likely to have been involved in the child protection system.

In 2010/11 in B.C., an Aboriginal child was 4.5 times more likely to have a protection concern reported than a non-Aboriginal child, 6.1 times more likely to be investigated, 8.2 times more likely to be found in need of protection, 7.4 times more likely to be admitted into care, and 13.4 times more likely to remain in care. (Turpel-Lafond, 2013, p. 20)

In spite of growing awareness of the systemic problems associated with Aboriginal and single-parent families involved in care (e.g., poverty, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse), child welfare interventions continue to be narrow, piece-meal, unreliable, and overwhelmingly individual (Blackstock, 2010; Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008). As the arguments detailed in this chapter suggest, the masterful bounded and enterprising self as described by Cushman and Rose is at the heart of the difficulties of the child protection system in British Columbia and North America. It fosters a limited framework from which problems and interventions of child maltreatment can be understood and acted on. More specifically, this conception of selfhood provides a platform on which social problems can be made intelligible in terms of personal traits and dispositions, while occluding the historical, sociocultural, and political factors that participate in them

Chapter 4.

Reestablishing Well being in Child Welfare: The Communal Self as an Alternate Conception of Selfhood in North America

As Cushman (1990, 1995) contends, the study of the self is particularly challenging in that gaining a perspective on and imagining a self other than the one of our era requires a great deal of reflection, some of which may be quite uncomfortable. As difficult as this may be however, he argues it is a task that deserves the most vigorous consideration, for it is only through such analysis that one can obtain an enlarged perspective on the forces that shape our selfhood, the discourse employed to justify it, the consequences that may result from it, the illnesses that afflict it, and the activities responsible for healing it. He notes that at the current time, psychologists are placed in an awkward position in that they are entrusted with the duty of healing an ailing self without being allowed to address the historical causes or perform the structural societal changes that would heal it (Cushman, 1990). Child protection workers can be said to be in a similar situation. They are entrusted with the responsibility to care for neglected children and their families without being able to address the many historical, sociocultural, and political issues that contribute to maltreatment. It is in the spirit of Cushman's advice that I propose an alternate conception of selfhood, one that recasts the self ontologically, as historically, culturally and socially constituted. This proposition is offered on the basis of the three key interrelated arguments developed in this thesis. First, child well being, which is a central principle in the justification of governmental intervention in families, is under serious threat by current individualistic child protection practices in North America. Second, child welfare practices operating under child-centred principles and legislation are inextricably bound to a problematic masterful, bounded, and enterprising orientation to selfhood that renders the historical, socio-economic, and political context seemingly irrelevant. Third, the masterful, bounded, and

enterprising conception of selfhood, and the child protection practices that arise from it, narrows analysis of the problems of child maltreatment and intervention in ways that lead the child protection system to fail to act preemptively and effectively towards sustainable solutions.

Ontological redefinition is a pre-condition for much needed change in the child welfare system in British Columbia. Notwithstanding the fact that individualistic conceptions of selfhood are portrayed as scientifically, socially, and politically neutral, they have a large impact in all aspects of our lives, posing large impediments to wide socio-political reform. In Cushman's (1995) words:

We have difficulty solving our political problems today in part because we do not experience ourselves as political beings. Our cultural clearing is configured in such a way as to exclude the social connectedness of the commons, the public meeting place where citizens exercise their political obligations to their community and experience a sense of common purpose and group solidarity. The only place available for us in our current terrain is one that defines us as discrete, isolated individuals who have few loyalties and identities beyond our individual selves and families, few available activities beyond acquiring and consuming. We cannot develop communal commitments because we cannot think of ourselves as citizens—as active, involved, caring political beings. In our world, a world in which the individual is pictured as separate and apart from, actually opposed to, a dangerous, potentially controlling state and rigid authoritarian traditions, “freedom” is defined as the absence of social influence and political allegiances. (pp. 339-340)

