Making Sense of Poverty in Child Welfare:

A Grounded Theory Informed Study of Public and Tribal Child Welfare Workers'

Poverty Constructions, Perceptions of Causes, and Praxis

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Between 2009 and 2011, the percentage of people living in poverty rose from 14.3% to 15.0% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Poverty is growing social problem, however, individuals in the United States differ in their perceptions of the causes of poverty, as well as what they think should be done about it. Scholars argue that studying the perceptions of the causes of poverty is warranted because individuals' perceptions shape behavior toward poor people and actions related to poverty (Strier, 2008), such as their "help giving" (Weiner, 1993) and support for social welfare programs (Gilens, 1999). Research on perception helps analyze one factor that informs practitioners' behaviors, an important area of study for scholars and activists who study antipoverty policy and practice, such as those in the field of social work. However, in the area of child welfare, a specialized area of interest for social workers and a place where child welfare workers operate extraordinary control over their clients' lives (Lipsky, 1980), research on child welfare workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty is almost non-existent.

While there is a lack of research of child welfare workers' perceptions, studies examining perceptions of the causes of poverty of other comparable populations, such as social workers and social work students, have been conducted in the United States (Bullock, 2004; Clark, 2007; Perry, 2001; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997; Roff, Adams, & Klemmack, 1984; Rosenthal, 1993; Sun, 2001), and internationally (Ljubotina & Ljubotina, 2007; Monnickendam, 2010; Strier, 2008; Weiss and Gal 2007). Many studies examine perceptions of the causes of poverty

exclusively, but others have combined this focus with others, such as beliefs about welfare system and welfare reform (i.e. Bullock, 2004).

In addition to the studies of social workers, studies of the general population abound, both in the U.S. (Cozzarelli, Tagler, & Wilkinson, 2002; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feagin, 1972; Griffin& Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Smith & Stone, 1989; Will, 1993) and internationally (Ditch, 1984; Furnham, 1982; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Hastie, 2010; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Hine & Montiel, 1999; Lepianka, Gelissen, &Van Oorschot, 2010; Nasser, Singhal, & Abouchedid, 2005; Niemela, 2008; Reutter et al., 2006; Stephenson, 2000; Wollie, 2009). Studies of social workers and the general population have predominately utilized quantitative methods to examine the relationship between predictor variables such as personal characteristics (i.e. race, class, gender and age), and personal values (i.e. religious orientation and political affiliation) and perception of the causes of poverty. Although in some respects social workers and social work students' perceptions of causes of poverty studies are most comparable to the population of child welfare workers, there are limitations to the comparison considering the unique role and implications of child welfare workers' decision making for and with families, such as removing children from their home and placing them in out of home care. Therefore research exploring the specific perceptions of the causes of poverty of child welfare workers is warranted.

Currently, there is a lack of published research conducted on child welfare workers' perceptions of poverty. However, in two studies, that sampled child welfare workers and framed their purposes as exploring race-based issues in the context of child welfare, poverty arose as a sub-category in both studies' findings (Chibnall, Dutch,

Jones-Harden, Brown & Gourdine, 2003; Križ & Skivenes, 2011). The first study's findings indicated that poverty was a central issue from child welfare workers' perspectives when asked about the over-representation of children of color in the child welfare system (Chibnall, Dutch, Jones-Harden, Brown & Gourdine, 2003). Similarly, a comparative study of child welfare workers employed by public child welfare agencies in the U.S., Norway, and England indicated that workers in the U.S. identified poverty (69% associated poverty with racism and oppression) as one of the five main differences in working with racial and ethnic minorities in contrast to white service users (Križ & Skivenes, 2011).

While the findings of those studies suggest that in the minds of child welfare workers issues of poverty, and race, and issues such the disproportionality of child of color in the child welfare system are connected, how child welfare workers perceive the causes of poverty, in this racialized context, has not yet been explored. Further, in addition to these previous child welfare worker studies' findings that demonstrate that issues of poverty are interconnected to and exist in the context of race within the child welfare system, the host of other research findings indicate that individuals' co-occurring demographic categories such as gender, class, political orientation and regional locality can predict different explanations of poverty.

This dissertation study explored several questions about child welfare workers' perceptions of the cause of poverty using qualitative methods, informed by grounded theory. The first research question asked how child welfare workers, differently located by gender, race, and class construct poverty. To account for the socially constructed nature of such a complex concept as poverty, attention was given to how child welfare

workers constructed poverty. Therefore, study participants were asked to provide their definition or construction of poverty. The second question sought to understand the relationship to perceptions of the causes of poverty and child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, and class. The detailed descriptions of child welfare workers' perceptions of the cause of poverty provided data to compare to and expand on the existing research on social welfare workers' perceptions of the cause of poverty. The third and final question sought to understand how the perceptions of causes of poverty translate into child welfare workers' practice framework, in both self-reported action and attitudes toward poverty related actions.

Based on the predetermined interests of the study to examine how social location of workers impacted how they understand poverty, as well as how these understandings informed their practice behavior, two chosen theoretical lenses shaped the study's construction. An intersectional analysis lens will be used, which approaches the research questions and the research design itself with the interconnectedness of race, class and gender as social constructed locations at the center. In addition, the lens of attributional theory will be used, which is one of the theoretical frames for perception studies such as this one, examining how individuals move from feeling to attributing cause to choosing action.

Problem Statement

In the United States, the system of child welfare acts as a powerful and complex structural agent in the lives of families. Although the role and focus of child welfare has changed over time, with the pendulum swinging repeatedly between a child saver and a family preservation frame, the overwhelming focus of the child welfare system has been

on protecting children. Currently, the child welfare system is defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children & Families as "a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p.1). These services include the mandate of removing children from their families if evidence of abuse is substantiated. Directed by both federal and state legislative statues, this mandate and other child welfare services are passed down to smaller child welfare service units. Those who work in child welfare, supervisors and caseworkers alike are bound by these mandates. In addition, the designated funding for child welfare stipulates what workers can and cannot do.

However, many scholars and activists have critiqued the system of child welfare for its poor aimed intentions, which ignore the interconnected issues of poverty (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Lindsey, 2003; Pelton, 1989; Roberts, 1999), gender inequality (Mink, 1995; Roberts, 1995, 1999), and the racialization of the system (Roberts, 1995, 1999, 2002). These arguments culminate in the analysis that the overall child welfare system maintains a preoccupation in approach and practice on individual parents' deficiencies and lacks a critical analysis of the structural inequalities and injustice of the U.S. economic, political and social systems, an analysis that demands a reframing of the problem and solutions to child welfare.

Lindsey (2003) argues that the national child welfare system would more likely make a difference in the lives of children if its purpose were to end child poverty. Alleviating child poverty shifts the focus of child welfare from investigation and intervention, to a prevention focus and a future orientation. Although recognized as a

scholar and a progressive child welfare thinker, Lindsey's (2003) strategies to shift child welfare's focus to end child poverty with strategies such as child savings accounts are largely ignored. Instead, child welfare continues to address child maltreatment with little systematic efforts to also implement or target the creation of meaningful anti-poverty strategies.

One reason for this pattern may be what Pelton (1989) called the "myth of classlessness" of child maltreatment. This pervasive notion has historical roots in the social and political system of child welfare and social welfare policy (Pelton, 1989). The myth is that child maltreatment occurs as often in all families, regardless of income. Following this myth, the problem of child maltreatment is not poverty, but rather the problem is parents who are maltreating their children. This of course denies the research, both in the past (Gil, 1970) that found that poverty was one of the structural factors underlying child maltreatment, and present, that children living in poverty are three times as likely to be abused and about seven times more likely to be neglected, according to the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (Sedlak et al., 2010). Further, a study using an experimental design aimed to examine causality between income and child maltreatment found that additional income reduces the risk of child maltreatment (Cancian, Slack, & Yang, 2010). In this study, compared to control group, the experimental group who received more child support income was about 10 percent less likely to have a "screen-in maltreatment report". These findings dispute the myth of classlessness of child maltreatment.

Accepting the myth of classlessness is analogously equated to a framework of colorblindness that claims all people are the same but ignores the realities of past and

current systems of racism. In the same way, a classlessness approach ignores the reality of all the ways poverty intersects with child welfare, ranging from the reporting of child maltreatment, the unrelenting stress of parenting while dealing with a paternalistic welfare system, to the practice behavior of child welfare workers. In addition, it ignores the way poverty is seen or fails to be seen as a relevant issue to address with direct poverty reduction strategies using child welfare policy.

Interconnected with these issues, is the reality that poverty is often racialized – meaning that poverty is social constructed as having a racial quality – both in the general population's perceptions of individuals (Gilens, 1999) as well as in practice, as seen in the disproportionality of children of color in the child welfare system (Roberts, 1995, 1999, 2002). Understanding this racialization of child welfare is far from complete, although many scholars have and continue to work at untangling this complex phenomenon.

In the midst of the theoretical and political critique of the system of child welfare, the inner workings of child welfare in the form of the daily work of child welfare workers continues on. Child welfare workers assess, intervene and manage child welfare cases, exercising great amounts of control in the children's lives they deem to protect and the families of those children. While policies and procedures lay out expectations, regulations and protocols child welfare workers, like other "street-level bureaucrats", make countless decisions that impact these family lives in the most significant of ways (Lipksy, 1980). This study asserts that how child welfare workers' perceive the causes of poverty is a relevant part of understanding one part of the complex relationship between poverty and child welfare.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation includes the following chapters. Chapter 2 contains the problem statement, focusing on the complexity of the multi-faceted issue of poverty in the child welfare system and a summary of the theoretical frameworks used to frame this study, intersectional analysis and attributional theory. It presents an examination of the current literature on perceptions of the causes of poverty, specifically of social workers, as a for child welfare workers, both students and professionals in the United States and internationally, with particular consideration of the methodological issues in prior perception of causes research as well as the current gaps in the literature. Finally, based on the review of this literature, the research questions and methods for answering these questions are presented.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and the methods used in this study. This chapter describes the grounded theory informed research design, and the particular techniques of coding, writing memos, matrixes, theoretical sensitivity and visual depictions of the data, as well as the data collection process including instrumentation. In addition, the analytic approach of intersectional theory as used in this study is outlined. The sample of the study is also described. This chapter concludes with the role of the researcher statement.

Chapter 4 describes the theoretical model developed from the data, which includes a visual depiction of the process of the core phenomenon, *child welfare workers making sense of poverty*. Descriptions of the core phenomenon and the four surrounding categories of the data -- causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions and strategies -- are presented, including the subcategories, themes and dimensions.

Chapter 5 contains a brief intersectional analysis of the data looking specifically at the participants' constructions of poverty and their perceptions of its cause. Differences in constructions of poverty and perceptions of causes between identified intersectional sample categories of the child welfare workers in the study are presented.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and interpretation of the major findings. First, the major findings of the study are summarized. Then, an interpretation is offered that weaves together the grounded theory informed analysis of this study with the intersectional analysis as presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In this interpretation, the findings of the study are put in light of the perception of the causes of poverty literature, as well as the context of the child welfare system in general.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, presents the implications for policy, practice, and social work education and child welfare training. It also includes several suggestions for future areas of research. The limitations of the study are also given, outlining the design, theoretical, sample, and measurement limitations. Lastly, the chapter ends with the conclusion of this dissertation.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND, SIGNIFICANCE AND APPROACH TO STUDY

Literature Review of Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty

The aim of the following discussion is to contextualize the need for research on child welfare workers' perceptions of poverty. To begin, a review of the current state of the literature on individual perceptions of the causes of poverty is outlined, highlighting Feagin's (1972) foundational categorization of individual and structural explanations, respectively described as blaming individual characteristics and failings, and blaming systemic and external situations such as social and economic. In addition, as a stand-in for child welfare workers, particular attention is paid to research in the United States and internationally on social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty, both social work students and professionals. To conclude, the gap in research on child welfare workers' perceptions of poverty is presented.

Studies of the Perceptions of Causes of Poverty

Over that last 30 years, there have been numerous studies conducted on perceptions of the causes of poverty.[1] These studies have taken place both in the U.S. (Cozzarelli, Tagler, & Wilkinson, 2002; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feagin, 1972; Griffin& Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Smith & Stone, 1989; Will, 1993) and internationally (Ditch, 1984; Furnham, 1982; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Hastie, 2010; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Hine & Montiel, 1999; Lepianka, Gelissen, &Van Oorschot, 2010; Nasser, Singhal, & Abouchedid, 2005; Niemela, 2008; Reutter et al., 2006; Stephenson, 2000; Wollie, 2009). For the purposes of this discussion,

[1] In this discussion, the studies of social workers are separated from others.

which is focused on the perception of the causes of poverty, the following review briefly describes the main methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and variables used.

Methodology. Almost all the studies used quantitative methods, typically administering a scale or questionnaire. A commonly used scale is the one designed by Feagin (1972), a 11 Likert-type item scale, tested using factor analysis, which will be described more fully below. In addition to using Feagin's scale out right, adaptations of Feagin (1972) and Kluegel and Smith's (1986) scale are also common (i.e. Hunt, 2002). Additional scales have also been developed and validated (Atherton, 1993; Yun & Weaver, 2010). While most studies collected respondent data directly, other studies analyzed administrative data from governmental sources (i.e. Kreidl 2000; Lepianka, Gelissen, &Van Oorschot, 2010).

Recently, studies of the explanations of poverty have taken a more sophisticated statistical approach than previous work, using forms of logistical regression to model if and how contextual and individual characteristics, such as personal values and structural country-level characteristics effect poverty explanations (Griffin& Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Hopkins, 2009; Hunt, 2002; Kreidl 2000; Lepianka, Gelissen & van Oorschot, 2010; Weiss Gal, Benyamini, Ginzburg, Savaya, & Peled, 2009; Zucker, & Weiner, 1993).

Theoretical Perspectives. In general, studies identified a wide range of theoretical perspectives that grounded their work, including attributional and dominant ideology theories. A brief description of these theories is offered here.

Attributional theory. Attributional theory, a social cognitive theory of motivation centered on the belief that retrospective causal attributions have bearing on present and future motivation and achievement, is one viewpoint used in several studies of

explanations of poverty (Furnham, 1982; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Hine & Montiel, 1999; Weiner, 1993; Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011; Zucker, & Weiner, 1993). Weiner (1986) a main theorist of attributional theory defines causes as "constructions imposed by the perceiver (either an actor or an observer) to account for the relation between an action and an outcome" (p. 22). Further, attribution of causality may also lead to the assigning of responsibility, such as external or internal control (Weiner, 1986).

Dominant ideology theory. Dominant ideology theory (Huber & Form, 1973) is another theoretical perspective on beliefs and attitudes of poverty, as well as inequality applied by researchers (i.e. Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lee, Lewis & Jones, 1992). Huber and Form (1973) contend that "dominant ideology of American stratification is based primarily on three values: equality, success, and democracy" (p. 4). The major premise of this theory is that individuals are responsible for their own economic fate and opportunities for hard work are abundant, therefore inequality is justified (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lee, Lewis & Jones, 1992).

Although this dominant ideology theory is used to help explain perceptions of poverty, as well as homeless and inequality, there is evidence of its limitations. For example, Lee, Lewis and Jones (1992) tested its usefulness as compared with public arena theory - the idea that at any point in time social issues compete with one another (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) - to explain public beliefs about the causes of homelessness and the results indicates somewhat greater support for the public arena perspective.

Variables of Interest: Values & Personal Characteristics. Another common aspect to research on perceptions of the causes of poverty is the examination of the effect

of the independent variables of personal values, such as political orientation (Furnham, 1982; Griffin & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Hopkins, 2009 Lepianka, Gelissen & van Oorschot, 2010), and personal characteristics such as personal experience with disadvantage (i.e. Lepianka, Gelissen & van Oorschot, 2010), religious affiliation (Hunt, 2002) and more commonly in the U.S., race (i.e. Clark, 2007; Griffin& Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Hunt, 1996) on the dependent variable, perceptions of the causes of poverty. Research examining these predictive relationships between these identified independent and dependent variables aim to understand what kind of person explains poverty in what way.

Before moving on to review the literature of social worker's perceptions of the causes of poverty, a brief outline of Feagin's (1972) study is presented. This study is referenced in many studies as a kind of touch stone perceptions of poverty study, as it is recognized as the first of its kind, and therefore is valuable to outline.

Feagin's foundational study. More often than not scholars who study individual perceptions of the causes of poverty reference Feagin's (1972) work as the starting place of perceptions of poverty research. The landmark study presents findings from interviews of 1,017 randomly selected adult Americans who during the interview were given 11 statements expressing reasons "why there are poor people in this country" and were told to rate the importance of each statement, in order to identify their perceptions of poverty.

Based on groupings of these 11 item Likert-type in his scale, Feagin (1972) stated that he devised three, what he called, general categories of the causes of poverty: individual explanations (individual characteristics and failings caused poverty), structural explanations (systemic and external situations were blamed, such as social and economic)

and fatalistic explanations (reasons such as bad luck, God's will). Feagin (1972) reported that the validity of these three categories was determined by their face validity with items linked to locus of responsibility for poverty, as well as factor analysis.

The results of the study indicated that about half the sample identified the statements of the individual explanation as very important, while structural explanations were considered very important to less respondents, and fatalist explanations the least. Feagin (1972) points out the existence of the stratification of explanatory beliefs in socioeconomic and demographic groups. For example, respondents who gave high priority to individualistic explanations of poverty were white, over-50, middle levels of education, and residents of Southern and North Central regions and respondents who gave high priority to structural explanations were African Americans, Jews, under-30, the poor and the lower levels of education. These findings provided Feagin the window into how Americans view the causes of poverty and began the bases of research in the field of the perceptions of poverty.

Kluegel and Smith (1986) conducted additional testing of Feagin's scale of the perceptions of poverty, confirming overall validity of the scale, with minor adjustment made in language (i.e. contemporary racial identifiers). Based on this analysis, Kluegel and Smith used Feagin's scale for their own large-scale U.S. study of 2,212 respondents, systematically sampled, who were interviewed on their beliefs about inequality, a part of which was explanation of poverty.

The next section of this discussion turns to the research of social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty. As this group of respondents is theoretically more

comparable to child welfare workers, the analysis of this literature will be more extensive that the general research review.

Social Workers' Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty

The study of the perceptions of the causes of poverty holds particular interest in the field of social work for a variety of reasons. First, researchers studying perceptions of the causes of poverty stated their purpose as to examine social work's claim to uphold the commitment to working with the poor (i.e. Clark, 2007), and the uniqueness of profession's the person in environment framework (i.e. Weiss & Gal, 2007). Secondly, some social work educators and scholars, as well as social scientists outside the field, argue that there is a link between the perceptions of the causes of poverty and the shaping of public policy in increasingly paternalist and racist ways (Schram, Fording, & Soss, 2011). And lastly, there is an untested or validated hypothesis that individual practitioners' perceptions of the causes of poverty may inform practice with people in poverty.

With these reasons to guide the efforts, there has been an extensive amount of research on social work students' (Clark, 2007; Ljubotina& Ljubotina, 2007; Perry, 2001; Rosenthal, 1993; Schwartz & Robinson, 199; Weiss, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b) and social work professionals' (Monnickendam, 2010; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997; Strier, 2008; Sun, 2001; Weiss & Gal, 2007) perceptions of the causes of poverty.

Studies measuring social workers perceptions of the causes of poverty are organized here into two collections, studies in the United States (Clark, 2007; Perry, 2001; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997; Roff, Adams,

& Klemmack, 1984; Rosenthal, 1993; Sun, 2001), and international studies (Ljubotina& Ljubotina, 2007; Monnickendam, 2010; Strier, 2008; Weiss and Gal 2007). While each study within these collections is unique in sample, methods and findings, there are some notable similarities to all.

The first similarity is the use of quantitative methodology, reflective of the perceptions of the causes of poverty research field as a whole. Specifically, almost all social work studies utilized survey methods, with the exceptions occurring outside the U.S. (Monnickendam, 2010; Strier, 2008 in Israel). In fact many of the studies used or adapted Feagin's (1972) methodology, including his scale (i.e. Sun, 2001). Others created survey instruments specifically with social work in mind, both uni-thematic (i.e. Atherton, 1993;) and multi-thematic (Cozzarellis, 2001; Ljubotina& Ljubotina, 2007; Rosenthal, 1993; Weiss & Gal 2007; Yun & Weaver, 2010). In addition to the commonly used survey methods, similar sampling strategies were employed. A fair number of studies used convenience samples, such as using preexisting databases such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (Reeser & Epstein, 1987) and classrooms of students.

Another similarity in these studies is the samples' lack of overall diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, education and socioeconomic class. This lack of diversity is reflective in general of the social work profession which for the most part is dominated by white, women with at undergraduate and graduate level educations, however, the use of oversampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2010) as a strategy to address this limitation was not commonly used.

While these many similarities exist across studies, there were also notable differences. The first of these differences existed in a small group of studies that were designed to compare subsets of different groups (Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Strier, 2008; Weiss & Gal, 2007). For example, Weiss and Gal (2007) compared social workers and other middle class professionals in Israel. Another difference identified briefly above, was the use of qualitative methodology (Strier, 2008). Strier (2008) conducted individual interviews with social workers and clients of social services in Israel, stating that given the complex and often contradictory nature of perceptions of poverty a qualitative approach was appropriate.

The following section reviews the current literature on social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty, first in the United States, separated into studies of professionals and studies of students. The section concludes with a review of the international studies of social workers, one in Croatia, and three in Israel.

United States' Professional Social Workers

Recent studies of social workers' perceptions of the cause of poverty in the United States include samples of both social work professionals (Bullock, 2004; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997; Roff, Adams, & Klemmack, 1984) and social work students (Clark, 2007; Perry, 2001; Rosenthal, 1993; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991; Sun 2001). These studies used survey methods to collect data on social workers perceptions about poverty, while some did not frame it as the causes of poverty but rather attitude toward poverty and the poor (Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997). Several of the studies were geographically located (Clark, 2007; Perry, 2001; Rehner, Ishee, Salloum & Velasues, 1997), providing a location based, and potentially

culturally based findings. Generally speaking, the research documents that social workers perceived poverty to be caused by structural factors. To highlight the way research on social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty has been conducted, as well the studies findings, the studies of professionals by Rehner, Ishee, Salloum & Velasues (1997), Reeser & Epstein (1987) and Bullock (2004), and the studies of students by Clark (2007) and Sun (2001) are outlined in detail below.

Professional Social Workers. The studies of perceptions of the causes of poverty of professional social workers in the United States span from 1968 to 2004. More recent studies have sampled social work students and taken place with professionals in other countries. Below are several examples of the studies of perceptions of the causes of poverty of U.S. social work professionals by Bullock (2004), Reeser & Epstein (1987) and Rehner, Ishee, Salloum & Velasues (1997). As mentioned above, several studies of professional social workers, samples were drawn from NASW sources, either at a NASW conference (Rehner, Ishee, Salloum & Velasues, 1997) or from NASW membership lists (Reeser & Epstein, 1987), while the third drew the social workers sample from a state Health and Human Service office (Bullock, 2004).

Social workers in Mississippi. In one example of this convenience sampling strategy, Rehner, Ishee, Salloum & Velasues (1997) surveyed 186 Mississippi social workers at the Mississippi NASW chapter conference to explore the relationship between attitudes toward the poor and the variables of political orientation, educational training, and licensure status, using Atherton et al.'s (1993) Attitudes Toward Poverty (ATP) Scale, a unithemeal 37 Likert-type item scale about poverty and the poor. ATP tested for validity (alpha= .93) for the 37 items. Using multiple regression and analysis of variance,

overall findings indicated that the sample had a relatively positive attitude toward the poor, as defined as a higher score on the ATP. Political orientation findings demonstrated that social workers who identified with the political left were more likely than those on the right to hold positive attitudes toward poor, such as being able to identify with them and disagree with paternalistic statement. Other findings of interest include that years of social worker experience were correlated with ATP scores, and that direct service providers (61 percent of whom identified as conservative Protestants) had the most negative attitudes – lower ATP scores – toward the poor, in contrast to administrators and consultant/teachers.

While Rehner (1997) and colleagues used the ATP, which is identified as being unithemeal, they conducted a factor analysis as part of their study to account for a greater percentage of variability. Since this study was done before Yun and Weaver's (2010) short form of the ATP that was multithemeal, Rehner's rigorous data analysis helped to address the scales limitations with this Mississippi NASW sample.

Comparative NASW study. Reeser and Epstein's (1987) also used NASW sources for their study, drawing samples from NASW membership databases. However, Reeser and Epstein's study departs from other studies of its kind in that its purpose expanded beyond measuring social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty to include measuring commitment to activist strategies and goals, and the social workers' clients' social class. In addition to the expanded purpose, the 1987 publication compared the results of two prior studies, one by Epstein from 1968 and the other by Reeser in 1986.

The findings from Reeser and Epstein's (1987) study demonstrated a few important differences between the data from samples of 1968 and 1986, as well as

contradictory findings. The respondents of the 1968 study had more commitment to working with poor and the profession's involvement in social change, although they saw cause of poverty as more individual explanation. This was the inverse for respondents from 1986 who most often perceived cause of poverty as structural, rather than individual but did not view a commitment to working with the poor or the profession's involvement in social change as a priority. Although Reeser and Epstein's original designs were not the same nor did they use a strategy to have proportional samples, with attention to demographics such as race, gender, socioeconomic, and education level, their study's premise of comparing views over time provides a unique lens to examine social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty and their commitment to activist strategies and goals, and the social workers' clients' social class.

Social workers in Midwest HHS office. Bullock's (2004) study of 39 social workers, who assisted clients with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits in a Midwestern city state Health and Human Services office, and 41 welfare recipients had three purposes: 1) examine their explanation of poverty and perception of the welfare system, 2) assess support for cultural beliefs about poverty, and 3) examine the relationship between welfare reform policies, beliefs about welfare recipients, and attributions. The findings indicated that both groups supported the economic/structural causes of poverty, confirming the well documented evidence of previous studies (Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rosenthal, 1993; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991). Additional results from extensive correlational analyses provided more subtle understanding of the underlying differences between and within groups (see Bullock, 2004). Highlights from these analyses include the finding that the low-income respondents were more supportive of

progressive policies than social workers. An important limitation of note is the study's lack of racial and ethnic representation of both the social workers and the low-income respondents.

Social work students. Although similar to the research on professional social workers in methodology and overall approach, the studies on social work students' perceptions of the causes of poverty in the United States (Clark, 2007; Perry, 2001; Roff, Adams, & Klemmack 1984; Rosenthal, 1993; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991; Sun, 2001) uniquely demonstrate the profession's professed commitment to educating students about social problems, as well as the profession's value of social justice. Findings across the studies of students confirmed the results of the professional social worker studies, that most students supported a structural explanation of poverty, although some respondents did have severe misconceptions about the economic reality of the poor (Rosenthal, 1993). The most recent studies Clark (2007) and Sun (2001), that both used survey tools adapted from Feagin's scale, will be highlighted here, to demonstrate recent developments in this area of research.

MSW Students in California. Clark (2007) analyzed the survey responses about the perceptions of poverty from 2, 213 master level social work students' in California, at two data points entering and exiting their graduate programs. The survey tool, that included questions adapted from Feagin's (1975) Attitudes Toward Poverty Scale and Reeser and Epstein's (1987) survey instrument, used the four classifications based on Reeser and Epstein's study: individual, structural, technological and interest group. Findings in Clark's (2007) study indicated that a small majority (54.1%) of students entering the program preferred societal/institutional change methods verses individual

adaptation methods to address poverty, and this preference increased at the time of graduation. In addition, findings indicate that the program may have some effect on decreasing stereotypes of the poor, although there was not any statistical analysis to identify whether this was statistically significant. Along with the finding that a majority of students preferred societal strategies to address poverty, another important finding in Clark's (2007) study is that students' race and ethnicity affects their perceptions of and interest in working with the poor. The general lack of statistical analysis of significance limits the usefulness of this study's findings. Another limitation of this study is social desirability bias that is present in self-reported information.

Comparison of Social Work and Non-social Work Undergraduate Students. Unlike Clark's sample of master level social work students, Sun (2001) compared 65 social work (SW) and 65 non-social work (NSW) undergraduate students from a southwestern university. Findings support prior evidence that SW students attribute poverty more to structural factors than individual, however when race and gender was considered, the results differed. Nonwhite and male SW students demonstrated support of structural and individual factors. White NSW deemed structural factors as equal to individualistic factors, while white SW emphasized structural factors.

In the implications sections for both of these studies, Clark (2007) and Sun (2001) both discussed how these studies may point to the effectiveness of social work educational aims to increase student's awareness of structural causes of social ills, such as poverty. However, they also acknowledge that a causal relationship between social work education and student attitudes toward poverty would require more rigorous research designs, and replications of studies.

