“This is how we show up for our relatives”: Understanding how Indigenous relative caregivers embody traditional kinship to resist the colonial child welfare system

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Dedication

I was taught that when children pass away, they go straight to the Creator's world. I am dedicating this dissertation to the thousands of Indigenous children murdered by residential and boarding schools, and other forms of colonial violence. The only comfort I can find is in their immediate ascent to the Creator's world. To the Indigenous children of today, including those who call me Aknulha and future generations, I do this work with love for you.

Abstract

This study responds to the gravity of the ongoing removal of Indigenous children, the intractability of colonization in the child welfare system, the glaring absence of Indigenous voices and their distinct experiences in the professional, empirical child welfare literature, and dearth of studies that implement Indigenous methodologies. Grounded in Indigenous Storywork and Aknulha (Mother/Aunty in Oneida) methodologies, this qualitative study sought to understand (10) Indigenous relative caregivers' experiences with the colonial child welfare system, how they live their traditional kinship beliefs and practices amidst ongoing colonialism and their desires for Indigenous child welfare. Findings identified specific forms of colonialism still inflicted upon Indigenous children and families in the modern child welfare system. The child welfare system perpetrates ongoing removal and separation, a form of colonial violence as a vehicle for implementing assimilative practices. Relative caregivers also exposed how the child welfare system continues to impose the modern colonial gender system, continuing a legacy of government sponsored civilizing educations programs to assimilate through racializing and genderizing Indigenous families. Second, this study revealed, what Lugones (2007) called "sites of resistance", the knowledge of Indigenous relative caregivers who are actively living our traditional intergenerationally transmitted kinship knowledge and practices to resist the child welfare systems and protect our children from ongoing colonialism, removal and separation. Implications for tribes, social work and child welfare are presented.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study addresses one of the most serious issues facing Indigenous People, our communities, and future generations today: a modern-day legacy of forced removal of Indigenous[1] children by North American colonial child welfare systems. For too long, settler governments have been forcefully removing Indigenous children from our families and communities for the purpose of colonization. The over removal of Indigenous children by the child welfare system is akin to the forced removal practices of boarding schools, the Indian Adoption Project and other colonizing projects. Despite the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and various community-based reforms, intended to halt removal, the child welfare system continues to remove Native children at disparate rates. This study responds to the gravity of the ongoing removal of Indigenous children, the intractability of colonization in the child welfare system, the glaring absence of Indigenous voices and their distinct experiences in the professional, empirical child welfare literature, and dearth of studies that implement Indigenous methodologies. For these reasons, I sought to understand Indigenous relative caregivers' experiences with the colonial child welfare system, how they live their traditional kinship beliefs and practices amidst ongoing colonialism and their desires for Indigenous child welfare.

Current state of child welfare with Indigenous Peoples[2]

[1] For consistency, we will refer to Indigenous communities and peoples of North America (Canada and the U.S.) as "Indigenous," unless their specific tribal, Indigenous, First Nation or Aboriginal names are specified in the research or when referring to a specific law (e.g., Indian Child Welfare Act).

[2] Some portions of the chapter are updated versions from our published scoping study which was the background for this specific study (see Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener & Marsalis, 2018).

Settler child welfare systems continue to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities at disparate rates. In Minnesota, the disproportionate removal of Indigenous families in the child welfare system is reflected at multiple system levels. Nationally, Indigenous children have the highest rates of out-of-home care with 13 in care per 1000 compared to 4.2 for whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). In Canada, Indigenous children comprise 52 per cent of foster children under 14 years of age despite representing just eight per cent of that age group in the Canadian population (Statistic Canada, 2016).

Disparate removal rates persist in the U.S. and Canada despite legislation designed to halt the removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities. In the U.S., the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (U. S. Public Law 95-608) was passed at the demand of the tribes to halt the removal of Indigenous children by the child welfare system from their families and communities and reclaim Indigenous cultures. It focuses on Indigenous family preservation as integral to tribal sovereignty and reparative justice (Red Horse et al., 2000). It recognizes that the removal of Indigenous children from their families is devastating not only for their families, but for Indigenous communities as a whole. Maintaining Indigenous children in Indigenous homes and communities ensures continuation of Indigenous survival and life for future generations.

ICWA places exclusive jurisdiction of child welfare laws and regulations on tribal lands with tribes. In urban areas or places off reservation, ICWA requires tribal notification by county or state child protection agencies of child maltreatment allegations and child custody proceedings involving Indigenous children eligible for tribal enrollment. The law requires "active efforts" before placing children in foster care, which

is a higher standard than "reasonable efforts" used before removing non-Indigenous children from their families. To remove Indigenous children from their families, the law requires testimony by a qualified expert witness (QEW) familiar with the child's culture. If out-of-home care (removal) is necessary, the law also specifies preferences for placements first with relatives, then members of the child's tribe and, lastly, another Indigenous family. Only after these placements have been considered can a child be placed with a non-Indigenous family.

Unlike child welfare in the U.S., child welfare in Canada has several systems (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Child welfare mandates differ across the 13 provincial/territorial areas. Each provincial system is shaped by federal, provincial, and First Nations legislation. There is no universal definition of child maltreatment across the Provinces. Despite a shared goal of protecting children from abuse, and basic understandings of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment, and exposure to interpersonal violence or substance abuse (Sinha, et. al., 2011), Sinclair (2016) declared that "Indigenous Child Removal System" perpetuates the same cultural genocide since European contact. She claims it is a continuation of the 60's scoop, that "scooping" (forced removal) continues via the legal and child welfare systems and these systems must be dismantled (Sinclair, 2016).

In view of the high rates of removal of Indigenous children, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has made major changes in its rules to strengthen compliance with ICWA and enhance the preservation of tribal communities by maintaining families and safeguarding children's connection to their communities (Federal Register, 2016; U. S. Department of the Interior, 2016). Additionally, the Minnesota Indian Family Protection Act (MIFPA) is

the Minnesota statute that expands portions of ICWA to strengthen the preservation Native families, tribal identity and cultures. It also expands the capacity to provide guidance regarding the best interest of American Indian children involved in Minnesota's child welfare system (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2018). These attempts to resolve high rates of removal through improved oversight, training, and implementation and compliance of ICWA have not resulted in the anticipated reduction in removal. In Minnesota, one-third of counties failed to follow ICWA law, including almost half of the counties that surround reservations. In 2020, the state of Minnesota began financially penalizing counties who fail to follow ICWA law. This has been the first time the state has administered penalties for ICWA non-compliance (MN Native News, 2020).

Major ICWA implementation and compliance problems persist despite these efforts and Indigenous children continue to suffer within the U.S. child welfare system (Evans-Campbell, 2006) in part because Eurocentric values and goals are embedded into the fabric of the system itself. Bussey and Lucero (2013) summarized three fears faced by Indigenous families when encountering the child welfare system: a fear of losing their children as have others before them, the caseworker's lack of cultural knowledge, and being judged as an inadequate parent based on non-Indigenous cultural values. Furthermore, they point out that European American-based approaches to child welfare stress individualism, independence, confidentiality, and authority through formal education. These values not only conflict with traditional Indigenous values, but they also mirror assimilationist policy of the late 19th century, including Indian boarding schools

and the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887[3] that devastated Indigenous communities (Adams, 1995). From an Indigenous perspective, families are strengthened through kinship bonds; community and tribal connections; values and traditions; language; spirituality, and cultural practices (see Red Horse et al., 2000).

This leaves Indian families in state of precarity; constantly measured against an unspoken white, middle-class standard. This has led to a call to decolonize the child welfare system. As we move to decolonize child welfare and reclaim our own Indigenous self-determined forms of Indigenous child welfare, addressing the immense colonial violence perpetrated by the child welfare system is also critical.

Background

> "The long-continued policy of removing Indian children from the home and placing them for years in boarding school largely disintegrates the family and interferes with developing normal family life. The belief has apparently been that the shortest road to civilization is to take children away from their parents and insofar as possible to stamp out the old Indian life" Meriam, 1928, p. 15.

Indigenous child removal in historical context

Before I discuss colonization and genocide, I must acknowledge that the history of Turtle Island and Indigenous Peoples did not begin with the colonial era as many western centered historical accounts and texts claim. Indigenous history began thousands

[3] The Dawes Act aimed to assimilate and civilize American Indians through replacing their relational connection to lands with individualistic notions of private property, making Indigenous notions of land "savage" (Adams, 2005; Deloria & Lytle, 1983; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The Dawes Allotment Act was devastating to Indigenous Peoples, reducing Indigenous territories from 138 million acres in 1887 to only 52 million in 1934 (Pommersheim, 1995).

of years prior when Indigenous people lived and thrived on Turtle Island. However, it's also important to contextualize our current issues with more truthful accounts in that moment in time. Indigenous genocide and historical trauma in Turtle Island are manifested today in many forms of oppression, violence, and structural racism including within child welfare systems (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins & Altschul, 2011). The colonization of Indigenous Peoples is a very traumatic part of our history, but so is our survivance, strengths, knowledge systems, and connection to our lands. Despite the destruction of colonization and genocide, many contemporary Indigenous nations embrace the Seven Generations Philosophy. This philosophy considers how each decision made today will affect the next seven generations and beyond (Lyons, n.d.) and to ensure the survival and reclamation of our lifeways amidst ongoing colonization. However, we must remain vigilant in recognizing ongoing colonialism in every aspect of our society so that we can resist and revitalize who we are as Indigenous Peoples. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that many of our grandparents and great-grandparents were subjected to blatant child removal policy for the purpose of "civilization" that continues today in child welfare systems.

Federal Oversight: Land theft and Assimilation through civilizing education projects

Family Education

The theft of Indigenous lands hinged upon the destruction and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. During the late 19th century, the U.S. federal government's greed led to land theft in the west for the purpose of white settlement. Natives were forcefully removed, severed from the sustenance, emotional and spiritual ties and legal claims to

their lands and forced onto reservations (Cahill, 2011). In her historical analysis of the federal Indian Service from 1863 to 1933, Cahill (2011) found that the goal of land seizure centered on the assimilation and civilization of Native Peoples, including the destruction of Native cultures, removing and separating Native children from their families, destroying Indigenous marriage relations, and forcing Indigenous families to conform to white, middle class gender norms (Cahill, 2011, p. 3).

Indeed, Cahill (2011) illustrated how the Indian Service imposed "Anglo gender identity" through civilizing education projects for adults and children. Children were subjected to the "Indian School Service" in 1882, and removed far from home (Cahill, 2011). For adults, Cahill (2011) explained that adult education for males consisted of the Farmer Program to teach them how to take care of the newly allotted lands as a result of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 in order to take care of their western nuclear family. Indigenous women were subjected to training by field matrons to learn "appropriate household skills on their newly allotted lands", to transform land into "landscapes to fit their vision of an ideal home" (Cahill, 2011, p. 46).

Boarding and Residential Schools

Boarding schools (Residential schools in Canada) were one way that settler governments enacted their policies of forced civilization and assimilation for Indigenous children. Beginning in the early 1800s and continuing well into the 20th century, Indigenous families and children were victims of U.S. and Canadian governments' efforts to forcefully and brutally assimilate Indigenous people. The assimilation of children focused on separation and removal from their family and community influence, forced into schools far away from their families (Grande, 2004). The goal was to sever

Indigenous children from their families and communities via off-reservation boarding schools in order to assimilate to European American culture (Adams, 1995; Grande, 2004).

The U.S. government established boarding schools during the late 19th through the mid-20th centuries. These schools were carceral and subjected children to many forms of abuse including beatings, starvation, and public humiliation (Cahill, 2011), and a "para-militaristic structure of forced labor and 'patriotic' propaganda (Grande, 2004, p. 18). Native children were not only deprived of the care, nurturance and protection of their families and communities, many experienced abduction and then emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, disease, and malnutrition (Adams, 1995; Child, 1998, Lomawaima, 1994; Smith, 2004). Many Native children died as a result of these harsh conditions, and some were murdered in these schools. The forced separation of children from their families and communities during the U.S. boarding school era continues to affect Indigenous families and communities in the form of historical trauma and historical unresolved grief, according to Brave Heart, et. al. (2011).

Indigenous children in Canada also were stolen from their families by the foreign settler Canadian government. In 1920, the Canadian government mandated that all Indigenous children of school age attend carceral residential schools. During the height of the Residential School System Era in the 1930s and 1940s, between 90,000 and 100,000 children were forcefully institutionalized for the purposes of eradicating Indigenous culture, language, and life (see Blackstock, 2011; Johnston, 1983; Milloy, 1999). The Canadian government's brutal implementation of residential schools has severely impacted generations of Indigenous people. In their study of second-generation

residential school survivors, Bombay, Matheson & Anisman (2011) found that depressive symptoms were higher among adults who had at least one parent attend residential school. Likewise, in another study, Bombay and colleagues (2014) reviewed historical trauma literature that assessed the intergenerational impacts on myriad of health and social outcomes and confirmed a relationship between residential school attendance and psychological distress. The residential school experiences also impacted the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to overcome damage to their identities and collective functioning (Matheson, Bombay, Haslam & Anisman, 2016). Finally, Bombay and colleagues (2020), found significant relationships between children of residential school survivors and their experiences in the foster care system and childhood adversity.

Along with ongoing forced removal, historical trauma continues to haunt our current generations of Indigenous communities. In 2021, 215 bodies of Indigenous children were uncovered in a mass grave at Kamloops Residential School (Seneca Nation of Indians, 2021). As I write this dissertation, I am grieving with my Indigenous relatives across Turtle Island.

Indian Adoption

Although most of these schools closed in the 1950s and 1960s, the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities continued during the "Sixties Scoop" in Canada. Through the late 1950s and into the 1980s, thousands of Indigenous children were "scooped" (forcibly removed) by the Canadian government from their families and communities and adopted into predominantly white, middle class families in Canada and the U.S. As a result of these forced removal practices, many adoptees experienced cultural identity loss and a broken connection to their families and

communities (White Hawk, 2015). Their forced removal from their birth families and communities continues to undermine adult adoptees and Indigenous communities today. (See Blackstock, 2011; Johnston, 1983; Milloy, 1999).

Similarly, near the end of the U.S. boarding school era, the federal government focused on a different assimilative experiment on Native American children and families. In 1957, the Bureau of Indian Affairs partnered with the Child Welfare League of America to create the Indian Adoption Project (Balcom, 2007; Fanshel, 1972; George, 1997; Jacobs, 2013). The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America hired social workers to adopt almost 800 Native children to white families from 1958 – 1967 (Balcom, 2007). Thibeault & Spencer (2019) found that social workers were involved in the direct adoption practices, administration and research of the Indian Adoption project, and they were working within the scope of their code of ethics at the time. As a contractor with the Child Welfare League of America, David Fanshel (1972) conducted a study from the perspective of 97 white adoptive parents and found transracial adoption practices were good for the Indian child and family (Fanshel, 1972). Given the lack of perspective of Indigenous adoptees, their families and communities, it's not surprising this study yielded positive results in favor of transracial adoption. It's evident today that transracial adoption of Native children has created a traumatic legacy for adoptees, their families and communities (White Hawk, 2015).

Social work's Involvement in civilizing education projects

> "Social work has a negative connotation with Indigenous peoples and is often associated with the theft of our children, destruction of families, and oppression in Aboriginal communities" Sinclair, 2004, p. 1

Raven Sinclair's (2004) statement reflects Indigenous People's traumatic experiences at the intersection of social work and child welfare and the profession's long history of forced removal and separation of Indigenous children. Although the child welfare workforce comprises workers with degrees outside of social work (National Association of Social Workers (2013), the social work profession has been the leader in developing standards for child welfare practice. Social workers have historically served critical roles in child welfare (NASW, 2013). Additionally, in their study on public perceptions of social work, Calhoun and colleagues found that 98% of the Minnesota public think social workers work in child welfare, specifically "child abuse and neglect" (Calhoun, Lightfoot, Okamoto, Goodenough, & Zheng, 2020). Clearly, the social work profession is closely linked to child welfare, therefore, I would be remiss if I didn't offer a critique of social work in the same vein as child welfare as colonial projects.

The social work profession emerged in the late 1800s as white upper-class white women were immersed in philanthropy. Philanthropist, missionary and social reformer Anna Laurens Dawes called for professional social work training at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1893 (Trattner, 1999). She was daughter of Senator Henry Dawes, author of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, a devastating Indian land policy that severed Indigenous Peoples from their lands to be reduced to private property in the name of civilization (Deloria & Lytle, 1983). Anna Dawes believed that civilizing the Indian was a missionary's duty and advocated for the social work to play a role in the civilization process. In her piece titled "The Present Need of Indians" (1896) she argued for the necessity of missionary work and Christianity to develop the moral being of the heathen savage to civilization (Dawes, 1896):

> "At this present time the need of the Indians for missionaries is greater than ever before. They have reached not only a new crisis, but a crisis of a new kind. Practically speaking the Government has done what it can for the, or very nearly all. The Indian has law, land, education, he is fast becoming absorbed in the surrounding people, but never was he in worse need. All these great fundamental principles of social life have been thrust upon him, oft against his will and largely unprepared; certainly, with very little comprehension of their resulting privileges or duties. He needs a friend beside him at every step. Thrust out into an alien and hostile community, he is in some sense in a worse case then when he dwelt along in undisturbed barbarianism." Dawes, 1896, p. 85-86.

In the 1920's the Institute for Government Research commissioned Lewis Meriam to investigate the poor conditions on Indian reservations. Critical of the implementation of the Dawes Act and boarding schools, Meriam argued that social work was particularly suited to engage in the work of Indian betterment (Meriam, 1929) and that social workers be dispersed to civilize the Indian within his natural ties (p. 403); that the Indian's "point of view" could be best changed in his "home conditions" (p. 221). Just as "qualified college women with training in family casework" had dealt with "foreign born children" in the urban areas, the social worker could likewise manage Indian children (p. 420). Julia Lathrop, notable social work pioneer and Director of the United States Children's Bureau, responded to Meriam's call establishing decades long cooperation with the Indian Service emphasizing the necessity of providing "trained workers to help the Indians, training that should include courses in manners" (in Meriam, 1929, p. 553). The

Bureau went on to fund the aforementioned Indian Adoption project (Johnston-Goodstar & Waubanascum, 2021).

As social work evolved as a profession, its missionary motives remained evident, particularly toward notions of the family. Heralded as an early pioneer of social work, Edith Abbott proclaimed that the "ordinary family" was accepted as a "fundamental principle of social work" (p. 7). In her publication "Social Welfare and Professional Education" (1942), Abbott described social work's adherence to the "ordinary family" citing the Second Annual Report of the Board of State Charities (Massachusetts Board of State Charities,1866), which described the "ordinary family" a heteronormative patriarchal structure (1866, p. xlv-xlvii). Coupled with missionary, assimilative, and philanthropic duty, early social workers sought to erase savage Indigenous kinship structures to replace them with civilized heteronormative structures. Social work accepted and carried out policies and practices as the federal government sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples through boarding schools (Adams, 2005; Sinclair, 2004), Indian Adoption Project (Balcom, 2007; Fanshel, 1972; George, 1997; Jacobs, 2013; Thibeault & Spencer, 2019), and continues to though modern social systems (Sinclair, 2004; Tamburro, 2013).

Ongoing colonialism still exists in modern social work (Tamburro, 2013). Today, social welfare practices and policies, including child welfare, continue to enforce western family ideals and submerge Indigenous lifeways. Abramovitz (1996) described that social order and social systems are entrenched with the "colonial family ethic" (p. 52), the western family structures, grounded in patriarchy, the subordination of women, enforcement of family and marriage comprise social order. Social workers often carry out

policies that are entrenched in the colonial family ethic (Abramovitz, 1996). Hart (2002) urged that social workers are not meant to challenge colonization. Social work education programs funnel social workers trained in Eurocentric social work paradigms to work with Tribal communities and in government agencies like child welfare that maintain control over Indigenous families. Absolon (2019) cautioned that without addressing ongoing colonization and decolonial responses within social work education, social work students will continue to perpetuate harm and injustice to Indigenous communities under the guise of helping and altruism (Hart, 2002).

Chapter 2: Literature Review[4]

This review of literature was sensitized by multiple conversations with Indigenous elders from the Ojibwe (including Priscilla Day, personal communication, November 21, 2017) and Fond du lac (including Julia Jaakola, personal communication, March 19, 2018) tribes, as well as their writings (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000). For decades, Indigenous elders and scholars, who have personally experienced the impact of colonialization and historical trauma in their own families and communities, have been practicing, explicating, and advocating for culturally-based child welfare practices to improve services to Indigenous families (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000).

Approximately half (N=19, 51%) of the reviewed studies were concerned with understanding disparities, primarily in out-of-home placements (N=10). However, they included studies of kinship adoption (N=1), the prescription of psychotropic medication to child welfare-involved children (N=1), parents' access to services (N=1), outcomes of

[4] The Review of the Literature chapter is an updated version of our published scoping study that served as the literature review for this specific study (see Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener & Marsalis, 2018).

adult foster alumni (N=2), use of differential response (N=1), maltreatment substantiations (N=2) and investigations (N=1).

Several other studies (N=11, 30%) focused on culturally based child protection practices and principles within Indigenous tribes and communities. Three additional studies (8%) provided some evaluation data on practice models with varying levels of cultural foundations. Two more studies (5%) evaluated compliance with ICWA. One study focused specifically on the experiences of Indigenous parents providing foster care (3%), and one of Indigenous professionals (3%). (See Table 1).

Most of the studies (65%, N=24) used methods and perspectives from outside of Indigenous cultures. Even if these studies included Indigenous authors, most analyzed data from administrative records or secondary data sources collected primarily by non-Indigenous professionals, or used instruments developed within other cultural contexts. In contrast, 10 studies (27%) prioritized the insider perspectives and experiences of Indigenous professionals (N=6), community members (N=2), both community members and professionals (N=1), and foster parents (N=1). With the exception of assessments of three evaluation studies (8%) that included both insider and outsider perspectives, the experiences of parents involved with child welfare are notably absent. Also notably absent are the perspectives and experiences of children and youth. (See Table 1).

Eleven studies (30%) employed qualitative methods, and two studies (5%) employed mixed methods with an emphasis on the quantitative component. Most of the studies (N=24, 65%) used quantitative methods, and most of these studies (N=15) used large, nationally representative data bases including the National Survey of Child and

Adolescent Well-being NSCAW)[5] (N= 5), National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)[6] (N=1), the Canadian Incidence or First Nations Canadian Incidence Study (CIS, FN-CIS)[7] (N=6).

Only six studies (16%) focused on specific tribes: Passamaquoddy and Maliseet, Ojibwe (n=2), Wabanaki, Inuit and Weechi-it-te-win limiting understanding of variation across diverse Indigenous cultures and specific local/tribal experiences and practices.

Why disparities persist

In the U.S., Indigenous children have the highest rates of out-of-home care with 13 in care per 1000 compared to 4.2 for whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). Indigenous children are 1.9 times more likely to be subjects of alleged maltreatment reports than are white children (Children's Bureau, 2018). In Minnesota,

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[5] NSCAW is a representative longitudinal survey of children and families who have been the subjects of child protection service investigations in the United States. It uses reports from children, parents, caregivers, caseworkers, and teachers, as well as data from administrative records. It used two cohorts from 1999 to 2012 including 12,000 children and 75,000 variables. The first cohort contained 6200 children aged birth to 14 years from a national sample of child welfare agencies across the country followed for five to six years. The second cohort had 5800 children aged birth to 17.5 years followed for three years. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Admin for Children and Families, Ofc of Planning, Research & Evaluation, Resource Library. (2018). National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), 1997-2014 and 2015-2022. (Retrieved April 2018) https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-child-and-adolescent-well-being-nscaw

[6] NCANDS is a federally sponsored child maltreatment data collection system involving all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico established in response to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988. States annually submit data of all reports of alleged child abuse and neglect that received child protection services response. Case level data elements include child data, types of maltreatment, findings, child and caregiver risk factors, services, and perpetrator data. Agency level data include prevention and response services and caseload and workforce statistics. (HHS, ACF, Research Data & Technology National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, 2018).

[7] "The Canadian Incident Study" of reported child abuse and neglect is conducted every 5 years from child maltreatment reports to child welfare agencies in Canada. Findings are divided into abuse and neglect, maltreatment characteristics, investigation outcomes, child characteristics, household characteristics, referral characteristics, and agency characteristics. The study is a collaborative effort of federal, provincial and territorial governments, university-based researchers, Aboriginal Child & Family Caring Society, child advocacy groups, and child welfare service providers. The FN-CIS is the First Nation subset of CIS. (Public Health Agency of Canada, Ottawa, ON. (Retrieved April 2018) ISBN 978-1-100-16915-6 http://cwrp.ca/cis-2008/study-documents

Indigenous children are 5 times more likely than white children to be subjects of an allegation of maltreatment in a Child Protective Services (CPS) accepted report. This disproportionality is even higher than that of Black children who are 3 times more likely than white children to be subjects of maltreatment reports (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2018). Nationally, Indigenous children have the highest rates of out-of-home care with 13 in care per 1000 compared to 4.2 for whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). In Minnesota, 96.4 Indigenous children per 1000 were in out-of-home care in 2014 compared 5.5 white children. The number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care in Minnesota has increased from 77.7 children per 1000 in 2005, while most other groups have decreased. Finally, Indigenous children in Minnesota have the highest rates of re-entry into out-of-home placement within 12 months following family reunification (27.3% vs 21.7% for white children). (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2015).

In Canada, Indigenous children comprise 52 per cent of foster children under 14 years of age despite representing just eight per cent of that age group in the Canadian population (Statistic Canada, 2016). In the U.S., Indigenous children under approximately age 17 have the highest rate (14.2 per 1000) of substantiated maltreatment reports (Children's Bureau, 2018), and are removed and placed in foster care at a rate 3.3 times the rate for white children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; Kids Count, 2016).

Several related issues emerged from the studies pertinent to understanding disparities experienced by Indigenous children in the child welfare system.

Social issues faced by many families who experience child welfare are more severe for Indigenous families

Social issues such as poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence, among others experienced by many families who encounter the child welfare system are relatively more severe for Indigenous than non-indigenous families, likely resulting from historical trauma (Brave Heart, et. al., 2011). Some studies suggest that these issues may contribute to disparities in child welfare system removal. In particular, low income is associated with findings of neglect (Bunting, Davidson, McCartan, Hanratty, Bywaters, Mason & Steils, 2018; Deater-Deckard & Oanneton, 2017). In Canada, child welfare-involved Indigenous families tend to experience greater economic poverty than other child welfare-involved families (e.g., Sinha, Ellenbogen & Trocmé, 2013). Indeed, neglect is the largest category of investigation for Indigenous families (e.g., Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2013). Using the 2008 CIS data, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha et al., 2013) found that neglect only was the largest category of investigations for Indigenous children, and the proportion of Indigenous cases that involved neglect only was significantly higher than for non- Indigenous cases (41.2% versus 27%). Using the 2008 First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (FNCIS-2008) data, they again found that the overrepresentation of Indigenous children relative to non- Indigenous children in investigations was particularly pronounced for neglect (Disproportionality ratio=6) (Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2013).

In Canada, other social issues often associated with poverty such as housing problems (Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin & Blackstock, 2010; Sinha et al., 2013),

single parenting (Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004), and alcohol/other substance abuse problems (Sinha et al., 2013; Trocmé et al., 2004) also are more intense for child welfare-involved Indigenous than non-Indigenous families. Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Ellenbogen & Trocmé, 2013) also found that Canadian workers identified a significantly greater percentage of investigated Indigenous than non- Indigenous households on every caregiver or household risk factor examined except "health issues." Caregiver risk factors were substance abuse, history of foster care/group home, domestic violence, few social supports and multiple risk factors. In addition to low income, household risk factors were housing problems, caregiving resource strain and multiple household risks.