Here Cushman conveys the unfortunate social and political disconnection that arises from understanding ourselves and our existence as an individual journey fundamentally isolated from others. He decries the social apathy and the political passivity that attends the fragmentation of communities and that stands in the way of broad social reform, much like the malaise Taylor (2003) describes. At the heart of Cushman's account is a word of caution to attend to the ahistorical, acultural, and asocial presuppositions of the concepts we hold regarding the nature of selves. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the detriments associated with holding such a conception of selfhood can be devastating for children and families served by child welfare services. Such critical consideration is intended to prevent the individualization of social-economic challenges,

and in turn promote an active stance on the prevention and intervention of child maltreatment for well-intended parents to reunite with their children.

The assertion that the child protection system in Canada and North America is in need of a theoretical reform is hardly new. In the late 1990's, a Canadian initiative called the Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Investigation (COCW) led by Nico Trocmé, Bruce MacLaurin, and Barbara Fallon asserted that the approach to the investigation of child maltreatment required substantial change. These authors posited that a clear picture of child maltreatment only would be possible if investigators took an ecological perspective, in which the interplay of factors at the levels of the child, parents, the family's community, and the sociocultural context in which parenting occurs, were fully considered and addressed. Trocmé et al. (2000) argued that child protective services in Canada had displayed limited progress in the previous 20 years, observing that "services to maltreated children and their families continue to be driven by evidence of need irrespective of evidence of service effectiveness" (Trocmé et al., 2000, p. 166). Trocmé et al. pointed out that progress was hindered by three main challenges: first, that more effort was spent on detection, reporting, and removal of children from dangerous situations than observing the long-term effects of such interventions on the well being of children and families; second, that contradictions amongst child protection, family preservation, and child well being created problems in practices and legislation; and third, that conceptual vagueness and obscurity stood in the way of establishing clear objectives of care and measuring the outcomes of child protective services across the country (Trocmé et al., 2000). This analysis fell short of addressing conceptions of selfhood, although it alluded to the lack of concern of conceptual issues. Unfortunately, as this thesis has illustrated, the problems addressed in this initiative are yet to be overcome. At the present time in Canada, it is still not possible to gain a clear account of child maltreatment across the country. Neither is it possible to have a clear sense of the effectiveness and outcomes of child protective services and reunifications. At the present time in Canada, multiple placements remain a challenge for systems across the country, and contradictions between family preservation and child protection persist in many welfare systems, which suggests that the response to calls for a more holistic approach to child welfare—aimed at addressing the structural, social, and cultural issues that afflict families in the country —has been slow to take effect.

Although the reasons offered for the failure to make profound changes in North American child protection systems are typically economic (e.g., budget cuts, constraints, and underfunding), it is important to acknowledge the impediments presented by the individualistic, bounded, masterful, and enterprising self to holistic perspectives on child maltreatment. The epistemological and ontological individualism assumed in contemporary enterprise culture, incorrectly casts selfhood as an isolated experience, tracing and attributing social issues to individuals and their dispositions, in isolation from their contexts. This narrow approach is particularly deleterious in that it prevents researchers, policy makers, and child welfare stakeholders from obtaining clearer understanding of the problem of child maltreatment and achieving comprehensive and sustainable solutions. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, when one adopts a broader, more socioculturally attuned stance to child welfare, the individualistic enterprising conception of selfhood proves limited and unsuitable to understanding the complex issues connected to child maltreatment.