International Studies of Social Workers

Along with these United States studies perceptions of the causes of poverty in the field of social work, similar studies have taken place in Croatia (Ljubotina& Ljubotina, 2007), and Israel (Monnickendam, 2010; Strier, 2008; Weiss and Gal 2007). Four studies used comparative samples, one subgroup being professional social workers or social work students, and then a comparison group, consisting of other professions ore client groups. Two of the studies employed surveys and other two used qualitative methods. Similarly to the U.S. studies, the perceptions of poverty, whether in the quantitative or qualitative studies, were categorized and discussed using the terms developed by Feagin (1972) (individual, structural, and fatalistic), demonstrating the ubiquitous and dominant nature of these categories. The findings in general confirmed the results of the U.S. studies, that social workers are more likely to perceive the cause of poverty to be structural. The studies are outlined below.

Croatian comparison of undergraduate students. Ljubotina& Ljubotina (2007) study in Croatia utilized a convenience sample of 365 seniors in college, who were students of social work, economics, and agriculture. Creating an adapted version of Feagin's (1972) scale that added micro-environmental causes (e.g. poor family, single partenthood, region), the aim of the study was to examine how these senior students attributions of poverty differed, with the assumption that given the different educational, theoretical frameworks of the fields may produce differences. They also measured themes of the students' personal values. The results indicated that all students groups identified structural causes of poverty as most explanatory, then micro-environmental,

individual, and fatalistic. Also, social work students attributed individual causes as less important than the other students.

Israeli middle class professionals and social workers. Like Ljubotina& Ljubotina (2007), Weiss and Gal (2007) used a questionnaire to compare the perceptions of poverty of 482 social workers and 165 other middle class professionals in Israel. The rationale for this particular population comparison is twofold. First, is to understand whether attitudes towards poverty reflect the unique 'person-in-environment' basis of social work and second is to examine whether "the attitudes of social workers do indeed offer a platform upon which to adopt a repertoire of intervention strategies that include social change as a key element for dealing with service users' needs" (p. 894). The results indicate that both social worker and middle-class professionals were most likely to perceive the cause of poverty to be structural, less inclined to attribute it to psychological causes, and least likely to attribute it to individual causes. The difference between these explanations for both groups was found to be statistically significant ($p< 0.0001$). However, the difference between social workers and middle-class professionals tendency to explain poverty by structural or individual factors was not statistically significant. The one statistically significant difference between groups was regarding the psychological explanation, where social workers were more inclined to agree with it as an explanation. Authors concluded that the findings undermine social work's claim that it is the professions frame, such as social justice or the person in environment that shapes their unique perspective. Instead the findings suggest is it class that shapes a respondents' perception.

Weiss and Gal (2007) seek answers to the question of whether class is more of a predicting variable of people's perception of the causes of poverty, using an all Jewish population in Israel. Although this question is a relevant one, the construction of "class" as defined as type of work employment (i.e. teachers, computer programmers) and a bachelor's education seems unduly reductionistic, when class is quite a complex construct that could include a combination of income, wealth, education, and perceived social status. Also, this study's homogeneity of race and ethnicity must contextualize the findings.

Social workers and physicians in Israel. The second study in Israel sampled 17 social workers and 16 primary care physicians (PCPs) to qualitatively examine their attributions, perspectives, as well as their "moral imperatives" (defined as beliefs how their clients or the government should act to address poverty) with regards to poverty (Monnickendam, 2010). As a result of the qualitative nature and analysis of the study, the findings did not indicate a perception of poverty that was more likely, but instead indicated that four main attributes (individualistic, structural, fate, and policy) for poverty appeared from the focus group and personal interviews of both social workers and PCPs. Differences between samples included that social workers looked at policy from a micro perspective representing the "first psycho, then social" orientation (Buchbinder, Eisikovits, & Karnieli-Miller, 2004) while and PCPs looked at policy from a macro perspective.

Israeli social workers and social service clients. And finally in the third and last study of social workers in Israel, 14 social workers and 45 Jewish clients were interviewed using a grounded theory approach (Strier, 2008). Strier (2008) states that

qualitative methods were chosen because they are more sensitive to the complex nature of the perceptions of social problems, such as poverty. Rather than confirming the ranking and support of the predefined categorizing of the explanations of poverty, the findings depict the contextual, complex, and conflicting internal discourse of both worker and client. Another important sub-category in the data is the view held by both social worker and client of the role of social services is to relieve material deprivation, rather than organizing any kind of social or political action to bring about changes in social policy. A further expansion of these findings in the form of a larger qualitative study, or using the sub-categories as guides for developing items for a survey, would help to add credibility, particular of the social workers since it was a fairly small sample. With that said, this study offers one of the rare examples of a qualitative approach used to answer the question of how individuals perceive the causes of poverty.

Challenges in Research of Social Workers' Perceptions

A review of this literature on social workers' perceptions reveals several gaps. For almost a decade the most recent studies of the perceptions of the causes of poverty have been conducted outside the United States, leaving a gap of extensive data, particularly on professional social workers, from the United States. Methodologically, the research has been dominated by quantitative methods, particularly in U.S. studies. In addition, there are no studies on child welfare workers' perceptions which considering that social workers often work in child welfare as direct service providers as well as supervisors and policy makers, and that the level of poverty of most child welfare caseloads is high, this lack of research is significant.

In addition, several conceptual and methodological issues exist in the research on perception of poverty – what it is, its causes and what should be done about it. These issues are similar to the issues that are present in the whole of perceptions of the causes of poverty research. A critique of the literature of perceptions of the causes of poverty as a whole is now presented.

Critique of Perception of The Cause of Poverty Research

Several critical issues have been raised about the research of perceptions of the causes of poverty that require discussion (Lepianka, Van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2009; Weiner, Osbourne, & Rudolph, 2011). The first group of issues can be classified as conceptual, as they address how the study of the perception of the causes of poverty is constructed. Secondly, is the issue of whether the current methodology to study perceptions of poverty is adequate. The following discussion outlines these issues.

Conceptual Issues

The construct of poverty. Along with the limited range of respondents, an additional conceptual issue in the literature is the lack of consistent recognition of the socially constructed nature of poverty. For example, many studies are developed with the purpose of finding out causes of poverty, but how the respondent defines poverty is not examined or stated. Therefore, the identified causes of poverty are disconnected from the respondents' construction. This disconnection mirrors the criticism of traditional decontextualized study of social attitudes toward social problems (Strier, 2008). How a respondent constructs poverty may change how they perceive it. Also poverty for some may be an economic construct, while for others it encompasses social and political limitations as well. For example, authors such as Amartya Sen (1999) argue that poverty

is not only an economic construct, but also the inability to fully participate in society. If the argument that poverty is a complex construct that is socially constructed is followed, then beginning a study with an exploration of how respondents define poverty would help to enrich the findings (Soss, 2012).

Three-tier categorization. As mentioned earlier, the reality that Feagin's (1972) three-tier categorization has been the dominant construct in the perceptions of the causes of poverty field creates both a sense of order in the field, but what is lost because of this categorization? Awareness of prescribed nature of the categories is present in the current literature (Harper, 1996; Strier, 2008; Weiss & Gal, 2007). Weiss and Gal (2007) acknowledged the four primary causes of poverty "offered" to the respondents in their study were already set. Another issue is whether there is an agreement of the framework of the current categorization of the perceptions of poverty, when authors have begun to include fourth categories, such as technology and interest group.

Lepianka, Van Oorschot, and Gelisson (2009) add that there is not consensus of poverty explanation typologies, as demonstrated in the literature review. In deed, additional typologies may help to ferret out important knowledge gaps in poverty explanation when the previous three-tier categorization fails to depict the nuance. For example findings from several studies suggest that that respondents' view of that poverty is explained by a culture of poverty beliefs might be identified in the scale as a structural explanation or at least does not fall strictly into the individual and structural attributions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Nilson, 1981).

Methodology Issues

Limits of quantitative. Some argue that the current methodology to study perceptions of poverty is inadequate (Lepianka, Van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2009; Strier, 2008). Survey data does allow for large-scale data collection, as well as increases generalizability, its limitations include the lack of sensitive to complex constructs (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Strier (2008) states that qualitative methods are more sensitive to the complex nature of the perceptions of social problems, such as poverty.

Gaps in Research of Child Welfare Workers' Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty

After an extensive search using google scholar as well as traditional academic search engines, no publications were found that focused exclusively on child welfare workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty. There were only two sources that distinguished child welfare workers' in their sample and focused on topics close to perceptions in the context of poverty. The first is in a Children's Bureau report (Chibnall, Dutch, Jones-Harden, Brown & Gourdine, 2003) entitled Children of Color in the Child Welfare System: Perspective from the Child Welfare Community, this nine site, multi-level study sought to understand child welfare workers' perspective on the over-representation of child of color in the child welfare system, using interviews and focus groups. Findings indicated that child welfare workers across the nine sites identified that poverty and poverty related circumstances play a primary role in the over-representation of children of color in the child welfare system. These child welfare workers perceptions do not per se speak to the cause of poverty, but they do indirectly express the perception that poverty is one of the causes of this over-representation of children of color, articulating their view that there was a connection between the two issues.

The other publication on child welfare workers that approaches the study of perceptions of the causes of poverty, is a comparative study of child welfare workers who were employed by public child welfare agencies in the U.S., Norway, and England that explores the workers' experience working with racial and ethnic minority families (Križ & Skivenes, 2011). This 2011 publication focuses on the findings from the interviews of 40 child welfare workers in California, with brief comparisons of the other samples offered. When asked about the experience of working with racial and ethnic minority families, one out of these 40 child welfare workers said there is no difference, while three said all families are different. The 36 other workers identified five main differences in working with racial and ethnic minorities: culture, poverty (69% associated poverty with racism and oppression), racism and oppression, lack of a sense of entitlement (compared to White families) and language. Another key finding from this study is that only one child welfare worker believed that the child welfare system is responsible for the disproportionality of children of color in the child welfare system.

Considering the various ways that child welfare workers engage with the poverty on theoretical levels, such as risk factors for maltreatment (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, HHS, 2003), and practical levels, such as determining what they can and can not do to assist families on their caseloads who are negotiating TANF, dealing with unemployment, lack of housing, and policy levels, the lack of research on child welfare workers' perceptions of poverty, what it is, its causes and what to do and who should do it, is a serious gap.

Based on the findings of this review, it is clear that further research is needed to develop a baseline of child workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty. In addition,

there are several key aspects to how this research could be conducted that would address the limitations found in the research on social workers as well as incorporate some of conceptual issues identified in the critiques. The following list outlines some of these aspects.

First, it would strengthen an initial study of child welfare workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty if methods included a strategy (i.e. a survey or interview questions) to collect data regarding the respondents' construction of poverty. Including the construction of poverty would give the subsequent questions about the causes of poverty depth, as well as add to the basic knowledge base of child welfare workers' beliefs. In addition, it is the aim of future research to understand the range of conceptualization of poverty from limited economic and political participation, as proposed by Amartya Sen (1999) to an immediate needs only conceptualization.

In addition, there is evidence that while survey methods would provide data for many more child welfare respondents, there are inherent limitations that need to be addressed. First, is that the questionnaire used must allow for respondents' to have a more complex explanation system that allows for multi-theme responses (i.e. Hunt, 2002; Yun & Weaver, 2010). Careful analysis of all the existing scales and questionnaires on perceptions of poverty must be made, and selected, or adapted to fit this desire of greater subtlety and nuance.

Further, questionnaires do not capture the complexity and often the contradicting poverty perceptions and beliefs uncovered in the limited qualitative studies (Strier, 2008; Weiss & Gal, 2007). Therefore, a qualitative design would provide an exploratory methodology for an initial study.

Research Questions

Based on this literature review and the identified gaps in research, the following study seeks to explore child welfare workers' construction of and their perceptions of the causes of poverty, as well as how these translate into workers' practice frameworks. Specifically, this study will examine a sample of child welfare workers from counties and tribal entities in Minnesota. The following research questions for this are:

1. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class construct poverty?
2. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class perceive the causes of poverty?
3. How are the perceptions of causes of poverty translated into child welfare workers' practice framework, in both self-reported action and attitudes toward action?
    a. How do child welfare workers see the role of child welfare in anti-poverty efforts?
    b. How do child welfare workers see their role in the context of the poverty of the families on their caseload?
    c. How are child welfare workers' perceptions of causes of poverty shaped by the gender, race, ethnicity, and class of clients?

Overall, the research questions extend from an intersectional paradigm, examining the interlocking categories of race, class and gender throughout.

The first question of this study seeks to contextualize the participants' perceptions of the cause of poverty. Namely, how do child welfare workers in the sample construct the idea of poverty? For example do they construct poverty in economic terms only, such as income level, or are social and political components included as well, as suggested by

authors like Sen (1999) who suggest a capability inequality definition of poverty. A limitation of prior studies of perceptions of the causes of poverty, as identified by several scholars was that the studies' designs decontextualized perception of cause from how poverty was defined (Soss, 2012; Strier, 2008). This first question of this study aims to contextualize respondents' perceptions of cause in their constructions of poverty, adding to fuller data and more nuanced understanding.

The second question seeks to understand what child welfare workers perceive the causes of poverty are and how these perceptions are related to the workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class. This question is the standard question in perceptions of the causes of poverty research, although for this study, it is set within an intersectional approach. The last question and sub-questions seek to answer how child welfare workers' translate their perceptions into praxis. These questions were chosen for several reasons. First, this study seeks to not only be a knowledge building effort, but one that also contributes practice knowledge to the fields of child welfare and social work, the profession that trains child welfare workers across the country. Secondly, parallel literature on welfare workers raises questions about the impact of race, gender, and class plays on individual workers as they struggle with the impact of rigid organizational climate, and welfare policy reform that leads case workers to have more control over their clients lives, while at the same time being more "responsible" for clients working (Ridzi, 2009; Watkins-Hayes, 2009). Along these lines, question three and its sub-questions seek to understand how child welfare workers' view child welfare place and their role as workers in the addressing the poverty of the families in the child welfare system.

Theoretical Frameworks

The following section outlines the theoretical frameworks of this study: intersectional analysis and attributional theory. As intersectional theory is the main theoretical paradigm applied to this study, greater detail will be paid to the theory it self, as well as how it is applied to research. Also, a brief review of poverty and child welfare literature using an intersectional approach is presented. Next, is an overview of the theory of attributional theory.

Intersectional Analysis

The use of intersectionality as a theoretical lens or approach to analysis particularly in the social sciences has exploded in the last two decades. An intersectional approach is used most often by feminists and often women of color scholars and activist/scholars, in a variety of fields, such as law and social policy (Mink, 1995,1999; Roberts, 1999; 2002); political science (Hancock, 2007; Simien, 2007); social work (Hulko, 2009; Mehrotra, 2010; Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris and Hamilton, 2009; Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008); women's studies (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2002); and women's rights and economic change (Symington, 2004).

Intersectional analysis seeks to understand the constructed interlocking and interconnected categories of race, gender, and class. Developed by critical black feminists who critiqued the separate analysis of race, gender and class, and also the additive approach to these categories, these theorists argued that this single category analysis fails to fully illuminate the complexity of gendered race and raced gender, as well as the inseparable moderator of class (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989). Moreover, they posit that intersectional analysis more fully explains the complexity

inherent in social issues, such as domestic violence within communities of color (Crenshaw, 1991).

In addition to its use as a theoretical lens, intersectionality has also been applied to research (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Hancock, 2007; Landry, 2007; McCall, 2005; Murphy et al., 2009; Simien, 2007). Hancock (2007) lays out three core elements that distinguish an intersectional research paradigm from other approaches. First, the intersectional approach recognizes the political significance of categories. Second, it assumes that there are interactive, mutually constitutive relationship among categories, and third that there are dynamic interactions between institutions and individuals. An intersectional approach tries to engage the challenge of the multiplicity of comparisons and conceptualizations involved in intersections. Adopters of intersectional research propose that intersectional research paradigm contests homogeneity of cases and independence of variables (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Simien, 2007). However, in the face of this challenge and complexity intersectional researchers must hold the line, stand firm and not fall back on conventionally designed theories. With this in mind, adopters of intersectional research propose applying the theoretical framework of intersectionality to every aspect of the research endeavor, broadly speaking, but also tailoring the use of intersectionality to the time- and context-contingency of each research effort.

An intersectional approach to research also includes data analysis. Painted in a broad stroke, researchers ought to bring an intersectional theoretical sensitivity to their studies. This sensitivity requires that researchers carefully analyze the data to determine how and if there are salient intersections seen in the data, recognizing that intersections are not static or always relevant to the subject at (Murphy et al., 2009).

To illustrate intersectional theory applied to poverty and child welfare, the following section samples a few key authors approaches.

Intersectional writing on poverty and child welfare. In Leroy Pelton's work *For Reasons of Poverty* (1998) and Duncan Lindsey's (2003) *The Welfare of Children* both authors discuss the interconnectedness of race, gender and class and look at how the social location of individuals impacts their experiences within the macro systems of child welfare in their work, they do not use a feminist lens per se. Other authors look at poverty governance (Soss, Harding & Schram, 2011), and public welfare policy (Quagdagno, 1994), but with a unitary lens of race. Using the work of Gwendolyn Mink (1995, 1999) and Dorothy Roberts (1995, 1999) as examples of an intersectional approach, close examination of how the interconnectedness of the system of welfare and poverty in writing is explored.

Mink's frame of welfare politics: gender and racial order. While Mink (1995, 1999) does not focus on child welfare but on the system and provision of social welfare, her analysis can be translated to the child welfare system, as she looks at how women, specifically women of color, are particularly targeted as needing reform. In *The Wages of Motherhood,* Mink states, that, "Welfare politics has always been a discourse about gender roles and about racial and cultural order" (p. 178). Mink argues that welfare is fundamentally an issue of gender inequality and racialized social structures, although she does not use the word interconnected or interlocking, her analytic approach echoes intersectionality.

A poignant point from Mink's (1999) writing that is relevant to the overall historical roots of the intersectional approach of women of color pushing back against

white feminism, is her critique of feminists who quite blatantly ignore poor women as women. The specific example Mink uses to illustrate her point comes from how in 1990s when welfare reform began to gain steam, feminists, with few exceptions did not rise up against the reform efforts. Mink sees this an example of feminists, white feminists in positions of political power, did not include poor women as valuable or part of the movement.

In contrast to this exclusion of poor women, Mink (1995) argues that welfare needs to be considered a form of gender justice, a provision that women, particularly women of color, need to maintain their economic independence and free them from dependence from the potential of unwanted relationships with men, and equally importantly, for them to be able to choose to stay home and care for their children, something that women who are not poor are encouraged and/or allowed to do. Mink's argument does not stay on the page alone; she organized the "Women's Committee of One Hundred to Fight Against Personal Responsibility Act, 1996" (Kansas State University, 1998).

Robert's the color of child welfare. Similar in analysis to Mink, Dorothy Roberts (1995, 1999) also sees welfare as attack on poor women of color, but her attention is placed on black mothers in the child welfare system. In the influential book, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*, Roberts (1995) describes how the child welfare system is deeply racialized, what the consequences are for black families, and how the current policy trends, including criminal and welfare impact families involved in the child welfare system. She concludes with investigating what the potential group-harm is

for the African American community as a result of losing so many children to the child welfare system.

Roberts (1995) makes a direct link between her critique of the color of child welfare and child welfare workers' perceptions of poverty stating that "Raising children in poverty also looks like parental unfitness if you believe that poor people are responsible for their own predicament and are negative role models for their children" (Roberts, p. 27). Translation of this sentence to this study would be "what do child welfare workers' believe that poor people are responsible for or not?"

The intersectional approach to this study incorporates the critical, feminist, social constructionist perspective, which asserts that the inherent complexity of issues like perceptions of poverty are more fully explained by examining the interconnectedness of categories.

Attributional Theory

Attributional theory is an umbrella term used by social psychologists for the various approaches to the study of perceived causes, their antecedents, and in addition, the subsequent reactions to those identified causes (Weiner, 1992). The perception of cause is the aspect of attributional theory that is most relevant to the discussion at hand, although the antecedents, and the subsequent reactions to the identified causes of poverty are equally important. Perceived cause is the idea that people hold ideas of explanation for a situation, such as an achievement, however it is also used for nonachievement-related contexts (Weiner, 1992).

Research on perception of the causes of poverty that adopts an attributional theory approach tends to come out the field of social psychology (Bullock, 2004; Weiner, 1993;

Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011; Zucker, & Weiner, 1993). Weiner (2011) has taken his previous work around a scheme of causal properties (locus, stability, and controllability) in the context of illness and effort (see Weiner, 1985) and applied to the study of poverty.

The criticism of attributional theory in the context of perception of poverty points to several key areas of concern. Using the methodology of discourse analysis, Harper (1996) identifies four major theoretical limitations of attributional poverty research, they are: individualism (that the unit of analysis of perception is individual), stability (it the assumes the stability of underlying attributional structures), constructed nature (that poverty is not a fixed idea, but instead is a socially constructed concept), and neglecting the effects of explanation (the lack of curiosity in the field to go beyond perception, limiting the political and social usefulness of the data). This critique warrants consideration in future perceptions of the cause of poverty research.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter began with an overall review of the perceptions of the causes of poverty literature, examining the standard methodology used, theoretical grounding, and Feagin's (1970) foundational study. Next a review of the literature focusing specifically on social welfare workers perception of the cause of poverty was presented. The studies were organized by research location, including U.S. and international studies, and sample populations, students and professionals. An overall critique of perception of cause of poverty research revealed that survey methodology has been the dominant methodology which prohibits a more nuanced understanding of the social constructed concept of poverty, in addition, criticism of the three-tiered framework used in most of the research

was reported. The gap in research on child welfare workers was also presented. An overview of the intersectional analysis and atttributional theory, two theoretical frameworks that used in this study were described.

Chapter 3

METHODS

Research Design

In the following chapter, the methods for this qualitative grounded theory informed study exploring public and tribal welfare workers' perceptions of the cause of poverty are presented. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class construct poverty?
2. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class perceive the causes of poverty?
3. How are the perceptions of causes of poverty translated into child welfare workers' practice framework, in both self-reported action and attitudes toward action?
    a. How do child welfare workers see the role of child welfare in anti-poverty efforts?
    b. How do child welfare workers see their role in the context of the poverty of the families on their caseload?
    c. How are child welfare workers' perceptions of causes of poverty shaped by the gender, race, ethnicity, and class of clients?

This study used a qualitative methodological frame to explore the research questions. Broadly speaking, qualitative methods explore meaning of phenomena experienced by research participants most often by close attention to the language and descriptions of those experiences through the study. Given the purposes of this study, the qualitative methodology of grounded theory was selected as best suited approach.

Although this study does not claim to be a purely grounded theory study, as will be evident particularly in the following description of this chapter, it was informed by many of the key elements of grounded theory and therefore a discussion of the methodology is presented. While, at the same time, the chapter aims to point out where the study is clearly diverging from the main principles of grounded theory and to describe this divergence.

Grounded Theory Overview

Grounded theory, a qualitative methodology originally developed by the sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, moves beyond describing data to generating a theory from that data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In grounded theory research, the researcher utilizes several techniques – theoretical sensitivity, coding, visual depictions of data, and use of literature – to move from data description to theory generation (Gilgun, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2007). Studies using grounded theory span many fields, including sociology, nursing, education and social work, and are often used to study areas of "action" or processes (Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Grounded theory is an appropriate methodology to inform this study for several reasons. First, this study's aim -- to understand and map the relationship between public and tribal welfare workers' construction of poverty, perceptions of the cause of poverty, practice framework and their social location into a useable form of knowledge, one that could be useful for the child welfare system and social work education, as well as to inform public policy -- fits well with the frame of grounded theory. Second, the use of grounded theory, with its focus on the development of concepts, allows for this study to examine the constructed nature of how people understand poverty, a focus that has been

lacking in prior research of perceptions of the cause of poverty done with the extensive use of survey methodology (Lepianka, Van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2009; Strier, 2008). Third, grounded theory fits with the study's intersectional analysis lens as both frameworks start with the analytic process of interpreting larger categories and then looking at the connections between categories to formulate a new conceptualization (Bowleg, 2008; Warner, 2008). Therefore, using grounded theory to inform this study provides an opportunity for close examination of the data with room for an interpretive analysis of the development of concepts and the relationship between those concepts.

This grounded theory informed study consists of individual interviews with public and tribal child welfare workers in Minnesota. The two main data sources were in-depth individual interviews and a brief demographics questionnaire. Individual interviews provide in-depth data on individuals' experiences and the meanings of those experiences (Sherman & Reid, 1994). In addition, because the goal of the study was to gather the range and diversity of experiences offered in the responses, individual interview data collection was best suited to this goal. The demographics questionnaire provided some basic demographic information including the workers' length of time working in child welfare, age, education type and level, as well as questions regarding socioeconomic status.

Sampling Method

Sampling frame. The sampling strategy used in this study began at the county level, as Minnesota is, outside the tribal based entities, a county-operated, state-administered child welfare system. The identified goals of the county-level sampling strategy to recruit participants were two-fold: 1) to recruit from counties with different

population sizes and from a variety of regional areas, and 2) to recruit from counties with poverty levels above the 12% state average. The rationale for this sampling strategy was to strategically increase the diversity of potential participants' geographic and regional locations, as well as increase the likelihood of potential participants' experience of working with families living in poverty.

Table 1

Economic Research Service (ERS) 2003 Rural-urban Continuum Code

Metro counties:	
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Nonmetro counties:	
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area

The first goal of the county-level sampling strategy representation was met by using the nine identified categories from the Economic Research Service (ERS) 2003 Rural-urban Continuum Code (ERS, 2012) (See Table 1) that distinguish metro counties by size and nonmetro counties by their degree of urbanization or proximity to metro areas. The second goal -- to increase the likelihood potential participants would be working with families in poverty -- was meet by using 2010 Census data to identify counties with poverty levels above 12%, Minnesota's state average. These counties' poverty levels ranged from 12% to 23.6%.

In contrast to this systematic county-level sampling frame, the eleven tribal entities were not organized by regional differences or tribal poverty rates. First, the tribal entities, with the exception of the primary urban tribal community are all located outside of the major metropolitan areas of the state. Second, 2010 Census data showed that the tribal poverty rates were all above 12% and therefore all fell within the second goal for the sampling frame. Third, the sample size of the tribal entities was much smaller than the 87 counties. More specificity about recruitment of tribal entities will be outlined below.

Inclusion Criteria. There were three criteria required for inclusion in this study: 1) participants needed to be either county or tribal (ICWA) worker, 2) at least a 25% FTE of work with child welfare cases, and 3) that the first two criteria were met within the frame of last 18 months.

Recruitment strategies. Following the development of the sampling frame, the two recruitment strategies used to achieve the sample were contact with specific county directors and tribal entity leaders, and use of professional contacts' networks. Indirect strategies to recruit public and tribal child welfare worker were necessary because their contact information is not on public record and there is not a state database of all workers (per conversation with a Department of Human Services employee). The two recruitment strategies were necessary for several reasons. The first strategy -- contacting specific county directors and tribal entity leaders -- was successful at recruiting white and tribal workers. The second strategy was added in the later stage of the recruitment process to increase contact with workers of color.

In addition to diversifying recruitment strategies to include the workers of color in the sample, the inclusion criteria was adjusted with IRB recruitment six months into recruitment phase of the study. The adjustment expanded the inclusion criteria to include workers who had been public child welfare workers within the last 18 months; prior inclusion criteria stated that participants must have been currently working in child welfare. As stated above, this change became relevant when recruitment of workers of color, particularly Asian and Latino workers, was proving difficult.

Overall, prior to and during each recruitment strategy each step was made with careful consideration to increase potential participant confidentiality and to decrease coercion, which will be explained in more detail below. In addition, at each change to part of the recruitment strategy, confirmation was received that each of the participants met the study's inclusion criteria.

County directors/tribal entity leaders. Contacting specific county directors and tribal entity leaders was the main sampling strategy. Individual directors and tribal leaders were contacted via email (See Appendix A: Introductory Email). This email included a brief introduction to the study, a request for support in reaching their workers to seek their participation in the study, and the informed consent document (See Appendix B: Informed Consent Document). The request was sent to the directors to reach their workers directly in order to decrease the potential for coercion. In addition, the introductory email also contained an offer was made the researcher present a workshop on a few topics as a way offering something concrete and meaningful as a token of thanks to the county/tribal entities.