These Canadian findings of the relatively intense social issues experienced by Indigenous families who were subjected to investigations are consistent with those pertaining to families with children in out-of-home care. Based on their analysis of data from the 1998 CIS, Trocmé and colleagues (Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004) attribute the overrepresentation of Indigenous children both with substantiated cases and those in out-of-home care to disproportionate risk factors experienced by their families. They found extremely high rates of hardships among Indigenous families compared to other families including unstable housing, alcohol and drug use, and intergenerational maltreatment. They found that proportionately more cases from Indigenous families involved neglect than other families and family heads were more often single. Likewise, Fluke and colleagues' (Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin & Blackstock, 2010) analyses of the CIS 1998 data indicate that poverty and poor housing significantly account for over representation of Indigenous families with children in out-of-home care.

Canadian findings of the intense level of social challenges experienced by Indigenous families relative to other families who encounter the child welfare system are consistent with available U.S. data. Based on a case record review of children in out-of-home care in a Minnesota county, Donald and colleagues (Donald, Bradley, Day, Critchley & Nuccio, 2003) found that Indigenous children were more likely to be exposed to physical neglect than their non- Indigenous counterparts. Their families were mostly single-parent households experiencing poverty. Although alcohol use was a significant problem for both Indigenous and other families, rates were significantly higher among Indigenous families (Donald et al., 2003. See also O'Brien, Pecora, Echohawk, Evans-Campbell, Palmanteer-Holder & White, 2010). In a series of studies using data from the NACAW research, Carter (2009, 2010, 2011) found that Indigenous children in the U.S. in out-of-home care came from more economically insecure homes than did children from other ethnic groups. In addition, the caregivers of these children had a greater prevalence of substance abuse and mental health problems compared with non-Indigenous caregivers.

Less appropriate services are available to Indigenous than other families

Relatively poor availability of services also may contribute to disparate removal of Indigenous families by child welfare. There also is some evidence that services other than child welfare are even less available to Indigenous than other families who experience child welfare.

In their study of Canadian families under investigation for maltreatment, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2013) point to poor accessibility to alternative social services for Indigenous families as contributing to the relatively high

levels of child welfare services for families needing help with a range of social problems. They found that a higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous investigations involved non-professional referral sources: a relative, parent, or neighbor/friend of the child reflecting the relative scarcity of professional support other than child welfare for Indigenous families. They also note that despite multiple caregiver and household risk factors, 58% of Indigenous investigations did not involve substantiations of maltreatment.

Available data for U.S. child welfare-involved families is broadly consistent with Canadian findings of poor service accessibility. In their analysis of data from the NSCAW study, Libby and colleagues (Libby, Orton, Barth, Webb, Burns, Wood & Spicer, 2007) found that unmet needs for mental health and substance abuse treatment characterized all parents in the study, but that Indigenous parents were even less likely than non-Indigenous parents to receive mental health services. In their study of children in foster care in northern Minnesota, Ferguson, Glesener and Raschick (2006) found that significantly more white than Indigenous children received psychotropic medication, although it was unclear if particular groups were over-, under- or appropriately medicated.

Unmet mental health service needs also may be reflected in the adult mental health and wellness of Indigenous people who have experienced out-of-home care. In the U.S., Landers and colleagues (Landers, Danes, Ingalls-Maloney & White Hawk, 2017) found using a purposive sample of 129 Indigenous and 166 white adults who had been separated from their birth families by foster care or adoption, that Indigenous people were more likely to report mental health and substance abuse problems than were whites. O'Brian and colleagues' (et al., 2010) interviews with foster care alumni revealed that

Indigenous people were less likely than whites to have access to therapeutic services and supports: counseling and mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, group work or counseling.

Racism is embedded in both practitioner and system levels of child welfare

There is some evidence that state, county and provincial child welfare services available to many Indigenous families reflects racism at the individual and system levels. First, workers may weigh various risk factors differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families in neglect cases. Using 2008 CIS data, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Ellenbogen & Trocmé, 2013) found that, overall, differences in investigation characteristics (e.g., type of maltreatment, physical harm to the child and referral source), the child's age and functioning, household characteristics and caregiver risk factors accounted for disproportionalities in substantiation of maltreatment in Canada. These factors, however, did not fully explain disproportionalities in *neglect* cases. Worker confirmation of caregiver substance abuse and single parenting increased the odds that they would substantiate neglect in Indigenous, but not non-Indigenous children. On the other hand, the presence of housing problems increased the odds of a neglect finding for non-Indigenous, but not Indigenous children.

There is some evidence that state and county workers also treat Indigenous families accused of neglect differently and more severely than other families in the U.S. child welfare system. Fox (2004) examined mainstream workers' perceptions of neglect in Indigenous and Non-Indigenous families as reflected in NCANDS data. She found that neglect of Indigenous children was more often associated with foster care placement and

juvenile court petition, while neglect for white children was more often associated with family preservation services.

Further evidence that Indigenous families are treated differently and more severely in U.S. state and county child welfare systems comes from Minnesota state-level data between 2003 and 2010. Jones (2015) examined whether race predicts family assignment to a traditional investigative response or a differential response ("Family Assessment"). The traditional response is intended for cases in which there is a high level of risk to children. The differential response track is intended for cases in which there is a low to moderate level of risk. Its goal is to engage families in a non-adversarial way, identify strengths and needs, and connect them to resources. Jones (2015) reviewed previous research indicating that differential response has several promising outcomes including increased family and worker satisfaction, increased services to families, and more attention to needs that families identify as important: all without additional risk to children. Among other findings, Jones (2015) discovered that even after controlling for poverty, family structure and other risk factors associated with race, Indigenous children were less likely than white children to be assigned by workers to the family assessment track for 4 of the 8 years examined. She suggests that bias in workers' decisions for pathway assignment may underlie these disparities.

Distrust in the child welfare system results in avoidance

Some literature also provide evidence that Indigenous families' and communities' experiences of racism in U.S. state and county child welfare services reinforces their distrust and avoidance from government child welfare services, a legacy from decades of genocide, forced child removal, and cultural oppression. While this distrust is legitimate,

the prioritization of Indigenous-centered and Indigenous-led services are more helpful and may resolve trust issues. Red Horse et al. (2000) surveyed 79 Indigenous people at national conferences and conducted two talking circles with Ojibwe elders in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Participants critiqued government child welfare practices as reflecting an ignorance of Indigenous cultural experiences. They observed that government practitioners typically do not have direct experience with healthy Indigenous families and communities. Such inexperience contributes to the development and reinforcement of negative stereotypes about Indigenous people, ignorance of traditional Indigenous support services and defensiveness among non-Indigenous child welfare workers. They further argued that government child welfare practices that approach Indigenous families from a deficit perspective, and emphasize power and control, reinforce Indigenous peoples' distrust of white social workers.

Likewise, Halverson, Puig and Byers' (2002) qualitative interviews with seven Indigenous foster parents suggest how bias within child welfare practice can lead to the disengagement of families from the system. Foster parents described problems with child welfare workers stemming from workers' discrimination and negative perceptions of Indigenous people as poor caregivers. All reported feeling discouraged by the lack of support they received from workers.

Traditional beliefs and practices of the wellbeing of Indigenous communities

Although the following section presents empirical data of Indigenous beliefs and practices pertaining to child wellbeing and connectedness, I would like to emphasize that Indigenous Peoples have been living these beliefs and practices for thousands of years. I am not suggesting that our beliefs and practices could ever be construed as evidence that

is confirmed through empirical research, in fact, we don't need research to confirm what we already know, believe and live. Our Indigenous knowledges have been intergenerationally transmitted for thousands of years and we still rely upon Indigenous ways of knowing to guide our lives. The following empirical studies may be interpreted as reclaiming and preserving our Indigenous knowledge base to aid in decolonization efforts and the revitalization and reclamation of Indigenous systems and lifeways that communities have been implementing for time immemorial.

Several empirical studies (9) contained data relevant to understanding cultural beliefs and practices pertaining to the wellbeing of Indigenous children. There is some evidence suggesting a need for *unique* policies and practices for Indigenous people. For instance, in their analysis of U.S. national foster care data for Indigenous, African American and Hispanic children, Lawler, LaPlante, Giger and Norris (2012) found that an independent construct was operating for Indigenous disparities. In this section, we turn to the cultural beliefs and practices within Indigenous communities for models of policies and practices that may reduce disparities within government child welfare systems.

Children are rooted in and collectively cared for within extended families and communities

For many Indigenous peoples, their children are viewed as rooted within extended families and communities who collectively maintain child wellbeing. In Halverson et al.' (2002) qualitative study of Indigenous foster parents, participants considered the children within their care to be their kin, even if they were not biological relatives. These participants contextualized their caregiving within a cultural-historical context involving the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes, especially

during the boarding school era. They described the importance of socializing Indigenous foster children through Indigenous practices as part of healing from such historical trauma.

Likewise, Red Horse et al.'s (2000) talking circles with tribal leaders, and Pooyak and Gomez's (2009) narratives from two Canadian social workers (one Indigenous and one non- Indigenous) practicing with Indigenous people, reflect a view of children as members of extended families and communities, and deeply valued members of their tribes (see also Morrison, Fox, Cross & Paul, 2010). Themes emergent from Hand's (2006) ethnographic research within an Ojibwe tribe, for instance, include the continuing importance of extended families and a general commitment to ensuring the well-being of children among all Ojibwe community members. The importance of the child as a member of an extended family and community also is reflected in Barth et al.'s (2002) large scale, quantitative record review of 38,430 young, California children in out-of-home care between 1988 and 1992. These data indicated that kinship adoption was higher for Indigenous than most other children and was especially likely to be with aunts and uncles rather than grandparents.

The importance of children as rooted within extended families and tribes/communities also is apparent from Morrison et al.'s (2010) case study based of a Wabanaki elder who had experienced customary adoption and tribal social services as a child. During interviews, he explained that there are no terms in the Wabanaki language for "nuclear family" or "adoption." Children are born into a community, and that community is responsible for protecting and nurturing them. He described a community-based form of "wrap-around" services provided to those in need. For example,

community members (including children) know who will serve as caregivers when children need safe places. If parents are drinking, for example, children will go to an "auntie," temporarily. He viewed parents as the people a child is with at the time, and all cousins as brothers and sisters. He explained that determining who belongs to the community is not simply based on blood or even tribal affiliation. Rather, there is a psychological, emotional, and spiritual sense of relatedness. Children will feel welcomed where they are loved.

The importance of the child as rooted within the extended family and Indigenous community was also apparent from Lucero and Leake's (2016) qualitative meta-synthesis of three national projects involving 75 tribal child welfare programs. A common characteristic of these programs was a view that Indigenous children's well-being is grounded in cultural values and supported by cultural practices. A cultural definition of Indigenous child well-being included: (a) being nurtured and protected by family, kinship network, and community; (b) knowing and interacting with members of the kinship network; (c) feeling a sense of belonging to and being recognized by the tribal community; (d) learning about and participating in tribal culture; and developing an Indigenous and tribal identity.

In their review of administrative data from four California counties over a five-year period, Quash-Mah, Stockard, and Johnson-Shelton (2010) found that Indigenous children have more stable foster care placements when living within environments that encourage traditional norms of extended kin relationships and community caretaking of those in need. Counties were ranked on "American Indian Cultural Environment" (or AICE), primarily by the percentage of the population identifying as "American Indian",

and by the presence of tribal reservations or recognized tribes within their boundaries. Children placed in the counties with the strongest AICE, had fewer and longer placements. Evidence from one county with data on individual placements indicated that children whose home tribes were located in that county and who were placed on Rancherias (small reservations) had significantly longer placements.

Practice is non-coercive, strengths- and community-based.

Another characteristic of Indigenous beliefs and practices concerning child wellbeing is a non-coercive, strengths- and community-based orientation to removing barriers to healthy functioning and healing from past traumas. Rousseau (2015) conducted a focus group with 9 Indigenous professionals and in-depth audio recorded interviews with 22 others working within the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. In contrast to North American, government-run child welfare services, which typically focuses on diagnosing and treating family deficits and compelling behavioral change, Indigenous professionals described their management and practice as demonstrating strong collective values and a deep respect for community protocols (Rousseau, 2015). Rather than exerting expert authority and power, the orientation they described was one of sharing power with individuals and providing advocacy and support to remove barriers to healthy functioning.

Likewise, Pooyak and Gomez's (2009) narrative analysis of two Canadian social workers, an Indigenous woman practicing in a "mainstream" community, and a non-Indigenous woman practicing in an Indigenous community, reflected a non-coercive, community-based approach to child protection. They described that from an Indigenous perspective, children are the future, and their care is vital to ensuring the survival of

Indigenous people. They are embedded within families, networks of families, and their larger community. The non-Indigenous social worker observed that working within an Indigenous context allowed her to work in a more fluid and flexible way with clients on their own terms where she was able to use her professional "power" to reduce barriers rather than compel behavior change.

The non-coercive, community-based nature of tribal practices also was apparent from Bjorum's (2014) analyses of a focus group with nine Wabanaki (Maine) tribal staff members, a foster parent, and a tribal council member. Participants described fundamental differences in what guides the work of tribal and state child welfare workers. Tribal practice originates from a core value that these are "our children" in contrast to a bureaucratic system that prioritizes rules and regulations. They also described tribal workers as viewing the removal of a child from the community as having much more profound consequences than did state workers.

The consequences of removing a child from the community have ramifications not only for the child, but also for the community as a whole. One of the most consistent themes in Lucero and Leake's (2016) qualitative meta-synthesis of tribal child welfare programs was that tribal child welfare work is also cultural reclamation work, i.e., preventing the loss of the tribe's children. Although child protection was paramount, several other goals reflecting this theme underlay tribal child welfare that are not typically considered part of child welfare practice at the state or county level: (a) preserving tribal culture by strengthening children's cultural knowledge and cultural involvement, (b) maintaining children's connections to their kinship network and the tribal community, and (c) increasing the well-being of the tribal community.

Simard (2009) conducted a qualitative, secondary data analysis of culturally restorative child welfare practice using 10 videos, each 1 to 1-1/2 hours in length, from an Indigenous child welfare agency. These videos are part of curriculum development data archives available to educate workers. They describe the foundational practices of the agency to promote Anishinaabe cultural identity through rectifying damage done to communities, rebuilding natural structures and fostering natural, existing resiliencies. They present an historical context in which colonial governments have attempted to convert Indigenous people to mainstream ways through coercion. By contrast, they present a modal of governance through collaboration with elders, tribal leaders and grassroots community members. The underlying belief is that the people within Indigenous communities have the power to create the infrastructure and services to help and heal their people. In this context, child welfare practice emphasizes collective responsibility for raising children and instilling values and traditions of Indigenous communities. The definition of family is broader than the nuclear family. The community is seen as having a sacred responsibility for child rearing and mentoring fellow community members.

Evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-based and culturally-respectful programs

Several studies contained empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-based or culturally-respectful programs. Indigenous scholars have been advocating for, developing and implementing culturally-based child welfare practices for decades (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000). Some recent research includes empirical examinations of child welfare practices with Indigenous families that are culturally-based

or culturally-adapted. We consider approaches that are culturally-based, at minimum, to recognize the impact of historical context including historical trauma on families, consider children's extended families and tribes/communities as critical resources for their care, and to be non-coercive, strengths- and community-based. Culturally-adapted approaches emphasize cultural competence and sensitivity in the delivery of approaches originally designed for other contexts, or apply approaches designed in other contexts that are based on culturally similar beliefs.

Culturally-based child welfare approaches designed for Indigenous child welfare

Lucero and Bussey (2012) present an evaluation of a collaborative and trauma-informed practice model for urban Indigenous child welfare. Established in 2000, the Denver Indian Family Resource Center is private, non-profit, and community-based. As part of the Colorado ICWA taskforce, it partners with child welfare systems in 7 counties in the Denver metro area to reduce disparities and prevent the break-up of Indigenous families. Its Family Preservation Model (DIFRC FPM) was developed over a 10-year period as a practice model for Indigenous families. The model incorporates components such as improving the cultural responsiveness of providers, encouraging partnerships, and otherwise supporting ICWA compliance (e.g., a commitment to kinship placements). It also incorporates direct practice components including team decision-making, intensive case management and treatment services.

Participants were 49 families with 106 children involved with child welfare due to parent substance abuse and child maltreatment. It also included 24 families with 73 children who were TANF–eligible and considered at-risk for child welfare involvement. Families were experiencing many challenges including untreated trauma, unmet mental

health needs, domestic violence, housing instability, poverty, and substance abuse. Results indicate that the model shows promise in preventing out-of-home placement of Indigenous children, while at the same time improving parental capacity, family safety, child well-being, and family environment. Clients interviewed emphasized the importance of concrete help securing basic resources, parenting classes, culturally-sensitive services, and their cultural match with DIFRC workers.

Bussey and Lucero (2013) also examined Colorado state-level CPS data for 5-year periods from 1995 – 1999, and 2005 – 2009. These data showed a decrease in the disparity ratio for placement of Indigenous children compared to white children. Appropriately, these authors do not confirm causality from these data, but they do point out that the decrease in disparities followed a decade of efforts on the part of the Colorado Department of Human Services and DIFRC to heighten county-level compliance with ICWA, partner on cases involving Indigenous children, refer families to culturally-responsive services and support kinship placements.

Richardson (2008) evaluated a Specialized Native American Program within the Iowa DHS. The program focuses on community outreach, prevention and intervention with Indigenous children and families at risk of involvement in the child welfare system. It aims to improve cultural competence in the delivery of services, increase attention to ICWA, reduce caseloads, increase available Indigenous foster homes and place greater emphasis on relatives and community networks as resources. Workers received training and developed the capacity to assist families through a more culturally competent, strengths-based approaches to promoting resiliency within families and utilizing family team meetings. Unit workers were aided by tribal liaisons employed by DHS to empower

Indigenous families and mitigate involvement with DHS and court systems. Twenty-three families who received services were assessed using the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale and the Colorado Family risk Assessment. Some interviews were conducted with families and service providers.

Although formal statistical analyses were not presented, Richardson (2008) reported positive changes on all domains of family functioning (environment, parental capacities, family interactions, family safety, and child well-being) and decreased risk for most families. Providers reported improved relationships between DHS and the Indigenous community, increased flexibility in funding, increased awareness of Indigenous culture and understanding of cultural practices (Richardson, 2008). The presence of an Indigenous liaison was viewed as facilitating openness with Indigenous families and the presence of an Indigenous worker as increasing trust, engagement and alliance with families. Clients reported feeling listened to, respected and empowered (Richardson, 2008). The purchase of tangible items through flexible funding was important as was the Indigenous liaison and worker. Such "race matching" improved communication and empathy and facilitated a sense of comfort, commonality and support important to engagement.

Culturally-adapted child welfare practices

Lucero, Leake, Scannapieco and Hanson (2017) evaluated the cultural fit of an approach for practice model development for tribal child welfare agencies. Three tribal agencies used Business Process Mapping (BPM) as a tool to develop culturally-based tribal child welfare practice models. Business Process Mapping (BPM) is a highly structured and detailed process that involves the staff working collaboratively to define

and document each step of their practice from case referral and intake to assessment, service delivery and case resolution with the assistance of an outside facilitator. Lucero and colleagues considered that the collaborative nature of the BPM process could be a good fit for the tribal agency. Data included: a survey of tribal child welfare staff members' perceptions of process (N=31), qualitative interviews (N=5), focus groups after 1 and 2 years (N=23, N=21), and content analysis of case files to examine model uptake (random sample of 4-9 cases from each tribe). In summary, tribal agency members considered BPM to be a "mainstream" intervention but found it to be useful in creating models reflecting child welfare practice in tribal cultural contexts. They also indicated that future adaptation of the BPM for use in tribal settings should help tribes to better articulate cultural values and norms, as well as differences between tribal and mainstream child welfare approaches.

Chaffin, Bard, Bigfoot and Maher (2012) compared recidivism rates and client satisfaction ratings of a subgroup of 354 Indigenous parents in Oklahoma to the larger sample of parents receiving SafeCare. SafeCare is a manualized, highly structured behavioral skills training model delivered as one component of a broader home visiting service. This model has been found to be more effective than home visiting services as usual including in reducing recidivism of child maltreatment. Inclusion criteria included that the child welfare-involved parent have a least one preschooler and no current untreated substance use disorder. Data were not available on response rate of Indigenous parents. In the full study, 72% of all approached individuals agreed to participate. Modules addressed: a) parent/child interaction, basic caregiving structure and parenting routines, b) home safety, and c) child health. Service providers received classroom

training and information about Indigenous culture and cultural competency. Six-year recidivism reduction for Indigenous subsample was equivalent to the larger sample, and overall client satisfaction ratings were positive.

Challenges of implementing Indigenous-centered child welfare services

Several studies contain empirical data relevant to understanding the challenges to implementing culturally-based/adapted county, state and provincial child welfare services. Clearly, concerns about disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families have been voiced for decades. Likewise, Indigenous scholars and professionals have been describing and implementing Indigenous-centered services to Indigenous families for decades. Furthermore, available empirical data suggest that culturally based county and state child welfare services may be effective. There appear, however, to be a variety of obstacles to their widespread implementation.

Inadequate allocation of resources to agencies undermines services to agencies serving high numbers of Indigenous families

Several papers from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) indicate that the disproportionate involvement of Indigenous families in the child welfare system possibly reflects a lack of appropriate resources at the agency or community level in agencies with high levels of Indigenous cases. A stable finding across multiple studies and over time indicates that Indigenous children are more likely to be placed in out-of-home care in agencies where 45% or more of the investigations involve Indigenous children. Using data from the 1998 CIS, Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin and Blackstock (2010) found that a key predictor of placement decisions was the number of Indigenous reports to an organization. Likewise, Fallon et al. (2013) in their analyses

of the 1998 CIS data found that the higher the proportion of investigations conducted by an agency involving Indigenous children, the more likely placement was to occur. Using the CIS data from 2008, Fallon et al. (2015) found that the higher the proportion of investigations of Indigenous children, the more likely placement was to occur for any child.

Chabot et al. (2013) built on the two previous studies (Fluke et al., 2013; Fallon et al., 2015) using data from the 1998 and 2003 CIS to clarify the effect of the proportion of Indigenous reports on out-of-home placements. They examined two variables that might reflect limitations of resources, the "degree of centralization of the agency" and the "education degree of the majority of workers." They found that agencies with access to workers with a more formal social work education and a centralized intake model reduce the likelihood of out-of-home placements in the presence of large Indigenous caseloads.

Agency-level factors impede Indigenous-centered child welfare practices

There is some evidence that agency-level characteristics impede Indigenous-centered child welfare practices with Indigenous families. Using the 2008 CIS data, Fallon et al. (2015) found that the structure of agency governance is an important predictor of out-of-home placement. Specifically, children are at greater risk of placement in government-run agencies compared to community-run agencies (community agencies that receive provincial funding). They suggest that community agencies have a more autonomous structure and greater flexibility to provide culturally-sensitive services than provincially-run agencies.

That agency-level factors can disadvantage Indigenous families also is supported by Rousseau' (2015) qualitative study of the experiences of Indigenous professionals

working in the British Columbia child welfare system. During focus group discussions with nine Indigenous professionals and in-depth audio recorded interviews with 22 others, a variety of organizational-level factors emerged that participants viewed as impeding their practice with Indigenous families. These included poor support for Indigenous practice, racism, cultural incompetence, hierarchical structure and decision making, risk –averse practice norms, and change initiatives viewed as poorly implemented or merely rhetorical.

Poor agency support for Indigenous practice also emerged from Johnston's (2011) qualitative interviews with ten, Canadian social workers (9 non- Indigenous and 1 Indigenous) providing child welfare services in Nunavut (Inuit) communities. They described how a lack of training for working in Inuit culture led to cultural confusion, misunderstandings and the non- transferability of skills. They emphasized that taking the role of learners on the job was necessary for them to understand Inuit culture and function effectively in their roles as child welfare workers.

State-level factors impede Indigenous-centered child welfare practices

There is some evidence that state-level factors, specifically, the failure to fully comply with ICWA, impede Indigenous-centered child welfare practices leading to poorer outcomes for Indigenous families. ICWA mandated that states take certain steps when dealing with Indigenous families, but the federal government failed to put a formal monitoring system into place. Hence, compliance has been a problem (Limb & Brown, 2008). Indeed, the limited empirical research of ICWA compliance published in peer-reviewed journals reflects somewhat mixed results. Limb and colleagues (Limb, Chance & Brown, 2004) conducted case record reviews of 49 ICWA-eligible children in out-of-

home care and surveyed 78 caseworkers and 16 tribal workers in a Southwest state. State workers reported limited knowledge of many ICWA requirements, but nonetheless, 83% of Indigenous children were placed according to preferences outlined by ICWA. Both state and tribal workers reported a high level of state-tribal cooperation in working with Indigenous families.

Summary

This review of literature revealed that disparities in the U.S. and Canada are attributed to issues such as poverty, housing, mental health, single parenting, substance abuse, systemic racism and intergenerational maltreatment as indicators for child welfare involvement (Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener & Marsalis, 2018). In addition, culturally-specific practices identified in the scoping study are reforms, but they have been limited in their success because the system doesn't recognize its colonial complicity and continues to do undermine Indigenous-centered interventions. While these studies are an important part in magnifying deep issues within the child welfare system, there is a glaring lack of consultation, knowledge, and perspectives from Indigenous families and communities who encounter the colonial child welfare system in the professional, empirical literature.

In addition, there is a blatant absence of empirical research that is conducted with Indigenous research methodologies. In order to understand the child welfare experiences of Indigenous People, it is necessary to implement research methods that are respectful and non-extractive, and methodologies that can effectively convey Indigenous perspectives. In addition, many Indigenous Peoples and communities are protective of our traditional and ceremonial practices and beliefs, and many are not written or talked

about outside of the community. In many cases, non-Indigenous research methods are inappropriate to conduct research into these areas. Furthermore, Indigenous people have experienced abuse, exploitation and misrepresentation at the hands of outside researchers (see Smith, 2013). There is, however, established and growing literature on Indigenous methodologies (See Archibald, 2008; Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Hart, 2010; Huaman, 2019; Kovach, 2010; Kovach, 2017; Smith, 2013; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2001 Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous research methodologies and methods that stem from Indigenous research paradigm and knowledge creates a path for accurate representation and interpretation of the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and communities (Wilson, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

I argue that the long-standing practices of *removal* and *separation* are forms of colonial violence that remain industry standard practices within child welfare today, leaving Indigenous families in fear that their children will be removed just as others have before them (Bussey & Lucero, 2013). This study responds to the gravity of the ongoing removal of Indigenous children, the intractability of colonization in the child welfare system, the glaring absence of Indigenous voices and their distinct experiences in the professional, empirical child welfare literature, and dearth of studies guided by Indigenous methodologies.

This study expands upon Indigenous communities and scholars and non-Indigenous resisters who have documented that ongoing colonialism exists in the child welfare systems of the U.S. and Canada and have been working toward decolonizing child welfare through resistance, revitalization and reclamation of Indigenous lifeways. It

also seeks to identify and problematize the ways in which the child welfare system has perpetrated ongoing colonization and colonial violence. The child welfare system continues to mirror other colonial systems which locate the problem within the Indigenous individual or community instead of colonization (Smith,1999). The "Indian Problem" submerges explanatory colonial, social and historical contexts (Tuck, 2009), and promotes interventions that focus on adapting or assimilating to dominant society (Davis, 2014), resulting in what Eve Tuck (2009) deems as damage centered research. For Indigenous communities, the excessive focus on the problem *within* exacerbates the harm of colonialism, including the continued erasure of Indigenous lifeways. Colonialism, its harms and institutions must be identified as problematic.