In claiming that the individualistic conception of selfhood is ill-suited to guiding responses to child maltreatment, it is then necessary to explore a different, more suitable, way to re-conceptualize selfhood. As Rose aptly puts it “if we cannot disinvent our selves, we might at least enhance the contestability of the forms of being that have been invented for us, and begin to reinvent ourselves differently” (Rose, 1998, p. 197). I offer an alternate conception of selfhood: Martin, Sugarman, and Thompson’s (2003) socioculturally and historically situated conception of selfhood. This conception is predicated on the observation that the constitution of persons and that in which their psychologically capable personhood consists, is predicated on social and cultural practices and interactivity. Individuals are invariably born into cultures and societies that precede them. They come to know about their world and themselves through relational interactions with others within established sociocultural traditions and practices. From this perspective, it follows that selfhood cannot be made intelligible in the absence of considering the background of social, historical, and cultural significance within and through which human individuals are constituted as psychologically capable persons. Human development, experience, and psychological functioning cannot be understood as isolated or separate from the relationships and contexts that constitute them. Martin, Sugarman, and Thompson’s configuration of selfhood does not imply that selfhood is

culturally or socially determined. Rather, it acknowledges that selfhood is built on socially constructed meanings and practices, grounded in historical traditions of being, which individuals appropriate and then manifest in forms of self-knowledge and self-understanding. As Vygotsky (1978) and other sociocultural developmental theorists argue, the forms that individual psychology take do not originate in the minds of individuals. They are first enacted in public, coordinated activity with others, and subsequently taken up by individuals as their own and used to interpret themselves and their experiences. In Vygotsky's (1978) words:

Every function in a child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals (p. 57)

This sociocultural constitutionist conception of selfhood provides the basis for Martin and McLellan's (2013) *communal agent*. This communal approach to being and acting in the world corrects the shortcomings inherent in the enterprising self in that it reformulates selfhood as socioculturally constituted process of becoming.

It is not necessary to deny the existence, even the importance, of our psychological selfhood and agency so long as these are not understood as interior, entirely individual entities to which our personhood can be reduced. By retaining the actuality of our psychological experience as socially interactive individuals who develop first-person perspectives and understandings of the world, others, and ourselves the conception of communal agency we endorse continues to speak to many of the legitimate concerns, interest, and rights of [persons] as individuals but without the problem of individualism, psychologism (interiorism), reductionism, and manipulation [...]. By emphasizing the necessary historical, cultural, and social embeddedness of our psychological lives, our approach to communal agency replaces self-absorption and self-interest with personal and social goals and ideals that include the social virtue of collective flourishing as a primary life goal. (Martin & McLellan, p.178)

Cushman (1995) submits that the task for psychologists is not to liberate or free the self, but rather to consider possible ways in which new kinds of self-understandings can be possible. That is to say, the task for professionals in the business of helping heal

the self is not to look for ways in which individuals can be made more self-sufficient, more independent, and have more choices in spite of the context where their problems occur. The job of the psychologist is, rather, one of orienting the client to the larger historical, sociocultural, and political framework of their problem. In doing so, psychologists can not only move past the prescription of temporary fixes that fall short of addressing the causes of their clients' problems, but also encourage clients to exercise their agency to change those very matters in ways that benefit not only themselves, but also, their communities and society. Cushman's recommendation is not limited to acknowledging that individuals are inherently socioculturally constituted and that problems must be addressed in this light. The implication is also to consider possible ways in which societies and social policies can be made better to promote the well being of its citizens. Sweden's experience with child welfare and child protection may be helpful in illustrating this point.

Unlike child protection approaches that frame maltreatment around individual notions of parental malevolence, Sweden adopts the perspective that social stress is one of the main factors that precipitates the psychological dysfunction that may lead parents to maltreat their children. Therefore, social policy is designed to reduce parental stress. With this philosophy in mind, municipal and federal levels of government joined forces to adopt a social stress-reduction approach to child welfare. Starting in the 1980's, Sweden created primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of intervention. Primary intervention is conveyed in the form of a sound universal welfare system that grants access to basic resources (e.g., healthcare, education) for all citizens (Russell et al., 2008). Secondary intervention is translated into a wide net of integrated social services aimed at strengthening families. Services commence before the birth of a child and extend well into adulthood. Parents receive thorough pre-natal and infant care, parenting education, and are entitled to maternity and paternity leave. They also receive a number of free or highly subsidized services to aid in the task of parenting such as healthcare, childcare, and education. Other benefits include the guarantee of a minimum child support benefit for single parents, housing subsidies, and employment policies that support job stability for parents (Cocozza & Hort, 2011; Russell et al., 2008). Tertiary intervention comes in the form of a non-coercive and cooperative family-service

approach, where parents involved in the child protection system receive extra support to improve psychological and familial functioning.