In this main recruitment strategy, county directors and tribal entity leaders chose a variety of different avenues by which they communicated the request for participation to their child welfare workers, including the direct forwarding of the introductory email, which included the text for the recruitment email (See Appendix C: Recruitment Email) as well as the informed consent document. A few county directors requested a tailored email be written to introduce the study and invite participation of workers. In these avenues workers made contact directly with the researcher via email and phone. Sometimes, although this was not the process outlined in the email nor desired by the researcher, directors or supervisors lined up interviews with workers and then informed me of the interviews.

Professional network strategy. Due to the lack of response from county child welfare workers of color to county directors announcements about the study, the second strategy of using my professional networks to recruit workers was implemented. I made contact via email, as well as in person, with a variety of other professionals who work in the field of child welfare to request their assistance in distributing the study's recruitment email particularly to county child welfare workers who were people of color. After receiving the recruitment email as well as the informed consent document, these professionals sent the email directly to their child welfare worker contacts. Again, in the email, the request was if the worker wanted to participate in the study, that they contact the researcher directly via email or phone.

Saturation. The sample size was determined using the principles of saturation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), in other words sampling continued until no new information was added from each newly sampled unit. In this study, saturation was determined using

interview field notes and open coding to track whether the information coming from participants was redundant to prior sampled units. Sampling concluded when adequate saturation was achieved.

Instrumentation

There were two instruments used during the individual interviews with child welfare workers in this study, a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix D: Interview Guide) and a demographic questionnaire. The interview guide contained five main content areas; they were the worker's: 1) construction of poverty, 2) perception of the causes of poverty, 3) beliefs about the role of a child welfare worker to address poverty, and 4) beliefs about child welfare responsibility in anti-poverty efforts, and 5) perception of how their race/class/gender impacted his/her understanding of poverty in the context of child welfare. The guide consisted of 12 main questions and several probes to encourage further response to the main question. These 12 questions were asked of all participants. If the participant was educated as a social worker, either BSW or MSW, two additional questions were asked to explore the participant's thoughts about how being educated as a social worker impacted how they thought about poverty.

To capture the demographics of the worker, a simple demographics questionnaire (See Appendix E: Demographics Form) was used. It included nine questions about the following: the worker's race, gender, age, education level and type of degree, and years working in child welfare. In addition, six questions are asked to assess the workers' current (5 questions) and past (1 question) socio-economic status.

The interview guide and the demographics questionnaire were pre-tested prior to utilization in the study by one former child welfare worker and one non-Minnesotan child

welfare county director. This included a pilot hour and half interview and completion of demographics questionnaire. Feedback and recommendations were incorporated to improve the pre-existing interview guide and questionnaire and then re-submitted for and received IRB approval.

Data Collection

Informed consent. Informed consent was achieved through these steps. First, prior to setting up an interview, each potential participant received an email containing the informed consent document, a detailed description of the study with particular details outlining what ass being asked of the participant, including the potential minimal risks and benefits of participation of the study (See Appendix B: Informed Consent Document). In addition the informed consent document stated that participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that participants could terminate their participation in the study at any time. Before consenting, potential participants were encouraged to review the consent form thoroughly and to contact the researcher with any questions regarding the study prior to the interview. Part of the email containing the informed consent document included a clear description of how to contact the researcher with questions. To allow for time for potential participants to consider their readiness to consent to participate in study, receipt of document always occurred at least 24 hours, and usually one or two weeks prior.

Second, prior to the commencement of each interview, the researcher reviewed the consent document, and again asked if the participant had any questions. Third, the researcher asked the potential participants two open-ended questions, as described in the

study's IRB application. Fourth and finally, a signed consent form was obtained from each participant.

Interviews. All the interviews were conducted in person by the researcher. The location of the interviews was determined by what was convenient for the participant. In addition to convenience, locations were negotiated based the need for confidentiality for the participant and a relatively quiet environment for a quality recording of the interview. The majority of the interviews (86%) took place in the participants' tribal or county offices, usually in a conference or interview room. The remaining non-office interviews (14%) took place in locations identified by the participants (i.e. church office, home office, coffee shop, university library). Per agreement from participants, all interviews were audio-recorded with a digital recording device. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to a little over 90 minutes in length, with most lasting for approximately one hour. After completing the interview, participants were presented with a token of appreciation in the form of a small bag of chocolates (although two individuals declined), complying with the statewide policy limiting county workers receiving gifts that are less than five dollars in value.

Data Analysis

Overall, the grounded theory informed data analysis of this study included the key techniques of coding, a fundamental qualitative data analysis tool, constant comparison using the creation of memos, and visual theoretical models of the data, as well as the use of a conceptually clustered matrix. Data analysis began with informal note taking during and following each interview. These field notes gathered thoughts and reflections of interviews, including impressions of potentially salient categories. In addition, to

facilitate both the management and analysis of the data, ATLAS.ti, the qualitative data management software was used. The data analysis that took place in this study is described below.

Transcription and data management. A trained professional transcriptionist transcribed all recordings of interviews verbatim. As each transcript was received, it was uploaded into ATLAS.ti. Several of the transcripts were checked for accuracy with the recordings. Along with containing all the transcripts of the interviews, ATLAS.ti was used to manage coding, organize codes, mark text, and create memos, parts of the data analysis process that will be described below.

Coding. The coding in this grounded theory informed study consisted of a multi-step process, a process that Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe using the metaphor of working on a puzzle. The first step in the process was open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe open coding as the initial work of sorting puzzle pieces, which includes the process of looking for and organizing individual pieces into piles of commonly colored pieces and edge pieces. Open coding in this study consisted of sorting and organizing the text of all the interviews into broad categories. Table 2 is a sample of these coding categories.

Table 2

Sample of Open Coding Categories

1. Definitions of poverty
2. Causes of poverty
3. Addressing poverty
4. Limits to addressing poverty
5. Race social location

6. Gender social location
7. Socioeconomic Status social location
8. Intersectional analysis
9. Experiences that shaped workers' understanding of poverty
10. Workers' view of policy
11. Entitlement - white people
12. Entitlement – poor people
13. Role of CW worker in poverty
14. Change over time
15. Tax Credit

Following open coding, axial coding commenced. Using the metaphor of the puzzle, axial coding is the process of putting the puzzle pieces together. Several techniques were used in the axial coding phase, including the creation of detailed matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and more memos, which included code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) both of which will be described in more detail below. Through the process of axial coding sub-categories and themes of each of the categories surfaced more fully and with greater specificity and depth, leading to a new conceptualization of the categories' relationship to each other. Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990), paradigm model, the main categories of the study were linked together in a relational model surrounding the identified core phenomenon of the study that included the causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions, and the strategies.

Following open and axial coding, selective coding the last phase of the coding process consisted of integrating the concepts from the open coding and axial coding into the "story" of the core phenomenon of the study (1990). At this point in the coding

process, a visual diagram was created to help with the developing conceptualization of the paradigm model for this study. In an iterative process, the model was used to help relate the categories of causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions, and strategies together, as well as help refine the sub-categories and themes and validate the relationships of the categories with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Conceptually clustered matrix. A conceptually clustered matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was created using an excel spreadsheet with the individual participants' key identification data, including demographic information, and then the categories that surfaced in opening coding were organized at the top, under which the sub-categories, themes and properties of those categories were filled through the process of axial coding. Notes, phrases and words of each participant were placed in each of the cells, with blanks in data noted. The creation of the matrix provided another analysis avenue for the iterative process of going back to each participant's interview to revise and refine coding. Also helpful was process of the constant comparison strategy of creating memos to explore and refine the meaning of the emerging sub-categories and themes from the broad categories. An example of the matrix used is included (See Appendix F: Example of Matrix).

The process of analyzing the data using the matrixes was facilitated in two ways. The first was examining the categories of data by individual participants, and the second was categorizing the participants into groups of individual participants based on their race/class/gender social locations, defined here as "intersectional sample categories" or "intersectional categories". These different avenues of analysis were conducted to describe and interpret (all description is interpretation) the sample's findings as a whole,

and to examine what, if any, were the differences between workers differently located by race, class and gender in order to answer the study's first two research questions, which will be described in detail in Chapter 5.

Examination of the individual participants data in the matrix allowed for an overall picture from the entire sample, so broad categories, sub-categories and themes could begin to surface in a visual way. Once the matrix was fully formed, extensive memos were written to document the overall sub-categories, and themes based on the current understanding of the broad categories. Then the matrix was divided up into five intersectional sample categories, which will be described more fully in the sample section. These five smaller matrixes were analyzed, again with memos regarding the differences between these intersectional sample categories.

Memos. The use of memos began during the open coding phase. The technique of creating memos includes many types of notes by the researcher including code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, memos included these different kinds of notes: code notes were written to document questions and explore connections between codes, while theoretical notes included researcher's thoughts about emerging theoretical ideas, and operational notes consisted of notes about changes in the meaning of codes. These memos were managed within the ATLAS.ti program, allowing for link to specific quotations from the data.

Diagrams. Creating visual depictions or diagrams of the emerging theory from the data is a common practice in grounded theory research. These diagrams help the researcher start to develop the visual nature of the relationship between the categories, sub-categories and themes. In this study, diagrams were used at the point of axial coding.

One diagram was developed using Corbin and Strauss's (1990) outlined process of identifying a core phenomenon, and then the categories surrounding them: causal conditions, context and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. Casual conditions are defined as what factors caused the core phenomenon. Strategies are actions taken in response to the core phenomenon. Contextual and intervening conditions are respectively specific and broad situational factors that influence the strategies. Consequences are outcomes from using the strategies.

Credibility, Transferability and Dependability

In qualitative research, there are several key criteria used to support rigorous practice, the first of which is credibility. Establishing credibility, which is comparable to internal validity, is the process of conducting research in ways that increase the odds that the findings are trustworthy and credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, threats to credibility were addressed by peer debriefing and conducting member checks. To keep the researcher critically aware of biases in the research process, peer debriefing took place throughout data analysis with committee members, outside faculty members, as well as other doctoral students.

An additional strategy used to increase trustworthiness and credibility was member checks. Member checks were conducted with participants that provided direct testing of findings and interpretations. Specifically, five participants were asked to review an early draft of the findings section, with three specific questions to consider and provide feedback to the researcher. They were:

> 1) Generally speaking, does this summary reflect your own practice experience - either your own understanding or your experience with your colleagues?
>
> 2) Do you notice anything that seems unclear, inconsistent, or unsubstantiated?

3) Do any of the sub-categories particularly surprise you or resonate with you? Feedback from the three of the five participants who responded provided preliminary evidence of the credibility of the findings.

A second key criteria used to support rigorous qualitative research is transferability. Transferability was pursued through a variety of processes. The first of these was providing thick description of the data, which gives the necessary context for another researcher to transfer a conclusion about that data elsewhere (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, a goal for this study is that scholars, educators, and child welfare administrators could transfer the findings of this Minnesota-based study to other populations. Therefore, in this study, the researcher provided thick description through comparative and inductive analyses (Gilgun, 1994, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2007). Finally, in this study the researcher documented and examined every step in the research process, producing an audit trail to help demonstrate the dependability of the inquiry.

Defining Child Welfare Worker in Minnesota

Throughout the study, the term child welfare worker is used. For the purposes of this study, the term child welfare worker is defined as a county or tribal worker whose work includes public child welfare (i.e. investigation, protection, family assessment, foster care) for at least 25% of the worker's time. This definition is necessary, as workers who work in these child welfare areas do not have a job title of "child welfare worker". Since Minnesota has a county-run, state-administered child welfare system, counties wield the authority to make many key decisions, including the naming of positions, and job duties without state direction. Therefore, there is not a standard job title structure for county workers doing public or tribal child welfare work, and the title designation of

child welfare worker in Minnesota is not always given to a county worker who may be working in child welfare. This is particularly true in counties outstate where a county worker may be responsible for many types of work, including child welfare.

Study Sample

The study sample of 30 public and tribal child welfare workers represented 10 counties and tribal entities.

County and tribal entity level data. Out of the thirty-one counties and tribes contacted by email, ten replied to my email indicating their agreement to assist in the distribution of the recruitment email and informed consent document. Three replied to the email with a denial of agreement for contact with their workers, citing workforce issues including lack of time and high turnover. Eighteen did not respond to the email at all. Table 3 provides the number of counties included in the sample and their corresponding ERS county code description, as well as the number of participants that came from counties with those ERS codes.

Table 3

Participants by ERS County Code

		Number of Counties included in Sample	**Number of Participants from Counties**
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more	2	18
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	0	0
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	0	0
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area	1	3
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area	1	2
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999,	2	3

	adjacent to a metro area		
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area	0	0
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area	1	2
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area	2	4

Race, gender & age. Participants were asked to identify their race/ethnicity by writing it in the blank provided. This approach to race/ethnicity data collection was chosen so participants could self identify as specifically and uniquely as desired. Four participants identified their race/ethnicity as African American/Black. Two participants identified as Asian (Vietnamese, Hmong). Three participants identified as Native American/Oijbwe. One participant identified as Mexican American. Twenty participants identified as White/Caucasian, with two of them identifying specific ethnic identities, one Italian American, and one Hispanic. As representative of the public child welfare workforce, 27 of the participants identified as female and three as male. The age range was 27-58 years, with the average being approximately 42. This sample is fairly representative of the national workforce based on the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute data (2011) that reports that the average frontline child welfare worker is a 40-year-old white female, although in urban settings she is more likely to be African-American.

Education. All workers had graduated with a bachelor's degree, in a variety of fields. While bachelor degrees in social work were the most common (50%), several other fields were identified including psychology/family social science (5), community corrections/criminal justice (3), human services/communications (5), women's studies/Spanish (1), and sociology (1). Eight workers had earned their master's degree,

two in public administration and six in social work. All the workers with their MSW worked in Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

Child welfare workforce data. Several areas of child welfare workforce data were collected to provide information regarding the participants' specific workforce experience, including title of position, length of time working in public and/or tribal child welfare, percentage of time caseload worker identified spending time working on poverty related issues, and amount of caseload worker defined as "low income."

Current child welfare position title. A wide range of position titles was represented in the sample, with the largest number of participants identifying their position as child protection worker. Table 4 provides the breakdown of the participants' different titles and corresponding number of workers holding that title at the time of their interview. As mentioned previously, Minnesota is a county run public child welfare system; therefore the titles given to child welfare positions are defined by each county which makes it more difficult to determine the type of work of done by the worker based on name alone. However, the title of Senior Child Protection Worker does indicate a higher rank, in addition to Social Service Supervisors were management level positions.

Table 4

Distribution of Participants by Current Child Welfare Position Title

Current Child Welfare Position Title	**Number of Workers**
Child Protection Worker	11
Social Worker	5
Social Service Supervisors	4
Senior Child Protection Worker	3
Family Assessment Worker CP Workers	3
CP Worker/Urban Tribal Representative, Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)	3

Child & Family Case Manager	1

The length of time participants reported working in the public/tribal child welfare system ranged from seven months to 27 years, with an average of 11.43 years. When participants responded to the question of the percentage of time spent on addressing poverty related issues (See Table 5), a wide spread of results were collected. Out of the 30 participants, 12 reported "more than 75%" and four reported "50-75%", while at the same time, seven participants marked "0-25%", seven marked "25-50%". The highest percentage of participants reported the greatest percentage of time spent addressing poverty, however the most participants reported less than half of their time.

Table 5

Participants' Reported Percentage of Time Spent Addressing Poverty Related Issues

Percentage of Time Spent Addressing Poverty Related Issues	Number of Participants	% of Participants
0-25%	7	23%
25-50%	7	13%
50-75%	4	13%
more than 75%	12	40%

Participant's socioeconomic data. Six questions in the demographics questionnaire were used to assess participants' socioeconomic status (SES) information. Five of those questions were used to assess current SES. They were modeled after standard survey type socioeconomic status questions. The current SES questions included one yes/no questionnaire item was about homeownership, while the other four current SES items were all frequency questions (ranging from Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Usually). The sixth question was used to assess childhood SES.

Table 6 provides the participants responses to the SES questions. The majority of participants owned their own home (83%). In addition, the majority of participants reported that they never had to chose between buying food and paying bills (73%), affording adequate housing (73%), and delay in receiving medical care (63%). While slightly less than half of the participants (46%) reported that they never worried that their employment was providing sufficient income for you family's needs. In contrast to this trend of current SES stability, the past SES questionnaire item, the largest number of participants (n=9, 30%) reported usually having financial stress in childhood, with a more even distribution of frequency across response categories.

Table 6

Participants Responses to SES Questions in Demographics Questionnaire

Type of SES Question	**SES Question**	**Participant Responses**			
Current					
		YES	**NO**		
	Own Home	**25**	**5**		
		NEVER	**RARELY**	**SOMETIMES**	**USUALLY**
	Buy food/Pay bills	22	5	2	1
	Afford adequate housing	23	4	4	0
	Medical care Delay	19	5	5	1
	Employment Sufficient	14	6	9	1
Past/History					
	Childhood Financial Stress	7	8	6	9

Intersectional Sample Categories

As mentioned above, in order to attempt to understand if workers constructions of poverty and perceptions of its cause differed when examining their different social locations, participants were grouped into "intersectional sample categories". These categories were determined by the participants' race, class and gender as defined by them in the demographics form. To protect the participants' anonymity of the small numbers of different racial groups, categories of "workers of color" were made, consisting of the participants who identified as African American, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Mexican American. There were five intersectional sample categories: 1) workers of color, female, middle SES; 2) workers of color, female, low-middle SES; 3) white, male, middle SES; 4) white, female, middle SES; and 5) white, female, low-middle SES. Within the five categories, there were between three and twelve participants, with the smallest group being the white male middle SES and the largest being the white middle SES (See Table 7). The SES category of low-middle and middle was determined by the participants responses to the demographic questionnaire.

Table 7

Intersectional Sample Categories

	Workers of Color, Female, Middle SES	Workers of Color, Female, Low-Middle SES	White, Male, Middle SES	White, Female, Middle SES	White, Female, Low- Middle SES
Total	6	4	3	12	5

Role of Researcher & Assumptions

In the practice of rigorous qualitative research, reflexivity is a highly esteemed process. The use of reflexivity, which is applied not only to the analysis of data but to every part of the research process, can help to transform how research is conducted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2002). In this study, I practiced reflexivity in a variety of ways with the aim of increasing my awareness of my biases and assumptions, including a log of my thoughts, reactions and questions and discussion of my experience in the research process with a small group of peers and members of my dissertation committee. Included in this study's practice of reflexivity is the following reflexivity statement, in which I discuss experiences and biases that shape my role as a researcher. Several aspects of my personal and professional life are particularly relevant in this study: my social location as a white, female, middle SES social worker; my outsider status in child welfare; and my theoretical assumptions.

In this study, one factor at play in my role as a researcher is my particular social location as a white middle SES highly educated woman. Both my role of researcher and many experiences of my personal and professional life are steeped in privilege assigned to people with access to high levels of education, plentiful financial resources, and white racial identity. This positionality shaped this study in a variety of ways. First, I believe I was granted access and trust by the counties because of my professional status and a student researcher with the largest university in the state. Second, as a researcher I approached this study with my particular lens, which is shaped both knowingly and unknowingly by my privileged social location. For example, I have studied the concept of poverty, but I don't have a lived experience of it. Therefore, this personal distance and this academic approach shape my thinking about poverty.

And yet in addition to this personal distance and my academic approach, my experience as a practitioner for fifteen years working exclusively with families who were living in or working at the edge of poverty also informs my lens as a researcher engaged in a study about poverty. My view that poverty is a historically rooted phenomena that is racialized, gendered, and localized in communities comes equally from my practitioner experiences and my scholar/activist framework that seeks to call attention to changing policies and the systems that implement them rather than focusing on individual level responsibility and solutions. Moreover, my practitioner experiences included work with dozens of social service agencies, social welfare systems, including child welfare, and community level organizations. So all I have watched, heard, and dealt with as a practitioner has shaped my assumption that professionals and the systems that families engage with have different understandings of poverty and how to address it.

Similarly, my interest in understanding and my assumption that social location shapes how public and tribal child welfare workers think about poverty also grows from my combination of personal, professional and academic experiences. These experiences have consciously and existentially also shaped my understanding and approach to thinking about poverty, race, social systems and oppression.

In addition my social location, and personal, professional and academic experiences, my outsider status in the field of child welfare also impacted my role as researcher in this particular study. I have never been a child welfare worker in any capacity. I recognize I do not know firsthand what it means to be a child welfare worker. Throughout this study I sought input and feedback from current and former child welfare workers, academics more knowledgeable than me about the child welfare system and

workforce issues, as well as utilizing member checks of the findings. At the same time, the issues of child maltreatment reporting and investigation are not foreign to me. Over my fifteen years as a social work practitioner working in domestic violence shelters and facilitating community organizing with families, I have interacted with the child welfare system in a variety of direct ways. In addition, the type of work I have practiced has been directly or indirectly preventative in nature, with a focus on family violence, which includes child maltreatment. With this said, the perspective of outsider to the practice of being a public or tribal child welfare worker shaped my lens as a researcher.

I began this study with several assumptions about how public and tribal child welfare workers might think about poverty, and specifically the causes of poverty. I came with the assumption that there would be a difference between workers of color and white workers on their perception of the cause of poverty. Specifically I believed that white workers would perceive poverty as being more individual caused, based on the research that white people tend to not be as knowledgeable or to express an awareness of the impact of such historical practices as race based housing discrimination on the asset development of people of color in comparison to white people (Gilens, 1999). At the same time, I had assumptions that some workers of color would have more of a structural perception of cause than white workers. This was partially based in the literature, but also based in my personal and professional experience, having participated in multiple undoing racism and anti-racism trainings as well as experiential learning work (i.e. The People's Institute training).

With that said, I recognize that my perspective is what it is, and I practiced reflexivity using peer debriefing and discussion as well as the maintenance of a research log to help maintain awareness of this perspective and the biases inherent.

Institutional Review Board Process

Submission of an Institution Review Board (IRB) application Expedited Category 7 [2] with the University of Minnesota IRB took place in April of 2012. This study was accepted in May of 2012. Two *Change of Protocol* Forms were completed, submitted and approved during the past 9 months based on minor amendments to the study protocol. The first change was a revision made in July of the interview guide and the demographics forms based on revisions. These changes were made prior to the collection of any data, so all the interviews were conducted using the same interview guide. The second Change of Protocol form was submitted and approved in January 2013 to adjust the inclusion criteria. The change allowed for participants who had been public child welfare workers within the last 18 months to be included in study recruitment, prior inclusion criteria stated that participants must be currently working in child welfare. As stated above, this change became relevant when recruitment of workers of color, particularly Asian and Latino workers was proving difficult.

[2] Expedited Category 7: Defined as research posing minimal risk to participants, as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Protection of Human Subjects and consisting of research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Finally, as expected since this study was exempt nature, none of the counties or tribes selected in the sample requested an application for their own IRB process and procedures for research with human subjects within their county.

Defining Terminology

"Worker". Before moving forward, a few notes about terminology used in the forthcoming results chapters are needed. Rather than use the term "participant" to identify those individuals in the study's sample the term "worker" will be used. The term worker was chosen as it locates the study's workers in the role they are in within the context of this study. Although they were asked questions, and provided information that was somewhat personal in nature, their personal perspective was asked in the context of their professional role, as will be evident from the following findings. Also, the term "child welfare worker" will be used in this chapter when referring to the role of the position of someone who works in child welfare in the context of overall workforce or role related issues, such when one of the workers from the study talks about other child welfare workers.

Defining Social Location in this Study. Social location is a term predominantly used in academic fields such as sociology, women's studies, race/gender studies, to signify the socially constructed nature of identity. In this study, the intersection of the particular social locations of workers' race, class and gender was central to the purpose of this study. Rather than conducting research that approaches race, class and gender as set terms that exist outside of the institutional and political context of systems of power, and infers from simple demographic data the relationship between that data and other variables or findings, this study sought out individuals' particular articulation of the

intersection of their social locations. Then, with these particular social location articulations defined, the study examined how workers constructed meaning between their race/ethnicity, class and gender and the influence on their understanding of poverty in the context of child welfare. This section contains the workers' direct responses to the questions of if and how of their social locations influenced their understanding of poverty.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction of the Theoretical Model: Child Welfare Workers Making Sense of Poverty

The result of the grounded theory informed analysis described in the methods section (Chapter 3) was the identification of a model (See Figure 1 below) that depicts this study's core phenomenon of the study ***child welfare workers making sense of poverty*** and the nascent categories around the core phenomenon. The four categories that surfaced around the core phenomena were: ***1) lens of social location,*** which is the causal conditions category; ***2) what I think I can do***, which is the contextual category; ***3) limitations abound,*** which is the intervening conditions category; and ***4) do what you can,*** which is the strategies category.

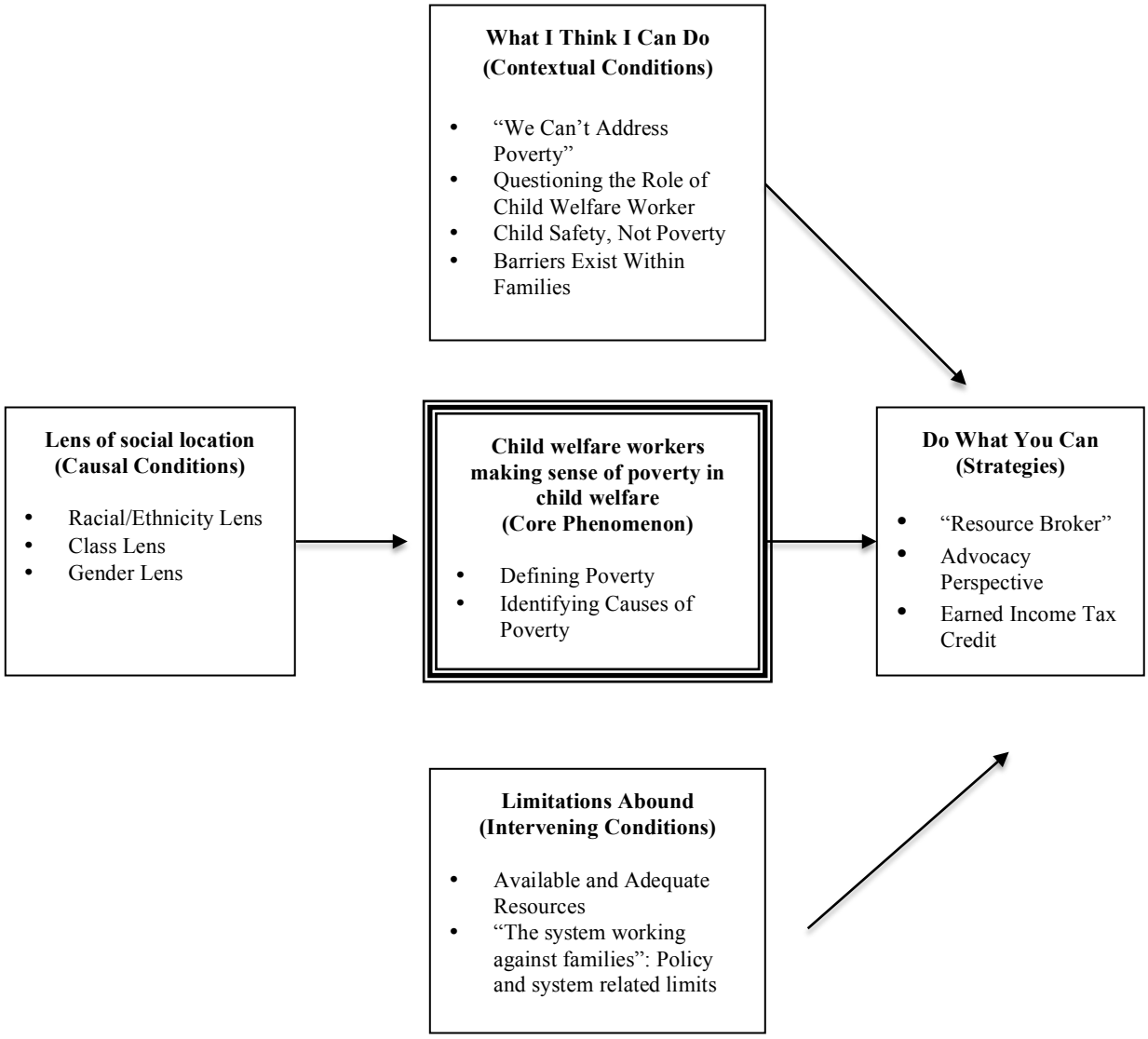

Figure 1

Theoretical Model: Making Sense of Poverty In Child Welfare

As depicted in Figure 1 ***child welfare workers making sense of poverty*** was the core phenomenon of this study, which included the core sub-categories *defining poverty* and *identifying causes of poverty*. The causal conditions category of the core phenomenon ***lens of social location***, contained the particular elements of the workers'

experiences and identity that both influenced the workers' making sense of poverty – the core phenomenon and included the sub-categories of *race/ethnicity lens, class lens,* and *gender lens*. The intervening conditions category ***limitations abound*** detailed the ways workers saw their jobs, the systems (social welfare, child welfare, systems of oppression), lack of resources limited what the workers could do to work with poor and working families engaged in the child welfare system. The sub-categories of *available and adequate resources,* and *"the system working against families": policy and system related limits* d in the *limitations abound* category.