Purpose of the Study: To uphold Haudenosaunee Law is my purpose

Two-Row Wampum Belt

The Two-Row Wampum belt is a political agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and white settlers. According to Tehanetorens (1999), wampum belts are made of beads of the quahog shell and are used for official and spiritual purposes and serve the basis for treaties and laws. Tehanetorens (1999) explained that the Two-Row Belt depicts two paths along the same river. The two vessels that travel along two, separate parallel paths consist of a birch bark canoe, symbolizing the Indigenous Peoples and our laws, customs and lifeways. The other vessel is a ship that represent white settler laws, customs, and ways. The Two-Row Belt is an official agreement that the people traveling within each vessel neither will make "compulsory laws or interfere with the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel." (Tehanetorens, 1999, p. 74). The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is the only side that has

upheld this agreement (Tehanetorens, 1999). In today's child welfare system context, the settler system continues to impose their laws and kinship norms onto Indigenous peoples, proving that the Two-Row Wampum agreement is still not being honored by settler society.

These teachings have guided me to implement a critical, decolonial lens to identify the ways in which settler society has failed to uphold their agreements, and how they continue infecting our people with ongoing colonialization and colonial violence in the child welfare system. Indeed, Cavender Wilson (2004) explained that we must discern what has been imposed upon our people so that we can decide what is useful, what we need reclaim and revitalize, and the forms of coloniality we need to delink from. Lugones (2007) also proposed that we identify the systems that have been imposed upon us so that we may be compelled to resist and reject those systems. According to Cavender Wilson (2004), asserted to reclaim and revitalize who we are as Indigenous Peoples in every aspect of life to uplift our own people from the ravages of colonization. First, we need to recognize how colonialism is still infecting our people.

Through this study, I implemented Indigenous research methodologies to more deeply understand the way coloniality operates within the child welfare system by examining Indigenous relative caregiver's experiences within the system, to explore and identify intergenerationally transmitted traditional beliefs and practices for the welfare of Indigenous children and desires for the future of Indigenous child welfare.

Research Questions

This study examines four central qualitative research questions to explore the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous relative caregivers within the colonized child welfare system. The research questions are:

1. How do Indigenous caregivers experience tribal and western child welfare systems?
2. What are traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to the welfare of Indigenous children?
3. What advice do Indigenous caregivers have to offer child welfare students, state child welfare systems, and Tribal child welfare systems?
4. What are Indigenous relative caregiver's desires for the welfare of Indigenous children?

This study will contribute to building and preserving the existing knowledge base to aid in decolonization efforts at multiple levels, including child welfare practice, education, policy, child welfare, and tribal governance. The two overarching goals are to halt ongoing colonialism, colonial violence, removal and separation, and to seek and share Indigenous kinship knowledge and practice to strengthen Indigenous kinship structures to de-link from western imposed heteropatriarchal nuclear family structures.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives

The settler government's forced removal and separation of Indigenous children attempted destruction of Indigenous families and limited use of community-based reforms compromise a legacy of violence derived from the establishment of colonial power based on racial hierarchy.

Scientific Racism and the Coloniality of Power

"In the 19th century, social scientists began applying Darwin's theories of evolutionary biology to human society, theorizing the emergence of modernity, or the "fittest" race" (Johnston-Goodstar, 2020, 378). These scholars argued that *races of people* were biologically distinct and on an evolutionary path to becoming modern man. Races were then categorized and placed into developmental levels: savage, barbarian and civilized (Morgan, 1877). As Europe shifted into the Age of Enlightenment, so did its justification for extractive (capital, labor) and settler (land) colonial activity. Colonization, once founded on assumptions of religious supremacy were now justified by the science of racial development (Johnston-Goodstar, personal communication, 2021).

Quijano (2000) describes this history in his Coloniality of Power as a culmination of two main axes: world capitalism and race. Quijano explained world capitalism entailed "all the forms of labor, production, and exploitation were an ensemble around the axis of capital and the world market" (2000, p. 216). He described capitalism as a "new, single structure of relations of production" (2000, 216) and race, the other axis, as "a new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations" (2000, 216); a biological construct, was used to establish racial categories and a hierarchical structure to distinguish the superior race from the inferior races. According to Quijano (2000), race became the criteria in which to organize the power structure within society: for categorizing societal power structures, the division of labor, and the possession of power and control over resources and production to create and maintain world capitalism. It's most significant implication of this coloniality of power is the emergence of a Euro-centered capitalist colonial/modern world power that is still with us" (Quijano, 2000, 218).

The Modern Colonial Gender System

Quijano's work provides an important lens to explain global coloniality, however, Lugones' (2007) modern colonial gender system expanded Quijano's ideas of race and capital to include the coloniality of gender and sexuality. Maria Lugones' (2007) modern colonial gender system is particularly relevant to understand coloniality within the evolving federal oversight and control of Indigenous children from the boarding school era to the modern child welfare system. Lugones (2010) noticed the absence of gender and sexuality as a distinct categorical, dichotomous, and hierarchical logic separate from race. She explained that Eurocentric gender and sexuality was imposed upon the colonized to further categorize them into the hierarchy of underdeveloped and developed, superior and inferior, human and non-human, and dominant and dominated. She explained that both Indigenous Peoples and Africans who were subjected to enslavement were not considered human; biology was tied to behavior and entire races of people were deemed animals who were "uncontrollable, sexual, and wild" (p. 743).

Lugones (2007) also described the superiority of the white man above all others, including the white bourgeois woman. The colonial, modern, Christian, heterosexual white man was considered perfect, fit for rule, fully civilized, while all others were "aberrations" (p. 743). Lugones further described how normative judgement was inflicted upon men versus women:

> I propose to interpret the colonized, non-human males from the civilizing perspective as judged from the normative understanding of "man," the human being par excellence. Females were judged from the normative understanding of "women," the human inversion of men. Lugones, 2007, p. 743.

According to Lugones (2007), the hierarchical dichotomy of sex became the normative definition of gender, which was also considered a human characteristic.

The imposition of a modern colonial gender system as part of the larger colonial project (Lugones, 2007) has been carried out across multiple U.S. civilizing projects. The system imposed gender dichotomy (as opposed to gender fluidity or multiple genders), monogamy, patriarchy (as opposed to matriarchy) via schools, family education programs, churches, and eventually child welfare systems. Early civilizing projects, such as civilizing education programs (Cahill, 2011), carceral boarding and residential schools (Grande, 2004), and the Indian Adoption project (Balcom, 2007; Fanshel, 1972; George, 1997; Jacobs, 2013; Thibeault & Spencer, 2019) were precursors to the modern child welfare system that executed violent removal and separation of Indigenous children, families and communities in order to accomplish their colonizing and civilizing missions. Isolating children from the influence of their families and communities to fully civilize Indigenous children provided justification for violent removal and separation practices (Grande, 2004). These colonial missions included the complete eradication of Indigenous lifeways, including the forced assimilation to the modern colonial gender system.

Colonial Matrix of Power

Tlostanova & Mignolo's (2012) Matrix of Coloniality also helps to theorize ongoing coloniality in child welfare system and to decolonize our thinking, knowing, and practice about child welfare. Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012) explain that several global regions, while having their unique local histories, are located within a "universe" under a shared colonial matrix of power. Regions, including America, are linked by "Western hegemony by the logic of coloniality" (Tlostanova & Mignolo's, 2012, p. 2). Likewise,

Tuck & Yang (2012) and Wolfe (2006) affirm that settler colonialism in pursuit of Indigenous land, aims to destroy existing Indigenous structures to be replaced by settler structures.

According to Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012), coloniality exists in all forms of society such as culture, knowledge production, and "other aspects of modern existence" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 8). The struggle and conflict for domination of one society over the other is employed through four spheres: economic control, control of authority, control of knowledge and subjectivity via education and colonizing existing knowledges, and control over family, gender and sexuality (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Drawing upon Tlostanova and Mignolo's coloniality of power in addition to Quijano's "coloniality of power" (2000) and Maria Lugones' (2007) "modern colonial gender system" (p. 189), this study will explore and address the fourth sphere, control over family, gender and sexuality and the role of the modern child welfare system as a violent and ongoing civilizing project that continues to brutally disrupt Indigenous family and kinship structures, values, and practices.

Decolonization in Social Work

This study is also informed by Indigenous scholars who have applied the aforementioned theories within the context of social work and provided frameworks for which generations of Indigenous scholars can continue to unravel coloniality, stop colonial violence and revitalize our lifeways (Absolon, 2019; Absolon & Absolon-Winchester, 2016; Baike, 2009; Baskin, 2016; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2003; Bruyere, 1999; Clark & Drolet, 2014; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2007; Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008; Gray, Coates, Yellow

Bird & Hetherington, 2013; Greenwood & Palmantier, 2003; Hart, 1999; Hart, 2009; Koleszar-Green, 2019; Red Horse, Martinez, Day, Poupart, Scharnberg, 2000; Sinclair, 2004; Sinclair (Otiskewapiwske), Hart (Kaskitemahikan), & Bruyere (Amawaajibitang), 2009; Tamburro, 2013; Weaver, 2016; Yellow Bird, 2008; Yellow Bird, 2013).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2020) recently published a news release urging the profession to reckon with its history of racism and white supremacy. Indigenous scholars (Absolon, 2019; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, Hetherington, 2013; Sinclair, 2004, Koleszar-Green, 2019), have described decolonizing social work as a way recognizing and contesting harmful Imperial frameworks and western hegemony in social work. According to Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird & Hetherington (2013), decolonizing social work, and I argue that these same principles apply in child welfare, includes a reckoning with the colonial complicity in which social work accepted and carried out (carried out in child welfare). Gray et. al. (2013) provided major tenets of decolonization in social work:

- Requires that the profession acknowledge its complicity and ceases its participation in colonizing projects, openly condemns
- Collaborates with Indigenous Peoples to engage in decolonizing activities against public and private colonizing projects;
- Seeks to remove the often-subtle vestiges of colonization from theory and practice;
- Allows for the acknowledgement and incorporation of the strengths of Indigenous communities, rather than deficit-based approaches that blame the victim;

- Recognizes and credits the strengths and contributions of Indigenous knowledges, traditions and practices, and supports Indigenous People's cultural survival and Indigenous rights. (Gray et. al., 2013, p. 7)

Similarly, Absolon (2019), an "Indigenist Structural Social Worker" from Northern Turtle Island (Canada) described decolonization as a process for settler societies, including social work, to critically examine, engage in truth-telling with settler colonial history and modern structures. She further explained that decolonization is the responsibility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, settler descendant scholars because this shared history of settler colonization includes their settler ancestors (Absolon, 2019). Absolon (2019) clarified the point that decolonization is not a priority in social work education and continues to harm and colonize Indigenous Peoples. Before Indigenous knowledge integration, social work needs to interrogate itself as a settler colonial structure (Absolon, 2019).

Identifying and understanding historic and ongoing colonialism in child welfare is only part of my research aims. The other central aim of this study is to understand how Indigenous relative caregivers are living our kinship teachings and practices, despite ongoing colonialism in the colonial child welfare system. Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012) describe decolonial thinking, or epistemic de-linking, as breaking free from colonialism, including ways of knowing, thinking, power and the ability to "unlearn the thinking imposed upon us by education, cultural and social environment" (p. 7). Thus, I would also claim that Indigenous Peoples continue to revitalize and reclaim those kinship teachings and practices that were abolished through forced government removal practices; however, I also assert that Indigenous relative caregivers are important pieces

of kinship structures who continue to live by intergenerationally transmitted kinship teachings and practices to maintain family structures and to protect our children from the colonized child welfare system.

Decolonial thinking (de-linking) in social work is actualized by breaking free from Western thinking, theory, and practice. Koleszar-Green (2019) affirmed that decolonization requires the unlearning of Imperial hegemonic knowledge, and the learning and relearning of Indigenous knowledges and theories (p. 70). Several social work scholars (Absolon, 2019; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, Hetherington, 2013; Sinclair, 2004) have advanced the notion that decolonization occurs through using Indigenous knowledges to transform social work education (Absolon, 2019; Koleszar-Green, 2019).

Chapter 4: Methodology

I was born an Indigenous woman and raised on the land of the Menominee. My entire being has been shaped by a strong kinship to my relatives, community, land and all of Creation. When I decided to enter this Ph.D. program, I decided I would follow the advice of my late Grandfather. He told me "Never forget where you come from." As I navigate academia, his words become more and more important. My love and respect for my people, past, present and future, dictate my decisions, and I carry them with me at every step of my research process. For these reasons, this research was carried out guided by an Indigenous research paradigm (IRP). Wilson (2008) explained that *elements* of IRP, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, are bound by relationality and possess relational characteristics, which are distinct features from western paradigms. According to Wilson (2008) the elements blend within one another,

change in one element impacts others, all elements are equal and inseparable, and ideas flow in an interrelated manner (Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) emphasized that each element embodies relationships when implemented in research contexts (between researcher and participants) and between the researcher and the research (e.g., the researcher is inseparable from the research).

Relationality is valued and prioritized in an Indigenous research paradigm. Wilson (2008) described that axiology and methodology are based on implementing and maintaining relational accountability, that we must be accountable to our relations and research relationships. He explained that relational accountability is more meaningful than validity, statistical significance, or being right or wrong under an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2008). I describe how I implemented an Indigenous research paradigm in this study through Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, Lee-Morgan, & De Santolo, 2019). In addition, Kovach (2010) clarified that tribal communities share values that are inherent in Indigenous methodologies but are also grounded in specific tribal knowledge. Therefore, I follow the direction of Wilson's (2008) aforementioned Indigenous research paradigm, Archibald's (2019) Storywork methodological principles, and my own tribal knowledge and teachings to guide this research.

Indigenous Storywork Methodology

I implemented Archibald's (2019) Storywork methodology to adhere to the elements of Wilson's (2008) Indigenous research paradigm. Archibald (2012) described Indigenous Storywork as a "research process to make meaning through stories" (p. 4). In a methodological context, Archibald (2012, 2019) presented Storywork principles as

ethical guides, including respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy, as forms of traditional values and teachings implemented in a Storywork research context. These ethical principles are a way to maintain relational accountability to the stories and between the storyteller/knowledge holder and listener (Archibald, 2008). Archibald (2019) explained these four principles serve as an ethical guide to carry out respectful research while honoring Indigenous storied knowledge. They also allow the researcher to become "story ready", to be ready to receive the stories in a respectful and responsible manner (Archibald, 2019, p. 2). Next, I describe how I used Archibald's (2008) 4 Rs as an ethical guide to adhere to relational accountability, combined with my specific tribal teachings, throughout the research process.

Respect

Respect is a main ethical tenet of Indigenous Storywork, and it is a value that I grew up with. I was taught to respect our animal relatives, our land, our people, and every living being on this Mother Earth. In her quest to develop a culturally appropriate Indigenous methodology, Archibald (2008) began with "the principles of respect for cultural knowledge embedded in the stories and respect for the people who owned or shared the stories as an ethical guide" (Archibald, 2008, p. 36). Similar to Archibald, I knew that my research process had to be respectful to my people and communities. From the very beginning, even before I knew much about research, I knew I had to be careful to navigate the selection of topic because I wanted to make sure that I didn't disrespect our sacred knowledges by bringing them into academia. There is a lot of our knowledge and culture that doesn't belong outside of our people and communities.

In addition, much like Archibald (2008), I didn't want to "repeat colonial abusive, outsider research practices that led to mistrust among Indigenous communities" (p. 36). I knew that I didn't want to engage in practices like outsiders who took academic liberties with our people, for our exploitation and their gain. I thought about ways that I could respect the knowledge holders and avoid exploitative practices throughout the entire process. I believe that I have carried this research out with the utmost respect to my people and communities.

Reverence

The notion of reverence in a research setting is also unique to an Indigenous methodology, however, spirituality is essential to the balance of Indigenous life. Archibald (2008) explained that we must treat stories with reverence. Wilson (2008) attested to reverence as a vital component in Indigenous research where he referred to "research as a ceremony". He explained that ceremony is a place and space where everyone "must accept a raised state of consciousness" and applied this same notion to the research context (Wilson, 2008, p. 69). I have experienced this raised state of consciousness throughout my lifetime of engaging in my traditional ceremonies, so I resonate with Wilson. I was able to easily integrate reverence into my own research process.

While I did not experience stories containing conversations of reverence, I brought these practices into my research practices. For example, my raised state of consciousness sometimes comes while I dream and when I connect with Ohne·kánus (our water relatives). Many Native people believe that ancestors, or other people who have crossed over to the Spirit World, visit us in dreams. My ancestors provide me with

direction when they visit me in dreams. When I awake, I continue to process and make meaning relative to the portion of research that I ponder, such as making meaning of a particular story. I make sure to store a notebook and pen next to my bed so that I am prepared when an ancestor provides me with the guidance I need through dream.

Additionally, I regularly visit Ohne·kánus on the lands of the Dakota at Mni Sota Makoce and ask my ancestors for guidance along this research journey. I offer Oyuʔkwaʔu·wé· (traditional tobacco, one of our plant medicines) to Ohne·kánus and ask them for strength and clarity to engage in story meaning, to analyze and represent stories with respect and responsibility. I regularly seek out these spaces to process complex ideas, code data, or to ask my ancestors to give me ska:na (peace) as I become emotionally drained from experiencing and reading about the continued colonization and exploitation of my people and Yukhinulha Ohw^tsya? (our Mother Earth). I will continue to rely on these practices of reverence to respectfully and responsibly continue this research project and beyond.

Responsibility

Archibald (2008) emphasized her meaning of responsibility, "I should also take responsibility for any mistakes contained in my research because those who shared their knowledge with me did so with great care and often said that they spoke the truth as they knew it" (Archibald, 2008, p. 24). Being a responsible Indigenous relative and researcher means that I must always consider how I'm maintaining relational accountability throughout the research process. For instance, I practiced responsibility in the data collection phase by implementing Kovach's (2010) Conversational Method. This method is relational and adheres to relational accountability. The experience was similar to an interview, but there were differences that allowed me to practice my Indigenous values

while interacting with the Knowledge Holders (see detailed description in the Methods section).

In addition, I consciously decided to analyze the data in a responsible manner. I am aware of the critiques concerning reliance solely on Western methods, and I agree with Wilson (2008) that conducting TA could "destroy" the relationships that exist within the story (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). Likewise, I agree with Simonds & Christopher (2013) who asked an Indigenous research advisory board to engage in TA, but their efforts were unsuccessful. They shared that TA rips the story from the context and relationships within the story are lost (we learn from the whole story). Ripping the story from the context is disrespectful to both the storyteller and their story when we detach the story from the context because the context is unique to each story. I agree with these critiques of Western analysis methods, however, I also feel that integrating Western and Indigenous analysis methods can also be useful when done with a conscious effort conduct responsible and respectful research. Therefore, I utilized Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to find relationships among Indigenous relative caregiver experiences. I also utilized a modified version of Kovach's "condensed conversation" in my data analysis to "stay true as possible to the voice, context, and their truth" (Kovach, 2009, p. 53). In other places I used longer exemplars to include important contextual pieces of each story.

We also have a responsibility to our ancestors to keep their knowledges alive. We can do this through story and research. I have been a story listener/learner all of my life. I became a storyteller when the creator chose me to become an Aknulha (Aunty and Mother). As a daughter of oral tradition, my mother and aunties told me stories of my

family and other families in our community. Many of these stories illustrated how my Grandparents helped care for several children in our community. I was only two years old when my Grandmother passed away, but I remember her through story, and she is alive in our spirits and memories because of story. My duty to the next 7 generations is to pass these stories forward to my children and grandchildren. It is my responsibility to carry these values in all areas of my life, including as an educator and scholar, in a responsible way. To reach more people, to assist our communities redress the effects of colonialism and recover and revitalize our knowledge.

Reciprocity

I grew up in an intergenerational household with many natural helpers. My Grandfather would welcome visitors into his home on a daily basis, and sometimes they would go into his bedroom where they would talk about more serious matters such as sobriety (so my Mother has told me). Growing up observing how my family has helped one another in community through stories helped me carry out this research in hopes that our stories will help other Indigenous relative caregivers who continue to battle colonialism in child welfare. My upbringing also shaped the way that I give back to the communities that continue to shape the woman I am today.

Reciprocity is a tenet of Indigenous Storywork methodology, and it has guided my decisions to give back to the communities that teach me. Reciprocity was a way that ensured that I wasn't repeating harmful and extractive research. When I moved to Minnesota in 2016, I engaged in several Indigenous community-led efforts toward collective well-being. I wanted to make sure I was giving back in the communities, so I looked for ways that I could naturally give back throughout my research process. I

offered my knowledge and skills in sewing and creating Indigenous regalia where I served as a volunteer teacher for "The First Gift" making moccasins for Indigenous babies in a Newborn Intensive Care Unit. This effort is led by an Indigenous leader and caregiver who shared her story with me. Through this experience, I learned to model reciprocity through giving back a form of sacred knowledge.

In addition, I have volunteered to sew medicine bags for the Lower Phalen Creek Project to distribute to front line workers during this pandemic, and more recently I assisted the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center with making ribbon skirts and shirts for high school graduates. Being in a community with Indigenous People strengthened my relationships. I shared with one of the organizers that being among Native women nourished my soul, especially during these tough times of Covid-19, the murders of George Floyd, Daunte Wright and others, and our own ongoing resistance against colonialism. I also told her that simply walking into a room full of Native women laughing and sharing knowledge melted away any stress I was feeling. Simply put, being in a community with our own people, making beautiful regalia with good minds is not only reciprocal, but it is healing and therapeutic.

In the community where I have lived since 2016, I served as a member on the Roseville Area School District American Indian Parent Committee. In this capacity, we accomplished significant changes that benefit Native youth in the school district. For example, we were able to pass a policy that bans students, staff and visitors from wearing or displaying Native based mascots, or other offensive stereotypical symbols. We also consulted with Dakota elders to name the newly build Fairview Community Education Center.

Finally, I have been called upon to contribute to our School of Social Work. For the past two years, I have been honored to serve as an organizational mentor with one of my former student groups. They won a social justice innovation award based on one of my course assignments, "Designing a Social Innovation", where they designed a toolkit for their peers to operationalize vital conversations on race with an intentional trajectory toward collective liberation and justice within our school. In addition, as an elected Ph.D. Committee Student Representative, I work with our Committee's task force on doctoral research curriculum where I make recommendations for integrating Indigenous knowledge, methodologies, and methods into our Ph.D. research curriculum. I have also completed multiple guest lectures and community presentations on Indigenous topics.

Aknulha Methodology: the Oneida word for Mother and Aunty is the same

> "When he asked me to conduct various research projects, for the Planning Department or the Justice system, invariably there would come a time when the tribal meaning of a particular activity or term was important to the discussion. He would go to his elders and discuss these meanings, then sit down with me – we sometimes spent an hour simply talking about the meaning of one word, in English, in Menominee, in the context of whatever topic we were studying" (Beck, 2000, p. 6).

The above quote was written by an historian about my late grandfather. My Grandfather was fluent in the Menominee language. He had the great honor to have a rare and unique worldview of our Menominee people. I am not a fluent speaker of any of my Indigenous languages, so I would like to apologize to my ancestors and relatives for communicating in English. I strive to remedy my language deficiency, and I have been

learning Oneida language since I became an Aknulha (Mother) in my early twenties. Learning our language has confirmed what David Beck wrote about my Grandfather about how the meanings of our Indigenous words are deep, including the word "Aknulha" (Mother and Aunty) and "Twahwahtsilay^" (we are all family).

Indigenous methodological values, such as Storywork methodology, are common among many Indigenous communities, however, Kovach (2010) explained that our worldviews are grounded in our specific local, tribal teachings. My own worldview is grounded in a mixture of tribes from which I was created and nurtured, including the ancestral, cultural, and political teachings of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy which consists of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations. Wakeny^nta ni wakitalota, Onyot^aka ni wakahuntsyota, I am of the Turtle Clan and Oneida is my Nation. I also descend from the Menominee, Potawatomi, and Stockbridge-Munsee Nations of Wisconsin. These identities are my great honor. I am proud of who I am, and I have never forgotten where or whom I come from.

The topic of this study was born out of my personal experiences as an Indigenous Aknulha (Mother and Aunty) caregiver and relative within a larger community context. I have been experiencing a lifelong inspiration by the teachings that my Grandparents, Aunties and relatives modeled as I grew up embraced by their intergenerational love. My desire to talk to other Indigenous relative caregivers came from my family's conflicted lived experiences with the Indigenous child removal system (Sinclair, 2016) and our own practices of Indigenous kinship. Throughout my life, I heard stories of the government forcefully removing our children for generations, and it still happens. My Great-Grandmother was forced to attend a boarding school. She spoke fluent Oneida, but she

was shamed and never passed it to any of us. I very young when she passed, but our pictures together are evidence that we shared physical time and space together on this Mother Earth. I was also very close to my Oneida Grandmother, Menominee and Stockbridge Grandfather, Aunties, Uncles, and cousins. We were also a part of the community. As a child, I was always in awe that my Mother knew everyone on the Rez. She would tell me stories about all of the families and who we were related to. I know who I am because of my Mother and her storytelling. I also didn't know the concept of a nursing home or a child welfare system as a young person. We just took care of each other in our own homes when our elders couldn't care for themselves or when a child needed to be taken in. These intergenerational kinship teachings influenced me to take care of my own nephews for the ultimate goals of maintaining our kinship structure and protecting our children from the child welfare system.

Contrary to western definitions of family roles, such as Aunt, our meaning of Aunty is deeply connected to the role of the Mother and Sunkwayatisu (The Creator). Aknulha means both Aunty and Mother in my Oneida language and represents the deep connection between Mother-Child-Aunty. Our Mother/Aunty roles are important as we believe children are gifts from Sukwayatisu. Over 20-years ago, Sukwayatisu blessed my sister with a son and me with my first nephew, and 19 years ago I gave birth to my son. I proudly serve in my role of "Aknulha" to eight nephews, one son, and one daughter. My own Aknulhas have collectively nurtured me throughout my life. Their teaching and modeling helped me carry out my Aknulha responsibilities in a good way as I currently live my life. My Mother and Aunties continue to pass traditional kinship knowledge to me through stories.

Caring for family has been modeled throughout my life within my communities. I have taken care of several of my nephews during their lifetime and I carry on this role of Aknulha by keeping them safe and connected to our family and culture. Like many other Indigenous families, ours has experienced our own issues stemming from historical trauma and distrust of the government and child welfare system. My relatives and I understand the implications of our children potentially entering into the child welfare system, so we apply what we have learned from our Grandparents and try to avoid child welfare system involvement.

My family implements our ancestral and traditional teachings guide our kinship practices. Modeled by our Grandparents, Bertina and Robert Dodge Waubanascum, we engage in Aknulha teachings and enter into family agreements. For example, at the end of Summer, 2019, my sister and I agreed that my 13-year-old nephew would live with my husband and I for a few years until she was able to become stable in her own life. Unlike the child welfare system, which can be punitive, shame-based and can result in removal, our agreement was supportive, relational, and positive. Our agreement was based on our shared understanding that I was not trying to take away her role of "Mother" because only the Creator possesses that power. Our understanding was based on our ancestral teachings that our roles as Mother and Aunty are deeply intertwined and we strive to both maintain our traditional teachings and protect our children in the face of continued colonization and historical trauma.

Wilson (2008) explained that we use specific types of stories to help and counsel others. I use these teachings to help other relative caregivers who seek counsel. One purpose for doing this research is to share Aknulha stories, experiences, and knowledge

to help other Indigenous relative caregivers. In this context, I use research to help people and as a means to preserve our knowledge and stories. My Aknulhas and grandparents nurtured, taught, and modeled these teachings for me, so I want to do the same for other relative caregivers.

This research journey culminated in the development of an Aknulha methodology based on the Oneida value of "Twahwahtsilay^" (we are all family) as my own way of honoring and upholding relational accountability to the young relatives and relative caregivers in our communities. I present the elements of Aknulha Methodology that are in alignment with Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork principles and teachings from my Haudenosaunee Nation. As an Aknulha, I have listed the elements of Aknulha methodology that provided me with the local/tribal guiding principles for this research project's topic, purpose, and dissemination.