This broad social interventional approach has had a large impact on child welfare in Sweden, as can be observed in Sweden's top rank in measures of child well being. According to measures of health and safety in major economies, Sweden ranks first in child well being, while countries that subscribe to narrower approaches that align with enterprising culture, such as Canada and the U.S., score much lower despite their wealth—ranking 8th and 10th, respectively (Gilbert et al., 2011).²³ Sweden's child maltreatment investigation rate is also a good indication of the impact such social measures produced in terms of well being. On average, the rate of investigations in Sweden is less than half that of Canada: 17.5 per 1,000 children compared to 39.1 per 1,000 children (Cocozza & Hort, 2011).²⁴ Another indication of the benefits associated with Sweden's approach to child welfare can also be observed in the distinctiveness of out-of-home placements. In Sweden and other Nordic countries that subscribe to similar, more ecological approaches to child welfare, out-of-home placements involve a narrow age range of children; more precisely, children aged 13 to 17. By contrast, in countries such as the U.S. and England where enterprising culture originated in the mid-1980's—Reaganomics in the U.S. and Thatcherism in the U. K.—children aged zero to four years old comprise about 40% of out-of-home placements. Also, in Nordic countries, placements are mainly voluntary (70%-90%) and reunification with the family of origin is common. These statistics exist in stark contrast with North American figures, where placements are mostly involuntary and return to the family of origin is low and/or marked by unsuccessful attempts (Gilbert, 2012).

Although Nordic countries do not declare their subscription to a communal self per se, their social welfare system orients to a socially constituted view of selfhood,

²³ 1st) Sweden; 2nd) Netherlands; 3rd) Finland; 4th) Denmark; 5th) Norway; 6th) Germany; 7th) United Kingdom; 8th) Canada; 9th) Belgium; 10th) United States

²⁴ Municipal rates of maltreatment investigations vary between 11 to 24 per 1,000 children across municipalities. It is estimated that one third of the investigations do not refer to maltreatment but rather adolescent criminal offences. Since Sweden does not have a juvenile delinquency system, any instances involving minors and law enforcement are reported to the child protection system.

where one's well being is inextricably related to the socio-economic and political context. As can be observed in Sweden, even a generous universal social welfare network cannot completely eliminate the problem of child maltreatment. What a socially responsive welfare system can do, however, is to allow for the differentiation between truly dysfunctional and malevolent parenting from the cumulative effects of social disadvantage. If social distress is reduced significantly, and parents receive the psychological, social, and economic support they require to parent, child protection providers would be better able to make such distinctions. At the present time in North America, child protection systems are flooded by well-intended parents overwhelmed by effects of poverty. Unlike interventions in Sweden, interventions in the U.S.—typically centred on individual change—have neither alleviated the problems families face, nor been helpful in reuniting families separated upon involvement with the system (Frankel & Frankel, 2006). What the Swedish example compellingly conveys is that the interpretation of persons and families as intrinsically connected to their social context, proves more successful as a premise in implementing sustainable solutions to child welfare, and in turn, child protection.