Within the contextual condition category, ***what I think I can do,*** the sub-categories of *"we can't address poverty" within the child welfare system; questioning the role of child welfare worker in addressing poverty; child safety, not poverty;* and *families can create limits* d. The strategies category ***do what you can***, which are actions taken in response to the core phenomenon captured what the workers identified as the strategies a child welfare worker can use to address poverty as the workers have made sense of it. The sub-categories *being a "resource broker"*, *advocacy perspective, using the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),* and took shape in the *do what you can* strategies category.

The core phenomenon and the categories around that phenomenon are described fully below. First the phenomenon and the categories are described, followed by the sub-categories and themes, each in a separate section. Following each section, a summary outlining that section's main findings is presented, with an overall summary of the entire chapter at the conclusion.

Lens of Social Location: Causal Conditions

The causal conditions of this study's core phenomenon, making sense of poverty in child welfare, was the category termed ***lens of social location***. This causal condition captured the factors workers described as what impacted their thinking about poverty in the context of child welfare, namely their experiences and social locations. As outlined in Table 8 the sub-categories of the causal conditions category *lens of social location* were lenses of *race/ethnicity, class* and *gender*. Within each of the sub-categories, different themes arose which will be outlined in detail in the following section.

Table 8

Lens of Social Location: Causal Conditions

Sub-Categories	Race/Ethnicity Lens	Class Lens	Gender Lens
Themes	1. White Privilege	1. Recognizing How Middle Class/Stable Experience Limits Understanding of Poverty.	1. Being a mother
	2. Racial Identity as Lens of Strength	2. Framing Experiences With Poverty/Major Financial Stress As Sources Of Building Capacity.	2. Comparison of genders
	3. Immigrant Experiences		
Dimensions			*Dimensionality:* Impact of Gender Lens

Race/Ethnicity Lens

Race/ethnicity lens was one of the three nascent sub-categories in the causal category *lens of social location*. Overall, most workers (27/30, 90%) described ways that

their race impacted the way they think about poverty in the context of child welfare. For those workers who did think race impacted their thinking, several of their responses lacked any specificity about how or in what ways. Workers who responded with this lack of specificity were all middle SES, most were white women, one worker was a woman of color, and the other two were white men. For example, after agreeing that there were ways her race impacted her thinking about poverty, she said, "I hadn't thought about it that way" (Michelle, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES). From the data of all the other workers who identified that there were ways that their race impacted their thinking about poverty, three main themes emerged: 1) *white privilege*, 2) *racial identity as a lens of strength*, and 3) *immigrant experiences*. In addition, there were a few workers who did not think race impacted their thinking; that data will be described at the end of this section.

White privilege. The first theme of the sub-category *race/ethnicity lens* was ***white privilege***. A little less than half of the white workers (six workers, all of who were white women) described that the privilege of whiteness impacted how they thought about poverty in the context of child welfare. Within the white privilege discourse, there were workers who talked about white privilege as a relevant causal factor in how they think about poverty in a rather abstract way, while others tied it directly to their own thinking or their experience of practice with families in the context of poverty and the child welfare system. For example, Alice talked about how white privilege is ignored but how she thinks it spans across several areas of influence including how child welfare workers "do things" and how families she works with see her as a worker. Alice states, "Yes, I think that we all have this white privilege and we don't think that it impacts us on how

we do things, but it does (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)."[3] Another worker, Rachel talked about both how in the context of poverty, white privilege benefited her directly, as well as how she recognizes that clients who are not white have a different experience than hers.

> Well I think that Caucasian people tend to get what they ask for verses other races. It is a benefit on my part. So when I get clients that are Hispanic or Worker of Color they *do* feel different than I do, and they don't get everything that they want or I would have gotten in their situations. (Rachel, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES).

In contrast to the workers who directly adopt the perspective that *white privilege* is part of how they think their race impacts how they think about poverty in the child welfare system, one worker had a different take. She stated:

> I don't know that my race does. I think my experiences do. Yet, I am not blind to know my white privilege and I know that I have a lot of factors that have always worked for me, whether it's being white, I know that I'm attractive and I know that there's different things that have impacted how I've been able to move through systems that maybe some of my black friends would've never been able to do. (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

[3] Although the worker doesn't acknowledge who she is talking about directly, she chooses the word "we" to talk about who has white privilege. In the rest of her sentence "it impacts us on how we do things" seems to imply her fellow child welfare workers that in her small/rural county where potentially and probably all the other workers are white. However, she could be referring to another "we" as this was not explored during the interview.

Another worker, Beth, also had a different approach to talking about how whiteness impacted how she thought about poverty. She stated that her race didn't impact her thinking about poverty, but her white guilt has shaped it. Although Beth did not elaborate on what the term "white guilt" meant to her, she later stated that although an anti-racism initiative like the one in the county where she works is "very interesting and it makes a lot of sense", she states:

> I think that's one piece of it. But I think that you have to acknowledge that and I think also… I don't know I just think there's just so many pieces to it that I don't see it as just this or that. (Beth, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Racial identity as lens of strength. The second theme ***racial identity as a lens of strength*** was the way most workers of color (7/10, 70%) described the impact of their *race/ethnicity lens*. The theme *racial identity as a lens of strength* came from workers of color describing how they experienced their racial identity as something that bolstered them to make personal choices in relationship to poverty. Racial identity also gave them clarity about the experience of living in poverty, as well as in racialized and racist contexts, enabling them to relate to families in the child welfare system. Gail provided an exemplar of the way racial identity was framed as an internal strength used to fuel her desire be in financial control of her own life:

> It's empowered me. Being a black female and I think my complete upbringing helped shape that. Both my grandmothers at one point and great were matriarchs in our family and grew up in poverty and were poor. The same with my mother, my mom was poor who worked her butt off and when my step-dad came into the picture, it was a two-family home, for the majority of my life. But, it was… being

> a single… well, not single anymore, but a black female, made want to be successful even more because I didn't want to have anybody tell me what I could and could not do. I wanted to be in control of my own resources. I wanted to be in control of my own life. And not have the government or anyone else tell me how I should live. (Gail, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Along with the way racial identity was a motivating force in the face of the prospect of personal poverty, the theme of racial identity as a lens of strength also incorporated workers linkage of their own racial identity with their ability to relate to families in the child welfare system in racialized contexts. For example, Keisha described that her racial identity as well being a young mother impacted how she thought about how she related to families in the child welfare system in racialized contexts.

> I'm the community. Some people are like "I remember you" but I think that definitely impacts. I think being a [worker of color] woman definitely impacts how I can relate, whether as a single mother or just a younger woman who wants to balance work with having fun and living life and the family dramas and stuff, but still be educated enough to know some of those differences and being able to talk, being able to communicate on a level where your client understands you're not being… I have a colleague who's a fifty-year-old white woman with no kids. I think that my approach and my communication with a client and her communication is going to be different. Not to say she's not impactful or that I'm more impactful. It's just a different experience. I feel I have an ability to connect with clients at their level. (Keisha, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker who linked her racial identity with her increased ability to relate to families in the child welfare system in racialized contexts, because her own racial identity and experiences of discrimination heightened her awareness of it, stated:

> I think it [her race] just made me more aware of how that comes into play for people and just the subtle discrimination or barriers that get thrown at people. I don't think unless you've had that happen to yourself, you really quite understand the challenge.
>
> *So you feel that your own personal experience allows you to be both aware of it and that it happens.*
>
> Yes and I feel clients feel comfortable discussing that because they know there's that shared understanding. It's not something that really needs to be spoken there's just easily understood things. (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Immigrant experience. The third theme of the *race/ethnicity lens* is ***immigrant experiences*** and includes how some (5/30, 17%) workers made sense of poverty in child welfare was shaped in the context of immigrant experiences. Although most of the workers who spoke of these impactful *immigrant experiences* were recent immigrants, others who did not identify themselves as having an immigrant experience talked instead about their racial/ethnicity lens as a causal condition to their making sense of poverty in the context of child welfare in contrast to people whose thinking about poverty that had been shaped by immigrant experiences.

One worker, Mae, described how her experience of immigrating to the United States made her more sensitive to how assumptions are made about families' actions in

the context of poverty. She told the story of a family's actions that were interpreted as neglectful because of the assumption about how the children were acting and why, when really the children were acting in ways that made sense considering their experience of poverty. In contrast she identified that as a recent immigrant she was more understanding. Mae further explained:

> Things like that and when you go in as someone who has experience… well, not like experience that type of situation, but who is understanding, then you tend to look at situations like that differently. And you tend to ask the parents for clarification and not make assumptions about things. (Mae, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Another worker who was a second-generation immigrant identified her families' immigration experience as one fraught with challenge, both financial struggle and ethnic discrimination. The middle class success of the family led to the perception of her family as "lucky" and communicated that she needed to make something of herself. She said:

> But, as a kid, I came from nobody owes you anything. Sometimes, for fun, I'd come home from something I learned in school and I'd go "well, I'm going to apply for welfare when I grow up." My mother used to say "why? And take it away from someone that really needs it? You're capable. That's why we're sending you to school." that kind of thing. So, I don't know. (Francesca, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

One non-immigrant worker identified that he thought that race impacted how he thought about poverty saying, "If I was an immigrant man in this town I would have different views" (Bruce, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES).

Perspective: Not impacted by race lens. Although not identified as a theme in the *racial/ethnicity lens* sub-category of the causal category *lens of social location*, there was the finding that a few workers (3/30, 10%) perceived that a race/ethnicity lens did not impact their understanding of poverty. These were white workers, middle SES, and included both females and males. This finding points quite to a different and particular understanding of workers in contrast to the majority of the sample who did perceive that a race/ethnicity lens did not impact their understanding of poverty. And yet, although these workers concluded that they did not think race mattered in how they made sense of poverty in the context of child welfare, their responses were not resolute or without caveats. Tom for example responded, "I don't think it matters, but other people probably think it does" (White, Rural, Male, Middle SES). The other two stated their negative response with couched expressions, such as "not really." For example, one worker stated that she did not think race entered into her day to day work described how the rural community around her responded to African American families:

> Well, I think it's unfortunate that the few black families that have moved into our county, at one time or another have looked too much like the stereotypical black family that has problems, to a lot of the community. Somebody moves in and we start getting calls immediately, whether anything's going on or not. And they make a lot of vague accusations and those are often times just reactions to somebody of a different race moving in…How I deal with it, with work, is we just look at the criteria of what's going on and hopefully work with anybody the same. (Thelma, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Class Lens

The second sub-category of the *lens of social location* causal condition of this study, ***class lens,*** concentrated on the experience of "class" (this term was not defined, but allowed for workers to self define) as being something influential to how workers thought about poverty in the context of child welfare. The two main themes of how class influenced their thinking were 1) *recognizing how middle class/stable experience limits understanding of poverty*, and 2) *framing experiences with poverty/major financial stress as sources of building capacity*.

Recognizing middle class/stable experience limits understanding of poverty. One of the main themes that emerged from the class lens data was that some workers' (10/30, 33%) recognized that the experience of a middle class/stable financial childhood and young adulthood limited their understanding of poverty, as one worker illustrated: "And again, I think that makes it no matter how much I understand it intellectually, if you haven't lived through that, you can only understand it to a certain degree" (Millie, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES). Some workers, who identified with a middle class or stable socioeconomic status, illustrated this sub-category of the limits of their understanding poverty when they contrasted their middle class experience in childhood with people's experiences with less means. Ernestine identified that having both financial and social support from her two-parent family when as a young woman she had a child and raised the child as a single mother, stood in sharp contrast to a friend in a somewhat similar parenting and education circumstance without multi-level support from her family, and that this experience impacted her understanding of poverty:

> Yes, I was 19 when I had my son and I went through school (college) with him. But, then, I think I had two parents who watched him every weekend, watched

him while I went to class. I didn't live with them but if I was short a month they were able to help pay. I also think I had a great girlfriend who was in a similar circumstance. But she grew up with her mom as a single parent and died when she was 16. Now that we're 40, and I met her back when we were in school, she's still suffering the ramifications of not having that support early on even right through now. (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES).

Jennifer stated:

I don't know. I guess growing up privileged speaks to me. My life has been easy when it comes down to A, B, and C and I'll get D at the end. It has been easy for me. I recognize that and realize that and I know it is not easy for the people I work with in general. (Jennifer, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

This theme of having a limited ability to understand poverty coming from a middle class or financially stable family was echoed in one worker's story of her short-lived financial stress as a single mother living in a house with no heat that gave her a window into what financial hardship might be like:

Then, I was a single mom with three kids for a while, and transitioning down from that county to this county, trying to sell my other house, not being able to live in two houses at the same time, obviously and this Amish gal gave me her house to live in as long as I fixed it up, and so I did going into winter, no hot water, no heat and so I had to get the space heaters- the ones that aren't the ones that if you touch them you get burned because I had three very small children. But, I've lived there, too. You know what I mean? I've lived that life, too, and it was short-lived. It wasn't like I was poor. But, I just simply cannot afford a home

from four hours away and my name is still on that and be able to buy one down here. And so I have, I think, a compassion factor for people can be in these situations. (Lois, White, Rural, Male, Low-Middle SES)

Framing experiences with poverty/major financial stress as sources of building capacity. The second theme of the sub-category *class lens* was ***framing experiences living in poverty or with major financial stress as sources of building capacity***. Of the workers (11/30, 37%) who identified the experience of living in poverty as a source of building capacity, the majority stated that it was their experience as children that was influential, while a few other workers identified their experience of economic hardship as adults. This theme of *framing experiences living in poverty or with major financial stress as sources of building capacity* took two forms. The first form most commonly identified was that the experience of having economic or "class" based stress provided them with awareness and skills to work with clients/families in poverty and second was that workers described the experience as having taught them important values, such as compassion, and patience.

These two forms of building capacity that came from workers' experiences living in poverty or with major financial stress were related to each other, as workers saw the values of compassion and patience as informing their approach to and actions when working with child welfare families in poverty. For example, Mae whose family came to the United States as a refugee and utilized social welfare benefits, explained:

I think that has influenced in my work with families in that I understand how difficult it is for a parent to find a job because it was difficult for my parents to find jobs. I understand how difficult it is to budget in a household when you have

multiple children in the household. In my work when I come face-to-face with families like that, I try to be more understanding, I try to be more supportive and work with them a little harder in finding the resources that they can access or be more patient with them about their time. (Mae, Asian, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Alice linked her own nuclear family's experience with poverty as a source of strength that she applies to working with families to think through how they can make ends meet. She said:

I think (I am) more open; I understand what it is like to be in poverty, with my own four kids. We have been homeless, we have been without food, we have had to go to food shelves, and understanding what my clients are going through, and how to help. It also taught me the resources to go to and show clients to go towards, and what areas to find resources and what to look for during different situations. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Another worker explained how her experience with poverty taught her how to "survive":

I had everything I ever really needed. But there were times she [her mother] was on government stuff. There were times she worked nights. All those things that people had to do to make due. But, I would never have considered ourselves poor. But she alludes to things that she had to do that she felt were…

It was hard.

Living in low-income housing. So, again, around people, you learn about what people do to survive; robbing Peter to pay Paul. Giving up this, giving up that. (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

She went on to explain how this lived experience of "those things that people do to make due" makes a important difference in the way thinks about other struggling families who are making choices about needs and luxuries. This lived experience decreases the degree to which she "judges" people who are in poverty, which in her mind is in contrast to the judgment of child welfare colleagues who did not grow up in families that were just making due.

> There's a lot of judgments that happen in this work (child welfare) about "they're calling me for gas money, but yet they have cigarettes". Or, "they come in with nice clothes, but they don't have money for diapers". Or "their nails are done, or their hair is done". There's all these judgments about people who have low-income that have all these things that middle class people would think are supposed to be extras.
>
> *So it sounds like you have a different perspective on that.*
>
> Yes. And some of it is I know people trade services for other things. Maybe they watched somebody's kids for them while they went to work and maybe she does hair. I mean, there's a lot of trading that goes on in low-income. (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Gender Lens

The third sub-category in the causal category *lens of social location*, the factors that lead to the core phenomenon making sense of poverty in child welfare, was termed the ***gender lens***. The data from this category contained a dimensionality of the impact of the *gender lens* on how workers thought about poverty in the context of child welfare; this dimensionality ranged from very impactful to not impactful at all. In addition to this

dimensionality, two main themes emerged within the sub-category gender lens. These two themes were: 1) *being a mother,* and 2) *comparison of genders*.

Dimension of impact of gender lens. One of the findings of the sub-category *gender lens* was that it contained a dimensionality of how impactful the workers thought it was on their thinking about poverty. The continuum of this impact of gender lens ranged from very impactful to not impactful at all (See Figure 2). Workers' responses ran the continuum of the dimension, almost equally divided between workers who perceived that their gender did impact and workers who did not. Of those workers who stated that gender did not matter were all white with one exception, most of whom identified as

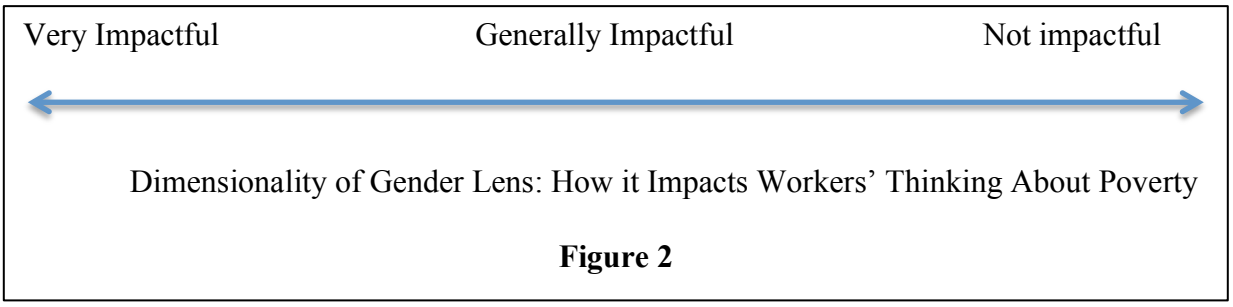

Figure 2

middle SES, and more of the male workers. Among workers who did think that gender mattered there was a diverse of races and ethnicities, as well as SES categories, and one of the men.

In the middle of the *gender lens* dimension ***generally impactful***, workers identified that their lens of gender impacted their understanding of poverty in a variety of ways. For some, they responded with rather short answers stating that they did agree, however they did not describe how this impact shaped their thinking in certain terms. Other workers, representing the far end of the dimension continuum ***very impactful***, had very specific examples of how their gender played a role in their thinking about poverty, more specifically their own views about gender in general. One worker stated that her

gender probably did, because "life experience has an awful lot to do with perception and that is the part of the role of poverty" (Jane, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES). Another worker stated how she viewed gender as impacting how she thinks about poverty:

> I think it's huge…I don't care what anybody says. Males are still making a lot more than women are. In fact, this happened just recently. Before I got this job, I applied at the jail in Fergus and there was a big beefier male that got the job before me. I was like "hm. Interesting." So, even though I passed all the agility tests, the whole works, the male got it first because it was jail and I can see their concerns with safety, you know, here's a young attractive female and we're going to throw her to the wolves by letting her work in the jail. But, I applied because I wanted to work in the jail, right? So, yeah, I think sexism is still very much alive. (Violet, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)

On the far right of the continuum was ***not impactful*** the perception that the lens of gender did not impact their thinking about poverty. As stated above, most of the workers who did not think that their gender impacted how they thought about gender were white, but the workers were from different SES backgrounds as well as were both women and men. Many of the workers who identified that gender did not matter to how they made sense of poverty did so with some consternation. Statements that illustrated this internal struggle made by white women who identified as middle SES included ones such as "not sure it matters", "difficult to answer," and "haven't thought about it". An example of a worker who thought gender didn't matter stated:

> And I don't know… I was raised by June Cleaver. So I don't know that my gender impacted at all. And when I say June Cleaver, I mean literally. Didn't

> work outside the house. Worked very hard. I don't think that shaped my thought process or does at all…So, I'm not sure that that impacted it or does impact it. (Kristen, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

However, women were not the only workers who did not think gender mattered to how they though about poverty in the context of child welfare. Two of the male workers (white middle SES) rejected that their gender played in role. One worker stated, "I don't think it affects it one way or the other. Maybe that's just me. I don't think it has affected." (David, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES).

Another way that workers (all white women middle SES in rural areas) suggested their lens of gender did not impact how they thought about poverty was by suggesting another element of their identity. Millie gave the example of her training as a social worker and her spiritual life as being more impactful that her gender lens:

> I really think my social work training and the idea of being in a helping profession… and really, I would tell you that my spiritual life has shaped my work more so than whether or not my gender has. So, I have a real strong faith-based mission in life and that would have been a much bigger influence than being a woman. (Millie, Rural, Female, Middle SES).

Being a mother. The first theme of the *gender lens* sub-category was termed *being a mother*, which captures some workers (6/30, 20%) identification that the experience of being a mother impacted how they thought about poverty in the context of child welfare. Several workers stated that motherhood gave them and insight on what mothers they work with are going through as they struggle with poverty, as well as that they used their experience as a way to compare themselves.

> Well, being a woman with two young children at the time, I had to go on food stamps and it was very eye-opening, because I was working but yet I was two dollars ahead every week after daycare and going to school. I needed that help. (Holly, Worker of Color, Tribal, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Another worker stated:

> Yeah I think that probably being a woman and being a mother has given me sensitivity to it and some understanding of it. Sometimes I do get into the whole I've gone through this, you should be able to go through it but then I take a step back and realize that things are not the same for everybody. I also think that being a young woman has its own challenges too because young moms are very different than moms who are more mature.
>
> *Would you say that's developmentally?*
>
> Yes, I would that they may have got more experience. I think that this is interesting too, I was in my mid-20s and I was just a little bit older than some of my clients or around the same age and now 15 years later it's kind of interesting that the way that I am able to work with other women and other mom's is different now for me than it was when I was first starting. I have had other colleagues who are women but who don't have kids and I think a lot of times their clients don't feel like they really understand… (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Other workers shared this perception that if you have not been a mother you cannot really understand parents.

Comparison of genders. In the second theme of the sub-category *gender lens,* termed *comparison of genders,* a few (4/30, 13%) workers compared themselves to another gender, saying that they thought differently that they treated clients of different genders differently. For example some female workers stated that men think differently than they do about poverty. One female worker spoke about her perception of a gender-based difference, but mingled gender with refugee status, field of employment, and family structure.

> The way I look at poverty probably different from my guy friends who aren't in social work, who have a job. You know, that kind of thing. How I look at poverty, they look at it differently. Yeah, I notice that. I mean, we're refugees. But I think also the path that they choose to go and their family background, like I was raised by my dad mostly and they were raised by both of their parents, you know? And so the way they were pushed to get to where they are is how they look at things. To them, poverty is about the money they make, rather than shelter or food or health. So, that kind of thing. So they look at it differently. So that's what I notice, that I would view it differently and I think it's because I'm in social work. (Ruby, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

One of the male workers also saw a gender difference, but his experience was within the context of other child welfare workers.

> Yeah, I think differently about people who are in poverty than most of my female co-workers, I think more so… unless there is some kind of disability or mental illness or something that is really holding them back, I think it is more on the

person and their choices that they're in poverty, than anything else. *(Tom, CP Worker, White, Rural county, Working-Class)*

Another worker described how she treats her female clients (i.e. mothers of children on her case load) differently than men, stating: "I have to be respectful to all and understanding but I try to empower women more so than a man (Jennifer, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)."

Summary of Causal Condition Category: Lens of Social Location

The section above outlined the ***lens of social location,*** the causal condition category of this study's core phenomenon, making sense of poverty in child welfare. Lens of social location captured workers statements about how their social locations impacted their thinking about poverty in the context of child welfare. The sub-categories of the causal conditions category *lens of social location* were lenses of *race/ethnicity, class* and *gender*.

Child Welfare Workers Making Sense of Poverty in Child Welfare: Core Phenomenon

The above-described category of causal conditions, *lens of social location*, resulted in the subjective core phenomenon: ***making sense of poverty in child welfare***. As reported by workers, this *making sense of poverty* included their (a) defining poverty, and (b) identifying causes of poverty. These core sub-categories of the core phenomena convey the two main processes workers used to make sense of poverty in child welfare. Most, but not all, workers communicated the inherent difficulty and complexity of making sense of poverty in the context of child welfare. For example, many workers

expressed aloud the difficult nature of communicating their definition of poverty, making statements about their tendency to "overthink" it, or the situational contextuality of poverty. Some workers exclaimed with a laugh while one referred to the prospect of defining poverty as "opening that can of worms." These exclamations occurred often and conveyed workers' strength of feeling when making sense of poverty in child welfare.

Table 9 outlines the two core sub-categories of the core phenomenon *making sense of poverty in child welfare*: *defining poverty*, and *identifying causes of poverty*. In the first core sub-category ***defining poverty***, workers defined poverty in a variety of ways that led to the surfacing of three main themes: (1) *"not getting basic needs met", (2) more than monetary limitations,* and *(3) federal poverty guidelines as benchmarks.* In the second core sub-category of the core phenomena, ***identifying causes of poverty***, workers described their different understandings in four main themes: (1) *individual factors, (2) family/generational expectations and values, (3) structural/systemic cause, and (4) luck*. These core sub-categories, themes, and properties will be explored in the section below.

	Table 9 **Workers Making Sense of Poverty in Child Welfare: Core Phenomenon**	
Core Subcategories	**Defining Poverty**	**Identifying Causes of Poverty**
Themes and Properties	1. "Not getting basic needs met"	1. Individual cause a) Individual factors (i.e. mental health) b) "Settling for less" c) "Personal choices" and priorities
	2. More than monetary	2. Family/generational cause

	limitations	a) Generational expectations and the culture of poverty b) The cycle of poverty
	3. Federal guidelines as benchmarks	3. Structural/systemic cause a) Ineffective social welfare systems b) Racism c) Colonialism/historical trauma d) Place-based Issues e) School Resources
		4. Luck

Defining Poverty: Core Sub-category

One way workers made sense of poverty in child welfare resulted in the first of the two core sub-categories of the core phenomenon, ***defining poverty***. The main poverty construct themes that all 30 workers (100%) used to describe poverty was *"not getting basic needs met".* Workers also added some nuanced discussion about additional ways of constructing poverty that developed as secondary themes: *more than monetary limitations*, and *federal guidelines as a benchmark.* These poverty definitions or constructs were not mutually exclusive within an individual worker's definition of poverty. More often workers' constructions of poverty melded two or more themes.

"Not getting basic needs met". The dominant poverty construction theme that emerged from the data was "***not getting basic needs met".*** When defining this *"not getting basic needs met",* workers identified a range of needs including: food, shelter, running water, clothing, transportation, medications, medical care and insurance, dental care and insurance, and money. However, food, shelter, and clothing were the core group of basic needs identified by most workers who defined poverty this way, as illustrated by Rachel:

> Poverty is when I go into a household and see a little child that hasn't eaten, or I go into a house in the winter and see a little child in shorts because mom can't afford to buy them weather suitable clothing, or they are in pants that are 4 or 5 inches short for them, and that they are not getting their basic needs met.
>
> *So your basic needs are?*
>
> Food, shelter and clothing. (Rachel, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Along with description of "not getting their basic needs met" given by the above worker, workers used a variety of ways to describe the way families lacked the ability to meet these basic needs, including "not being able to provide", "not having enough or barely enough" and "the inability to provide". One worker described not only the lack of ability to meet basic needs, but the challenge of having to decide between basic needs because getting all of them met was not possible.