Elements of Aknulha methodology

Aknulha practice

- The role of Aknulha (Mother and Aunty) is grounded in Haudenosaunee knowledge, language and meaning as a matriarchal society and modeled through generational teachings
- Aknulha signifies a connection between Mother, Aunty, Creator, and Child
- Aknulha practices are supportive, not shame-based or punitive
- Aknulha practices are protective. They protect against continued removal by government child welfare systems. Many Native people continue to feel distrust toward the child welfare system due to a legacy of forced removal during the boarding school, Indian Adoption Project, and modern child welfare era

- Aknulha practices are decolonized. The meaning of Aknulha is not bound by western definitions of family and kinship

Aknulha knowledge

- Aknulha knowledge respects and recognizes that the inherent connection between Mother and child cannot be severed (opposed to termination of parental rights or closed western adoption practices)
- Aknulha knowledge and experience understands that these practices are not perfect and may experience challenges

Aknulha knowledge in research contexts

Learning and sharing Aknulha and kinship knowledge and practice is a way to strengthen Indigenous kinship structures as a way to de-link from western imposed heteropatriarchal nuclear family structures. Documenting these knowledges and practices via research is a means to preserve and transmit to future generations.

As Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) described in fourth sphere of the Colonial Matrix of Power, colonizers deliberately executed policies and practices to erase Indigenous lifeways, including kinship knowledge and practice. Aknulha methodology provides justification for meaning making through Indigenous kinship stories. The goal to revitalize, stitch by stitch, and grow these practices provides a model for building tribal capacity, integrating these practices into everyday lives and integration into their tribal child welfare laws/codes. This knowledge may also contribute to the knowledge based on social work and child welfare education and decolonizing child welfare knowledge, practice, and systems.

Chapter 5: Method

This is a qualitative study that illuminates the knowledge of Indigenous relative caregivers, their experiences with the colonial child welfare system, their stories of kinship, and their advice and desires for a decolonial system of child welfare.

Site

The primary site in which this research took place was in Mni Sota Makoce, the original, unceded homelands of the Dakota Peoples. As a visitor to these lands, I engaged in respectful research and sought knowledge and guidance mostly from Indigenous relative caregivers who belong to tribes from this region, however, two of the knowledge holders are originally from Wisconsin. Mni Sota Makoce is the present home to 11 sovereign Tribal Nations. The four Dakota tribes include the Upper Sioux (Dakota) Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, and Lower Sioux Indian Community. These Dakota nations are the original inhabitants of the Minnesota area and are currently spread throughout the lower half of the state along the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. There also are seven Ojibwe Bands including the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond Du Lac Reservation, Grand Portage Band of Chippewa Indians, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, and White Earth Reservation. These tribes are spread throughout the northern half of the state, many on large lakes (Lake Superior, Upper and Lower Red Lake, Lake Mille Lacs, Leech Lake, Lake Vermillion). In addition, many of the state's urban centers in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth have Indigenous families and communities from tribes centered in the Dakotas Wisconsin, and Canada, including a Ho-Chunk band office location in St. Paul, MN.

Knowledge holders

For the purpose of this study, I use the terms Indigenous relative caregiver and knowledge holder interchangeably to refer to participants. I believe these titles show respect the legitimacy of the Indigenous knowledges each person shared through conversation and story. Referring to Indigenous Peoples in research as knowledge holders aligns with Lugones' (2007) beliefs that our people are "fully informed" and active resisters (p. 747-748). In addition, I have heard phrases in different Indigenous languages that indicate "we are all related", thus, in many nations our kinship transcends western familial constraints that extend to the community. Therefore, relative caregiving could indicate caring or advocating for Indigenous children both inside of the home and/or in the community.

Since 2017, I've been involved in a research team with the University of Minnesota, which consists of myself, Dr. Wendy Haight, David Glesener (Ph.D. student), Dr. Priscilla Day, Brenda Bussey, and Dr. Karen Nichols (the latter three are with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies at the University of Minnesota – Duluth (the Center)). Our research team built relationships with individuals and community partners through our ethnographic research with the Center (see Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener, Day, Bussey & Nichols, 2019; Haight et. al., 2020; Waubanascum, Haight, Glesener, Day, Bussey & Nichols, under review). Our partners at the Center provided referrals to community members they identified as relative caregivers. In addition, I am also a tribal community member and relative caregiver. I have nurtured lifetime relationships with fellow Indigenous relative caregivers. Several of the knowledge holders and I have built supportive relationships based on our shared

experiences of caring for our young relatives. Based on these existing relationships, I sought out those individuals I have some form of kinship with.

Knowledge holders were affiliated with sovereign Tribal nations across Minnesota and Wisconsin. The inclusion criterion included: 1) members or descendants of any tribe, who live in Minnesota or Wisconsin 2) primary caregivers of children of relatives or other tribal/community members, or other Indigenous relative caregiver as defined above, 3) tribal community elders with knowledge of traditional kinship knowledge and practices, 4) knowledge holders able to freely choose to participate in the research on their own. We excluded individuals if some issue prevented them from reading and signing the informed consent form on their own. Eligibility was assessed by the study team, which included me (Cary Waubanascum, Ph.D. candidate), Dr. Wendy Haight, Professor, and Ruth (Ruti) Soffer-Elnekave, Ph.D. Candidate, all from the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Ten relative caregivers agreed to share their stories and knowledge. Knowledge holders consisted of individuals who were in their mid-20s though early 60s. Seven of them identified as an Aunty caregiver. Some of the knowledge holders had lived experiences as relative caregivers who encountered the child welfare system, some had been involved in the foster care or child welfare system as a child, and others indicated they purposely avoided child welfare system involvement. I also defined “Indigenous relative caregiver”, from a decolonial thought process, as someone who shows up for their community through advocacy, activism, systems change, or service (this is not an exhaustive list). For example, some of the knowledge holders in this study identified as relative caregivers who dedicated their lives to changing child welfare for our young

Indigenous relatives. Even though they are not taking care of children in their own households, their relationships extend to the community as many Indigenous communities believe we are all related.

Table 1: Knowledge Holder, Relative Caregiver Descriptions

Alias	Role(s)	Tribal Affiliation
Lacey	Lacey has been a relative caregiver for several of her nephews. She is from tribal communities in Northeastern Wisconsin. She is also a social worker and social work educator.	Wisconsin Tribes
Susie	Susie is a relative caregiver who has cared for her young nephew, along with her daughter. She is also a doctor and lives and practices in her tribal community in North Dakota.	North Dakota Tribe
Joe	Joe and his wife live in an urban area of Minnesota. He and his wife have cared for many Native foster children over the past 20 + years. He is also a professional in his community.	Minnesota Ojibwe Tribe
Kevin	Kevin is a well-known educator, professional, and community member within the Twin Cities and across Turtle Island and specializes in Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQ+ experiences and scholarship. Kevin also has lived experience in the foster care system and is a boarding school survivit. Kevin often shares their story in trainings. Kevin is	Dakota (Sisseton)

	a relative caregiver in a communal sense, where they take care of Native children through service, education and activism.	
Waterlily	Waterlily is a relative caregiver to several young children. She lives in an urban area of Minnesota. She is a well-known leader, community organizer, professional, scholar, educator, and good relative. You will always find her in her community organizing Indigenous wellness programs and events and protecting our people from ongoing colonialism.	Minnesota Ojibwe Tribe
Lenna	Lenna is a relative caregiver and Mother from Northeastern Wisconsin. She has cared for a young person in her community. She is also a professional and works with youth for her Tribal social services.	Wisconsin Tribes
Amber	Amber is an elder and relative caregiver from an Ojibwe tribe in Minnesota. She adopted her niece and has provided care for a few other children in her community. She is also a Tribal child welfare professional and provides training for tribes across Turtle Island.	Minnesota Ojibwe Tribe
Betty	Betty is an elder, social worker, and social work educator. She is a relative caregiver in a communal sense.	Minnesota Ojibwe Tribe

Ande	Ande is a Mother, Aunty, relative caregiver and county child welfare professional. She cares for several young relatives in the foster care system.	Minnesota Ojibwe and South Dakota Tribe
Cedar	Cedar is a professional social worker with lived experience in child welfare and foster care systems and a relative caregiver in a communal sense	Minnesota Ojibwe Tribe

Sampling

I used both purposive and snowball sampling for this study. According to Padgett (2017) in purposive sampling the researcher selects participants based on particular knowledge they possess. I carried out a purposive recruitment approach based on my own existing relationships with Indigenous relative caregivers. I had conversations with some knowledge holders that included a description of my research, and then I asked them if they wanted to contribute their knowledge and experiences. I also used snowball sampling, and I asked knowledge holders to refer interested persons who met the study's criteria. Snowball sampling only occurred for a few individuals because I had relationships with most of them. For this study, a common characteristic of each knowledge holder was that they were an Indigenous relative caregiver.

Procedures

Interview: Conversational Method in Indigenous Research

The data collection method consisted of Conversational Method in Indigenous Research introduced by Margaret Kovach (2010). All conversations were audio-recorded

with the knowledge holder's consent, and they were transcribed verbatim. Each conversation lasted approximately one-hour. One conversation was conducted with each knowledge holder. According to Kovach (2010), conversations are practiced in western qualitative research, however, this conversational method fits within an Indigenous paradigm and is distinctly relational and purposeful, meaning that the study involves a decolonial aim (Kovach, 2010). The Conversational Method involves distinct characteristics which I have used in my interactions with the knowledge holders (Kovach, 2010). For example, in my upbringing, I was taught that there are certain times when we shouldn't interrupt a storyteller in the middle of their story. In the research setting, there were certain times that I would refrain from interrupting for the sake of asking an interview question if a knowledge holder was in the middle of sharing their story. This form of conversation is linked to a particular tribal epistemology (or knowledge) and situated within a relational Indigenous paradigm in which I described in the "methodology" section of this study.

We asked each knowledge holder if they felt comfortable talking with me and any other members of the research team. Ruth and I talked with 6 knowledge holders together using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A). I independently conversed with 4 of the knowledge holders. Two of the knowledge holders indicated they only felt comfortable talking with me. Knowledge holders were invited to share their experiences with both government and tribal child welfare systems, their traditional kinship beliefs and practices, advice for child welfare students, state child welfare systems, and Tribal child welfare systems, and desires for changes in child welfare if they had a "magic wand." Follow up prompts included questions about specific experiences with the child

welfare systems and traditional child welfare practices. I also asked Knowledge Holders to assist in approving and/or editing their contributions to the findings, as a form of member checking.

Each conversation was informal, flexible, dialogic, collaborative, and consisted of a particular protocol as determined by the epistemology and/or place. In this context, I was raised with a particular protocol for introducing myself when I particularly meet other Indigenous people. For example, in one conversation, I didn't know the knowledge holder. In our introductions, we spoke about our tribal lineage and people we knew in common. These forms of introductions are very common among Indigenous peoples. Sharing this information is important when grounding Indigenous people to a particular place. It also helps build relationships, which is key in Indigenous research to establish trust. In the remaining conversations, I already had some form of kinship with each of the relative caregivers, so relationality was already established well before the research relationship began.

Kovach (2010) described the additional characteristics of conversational method, noting that it is informal, flexible, collaborative and dialogic (Kovach, 2010). This experience reminded me of when I talk to elders in my own community. I instinctively knew that I would have to balance deep listening with engaging in dialogue. In many Indigenous communities, including my own, it is disrespectful to interrupt people when they are sharing their story. In this research, I used my ancestral teachings to implement respectful conversations by not interrupting when appropriate. I employed "deep listening", a process where the listener is physically, intellectually, and spiritually presently engaged in the storyteller's story. The listener does not provide any verbal

feedback or interruption but may provide eye contact or affirming body language (Umbreit, personal communication, 2021). In other areas of the conversation, I engaged in a collaborative dialogue. I inserted myself as appropriate and asked follow-up questions when there was a natural break in their conversation/story.

Field Notes

Loosely structured field notes were created to briefly describe the context of the physical and social setting and the general demeanor of the knowledge holder. I also documented initial, overall themes immediately after each conversation, which was most helpful when I induced themes in the analysis phase. Some time had passed between each conversation and my data analysis, and the Covid-19 pandemic was somewhere in the middle of this process. Having these field notes helped remind me of each conversation and I was able to compare my initial thoughts with the final themes.

Setting

Conversations were conducted in various areas chosen by each knowledge-holder both in the Twin Cities and Duluth, Minnesota areas. Conversations took place at the following locations: University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Campus library, a Native American owned coffee shop and art gallery in Minneapolis, MN, a family restaurant in Duluth, MN, a tribal college in Northern Minnesota, their places of employment, and two were done by phone due to distance. None of the interviews occurred on Tribal lands, so no approval was sought from any particular Tribal Institutional Review Board or Tribal government was not sought. Finally, Knowledge holders were compensated with a $25 gift card.

Data analysis consisted of both western and Indigenous methods as described below.

Ethics and Informed Consent

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted through the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities to ensure protected, informed, and uncoerced consent.

The topic of Indigenous child welfare and colonization may be emotionally demanding. To minimize any emotional or spiritual risk to knowledge holders, they were assured that their participation was voluntary, and that they could discontinue their participation at any time. Both Ruti and I are experienced professionals who were sensitive to any emotional reactions that could have arisen and were prepared to appropriately respond with support. The consent process was explained to potential knowledge holders during recruitment. The knowledge holders read and signed the informed consent form (Appendix B) before each conversation. Knowledge holders were assured before interviews that they could withdraw at any time without any negative effects.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were uploaded into a secure drive on the University's computer. Transcriptions were coded for themes using NVIVO 12 for Mac (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2021) qualitative data analysis software (full data analysis methods are described below).

Thematic Analysis

One underlying aim for this study was to understand how Indigenous relative caregiver experiences with child welfare and kinship practices were similar. Therefore, I implemented thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) to identify, analyze, and interpret themes and relationships across stories. Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because it is "unbound by theoretical commitments" (p. 297), can be applied across research paradigms, and was developed for use within qualitative research. I analyzed the data using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phases for thematic analysis, which is an inductive approach to identify, analyze, and interpret themes. The following is a step-by-step process of how I carried out the thematic analysis:

Phase 1 – Familiarizing myself with the data

Phase one consisted of re-familiarizing myself with the data. I was personally involved in each conversation/data collection, but some time had passed since the conversations took place. I re-immersed myself by reading and listening to each conversation so that I could re-familiarize myself with the breadth, depth, and emotional contexts of the stories. In this phase, I was able to imagine myself in the time and place that I spent with each knowledge holder. As I actively read and listened to each conversation, I noted patterns and meanings in this phase by making notes.

Phase 2 – Generating initial codes

I used NVIVO software to code each conversation. I listened to each conversation, again, as I read along and coded the data. In this phase, I looked for pieces of data that captured the essence of the research question: stories of traditional kinship experiences and their experiences within the child welfare system. I also highlighted

some surrounding context for each code and noted potential areas for the Indigenous condensed conversation analysis (Kovach, 2010).

Phase 3 – Inducing themes

After coding each conversation, I merged patterned codes together under the same theme. Finding relationships immediately after coding a conversation helped me make connections while the stories were fresh in my mind. Next, I gathered the codes into broader themes. I used NVIVO to organize patterns of codes under each theme. I also organized different levels of themes and organize by parent, child, and grandchild themes.

Phase 4 – Reviewing themes

As I began to refine the themes, I reviewed them and created a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), level one theme analysis consists of reviewing the codes to determine if they fit and form a pattern. Level two theme analysis entails reading the entire dataset to determine if the themes fit in relation to the dataset, and to see if anything was missed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this process, I determined that some of the themes were similar and could be merged.

Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes

Defining and naming themes entails further refinement and definition. In this phase, I described the "essence" of each theme and determined how it fit within the overall story (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I constructed a narrative account and detailed analysis for each theme and described what was interesting about each theme and why (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also refined any themes that need to be broken down into sub-

themes. This is the phase in which I began to integrate the condensed conversation analysis (see below).

Phase 6 – Producing the report

After capturing fully refined themes, I began the final analysis and report writing, which followed a "concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 23). I made sure that each theme encompassed sufficient data. For each theme, I chose "vivid examples" or exemplars that captured the essence of each theme. I concluded each theme with a condensed conversation, which is described below.

Condensed Conversations and Stories

After locating the relationships across stories with thematic analysis, I applied a customized version of Margaret Kovach's condensed conversation analysis method to uphold relational accountability. Modeled by Kovach (2009), the condensed conversation honors the knowledge holder's story in context and voice of the knowledge holder (Kovach, 2010). According to Kovach (2010, p. 116), a condensed story comprises the essence of the inquiry and stays "as true as possible to the voice, context, and their truth" (Kovach, 2009, p. 53).

For this study, my customized version of condensed conversation includes a mixture of longer, contextualized exemplar when the knowledge holder was sharing a particular story. Some exemplars are longer to include contextual information. These represent moments when I did not insert my voice into the conversation and when they were telling their story uninterrupted. I also integrated condensed conversations where appropriate. These condensed conversations include my dialogue in addition to the

knowledge holder's expressions to signify my relationship to both the knowledge holder and topic.

In addition, Kovach explained that each conversation/story is "couched" between a brief introduction and a reflective commentary of the teachings most relevant to the writer (me). She clarified that readers will be able to make their own interpretations through their own lens as the conversation/story will remain in its context (Kovach, 2009). I included a brief introduction for each theme. I also wrote a deep and personal introduction of each knowledge holder as though I was introducing each person to my family or my community. I also described the reasons I asked them to contribute their knowledge to this study, and how they are related to this topic. My reflective commentaries are located in the final discussion section.

Chapter 6: Findings

Introduction

> And then because the colonizer controls the narrative then we are never able to say, "Hey, guess what, there's nothing wrong with us, there's something wrong with you." There's something wrong with the colonizer and until we have the space as Native people to carve that around our communities and around our children to say, "Hold up, we're going to try to stop this from happening in some little way," so like my little way was [child's name], right? I feel like I saved her from the system. We believe that you choose your parents, in the Spirit World, she chose them. And that's powerful. Who am I to disrupt that, you know what I mean? And who is the system to disrupt that? If you're constantly looking at our

community that there's something wrong with us and never understanding and seeing into yourself, then this is never going to stop.

Waterlily's words represent a theme expressed across knowledge holder stories: shifting the problematization of Indigenous peoples to the colonized child welfare system. Since the late 1800s, the federal government implemented policies and programs that focused on the "Indian problem", subjecting our people to colonizing and assimilation projects such as boarding schools and the Indian Adoption project. In this chapter, I present the experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers who have encountered the child welfare system. Relative caregiver, from a decolonial lens, can mean family or kin who have provided care for children in out-of-home placement, or by family agreement. Relative caregivers also describe people who shows up for their community and work to protect our Native children from the child welfare system through Indigenous centered interventions, activism, education, and decolonization. I wanted to honor our relationships that extend to the community because in many Indigenous communities, we are all related.

The thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of transcribed interviews revealed three broad themes and several subthemes that represent how the knowledge holders describe the system and their interactions with it. The first theme, "So we've been taken away since forever: Experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers in the colonized child welfare system", reflects how ongoing colonization in the child welfare system causes various stressors for caregivers and families. The second theme, "This is how we show up for our relatives: Living our Indigenous kinship amidst ongoing colonization", provides examples of how relative caregivers are living their intergenerationally transmitted

Indigenous kinship knowledge and practices, solutions, interventions to protect their young relatives from the child welfare system. Finally, the third theme, "Desires for the welfare of our children: Delinking from colonial child welfare", presents advice and their desires for a decolonial form of child welfare. Exemplars and condensed conversations will demonstrate some interrelationships across themes.

"So, we've been taken away since forever": Experiences of Indigenous Relative Caregivers in the Colonial Child Welfare System

The following stories were shared by Indigenous relative caregivers in response to the question, "how do you experience the child welfare system?" While no direct prompts were provided to steer the conversation toward colonialism, knowledge holders consistently shared experiences that implicate the child welfare system as perpetuating ongoing colonialism in various ways. Results revealed that the child welfare system is a perpetrator of colonization and colonial violence through forced removal, assimilation, negligence, invasion, punishment, and racism.

The child welfare system perpetuates ongoing colonialism by forcefully removing and separating Indigenous children

To illustrate how the child welfare system is a continuation of forced government removal practices, Ande provided an example that mirrored boarding school practices. Ande is an Indigenous leader, relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, and social worker (among many other titles). She is a professional with experience working in county child welfare and Indian child welfare in Minnesota. She is also an educator and continues to fight against ongoing colonization in the child welfare system. I met her in 2017 when we were working on our Ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare

Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. We met on several occasions and have built a relationship based on our shared experiences and roles within our families and communities. I asked her to participate in this project because of her lived experiences as a relative caregiver and child welfare social worker. She is a good relative who cares for young relatives in her community. I asked Ande about her experiences with the child welfare system as an Indigenous relative caregiver. The following condensed conversation between Ande and I illustrate how child removal, reminiscent of the boarding school era, is ongoing in the child welfare system.

> So back home in South Dakota, because I think of that as home too, not just [Tribe]. My brother's baby's mother takes care of her nieces and nephews because their Mom struggles with addiction. Those kids have been with different family members, they're really challenging kids. So, when it gets too difficult to manage, they go to the next family member, and unfortunately on Tuesday, they had to drop the kid off. They said, "We gave her to the state", and like, [Ande pauses and begins to silently cry]. You will think when people say that, that they think there's going to be help [but there was no help], and their heart was so heavy. They couldn't figure out what else to do. And the state would be like, "Oh well, give us your kid, we will help them", but they know that she's not going to get the help that she needs. And so, I could tell in her voice, I was like "Oh my gosh, what's wrong with you?" "Why are you so glum?" And she said, "We just gave her to the state", and I was just like, "Oh my god I'm so sorry." And I work for the state, not for the state of South Dakota, but that had to have been so hard. I was trying to tell her, "You guys really did try everything that you can, you know the stuff

that she needs you guys don't have access to without the help of the state." They're from South Dakota, they gave her to the state of North Dakota, to be shipped off to a whole other state.

Cary: What?!

Ande: Yes. We met at the airport [when] she was being shipped off to Ohio.

Cary: With who?

Ande: With a psychiatric facility. So, in the end they said they can't have contact. She said, "I wanted to go hug her. Say goodbye, but the social worker said 'No'," only the mother, she's a young mother, and her baby could say bye to her and once she got on the plane, none of the family could have communication with her.

Cary: What? [in disbelief]

Ande: Yeah.

Cary: Sounds like the boarding school all over again. I'm taking your child. Wow! Wow It's amazing how many of us try to avoid [the system]. I've heard from a few other people who just take the kids and try to avoid the county or state and altogether.

Ande: "Yup!"

Likewise, Sage shared her experiences working alongside the child welfare system as a Reunification Case Manager with her tribe. I asked Sage to share her knowledge because I value her perspective as an Indigenous relative caregiver in the communal sense. I met Sage about two years ago in the University setting. I got to know

her a little more when we became Facebook friends. I appreciate social media because sometimes people may reveal their values and stances on issues. Sage's beliefs and decolonial actions within the Twin Cities are evident as she continues to fight against ongoing colonization as an Indigenous leader within the community and a "Reunification Case Manager" with her tribe. She is a fierce mother, advocate, activist, social worker, and relative (among many other roles). She has dedicated her life to ensure Indigenous children are safe from the colonial child welfare system. During the beginning of our conversation, I asked Sage why she chose to work in the Indigenous child welfare system. She described her own experiences in the system and determined that she didn't want any other child to experience what she went through:

> I feel like it's legal kidnapping. I'm working in it right now and I see it almost every day. Some of the things that we have to do or some of the things that I have to hear or fight against [are horrible]. First of all, why do I have to tell a judge that this is against the law? And after that is ignored, why do we have to pay our attorney to write a briefing to the judge to explain why what they're doing is illegal? What were the judges doing? The judge is supposed to know the laws. Last month I had to have our lawyers draft a briefing to tell the judge "This is why what you did is against the law." Why is that a thing??! Why should we have to spend our own money that could be going to our families on explaining to a literal expert of the law, why what they're doing is against the law? That idea blows my mind. You know, it's a very basic thing. It wasn't even specific to ICWA, it was a very basic part of Child Protection Law...and the thing is, had I not been there, I think it would have just slid by. But it was a really big thing that

had a really big impact that could have torn an entire family apart. It could have led to a child being moved from here to another continent.

Sage elaborated and described how she had to navigate the system to make sure laws were followed appropriately:

> Yeah, then I was going through the whole system trying to figure out, well how do I address this judge that just literally did something illegal. How do I fix that, who oversees this judge? DHS told me they don't get involved because we oversee counties and social workers not judges. They told me if mom has a problem, then mom will have to report the judge. There should be someone overseeing this, and I think the judge knew the whole time. I think it was just an attempt to and because this has happened, it's not the same issue but several issues with the same person trying to like jump the gun and like do things that are not okay, and it's like a constant battle, like who's holding them accountable? Nobody!

The child welfare perpetuates colonialism by imposing the "modern colonial gender system"

A few of the relative caregivers have lived experiences of the child welfare and foster care systems as children. They described how the system continued to impose what Lugones (2007) described as the modern colonial gender system, that is, the systematic gendering of Indigenous Peoples to create a hierarchy of superior and inferior and human and inhuman. As described in chapters 1 and 3, the settler government imposed heteropatriarchal, Anglo gender identities to civilize Indigenous Peoples through various colonial projects (Cahill, 2011).

I asked Kevin to share his knowledge for this project because they are a well-respected elder, leader, Two-Spirit relative, educator, and professional mental health clinician. Kevin is nationally known throughout Turtle Island and has dedicated their life to protecting Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ youth from ongoing colonization in child welfare and foster care system. Kevin strives to bring attention to the often ignored issue of violence against Two Spirit, Native LGBTQ+ and Native men and boys. Kevin uses their personal story in trainings to help others who are experiencing similar situations. While the following excerpt represents a traumatic event, it also represents how the child welfare system has inflicted trauma by imposing western gender norms onto our people. In Kevin's story, negligence through the submerging of their Two-Spirit identity was extremely traumatic. They also discussed an important intersection of boarding schools forcing western gender norms. Kevin described how their own involvement in the child welfare system inflicted emotional violence and trauma by forcing modern colonial gender norms through state sanctioned therapy. When asked about their specific experience with the child welfare system, Kevin followed up this point with his own experience as a Two-Spirit youth who experienced the foster care system:

> They [the child welfare system] will in turn create more mental health issues. They will then create their own internalized homophobia, in how they see themselves. Oftentimes, when a child is not feeling safe that's when they run to the streets and become a bigger target for sex and human trafficking. So, I don't believe that the system is doing enough for individuals who identify [as Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+]. I also speak about the child welfare system failing me because they continued to keep putting me back into a home where more violence was

perpetrated upon me. Sometimes, as an adult, I think about what I experienced, and I think they just put me in a place not even knowing the impact that it would have on me. At the age of ten when I was emancipated by the court system, I was forced to go to a boarding school and my experience in the boarding school was not good. I was severely abuse, and my own social workers, my own child protection program, didn't know how to properly serve me. I was forced to see a psychologist and the psychologist was more interested in changing my identity rather than talking about the trauma that I experienced. I don't have really good things to say about the system today.

From their professional experience, Kevin elaborated and described how they encounter similar failures for Two-Spirit youth in the child welfare system

I will say that we are failing our Native youth by not teaching them about this identity, and I believe that it's our responsibility as Native people to teach them about how important their identity was before colonization. I had an opportunity to attend a panel of young people, and one of the individuals identified as a Two-Spirit transgender (female to male) and he talked about his experience of being forced to go to church. He talked about getting no support about his identity. I went to the higher up people and said, "I'm really saddened because the system hasn't changed much." They looked at me and they said, "really?" And I said, "yes," because that child should not have to be put in a place where he's not being supported for who he is or even having workers who cannot find support for him.