The communal approach adopted by the Swedes is also promising in terms of the integration of social services. One of the main criticisms directed at the child protection system in North America is the “siloes approach to supportive services” children and families in care receive upon coming in contact with child protection systems in North America (Bell, personal communication, April 25, 2013). Because selfhood is viewed under an individualistic lens in North America and agencies perpetuate that conception, welfare services operate under their own mandates with little integration or coordination among agencies. The pitfalls associated with the silo approach were illustrated in the previous chapter in the discussion of children apprehended over concerns of exposure to domestic violence. As was mentioned previously, DV agencies and child protection agencies operate under a “primary victim protection mandate.” Such mandates frame the needs of children and women as independent of each other and fail to recognize that this approach places women at risk, to the extent that it creates barriers for women to report abuse, or worse, it creates incentives for women to conceal abuse to avoid being separated from their children (Friend et al., 2008). In British Columbia, this siloes approach has also been amply

criticized for its failure to comprehend the diverse and interconnected needs of communities, families, and children who continue to receive individual intervention for problems that have been identified as major social issues, such as poverty, homelessness, and cultural discrimination (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008; First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2013; Turpel-Lafond, 2013b).

Arguably, a communal conception of selfhood would encourage a different perspective in that the needs of children, parents, and communities are viewed as integrated and interdependent; requiring equally comprehensive and interdependent interventions. A prominent American initiative, Casey Family Programs, capitalizes on the integration of communities, families, and children as an approach to preventing and reducing the need for foster care. They state:

We will not be able to address the challenges facing vulnerable children if we work separate and apart from the issues impacting their families and their communities. Our efforts for children need to be mobilized under a shared vision and a common goal. No system of government – child welfare, education, health care, mental health, juvenile, justice or family courts – can work in isolation and expect to accomplish its goals for children. Similarly, no sector of a community – business, faith-based, philanthropic, political, or non-profit – can expect sustainable improvement in the welfare of children to occur unless there is active and fully integrated involvement. (Bell, 2012, pp. 7-8)

This initiative is in line with a growing body of research that has shown that when the needs of children, families, and communities are considered and planned concomitantly, the incidence of child maltreatment and placement decreases and the negative effects associated with life in care are attenuated (Brownell et al., 2011; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

In British Columbia, integration has been at the centre of Aboriginal advocacy. After observing the insidious effects of disintegrated services in their families and communities “[First Nations Groups have sought] to avoid the fragmentation and professional turfism so familiar in mainstream education, health, and social services, calling instead for the pursuit of ‘Aboriginal ways’ for Aboriginal peoples” (Ball, 2005, p. 3). The “Aboriginal way” to which Ball refers entails an understanding of the well-being of children, families, and their communities as one. The Aboriginal call for holistic services

models would resonate with Swedish social welfare stakeholders, where services aimed at child protection (e.g., out-of-home placement, respite care) are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are part of a concerted effort to rehabilitate families and improve communal welfare (Cocozza & Hort, 2011; Gilbert, 2012; Russell et al., 2008).

Finally, a theoretical shift from an individualistic to a communal conception of selfhood would disavow individual explanations for phenomena that are largely social in nature, removing the sole responsibility for maltreatment (and for change) from parents and redistributing it to include communities and governments. When we take into account that in North America, poverty is the common thread that weaves families involved in the child protection system together (Russell, et al., 2008), it is plausible that an approach aimed at significantly reducing poverty and social stress would have a positive impact on the incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment. If families were provided with some relief from systemic challenges they constantly face, such as difficulties with accessing child care, securing food, living in safe neighborhoods, etc., prior to involvement with the child protection system, it is reasonable to presume that the rates of investigations and out-of-placements, as well as the negative effects associated with them, would decrease, as observed in Sweden.