> Poverty is to me when you have to make a choice between your basic needs; which basic needs do you have to give up in order to have the other one. Is it transportation in order to buy groceries? Or do you miss a day of eating so that you have money to put in your car so that you can get to your job? Or you don't have a car because you have to pay for rent? (Holly, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

More than monetary limitations. The ***more than monetary limitations*** construction of poverty (will be referred to as *more than money* from henceforth) was the second dominant theme in the *defining poverty* core phenomenon sub-category. This theme echoes Sen's (1999) conceptualization of poverty as the lack of capabilities, which extends poverty to include lack of access to political participation and lack of freedom. In

this study, a little less than half the workers defined resources in ways that went beyond financial resources such as aforementioned basic needs (e.g. food, clothing and housing). The list of these resources included family and social support, education, "blessings of whatever kind", and school resources. Therefore within the construction of poverty as *more than money*, poverty was defined as the lack of this wide range of resources, rather than the lack of basic needs only. But a few workers went beyond this expansion to include that poverty is more than monetary limitations because it is linked with the experience of oppression. Each of these aspects of the *more than money* theme is described below.

The greatest number of workers who shared this *more than money* construction of poverty identified family and informal support as a key element in how they made sense of poverty. The presence of family and social support was seen as a buffer to poverty to the extent that workers stated that families who could be considered poor in economic terms would not be because of those other types of support. One worker described how having family support "means you aren't poor." She continued:

> Bottom of the bucket when you see people in poverty. Even if you don't have a lot of stuff and you have a lot family, you have support, you are not in poverty because you have family.
>
> *So that family support makes a difference in your feeling of people being in poverty or not and if you've got it, then you're not.*
>
> Umhum (affirmative) you're not poor. (Loriane, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Education was another resource that a small number of workers identified as being part of the elements included in their definition of *more than money* poverty.

> When I think about poverty, I think about lacking or being without and I think about financial poverty, educational poverty is huge for me. I think those are the two that I really think about: educational and financial. And it's a big one I have to work on with families I work with.
>
> *Say more about the educational piece, what is educational poverty?*
>
> When I think about educational poverty, I think being without education, not having basic educational knowledge to move forward in life, not completing school, not being able to read, not being able to write, to help your kids with their homework because you didn't finish it yourself, it wasn't important, maybe in your family and the trickle-down effect of that. I guess the educational piece is more profound than I would've expected it to be coming into the field. (Keisha, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

A few workers extended this poverty construct of *more than money* past the widening of the list of resources families in poverty do or do not have, to include oppression. Oppression impacts people's ability to thrive and it impacts their opportunities and choices. Zelda described poverty as a lack of resources, including financial, but also said that poverty was really oppression.

> I just think you're kind of oppressed. You're always stressed out and really, it is oppression. You can't access all of who you truly can be when you don't have all at you need to thrive on a daily basis and feel comfortable. (Zelda, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES).

Another worker stated, “Not just having poverty where it’s an economical thing. But, really looking at people’s opportunities and oppression” (Beth, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES).

Federal guidelines as a benchmark. In addition to the construction of poverty as *“not getting basic needs met”* and *more than money*, the third theme was ***federal guidelines as a benchmark*** to receive some kind of social welfare benefits. “So just to be safe here, I would say anyone who’s on public assistance or receiving public assistance, whether it’s food services or medical assistance, cash assistance…” (Ruby, Person of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES). The list of social welfare benefits identified by workers (8/30, 27%) also included free and reduced lunch eligibility for children, and subsidized housing. Workers also stated that while federal guidelines in child welfare related systems could identify what poverty is, some workers expressed that the federal guidelines are too low, as illustrated here by Millie:

> The first thing I think about is our federal poverty guidelines that we live and die by in terms of eligibility for services. But, they are so low that I still think that people who live above the poverty guidelines are still in poverty and so my more generic answer is anybody who is basically unable to meet their daily needs on a regular basis. (Millie, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Identifying Causes of Poverty: Core Sub-category

In addition to *defining poverty*, the other core sub-category of the core phenomenon *making sense of poverty in child welfare* was ***identifying causes of poverty***. This category was termed *identifying causes of poverty* through analysis of the codes to accommodate the data, in which workers described how they held not one singular

understanding of the cause of poverty, but multiple. Four themes surfaced from the data: *structural/systemic cause individual cause, family/generational cause,* and *luck*. The three most prominent sub-categories were *structural/systemic, individual cause,* and *family/generational*. As stated above, while some workers only identified one cause, most identified several, as illustrated by Thelma's response:

> The bulk of the people I work with have some kind of limitation. I believe that to be the case. There's a few people that have had bad luck in some way, they've lost their jobs because of the economy, those kinds of things. But, the majority of them have some kind of limitation; mental health, mental disability, chemical dependency. You know, it's very seldom we have somebody that just has nothing going on and it's poor and can't meet their kids' needs. It's usually some of these related things. And the lack of services in the last years is getting crazy. They don't have the supports. (Thelma, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES).

Each of the themes and their corresponding properties will be discussed below.

Structural/Systemic cause. The first theme of the core sub-category *identifying causes of poverty* was ***structural/systemic cause,*** the perception that large structural forces as well as systemic issues caused poverty. Most workers identified *structural/systemic cause* (25/30, 83%), although by all workers of color (as will be described in more detail in the next chapter). While, some workers cast wide nets toward the systemic forces that caused poverty, exemplified by one worker who said, ¨I would say for American Indian People, colonialism and for women, it's sexism" (Zelda, Worker of Color, Tribal, Female, Middle SES), most workers identified *structural/systemic cause* in patterns that developed into the specific themes of: 1) *lack of effective systems* in place

to support a family if they are struggling to make ends meet, 2) *racism*, 3) *colonialism/historical trauma*, and 4) *place-based issues*, and 5) *school resources*.

Lack of effective systems. The first property of *systemic/structural cause* of poverty theme was termed ***Lack of effective systems***. This property communicates the workers perception that the systems kept individuals and families from ever leaving poverty. Examples were the limitations of child care assistance, many different MFIP issues such as income restrictions, time limits, and inconsistent programs.

> What I'm thinking about is the families that I have now, currently, I'm just trying to think about some of the things that are going on. I have one family who is homeless; the homeless shelters are completely full. She lost her food card and because she doesn't have an address, she can't get a new one. Those kinds of things. When parents of newborns do not have child care, who are required to do job search. So that type of thing if they don't have child care in place, for some reason. Sometimes, it's [**unintelligible 6:19]**, sometimes it's the parents being lazy. Those type things. Or parents having requirements that they're not able to make because of transportation or because of child care or because of [**unintelligible 6:39]** in general (Gail, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker stated that the really poor get services but if a parent is working, there are less services, so "if you are over that middle gap, it's hard to make it over" (Keisha, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES). Keisha's description of getting from poverty over to the middle class as being "hard" stemmed from her observation of families working to get out of poverty, only to experience a catch-22 with the systems

that were supporting their efforts. A systematic double-bind can lead families to feel a sense of despair and hopelessness as illustrated here by another worker:

> The minute mom hits that spot, they (welfare systems) start taking away, but yet, when they start taking away, they (the parents) still don't have enough to do either the food thing, the daycare thing or whatever. Then they sit there and go "well, hell, I may as well quit and go back home." The very system, I think, that's in place to sometimes help is counter productive.
>
> *So, with that example that you gave of the mom, at that moment that she maybe had the job and everything was sort of in place and she could've made that leap or step out of poverty, it's like ok we're going to take it all away and the whole thing falls apart.*
>
> You can still have some food and some daycare. But, now, her check alone isn't enough to pay the rent or the daycare or whatever. You know… it's like ok, "do we want these people to be able to help themselves?" It's crazy. (Francesca, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

One worker said she sees in part that poverty is caused by the way systems are developed, which to her is linked to opportunities.

> You have people in poverty and I feel like because there's not opportunity, I don't think it's necessarily there is… there are… but specifically people saying we're trying to oppress you and keep you down, and things like that. But I think it's the way in which our systems are developed, that aren't developed in a way to help people lift themselves out of poverty. But they're developed in a way to almost

like dangle in front of people that they just can't quite reach, and keep them spinning and spinning. (Beth, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Racism. The second property of the theme of *structural/systemic cause* was that a system of ***racism*** caused poverty, as identified by some (6/30, 20%) workers.

As far race, there is always been, let's say, I'm (Worker of Color) coming out of that slavery. When I think about the American Indians and how the world has been, where there's been the disparity of most races meaning the disparity is always about the treatment of others and who has what and who has what not. (Charese, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

One specific understanding of how racist systems caused poverty was the reinforcement of discrimination and the gap between the privileged and the poor. Ruby used the example of racial disproportionality of people of color in lower paying jobs, saying,

Maybe the race. I think that there is a huge gap between the privileged and the… poverty. More people of color are on public assistance more than any other race. And then, I'm looking at unemployment, I'm looking at economic status. There's just more people of color on the lower kind of jobs, menial jobs… (Ruby, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

This worker expanded on this, saying that it is harder for people of color to move up the economic ladder.

Colonialism/Historical Trauma. Present in the findings along with the property of *racism* in the theme of *structural/systemic cause* of poverty, was the third property, the force of ***colonialism/historical trauma*** of Native American people, as evidenced in the

boarding school era as well as the overall treatment of Native people. Historical trauma was mentioned both by a few (4/30, 13%) Native women and white women as a part of their perception of the structural/systemic cause of poverty.

> I blame it on the boarding school era because back then the kids were forcibly taken from the families, so they did not grow up with those values. Granted there were kids lucky enough to stay home with their parents, and be raised in the correct way but a lot of families were torn apart like that. A lot of families in my community; the Indian community, like my mom, she was sent to boarding school, she didn't know how to be a parent. In turn, I didn't know how to be a parent. I went back to my grandma. My grandma taught me how to be a parent. So when you think that that trauma happened (boarding school era) sort of set off a different path…Instead of following that smooth flow of life, it kind of swept you off somewhere. (Loriane, Worker of Color, Tribal, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker located the structural cause of poverty in her understanding of "class disparity" in general, and also rooted her perception of cause in the impact of historical trauma.

> There are social Darwinists still today and there were social Darwinists at the very beginning and if you're not strong and fit and whatnot, then, you don't really deserve it. So I think that plays out even in our modern world. That's a pattern that's followed us throughout time… if you look at the Native Americans, we went in there and in my most unprofessional terms, we slaughtered them. We slaughtered them and we separated them and we intentionally oppressed them so

that they were where they are at now. (Violet, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Place-based issues. Within the fourth property of *systemic/structural cause* of poverty termed ***place-based issues***, there were two main clusters of issues. One cluster was of rural workers responses about rural, small town issues and the second was tribal workers issues about reservations and tribal resources. Workers from the rural counties talked about how their rural communities may not have resources to be able to provide for the families in its area, as well as the lack of jobs in the area. The lack of resources and jobs was seen as both a long-standing issue in rural communities but also a recently pressing issue for a new batch of families who had lost jobs, health insurance and housing due to the Great Recession of the last five years.

Rural issues included lack of jobs, specifically the lack of jobs at a livable wage, inadequate public transportation and lack of personal modes of reliable transportation – both the lack of public transportation and the expense of owning a car - which is both essential to find and keep a job. "Not just that there is not enough jobs, but not enough jobs that pay well enough to make a living, because if you make $6.00 an hour you are not going to make a living" (Jennifer, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES).

Workers indicated that the living environment was both something that people in rural communities did not want to leave, but that the living environment limited their vision of what was possible.

If a child is raised in poverty it is really hard to climb the ladder to get out of it. So I think that has a lot to do with it. Then but also the living environment and the community they live in, the area, neighborhood. Usually kids that live in

> poverty don't move out of that area so they don't have new experience, new life situations. So I think is probably related to that cycle of poverty. It's just that perpetuation of what that looks like. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Along with rural community issues, tribal workers stated that issues related to access to tribal resources and services, as well as the issue of living in urban communities away from reservations contributed to causing poverty. One worker illustrates this theme here:

> Well, if you're up on the res [reservation] and you go to school but there's really no jobs out there, there's really no where to expand, especially in your earlier years and so you take minimal jobs so you come to the city with no skills, no money and you end up living with family somewhere and basically end up stealing or just trying to survive. A lot of it is you don't have the people to help you. The support system is crap- or it used to be crap. (Holly, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

School resources. Along with rural and tribal placed-based issues, the property of ***school resources*** arose within *structural/systemic* causes of poverty. A few workers (3/30, 10%), most often those that worked in urban areas, described inefficient school resources as a cause of poverty. Workers identified schools as places that often do not want support, let alone deal with children/families and particularly lacked resources for children to succeed and therefore increasing the probability that they would live in poverty as adults. One worker Ruby, who started talking about discrimination being part of her perception of the cause of poverty gave the example of school resources as a form of this discrimination.

> Yeah. Like if you compare schools; like they have schools and there's city schools and the resources they have and if you look at the suburban kind of schools, there's huge differences in resources. Like how the kids get resources. So I think just the fact that they don't get the same education as kids who are on a welfare neighborhood. I think that kind of prevents them from actually moving up. They don't have the same level of education and the same level of resources to be where they can be to compete with their classmates. (Ruby, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Individual cause. The second theme in the core sub-category *identifying causes of poverty* was ***individual cause***. A majority of the workers (23/30, 67%) perceived *individual cause* as one part or the sole cause of poverty. Within the theme of *individual cause* there were three specific properties of workers descriptions of *individual cause*: 1) *"settling for less"*, 2) *individual factors* (i.e. mental health), and 3) *"personal choices"*. Often workers that perceived individual cause for poverty included aspects from all three of the properties, as Tom illustrates below:

> I've seen some people that have relied on the system for so long, that they just don't take the initiative to do something. I have seen people that have the ability to do something and change their life for the better, but I have seen people too that don't have the ability to do that and it is a lot harder to do that and there is all those boundaries like in transportation and communications or just developmentally or just mentally, having a mental illness that's just keeping them depressed. (Tom, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

Individual factors: mental/physical health. The main property of *individual cause* identified by more than half the workers in the sample (16/30, 53%) was *individual factors* that included physical and mental health, addiction, and abuse, but also individual emotions such as anger and frustrations, as illustrated in the statement of this worker:

> They are living on a day-to-day basis, and surviving, and I think a lot of time, their addiction problems, the type of abuse, their anger and frustrations get in the way that they get very discouraged to even become more productive within themselves being able to provide for their families. (Monica, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Another part of this individual factors theme was people's "willingness to get support for their mental illness, whether it be medication management or other outside supports." (Rachel, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES).

Some workers stated that the issues of mental and chemical health and disability were not causes of poverty but barriers or limits to their ability to get out of poverty, as illustrated here by Sherrie who stated, "I don't think it causes them to be poor, but I think it limits their ability to function, so therefore filling out a simple job application is simple for me but is a very complex task for them(Sherrie, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)." Another worker stated:

> They [issues such as mental health] don't make people poor, but they make it difficult for people to access resources and jobs that are available to them, which would in fact bring them out of poverty. (Stacey, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

This reframing of individual issues as barriers to getting out of poverty co-existed for some workers with the main perception that identified mental health and disability as reasons for poverty.

"Settling for less". The second and more minor property of the *individual cause* theme, ***"settling for less,"*** described a few workers' (4/30, 13%) attribution of poverty to an individual's low expectations. For example, after David described that it was the lack of work that caused poverty, he went on to say that there will always be poverty because, "Some people don't demand or want as much as other people. Some people are just happy with little, that doesn't mean they are poor but they just don't strive to want things." (David, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES). Another worker stated:

> Their values. I think some of the people I work with, I come across seem comfortable living in poverty, they don't seem to care. I know I'm not going to say any of this politically correct, but, they're fine just the way it is. They're fine just getting food stamps and this and that and just be able to live off that, and live off it very well. I mean, they're able to provide enough and they're happy with that. (Lois, White, Rural, Male, Low-Middle SES).

"***Personal choices" and priorities***. The third, last property of the sub-category of *individual cause* of poverty emerged as ***"personal choices" and priorities***. The few workers (3/30, 10%) who identified personal choices as the cause of poverty or one aspect of the cause of poverty often spoke about people facing hardship and that their choices determined their outcomes. These workers articulated choice in the form of individuals' priorities and resulting actions, as Thelma illustrated in this way:

> But it's so often part of their own actions. I know lots of people who can produce an amount (money) and do it in their cigarettes every single day but say they can't feed kids. So, it's poverty. It's priorities. (Thelma, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Other workers described personal choice as being part of their perception of the cause of poverty using their own lives as examples of how poverty can be overcome by choice. One worker said:

> I think that it has to do with personal choices. I firmly believe that opportunities are out there for everyone no matter (what) race. There is no discrimination or should not be. I really do, I am a living example. (Monica, Worker of Color, Urban. Low-Middle SES)

Family/Generational causes. In addition to *structural/systemic cause* and *individual cause,* the third main theme of *identifying causes of poverty* was ***family/generational causes***. Workers (19/30, 63%) who perceived often spoke about "family" both with perspective of the nuclear as well as the extended family or "generations" of family that was considered part of that cause. This generational understanding included the identification of patterns of behavior within families, as well as attitudinal and psychological factors that were part of the generational cycle. Within the theme of *family/generational causes*, two properties emerged: 1) *generational expectations and the culture of poverty*, how workers see the expectations of families perpetuating generational poverty and creating a culture of poverty, and 2) the *cycle of poverty*, which was the term workers used to describe this historical nature of generational poverty to communicate the inevitability in their perspective. Often workers

used examples of both the properties in their attribution of *family/generational causes* of poverty.

Generational Expectations and Culture of Poverty. The first property of the *family/generational cause* of poverty was ***generational expectations and the culture of poverty***. The workers (15/30, 50%) who stated that families' lack of or low expectation were part of the cause of poverty did so in a variety of ways, but they particularly suggested poverty was caused by families' lack of work and educational expectations for their children, creating a kind of culture or value system. Thelma provided an exemplar of this theme:

> Well, culture is all sorts of things. Obviously. Culture of poverty; certain way of life. We don't work. We use the welfare rolls. And mind you, that's a small group. (White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Gail adds:

> I think that poverty can be generational. I think poverty has to do with, in some ways, a value system. It definitely goes back to expectation. Without education, you're not going to get the job. Without your value on education, you're not going to make it. And I think generationally, it's what you see growing up, it's what your family system is. (Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES).

This worker used language of "generational" issues pointing to a sense of the patterns occurring for multiple generations:

> If there are parents who didn't graduate from high school, who were able to maintain their family, but yet there wasn't an expectation for them to go on and do better with the educational process. Or, you know, my dad always worked in a

factory. The factory is good enough for me. There's no reason to try and expand that. It also might be generational in mental health issues. So there're just cycles through families in what the norms and expectations might be. (Jane, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

The "cycle of poverty". Along with the *generational expectations and the culture of poverty* property of the *family/generational cause*, emerged the second property: ***the "cycle of poverty"***. The *"cycle of poverty"* was identified by some of the workers in the sample (7/30, 23%). However there was discrepancy in the workers' descriptions and uses of the term "*cycle of poverty"*. Workers used the phrase the "*cycle of poverty*" to describe the pattern of intergenerational use of federal assistance programs, while others used the phrase to describe the intergenerational pattern of living in poverty learned from their extended family, who had been "growing up on poverty themselves" (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES). Underlying both uses of the phrase "cycle of poverty" was workers' perception that the cycle was one part of the *family/generational cause* of poverty.

I think there are several different factors, but I believe in the cycle of poverty….

When you say you believe in the cycle of poverty, what do you mean?

I believe that often times, when you look at a family in poverty, you will probably find, especially in our cases, that there is a historical piece to the poverty. Whether they grew up in poverty as well, their grandparents, their parents, the adult… I mean, there is a historical piece of poverty. (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker stated that the cycle of poverty is so difficult to break because the cycle involved more than just the family; it involves the context of the family, such as the location of where children grow up.

> I think then again it has a lot to do with life experiences. Most of the time, it's hard to break that cycle of poverty. If a child raised in poverty it is really hard to climb the ladder to get out of it. So I think that has a lot to do with it. Then but also the living environment and the community they live in, the area, neighborhood. Usually kids that live in poverty don't move out of that area so they don't have new experience, new life situations. So I think is probably related to that cycle of poverty. It's just that perpetuation of what that looks like. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Luck. The fourth and last theme, ***luck,*** surfaced less prominently within the category of *identifying causes of poverty* than the other three themes outlined above. However, luck was a cause of poverty that workers (10/30, 33%) repeatedly went to, both to describe their perception of cause and why they thought there was a difference between the wealthy and poor. There were two properties in the theme of luck. The first is "dumb luck". Workers' described "*dumb luck,* as a kind of random misfortune, such as being born into one family or another, as illustrated by Ernestine who said, "Luck- just born into a family so you have a leg up. Families give stability, knowledge about how to succeed" (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES). When workers described this kind of random event, they used expressions such as "some people are lucky, some aren't" and "sometimes you are just born into it". These phrases reveal these

workers' sense of bewilderment or resignation (e.g. quoting the Bible verse "the poor are always with you").

In addition, workers described the theme of *luck* as being tied up with access and opportunity. Beth described luck causing poverty in this process of access and opportunity using fictional characters of Joe and Frank to illustrate her point:

> So, Joe is Mr. Wealthy. He may have had more opportunity because of where he came from as far as his educational background, how much money his family had, their availability to different things, to expose him and maybe Frank didn't have those things. And so Frank maybe is smarter and could do very well but because he didn't have all these different opportunities, this education background, he's not really given that opportunity. (Beth, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Summary of Core Phenomenon: Making Sense of Poverty in Child Welfare

The core phenomenon identified in this study was ***making sense of poverty in child welfare.*** To make sense of poverty in child welfare, the workers in this study used the processes of ***defining poverty*** and ***identifying causes of poverty***, which were identified as the two core sub-categories of the core phenomenon. The core sub-category *defining poverty* contained three main themes that were the poverty constructs identified by workers: (1) *"not getting basic needs met", (2) more than monetary limitations,* and *(3) federal poverty guidelines as benchmarks.* In the second core sub-category of the core phenomena, *identifying causes of poverty*, workers described their different understandings in four main themes: (1) *structural/systemic cause (2) individual cause (3), family/generational cause,* and *(4) luck*.

The next category presented is the contextual conditions, which is the one of the two categories that shapes the strategies category which is the actions workers identify as what child welfare workers can do to address poverty once they have made sense of it.

What I Think I Can Do: Contextual Conditions

As depicted in the theoretical model at the beginning of the chapter, the contextual conditions category that was termed ***what I think I can do*** emerged around the strategies category *do what you can* in response to making sense of poverty. The category of contextual conditions in the Corbin and Strauss (1990) model are those specific factors that influence the strategies taken in response to a study's core phenomenon. In this study, the contextual conditions category *what I think I can do* sub-categories emerged where workers described perspectives on their role as a child welfare worker in the context of doing what they could to address poverty in families' lives. As seen in Table 10, the sub-categories for this contextual conditions category *what I think I can do* were: 1) *"we can't address poverty"; 2) questioning the role of child welfare worker*; 3) *child safety, not poverty*; and 4) *families can create limits.*

	Table 10 **What I Think I Can Do: Contextual Conditions Category**
Subcategories	"We Can't Address Poverty"
	Questioning the Role of Child Welfare Worker In Addressing Poverty
	Child Safety, Not Poverty
	Families Can Create Limits

"We Can't Address Poverty"

The first sub-category ***"we can't address poverty"*** in the contextual conditions category of *what I think I can do* included workers experience of the inability of a child welfare worker to take action around poverty in child welfare. Workers who expressed this belief (10/30, 33%) often responded immediately with statements of doubt or straightforward dismissal that a child welfare worker can do anything to address poverty. In part, workers who held this view pointed out that there was a difference between helping families acquire basic needs and addressing poverty. Their thinking suggested that addressing poverty would entail larger systemic change, change that child welfare workers were not taking part in bringing about in their work with families. Jane illustrated this sub-category stating:

> We help time-limited. I mean that doesn't overcome poverty. We help with gaps. We'll pay somebody's rent if that'll get them through when they're in between a job. Help them get to the food shop. But none of that is systemic. It's all in the caseload.
>
> *When you think about… I mean, do you think child welfare has a role in changing poverty on a systemic level? Do you think that's something that fits with the mission that you think of as child welfare?*
>
> I don't think it fits with our current… I mean, it isn't what we have resources to do at this point in time. I mean, we work at that case level. We work at a family level and that's where our work is. Do we have expertise that could assist at a systemic level? Absolutely. Absolutely but that's that whose job is it at a

community to make the community better for everybody? We have, I think, just a small piece of that pie. (Jane, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker also differentiated between helping a family meet their basic needs and addressing poverty she said:

> I feel like it addresses more of just a basic need. I feel like it's something that doesn't necessarily addressing poverty. It's addressing a need, but I don't think it's necessarily addressing poverty. My feeling is that I don't know how… maybe it's just my thinking is different. It almost feels like you're asking them to address their own poverty. And I feel like there is some responsibility in making healthy choices and things like that. But I feel like addressing poverty is more of a system's issue and more of a political issue than it is an issue a specific person or family needs to address. (Beth, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

One worker responded that she thought child welfare workers couldn't do anything to address poverty, and she saw that being caused by the lack of resources at the disposal of the worker.

> What can I do? Change the system. I don't know how you can really change poverty. I mean, you can educate them, but then **(unintelligible 31:08)** they're just trying to survive. They're not even thinking about ahead. They're just trying to survive day by day. (Ruby, Person of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Questioning The Role Of Child Welfare Worker In Addressing Poverty

The second sub-category ***questioning the role of child welfare worker in addressing poverty*** in the category of *what I think I can do* described workers internal discourse about what the role of a child welfare worker' was in the context of poverty in

child welfare. In general, this discourse was limited to a few workers (5/30, 16%) challenging the idea that child welfare workers really *could* not change families' lives, but they also challenged the idea that workers know how families' lives or their means of making a living *should* be. Workers shared the sense of hesitancy they had about the idea that child welfare workers would be directive with families about if, let alone how, they should address poverty. Millie provided an exemplar:

> Because I think that we… and I think back a lot to some of the things that that culture of poverty and the whole concept talks about and is the ideal world where everybody's middle class? I don't know. Because there's a lot of good values in families with lower socioeconomic status and so what should people move to or toward. I don't know. I'm hesitant to suggest I know what the answer is, whether it's socioeconomic or related to neighborhoods, or family values or those kind of things. I'm hesitant to say what I have is what everybody should have. (Millie, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Keisha provided another an exemplar of this sub-category stating:

> Who am I to tell you that you have to have your education, or… you know, I can say at the end of the day that you're not going to get too far without education and you should think about going to school, get a trade. How does that ultimately impact child safety? Who am I to tell you that? It's a thin line to walk. (Keisha, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Child Safety, Not Poverty

The third sub-category in the contextual category of *what I think I can do* in the context of working with families involved in the child welfare system was termed ***child***

safety, not poverty. This sub-category contained some workers' (6/30, 20%) perspective that the role of child welfare workers was to ensure child safety rather than poverty, and that this was an important distinction, illustrated here by Tom who stated "Basic needs and safety of the kids, that's the main priority. Beyond that, it seems like a tough issue to address" (Tom, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES). Another worker stated:

> …that's probably the last thing they go in there ever thinking about is what can I do to address poverty situations…They go in there are address the issue at hand. Poverty, sometimes is one of the issues that certainly is not…we don't have an agency that you can come because you're in poverty. (Charese, Worker of Color, Urban,)

This perspective that the main priorities of child welfare are child safety and helping families meet basic needs was not held by many workers, however the idea of child safety was the primary goal of families can also be heard in the some current child welfare practice models (i.e. Signs of Safety) that are being implemented in Minnesota.

Families Can Create Limits

The fourth sub-category of the contextual conditions category *what workers think they can do* was ***families can create limits***. Less frequently mentioned than some of the other limits, some workers (6/30, 20%) identified that families themselves were limits to addressing poverty. Specifically the families create limits by what they are willing to work on (i.e. identify as goals in their case plan with the child welfare worker) and by the cultural expectations or norms of their families. Workers also identified that family norms and expectations can limit what a child welfare worker can do to address poverty.

One worker described how family and parent's addictions were one of the limits to address poverty, as she stated here,

> Umhum (affirmative) the number one thing I see all the time: family. The families don't want to see anyone succeed higher than them, sometimes. I saw classically in the welfare to work program where these moms want to go and get a job and put their children in daycare and right away the grandmas and the aunties are saying, "I can't believe you would abandon your kids. They're only small for a short time. And what? You're going to get a job and a college education and go live in one of those neighborhoods?" (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker stated that she saw a lack of follow-though from families on more long term beneficial programs that might help them address poverty:

> I have gone out of my with some clients to talk and get them enrolled and give them information on programs that not only can help their children, but can help them, but the follow-through on that has not been the greatest. (Keisha, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Summary Of Contextual Category: What I Think I Can Do

Within the theoretical model of this study, the contextual category ***what I think I can do*** described workers' perspectives on their role as a child welfare worker in the context of doing what they could to address poverty. The sub-categories for this contextual conditions category ***what I think I can do*** were: 1) *"we can't address poverty";* 2) *examining the role of child welfare worker*; 3) *child safety, not poverty;* and 4) *families can create limits.*

The next section presents the intervening conditions category limitations abound, which is the more broad scale conditions that shape what workers stated they could do to address poverty.