Sage had a similar experience from her lived experience with the child welfare and foster care system. This particular story revealed how the child welfare system and her foster parents imposed upon her the modern colonial gender system:

> I was taken away as a kid and put into foster care, and so was my Mom, and my Gramma was in a boarding school. So, we've been taken away since forever. I grew up in the system for most of my childhood. I was placed in 16 homes, and only one of them was an ICWA home. It really sucked. I mean I had to do a lot of things I didn't even recognize were because I didn't understand the concept of patriarchy. I think because as you get older you learn more about the language that is used to describe these things as you get older, but then I didn't recognize what patriarchy was, or why Christianity was so important to my foster parents. I didn't recognize it because I came from a long line of matriarchs and Christianity was not a big part of my childhood with my family. So, I didn't realize, things like the idea that you have to have food on my table at 5pm if you're a woman, and it can't be a minute late or a man's going to yell, or you have to go to church like no if ands or buts not even, you don't even get out of it when you're sick …. like you have to go to church. I was forced to go to church in several of my foster homes and do a lot of different things I could not understand... you have to wear pants when men are in the house, and these are things I never understood. I never understood while I was in it. I didn't grow up with my family like that. And so, I got put into these places where like none of the things that I learned growing up with my biological family was, it was all different and I was so confused. And because I wouldn't conform to those ideas, I was not accepted. Now looking back

> on it I have I finally have the proper terminology to say what these things are. This is what I hope [to help people understand] that it changes kids, it changes you, it changes your adulthood, it changes your child rearing. It changes everything if you happen to buy into that and when you're a kid, you buy into a lot of what's fed to you. If that's what it is and that's what it is.

What is profound about these shared experiences is that we continue to experience harm as a result of the ongoing colonialism in the child welfare system. Oftentimes, we don't recognize that genderization is just as harmful as racialization and both are colonization. In addition, knowledge holders also described experiences of trauma and harm from the child welfare system.

The child welfare system perpetrates colonial violence through negligence, invasion, punishment and racism

Knowledge holders described colonial violence from the child welfare system that have resulted in harm. The following experiences were due to what knowledge holders depicted as failures or negligence, invasion, punishment, and racism within the child welfare system.

Colonial violence through negligence

Negligence from the child welfare system can mean failure to implement laws such as the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), resulting in massive harm to the child and their family. Negligence can also show in the form of failure to provide appropriate services, or depriving the child of culture-based services, resulting in harm. Sage shared how being in the colonial child welfare system deprived her from her

cultural identity and their negligence in implementing ICWA caused her to become severed from her family:

> I was removed from my family when I was eight, and then we tried back and forth to you know they "tried" I'm air quoting this [tried]. They tried to reunify, and it was permanency when I was 12. We spent that long going back and forth. After talking to my mom later, she did not even understand what was happening and no one had given her a case plan. What was she supposed to work on without a plan?

Sage went on the describe how non-compliance with ICWA resulted in moves through several different placements:

> When I was 12 then I was out of home for good, then I had to go through all those different homes. Then later in life I found out that's not how it should have been. Sometimes I was only in a home for a few days because they got rid of me, having to pack all of my belongings in black garbage bags and go to the next person who verbally said I was part of the family but only for a little while.

She also described how this negligence resulted in the loss of her Native identity

> There are laws in place that should have to make it make it so it's not like that and I think about all the stuff that I've missed out on. Even getting back into my culture and getting to know my relatives is hard because I was removed for so long. I realize now that was part of the plan [for removal]. I don't want that experience for anyone else because it's terrible. You lose your identity. Not only that but you actually lose real people in your life, but you lose some of yourself.

Finally, Sage talked about the impact of culturally inappropriate services:

> Yeah, looking back on it now and see how. You have to be forced to see a therapist for most foster homes and like all my therapists none of them were culturally appropriate. So, I just sat in a room with a white lady across. Then I just sat there, staring, like "I'm not going to talk to you, I don't know you. You don't know my life. You don't understand the way that I live with my family lives like I'm not going to talk to you" and so I literally had a counselor for, I think an entire year, and I just sat across the table from her. And she would try to keep talking to me, and I would just look around for an hour, every week. There was no opportunity when I was a kid to go to ceremony, there wasn't an opportunity to learn my language, there wasn't an opportunity to even be with my family…. they would cut off visits and I wasn't allowed to be with my family at all for a pretty long period. No one tried to set up visits with my family members even knowing they are supposed to search for relatives right away. They didn't do that either. My only relative ICWA home was when I was 16, only ICWA home was when I was 16. I had spent from age eight until 16 in a bunch of other homes that they didn't even look for an ICWA placement. I just happened to get my third social worker throughout that period, and she was brand new and just graduated college. I was her first case she got handed. She had just learned about ICWA, and so she immediately got on top of it and within a few months I was in that home. But until then, they didn't even really look into it.

Lacy is an Indigenous Aunty who has cared for several of her young nephews over the past 20 years. She indicated that she learned how to take care of her family by

the way she was taken care of by her own big extended family in her tribal community. She is also a social worker who fights against colonialism in the child welfare system through social work education and research, and she continues to practice those kinship teachings that her relatives and community taught her. Lacy described a specific incident that was profoundly disrespectful that prompted her to demand that the county connect her sister to a Native American parenting program from their Tribe.

> I don't know what they were doing in my sister's home, but one of them didn't work out at all. One of the workers came into my sister's house and got very disrespectful. My mother was there and saw it. The girl even put her feet on her couch – she sat on the couch like this [feet and legs crossed on the couch]. My mother scolded the worker, "Take your feet off my daughter's couch!" [Laughter]. So, I asked the county social worker, "Can you refer my sister to the Oneida Parenting Program?" Sadly, there were some hoops she had to jump through, but she eventually got there. My sister felt more connected to the Oneida parenting program and workers. She engaged best with the Oneida parenting people. I believe that the presence and being with other Native people, they didn't approach her with shame. Knowing that she's going to be there and they're not going to shame her for anything or be disrespectful to her. I think that really helped her engage and open up. I know that my sister is hyper aware of shame. She's very aware if somebody's trying to judge her or shame her and she gets really like sensitive about it. So that parenting that the County sent in was a bust.

I met Waterlily at a community event that she organizes for Indigenous women's wellness. If you need to find her, you will always find her in her community. As I

attended her events throughout the past few years since we moved to Minnesota in 2016, I learned that we share common values where we, according to Waterlily, “show up for our people”, in a communal way. Waterlily is also a community leader, organizer, educator, and a good relative. I asked her to share her knowledge because she is an Aunty and cares for many young relatives in her community. Waterlily is also a professional and holds immense systemic knowledge. She is steadfast in recognizing racism and colonialism in the contemporary settler systems that continue to control our lives. She continues to fight against colonialism and to reclaim and revitalize our Indigenous lifeways. Waterlily described a situation where her family experienced harm when the system failed to communicate with her cousin the requirements she needed to complete in order to see her children. Waterlily discussed how she ended up doing the work that the social worker was responsible for so that her cousin could see her kids:

> When [Child’s Name] got placed with me, we had her birthday, and her mom was obviously still using. I went up to her and asked, "What are you doing? I guess I'm going to raise her if you don’t get your shit together." And I said, "But what the hell, you need to step up for this girl, this baby.” She replied, "oh my god Waterlily, I haven't seen her only but two or three times, I don’t understand why I *can’t* see her" and I'm like, "What?" – she told me, “I try to set up visits with the child protection worker and he didn’t show up or the baby didn’t show up.” There were misconnections, she said, "I don’t understand what I have to do to see my baby." And I'm like, “hold up, let me figure it out.” So, by this time, it's like two, three months later, and I finally see the child protection worker and the court case stuff is finally given to me and it literally says in there, “no supervised visit or no

visits until they go into treatment. So, I'm like it looks you just got to go to treatment, so I don't even know the process because I don't do that in the community. So, I'm like what 's the process and she's like, "I don't know, I think I just got to go to detox." So, I picked up my cousin and the dad, [Child's] dad. First, I feed them then I drive them to detox. Then I'm like okay, what's the process? So, then I hit up the child protection worker who technically that would be his job, right.

Cary: The new one?

Waterlily: Yeah, the new one. But he's got 80 cases when is he going to go pick up my cousin and drive her to detox? So, they go through detox, he gets in treatment first and then she's also supporting him and then going visit him and then she gets released from detox and they don't have a treatment place for her.

Ande discussed a situation where the child welfare system failed to conduct a simple relative search that caused a delay in placing the kids with her as a relative caregiver.

But definitely, a simple relative search like that is across the board. Something that would need to be done in a tribal or a state court case and that wasn't done because they would have found me, and I would have gotten a letter within the first 30 days of their placement letting me know that they were in placement and asking me how I want to be involved. And that's not ICWA, that's just child welfare practice. It's just something we have to do. My sister would have gotten a letter, once I got the phone call from my mom, I called my sisters and asked,

> “Hey did you know that Uncle's kids are in foster care, and have you gotten a call? Have you gotten any information? I kind of had to even advocate that the kids be placed with me, but they told me they had to look into things. I asked, “what do you have to look into? I'm a supervisor for child protection. I have a home big enough…my background check is clear…I have a vehicle…I'm willing to have supervised visits in my home…, like, what more do you need to look into? I don't get it, they have no reason like sometimes when we have to take a deeper look into people, it’s because something has flagged. But there was no flag for me, besides the fact that I lived out of their home district. Okay, but I still live in the state. And I'm talking about coordinating visits, and I go there regularly so in my head, it was like when are you getting these kids in my home? You want me to come and get them? Like what is the holdup here?
>
> Cary: How long did it take to get the kids into your home?
>
> Ande: It was about four months.
>
> Cary: Oh my god!

Amber is a relative caregiver, an elder, and a child welfare professional from a tribe in Minnesota. I first met Amber in 2014 when I worked for a national tribal justice system training and technical assistance organization. Amber served as a consultant and often trained tribal communities in tribal child welfare and justice system processes. Amber described how a lack of services in the system overwhelms families:

> I would like to see them follow the families as a whole for longer periods of time before they try to call them. What happens is the parents go to treatment. They’re

> in treatment for 30, 60, 90 days. They come out of treatment and they're coming home to the same environment that they left. They're newly sober and really have good intentions, but their same old friends are calling them, their same old family is coming around. Then, they say, "Okay here's your kids, here's your five kids that you haven't seen for two years but you went to treatment, so, we're going to give them back to you." I keep saying that they're overwhelming these already vulnerable people when they're coming home from treatment. It should be monitored longer. I think our expectations should be higher rather than thinking that this is the normal thing. I don't believe that we're supposed to accept things to be normal that shouldn't be.

These shared experiences of relative caregivers illustrate the traumatic impacts of child welfare system negligence and failures. The next sub-theme discusses experiences of an invasive child welfare system with deeply embedded issues of power.

Colonial violence through invasion

Knowledge holders described their reactions to child welfare system interactions that they deemed to be invasive. Lacy described an invasive situation that caused her stress as a relative caregiver:

> When we were involved in the system, I felt invaded at times because the worker had to come to my house and inspect my house. The parenting people came over and I felt invaded. Now, they were just there to spend time with my nephews, but I felt like it was an invasion of privacy. Now the government is involved and can enter my home at will and evaluate us. They had to inspect my house like I was the one who did something wrong. I get it, and I know they have to make sure that

a kid is going into a safe house and family, but as a Native person, I have a different feeling about this type of invasion. That feeling that my ancestors had as our lands were invaded, and we still feel like we are being invaded when outsiders come into our homes, and they have control over our lives. It's stressful.

Joe was referred to me by an Indigenous colleague and community member. Joe is from a tribe in Minnesota, a community member and a long-time relative caregiver and foster provider. Joe and his wife are known in the community for caring for many Native kids throughout the years as foster parents. I asked Joe to describe how Indian child welfare workers have been involved with his family and the kids they care for and if they have been supportive:

Most are really good about helping you work with the system. There's been a couple we've had problems with, but the majority of them are just great and I'm glad they are there because somebody's got to watchdog the county because, you know, I don't trust the county.

Cary: Can you give an example of one of the supports that were important for you from the Indian child welfare workers?

Joe: Yeah, not all workers are culturally sensitive. Some have really unrealistic expectations of this or that and, like I said, they got the power. They can write down in their case file and show the judge and they're more believed than us, I think in a lot of cases. So, we try to get a good relationship with somebody and there's always a team of people who does it. There are protection workers, sometimes there's probation. So, there's always a big team and of course

> everybody's got to watch us too as foster parents. Sometimes they seem like they're monitoring us more than the kid. So, we just try to keep them doing their job, which is not always easy to do because there's county workers that just want to do their time and not their job really. There's a lot of good county workers though. There's been just some we run into that, you know, are useless. So, it helps when there's somebody on that team that you can work with, and that's usually with Native workers.

Colonial violence through punishment

Knowledge holders described the child welfare system as a punitive structure that they fear and try to avoid. Susie is a young Native woman with a young daughter and nephew. Her Mother often lives with her to help her take care of her household. We became close friends when we met at the University family housing complex where we bonded over our shared experiences of being Native women pursuing a doctoral degree and Aunty caregiving (among other things). She recently graduated with a Doctoral degree. We would sometimes talk about our reasons for avoiding the child welfare system when we would meet to process our experiences taking care of multiple children while in rigorous programs. Susie explained that she tries to avoid the child welfare system because she feels like it would criminalize her sister:

> The formal system has so much power. Then you have to have certain paperwork for them. They're not sensitive to that openness with families. Like, okay, we don't agree with things my sister does, so [child's name] is here with me. This is a better situation for him, but they don't make it easy without criminalizing her. I feel like my sister would be criminalized. I feel like women in general, if you

> don't have your kids, they are looked at like "what's wrong with you?" So, I feel like they do that a lot. Then they would be like, well, why does she have her younger one and not her older one? I just feel like they try to make it seem like there's something wrong with her even though it's just a better placement. I live in a better school district. Like if it was simple like that, but they really try to go hard – harder into it, I think. Or even if they don't, I feel like I have some weird subconscious thing where it's like, oh they might [get involved] and I don't even want them to.

Lacy shared how the punitive nature of the child welfare system negatively affected her family and their relationships. She was taking care of her nephews who had been placed with her by the county child welfare system:

> I think when formal government systems get involved it's a really negative thing. It's a really bad thing. And that's why my sister ended all communication with us—she was angry. Two weeks after I reported her, she stopped talking to us. She was hurt and angry. When she finally came around you could see the anger, the guilt, and the pain in her face because reporting somebody is such a negative, punitive experience. So, it was hard for me to even make the report in the first place, but I felt like I had to at the time. I try really hard to avoid getting the system involved.

Lacy also described how a no-contact order affected her nephews:

> So, I knew that they missed her, and they loved her. I would tell them I love her too because she is my baby sister. That was the sad thing about being in the

> system, that there were sometimes no-contact orders. My sister and her kids couldn't see each other until the parenting people could facilitate supervised visits. I know that those types of interventions are necessary in some serious situations. But in our situation, I could've handled supervised visits with my own sister. They didn't even consult with me about how I felt about it. I just remember my younger nephew would cry himself to sleep every night because he missed his Mother so badly.

In addition, Lacy described her reason for choosing not to pursue kinship care from the county that depicts the acceptance of kinship care monies can be punitive:

> Receiving kinship care isn't going to impact my decision to take care of my nephews. I would take care of them either way. If I got it, great. I've gotten it before. When we moved here [to State] from a different state, I didn't have time to look into it, so I just let it go because it comes with strings attached because not the county is state involved in my family and that's not worth it. That's one of the reasons I take in my nephews to keep them out of the system. My Aunty didn't get any kinship care for her grandchildren she cared for. She didn't push for any monetary assistance because she believed that the children's mother would take them back because the system would come after her for child support. That would have caused her more trouble, so that's why she avoided kinship care. Her grandchildren were loved and taken care of without it because that's just how we take care of each other in our family and community. We do it regardless of system involvement or money.

Colonial violence through racism

Knowledge holders described experiences of racism with their child welfare system interactions. Their experiences indicated race as being a major factor in some of the harm they experienced when encountering the child welfare system. Waterlily described how she experienced racial disparities as a professional in a children's hospital setting:

> And guess how she lost those kids? Guess what it was. Untreated depression, that looked like neglect. That was neglect, but how many times are Native women going to lose their kids for being depressed? That's a disparity in itself because I'm pretty sure white women don't lose their kids for being depressed, because why? They have the resources. Because the difference between an active addiction problem between communities are resources. So, I work at a children's hospital, and even in diagnosis you can see racism. Our kids get diagnosed with FAS [Fetal Alcohol Syndrome] but white kids get diagnosed with Autism. They're almost the same symptoms.

When Ande was asked if she was involved in any investigation processes or court hearings as a relative caregiver, she described how the racist child welfare system incited fear:

> I did recently have a maltreatment report made against me by the police. Part of what makes my experience so complicated is that I work for this agency [child welfare], and I live within this county. So, the day I got the phone call from the police officer and explained what was happening, he said (he didn't know that I work here), "I do need to make a maltreatment report." And my heart just sank. I got so, so scared and I've had other instances where I've got the feeling that

people were going to report me, and because I work for the system, I get so scared that they're going to remove my kids and the kids I care for. This police officer said he had to make a report. He was trying to explain why. And I said, “No, I understand.” And I got really quiet, and I started crying. And he asked, “what's wrong with you? Are you okay?” I said, “you're about to make a report on me and I'm a person of color in this community. I know that the system doesn't treat us fairly. I'm scared.” He said, “well you don't really have anything to be scared of. You know this, and this is what it is. What you said to me makes sense [about the report]. And I replied, “but you're white. Don't Tell me I don't have anything to be scared of.” I said, “I work for this system.” And he said, “well then you would know that you don't have anything to be scared of.” And I said, “let me reiterate, I work for the system. I'm a person of color, I have every reason to be afraid.”

Ongoing colonization within the child welfare system can be deemed as negligence (failures), invasiveness, punishment, and racism. As such, relative caregivers continue to experience historical trauma triggers and ongoing trauma as they experience the child welfare system. To make matters even more complicated, knowledge holders described ongoing colonization from our own people in their shared experiences shared in the next section.

“The child welfare system is a “colonial stressor” that “triggers historical trauma”

The ongoing colonialism and colonial violence perpetrated by the settler child welfare system, including forced removal and submerging Indigenous lifeways, assimilation, negligence, invasion, punishment, and racism is evident in the shared experiences of relative caregivers. These conflicts can cause harm given the state child

welfare system's power and control over Indigenous bodies. Results also revealed relative caregivers experienced historical trauma triggers as a result of their experiences, for example trauma was triggered by the threat of removal by child welfare case workers.

Indigenous relative caregiver experiences align with Brave Heart and colleagues' (2011) "historical trauma response", which is defined as a myriad of responses to historical trauma, that is, the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma" (p. 283). These trauma triggers are deeply tied to those of our ancestors who were abducted and forced to attend boarding schools (U.S.) and residential schools (Canada) schools beginning in the late 1800s (Bombay, McQuaid, Young, Sinha, Currie, Anisman & Matheson, 2020) and those relatives who were stolen and adopted to white families during the Indian adoption era (Balcom, 2007; George, 1997; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Thibeault & Spencer, 2019).

When asked to respond to a question about her experiences with the child welfare system, Waterlily explained how the child welfare system "triggers" her historical trauma when she was helping a community member:

> My teenager [a teen she was caring for] got placed in an unsafe home, and any child protection worker just had to pull up the calls to know that there were sexual abuse allegations in that home. Then they would have never placed the child there. The community knows which houses are safe and unsafe. I heard a story from my community, where they had to go down to that court and say you can't place that child in that house, he was my abuser to the judge in order to save that child from being placed in that unsafe house, right? I was door knocking at

[Tribal Community] last summer and someone came out and said, "Waterlily, I need your help, one of my grandchildren are in foster care right now and I'm pretty sure they're being sexually abused by someone who's coming into the home." These things are really hard to unpack. I'm like, "Let me support you through this call, these are the things we need to as a community, call child protection," So, I'm coaching her through the call because this is what we would do as a community. We would say, how can I support you, how can I guide you to this process. Because when she calls, she gets all kinds of triggered. And by triggered, what I mean is that dealing with *the system is a historical trauma trigger* [emphasis added]. Because they used words like "removal", and they used tactics around fear. How are we supposed to engage in healing if we don't ever stop to think about how we're perpetuating these traumas over and over for Native people? So, even if they wanted to recruit me again as a foster parent, the system is traumatizing me and stirring up my historical trauma by using these words. Then I don't want to do this either. How am I supposed to care for this child? The system is so far from ever being able to do that because it's a system and the system is colonized, right?

Ande shared an historical trauma trigger that she both witnessed and experienced as a professional who works for the system. This is our condensed conversation:

Yeah, in their world in, their eyes that's so emotionally traumatizing for the kids. They need you to help them pack up, you need to help the kids transition into the car, and you're not only taking my kids, but you want me to help you.

Cary: Oh my gosh.

Ande: Yeah.

Cary: So, traumatizing for those little kids. I can't imagine. You think about your own kids. My daughter can't even sleep overnight anywhere. She's in a phase where she is clung to me.

Ande: Yes, and the faces of kids that you remove are absolutely heartbreaking. I hated that part of my job even when I did it and the parents knew, that didn't change the face. It didn't change the hurt. The parents hurt too. The kids aren't part of all those conversations about what's going on or where they are going. [As the social worker] I'm going to be forced to remove your kids, so the kids don't understand because they're not part of those conversations. All they know is that you've been showing up to their house a lot. And then one day you show up, and you take them. Just talk about *triggering for all of the historical trauma* [emphasis added], the blood memory from the boarding school. You have just up and removed [the kids] and, oh, man, it's triggering.

Similarly, Waterlily described an invasive interaction with a foster licensing case worker who came to her house to complete paperwork. Waterlily explained how the case worker triggered an emotional response after she used the word "removal."

"I'm not comfortable telling you this, I don't know who you are and you're in my house and I'm super uncomfortable and what's your bottom line? Why are you asking me this?" I grew up in [Tribal Community] and I knew a lot of people who lived in [Tribal Community] who didn't have jobs who did foster care. And I told her, "I don't understand what you're saying like how come you need to know all of

these about me when I know you give licenses to people who don't have jobs." And she says, "We want to make sure you're not going to live off of this." And I was like, "Again, I'm pretty sure you give licenses to people who do not have jobs," and then I didn't understand the question. Then she said if I didn't sign the paperwork, she was going to *remove* [emphasis added] the child from my care, have the child *removed* from my care, *removed*. I said, "Let me tell you something about your use of the word *removal* in my house, you are triggering my trauma, do you understand what happened to our people in boarding schools?" I was like, "Are you coming into my house as a child protection worker or you're coming to my house as a licensing worker? Because I think you put on the wrong hat. And is this how you talk to white families?" She was interrogating me in a way that is making it seem like I'm only going to do this foster care for a check. I'm calling her out on it and I'm like, "I don't want you in my house." And she's like if you don't sign this… I can't even remember if I signed it, she completely triggered me and in a way that made me question if I can do this because I don't know if I could have these white social workers in my house. I got to work with them all day long, I don't want them in my house.

Waterlily went on to describe another traumatic situation involving her young relative whom she saved from being removed and placed on a 72-hour hold. However, she experienced the threat of removal in the meantime due to barriers:

> My family member's child was placed on a 72-hour hold, so I called the social worker, it's 4:00 o'clock and she told me, "I can't tell you if I have the child." I said, let me tell you right now, "I'm licensed to do foster care, I need to know the

process because I do not want my relative to go to anybody else's house if she can come to my house," and they said, "Well, we need to have the Tribe," and now I have connections." I was like, who did they need to call at 5:00 o'clock now on a Wednesday? Because the system isn't viewing a 72-hour hold as a trauma and I'm like, what if someone came [and removed] your child for 72-hours and didn't tell you anything about where your kid was. And imagine being three years old and with strangers for 72 hours while you try to do this investigation. When you had a relative calling you, saying "I am licensed," So she said the process then would be have my licensing worker who's also friendly [sarcasm], at 5:00 o'clock, call them and say that my house is fine, and she can come.

Finally, Lacy described a similar triggering experience with a social worker who threatened to remove her nephew from their family and place him into foster care.

I recently had my nephew placed with me for a year by a county juvenile social worker. My nephew, [child's name], had got into some trouble, so my sister and I agreed that he could stay at my house until my sister became more stable with her housing. Once my sister became stable, we had a conversation and agreed that [child] was ready to return home. When I told the social worker about our plans, he became upset and threatened to place him in foster care because he didn't feel like my sister was ready to bring [child] back home. I instantly felt a sinking feeling in my gut as though my blood was made of lighter fluid, and he threw a lighted match on me. I was livid. I'm a social worker and I know that is not how you treat people we work with. I let him have it. As my voice began to raise, I told him that he needed to check his power and learn what the word "removal"

> means to Native people. He accused me of scolding him. I said if that's what he wants to call it. He was selfishly focused on his fragile feelings and was completely unaware of what us Natives have went through and continue to experience as far as colonization and trauma by the child welfare system.

These shared experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers illustrate that ongoing colonialism and removal continues to trigger historical trauma responses and negatively impact overall trust of the child welfare system. The next sub-theme illustrates failures within that child welfare system that has resulted in harm.

"We are doing the work of the colonizer": Tribal child welfare systems perpetuate internalized oppression, or internalized colonization

Tribes can inadvertently contribute to the ongoing assimilation and colonization of our own people through the implementations of policies and practices defined, created, and codified by western lawmakers and service providers (Johnston-Goodstar, Waubanascum, & Eubanks, in press). As social workers (including Indigenous practitioners) carry out western defined services, social work's history of missionary practices have forced Indigenous social workers to question if they have contributed to the ongoing colonization and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples (Hart, 2003). These experiences are consistent to what Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998), Poupart (2003) and Gonzalez, Simard & Baker-Demaray (2014) described as "internalized oppression", defined as violence and oppression committed internally among one's own group, people or community. Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998) coined the term "historical unresolved grief" to explain the connection between societal ills such as internalize oppression, historical trauma and "unresolved grief across generations" (p. 60). When asked to

describe their experiences with tribal child welfare, Knowledge holders talked about our own tribal systems can become extensions of the settler state. Kevin described how a national Indian child welfare organization and our own tribal communities have to catch up with honoring and fully integrating education and services focused on Two-Spirit relatives in the child welfare system:

> Cary: In your opinion, is the Indian Child Welfare Act implemented properly and if not, how?
>
> Kevin: No, it's not. [national Indian child welfare organization] has been around for 40 years? Two years ago was the first time that [national Indian child welfare organization] had individuals who identified as Two-Spirit, who are leaders within the community, that actually presented on the topic. I've – along with [co-presenter's name] presented on the impact of the foster care system on Two-Spirit people three years ago at the [national Indian child welfare organization] Conference. So even I believed that our own systems shun Two-Spirit identity because the identity was lost because of colonization. I've had conversations with individuals who know that their tribal communities aren't very welcoming to Two-Spirit people, so I do believe that our systems and tribal communities need to be improved. I believe that we still need to continue to educate and bring awareness about the identity. I can tell you so many stories. When I do trainings, the first thing I always ask if they know the word in their language that would identify someone like me. The majority of time people don't know – and I had one elder stand up and she said, "I don't know the word in my language, this is the first time I've ever heard of the Two-Spirit term and lastly, I didn't know that

there was that much violence within your community." So again, we're happy to educate and bring a lot of awareness of the impact from this community, that we are a forgotten, and that we are a severely underserved population. One of the questions I get as a clinician at trainings or community events is, "when do you know when a child is coming out?" And my response is that if a child is feeling unsafe, if they are living in a home where there's homophobia, if there's slurs, or if adults around them are speaking down about individuals who identify – the child won't come out.