In British Columbia, the MCFD has worked continuously toward achieving a more family service orientation. The MCFD's Performance Measures reports on a number of initiatives that orient to this aim. In terms of supporting families at risk, the provincial government and the MCFD have worked to expand the Child Care Subsidy Program to assist families with childcare costs, particularly for single-parents families. Protective practices have worked to maintain the family unit, increasing the number of families participating in family preservation programs such as the FDR, Family Response Group Conferences, and Child Protection Mediations—initiatives that replace investigations with collaborative problem-solving approaches intended to keep families together. As for Aboriginal children, more supportive services have been made available, especially for those with special needs. As well-intended as these initiatives may be however, they fall short of the kinds of structural changes that are required to effect significant progress in reducing prevalence and outcomes of child maltreatment in the province. Funding aside, on the basis of the foregoing, I suggest it is only if theoretical issues regarding the nature of selves that guide the child welfare system are amended, that child welfare systems in

British Columbia can be modified to address current problems. More specifically, the MCFD ought to reconsider the predication of its service and legislation on the perspective of individuals as independent, autonomous, and ultimately detached from others and their context.

Conclusion

Evidence seems to suggest that claims that the child welfare system in British Columbia is “broken” are accurate. The question then becomes how to fix it. A comprehensive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I hope to have provided a strong indication that the place to begin is with a certain brand of individualism pervasive in the current era. The assumptions perpetrated by disciplinary psychology concerning the nature of individuals that inform much of the institutional practice of the child protection in British Columbia require revision. Cushman articulates this point masterfully:

If, under the influence of individualism, this myopia continues, it will be difficult for us as a nation to address problems that appear as a result of larger political arrangements and the cultural frame of reference. If we psychologize and medicalize every human action by ridding it of any significant political cause, we condemn ourselves to denying the effects of the macro structures of our society. Therefore, we will leave those structures intact while we blame the only positions in our cultural clearing that shows up as responsible, culpable entities: the individuals and the dyad. If we cannot entertain the realistic possibility that political structures can be the cause of personal, psychological distress, then we cannot notice their consequences, we cannot mobilize to make structural changes, and we will have few ideas about what changes to make. We will become politically incompetent. Perhaps we already are. (Cushman, 1995, p. 337)

Cushman’s sobering words cut straight to the centre of the problem. Under the influence of individualistic approaches and beliefs, the child protection system has individualized social problems, blamed parents, and left the structure of inequality that precipitated their ingress into the system virtually intact. It is time to recognize that individualistic perspectives have neither resolved the problem of child maltreatment nor improved the quality of life of children and families brought into care. Political structures are not simply abstract concepts. They cause real problems, at times for generations. Poor institutional practices can lead to devastating effects including psychological

distress, family separations, and even suicide, and psychology is in part responsible for the status quo.

This thesis was intended as a critical consideration of the concept of self utilized in the discipline of psychology and its extension and implementation in child welfare practices. I hope to have illustrated that the failure to examine the socio-economic and political implications of the concept of the individual that informs much of child protection practices in British Columbia has served to disadvantage children and the families it means to protect. I also hope to have made a convincing argument that theoretical issues are not peripheral, but central, to practice. Failing to consider the theoretical and conceptual tensions and contradictions in the child protection system today, steers us to remain paralyzed, or trapped in an illusory discourse of freedom, choice, and individuality that fails to recognize that such notions are fundamentally circumscribed by one's socio-economic, cultural, and historical context. "Freedom and choice" are not, as individualistic approaches suggest, universally available to all and without serious constraints. For those born into cycles of poverty, discrimination, maltreatment, substance abuse, and familial and social isolation, freedom and choice may be elusive and largely imprisoning concepts. Finally, a great number of children and parents served by the child protection system in North America express frustration and distrust towards child welfare providers. Such frustration and distrust is frequently attributed to a general sense of apathy and lack of concern for the challenges these parents face in the task of parenting. I hope this thesis poses a valuable contribution to efforts to create a better, more comprehensive, and socially-responsive child welfare system for British Columbia's most vulnerable children and families.

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Appendix A.