Limitations Abound: Intervening Conditions

The intervening conditions category that surfaced in the model around the strategies category *do what you can* was ***limitations abound***. The category of intervening conditions in the Strauss and Corbin (1990) grounded theory text are those broad factors that influence the strategies taken in response to a study's core phenomenon. In this study, the intervening conditions category ***limitations abound*** came from workers' descriptions of the larger forces such as budgets and policies that directly impacted the range of choices of action workers could chose from, as well as forces such as geographic location and motivation of parents that impact the families directly, limiting what the workers perceived they could do to address poverty. As seen in Table 11, the sub-categories of ***limitations abound*** were: 1) *available and adequate resources*, and 2) *"the system working against families": policy and system related limits*.

	Table 11 **Limitations Abound: Intervening Conditions**
Subcategories	Available and Adequate Resources
	"The System Working Against Families": Policy and System Related Limits • *MFIP Limitations* • *County Level Limitations*

Available and Adequate Resources

The first sub-category of the intervening category *limitations abound* was the limitation of ***available and adequate resources***. Many workers (11/30, 37%) described the lack of or inadequacy of available resources to help families address poverty. The resources identified were lack of money available to assist families, limited affordable housing, lack of day care resources, and a decrease or the elimination of prevention services. These resources workers saw as necessary for parents who were trying to work outside the home or take steps to move toward more financial security, however due to the limitations of the availability and adequacy of those resources, the worker felt they could do little to address families' poverty. One example of this lack of resources was described here by Alice talking about the inadequacy of daycare assistance in the context of a parent trying to work the night shift:

> Daycare assistance the same thing, without daycare assistance we have child protection concerns, because we now have kids being watched by other kids or being left alone. Then there is the issue that we have a lot of parents that work the night shift and formality and there is no daycare available for them. So then the kids are left with either a sketchy caregiver or no caregiver at all because they should be sleeping, and now we have bigger child protection issues. So daycare assistance doesn't cover when you need to sleep so really you need double the daycare while you are at work and while you sleep, and we end up with parents sleeping when they should be watching their kids. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Bruce described how a child welfare worker can address poverty has changed over time given the decease in budget for prevention services at the county level, as well as the

increase in time workers must be documenting their work, taking them away from spending time directly working with families. He further explained:

> So, but, you know, the resources are kind of drying up too, for even the workers to find. We used to have a pretty healthy budget for (child protection) preventative services. But, probably in the last ten years it's dried up. If it's not paid for by insurance, it's not available. (Bruce, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

"The System Working Against Families": Policy and System Related Limits

In the second sub-category of the intervening conditions category ***limitations abound***, more than half of the workers (17/30, 57%) identified limitations to addressing poverty stemming from the management and the policies that the counties, state, and federal government pass down, termed ***"the system working against families"***. Within this sub-category, two different themes arose: 1) *MFIP limitations* a specific critique of MFIP being a program that doesn't do enough to help families get out of poverty, and 2) *county level limitations*.

MFIP limitations. The theme of ***MFIP limitations*** in the sub-category of *"the system working against families"* included workers' identification of multiple ways the MFIP program failed as a system to provide the support and the flexibility to help families leave poverty. One of these MFIP limitations was the time limit of five years which workers described as inadequate to help.

> I would say that they put programs in place and then they take programs away. I'm not sure that I disagree with the fact that we're putting these women on MFEB programs and saying you have sixty months, and I get that there needs to be a cap and yet, at the same time, five years goes like that and doesn't give

people a lot of time to try to get higher education, and you're still strapped for daycare and you're still strapped for trying to feed your family and your children. (Kristen, White, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Another ***MFIP limitations*** identified was current policy to limit the type of education level families could achieve, which in turn keeps parents in low paying jobs, which Ernestine provided an exemplar here:

> Yes, for example, you can only get a two-year degree, and yet you probably need a four year degree, if you can get the where withal to get a degree, in the first place. So things like that. I think too even my job; once you address the issue and got the family functioning you are expected to close you can't really stay open to help them get to the next level. I think the system is designed to support people in that way.
>
> *Not to help them in which way, getting them out of poverty or?*
>
> Yeah. Getting them out of poverty and getting them to an adequate place. (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

In addition to MFIP's limitations of the level of education and time limits, workers described the internal demoralizing effect the limits had on parents, as illustrated by Zelda:

> I mean, even the MFIP that some people are still eligible for, it doesn't cover much of anything. And that's another thing that impedes the ability for people, individual women to feel good. "What the heck's the matter with me? I never make it. There's something wrong with how I'm spending my money." When

really, they don't get enough in the first place. (Zelda, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

County level system limitations. The second theme in the sub-category of *"the system working against families"* was termed ***county level system limitations***. In addition to the critique of the MFIP welfare reform program, workers also had very targeted criticism of their specific county level child welfare systems that limit child welfare workers' ability to address poverty. David shared his experience of county level limitation stating:

> My supervisor thought we didn't really pay for it, and I said of course we pay for it. Why would we not pay for it? She doesn't have transportation. Well doesn't her family? Her family is as poor as she is. I doubt they even have a vehicle to make it to the cities and back. So now this lady's going to move to the cities to get out of here. So doing what I always have done, I have to arrange for her to get down to the cities and was asked why are we going to pay for this? I said if we don't pay for it then we are going to have to put the kids into foster care, which is going to be a heck of a lot more expensive, plus she doesn't want to be here. (David, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

In addition to particular county level systems as barrier to addressing poverty, workers also identified that spending less time with families and more with computers, limited a child welfare workers' ability to address poverty.

> Well, I've seen that our ability to make changes in people has probably lessened over time. Just because the lack of resources and the lack of time to actually do anything themselves and that's due to their being tied to a desk and a computer.

> Much more of their 40-hour week is spent with that, versus in the person's home having any direct influence. And so then our agency has had to rely on paying someone else to have that face-to-face contact, which is fine and good, but then when you don't have money to pay them, then you can't do that. So, families just kind of go without that face-to-face contact. (Bruce, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

Another worker stated:

> I think the fact that the agencies have less money. One of the things that… I said this to DHS once, so whatever. Shame on you guys because anytime you connect something to that computer, the county will then get a buck for doing that. You know the computer is going to be more important than clients. (Francesca, White, Italian American, Urban, Low-Middle Class)

Along with the policies workers named the system's rigid way of processing requests from families, stating that the streamlining of the system allows for no creativity in negotiating solutions with families.

Summary of Intervening Conditions: Limitations Abound

The intervening condition category of this theoretical model was termed ***limitations abound.*** It described the broad factors that shaped what workers in this study thought child welfare workers could do to address poverty. The sub-categories of ***limitations abound*** were: 1) *available and adequate resources*, and 2) *"the system working against families": policy and system related limits*. Within the sub-category *"the system working against families"*, two different themes arose: 1) *MFIP limitations* a specific critique of MFIP being a program that doesn't do enough to help families get out

of poverty, and 2) *county level limitations*. The next section outlines the strategies category, which is what workers thought they could do to address poverty.

Do What You Can: Strategies Category

The context condition *what I think I can do* and the intervening condition *limitations abound* shaped the strategies category: ***do what you can***. In response to the core phenomenon workers making sense of poverty, workers had the belief that child welfare workers do take action to address poverty of the families engaged in the child welfare system, within the previously defined limitations. There were three themes of the strategy of *do what you can*: 1) being a *"resource broker"* of basic needs and longer term programs and resources, 2) an *advocacy perspective,* and 3) the perception of the *earned income tax credit* as a source of poverty reduction for families.

	Table 12 **Do What You Can: Strategies Category**
Subcategories	"Resource Broker" • *Basic Needs* • *Longer Term Programs & Resources*
	Advocacy Perspective
	Earned Income Tax Credit

"Resource Broker"

The first theme of the strategy ***do what would can*** identified by most workers (18/30, 60%) as the primary means to address families poverty was being a ***"resource broker"***, providing resources or making referrals to additional resources. Within the strategy of resource broker, workers identified two main of types of resources that were important for families in poverty: basic needs and long-term programs or resources.

Basic needs resources. When workers talked about child welfare workers using the strategy of being a resource broker to address poverty, the most commonly identified type of resources were those that met basic needs. That strategy corresponds directly to the commonly held construction of poverty as the "not getting needs met." The basic needs resources workers identified as being provided by child welfare workers included cash assistance for emergency needs, clothing, baby items, and bus passes. Loraine illustrated being a basic needs resource broker, stating she is always on the lookout for things a family might need.

> I know a lot of resources. I do a lot of referrals; I do a lot of digging. This Friday, I knew of a little girl who needed a stroller. I happen to come across a free stroller, so there's her stroller, you know? Just connecting, networking, I guess. (Loriane, Worker of Color, Tribal, Female, Middle SES)

Long term programs and resources. Workers also described that child welfare workers provide referrals to the limited pool of resources, such as daycare, medical insurance or care, food stamps, financial assistance, and housing, as well as some job or education related programs. Job and education related programs included Job Corps, job fairs, but also helping with resumes. Describing how a child welfare worker would act as resource broker for job or education related programs, one worker stated: "My thing is that if you want to go to school, take this class, get your GED, I will give you the resources" (Monica, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)). However, some workers clarified that although job training and education were ways to address poverty that a child welfare worker could help support, they were not requirements that could be put in the case plan. One worker explained this distinction here saying:

> "If a family identifies a job then what we would do is refer them to one of the work fair programs and have them work with them. We can't say, 'well they never went to work' or anything like that. We would make referrals out to CAP or work fairs" (David, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

While many long term resources to address poverty were not ones that child welfare workers could provide directly to the families, the workers in this study described what they or child welfare workers in general would do to find resources for families. Tom provided an example of the process he went through to make sure families get resources:

> I think just let them know resources are available, what resources are available. In the one instance where the mom is working but can't get daycare assistance, let her know if you apply for MFIP you qualify automatically for daycare assistance. So, if you get the MFIP application going and helping them through that. (Tom, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES)

Being a resource broker of basic and long term programs and resources for families in the child welfare system was the main strategy the workers described as what child welfare workers could *do what you can*.

Advocacy Perspective

In addition to the strategy of being a *"resource broker"* of basic needs and long term programs, the second sub-category in the strategies category *do what you can*, was an ***advocacy perspective***. An *advocacy perspective* was defined by workers (17/30, 57%) describing that child welfare workers could take the approach or perspective of being an advocate for the families with whom they are working. Examples of this *advocacy perspective* as a *do what you can* strategy of action for child welfare workers to make

sense of poverty included several variations by workers, such as child welfare workers not being judgmental about families situations, listening to parents' stories, and approaching their work from a strengths perspective. Using this *advocacy perspective* meant that child welfare workers would take the role of advocate, both supporting the family to build their confidence within their worker-family relationship, but also in the context of working with other systems.

Workers who described this ***advocacy perspective*** within the worker-family context believed that this frame was a kind of starting place strategy to address families' poverty in the context of child welfare, as illustrated by Tonya in the quote below.

> I think you really have to listen to people's stories. I think you have to listen to how they were raised, where they came from, what were their parents like, where they lived, what were the expectations. I think to understand poverty in our clients, we have to understand how it started for them. (Tonya, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

As seen in the quote above, the ***advocacy perspective*** in the form listening to the families' stories served as a place for the child welfare worker to start understanding a family's poverty, and to that worker, it was a strategy to address poverty. In another example, a worker talked about her ***advocate perspective*** as one she uses within her relationship with families, but also in the way she talks with the parents about seeking out "services":

> Let them know that there are services around that you can go here, you can go there, you can go *anywhere* and I like to encourage them, try to build their spirit and say "Oh, my gosh, you've done this? You've done that? Wow!" (Zelda, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker relayed that she believed workers should address poverty by focusing on parents' strengths.

> I go the extra mile- I really do- because at the time of closure, I want to make sure I able to explore as many options, or tackle every angle as much as possible for this family, because they maybe struggling with one thing because of their involvement with us, but there are these other variables that we're dealing with, too and they will be out in limbo…I build on their strength. That is very important to me, because we are already down and out and they're already struggling. They might not have even heard someone complement them, their self-esteem is low. So one thing I really, really like to focus on is their strength. And they take it from there. (Monica, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

One example of how the ***advocacy perspective*** helped to support families who are working with systems to address their poverty was given by a worker who discussed how child welfare workers can help negotiate with the MFIP program.

> We can kind of help advocate for the clients when they get sanctioned, that they typically get upset, angry and shutdown. We can advocate to that client either to [the] job counselor or have them talk to the job counselor about [it]. We can kind of show and teach and do so I think advocacy is a big, big thing to help get families out of poverty and child welfare. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker stated that she thought of her work as a being a cultural advocate which is particularly important in the context of the Indian Child Welfare Act which requires a tribal representative work with all families involving a Native child.

Earned Income Tax Credit

While the strategy of ***do what you can*** included the category's third sub-category referring families to tax services to utilize the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), none of the workers of this study initially identified the EITC as an tool child welfare workers used in response to them making sense of poverty, despite EITC being one of the only U.S. poverty reduction policies that target the working poor in this country. Instead, after prompted by a direct question in the interview about the EITC as a means to address poverty in the context of child welfare, some workers (11/30, 37%) then described that indeed referring to volunteer or community run tax clinics was part of their strategy to *do what you can* to address poverty in the context of child welfare. As Stacey stated: "Absolutely. We have a lot of places where people can go and get their taxes done for free, so we refer them to there"(Stacey, White, Urban, Female, Middle SES). Rachel added that she went further and helped one her clients fill out tax forms: Around tax season, we always make sure that our clients get the information on it. Last year I had one client that I actually had to help her fill her taxes out to make sure she did it right and was able to get it. (Rachel, White, Rural, Female, Low-Middle SES)

At the same time there were workers has more complex attitudes toward the EITC, including the perspective that it was not the role of a child welfare worker to deal with matters such as taxes, and doubt of the usefulness of the EITC due to eligibility and accessibility issues and the overall value of the EITC for clients. David provided an example of the dismissive attitude that tax matters such as the EITC were a part of their jobs: "I know what it is but not work related-wise. I know what it is from reading about it. And the answer to your question would be yeah but it never enters into my job"

(David, White, Rural, Male, Middle SES). This perspective included workers who thought the EITC sounded like a good idea, but stated that child welfare workers were not helping families access it.

Workers who doubted the usefulness of the EITC due to eligibility and accessibility issues identified three main limitations that they thought were true about the EITC: families on MFIP do not get money back, that Native people don't have to file taxes, and that some immigrant families who are not working legally in the U.S. do not file taxes. A worker described her belief that families on MFIP are not eligible for tax refunds:

> We have tax programs that come in every year so at tax time I talk to the families about their taxes, did they file their taxes are they eligible to file taxes, if they're on MFIP, they don't get money back anyway. So it is really not helpful for them. I don't think they do. (Jennifer, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

Another worker illustrated her assessment that tax relief like the EITC was something she was not aware of, and that it is was not accessible or relevant for Native people:

> I haven't heard about, no. Our families wouldn't do it because they wouldn't know how to do the paperwork. Honestly, I don't even know if a lot of them would do their taxes. Native people, you don't have to do taxes. Certain eligibilities, you don't have to do taxes. (Holly, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Low-Middle SES)

Workers also had evaluative statements about how the families with whom they work, spend and manage their EITC refund. Most often workers stated that they perceived the families who received tax refunds (they did not usually state whether it was

from the EITC or other tax refund sources) did not spend the refund wisely, or secondarily, in the way they thought they should spend them. However, workers sometimes couched those statements saying that they were not trying to judge the families. Here is one workers response that illustrates this evaluative statement making sub-category:

> The answer to that is no, I help families during tax season by saying, here are they resources you need to get your taxes done for free or where you can go to get help with getting your taxes filed, and encourage families with that because there is typically a kickback, but I don't see families using that money wisely when they get that kickback…I am not judging but I being realistic, because I see them spend it all. They will just take their kids and buy a whole new wardrobe and I think that is great but it doesn't help them get out of poverty, it doesn't help fix any problems. (Alice, White, Rural, Female, Middle SES)

The EITC data revealed the range of workers' knowledge, perspective and self-reported use of the EITC as a poverty reduction strategy in child welfare.

Summary of Strategies Category: Do What You Can

The section above outlined the strategies category: ***do what you can***, what workers stated as the strategies child welfare workers could and do take to address poverty of the families engaged in the child welfare system. Three themes of the strategy of *do what you can* were reported: 1) being a *"resource broker"* of basic needs and longer term programs and resources, 2) an *advocacy perspective,* and 3) the perception of the *earned income tax credit* as a source of poverty reduction for families.

Chapter Summary

The nascent theoretical model outlined above consisted of the core phenomenon, *making sense of poverty in child welfare*. The two core sub-categories of the core phenomenon were *defining poverty* and *identifying causes of poverty*. The causal conditions category of the core phenomenon *lens of social location*, contained the particular elements of the workers' experiences and identity that both influenced the workers' *making sense of poverty* – the core phenomenon and included the sub-categories of *race/ethnicity lens, class lens,* and *gender lens*.

The intervening conditions category *limitations abound* detailed the ways workers saw their jobs, the systems (social welfare, child welfare, systems of oppression), lack of resources limited what the workers could do to work with poor and working families engaged in the child welfare system. The outline of the contextual conditions category, *what I think I can do*, included the sub-categories: *can't address poverty within the child welfare system*, *questioning the role of child welfare worker in addressing poverty*, and *child safety, not poverty*. And the last category of strategies, *do what you can*, outlined the strategies workers identified as what a child welfare worker can use to address poverty as the workers have made sense of it, including: being a *"resource broker",* using the *Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)*, and having an *advocacy perspective.*

Chapter 5

Intersectional Interpretative Analysis

The findings of this study presented in the previous chapter were offered with the primary framework of grounded theory that included a limited interpretative intersectional analysis. The findings were analyzed looking at the sample as a whole, with the sub-categories and themes presented without extensive analysis with regard to workers' differences in social location, outside of the particular causal conditions category ***lens of social location***. As described in Chapter 3, the choice to create a separation between the grounded theory informed analysis of the data and an intersectional analysis of the data took place in the process of axial coding.

In this chapter, further examination of the data is presented with the explicit purpose of answering more directly the first two research questions: how do workers differently located by race, ethnicity, class and gender construct poverty, and how do they perceive its causes. Although there are analytical limitations in having two unique methods of analysis within one study, as will be outlined in the limitation section in the next chapter, the following section provides an initial attempt at an interpretative analysis of the first two research questions of this study using the sample race/class/gender "intersectional sample categorizations" outlined in the Chapter 3.

Construction of Poverty Sub-categories By Intersectional Sample Categorization

Analysis of construction of poverty through the frame of how workers are differently located by gender, race, ethnicity and class reveals four threads:

1. A lack of specificity and elaboration of construction in the male workers compared to the women workers.
2. Both groups of women, white and women of color, who described themselves as low-middle SES constructed poverty most often as *"not getting basic needs met."*
3. The women of color middle SES more often included the construct of *more than monetary limitations* equally with the construct of *"not getting basic needs met,"* and most often they used both to define poverty.
4. White women middle SES most often constructed poverty in terms of *"not getting basic needs met,"* but also *federal poverty as benchmarks*.

The first thread that appeared in the construction of poverty was the lack of specificity and detail in the ways the men described the basic resources families lack as compared to all the women. One male worker defined poverty in a few words describing it as "Families struggling to adequately dress their kids for school, and families that probably get free lunches at school." When asked for further elaboration, the worker stated that was all. In addition to this difference, while white male middle SES group's definitions of poverty did include the three constructs of poverty, the sub-categories of *"not getting basic needs met"* and *federal poverty as benchmarks* surfaced more often with more of the workers in this group.

The second thread was almost all the women low-middle SES sample categories used the construct of *"not getting basic needs met,"* with fewer references to other constructs. Within the two sample categories, other points of departure were present. For

workers in the women of color low-middle SES category, *"not getting basic needs met"* was the key construction of poverty and poverty being *more than monetary limits* and constructs of *federal guidelines as benchmarks* came up in limited ways. The only example of poverty being more than monetary limits was articulated as a combination of the limit of time parents spend on children and the choices of where parents can take children on "outings", as well the resources families have available through children's schools.

Further, similar to the women of color low-middle SES, the white women low-middle SES intersectional sample grouping also primarily defined poverty as the lack of resources to provide for basic needs. Three of the five women in this grouping stated that that food, clothing and shelter as the basic needs to which families in poverty lack adequate access, with a fourth woman adding daily expenses. When explaining her understanding of poverty as "not getting basic needs met" one worker stated that for families she works with the basic needs consume them and she added, "How can you ask people to go above that?"

The third thread is that in contrast to both racial groupings of low-middle SES groups of women, the constructs of poverty identified by the women of color middle SES group included the construct of *more than monetary limitations* equally with the construct of *"not getting basic needs met"* and most often they used both simultaneously to define poverty. At the same time, some workers in this grouping who defined poverty as basic needs parsed the concept of "needs" with particular specificity and also described how they saw families in poverty dealing with those needs differently from workers from other groups. These workers, from their professional and personal context, recognized

that families may be in financial need but they have skills in working the system to their advantage which in some ways (in the minds of these workers) changes what is poverty or more specifically who is in poverty. One worker challenged this perspective of poverty, saying, "with my definition of poverty, the lack of knowledge, you may be economically in poverty, but you may know how to work a system and get your needs met with that knowledge." This distinction of poverty as being financially in need and being financially in need while getting needs met through systems was particularly present in this women of color middle SES categorization of workers.

The fourth and last thread is that, similar to the women of color middle SES group, the white women middle SES grouping of workers also used defined poverty as *"not getting basic needs met"* as well as *more than monetary limitations*, but they primarily used *"not getting basic needs met."* However, unlike the other women sample categories and more similarly to the men sample categories, they also referred to federal poverty guidelines as well.

Overall, the findings suggest that for the workers in this sample differently located by race, class, and gender, there were some differences in their constructions of poverty.

Cause of Poverty Sub-categories By Race/Class/Gender Sample Categorization

In the analysis of the perception of the causes of poverty through the frame of how workers are differently located by gender, race, ethnicity and class, four main threads appeared.

1. Almost all the workers who identified luck as a cause were white.

2. Structural/systemic cause of poverty was identified most often by particular race/class/gender categories of workers.
3. For white women low-middle SES, individual factors were not causes but barriers to getting out of poverty.
4. Women of color middle SES resembled the women of color low-middle SES most closely than any of the other intersectional groupings.

The first thread that arose about workers' perception of the causes of poverty was the predominance of white workers identifying luck as cause. Out of the ten workers who identified luck as a cause, nine of these were white and eight of those nine were in the middle SES category (6 women, 2 men). The white middle SES workers identified luck more often than structural/system (5). Although most workers in this grouping perceived family/generational and individual causes as the primary reasons for poverty. The only woman of color in the sample to identify luck as one of the causes of poverty mentioned luck as an aspect of why families are wealthy and not poor, stating that "Luck- just born into a family so you have a leg up. Families give stability, knowledge about how to succeed" (Ernestine, Worker of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES). In addition, this worker mentioned, in contrast to the white workers, structural/systemic causes to poverty, along with luck.

The second thread that surfaced about workers' perception of the causes of poverty was that structural/systemic cause of poverty was identified most often by particular race/class/gender categories of workers. *Structural/systemic reasons* were perceived to be one of the causes of poverty <u>all</u> the workers of color, both the middle SES and low-middle SES categorical grouping. In addition, women of color middle SES were

less often than all the other categorical groupings including the women of color low-middle SES to identify *individual cause*.

White workers, on the other hand, perceived *structural/systemic causes* less often, and the themes they used were more often the *place-based issues* or *school resources*, rather than *racism* or *colonialism*. Out of the three white males who identified the cause of poverty as structural or systemic in nature, two identified *place-based issues*. Three of the five white women low-middle SES identified the cause of poverty as structural or systemic in nature, one of which identified *school resources*, while another located the *structural/systemic cause* of poverty in her understanding of "class disparity" in general. More of the workers in the white women middle class SES category (8/11) perceived structural/system causes of poverty, and four of these workers identified *place-based issues*. Two of these workers had a much more socio-political critique that was grounded in an institutional racism or an oppression based framework of analysis.

In addition to the difference in the frequency of *structural/systemic cause* of poverty being perceived by sample categories, there was also a qualitative difference in the way the structural/systemic cause was described by women of color. Specifically, women of color communicated with directness and clear articulation of the awareness that large systems, working in concert with each other, were sources of oppression. The directness of workers was demonstrated in the succinct responses to questions, and the language chosen was not veiled but named the systems directly, as illustrated here in the entire statement of one of the tribal representatives when she explained her perception of the cause of poverty: "I would say for American Indian people, colonialism and for women, it's sexism." (Zelda, Person of Color, Urban, Female, Middle SES).

The third thread was the perception by white women low-middle SES workers that *individual factors* were barriers but not causes of poverty. While all the workers in the white women low-middle grouping identified individual cause, some of the workers simultaneously referred to similar terms other intersectional grouping workers used, such as mental and chemical health as well as disability, but stated that they thought that these things were not causes but barriers or limits to the ability to escape poverty. This reframing of individual issues as barriers rather than causes existed for one other worker, a white woman in the middle SES grouping.

The fourth thread was that women of color middle SES resembled the women of color low-middle SES mostly closely than any of the other intersectional groupings. The similarities are that most of the women of color with middle SES workers identified a combination of *individual* (4/6, 66%), *family/generational* (5/6, 83%), and *structural/systemic* (6/6, 100%) as the causes of poverty, and low-middle SES women of color individual (3/4, 75%), family/generational (3/4, 75%), and structural/systemic (4/4, 100%) as the causes of poverty.

Summary of Chapter

Using the frame of intersectional theory, this chapter presented an interpretative analysis of the first two research questions of this study using the sample race/class/gender "intersectional sample categorizations" outlined in the Chapter 3. This analysis examined the concepts from the two core sub-categories of the core phenomenon of the study, *making sense of poverty*: *defining poverty* and *identifying causes of poverty*. First, from the analysis of the poverty constructs from the *defining poverty* four threads of difference were uncovered from the data based on the described intersectional sample

categorizations: a lack of specificity and elaboration of construction in the male workers compared to the women workers; both groups of low-middle SES women, white and women of color, constructed poverty most often as *"not getting basic needs met";* the women of color middle SES more often included the construct of *more than monetary limitations* equally with the construct of *"not getting basic needs met,"* and most often they used both; and white women middle SES most often constructed poverty in terms of *"not getting basic needs met,"* but also *federal poverty as benchmarks*.

Second, from the analysis of the causal explanations from the *identifying causes of poverty* four threads of difference arose from the data based on the described intersectional sample categorizations: almost all the workers who identified *luck* as a cause were white; *structural/systemic cause* of poverty was identified most often and with varying specificity by particular race/class/gender categories of workers; for white women low-middle SES, *individual factors* were not causes but barriers to getting out of poverty, and women of color middle SES resembled the women of color low-middle SES most closely than any of the other intersectional groupings. Overall, these findings suggest threads of difference between how workers in this study construct poverty and perceive its causes.

Chapter 6

Discussion

This study examined how public and tribal child welfare workers construct poverty and perceive its causes, as well as their practice framework related to poverty. The study relied on interviews with public and tribal child welfare workers in 11 county and tribal entities in the state of Minnesota. The study used qualitative methodology informed by grounded theory, which aims to examine the construction of concepts and the relatedness of concepts, with a close attention to the language of the participants. In addition to this methodological approach, this study used an intersectional theory framework seen in the research questions and the interview guide questions, as well as in the pervasive influence of the self-identified frame of the researcher which directly and indirectly shaped the form and methodology of the study.

This study attempted to answer the following three questions, the third of which contained three sub-questions:

1. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class construct poverty?
2. How do child welfare workers differently located by gender, race, ethnicity, and class perceive the causes of poverty?
3. How are the perceptions of causes of poverty translated into child welfare workers' practice framework, in both self-reported action and attitudes toward action?

a. How do child welfare workers see the role of child welfare in anti-poverty efforts?
b. How do child welfare workers see their role in the context of the poverty of families on their caseload?
c. How are child welfare workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty shaped by the gender, race, ethnicity, and class of their clients?

The following chapter presents a summary of the major findings and concludes with an interpretation of the overall findings overall in the context of research on perceptions of the cause of poverty, as well as within the field of child welfare and social welfare policy.