Kevin went on to describe how tribal communities also need to address Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ marginalization that happens in our own communities:

I do a lot of work in regard to sexual violence against men and boys, and I know this is also a huge issue that's impacting Native communities. I watched the documentary, "Predator on the Reservation", and I was just blown away with the fact that the health service knew about this individual who was molesting boys. These boys are now grown men, but the reality of it is that we don't know how many of these boys were sexually assaulted by this doctor. So, a lot of these boys are now grown men, probably with a lot of major issues in regard to domestic violence, sexual assault or even perpetrating themselves. We really need to learn how to break down these barriers that we have even within our own communities and work on healing within our own communities. A lot of times we don't want to face these issue that are impacting our communities, so we sort of push them away. I've heard comments such as, "why, that's not happening in the community". However, in reality, I think our denial prevents us from healing.

Ande and Betty described instances where tribal child welfare systems are an extension of the state system. Ande discussed that her tribe had more stringent restrictions than the county. As a relative caregiver, she described how tribal child welfare seemed to be an “extension of the county” and not focused on her family, making it challenging to provide care for the children.

> This is hard because the tribal court system is involved as far as my family. So, I didn't know that this case was even open or anything and then the kids were placed with me. The women in our family are the leaders. They are the ones that make the decisions. So, when I took the kids, my Aunt is kind of like the go to. Since her grandma passed away, she's the one that's filled that role. She's been talking to me about what's been going on, and her frustration with the system. From her perspective, she really feels like [Tribe Name] is just an extension of the county, and that they're not really practicing child welfare. When she talks about it, she gets to the point of tears because she is so frustrated. She feels like they're not engaging with her. They had multiple meetings and they weren't asking them if they would be placement resources. They were asked to come to family group decision making meetings. However, the communication is lacking. If I'm really honest about how the experience goes, *it really does feel like an extension of the county* [Emphasis Added]. The challenging part is that the workers tend to forget that this is my family. I'm seeing a lot of differences in how services are being applied. Granted, the tribes don't have to follow active efforts, If I give the worker resources to get my Uncle a psych eval [because I work for the system and I am knowledgeable of resources] and you still don't connect him with that service, I

> feel like that is really dropping the ball. Then you sit in in my home and talk about how he can never parent his kids. Well, you haven't given him the services he's needed to be able to parent his kids.

Betty is an elder from a Tribe in Minnesota. I met her when we were working on the ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota – Duluth, Department of Social work. She is a long-time social worker, educator, community leader, and has dedicated her life to the welfare of Indigenous children. Betty mentioned there is still some lingering distrust, even among tribal social workers, but she also expressed some hope:

> The families continue to be distrustful, and they watch the Indian social workers. If they do something that looks like unfairness, [the families] feel like they're becoming a county worker. I'm not sure if that's still going on. The young social workers now at [Tribe Name] are really good people, and I admire them. I've had a couple of them as my students.

Waterlily talked about her frustrations with how colonization has caused our own people to become dependent on the child welfare system. She compared our original ways of "showing up for relatives" versus solely relying on the colonized child welfare system to intervene with our families:

> Believing in who we fundamentally are as Indian people is definitely rooted and in an Anishinaabe world view that I believe that I still have even though I speak English and I wear white men clothes and live in white men houses. I fundamentally still feel super connected to other Native people and the land. I

> wrote this big 'ol post about taking [child's name] or [child's name] going home to her mom and I said this, "If we understand how we show up for each other as relatives, right? And this is what we're supposed to do for each other, but the system has made it so weird that I had a family where no one wanted to get involved because they were waiting for child protection to get involved because then they would get help for that child. So, I said, "Okay, so you're just going to watch the demise of that Mom in her drug use for two years, dragging her kids around from spot to spot to spot because you're waiting for the system to tell you it's okay to intervene?" We have this intact original way of knowing and how we show up for relatives, and then we also have the super fractured colonized viewpoint because our connection towards our spiritual source has been so fragmented, so broken that we are like, "Oh, it's not our problem until we get a check for it [from the child welfare system]. Because it does happen. And guess what, and it's not wrong to ask for a check because you're barely making it yourself.

Waterlily elaborated about how we are doing the work of the colonizer. She shared a story from the book "Reservation Blues", a novel by Native author Sherman Alexie to illustrate her point.

> That's the true beauty of how oppressive systems work because now they got us doing the work of the colonizer. So, there is a story from Reservation Blues where this priest is doing missionary work on the Rez. He falls asleep and has this dream. In his dream he's delivering a sermon and all the Indians aren't paying attention. They're believing in their own ways, they're smoking pipes, praying

and speaking in their languages. They don’t care where they are or that he's there. They're in their own world and he gets so frustrated and he's angry because he's trying to save these poor Indian souls. All of a sudden two missionaries walk into the church and they're holding a black box. As soon as they walk in all the Indians are silent and they walk up to the front of the church. They say, go ahead father, finish your sermon, so he does. This time, all the Indians are paying attention and their emotions are swaying left to right. He could feel God's cash register ch-chinging with all the Indian souls he's saving but because he's a man, he gets jealous of the power these missionaries have. So, he wants to know more, he wants to understand (which is a very white thing to do), and he wants to know everything, so he asks the missionaries, "What's it – how did you do that?" And they reply, "Well we told them that they should listen to you" and he says, "Yeah, but how did you do that?" and he asked, "what's inside the box?" The missionaries said, "We told them that faith is inside the box and that they should listen to you, there's faith inside here." And he's like, "Faith? “Show me,” he said. So, they opened the box, and he looks in There's nothing in the box." And he asks, "How is their faith in the box?" And they said, "Oh, we told all the Indians if they don’t listen to you and believe you that we're going to open the box and there's smallpox in the box and we're going to kill everyone." And he's like, "What? That's fear." And he is staring like faith is fear. All of sudden the priest wakes up. It was just a dream and he's on a reservation in his church. In walks two Native women holding a black box, and he asks, "What's inside the box?" You know what the Native women say? "We don’t know." And that is what is happening,

> that's what colonization is. We are walking around holding the box – the tools of the colonizer, holding the baggage of oppression and historical trauma on our backs and we don't even know why. We are just doing it because the generations before just did it and we were never trying to actively heal or change. What we know about trauma is we could potentially heal if it ever stopped but it doesn't stop. Our kids that are in out of home placement is a testament to the fact that there is a problem with the system. There is not a problem with Native people, there is a problem with the system.

None of us are immune to colonization. I taught my first MSW class in the Spring of 2019 on the topic of "Diversity", which is a requirement for our social work programs. Since one of the major learning objectives was to highlight oppressive systems, I decided to teach my students about settler colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006), and then I found an article that connected settler colonialism and social work (see Fortier & Wong, 2019), and finally an article by Michael Hart (2003) titled, "Am I a modern-day missionary? Reflections of a Cree Social Worker". I admitted to my class that I probably contributed in some ways to the ongoing colonization of my own people and that I had to both reckon with it and forgive myself. However, I would strive to discontinue any missionary intentions and practices whether in practice or research.

"This is how we show up for our relatives: Living our Indigenous kinship amidst ongoing colonization

The second theme, *"This is how we show up for our relatives": Living our Indigenous kinship lifeways in the 21st century*, presents knowledge holders' stories of how they live their intergenerationally transmitted, community-centered, and culturally

grounded kinship, both personally and professionally, to care for young relatives and protect them from the child welfare system. Their experiences also reflect a way to identify, what Lugones' (2007) termed, "sites of resistance" to the colonial difference (p. 745). The following conversations illustrate how Indigenous relatives are living our kinship knowledge and practices by "showing up" for their families and communities to resist and to protect them from the child welfare system. The intergenerational transmission of relational kinship practices and knowledge serve as a foundation for community defined ways of taking care of our children.

Showing up for our relatives through intergenerationally transmitted, community-centered, and culturally grounded kinship

Betty is an elder from a tribe in Minnesota. I met her when we were working on the ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota – Duluth, Department of Social work. She is a long-time social worker, educator, community leader, and has dedicated her life to the welfare of Indigenous children. In her story about how she became involved in the welfare of children, she talked about the Indigenous values that were intergenerationally passed on to her by her family:

> First of all, I'm the oldest child in the family. We lived on a farm within the reservation, and we were more involved with farming than our Indian culture. Then as I got older, of course, I have recognized some of the things that we did were actually tribal kinds of practices. And being a tribal member then, became, foremost in my mind when I was about 19 or 20 years old, and I had my first daughter. I come from a line of strong women. We had an Indian hospital here

> until 1954 and my grandma worked there. She walked every day to her job that was about 3 miles away. When that hospital closed in 1954, she went away from home to [Tribe name] hospital to work. She was in a civil service, so she retired very nicely. That was not common among Indian women, especially back then. My mom worked on the farm. We always had people living with us. We had a bigger house for one thing. My mom was raising kids that were just a little bit younger than her. I think that started with this social work kind of ethics and it was the work – the sharing of our home and our food and being helpful in whatever way we could. Now, my father was first-generation from Poland, but he was the person on a reservation that all the guys would come to see about fixing cars and things like that.

Likewise, Lacy is an Indigenous Aunty who has cared for several of her young nephews over the past 20 years. She indicated that she learned how to take care of her family by the way she was taken care of by her own big extended family in her tribal community. She is also a social worker who fights against colonialism in the child welfare system through social work education and research, and she continues to practice those kinship teachings that her relatives and community taught her. Lacy referenced the above quote by Betty and talked about her teachings and experiences living in multi-generational household. She cited these as her motivations for taking care of her nephews and to avoid involvement with the child welfare system. Lacy shared a story about the connection between her Aunty and cousins (brothers):

> I grew up in a multigenerational household [laughter] on the [Tribe name] Reservation. My Aunt had a lot to do with my life. She's passed away now. My

> Aunt [Lilac] didn't have biological children, but she adopted her sister's two children. Then she adopted a Native baby from [State name]. We spent a lot of time at her house when we were little, and it was another home to us. She lived on [Lake name] Lake in [Tribal community], which is about a 15-minute drive from my grandfather's house. She was like another mother to me. She didn't treat me much different from her kids. Her boys and I grew up together and we were more like brothers and sisters. We spent a lot of time at my Grandfather's house too, and I felt closeness with the other cousins that were present. That's how a lot of Native families are.

Lacy continued with a story about the bond between her Grandfather and his grandchildren:

> There's a Catholic church in [Tribe name] and my Grandfather was raised Catholic like many other [Tribe name] families. But in his older years, he went back to our traditional ways and got his [Tribal] name. I remember going to church and to a few ceremonies with him as a little girl. I was 11 when he passed away and that was just the most devastating thing in my life. I actually saw him pass away and that was just so devastating because we were so close to him. His house was the best place on Earth. My father was not involved. He took on the role of a father figure for many of us, some more so than others. He provided that safe and loving place for us. That safe haven. I think about [what an elder taught me], she talked about how even if we as Native people didn't explicitly learn our Native teachings, we lived our Native values on a daily basis. The boarding schools took away our teachings, but they couldn't take away our values, or the

> essence of who we are as Native people. To me, being Native is a way of life and it was apparent the way that my Grandfather lived his life. I see that in my generation, the teachings are more explicit because our communities are actively revitalizing, recovering, and reclaiming our languages and our lifeways. We live our values as well because they have been passed on to us by our Grandparents and ancestors.

Similarly, Susie described a multi-generational family kinship structure that was modeled by her family and community, and where children always had a place to go. Susie is a young Native woman in her mid-twenties with a young daughter and nephew. Her Mother often lives with her to help her take care of her household. We became close friends when we met at the University family housing complex. She recently graduated with a Doctoral degree. We bonded over our shared experiences of being Native women pursuing doctoral degrees, while at the same time taking care of our nephews as Native Aunties. We would sometimes talk about our reasons for avoiding the child welfare system when we would meet to process our experiences taking care of multiple children while in rigorous programs. Susie grew up as a Dakota woman and described how her traditional teachings, including familial structures undefined by Western norms, influenced how her family cared for their nephew.

> I come from a culture that is matriarchal where the women carry all the knowledge and the teachings. Way back in the day, the men only hunted and then the women, moved the camps. They took down the teepees and everything, so, the women had a lot of responsibility. In our family structures, we don't have first cousins, and all of your uncles would be your dad. All of your aunts would be

your moms. And everyone was raised together as siblings. Your first cousins are considered your siblings.

Cary: So, there wouldn't be a situation that the child wasn't cared for?

Susie: Right, because any child would have so many other parents. So, I see that a lot on the reservation. Everyone has different moms. It's still customary for families to live together, and it's really normal to have multiple generations in one home. When my nephew came to live with us [Susie and her mother], my sister had him and she was 18 and they lived with us up until he was 3 or 4. Then she went to college. I was still in high school. So, it's always been that we all parent him or we've all taken care of him. So, when they came back it wasn't like a super foreign concept, or weird having him around. It was like he has always been around.

Amber described a similar kinship experience. Amber is an Indigenous relative caregiver, community leader, elder, educator and a child welfare professional. She is from an Ojibwe tribe in Minnesota. I first met Amber in 2014 when I worked for a national tribal justice system training and technical assistance organization. Amber served as a consultant and often trained tribal communities in tribal child welfare and justice system processes. Amber described a similar community-based kinship structure that looked out for one another.

It's always something that I've seen. I remember when I was a kid, this doesn't happen as much now, but we had our aunts and uncles that would stop us and tell us to behave. So, it was like we had a whole bunch of parents. There are different

parts of our family because we are so huge. My dad had 18 brothers and sisters, and a lot of them had a lot of kids. We grew up together in the Cities (my generation), and then a lot of us came back up here to Red Lake to live. We moved home after our parents got older and retired. That just seems that's how it was, you know? Everybody was raising kids and looking out for them.

Likewise, Ande talked about being raised by her community as a normal part of her upbringing. Ande is an Indigenous relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, community leader and social worker (among many other titles). Ande is an Indian Child Welfare supervisor for a county in Minnesota. She is also an educator and continues to fight against ongoing colonialism in the child welfare system. I first met her in 2017 when we were working on our Ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. We met on several occasions and have built a relationship based on our shared experiences and roles within our families and communities. I asked her to participate in this project because of her lived experiences as a relative caregiver and child welfare social worker. She is a good relative who cares for young relatives in her community. When asked about her kinship practices and teachings, Ande shared a story about how aunties took care of and protected the kids in the community

It was very community focused. My mom worked late hours and I don't think we ever went to a structured daycare. We were what people will call nowadays, "key zone kids." I got dropped off on the bus back home in the community, we would eat, then we'd go hang out with our friends, and then we would go to the YMCA. I can't remember what those folks were called where they would come and live in

> our community for a while. So, they would do stuff with us, but we had our Auntie's in the community. We would go to [one of my two] Auntie's houses if we needed something. It really was like the community caring for the community. So, we had to be home before the lights shut off, and we could hear people the whole way saying, "you better hurry up and get home your Mom is going to be upset with you." We did everything as a community. That's a [Tribe name] community that I grew up in. There was a summer where those people with the YMCA didn't come when they usually came for the whole summer. That's how our community kids got fed, not that our parents wouldn't feed us, but both of our parents work during the day so that's what we would do. So, there was a summer when I was 10 or 11 years old, and I was cooking meals for my community for the whole summer. I would cook breakfast, lunch and then I would do the evening snack. That's just how it was, you know, our Aunties took care of us. Even up here [Minnesota], their community was pretty much the same. Now that I'm older and I'm more involved in the community it's just very community focused and not individualistic.

I asked Cedar to share her knowledge because I value her perspective as an Indigenous relative caregiver in the communal sense. I met Cedar about two years ago in the University setting. I got to know her a little more when we became Facebook friends. I appreciate social media because sometimes people may reveal their values and stances on issues. Cedar's beliefs and decolonial actions within the Twin Cities are evident as she continues to fight against ongoing colonization as an Indigenous leader within the community and a "Reunification Case Manager" with her tribe. She is a fierce Mother,

advocate, activist, social worker, and relative (among many other roles). She has dedicated her life to ensure Indigenous children are safe from the colonial child welfare system, so they don't experience what she calls a "legal form of kidnapping":

> I do know that's sometimes, it's very rare, but sometimes it's absolutely necessary [to remove the child]. But I don't think it is mostly and then there's also the idea that, culturally, when we raise our children, if you are not able to safely parent your children, that is where your relations step in to help - community care. Then when you get back on your feet and you are able to safely parents again, your kids are brought back to you. And that's, that's just how it was, and still is sometimes. "It takes a village to raise a child" isn't just a concept people mention jokingly when they need their parents to take their kids for a weekend so they can do adult activities, community care was how we lived prior to colonization. It is our ways. We don't need a court order to do that, we don't need all of these rules that don't make sense in our culture and with our people. Our traditions and the CP [child protection] system...they don't even make sense together.

Lenna emphasized her kinship teachings contrasted with her belief about termination of parental rights. Lenna is a relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, and professional who is a youth service provider for her tribe in Wisconsin. I met Lenna in 2005 when our oldest children were in kindergarten together. We have often talked about how we raise our children in our communities based on our cultural values. I asked her to share her experiences and knowledge for this project because she also takes care of young relatives in her community. Lenna described her kinship teachings:

> I don't believe in termination of the parental rights. In my sister's case, my cousin – her little girl calls my sister “mom” because my sister had her from birth, but my sister doesn't try to keep her daughter from her. She lets her visit, and she does refer to her mom by her first name. The little girl loves her mom. I guess we don't feel like it's necessary to take the child and tell the parents that they have no right to see them or be a part of their life.

These stories are examples of how our Indigenous kinship structures and values are thriving, intergenerationally transmitted, and have provided a value and support base for living our kinship lifeways undefined by colonized, individualistic notions of the family. The stories in this next sub-theme provide more detail about how these kinship teachings are carried out to protect Indigenous children from the child welfare system.

Living our Indigenous kinship to protect our children from the child welfare system

Some knowledge holders described how they utilize these intergenerational kinship teachings as a basis for protecting Native kids from the child welfare system. These forms of resistance are consistent with Lugones’ (2007) practice of identifying sites of resistance to the modern colonial gender system. Lacy described how her kinship teachings influenced her decision to take her nephews:

> On my mother’s side of the family, my grandfather raised us. My grandfather and grandmother had 12 kids. My Aunties and Mother always told me that my grandparents always took in kids within their community who needed care. So even people who are still alive today say, “your grandparents took care of me.” And there was no money or court orders tied to it. There was no government intervention. It was just like I see this child who is in need of help. I’m going to

take you in and care for you. So, my family is very supportive. I mean I think my mother, as a grandmother, even feels relieved that I said that we were taking in another nephew into our own household. My mother always reminds me of what my grandparents taught us. She says, "you know, you're doing the right thing, and things will work out because you are doing the right thing."

Lacy elaborated her point by discussing her decision to take care of her nephews as a way of protecting them from the system:

> My nephews are so good and respectful when they're with me. [Laughter] So, it was a combination of child welfare system involvement that led me to take care of the boys. I never wanted them to be involved in the system. My decision to take my nephews was to protect them from the system, but I was also raised close with my extended family. I grew up close to my first cousins and many of us refer to each other as brother and sister. We grew up in my grandfather's home on the [Tribe name] Reservation. My best memories were a house full of people, especially on holidays and summertime. We celebrated each holiday with our huge family – those were my best memories. But even when some of us cousins would maybe get in trouble with our mother, we'd go around into our grandpa's room because he'd be like, "Leave, leave so-and-so alone." He would protect us. [Laughter]. My Grampa's home was the safest, happiest place on this Mother Earth.

Kevin described how they protect Indigenous children as a relative caregiver in a professional role. I asked Kevin to share his knowledge for this project because they are a well-respected elder, leader, Two-Spirit relative, educator, and professional mental health

clinician. Kevin is nationally known throughout Turtle Island who has dedicated their life to protecting Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ youth from ongoing colonization in child welfare and foster care system. Kevin strives to bring attention to the often ignored issue of violence against Two Spirit, Native LGBTQ+ and Native men and boys. Kevin uses their lived experiences and personal stories in trainings to help others who are experiencing similar situations. Kevin advocates, counsels, and protects Two-Spirit people who are involved in the foster care system. I asked Kevin to share his knowledge about how their community handled the care of children prior to colonization. Kevin shared his knowledge of the roles of Two-Spirit individuals prior to colonization, including being a protector of orphaned children:

> What I know is that before colonization, Two-Spirit people were treated with the utmost respect and honor. Our people – my people believed that Two-Spirit people were a gift from the Creator, to bring balance to man and woman. In my language, where I come from, I would be identified as a Winkta – that was the word that was given to me by my people. So, what I know is that our Two-Spirit people had community roles in which we played. We were healers, we were considered medicine people. We are considered powerful; we're considered sacred not meaning that we were any better than anybody else, but we had these special gifts that we can see the world in two different perspectives. We took in orphan children, and today most often people view LGBTQ people as sexual beings. However, before colonization we were looked upon as being more sacred and spiritual because we had these roles that we played.

Ande described how she carries out her traditional views of children, which impacts the way that she protects their spirits and emotions while they are in her care. Protection from the child welfare system involves emotional support. In many of our kinship teachings and practices, children are held in the highest regard. For example, I was taught that children are closer to the Creator's world than we are, similar to elders, if we view life in a cyclical nature of birth and death. Many of our tribal communities believe that children are gifts from the Creator, and they chose us to be their parents. Our children are our leaders, knowledge holders, and will carry on the future of our Nations, which is very different than the way colonized systems view youth as beings to be possessed or at-risk (Johnston-Goodstar, 2020; Killsback, 2019), for example. Ande made an important point about how she views and treats the young people that she cares for as a way to protect their emotional well-being:

> I have learned so much from all of the kids that have been in my care. I learn from my kids, and they picked me to be their Mother, but I even feel like this for my kids who are in my care from the foster system. Every kid who's been placed with me has been placed with me because they were meant to be placed with me. My lesson was that I had to learn from them. Some of them stay in contact and some of them don't. Some of them didn't have the greatest relationship, and we struggled with things. But each one of them taught me something that I needed to know. I'm thankful because they're teaching me what I need to know to help my kids when they get to be the age of the kids that I have. So, it's like they don't know what they're giving to me. Most of them are like, "oh Ande Thank you so much". They call me "mom" and I hear that, but I'm also like, "do you understand

the impact that you have on my life?" Thank you and it sounds all fluffy to say but kids don't get to feel that in this system. They feel like they're a burden to people, so I always try to make sure they know. If you could reach out and feel my heart right now you could feel the love and appreciation that I feel for what you've taught me. Even if you were just with me for a night or day or however long you were with me, there was something that you taught me, and I'm so thankful for that. But these other kids that go into their homes don't feel that. They are often treated like "you're here to cook you're here to clean, you're here as slaves." I hear that all the time from kids and they say, "well the last time I was just their slave, I just did this and that, they never thanked me, they never appreciated me." My 19 year old's boyfriend was adopted and grew up in the system. He's homeless now... where's that adoptive family? They are nowhere to be found and he sees what my cousin is getting from me and he's really jealous of it. They struggled in their relationship because of it. I try to help her understand that he didn't get what you're getting. And he sees that your life is on a different path because of what you're getting. And he deserved that too. So, I say, "be gentle with him."

Despite attempted assimilation of Indigenous lifeways by the U.S. federal government, Indigenous relative caregivers remain an important part of Indigenous kinship today. Relative caregiver experiences are nuanced by deep ties to the family, child, community and Creator. Extended kin, such as Aunties, Uncles and Grandparents often have an important role in raising children within an Indigenous family and

community structure that can be identified as “sites of resistance” from ongoing colonialism by the child welfare system.

Desires for the welfare of our children: Delinking from colonial child welfare

The final theme, “Desires for the welfare of Indigenous children: Delinking from colonized child welfare presents Indigenous relative caregiver’s knowledge and advice to government child welfare systems, tribal child welfare professionals, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students preparing for child welfare practice. Second, this theme details relative caregiver’s ways of helping as forms of delinking from colonial child welfare practices and worldviews. It also presents specific ways they are delinking through Indigenous-centered child welfare practices and cultural revitalization. Finally, relative caregivers envision a decolonial form of child welfare as they imagined having a magic wand.

Knowledge and advice from Indigenous relative caregivers

Indigenous relative caregivers were asked to provide advice for state and tribal child welfare, child welfare professionals, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students preparing to work in the child welfare field.

Advice to child welfare systems

Ande is an Indigenous relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, community leader and social worker (among many other titles). I first met her in 2017 when we were working on our Ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. We met on several occasions and have built a relationship based on our shared experiences and roles within our families and communities. I asked her to participate in this project because of her lived experiences as

a relative caregiver and child welfare social worker. Ande is an Indian Child Welfare supervisor for a county in Minnesota. She is also an educator and continues to fight against ongoing colonialism in the child welfare system. She is a good relative who cares for young relatives in her community. Ande talked about her experiences as an Indigenous social worker who works for a county child welfare system and offered some advice to county professionals and policymakers on how they can do a better job supporting American Indian families:

> Listen to the families that they're serving engage and collaborate with the with the tribes that they're working with. And not just the tribes, but also local nonprofits or American Indian folks within the community who are reaching out and trying to collaborate with professional agencies. I also think it's really important for those places who employ people from the community that they're serving to listen to those people. In my experience, they don't listen to me, and I know that's a journey that we're going on and at some point, maybe they will. My biggest struggle is that I'm not heard here, and if they would just listen to me, we would have a positive impact on disparities. It's frustrating to throw out an idea or a suggestion and have a conversation, and to not have it be heard. Then later on have that same thing come up again, and have it be quote unquote "somebody else's idea". It's also difficult when different things are being implemented, and they're opposite of what you're recommending, and you can very clearly articulate the impact that it will have on your community, but still not be implemented in the way that you're recommending. Then in meetings people are stunned and don't understand why the disparities are the way they are. I think it's also

> important for students and professionals to understand that this child welfare system was built on racism, and that it has biases and impacts every decision. [Racism] is interwoven into the system, especially when it's practiced on us from the dominant cultural lens.

Lacy is an Indigenous Aunty who has cared for several of her young nephews over the past 20 years. She indicated that she learned how to take care of her family by the way she was taken care of by her own big extended family. She is also a social worker who fights against colonialism in the child welfare system through social work education and research, and she continues to practice those kinship teachings that her relatives and community taught her. Lacy asserted the need to recognize and admit that conflicting worldviews impact social work policies and practices:

> Outside professionals and agencies need to be aware that they're operating from a whole different world view than Native people. Their worldview just doesn't fit. A lot of people would say, and I would agree, that the child welfare system is just another arm of the colonial government trying to assimilate us. They're coming in with their laws and regulations telling us how this is, how we should parent, this is what we need to abide by. It's another way to come in control and punish us. When I was working for a reentry program and I was also temporarily a state probation officer, our goal was to assimilate the "offender" into society. But whose standards are we using to define the ideal citizen? According to the court, they should get a job, get treatment, and find housing. It's a checklist and it's somebody's ideal. What is our Indigenous ideal as a thriving community member? It looks different.

Lacy went on to illustrate one of many ways that an Indigenous person may thrive by non-Western standards:

> Well, in a modern world it would entail getting a job, taking care of your family. But it could also mean participating in your community, attending your ceremonies if that's what they choose to do. If somebody (like me) who feels like an introvert [laughter], it could mean attending to your family or healing with your family. I feel like passing a set of values down to my kids and trying to live in an honest and good way, those things are harder to reflect on a checklist. And there's different ways to be. So, I would look at my clients and understand that one of them thrives on powwows. That's their life. So, one time a client wanted to attend a powwow out of state, but the probation officer said, "No, you're not allowed to leave the state. You can't go to powwows." Then I would say, "No, this is them living their best life." [Laughter] So it's a conflict. There you go. There's an example.