Household source of income by primary category of substantiated maltreatment

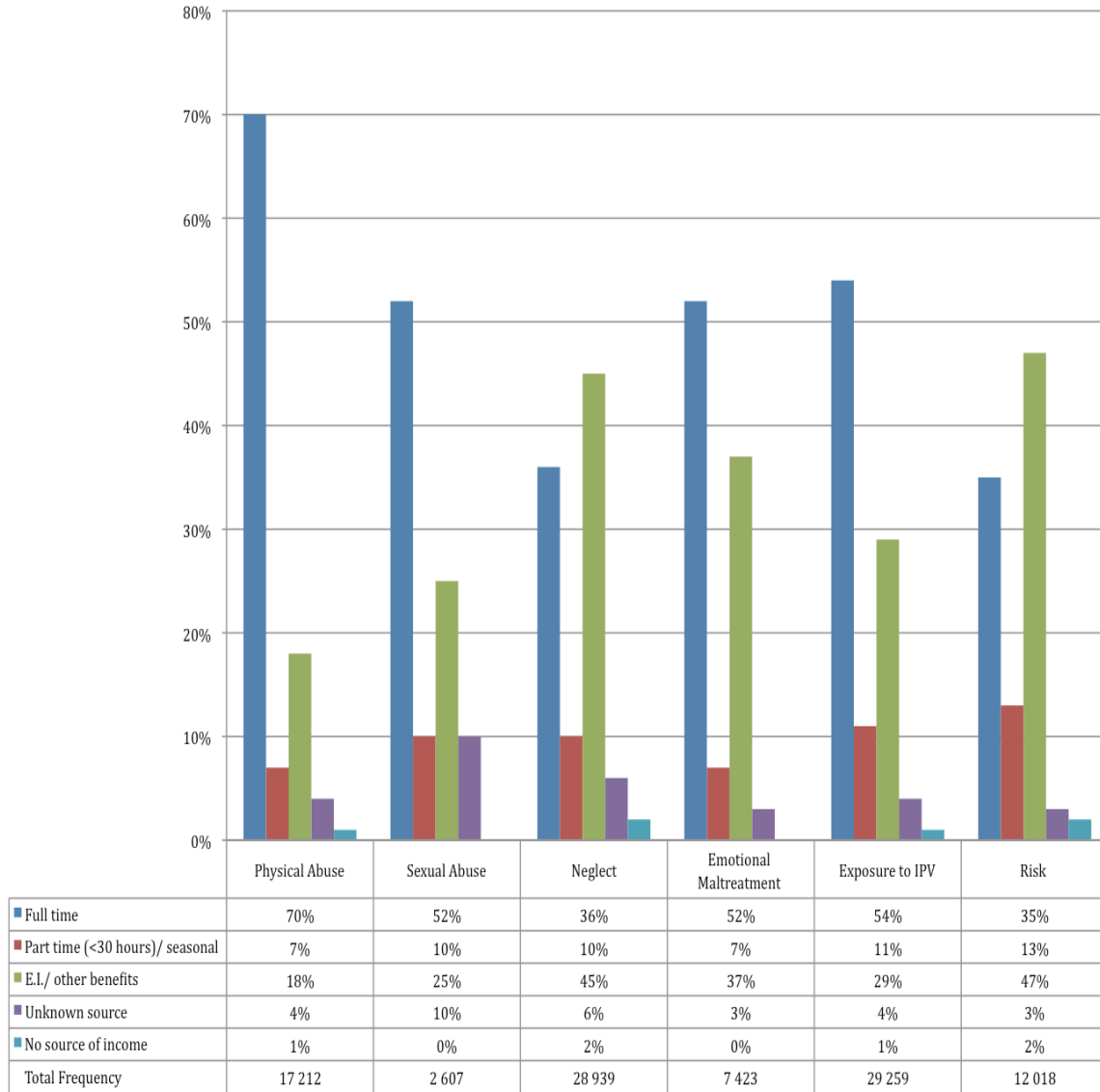
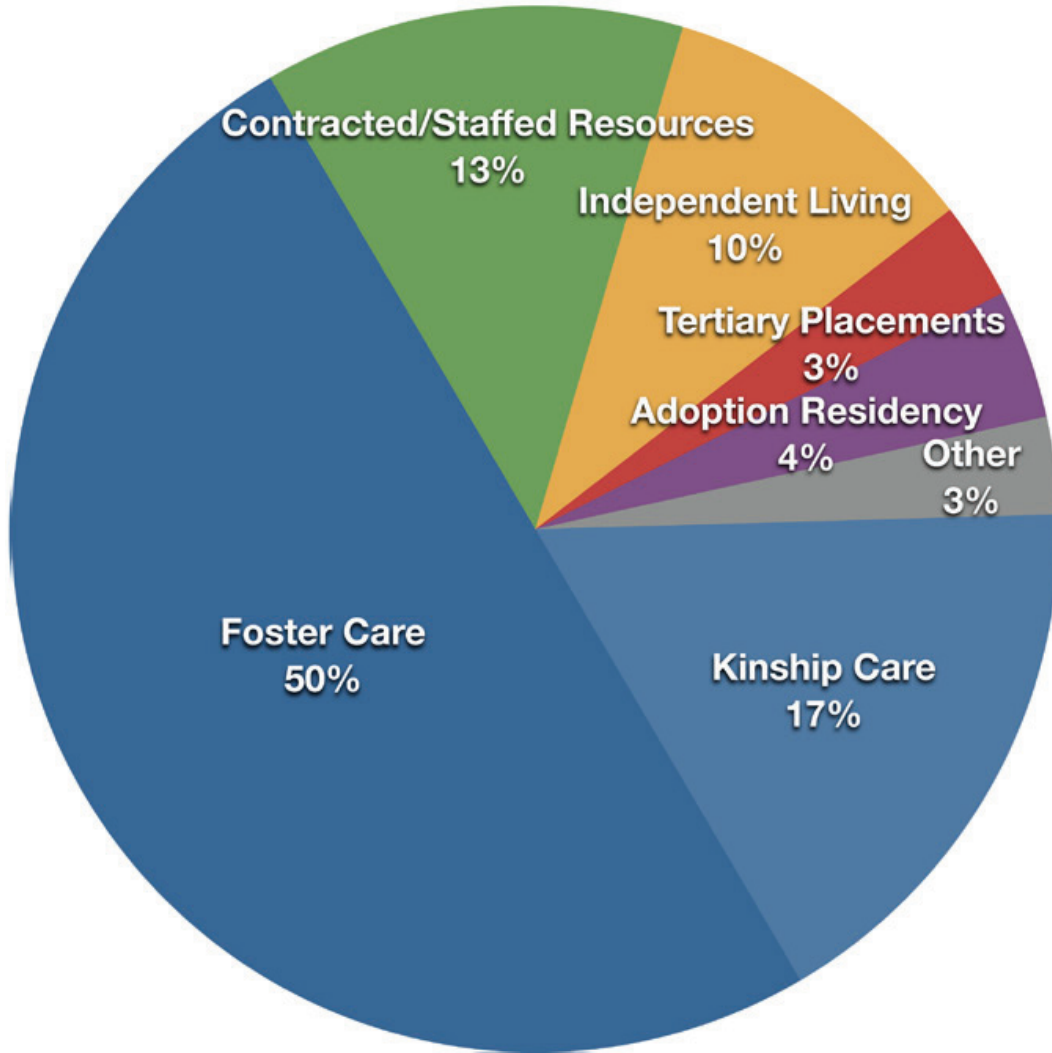


Figure 1: Household source of income by primary category of substantiated maltreatment, including confirmed risk of future maltreatment, in Canada in 2008 (Allan & Lefebvre, 2012).

Appendix B.

Breakdown of Placement Arrangements for Children and Youth in Care in British Columbia



Breakdown of Placement Arrangements for Children and Youth in Care in British Columbia (Ministry of Children and Family Development Residential Review Project, 2012).