Summary of Major Findings

The main phenomenon of this study was defined as child welfare workers making sense of poverty. To make sense of it, workers defined poverty and perceived a variety of causes. The findings reported in the previous two chapters describe the definitions of poverty, perception of its causes and practice frameworks of the public and tribal child welfare workers interviewed for this study in the context of their work in child welfare. All the workers in this study shared a common definition of poverty: *"not getting basic needs met"* or in other words, the lack of adequate resources or ability to access basic needs. Some workers extended this definition to include that poverty was *more than monetary limits*, including the lack of such things as education, social and emotional support, and more abstract concepts such as opportunities. A small amount of workers also included the use of *federal guidelines as a benchmark* to define poverty, consistent with the commonly held definition *"not getting basic needs met."*

Although the workers all shared a common core definition of poverty, there were slight differences in workers' construction of poverty. Male workers defined poverty more plainly than female workers, who used more words and had more descriptions and illustrations of poverty. All women workers who identified themselves as low-middle SES defined poverty most often in terms of lack of basic needs. Women of color middle SES were most likely to define poverty using language of *"not getting basic needs met"* and *more than monetary limitations*. And lastly, white women middle SES used *"not getting basic needs met"* language to define poverty, but also used *federal guidelines as a benchmark*. These minor differences in their constructions of poverty may point to a subtle difference in workers' social locations.

Workers identified four main causes of poverty in this study: *individual cause, family/generational cause, structural/systemic cause,* and *luck*. The most commonly identified cause, *structural/systemic cause* (25/30, 83%), included several themes: 1) *racism*, 2) *colonialism/historic trauma*, and 3) *lack of effective systems*, 4) *place-based issues*, and 5) *school resources*. *Individual cause*, the second most commonly identified cause (23/30, 76%), included three themes, 1) *settling for less,* 2) *individual factors* (i.e. mental health), 3) *personal choice*. *Family/generational cause*, the third most commonly identified cause (22/30, 73%) was described in two ways: 1) *generational expectations and the culture of poverty expectations*, and 2) *the cycle of poverty*. The fourth and least prominent sub-category of identifying causes of poverty was *luck* (10/30, 30%). Similar to the construction of poverty, most workers in the sample identified multiple causes, while some only identified one.

There were also variations in how workers differently located by race, class, and gender perceived the cause of poverty. Specifically, white workers, including both men and women, identified *luck* as one of the causes of poverty, while only one worker of color did. This analysis also indicated that workers of color in this study (all women) identified *structural/systemic cause* of poverty most often, while white workers identified it less often, with women middle SES and male middle SES identifying it more often than women low-middle SES. In addition, white women low-middle SES described some individual factors (i.e. mental health, disabilities) not as causes but as barriers or limits to escape poverty. Overall, women of color middle SES resembled the women of color low-middle SES more closely than any of the other intersectional groupings.

Not surprisingly, the workers in this study had more to say about what child welfare workers could *not* do to address poverty than what child welfare workers *could* do. Two main areas surfaced. First, some workers had developed attitudes about what they could or could not do to address poverty. For example, some workers stated that the primary goal of child welfare was child safety not addressing poverty. Others doubted that child welfare could address poverty. Second, some workers identified there were broad system level limitations that mediated what child welfare workers could do, including lack of adequate resources to provide for families, such as housing, child care, and educational programs, as well as MFIP constraints.

The two main strategies workers identified as actions child welfare workers could take to address poverty were being *"resource brokers"* and having an *advocacy perspective.* Having an advocacy perspective included listening to a family's story and being a cultural advocate. While many workers stated that the earned income tax credit

was helpful, some of the workers who work with immigrant un-documented parents, as well as Native American parents stated that the EITC is not a relevant poverty reduction strategy for access reasons.

Workers had clear ideas about the way their race, class and gender impacted how they thought about poverty in the context of child welfare. Overall, class and race were identified by most workers as having an impact, while fewer workers identified gender. All workers described how class impacted their thinking about poverty often with vivid stories about their diverse experiences of financial stability and poverty and/or major financial stress. The race of workers who described experiences were equally distributed among white and workers of color. Workers who described the impact of their personal experiences with poverty and financial stress included experiences from their childhoods as well as adulthoods. Particularly impactful for some women's thinking about poverty was the experience of being mothers, struggling to make ends meet. Race had an impact on how workers thought about poverty through white workers' experiences with white privilege, through workers of color perspectives of racial identity as a strength, and immigrant experiences. The few workers who did not think that race impacted their thinking were all white.

Workers identified the impact of their gender as least relevant to how they thought about poverty. However, it was only white workers, both men and women who identified gender as not relevant. Workers who deemed gender as impactful to their thinking about poverty were racially diverse, including all the different racial and ethnic backgrounds of the sample. Gender impacted how these workers saw poverty and

poverty-related issues, and how they thought about and how they reported their treatment of clients.

Although most workers described their social locations in separate statements during the interview, there were some workers who spoke about their identity in a multiplicative way, such as young African American single mothers.

Interpretation of Findings

This study was conceived as a means of addressing the larger question of child welfare workers' understanding of poverty by examining their perception of its causes and their resulting "helping" actions, as modeled in attributional theory (Weiner, 1993). However, this study was designed to first examine child welfare workers' construction of poverty as a precursor to perception, a line of inquiry missing in prior perception of cause studies (Harper, 1996). In addition, building on the evidence that there are racial, class and gender differences in social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty (Clark, 2007; Sun, 2001), and that child welfare workers see the interconnectedness of the issues of poverty, race and the disproportionality of child of color in the child welfare system (Chibnall, Dutch, Jones-Harden, Brown & Gourdine, 2003; Križ & Skivenes, 2011), this study intentionally used an intersectional theoretical perspective. Further, rather than only using demographic information as a lens to understand workers' responses – which is often the "variable" analysis of demographic data – this study used the multiple approach of asking workers directly how they thought their social location mattered in how they understood poverty in the context of child welfare, as well as examining the data particularly the subcategories of the core phenomenon: *defining poverty* and *identifying causes of poverty*.

The findings from this study, as depicted in the nascent theoretical model, outline a process of how the workers made sense of poverty. The process included their perceptions of the cause of poverty and their ideas about and self-reported action to address poverty in child welfare. The causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions, and the strategies that surround the core phenomenon were all part of this larger process of *making sense of poverty in child welfare*.

The following section offers a continued interpretative analysis of the findings within the context of the existing literature on perceptions of the cause of poverty. In particular, the study's findings about construction of poverty are related to the larger understanding of poverty measures and Sen's capabilities framework. Then findings on workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty are discussed in relation to prior survey-based methodology studies, based on Feagin's (1972) foundational study, and with attention to how this study's knowledge is different from, and builds on, prior social work research. This interpretation states in more direct terms how the findings answer the three main research questions of this study.

Construction of Poverty

As stated previously, one of the aims of this study was to start the examination of public and tribal child welfare workers' perception of the cause of poverty by asking how the workers construct poverty, a line of inquiry identified as missing in prior perception of cause studies (Harper, 1996). The findings of this study demonstrate that both consensus -- *"not having basic needs met"* – and variability existed in workers' definition or construction of poverty. The presence of both consensus and variability signals a place of departure, namely, that some workers diverge from the commonly

agreed about definition of *"not having basic need met"* and expand their definition to include aspects of life that are considered more than basic and more than monetary, such as education, social and emotional support, and opportunities. The reason for this departure is not fully examined in this study, but the findings suggest that workers' social location of race and gender play a role in how workers construct poverty.

The finding that all workers held a shared construction of poverty at the time of this study asserts that there is a common way child welfare workers define poverty. The workers' common definition of *"not getting basic needs met"* can be understood in the underlying assumptions of absolute poverty measures, "that there is a subsistence level of income or consumption below which people should be deemed economically disadvantaged or deprived" (Iceland, 2006, p. 21). The construct of poverty as *federal guidelines as a benchmark* also matches the assumptions of the absolute poverty measure. In contrast, the *more than monetary limitation* construct of poverty aligns more with the underlying assumptions of relative poverty measures, that "people are social beings who operate within relationships"(Iceland, 2006, p. 25) and that the consequences of resources below the resources of other could lead to not being "able to participate adequately in social organizations and relationship, and …thus incapable of fully participating in society" (Iceland, 2006, p. 25). Moreover, Sen's (1999) framework of capabilities expands on the framework of relative poverty measures, arguing that people need to have the freedom to act on their capabilities, and when they lack this freedom that is form capability poverty. The finding that some workers shared the underlying assumptions of this broader, more relative measure framework as their definition of

poverty suggests a difference in perspective is relevant for this study, however, further research would be needed to explore more fully.

Differently Located: Construction of Poverty. The study's findings indicate that the social location of workers' race affects their definition of poverty: specifically women of color middle SES group included the construct of *more than monetary limitations* equally with the construct of lack of basic needs, and most often they used both to define poverty; white men and women middle SES groups most often construct poverty in terms of not getting basic needs met, but also federal poverty benchmarks. Workers of color broader definitions of poverty that included the understanding that poverty is not only not getting basic needs met but that poverty includes more intangible "needs", such as opportunities, and more macro-level needs such as education.

Perception of the Causes of Poverty

The main categories, or poverty explanation typologies, workers in this study identified were individual cause, family/generational cause, structural/systemic cause, and luck. When compared to the foundational three-tier poverty explanation categories--individual, structural, fatalistic--often used in scales measuring individual's perceptions of the cause of poverty (Feagin, 1972), three of the categories identified in this study overlap, and yet, the additional category of family/generational reveals another poverty explanation. Perhaps it is not surprising that the workers in this study, whose primary "client systems" are families, see family as such a powerful influence that the workers would identify the family/generational explanation of poverty. The finding of an additional category to the three-tier categorization also builds on the evidence that there

is not a consensus of poverty explanation typologies (Lepianka, Van Oorschot, and Gelisson, 2009).

The identification of the family/generational explanation of poverty, with the underlying themes of both the culture and cycle of poverty, builds on prior research that found that respondents identified culture of poverty beliefs, which did not neatly fit into the currently used scales of individual and structural attributions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Nilson, 1981). Therefore, this particular finding supports the more recent trend in perceptions of the causes of poverty research, expansion of the three-tier categorization to include a fourth category, such as technology and interest group. The finding of family/generational explanation of poverty is particularly relevant for future studies that examine the perceptions of professionals who work extensively with families, such as child welfare workers and social workers.

Differently Located: Perception of the Causes of Poverty. These findings also indicate that the social location of workers' race – specifically the similarity of perception of cause amongst women of color across SES, the identification of luck as a cause by almost exclusively white workers, the direct and naming quality of identification of racism/sexism/colonialism by women of color – has some relationship to the way workers perceive the causes of poverty. This relationship appears to be that workers of color see the causes of poverty as a complex mix of individual, family/generational and structural/systemic, but their analysis of the structural/systemic is articulated more readily and more directly than their white counterparts, who were more likely to find cause in individuals and family/generational cycles, with less emphasis on larger systemic forces.

These findings support previous perception of the cause of poverty studies that either purposefully sampled African-Americans and Latinos, as well as whites (Hunt, 1996) or had a racially diverse sample (Clark, 2007) and found differences by race. Specifically, Hunt (1996) found that African-Americans and Latinos were more likely than whites to view both individual and structural as causes of poverty, and Clark's (2007) study of social work students found that students' race and ethnicity affected their perceptions of and interest in working with the poor. The findings from this study expand the base of evidence built from those studies - that used race as variable approach to looking at differences in perception and suggests a relationship between the racial experience/identity of individuals within the larger socioeconomic and political systems, as demonstrated by the overall differences in how workers in this study described how they thought their race impacted their understanding of poverty.

Workers' Perception of the Impact Their Race/Class/Gender Has on Thinking about Poverty

Social Location of Race. Most workers stated their race was a part of what impacted their overall understanding of poverty, although which workers and how they described this impact is important to highlight. For example, all the workers of color described multiple ways they thought their understanding of poverty was impacted by race-related factors, including their own race and their experience with racism. In addition, workers of color identified how they thought their personal experience with race-based discrimination gave them a unique understanding and "in" with clients of color, no matter if they were the same race as they were. In contrast to the unanimous agreement among workers of color that race impacted their thinking about poverty in

child welfare, white worker views were quite disparate. For example, some white workers stated that their race did not impact their understanding of poverty, while a small number of other workers stated white privilege impacted their understanding. The white workers that did talk directly about white privilege and institutional racism most often shared stories of how they had learned about these aspects through formal and informal educational experiences.

In general, the differences by race of workers' construction of poverty, perception of its causes, and how they viewed the impact of race on their thinking about poverty are particularly compelling when placed beside decades of data which shows that rates of poverty of women of color in the U.S. have been and are higher than white women (Glenn, 1985; Synder & McLauglin, 2004, IWPR, 2006). In the U.S. race and poverty are intertwined, leading to the idea of poverty being "raced", about which white workers in this study appeared to be less aware than their non-white counterparts.

Class. Differences in SES were not as apparent from these findings, although this may be due to the lack of variability within the sample, as all the workers were college-educated, working at similar levels of pay, and in addition were less likely to be workers of low-middle SES than the middle SES. In addition, as will be discussed in more detail in the limitations of this study, there was also the lack of data collected from workers about their specific SES childhood experience (only one demographics question) leaving the identification of SES more heavily weighed toward the current times, or up to the worker to disclose during the interview.

With these limitations in mind, these findings indicate the social location of workers' SES – specifically groups of women, both white women and women of color

low-middle SES constructed poverty most often in terms of lack of basic needs – may have a limited relationship to the way their construction of poverty. Another finding does indicate a subtle SES difference, as well as racial and gender difference, was that white women low-middle SES qualified their response that poverty was not caused by individual factors such as mental illness and substance abuse, but that these factors were "barriers" to escape poverty.

Gender. With regard to gender, this study's findings indicate that there are some differences based on workers' gender – specifically workers who stated that gender did not impact their thinking about poverty were all white with one exception, most of whom identified as middle SES, and all but one of the male workers. Among the workers who did think that gender mattered there was a diversity of races and ethnicities, as well as SES categories, and one of the men. The finding that *being a mother* was a significant experience some women identified as an aspect of why gender impacted how they thought about poverty in general is a salient concept in light of Mink's (1999) *The Wages of Motherhood* discourse on mothering in the realm of welfare and Roberts (1995, 1999) writing on black women mothering in the context of child welfare. Contextualized by both these authors within the racialized and classed political space, mothering is of paramount importance in the struggle for gender equality and freedom. The women who identified their own experience of motherhood in political terms also identified their experiences in economic and racial terms, showing an attention to and a lived experience of the intersection between them.

Connecting Perception of Cause to Practice Framework: Making Sense of Poverty Model

The third research question of this study *was: How are the perceptions of causes of poverty translated into child welfare workers' practice framework, in both self-reported action and attitudes toward action?* Despite the differences in the workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty, the findings from this study do not suggest great variation in the specific actions workers propose that a child welfare worker could take to address poverty, or that they themselves report taking. One explanation for this lack of distinction may be that public and tribal child welfare workers are county and tribal entity employees who are trained and managed with a great deal of specificity about what they must and must not do in their work with families. Part of their practice model and the organizational culture is the reality of this very specific structure complete with statues and policies they must follow to ensure the quality and safety of their work with families. Therefore workers' avenues to address poverty are profoundly shaped by the systems and structure within that particular work and organizational culture. Part of the limitation of this study, as well be discussed in the next chapter, was lack of triangulating data from county and tribal level work and organizational levels.

The first sub-question of the third research question was: *How do child welfare workers see the role of child welfare in anti-poverty efforts*? As discussed in previous chapters, the workers in this study did not readily identify that child welfare had a role in anti-poverty efforts. However, when asked directly about their knowledge about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as a tool for helping families in poverty who are also involved in the child welfare system, workers held divergent views. The views ranged

from no knowledge of the EITC to knowledge but dismissal that it was something child welfare workers should pay attention, to being adamant that it was a valuable resource for families.

Two issues about the EITC findings are particularly important to note. First, workers who expressed in their interview their evaluation of the families' mismanagement of any tax credit, did not report referring their families more or less than the workers who did not make evaluative statements. However, the evaluative statements suggest that workers hold beliefs that poor families mismanage their money in ways that, if it does not cause their poverty, the mismanagement contributes to it. Second, workers outlined what they perceived to be policy limitations of the EITC; particularly workers of color who work with immigrant families – documented and undocumented – as well as Native American families described that the EITC was not a tool either their families were eligible for or sought out. However, some of the workers' perceived limitations are their interpretations of the EITC eligibility guidelines, rather than the actual guidelines (e.g. MFIP enrollment does not make you illegible for EITC). In practice, this lack of factual knowledge about EITC eligibility could be another barrier to child welfare workers being supporters of the tax credit.

The second sub-question of the third research question was: *How do child welfare workers see their role in the context of the poverty of the families on their caseload?* Two main findings are relevant for this discussion. The first relevant finding is that regardless of their poverty constructs or the perception of cause, workers in this study identified being *"resource brokers"* as one of the key roles for child welfare workers. The actions taken as a resource broker entailed providing resources and referrals to families to help

them meet their basic needs. In light of the finding that the dominant construction of poverty was *"not getting basic needs met"* it follows that workers would see being a resource broker as a key strategy for them to address poverty. However, it was not clear from the data if workers who expanded their definition to include the *more than monetary* construct had a different practice model than those with only the *"not getting basic needs met."*

Following the premise that how child welfare workers construct poverty might inform the strategies they use to address the poverty of families with whom they work, it is curious then that the workers whose constructions of poverty could be considered to be closely "built" on the same road as Sen's (1999) construction of capability poverty did not vary widely from other workers in the study in their specific strategies to address poverty. This finding is particularly noteworthy in the field of social work with its stated code of ethics value of social and economic justice (NASW, 2013). Using the constructs of poverty found in this study, further examination of whether different constructions of poverty change the specific strategies child welfare workers use in addition to being a *"resource broker"* is a ripe location for future research.

The second relevant finding to the question how do child welfare workers in the context of poverty in child welfare see their role was the contracted quality of what they thought child welfare workers could do (as seen in the category *what I think I can do*) the contextual condition that shaped the strategies, and the sense of the breadth of the limitations (as seen in the category *limitations abound)* the intervening condition that shaped the strategies. In addition, although there was consensus around the workers' role of *"resource broker"*, there was a clear rejection by some workers of the notion that child

welfare workers could do anything to address poverty as seen in the contextual condition *what I think I can do*.

These findings are not surprising when put into the historic context of the child welfare system. In a recent article Duva and Metzger (2010) write, "Historically, the mission of the child welfare agency has been to protect children from harm, not to ameliorate conditions of poverty" (p. 63). The authors, who are writing particularly about child poverty and child neglect, go on to say:

> The child welfare system has focused its interventions not on addressing poverty issues, but rather on service interventions such as parenting education and counseling services. The role of poverty in child neglect cases has been largely ignored. This is not an indictment of child welfare workers, who must carry out a narrow mandate of child protection. They are provided with little system support for addressing broader family needs that impact risks to child safety. (Duva & Metzger, 2010, p. 63)

The findings of this study augment this perspective in multiple ways, including workers' acknowledgement that the systems – not just the child welfare system – the families on their caseload work with are not really functioning to address poverty issues.

An additional historical child welfare perspective on the preoccupation with child safety and the rejection of the idea that child welfare workers should be addressing poverty, is the context of past and current critique that child welfare agencies remove children from their families for reasons of poverty (Pelton, 1989; Keegan Eamon & Kopels, 2004). This critique and ongoing debate of whether child welfare removes children from home and fails to reunify families "for reasons of poverty" is ongoing. At

least one study's (Keegan Eamon & Kopels, 2004) findings from a review of court cases showed that child welfare agencies have done so recently supports that this curbing of that impulse is warranted.

The last sub-question of the third research question was: *How are child welfare workers' perceptions of causes of poverty shaped by the gender, race, ethnicity, and class of their clients?* While this sub-question aimed at understanding how the workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty were shaped by the gender, race, ethnicity, and class of their clients, the data from this study could not answer this question in an adequate way. This is due to complexity of making this link from the social location of clients to how that shapes perception. Although there was a question and a probe in the interview guide (See questions 5 and 5a. in Appendix D) that were originally written to gather data to inform this research question, those questions failed to achieve their intended purpose.

Overall Theory Building

As described in the first two chapters of this dissertation, attributional theory is the main theory used in studies examining perceptions of the causes of poverty. To review, attributional theory is an umbrella term used by social psychologists for the various approaches to the study of perceived causes, their antecedents, and in addition, the subsequent reactions to those identified causes (Weiner, 1992). This grounded theory informed study did not attempt to use the framework or test the principles of attributional theory. However, the assumption that child welfare workers' perceptions of causes of poverty would translate into their practice framework is a fundamental aspect of the theory of attributional theory. In addition, the paradigm model (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)

used in the data analysis of this study brought a similar organization to attributional theory; this can be seen in this study if the antecedents are considered the causal conditions category, the perceived causes are one of the sub-categories of the core phenomenon, and the subsequent reactions to those identified causes are the strategies category.

At the same time that similarities and overlap between the model of this study and attributional theory exist, there are three important differences. First, unlike most attributional theory studies which use survey methodology, this study's use of in-depth interviews allowed for a rich quality and nuance in the causal explanation categories, as well as all the major data categories. Second, the model of this study was developed with an intersectional theoretical sensitivity (Murphy et al., 2009). This sensitivity helped to examine the socially constructed nature of the antecedents, the perceptions and the subsequent reactions in the context of the model, an aspect often lacking in attributional studies (Harper, 1996). Third, this model examined not only the subsequent reactions (strategies to address poverty) to the workers identified causes, but also mapped out the contextual and intervening conditions that shaped them. These differences created the analytic space for elements of the model to surface that expand on attributional theory's framework for understanding cause.

The model of this study provides a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon that is public and tribal child welfare workers making sense of poverty, which is part of the goal of theory building. "Understanding a phenomenon implies that we can describe what differentiates it from another phenomena or we can differentiate instances of it (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010 p. 16)." This model helps differentiate how public and tribal

child welfare workers understand poverty in the very specific context of child welfare and builds overall theory about perceptions of the cause of poverty in the field of social work.

Chapter 7

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study examined public and tribal child welfare workers construction of the concept of poverty and the perception of its causes, within the context of their practice working with families engaged in child welfare. This final chapter proposes key implications for practice and policy, social work education and child welfare training. The limitations of this study are presented followed ideas for future research and a brief review of the study and its conclusion.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study suggest that policies indeed impact what workers can do to address poverty in the context of child welfare and what they see as limitations to what they can do. Overall, in the United States there is a pressing issue of the availability of effective and widespread poverty reduction strategies that child welfare workers may use as strategies to address poverty in the context of child welfare. This is a complex issue, one at the heart of ongoing debates about social welfare policy for the poor in the U.S. The following section offers several suggestions of federal and state policy reforms that could change the policy environment for child welfare workers in the U.S.

Develop a Comprehensive Family Policy

The United States lacks a comprehensive family policy that would create an overall safety net for families. Currently, federal policies that support families, such as universal early childhood education and paid parental leave, are missing, leaving poor and working poor families vulnerable to addition stressors that open the window for

increased child welfare involvement. Experts in child welfare reform argue that introducing a comprehensive family policy is one strategy to address poverty in the context of child welfare (Duva & Metzger, 2010). Findings from this study demonstrate that some of the issues, such as the lack of adequate and affordable child care, that keep families from getting out of poverty, and some of limitations, such as the lack of supportive systems for families, that keep workers from being able to address poverty more effectively could be addressed by changes in federal family policy.

A comprehensive family policy could include many components. Paid parental leave and early childhood education are two specific areas that address issues workers in this study discussed with regularity. A federal policy establishing paid parental leave could provide families with the needed time and financial support for parent/s and children during the critical time following birth (or adoption). This paid parental leave should not be dependent on employment, or rely solely on individual employers to provide funding, instead, funding would be included as part of the comprehensive federal family policy. In addition, universal early childhood education would provide poor and working poor families with two-generation support; parents would have consistent, safe, and affordable child care and children would have increased opportunities for social and educational learning preparing them for long-term educational success.

Increase Federal Funding of In-Home Provision and Family Support

In addition to the development of comprehensive family policy, federal child welfare financing policy could also be reformed to increase the level of in-home service provisions. One of the current criticisms of child welfare financing is that it is weighted to "back end" funding (e.g. Title IV-E Foster care and Adoption Assistance) that can only

be accessed after children are removed from their birth families (Murray, 2007; Scarcella, Bess, Zielewski, & Green, 2006). The findings of this study suggest that workers and families alike felt the effect of this "back end" versus "front end" child welfare financing. To correct this skewed child welfare financing policy, reform strategies must include a change in the way federal funding is dedicated to increase the ability of states to use these funds for in-home service provision and family supports (Duva & Metzger, 2010).

Strengthen Anti-Poverty Policies

In the U.S. there are many policies that are considered anti-poverty policies, including such programs as EITC, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and vocational training programs such as Job Corps. The findings of this study suggest that workers who are working with poor and working poor families that are involved in child welfare system see these programs as vital resources to which they can connect eligible families. However, most of the workers described that these programs were not enough to help families. For example, one worker described that the limited programs supporting the completion of only a certificate program or a two-year associate degree means that parents are stuck working in low paying jobs, caught between poverty and almost making it out. Therefore, anti-poverty policies should be strengthened to increase the level and poverty reduction effectiveness of the resources available to families.

Integrating asset development for families as a child welfare policy. Workers talked about how families struggle to make it from working poor to middle class. Assets are one of the key variables of the middle class that provide the capital to make purchases that will create wealth. However, families living in poverty lack these assets, and often

are unable to build assets for a variety of reasons. One policy approach that has been introduced in other states in the U.S. to increase assets and reduce poverty in poor and working poor families with children are asset development accounts, such as family asset accounts and individual development accounts (IDA). Asset account programs aim at addressing one of the fundamental issues of poverty which is not only the lack of adequate income but the lack of adequate assets (Aratani & Chau, 2010, Sherradan, 2002). The idea of asset building in child welfare echoes Duncan Lindsey's (2003) idea of child saving accounts as one of the key strategies in his alternative framework to child welfare i.e. not the prevention of child maltreatment but the end of child poverty. Future avenues of policy development in the area of poverty reduction in child welfare could examine the possible integration of a family asset account program into a county or tribal child welfare program and track outcomes based on multiple factors. In Minnesota, IDA programs are not utilized as a statewide strategy, so it is unclear from this study if those kind of programs are on the radar of child welfare workers, and what their assessment of the importance of engaging their families in IDA programs might be.

Implications for Practice

Child Welfare Practice Frameworks & Addressing Poverty

In the recent fact sheet entitled "How the Child Welfare System Works", the child welfare system is described as "a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). While this description does not include "addressing poverty", the window of doing so is there, therefore how a state and/or county interprets those outlined purposes would be

incredibly influential. Based on the findings of this study, workers across the state of Minnesota have a variety of perspectives on a number of areas related to what it means to address poverty as child welfare workers. Therefore looking forward is it important to consider the message of child welfare practice models about child welfare workers addressing poverty, and how do those practice models shape and support the workers' internal discourse that is shaped by their socially constructed positionality.

Among the participants who stated that the role of child welfare workers was child safety, not addressing poverty, two referred to their knowledge of the concepts in the child protection practice model "Signs of Safety" (Turnell & Edwards, 1999). The Signs of Safety model has been adopted fully by two counties in Minnesota and is being piloted by thirteen more. The model aims to revolutionize child protection turning from a paternalistic approach to a partnership approach to working with families (Turnell, 1998; Turnell & Edwards, 1999). While the Signs of Safety model does not suggest that child protection workers *not* address poverty, it does put all the worker's focus on child safety and building and maintaining a partnership with a family to work together toward child safety. Where does poverty fit into the Signs of Safety model? In the major text for the approach written by the founding creators (Turnell & Edwards, 1999) there is only one indexed reference to poverty and this is in the literature review on causes of maltreatment. One concern might be that this practice model does not account for the reality of poverty in families' lives, but instead promotes the "myth of classlessness" that Pelton (1989) argues is not a helpful concept to the overall success of child welfare.

Differential or alternative response. One recent child welfare practice framework, hailed as the one of the most significant reforms in child welfare, that might

be more poised to address poverty is differential response (also called alternative response or dual track) (Duva & Metzger, 2010). Implemented across the country including statewide in Minnesota, differential response is a model of child welfare practice that differs from traditional approaches, as it "permits a varied response determined by factors like the type of the alleged maltreatment, the number of previous reports, the age of the child, and the willingness of the parents to participate in services" (Duva & Metzger, 2010, p. 67). The hope of differential response is that *presenting* families with concrete, targeted, and customized interventions will allow for a child to stay safely in their home.