Kevin is a well-respected elder, leader, Two-Spirit relative, educator, and professional mental health clinician. Kevin is nationally known throughout Turtle Island and has dedicated their life to protecting Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ youth from ongoing colonization in child welfare and foster care system. Kevin strives to bring attention to the often ignored issue of violence against Two Spirit, Native LGBTQ+ and Native men and boys. Kevin uses their lived experiences and personal stories in trainings to help others who are experiencing similar situations. From both Kevin's lived and professional experiences, they provided some advice on how we can tweak our approach:

> I think one of the biggest things that I think about is the need for more funding so that we can work towards changing the system and supporting populations within our population. One of the things that I, as a mental health professional, always remind people of is that we should never make assumptions about people. Instead, we should be kind to them and ask simple questions, "How can I help you? What can I do for you?" Instead of making all these assumptions and making all these decisions for us without asking like our opinion. It's never good when a system or individuals think that they know what we need without even asking those simple questions. How can we help you? Is a simple question we should all be asking the people that we work with.

Advice to tribal child welfare

Ande was firm in pointing out the need for our own tribal child welfare systems to ensure that we are not becoming an extension of the colonized state and county child welfare systems:

> I think if they're working Indian folks that they need to remember that they shouldn't be an extension of the counties and that their work, focus, and lens should be tribally focused. It shouldn't be so hard for families to access services. Our family members shouldn't feel like their tribal worker is a county worker, working for the tribe. I think practicing from our values, leading in the heart way, and doing this work in the way that we were taught based on our values and our teachings is how we should be practicing.

Kevin asserted that Tribes need to provide more financial support for extended family members to keep children. He stated, "I've seen cases where there was just not

enough support maybe for grandma to keep the children and to me that's a failure of the system, especially if it's a good placement." Kevin provided specific advice for supporting Native families and young Two-Spirit, Native LGBTQ youth.

> Our people mean well when we take in our own children. Through my work in supporting Two-Spirit, Native LGBTQ youth, one of the things that I think that we need in our tribal communities is a specific curriculum to train our Native foster parents of our youth who identify as Two-Spirit and native LGBTQ. Our history is forgotten. So, a lot of our Indian families are very strong in their homophobia, and our children suffer. When we think about sexual assault, we think about individuals who are the perpetrators who often know who these children are and will often groom them. Many of these children become targets for even more victimization, so we need to teach our Indian people this information. I've heard in people in many different areas of the country say, "oh, we don't have those kinds of people in our community, and we know that's not true." Research says one in ten individuals identifies as LGBTQ, so we know that's not true and so a lot of this is our own people's thoughts and opinions.

Kevin also offered his advice for tribal child welfare professionals:

> I always want to make sure that I acknowledge all of our people, all of our children, our youth, our families, our adults that identify [as Two-Spirit, Native LGBTQ]. We need to continue to educate ourselves. We need to invite people who identify and who had been a part of the system to the table to have conversations with the because we always determine what we think is best for individuals. We need to really understand what is happening.

Advice to students in child welfare

Knowledge holders were asked to provide some advice for students training to practice in both tribal and state child welfare. Many of the relative caregivers are also professional practitioners and educators in the child welfare field. Their lived experiences as both Indigenous relative caregivers intersected with child welfare practice provided a great opportunity to learn from their knowledge

Advice to Indigenous students

Ande stressed the importance of practicing from an Indigenous worldview in child welfare.

> It's really important for Native students to know who they are and have a strong identity. If they're not an American Indian person, it's really important that they have an open heart and an open mind and in a genuine, not just with their words but really truly with their heart. For American Indian people who are looking to study in this field, it's more helpful if they're in a program that supports their values and beliefs. If they are forced to go into a program that's not American Indian focused, they need to know that [the program is operating from a western lens]. I would tell Native students "don't forget what your values are and don't be afraid to speak up and practice from that lens, and don't forget who you are. That can be really challenging so just remember who you are and remember why you're doing this work and what this means because it's our communities that are being impacted the worst by the child welfare system."

Lacy explained how she remained true to her values, as Ande indicated above. She described how she remained strong in her identity as she navigated through a Eurocentric social work program. Her advice to students:

> I knew that in my MSW program that I was going to get Eurocentric education, and that my worldview was not going to be represented. I knew that, but I was strong in my own identity as a Native woman, so I recognized where our worldviews conflicted. In my undergrad institution, I had an internal conflict because some of our friends were going to tribal colleges, where students experience tribally centered education with western academics. So, this ongoing little conflict has made me aware of what I need to learn and how I need to stay centered and grounded in my community. That's why I didn't want to go too far from home. So, I would like to give my advice to Native students. I would tell them to stay connected to their community, and never forget where they came from. That was advice passed on to me from my grandfather. He always said, "never forget where you come from." There's a lot that goes into that phrase. To me, it means that we must always be aware that we are here in this academic institution and that is exactly what it is. It's not a place where we are going to learn our indigenous knowledge. We are not coming here to learn our culture or our ways. Our ways, our culture and our knowledge systems are the foundation for how we view the world.

Advice to non-Indigenous students

Lacy explained the importance of knowing the local knowledge and the original Peoples that are indigenous to a particular place:

I would like to tell non-Indigenous students that it's so important to acknowledge, honor, and respect that this land is unceded Dakota land. Especially with social work. And I'm really happy that we had the social work history course. Other programs don't have it. It is so important that history is presented that doesn't erase us out of existence and that history is also taught from a Native lens. Not just from the Eurocentric viewpoint. Every history book I've opened up starts with the colonial era. From a colonial lens. What about the 2,000 years prior to the colonial era? History books, including social welfare history texts, begin as though the colonists settled in a blank wilderness and encountered heathen savages. So, just knowing that you're sitting on Dakota land right now and we have the great honor is only a start. I'm honored to be here on Dakota land. I feel like – I told my advisor that I didn't want to go to school far from home but being here not too far away in a similar land and environment as my own people, I feel relatable. I feel like the people here are relatable. The environment is relatable. I also take into consideration of the land and the water. Access to the water is important to me. I couldn't survive in a desert. That's not where my ancestors are from or where I was raised. I like to visit, but then I like to come home. [Laughter] So land is very important to me, and we say we're connected to our land and that's very true. We go to any lengths to protect our land and our water. And people are doing it today back home and all across Turtle Island. I feel like sometimes I'm missing out on those efforts back home, but um I'm also here for a reason. Many reasons.

Amber expressed that she would tell students that not all tribes are the same. Students should get to know the differences between each Tribe they are working with. Amber is a relative caregiver, an elder, and a child welfare professional from a tribe in Minnesota. I first met Amber in 2014 when I worked for a national tribal justice system training and technical assistance organization. Amber served as a consultant and often trained tribal communities in tribal child welfare and justice system processes.

> I think best thing that they could learn is that not all tribes are the same. Every tribe is different, and they need to go into the communities and get to know that tribal nation's culture and traditions. It's important to find somebody that's going to share that information. I think that's the most important thing because some people think that it's a one size fit all kind of situation for Native people.

Lenna and Kevin elaborated on this advice by asserting the importance of learning the impacts of historical trauma. Lenna is a relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, and professional who is a youth service provider for her tribe in Wisconsin. I met Lenna in 2005 when our oldest children were in kindergarten together. We have often talked about how we raise our children in our communities based on our cultural values. I asked her to share her experiences and knowledge for this project because she also takes care of young relatives in her community. Lenna stated, "I would say they definitely should understand the historical trauma aspect of it so they understand why a child might be more difficult to work with or learn differently than other kids. I would suggest getting to know some of the cultural ways and some of the language so that our children and families feel more open and trusting." Kevin provided some detail:

> One of the things that I remind people is to understand that each tribe is different. When you are going to work with an individual or a family it's really important to ask them, "where do you come from?" They shouldn't assume just because they may live in an area that may have more Dakota or Chippewa. They should also learn about their culture and never make assumptions of individuals or families, that's really important to know. They really need to become educated and understand the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma in our population and how colonization has changed so many things about us. They need to understand our language, how we take care of our families, and even how we parent. Our families and parenting were impacted because of the boarding schools, when our children were ripped out of their homes, their language and culture taken away from them. So, I believe that those are really two of the most important things we really think about when working with Native individuals.

The reality of our current world is that settler government child welfare policies and systems still have control over our Native bodies. The advice from knowledge holders comes from their lived experiences of this settler system. While this advice is important to continue to reduce harm and improve services with Native families, the final sub-theme moves toward a vision for a decolonial form of child welfare, which would mean complete tribal jurisdiction Native children in all situations.

Advice to all students in child welfare

Some knowledge holders stressed the importance of learning history that doesn't erase Indigenous peoples from existence. Betty is an elder from a Tribe in Minnesota. I met her when we were working on the ethnography with the Center for Regional and

Tribal Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota – Duluth, Department of Social work. She is a long time social worker, educator, community leader, and has dedicated her life to the welfare of Indigenous children. Betty explained:

> I would remind American Indian social workers that knowing their history is very important. Non-Indian social worker should know their own history and then come and learn the Indian's history. Then not being afraid to ask the questions, you know. So much damage was done over years – over the years out with that first question of Indian child welfare because the social workers were afraid to ask. Are you affiliated with the tribe? Are you an Indian person?

Similarly, Susie stressed the importance of knowing the history of the people that you are working with. Susie is a young Native woman in her mid-twenties with a young daughter and nephew. Her Mother often lives with her to help her take care of her household. We became close friends when we met at the University family housing complex. She recently graduated with a Doctoral degree. We bonded over our shared experiences of being Native women pursuing doctoral degrees, while at the same time taking care of our nephews as Native Aunties. We would sometimes talk about our reasons for avoiding the child welfare system when we would meet to process our experiences taking care of multiple children while in rigorous programs.

> I would tell students to know your history mostly because I feel like the Native American population is very, very unique in comparison to other cultures. I just feel like there's a lot of things that have happened like our traumatic history that plays out now, and people don't understand because they don't know their history. History is written by winners, and we didn't win, so I feel like a lot is

missing especially in schools. So, if you're going to work with any population you need to know what their history is, how they came to be here and the effects of history today in communities. I feel like we're always shamed by stereotypes like, "they use the system or the state." I feel like we're always given these stereotypes, but they don't see how we got here. It's hard for people to see past stereotypes.

Likewise, Betty's advice to students was about getting to know the community, and nuances within, in which they are working with:

My advice to any students has been and will continue to be that they gain familiarity with the community, and I don't mean just the case work. One of the phrases that I had used over and over and over, over the years is, if the only Indian that you know are on your caseload, you're cheating yourself. And just as I said, knowing themselves, then learning about the client and the client's family and the community and never making assumptions. I think that's true for social work in general. Not making assumptions because at [Tribe name] we have at least three segments within our population; the Christians, the people who are practicing tribal customs day-to-day and those that are Christians in using and practicing some of those tribal customs. They need to keep in mind as they're learning that there are different segments to the Indian population. And there's a lot of reasons for that, but it's not necessary to go into that. But rather being able to ask the family, "Where do you fit on this continuum of Indian practices?" New students should know that it's okay to ask questions. Even if they feel awkward to

you, you should be able to ask. And that question is necessary with American Indian cases. That's one of my Bible statements, I guess.

Given that Indigenous Peoples are subjected to the laws of the settler government and child welfare systems, Indigenous relative caregivers clearly have the experience and knowledge to improve practice with our families and communities. The remaining sub-themes push our thinking to imagine ways to delink from colonial child welfare practices and systems.

Indigenous ways of helping: Delinking from colonial child welfare practices and worldviews

The following stories illustrate the difference between Indigenous-centered child welfare practices. These practices are clearly different from those of the colonized child welfare system, further proving a severe misalignment of worldviews and practice.

I met Waterlily at a community event that she organizes for Indigenous women's wellness. If you need to find her, you will always find her in her community. As I attended her events throughout the past few years since we moved to Minnesota in 2016, I learned that we share common values where we, according to Waterlily, "show up for our people", in a communal way. Waterlily is also a community leader, organizer, educator, and a good relative. I asked her to share her knowledge because she is an Aunty and cares for many young relatives in her community. Waterlily is also a professional and holds immense systemic knowledge. She is steadfast in recognizing racism and colonialism in the contemporary settler systems that continue to control our lives. She continues to fight against colonialism and to reclaim and revitalize our Indigenous

lifeways. She described the way Anishinaabe People practice the welfare of children by discussing the Mother, child, and Auntie's connection to the Spirits, and Creator:

> If we're truly going to look at the current system of child welfare and we're going to say, "Oh, how are we going to apply Indigenous – or a Native or Anishinaabe world view," to how we center around children, then we would put that child center, right? And then by that we're going to say, okay, not the child, [but] the mom and the baby. How would we center them because they can't exist without each other, right? So, removing babies and children from mothers, and then expecting the mothers to get healthy, separately, is opposite of what we know to be true. We're further disconnecting them to the source so even thinking in terms of the umbilical cord. That umbilical cord connects them but, in some cases, if it is going to come to an actual removal, then there needs to be some sort of ceremony of passing over guardianship where we are letting the Spirits know that "now I'm the Mother". There should be like a better process for that but there isn't.

Similarly, Ande highlighted one major difference between her Indigenous perspective of how we help each other in a communal sense versus a settler child welfare system that is deficit focused. Ande is an Indigenous leader, relative caregiver, Mother, Aunty, and social worker (among many other titles). She is an Indian Child Welfare supervisor for a county in Minnesota. She is also an educator and continues to fight against ongoing colonialism in the child welfare system. I met her in 2017 when we were working on our Ethnography with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. We met on several occasions and have

built a relationship based on our shared experiences and roles within our families and communities. I asked her to participate in this project because of her lived experiences as a relative caregiver and child welfare social worker. She is a good relative who cares for young relatives in her community. I asked her to expand on how those traditional ways are different than the county or state and tribal child welfare.

> Well, I think the huge difference that separates us…and now granted people are going to say, oh, county systems are there to help, but their interventions aren't reflective of how we engaged as a community to help each other out. I think it was the Families First Prevention Act, I think that's trying to shift that lens that the county systems or the state systems look through. But that's the main difference is that when the county system becomes involved, it's an investigation. So now if you're screwing up as a parent and I'm your sister, I would come to you and ask, "Cary, what's going on here?" [as an example] "What do you need help with?" "What are you struggling with?" "Can I help you with anything?" We look for ways to be helpful and creative but when the county comes in, it's, "what happened on September 11?" and you know your son's got a bruise on his face and you know what happened and then you explain it, [they] open maltreatment findings. All right well what services do you want to be connected with? It seems like you may have mental health issues and so you should probably see a mental health therapist and it's like, for Christ's sake! I couldn't pay my bills. I couldn't do this; I can't do that. That situation was an accident. Yeah. Thanks for the help, not help [sarcasm]. I think the biggest difference is that when we're engaging with our community and trying to support our community in a healthy way. We are

> genuinely supportive, not really judgmental and more reaching your hand out. The county is more of like a microscope, [and focuses on] what you are doing wrong. And here's the services that we're aware of that you need to participate and that's the other part is that the system doesn't look at those cultural things so it's like, you know, my brother is struggling with alcoholism. My first thing is. Come on brother. You got to come to sweat [lodge] with me to go to ceremony... [In] white culture, you need a Rule 25. Like, what? [sarcasm] How does that even address the reason why he's even drinking? Then he's sent off to treatment. They don't understand that spiritual and cultural piece that we need, that we were separated from, and that we need to be re-engaged with to really truly heal. Yeah, so huge difference like black and frickin white. But they can't see it, it's like they're colorblind.

Following along a similar experience, Lacy, a relative caregiver and social worker, described a situation where the county parenting program was inappropriate and different from Indigenous ways of parenting. Lacy is an Aunty who has cared for several of her young nephews for over 20 years. She is also a social worker and continues to fight against colonialism in the child welfare system through research, much like Ande, Waterlily, and Kevin (who you will meet later in this chapter). Several years ago, two of Lacy's nephews were placed with her by a county child welfare system. The child welfare program contracted with an outside parenting program to provide services to her family for the goal of reunification. The parenting program workers visited her home to work with her nephews, and they worked with her sister separately in her home. Lacy

described a major difference between Indigenous and Eurocentric kinship in the following excerpt:

> The parenting people that they sent had no knowledge of Native parenting at all. The parenting worker was nice, but she had no knowledge of our ways. She couldn't even relate to my nephews. They didn't have an understanding of our ways of parenting or connecting to our children. It was a parenting program from their world view, which is very Eurocentric.

Lacy provided some clarification by explaining the how Native parenting may differ from Eurocentric parenting:

> So, one example is acknowledging that there are these strong intergenerational relationships already there. We have strong familial connections and just because I have my nephews doesn't mean that it was done in a shameful or punitive way. It's just how we take care of each other. I would say that taking in my nephews as an Aunty is something I was taught within my family as an Indigenous kinship practice. I was raised by some of my Aunties, Uncles and Grandfather. My own cousins were more like siblings. In my [Tribe name] language, there is no separate word for mother and aunt, it's the same word. I don't feel like that is ever honored or acknowledged or even known about in county child welfare practice. They just assume that if my nephews are with me that it's because my sister did something wrong, and that's not always true.

Delinking through Indigenous-centered child welfare

Some knowledge holders described interventions when asked about traditional beliefs and practices about the welfare of children. Lacy described her understanding of the ways that her tribe had traditionally dealt with issues of child protection. She described what I would call an "Aunty Intervention" that honors the deep, spiritual connection between her and her children, and could be described as an antithesis to the punitive child welfare system:

> I have roots in two different tribes. My grandfather was [Tribe name] and [Tribe name], and his home was on the [Tribe name] reservation. My knowledge right now of traditionally caring for our children is deeply tied to how I witnessed my Grampa do things. That's why I resonated so closely with that Wabanaki article where one of the participants said, "Oh, the kid might go stay at Auntie's house." When I read that, I thought, "Oh, yeah, that's what we do." [Laughter]. I grew up at my Grampa's house with my Mother and Aunties. There were times I was at my Aunt's house for a long time, but we never felt there was anything wrong with it. It's just the way we lived in our family. Aside from taking in my nephews the way I was taught and trying to avoid the child welfare system, I feel like there is one distinction between the way we did and still do things and the system. I really avoid the shame. I might express my frustration to my husband, but I would never bring these feelings to my sister. I accept her for who she is right now, and I love her. If I shamed her, I would ruin the connection that we have, and she wouldn't let me care for her kids. I think the best thing that I can do for our relationship is to just show her compassion because she's hurting. She's got some deep pain. So, when I do pick up the phone and tell her that I'm taking one of her kids, she

understands that I'm not trying to sever her rights as a parent. Only the Creator can do that. I don't talk mean about her in front of her boys. I don't take her to court for custody. I don't say she's any less of mother to them. I just let her know I'm here for her. I just say that I'm going to take one because I know that she wouldn't put up a fight. I know that she loves her boys.

Likewise, Ande described how her community approached the wellbeing and care of children as a communal intervention:

In my experiences back home in my community where we grew up, the people in the community disciplined us. So, if my mom wasn't there, they would step in and provide that discipline. I also recall a situation when something happened at home, and we had to leave. A social worker didn't show up and say that we had to leave. We went and stayed at my Aunty's his house for a while. One of my sisters never really lived with us as a kid. She lived with my Aunt, and she calls my Aunt "Mom' because that's who pretty much raised her. So, my Dad isn't an Indigenous person but when my Mom was struggling, I would go live with him. I would kind of bounce back and forth from my Mother to my Dad's house. I guess I was a bit much to handle. [Laughter] I think that's how things worked. You know, if a kid in the community was acting up and one of the Aunties was there or somebody else in the community, they would say, "hey we need to have this conversation." Or, if the kids looked like they weren't being fed or being cared for, someone would take care of them. Looking back, it makes sense to me. When we had our community feasts or where we were giving away clothes, or other community things, that's when they were talking to the parents of that kid. To me, looking

back, that would be an intervention. They would ask the parents, “hey, what's going on in your home?”

Or, if a family were alcoholics, somebody in the community would say “your kids need to come over here and stay the night.” Then after the party or whatever was over, there would be a conversation about, “what are you doing? your kids can’t be a part of that.” So, whoever was sober and safe in the community would step in and help folks out. I think when you look at dominant cultures. do you have child welfare? That's kind of like where Indian custodian came in is when our kids go and stay with somebody else and that's super informal way because that's how we help each other out.

Kevin asserted the need for proper mentorship for young people aging out of the foster care system. I asked Kevin to share his knowledge for this project because they are a well-respected elder, leader, Two-Spirit relative, educator, and professional mental health clinician. Kevin is nationally known throughout Turtle Island and has dedicated their life to protecting Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ youth from ongoing colonization in child welfare and foster care system. Kevin strives to bring attention to the often ignored issue of violence against Two Spirit, Native LGBTQ+ and Native men and boys. Kevin uses their personal story in trainings to help others who are experiencing similar situations. He asserted that as Indigenous helpers that we are not separate from the pain of the people that we are helping or counseling. Kevin reminded us that we cannot properly help and protect our children in the system until we also help ourselves:

One of the things that I think is important and that we are not doing enough is that we don’t have enough mentors or individuals that can help our young people who

have aged out of the system – we're not providing them with enough support in regard to basic living skills. We are not asking individuals who are okay with talking about their own experience in the foster care system and going into and talking to all these young people and reminding them that whatever they're experiencing right now doesn't have to define who they can become in the future. I wish someone would have taught me that. It would also have prevented me from trying to figure out who I was for half of my life and trying to work through my own trauma. I didn't start my healing journey until I was 29 years old. So, in the meantime I did a lot of self-destructive behaviors. I know things happen for a reason. However, I think that a lot of my mistakes could have been prevented if I would have had someone who mentored me and taught me my experiences didn't have to define my future. I've learned from my mistakes and one of the reasons I became a mental and chemical health therapist was because I believed that the Creator sent individuals to help me heal. So as part of who I am as a Native person and in helping my Native people, I chose to give back by trying to help my people heal. My grandparents, my parents were impacted by boarding schools. I believe that because they were impacted, they didn't know how to be parents. I don't hate my parents. I've learned to forgive them, but I also have chosen to not have a specific family member be a part of my life because they are still stuck. I'm not being judgmental, and I'm not turning my back on them, but I can't have them be a part of what I'm trying to do. So, we have many struggles and challenges as Native people, but I do believe that we are healing. I take a lot of advice from elders within the community, and I'm always reminded by what an

elder said, “you know, our people are impacted by 500 years of pain.” Individually, I’m impacted by 500 years of pain, and when I work with people, I also carry their pain, so it’s always important that we take care of ourselves. How can we do good work if we’re not taking care of ourselves?

Delinking through cultural revitalization

Some knowledge holders described cultural practices as interventions. Amber noted an increase of women in her community who make ribbon skirts as a symbol of cultural pride and intergenerational teachings. This conversation occurred in response to the question of traditional teachings traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to the welfare of Indigenous children.

> They have a powwow at the end of the year, and they select the princess and the brave for the coming schoolyear. It was last week, and I noticed a lot of the kids had ribbon skirts. There are classes up here to make ribbon skirts and regalia. There’s a couple of ladies that live by me, and I just found out they have a sewing class every Tuesday night and anybody can go bring their machines and sew, but they have to bring their own materials. These ladies worked with fifth and sixth graders and the girls made their own ribbon skirts. So, when they had this powwow last week, they all had ribbon skirts on. It’s becoming more popular, and that’s really cool to see. Cary: Yup, I’m seeing it too where I’m from. It’s beautiful to see our people getting so creative with their designs. Amber: Kids like to show up to a meeting dressed up in a ribbon skirt. Cary: Yea, I know what you mean, back in the day my grandpa, a Tribal judge for [Tribe name], wore a ribbon

shirt every day. Amber: Yeah, we have a couple council people that do that too. Cary: Yeah, I just love that, and I actually have one of his ribbon shirts.

Amber: Nice.

Cary: It's really good to see that.

Amber: Yup, my mom used to make ribbon shirts, shawls, and other [regalia]. My sister started making ribbon skirts a year or two ago, and now she's whipping them out all the time.

Cary: Oh, wow, that's amazing!

Amber: She gave [child's name] hers for her recital. I keep saying, "I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it." I have like all kinds of material ready to go to make both of us the ribbon skirts.

I know I can do it. I just have to get myself to a place where I can. I bought some beads because I was going to show [child's name] how to bead. There's a lot of ladies that I work that have told me, "I taught my daughter when she was about 10. She started beading." I think, we're just getting into it more, and my sister always sewed like my mother did. I just would do beadwork. So, I have a sewing machine and I have material and thread and I'm ready to go!

Similarly, Lacy talked about how she exposed her nephews to their culture and language as a healing mechanism after they were placed in her care:

I was working and taking care of several kids. I needed to focus my energies on my nephews. When I first got them, I told them that they were going to go to our

tribal school. My thought process with that was the first thing I need to expose them to is our culture and our teachings. I knew the first step in that was sending them to the tribal school where they would get that as a big part of their education. I would take them to some ceremonies too. We would also practice social dancing in my living room until [child's name] got too big because he had a growth spurt. We lived in a duplex, and our neighbors told us it was getting too loud [Laughter]. I have a recording of my nephew when he was younger. He was the first kid in his Native language class to memorize a particular speech in our language. So, I recorded him and had this extreme sense of pride about it. I saw some healing going on. But there was also still hurt and trauma because his brother would cry every night for his mother. They have come a long way since then, and I know the culture helped them with some of their healing.

Lacy also described her experience as part of research team that explored an Indigenous centered child welfare social work program. Lacy described the central piece of operating from an Indigenous worldview.

I know exactly why [program leader] and her team run their Institutes the way they do. I didn't even have to go to that Institute to know what they did and why they were doing it. They are telling you that this is their worldview, their Anishinaabe worldview, and this is the ways that they are operating from.

Interviewer: It also gets instantiated in the experiences that people get participating in the ceremonies, the fabric art (standing on Wabanaki land), and sitting and listening to an elder speak for two and a half hours at the very beginning. All of that, in a very concentrated form. I think they were trying to

make it something of an immersive experience. That's what they said you have to have to understand. You have the have the experience to understand.

Lacy: Yes, the experience. I think that's how us humans understand.

Interviewer: And [NAME] talked about, "the longest journey that you'll ever take is from your head to your heart."

Lacy: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Interviewer: And they talked a lot about the education of the heart in the head and that is the problem that we focus just on the head. You have to do these things. Have to check these boxes.

Lacy: That comes from our worldview. When we read this literature that I've put on the list [our must read list], we should read it with both our heart and the head. We should read and keep that right here [places hand on heart]. I believe [University's] program is just a great model for how Indigenous knowledge is implemented in a social work institute and program. It's not that it's an elective. It's woven in there. It's one of the foundations and is beyond a diversity training or an elective class. Their field work also reflects the worldview as well. So, from knowing to doing, which is also central to social work as a profession. However, what they're doing is social work from an Indigenous worldview, and that's going to trickle down to everything else, not just child welfare.

Envisioning a decolonial form of child welfare with a magic wand Decolonizing child welfare: If you had a magic wand…

Knowledge holders were also asked if they had a magic wand, what would they envision for the welfare of Indigenous children. At this point in the conversations, knowledge holders opened up about a deep desire to reclaim our Indigenous lifeways. Thinking about how to reclaim our children in a child welfare context, knowledge holders imagined that the colonial child welfare system had no involvement in the lives of Indigenous children. This would mean Tribes built their capacities to assume control over all Native children in every corner of the country. We can imagine problems if total sovereignty were exerted given ongoing poor ICWA implementation. So many Indigenous children are lost within the system because child welfare workers fail to ask if a child is tribal affiliated, or they fail to conduct simple relative searches.

Kevin regularly asserted that Native Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals are often excluded at all levels. I asked Kevin to share his knowledge for this project because they are a well-respected elder, leader, Two-Spirit relative, educator, and professional mental health clinician. Kevin is nationally known throughout Turtle Island and has dedicated their life to protecting Native Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ youth from ongoing colonization in child welfare and foster care system. Kevin strives to bring attention to the often ignored issue of violence against Two Spirit, Native LGBTQ+ and Native men and boys. Kevin uses their personal story in trainings to help others who are experiencing similar situations.