The findings from this study suggest that what is taking place most often when child welfare workers are addressing poverty is accessing direct cash and in-kind assistance, and while this kind of short term assistance is vital to families, it will not get to the underlying causes of poverty (Plotnick, 1992). This limitation of short-term versus long-term levels of addressing poverty was discussed by several workers suggesting that they are aware that the tools they have in their possession, along with social welfare programs in place to support low-income families, are often not enough.

Eliminating Poverty: Cross System Integration Of Child Welfare Agencies and TANF

In addition to looking at child welfare practice frameworks' impact on addressing poverty, another strategy that is currently drawing interest on a national level is the collaborative efforts of child welfare agencies and public assistance agencies to integrate services (Hutson, 2003; Kakusa & Hercik, 2002). Initiatives such as these demonstrate a larger awareness and proactive approach to the dually-involved families they serve. For

example, one initiative between the child welfare and public assistance agencies in El Paso County, Colorado went so far to create a joint mission to eliminate poverty and family violence (Hutson, 2003). Considering the findings from this study about how workers perceived that the *"systems were working against families*," it would be of great interest to learn how child welfare workers in El Paso County differ in the way think about their strategies of addressing poverty and if there would be a reduction in the limitations to do so.

Increase Knowledge about Poverty & Anti-poverty Policies

In light of the finding that some child welfare workers see *individual cause* of poverty more than *structural/systemic causes*, suggests the training child welfare workers receive about poverty may be missing research on key aspects of poverty research, including the racialized and structural inequality in U.S., as seen in the widening racial wealth gap (Shapiro, Meshede & Osoro, 2013). For example, longitudinal data spanning 25 years "found little evidence to support common perceptions about what underlies the ability to build wealth, including the notion that personal attributes and behavioral choices are key pieces of the equation (Shapiro, Meshede & Osoro, 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, a deeper analysis of economic forces, such as low-wage market system and globalization, could help provide child welfare workers with a fuller understanding of poverty in the lives of the families with whom they work. It is in the best interest of families and the child welfare system that workers be well versed in evidenced based frameworks of poverty that dispel the more readily available causes of *luck* and *individual cause*. Therefore, core training of child welfare workers should include

rigorous attention to and inclusion of current poverty research that examines the roots of poverty within the context of the U.S.

In addition, the child welfare system could increase the motivation to use and the knowledge of anti-poverty policies and resulting program as part of their strategies to support families and strengthen families to promote child safety and well-being. A relevant example discussed in this study is the EITC. The EITC is lauded as one of the primary antipoverty policies in the United States, along with the Child Tax Credit. However this study indicates the workers' perspectives on the value and effectiveness of EITC is mixed. In addition, not all workers identified that they thought the EITC was a strategy that child welfare workers used in their practice framework to help families in poverty. Moreover lack of knowledge and misunderstanding about EITC eligibility decreases the likelihood that families could gain helpful information regarding the EITC from child welfare workers.

Increased knowledge and use of the EITC by child welfare system may require explicit information sharing with state DHS commissioners about the value of increased communication with child welfare employees, grounded in the evidence that shows poverty as a risk factor for maltreatment and particularly for child neglect. Second, further communication strategies, and following through with counties about using them, including incentivizing families' application for these credits, could promote all workers' use of the strategy to address poverty.

In addition to the recommendations regarding states' DHS offices, the creation of a core level training module within the state's the centralized training center for all county and tribal child welfare workers, that increases workers' understanding of the

purpose, guidelines and value of EITC and other for families could be a strategy to improve the likelihood that families who are engaged in the child welfare system are utilizing EITC to its fullest benefit. Further, the child welfare training centers could create and institute special half-day trainings focused particularly on child welfare workers and poverty, specifically discussing the relationship between poverty and child welfare, but with a particular emphasis on what policies and practices, such as the EITC, a child welfare worker could utilize to assist families to address poverty in more substantive ways than bus tokens and referrals to food shelves.

Training Initiatives for Workers on Race/Class/Gender

The current approach of cultural competence is one of the main practice models of working with "diversity" in child welfare, both in child welfare training (Pinderhughes, 1997) and social work education (i.e. NASW Code of Ethics 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity, 2013). In addition, cultural competence has also been suggested as a means to address the disportionality of children of color in the child welfare system (Lawrence, Zuckerman, Smith & Liu, 2012). However the findings of this study reveal that workers' constructs of poverty and their perceptions of its cause can be rooted deeply in childhood and young adult experiences that are often important forces in how workers make sense of poverty.

Different approaches to understanding difference exist and some approaches are more focused on a structural and power analysis of systems. Models such as the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) "Undoing Racism" workshops provide a frame of moving beyond understanding the symptoms of racism to thinking about how to undo the causes of racism (PISAB, 2013). The results of this study suggest that a more

experiential discussion of critical issues such as racism, and historical trauma would provide workers an opportunity to examine how these systems have impacted how they think about poverty.

Implications for Education

The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) remains one of social work's foundational theoretical frameworks for understanding human behavior, and is used through the social work curriculum. Moreover, social work's frame of analysis is recognized as "person-in-environment". Both of these constructs communicate what social work hopes will be the field's unique contribution to the social sciences, a frame of analysis that includes the individual and their environment, without a hierarchy of one over the other. However, in a recent article discussing poverty and family policy, Seccombe (2002) states that when it comes to thinking about poverty, this approach, particularly the ecosystemic approach, is limited:

> "The ecosystemic perspective may acknowledge structural factors but it does not give center stage to the role that national and statewide economic policy must play in strengthening families. It continues to reflect U.S. cultural values that individuals are primarily responsible for their own plight and that reliance on government to redistribute wealth is un-American or antithetical to our core values"(p. 389).

Although a swift departure from the ecological model in social work education is not necessarily the answer to this critique, it raises an important question regarding how it is that social work bachelor and master programs teach about poverty. Is it from this ecological framework? And how could we teach about poverty from a different lens, even

in our direct practice classes? Instead of talking about poverty starting from the individual, what if we talked about poverty starting from the systemic perspective, one that starts with historical realities of the United States and situates how racial and gender inequality today continue because of the federal, state and local policies that supported race-based and gender-based discrimination, limiting the access to resources and assets that impacted the evolution of wealth in this country.

In addition to this more structural understanding of poverty, the findings of this study suggest that the way social work education and child welfare training centers define poverty may also be expanded. The economist Amartya Sen (1999) argues that poverty is not only an economic construct, but also the inability to fully participate in society. Recently in the field of social work the discourse about poverty and economic justice has shown signs of increasing.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first area of limitations was the study's design, specifically the mix of grounded theory and intersectional analysis, the challenges of examining social location, and the individual frame of analysis. The second limitation was issues within the sample. The third was the instrumentation, particularly the measurement of SES.

Design

While the design of this study was informed by grounded theory methodology, using semi-structured interviews, it was also shaped by intersectional analysis. Therefore, the study's research questions, which had very directive and specific areas of interest, were not a perfect fit with grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that having

too specific research questions in a grounded theory study limits the researcher's ability to listen to and interpret the data, as the specificity of the questions may pull the researcher into a more narrow understanding of the data. Therefore their recommendation is to have broad enough research questions about the process or phenomenon of interest, which after conducting this study is duly noted. Future studies, with attention to complex understandings of processes such as perception of the cause of poverty, would be conducted with better outcomes if fewer questions with broad, process type areas of investigation were posed.

It may be that another methodology may have been a better fit with the stated research questions. Specifically, the use of a comparative case study, with clear set hypotheses about the relationships, and a systematic approach to hypotheses testing with one participant at a time, with extensive individual focused and comparative analysis, may have proven to be a more fitting methodology for the stated research questions of this study.

Another stark design limitation of this study was the challenge of conducting a grounded theory study but having a very directive focus of wanting to examine the data through the lens of intersectionality. Part of this limitation came from issues described above regarding the fit of the research questions to a grounded theory study. Another part came from the researcher's lack of experience in conducting research with an intersectional lens. It also came from not being clear from the onset of the study how exactly the intersectional analysis and the grounded theory study were going to work together. These challenges are not unique, as Bowleg (2008) in her recent paper on the challenges of conducting intersectional research in the field of psychology states,

"researchers interested in conducting intersectionality research often have to self- teach and learn through trial and error" (p. 313). Part of the self-learning in this study was to figure out how to conduct research about individual's social location and to do that in an intersectional way.

One learning from this study is the importance of knowing how exactly social locations will be "measured" or operationalized, particularly when asking research questions that include how someone is differently located by race, class and gender, such as the first two questions of this study. Without being clear enough about how social location was going to be measured or determined and then used in analysis throughout the whole study, there were points in this study's data analysis process, particularly during selective and axial coding, when the lack of clarity interfered with the analysis process.

Specifically challenging was the attempt to analyze participants' responses about their definitions of poverty and the perceptions of the causes of poverty using grounded theory methods, while looking through the lens of the race/class/gender demographic data. What became clear in the middle phase of the analysis was a division of approaches was needed. Through reflection and discussion with committee members and colleagues, this researcher determined that the only place to fully investigate differences of race, class and gender within the grounded theory frame was the data from the questions asking *how participants perceived their race, class and gender impacting the way they understood poverty in the context of child welfare*. These data provided the appropriate opportunity for grounded theory analysis using the kind of intersectional approach that was intended from the onset of the study. Then it was determined that using the

intersectional sample categorizations, as described in previous chapters, provided the most meaningful way to look at the differences between social locations to answer the first and second research questions. This analysis became the material for chapter five.

The culmination of these particular limitations and the learnings led to the eventual decision to divide the findings into two parts, the grounded theory model in chapter four, and the intersectional analysis of the data looking particularly at the first two questions in chapter five. Although this split was not ideal, it was determined to be the best way to manage the limitations. In some ways, the study became a form of a multi-methods approach using grounded theory and intersectional analysis as the two methods.

A different design limitation altogether was the study's individual frame of analysis, looking only at public and tribal child welfare workers individual understandings of poverty. The ecological model and intersectional theory are posited in the respective understanding that individuals are shaped by and socially constructed within particular contexts and spheres. A different frame of analysis could have been a systems, organizational or policy frame. The choice to conduct this study from an individual frame, without triangulating the data with administrative data, limits the understanding of the workers' poverty constructs, their perceptions and their practice frameworks to that individual frame. Including more sources of data that could have provided a systems, organizational or policy perspective to the study. Specifically, collecting data from workforce training, MN DHS and tribal entities' communication about how counties and tribes present information to child welfare workers about the

poverty discourse and what the internal policies are about their role in poverty would have helped to address this individual frame limitation.

Sample

The sample in qualitative studies is relevant in terms of saturation of data, but not size. However, as the first two research questions focused on differences between race, ethnicity, class and gender, using a purposeful sampling strategy of sampling for saturation based on these criteria may have provided greater opportunity for depth. It also meant that having smaller numbers of workers of color led to the unsatisfactory choice of having to group workers into "workers of color" group to protect the anonymity of workers during the presentation of findings, rather than distinguishing people by their racial or ethnic identity if they were the only one in that category.

Instrumentation

The third categorical limitation of this study was in the area of instrumentation. The first instrumentation limitation was the lack of extensive measurement of socioeconomic status of the workers, and particularly the lack of self-identified location of class that could be then used across the sample for intra-participant comparison. Also, five out of the six SES demographic questions in the study measured SES experiences from the last 10 years, while only one question measured SES childhood experiences. More questions about childhood along with adding a SES self-identification question would have increased the accurate measurement of SES.

The second instrumentation issue was in the interview guide's lack of social location questions following the questions about workers' construction of poverty and their perceptions of its causes, when the research questions connected with those

questions specifically ask about workers' race, ethnicity, class and gender locations. Therefore, when analyzing the data from these questions there was the lack of participant-defined data linking how their responses could be understood within the context of the matrix of intersectionality. Without this data, the approach taken was to use the demographic categories workers had provided and to apply those categories to interpret how workers differently located by race, ethnicity, class and gender constructed poverty and perceived its causes. Future research approached with an intersectional theory lens would do well to think through issues of how data will be collected that would best allow for the type of analysis desired.

Suggestions for Future Research

This exploratory grounded theory study aimed to understand how public and tribal child welfare workers think about poverty, by examining their construction of poverty, perceptions of its causes, and how workers' translate these ideas into their practice framework. While there were many limitations of this study, the results add a small contribution to the knowledge base of perception of the causes of poverty, and also add one perspective on the complex relationship between poverty and child welfare. The following section outlines how the findings from this study have implications for future research.

Theoretical Model Development and Testing

The nascent model of this study is one step toward understanding the complex process of child welfare workers making sense of poverty in child welfare, the core phenomenon. The model depicts the causal conditions of the core phenomenon, and the intervening and contextual conditions that shape the strategies taken in response to the

core phenomenon. There are several elements that could deepen the model's relevance and meaning. First is the question, what are the consequences of the process as it is defined in this model? In other words, what are the consequences of the strategies child welfare workers take in response to making sense of poverty in their work? Adding an understanding of the consequences in the model is one element that could add to the literature on child welfare workforce retention, and inform child welfare training. The second element would be to explore how the larger system, county organizational discourse and policies around poverty add variability and complexity to the model. In addition, how does supervision impact the processes in the model? These two elements could help to broaden the model to include these structural, organizational and relational frames of analysis.

Construction of Poverty

The findings of this study suggest that there is a difference in how workers overall conceptualize poverty, specifically that there exists more of a basic needs deficit definition and a more expansive *more* than basic needs definition. Understanding the way workers construct poverty was an intentional decision in this study, aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the conceptualization and contextualization of the workers' attitudes (Soss, 2012), something often lacking in perception of the cause of poverty research (Strier, 2008). In addition, the findings provide some evidence that workers' construction of poverty differed when examined by intersectional sample categories of race, class and gender. And finally, the difference between the two main constructions of poverty appear to have some relationship to how workers think about what a child welfare worker can do to address poverty, but not necessarily to how workers perceive

the cause of poverty. To understand these relationships further, additional research is needed.

One line of inquiry would be to test the constructions of poverty found in this study. For instance, how do these constructions hold up with a larger sample of child welfare workers, with particular attention to gathering a sample of workers with a wide range of differences in identity, geographic location, political background, field and level of education, and length of work experience? A second line of inquiry would be to further examine the relationship between workers' construction of poverty and what they think they can do to address it. For example, future survey research could examine workers' conceptualization of poverty, using the two main constructs of this study, *"not getting basic needs met"* and *more than monetary* and then test what kinds of addressing poverty attitudes and actions are selected most often by the worker with each construction. The potential to expand this study's preliminary theoretical model by more fully exploring the relationship between construction of poverty and how it could be addressed would require testing to determine the nature of the relationship, including strength and direction, and what factors might mediate and moderate that relationship.

Perception of the Causes of Poverty

Along with the implications for research regarding the construction of poverty, the finding that workers differently located by race and somewhat by class do differ in the perception of the cause of poverty and in the way they self-identify social location as impacting in their general understanding of poverty suggests that social location is also a relevant line of inquiry for understanding how child welfare workers think about poverty. Three avenues to examine this line of inquiry are suggested here.

First, future research exploring the nature of the relationship between workers' social location and their perception of the causes of poverty could use the cause sub-categories identified in this study with a larger sample to provide evidence, and to shape and clarify a theory regarding the nature of this relationship. Such an investigation would need to include very specific questions that would deepen workers' responses, and additional data sources such as organizational and county level data. Particularly, there is a need to gain a clearer and more extensive measurement of workers' SES, especially workers' childhood experiences.

Second, there is a need for future research that explores the way county-level or state-level initiatives with an undoing racism or anti-racism framework are implemented, and if and how workers who participate in those initiatives describe their construction of poverty, and perception of cause, as well as their practice framework in the context of their clients' poverty.

Third, the intersectional frame used for this study was arguably both a useful analytic tool, as well as a challenge to the analysis and presentation of this study. Future research using an intersectional frame when examining perceptions of the cause of poverty would do well to first identify the social location categories of interest and how these will be measured, and also create a purposeful sampling frame in order to populate an adequate sample for the desired analysis.

Future research examining the relationship between workers' races/ethnicities and the races/ethnicities of the families with whom they are working and their practice framework to address poverty is a step toward designing child welfare workforce training

and social work education practice courses in general, and especially courses that have components that include topics such as diversity, privilege, and systems of oppression.

While future research may more robustly inform the complex nature of how public and tribal welfare workers understand and aim to practice in relation to the poverty faced by the children and families with whom they work, this research suggests the importance of conceptualizing the inquiry with a careful and systematic measurement of both the workers' understanding of the impact of their social location and the inclusion of county and tribal level information about the policies related to poverty and how those may shape workers' responses to the poverty of the family with whom they work.

Finally, as stated in other chapters of this dissertation, to balance the individual frame of this study, studies seeking to understand the relationship between child welfare workers and how they make sense of poverty in child welfare must also approach it from a structural and contextual perspective by identifying the county level policies, culture and discourse on poverty. In addition, to more fully understand how workers address poverty, future research would benefit from observing workers in the field as well as reviewing case notes to collect data on particular strategies involved.

Conclusion

The study of perceptions of the causes of poverty is an area of research that spans disciplines and crosses oceans, leading to a collection of diverse and yet focused body of research. One area of this research is focused on social workers, professionals and students who by profession have been connected to working with vulnerable populations, including the poor, as well as having a professional commitment to social justice (i.e. Bullock, 2004; Clark, 2007; Ljubotina& Ljubotina, 2007; Monnickendam, 2010; Perry,

2001; 2008; Sun, 2001; Weiss and Gal 2007). However, despite the complicated and intertwining relationship between poverty and child welfare, research on child welfare workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty has been missing.

This grounded theory informed study sought to address this gap by examining how public and tribal child welfare workers perceive the causes of poverty, while also examining how they construct poverty and their practice framework regarding poverty in the context of child welfare. This study contributes to the body of knowledge about perceptions of poverty by providing a visual depiction of how child welfare workers in this study make sense of poverty. The construct *"not meeting basic needs"* surfaced as the main poverty definition. Workers perceptions of the cause of poverty often were comprised of multiple cause explanations within one worker, including the four main cause explanations: individual factors, family/generational patterns, structural barriers, and luck. However, differences by race, class and gender were found in workers' perception of cause. In addition, all workers' described how they believed their SES impacted the way they though about poverty in general, while most workers believed their race did also. Gender was not considered to be as impactful. Finally workers identified limitations to addressing poverty, both system and policy-related limitations, and internal messages about what was possible for a child welfare workers to do.

In addition, the study aimed to bridge the practice world of child welfare workers with the ideological framework of the system of child welfare, which is informed by its historical context and located in the particular welfare system of the United States. The child welfare system must not be afraid to walk into the murky conversation about what their role is in the face of extreme income and wealth inequality, and the paternalistic

nature of the child welfare system, as it exists within the larger social welfare context in the United States. Clearly, ending poverty in the lives of families is not something that the child welfare system – in the work of individual workers - is equipped to or should be saddled with the sole responsibility to address. Child welfare workers work a case at a time, and currently their role is not to focus on creating community or policy level change which could help to bring about structural and policy level change. In addition, workers cannot end poverty by working one case at a time when structural factors, rather than individual one predict poverty in the U.S. Therefore, a rigorous conversation about the role of the child welfare system in the context of families lives must ensue.

The child welfare system is not tasked with the insuring the long-term economic health of families, and understanding how child welfare workers explain the causes poverty will not end poverty for the families with whom they work. However, child welfare workers are in the unique position of working with families, many of whom are poor, whose family cohesion, choices, safety, and well-being, some of the fundamental elements of human life are "investigated and managed" by public and tribal child welfare workers, their understanding of poverty, including their conceptualization of it, their perceptions of its cause, and how they make sense of it in their practice are important to understand. Research on how child welfare workers define poverty, perceive its causes and translate that into their practice framework can provide knowledge for the system of child welfare as well as whole social work educators who are often responsible for some degree of child welfare workers' education and training.

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Appendix A: Introductory Email to County Directors & Tribal Entities Directors or Tribal Leaders

Dear [Name of Director],
I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work. I am contacting you to request [Name of County/Tribe] County/Tribe's participation in my dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to explore child welfare workers' understanding of poverty and perceptions of its causes. This study is relevant to the practical work of the child welfare system because it will increase the knowledge of child welfare workers' approach their work related to issues of poverty. In addition, the study's findings could help inform the initial and ongoing training of workers to better serve families struggling with poverty.

I am seeking to work with your county, along with other counties and tribes in the state, to recruit workers that meet the study's inclusion criteria (**Minnesota county or tribal workers who work 25% FTE with child welfare cases, as a direct worker or supervisor).** If you agree, I would either recruit workers by email or by attending a staff meeting. Then, if a worker provides consent, I would interview that worker for approximately one hour, at a convenient location.

If you are interested, as a way of saying "thank you" for participation in the study, I would be happy to come and present on a topic that might be helpful to your staff and that I have research and practice expertise in, such as engaging fathers in child welfare, engaging men in preventing violence against women, or family centered community organizing.

I recognize that the workers' time is very precious and you maybe approached for research participation often, and yet in order to better serve the families served in your county as well as families in general who live in poverty, this knowledge base is important to build as it has direct implications for child welfare workers initial and ongoing training, as well as their academic education. In addition, this study would help to fill a gap in the knowledge base about poverty, which as we know, is one of the most salient issues for many families within the child welfare system.

I would like to contact you by phone in the next few days to discuss this research opportunity. Or if you would like to reach me, my cell phone number is 651-206-5010.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Juliana Carlson

Appendix B: Recruitment to Child Welfare Workers

Dear [Name of County] Staff,

My name is Juliana Carlson. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work, and work at the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. I am contacting you to request your participation in research study that will include county and tribal workers throughout Minnesota who work in the field of child welfare.

The purpose of this study is to explore workers' understanding of poverty and perceptions of its causes in the context of their work in the field of child welfare. This study is relevant to the practical work of the child welfare system because it will increase the knowledge of how child welfare workers' approach their work related to issues of poverty. In addition, the study's findings could help inform the initial and ongoing training of workers who serve families struggling with poverty and issues surrounding it.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Complete an interview of 12-13 main questions about your understanding of poverty and its causes in the context of your work in child welfare, as well 15 written demographic questions. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes, but no more than 60 minutes to complete. There is a possibility that second brief check-in interview may be scheduled, that would be less than 30 minutes to follow up on the initial findings. All interviews will be recorded.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, **please review the attached consent form**, and if you have any questions please contact me via email (carl3902@umn.edu) or phone at (651) 206-5010. After all your questions are answered, please sign the consent form, and either 1) scan the signed consent form and email it to me, or 2) mail the consent form to me at: 1178 Burns Ave. St. Paul, MN 55106.

When I receive your consent form, I will contact you directly to set up an interview, to take place at a convenient location.

Sincerely,
Juliana Carlson

Appendix C: Demographics Form

Demographics Form

Q1 What is your job title? _____

Q2 County of employment: _____

Q3 How long have you worked as a child welfare worker or had child welfare cases?

_____Years _____Months

Q4 What percentage of your time is used on addressing poverty related issues with/for families? (Please circle one)

a. 0-25%

b. 25-50%

c. 50-75%

d. More than 75%

Q5 What field is your undergraduate degree in? _____

Q6 Do you have a master's degree?

No

Yes → If yes, what is your master's degree in? _____

Q7 How do you describe / identify your race/ethnicity?

_____

Q8 How old are | | you?

Q9 What gender do you identify yourself as?

Male Female Transgendered Other_____

Q10 Do you own your residence?

Yes No

Q11 How often in the last 10 years have you had to choose between paying bills and buying food?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Q12 How often in the last 10 years have you have you worried about not being able to afford adequate housing?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Q13 During the past 10 years, how often when you needed medical care did you delay getting the care you needed because of cost or lack of insurance?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Q14 Thinking about the last 10 years, how often have you been worried about your employment providing sufficient income for you family's needs?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Q15 How often in your childhood do you recall being aware of financial stress in your house, such as parents arguing about money, or statements about not having enough money?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Semi-structure Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Today I want to ask you questions about how you view poverty in general, what you think are the causes of poverty and how poverty relates to child welfare. I am also interested in how different workers' backgrounds may impact their views. I am going to ask you a series of questions, and then I have a form for you to complete, that provides space for you to provide demographic information. Your responses to the questions and the demographic information will remain confidential, and at no time in the analysis or presentation of the data will any identifying information be used.

I am going to be using the term child welfare through the interview. When I use this term, I am including the whole system of child welfare that Minnesota counties are responsible for where children's safety in the context of their relationships with their "family" is central.

At any point in the interview, you can ask me questions or ask for clarification. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

First off, if you can tell me what your current title is and the county you work for.

1. When you first started working for the county with child welfare cases, what was one reason you began?

2. And currently, how many families are on your caseload? How many are child welfare cases?
    a. Of those families how many would you identify as low-income?

3. When you think about the word poverty, how do you define it? What is poverty?
    a. When you think then about child poverty, how would you define that?

4. What do you think are the causes of poverty?
    a. How do you explain why some people are poor and others are not?

    b. Are there particular experiences that you draw on or that shape your understanding of poverty?

5. Do you think that some families who interact with the child welfare system experience poverty differently than others? Why or why not?
    a. How does poverty look when you think about differences in race, gender of head of household, and family structure for families living in poverty?
6. If a family in your county is living in poverty, what **could** a child welfare worker do to address that family's poverty?
    a. What are the limits to what a child welfare worker can do for a family living in poverty?
    b. Are those limits bound by the county policies, federal policies, other?
7. What do you think is the role of a child welfare worker in anti-poverty efforts for their families, such as Earned Income Tax Credit, and Individual Development Accounts?
8. What do you think is the role of child welfare system in advocating for policy changes, or system changes, like welfare reform, or poverty reduction?
9. In what ways could your gender impact the way you think about poverty in the context of child welfare?
10. In what ways do you think your race impacts the way you think about poverty in the context of child welfare?
11. How about your particular experience of economic status?
12. Do you think your views about what child welfare workers can do about poverty has changed over time? If so, how have they changed?

13. Do you define yourself as a social worker?

If yes:

13a. In what ways do you think being trained as a social worker impacts the way you think about poverty, in the context of child welfare?

13b. How do you think your perceptions of the causes of poverty are different because of your social work training?

Appendix E: Informed Consent Document

Information Sheet for Research

Child Welfare Workers' Understanding of Poverty

You are invited to be in a research study of child welfare workers' understanding of poverty. You were selected as a possible participant because you work, or have worked (in the last 18 months) with child welfare cases 25% FTE in the state of Minnesota. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Juliana Carlson (University of Minnesota) doctoral candidate.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore child welfare workers' understanding of poverty and its causes in the context of their work in child welfare. The findings from this study will increase the knowledge of base of how child welfare workers' understand poverty and its causes in the context of their work, with particular interest in the relationship between child welfare practice and child welfare workers' understanding of poverty, in light of current child welfare and overarching social welfare policy.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Complete an interview of 12-13 main questions about your understanding of poverty and its causes in the context of your work in child welfare, as well 15 written demographic questions. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes, but no more than 60 minutes to complete. A second interview may be scheduled, that would be less than 30 minutes to follow up on the first interview. All interviews will be recorded.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:
There is minimal known or anticipated risk due to the nature of discussing issues related to poverty in the context of the child welfare system for those participating in this study. In addition, participants will be asked about their economic status, which may be considered personal in nature.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. An indirect benefit of participation is that the responses will help contribute to the knowledge base in the fields

of child welfare and social work about the critical intersection of poverty and child welfare.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is: Juliana Carlson, AM. You may ask any questions you have now or later. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact Juliana at University of Minnesota-School of Social Work, 651-206-5010, carl3902@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you can call the University of Minnesota Fairview Research Helpline at telephone number 612-672-7692 or toll free at 866-508-6961. You may also contact the Fairview Research Helpline in writing or in person. They are located at University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview Riverside Campus, 2200 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55454.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Appendix F: Example of Matrix

	Addressing Poverty		
	"Resource Broker" (Resources for basic needs)	Advocacy Perspective (Workers' frame of mind)	EITC
Jane			
Millie			
David			
Lois			
Thelma			
Violet			
Sherrie			
Rachel			
Jennifer			
Tom			
Michelle			
Bruce			
Alice			
Stacey			
Charese			
Laura			
Francesa			
Beth			
Tonya			
Maria			
Kristen			
Gail			
Keisha			
Ernestine			
Monica			
Rose			
Mae			
Holly			
Loriane			
Zelda			