If Kevin had a magic wand, they would want to see inclusion of Two-Spirit, Native LGBTQ on all levels of child welfare.

> I would like to see more work to support Two-Spirits Native LGBTQ youth. I don't see very much of that. We are so intertwined with the mainstream data, and

> even when we talked about curriculum development for our population, we often don't get acknowledged. Sometimes we're not even acknowledged in videos. I often ask why they are not including individuals who identify as Two Spirit or Native LGBTQ because we were impacted by that system too. I have sat with individuals who identified, and I've heard their stories of trauma from being part of the system. My population is really impacted by it, so I would like to see more acknowledgment of Two Spirit young people.

Lacy and Cedar offered similar desires for revitalizing our traditional structures, building tribal capacity, and eliminating state involvement in our tribal affairs:

Lacy talked about building tribal capacity:

> I would want to see tribes have total jurisdiction over all Native kids. I would also love to see them have the capacity to take jurisdiction over any Native kid living anywhere in Indian Country, whether or not it's on a reservation. I feel like states still have too much authority over Native kids and families. Just look at the disparities and over removal by state and county systems. Native kids are removed at much higher rates. So, if I had a magic wand, I could envision that Tribes having the capacity to assert their jurisdiction over any Native kid anywhere. We would also have our revitalized traditional systems in place to take care of our kids the way that our ancestors once did. I also know blood quantum and enrollment are heavy factors in Indian child welfare, so if I had a magic wand, I would also like to see genocidal blood quantum resolved too, but that's an entirely complex issue and I don't want to go there at this time, but I would like to see all Tribes acknowledge descendants in child welfare matters.

I end this chapter with a conversation between Cedar and I as we operationalized decolonization together. I asked Cedar to share her knowledge because I value her perspective as an Indigenous relative caregiver in the communal sense. I met Cedar about two years ago in the University setting. I got to know her a little more when we became Facebook friends. I appreciate social media because sometimes people may reveal their values and stances on issues. Cedar's beliefs and decolonial actions within the Twin Cities are evident as she continues to fight against ongoing colonization as an Indigenous leader within the community and a "Reunification Case Manager" with her tribe. She is a fierce Mother, advocate, activist, social worker, and relative (among many other roles). She has dedicated her life to ensure Indigenous children are safe from the colonial child welfare system. The following is our conversation about decolonization:

> Cary: I want to go back to thinking about decolonization, thinking about desires, thinking about a vision. As a person who knows a lot and who has experienced the child welfare system what do desire for Indigenous child welfare? What would you envision for the collective welfare of our young Indigenous people and communities?
>
> Cedar: Oh, that is a really loaded question. I don't know where to start on that one, that one's a really long one. I know it's nearly impossible to remove all parts of colonization, but bringing our language back, revitalizing our language is a big part. I think early language learning and teaching kids about ceremony and talking about a more. Everything starts in awareness, so awareness. But like the big part of that is removing [colonial systems]. I believe in abolition, and I don't think

jails and prisons should not be a thing. And I don't think that people should not be locked in places. I want the old ways back, but how do you even do that?

Cary: What about abolition in terms of the child welfare system?

Cedar: I feel like if I'm not trying to work myself out of a job, I'm not working ethically.

So, Yeah, I'm definitely here for abolition of child welfare. We have and have had our own system, not Child Welfare, but our own system. That's what I mean by going back to what we had we had our own system that I talked about earlier. There was no court, there were no white man's laws, there was community, and there was family, and we were free from colonial violence. Child protection started as a way to assimilate, and it started as a way to kill the Indians save the man. We already kept our kids safe, before settler colonialism; they're not safe now. They're not that safe in the system. Right. Our culture is not safe in the system. Our language is nowhere to be found in the system, our concepts of family are nowhere to be found in the system, our ways of thinking are nowhere to be found in the system. Our system is written by colonizers to maintain control, plain and simple. When we write out some of our paperwork for court, since we changed names and we use the [Native name] for [my tribe] when we write memorandums and QEWs to the courts.

We put all the language in there because we are bringing it back, and we are putting some of ourselves and our language and culture into the system. That's a start too- it's a start because its recorded, and it's a way to make it so they cannot

continue to erase us, our people, and our language from the system. Now I want to talk them into singing on the record. You have to learn how to pronounce this.

Cary: Yes. Yes. Yes. original language of this land.

We began talking about decolonization in the broader sense, outside of child welfare. I want to stress that this discussion is completely relevant to child welfare because everything is connected in our Indigenous worlds.

Cedar: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I am 100% for abolition of anything that came over here that was done by colonizers to keep control to force people to assimilate to kill our culture.

Cary: that's the decolonizing mindset.

Cedar: Absolutely. And even if it meant that I worked myself out of a job, there's other jobs. Yeah, I could, I could go back and start like growing my own crops, or having my own animals. I'm not opposed to that either. I would love to do that. I would love to be able to live off the land, but in this system, we can't even do that without paying into the government, and you cannot do that without working. It works the way it was designed, and it was designed to wipe out our entire peoples and our way of life.

Cary: I think about what this pandemic has taught us, and I've realized that our lives revolve around capitalism

Cedar: they do, you can't be 100% ethical in a system that revolves around capitalism. I remember I was talking to someone a couple days ago and she asked,

“did you get these from like an ethically sourced place?” So, there's white veganism right. People who are vegans and think they are ethical because we're not killing anything, but they need to realize they are also getting their food from mainly black and brown people who are working really, really hard to stay out in the fields and not get paid as much as they should. So that is not really ethically sourced. You're not killing something right. So, like clothing, “Is your faux fur better than real fur because you didn't kill anything? That takes 500 years to degrade back into soil. So, is it really ethical? Oh, there is no completely ethical way to live and it's in the system and it sucks.

Cary: I see Indigenous Peoples all over Turtle Island who are who are revitalizing our Indigenous food systems and decolonizing our food. I think about how our ancestors hunted and gathered and lived in a reciprocal relationship with the land. We prayed for those animals. When we hunt, we also pray, and we don't waste. We do it in our own spiritual way. It's a spiritual process. I don't live like that, but I think about it a lot, and maybe one day I will get there. It’s a dream for me.

Cedar: I have a lot of friends who do. They live off the land every day. I was just thinking of my friend yesterday. He hunts and fishes basically every day. I would do that, and I think we should be getting back to that. I actually just went to tour of a place that is opening here and they were talking about teaching kids about the different seasons and when you should be getting certain foods, and things like that. They were teaching about bringing it back to a more traditional way. I thought that was really cool too because we all missed out on that. Most of us missed out on that anyway. Yeah, I definitely did because I was placed you know,

and I missed out on all of that. That would be something that would be super important to learn.

Cary: Yeah, it's just a part of our original way of life.

Cedar: Yeah, we could be doing that. Not even just we could be doing that, but we *would* be doing that.

Cary: Yep, and that would improve our whole health, our whole well-being.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Through this study, I sought to understand Indigenous relative caregiver's experiences with the colonized child welfare system, how they live their traditional kinship beliefs and practices amidst ongoing colonization by the child welfare system, their advice to child welfare systems and practitioners and desires for a decolonial form of child welfare. Findings revealed specific forms of coloniality are imposed upon Indigenous children and families in the modern child welfare system. Specifically, the child welfare system perpetrates colonial violence, removal and separation, as a vehicle for implementing assimilative practices. Relative caregivers also uncovered how the child welfare system continues to impose the modern colonial gender system, continuing a legacy of government sponsored civilizing educations programs to assimilate and genderize Indigenous families. Second, this study revealed, what Lugones (2007) calls "sites of resistance", the knowledge of Indigenous relative caregivers who are actively living, passing on, our traditional intergenerationally transmitted kinship knowledge and practices to resist the child welfare systems and protect our children from ongoing coloniality, removal and separation. This chapter concludes with limitations and

implications for social work and child welfare practice and education, policy, research, and tribes. Overall, these findings address the lack of professional literature that features Indigenous voices pertaining to their experiences of the child welfare system.

Study results yielded three major themes: *"So we've been taken away since forever: Experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers in the colonial child welfare system; "This is how we show up for our relatives": Living our Indigenous kinship amidst ongoing colonization; and Desires for the welfare of our children: Delinking from colonial child welfare.*

"So, we've been taken away since forever": Experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers in the colonial child welfare system

The first theme responds to the first research question: how do Indigenous relative caregivers experience colonial and tribal child welfare systems? They were also asked to elaborate on how they experienced tribal child welfare systems for those who had experience with tribal Indian child welfare programs. The first theme emerged, *"So we've been taken away since forever": Experience of Indigenous relative caregivers in the colonized child welfare system,* and revealed Indigenous relative caregivers experienced a plethora of harmful encounters with the child welfare system. Consistent with Bussey and Lucero (2013), Indigenous relative caregivers described experiences and lingering fears of forced removal and separation. These experiences align with Raven Sinclair's description what she calls the "Indigenous child removal system" (Sinclair, 2016).

Lugones (2007) described the modern colonial gender system, an extension of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), as the systematic gendering of Indigenous Peoples to create a hierarchy that would dehumanize and subjugate Indigenous Peoples for the

control of their land and resources. As described in chapters 1 and 3, the settler government imposed heteropatriarchal, Anglo gender identities to civilize Indigenous Peoples through various colonial projects, including civilizing education programs and boarding schools (Cahill, 2011). Indigenous relative caregivers, specifically those who had personal experience within the foster care system as children, also divulged that they were subjected to the modern colonial gender system via therapeutic services and non-Native foster home placements, due to ICWA non-compliance. One knowledge holder painfully described that one of her many non-Native foster care placements forced her to conform to a heteropatriarchal, Christian household, which diverged from her matriarchal culture.

In addition to imposing the modern colonial gender system onto Indigenous children, the child welfare system also perpetuates Indigenous erasure by blatantly submerging Indigenous child welfare practices. Consistent with the literature that indicates that Indigenous centered child welfare practices are not supported by agencies or states and lack adequate resource allocation (Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener & Marsalis, 2018), child welfare systems continue to practice from Eurocentric worldviews, practices and policies, creating conflicts with Indigenous practices and worldviews (Baskin & Sinclair). Throughout their stories and across themes, Indigenous relative caregivers described blatant erasure of Indigenous practices that created tensions between Indigenous versus Eurocentric child welfare practices. In this context, Indigenous erasure is the blatant absence of Indigenous centered child welfare practice and the imposition of Eurocentric child welfare practices.

An extension of policies and educational program to assimilate Native peoples decades prior, today's colonized child welfare system is an ongoing colonial system that triggers historical trauma (Sinclair, 2016). Consistent with Brave Heart and colleague's (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins & Altschul, 2011), the Historical Trauma Response (HTR) refers to a "constellation of features associated with a reaction to massive group trauma" (p. 283). The knowledge holders described historical trauma responses as reactions to their experiences with the child welfare system, resulting in trauma, fear, and distrust, which is also consistent with fears expressed by parents in study conducted by Horejsi & colleagues (1992). In addition, these findings are consistent with "colonial trauma response" (CTR) a term developed by Evans-Campbell & Walters (2006) that connects historical trauma to contemporary experiences of colonization. Colonial trauma responses are reactions to contemporary discriminatory events or microaggressions (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Indigenous relative caregivers described various forms of colonial violence implemented as failures or negligence, invasion, punishment, racism. One knowledge holder referred to the child welfare system as a "colonized stressor", and several others detailed how the child welfare system as caused them to experience "historical trauma triggers". Based on the knowledge of previous literature and background (discussed in chapters 1 and 3), these forms of colonial violence and relative caregiver's experience are akin to boarding school removal and separation practices and continue to cause severe trauma responses.

Finally, some relative caregivers had experience with both county and tribal child welfare systems. Tribes can inadvertently contribute to the ongoing assimilation and

colonization of our own people through the implementations of policies and practices defined, created, and codified by western lawmakers and service providers (Johnston-Goodstar, Waubanascum, & Eubanks, in press). Relative caregivers shared their concerns with the marginalization and erasure of Native Two-Spirit, LGBTQ relatives, tribal child welfare programs becoming extensions of county systems (including Indigenous social workers), and that many of our people become dependent on child welfare system intervention (failing to use our Indigenous practices to intervene). These experiences are consistent to what Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998), Poupart (2003) and Gonzalez, Simard & Baker-Demaray (2014) described as "internalized oppression", defined as violence and oppression committed internally among one's own group, people or community. Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998) coined the term "historical unresolved grief" to explain the connection between societal ills such as internalize oppression, historical trauma and "unresolved grief across generations" (p. 60).

"This is how we show up for our relatives": Living our Indigenous kinship amidst ongoing colonization

Indigenous relative caregiver's traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to the welfare of Indigenous children was also lacking in the professional literature. Before I discuss this theme, I need to acknowledge that many of our Indigenous practices are not written about, discussed, or researched in academia. Keeping certain ceremonies and lifeways safely to ourselves does not make them any less legitimate. Although the results of this study reflect empirical data pertaining to beliefs and practices of Indigenous child welfare, I would like to emphasize that Indigenous Peoples have been living these beliefs and practices for thousands of years. I am not suggesting that our beliefs and practices

could ever be construed as evidence that requires confirmation through empirical research, in fact, we don't need research to confirm what we already know, believe and live. Our Indigenous knowledges have been intergenerationally transmitted for thousands of years and we still rely upon Indigenous ways of knowing to guide our lives.

The second theme, *"This is how we show up for our relatives": Living our Indigenous kinship lifeways in the 21st century*, describe the Indigenous kinship practices and knowledge that serve as a foundation for Indigenous community defined ways of taking care of our children. This theme presents knowledge holders' stories of how they live their intergenerationally transmitted, community-centered, and culturally grounded kinship, both personally and professionally, to care for young relatives and protect them from the child welfare system. I would also like to emphasize that living these Indigenous practices are a form of what Lugones (2010) referred to as, resistance to the colonial difference, or "intimate, everyday resistant interactions to the colonial difference. Interwoven in social life among people not acting as representatives or officials." (p. 743).

These lived experiences are consistent with the literature that identified Indigenous beliefs and practice in a child welfare context are strengths-based, non-coercive or punitive, and community centered (Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener & Marsalis, 2018). Indeed, many relative caregivers revealed how their Indigenous beliefs and practices consistently conflicted with Eurocentric child welfare policy and practice that they described as punitive and invasive. Relative caregivers provided examples of how they live their kinship teachings and practices, such as interventions that were community-centered where children are rooted in and collectively cared for in their

communities. In addition, relatives offered Indigenous centered interventions and solutions and gave examples of how they integrate culture into their natural interventions. This finding was consistent with Baskin & Sinclair (2015) who asserted that Indigenous versus Eurocentric child welfare practices can cause conflict.

Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are working to decolonize and revitalize our languages, cultures and lifeways that continue to be under attack. As Lugones (2007) and Cavender Wilson (2004) have taught us that we must discern what was imposed upon us, so that we may determine what pieces of our lives must be revitalized and reclaimed. In the child welfare context, these results have revealed a glimpse of the blatant ways in which colonialism is still inflicted upon our people. Thus, Indigenous relative caregivers who contributed their knowledge and experiences to formulate this theme have taught us ways that our tribal communities can delink and resist ongoing colonialism imposed by child welfare systems. In addition, I propose that these results have implications for reclaiming and preserving our Indigenous knowledge base to support decolonization efforts and the revitalization and reclamation of Indigenous systems and lifeways that communities have been implementing for time immemorial.

Desires for the welfare of our children: Delinking from colonized child welfare

The final two research questions explored Indigenous relative caregiver's advice and desires pertaining to several child welfare matters. I asked Indigenous relative caregiver's to share their knowledge and advice to colonized and tribal child welfare systems and students preparing to work in child welfare. Considering that colonized child welfare systems still have considerable control over Indigenous families, I wanted to gain

insight into how systems and practitioners can provide better services with Indigenous families, and to reduce immediate harm and trauma. Finally, I asked relative caregivers, "if you had a magic wand, can you describe your desires for the welfare of Indigenous children? The third theme emerged, *Desires for the welfare of Indigenous children: Delinking from colonized child welfare.*

The first sub-theme consists of advice from Indigenous relative caregivers. I wrote the advice in a letter format, similar to the way Shawn Wilson (2008) wrote to his children in his book "Research is Ceremony", so that I could directly convey the urgency to those institutions and groups. I decided to provide brief summaries of relative caregiver's advice in the form of mini-letters. Writing in a letter format seemed more natural to me particularly for this section.

Dear colonial child welfare systems:

They would also like you to know that collaborating with Indigenous communities is very important. Indigenous relative caregivers want to urge you to listen to Indigenous families and communities when they express concerns about the trauma and harm you are inflicting upon them and how they can do better with them. They would also like to emphasize that you should recognize and address that you are operating from Eurocentric worldviews and practices that are normalized and continue to cause harm.

Dear Tribal child welfare systems:

Indigenous relative caregivers would like you to know that sometimes your tribal child welfare systems replicate colonial child welfare systems that causes harm and

internalized oppression. Given that many of our communities have preserved our traditional child welfare practices that are community-centered and culturally grounded kinship, we need to provide more overall support (including financial) to keep children with Indigenous families and communities. We also need to do better with educating ourselves with the history and current ways to support our Two-Spirit Native LGBTQ children and include them in systems change efforts. We can no longer suppress and erase our young Two Spirit relatives.

Dear Indigenous students:

As you are studying to practice child welfare, Indigenous relative caregivers would like you to remember who you are and where you come from, your ancestors and the strengths within your families and communities. They would like to caution you to recognize where Eurocentric social work is being taught and implemented. Instead, always strive to practice from our Indigenous worldviews and stay true to our values, and don't be afraid to resist.

Dear non-Indigenous students:

Indigenous relative caregivers have a huge role and stake in the wellbeing of Indigenous children, both in their families and communities. They would like to share with you some important advice to prevent harm and trauma as you may work within or with our communities and families. First, they would like to tell you that not all tribes are the same. You should get to know the local tribal communities, their rich histories, their current societies and cultures. In addition, you should also become educated about the

impact of colonization, boarding schools and other civilizing projects executed by the federal government in an attempt to destroy Indigenous Peoples.

In the final subtheme, Indigenous relative caregivers described Indigenous ways of helping are community-centered, strengths-based, non-shameful, where extended kin step in to help when needed. Some relatives shared specific examples including an "Aunty Intervention" where she was raised with her Aunties, which helped her step in to take care of her nephews when she became an Aunty. Indigenous ways of helping were also implemented through cultural revitalization that was also a form of healing. These included making regalia, connecting the children to their culture and language, and also revitalizing Indigenous culture and worldview in a social work program.

Finally, I asked relative caregivers to imagine how would they envision child welfare for our children and families, if they had a magic wand. A few notable stories described desires for revitalizing our traditional structures, building tribal capacity, and eliminating state involvement in our tribal affairs, including abolishing the child welfare system.

Implications

Practice

Indigenous Peoples have traditional systems in place to support each other that existed on Turtle Island for generations prior to colonization. This study revealed how many of our traditional kinship practices are lived by relative caregivers to protect them from the child welfare system. However, the social work profession has been reluctant to recognize Indigenous knowledge and ways of practice and healing (Hart, 1999; Coates, Gray & Hetherington, 2006). Given the evidence of trauma caused by the child welfare

system that was gathered in this study, I want to urge child welfare systems to reckon with their colonial complicity and prioritize decolonial practices. I want to circle back to what Waterlily taught us when she said that Indigenous People don't heal separately, we heal together. I would like to reiterate what she has taught us:

> If we're truly going to look at the current system of child welfare and we're going to say, "Oh, how are we going to apply Indigenous – or a Native or Anishinaabe world view," to how we center around children, then we would put that child center, right? And then by that we're going to say, okay, not the child, [but] the mom and the baby. How would we center them because they can't exist without each other, right? So, removing babies and children from mothers, and then expecting the mothers to get healthy, separately, is opposite of what we know to be true. We're further disconnecting them to the source so even thinking in terms of the umbilical cord. That umbilical cord connects them but, in some cases, if it is going to come to an actual removal, then there needs to be some sort of ceremony of passing over guardianship where we are letting the Spirits know that "now I'm the Mother". There should be like a better process for that but there isn't.

Waterlily's guidance has significant implications for practice. Given the immense trauma triggers that occurs when Indigenous relative caregivers are threatened with removal and separation, practitioners must seriously consider how these harmful practices can be avoided. As Waterlily indicated, if removal is warranted, then practitioners also need to consult with Indigenous communities to determine how removal can be done in a non-violent way by using ceremonies. I would like to

emphasize that practitioners need to consult with tribal communities when integrating any types of ceremonies. Tribal communities must take the lead on any types of these services, and they will determine if they are permissible and appropriate.

Waterlily's teaching that Indigenous Peoples don't heal separately has another important implication for case planning. Judges and social workers should consider if their case plan is holistic and includes goals that reflects healing involving the entire family, including extended kin. In addition, family court judges that require a parent to attend therapy or treatment should also weigh the importance of assigning/requiring tribally specific programs, and advise additional components like family access to ceremony, language, efforts to protect and revitalize tribal ways.

Education

Findings in this study have significant implications for social work education. Indigenous relative caregivers revealed that ongoing colonialism is perpetrated by the child welfare system, including social work, thus, creating a demand for Social Work education, including CSWE's accredited curriculum, competencies, and course design, to mandate "decolonial" approaches in their content. Social work's Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), Competency #2 (CSWE, 2015, p. 7) explicitly states "Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). A recommended change for 2022 EPAS changes language from "Difference" to "equity and inclusion" in this opening sentence to Competency #2 (CSWE, 2019). Similarly, The National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) Code of Ethics (1.05) also recently shifted language from "cultural

competence" to "cultural awareness" (NASW, 2020), which means "social workers continuously seek knowledge and improve their skills and ability to meet the needs of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds" (NASW, 2020). Failing to address the underlying issues of norming Eurocentric culture through word changes are inconsequential (Baltra-Ulloa, 2013). A change in terminology continues to marginalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Despite current efforts to "include" Indigenous Peoples, such as "Tribal sovereignty" language (CSWE, 2015) and the addition of specialized Indigenous tracks at social work's premier conferences (Society for Social Work Research; Council on Social Work Education), our profession's standards continue to constrain Indigenous People's, our worldviews, practices, and histories to the margins (Hart, 1999).

Next, I provide an example of how I integrated decolonial content into the required course that addresses diversity, power, privilege and oppression, which was a natural fit for a mandatory MSW course.

Decolonization suffuses an MSW Diversity course

In late 2018, one of our faculty approached me to ask if I would consider teaching a section of the MSW "Diversity" course. I accepted the offer because I wanted to gain some experience teaching. It was my goal to become a faculty at a teaching university. As I read through each syllabus, it was evident that each faculty member's voice, ideas, worldviews, and specific knowledges were ingrained in each assigned topic and readings. I knew that I was thinking from a very different angle. I was sitting in our Ph.D. student office with my sister Ndilimeke, who is an experienced educator. She has also been impacted by colonization. We began talking about how I wanted to approach this class.

She said, “I’ve learned so much about what happened here in regard to colonization, and I feel like the same thing happened to us. It was like they (the colonizers) had a playbook.”

Ideas began swirling in my mind, so I walked downstairs to my advisor’s office, and she was there. I asked her for 5 minutes, but we ended up talking for much more than that (that’s how it always went down). I asked her to help me identify the “playbook”, and she reminded me to read Eve Tuck’s scholarship on settler colonialism, so I did. I also found a reading by Fortier & Wong (2019) who connected settler colonialism with social work’s involvement in the creation of the settler state.

I urgently approached my syllabus and began reorganizing the topics so that I could begin with laying the groundwork for teaching how the U.S. formed as a settler state. For me, we had to go above and beyond discussions about racism and talk about colonialism, the colonization of Indigenous Peoples, first. I had to teach my social work students to uncover what was systematically erased (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). I had an urgency to teach the actual roots of the various oppressions that social workers are expected to address. Hart (1999) stated that social workers weren’t meant to challenge colonialism, and I agree with his statement. However, I believe that ours is the prime profession to challenge, resist, and dismantle colonialism if we are to truly be the profession of social justice.

Applying theories of colonialism as a framework to analyze how settler structures operate in the modern world is powerful in its capacity to identify, deconstruct colonial systems that uphold oppression, privilege, and power without excluding the first, Indigenous Peoples of these lands. Critically examining social work policy, practice,

education, and theory in this manner has implications for social work decolonization in policy, practice, education, and history. In addition, addressing difference forms of colonialism in social work has potential implications for redefining social work's social justice value and efforts to align with decolonization (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013) and should be a central teaching in social work education.

Research

My Grandfather taught us to never forget where we came from. To me, this also meant that I remain true to myself, so I sought out ways that I could completely be myself, as an Indigenous woman and scholar, in these Eurocentric academic spaces. I felt that using Indigenous research methodologies was extremely important and appropriate to conduct research with Indigenous relative caregivers because we are relational and so are Indigenous methodologies. As described in full detail in chapters 4 and 5, conducting research as an Indigenous woman, linked to this research on a personal and cultural level, using Indigenous methodologies and methods had a few implications.

As I went through this process of conducting research using Indigenous methodologies, it became apparent that my Indigenous worldview, values, and urge to protect my own people was explicit throughout the entire research process. As I carried out research that was relational, I felt that knowledge holders trusted me with their highly sensitive and sacred knowledge and experiences. I honestly feel that they may not have shared certain experiences if they didn't know I was going to be respectful and responsible with their knowledge.

Policy

This study may contribute the urgency of passing laws to enforce ICWA compliance. In Minnesota, one-third of counties failed to follow ICWA law, including almost half of the counties that surround reservations. In 2020, the state of Minnesota, counties will be subjected to financial penalties for ICWA non-compliance. This has been the first time the state has administered penalties for ICWA non-compliance (MN Native News, 2020).

This study also speaks to the need for mandated ICWA training in every state. For example, the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies (The Center), Department of Social Work at the University of Minnesota-Duluth implements an Anishinaabe-centered MSW program, including continuing education, to address the disparate removal of Indigenous children by the Minnesota child welfare system. One of their premier continuing education events is geared toward Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare practitioners statewide. There, Center staff and colleagues educate practitioners about successful ICWA implementation models, the history and context of Indigenous families from pre-colonial times to present, genocide, assimilation and boarding school's effects on Indigenous families, including historical trauma. They also educate attendees on Anishinaabe values that are central to healing and health: courage, love, wisdom, respect, truth, humility, and honesty. Mandating these types of trainings can reduce disparities and strengthen state and tribal partnerships (see Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener, Day, Bussey & Nichols, 2018).

Sovereign Tribal Nations

Our Indigenous knowledges have been intergenerationally transmitted for thousands of years and we still rely upon Indigenous ways of knowing to guide our lives.

The knowledge shared by Indigenous relative caregivers in this study may be used to support Indigenous child welfare efforts to reclaim and preserve our Indigenous knowledge base to aid in decolonization efforts. For example, for tribes could use these study findings to inform their tribal children's codes, to develop decolonial interventions in their tribal-run human service programs (Johnston-Goodstar, Waubanascum & Eubanks, in press), and support other relative caregivers to keep their children within their families. Relative caregiver knowledge may also assist in contributing to the overall revitalization and reclamation of Indigenous systems and lifeways that communities have been implementing for time immemorial.

Limitations

As a child growing up in my community, I remember hearing people begin events by sharing an opening prayer or speeches spoken in our Native language. One thing that I heard in common among each speaker was a version this, "this is the extent of my knowledge of our language, so I apologize to my ancestors and the Creator for speaking in English." This has stuck with me throughout my career. In 2014, I was working with a tribal college on their strategic planning efforts. I was assisting the groups come up with ideas for their plan when one of the groups (who consisted of Native language faculty) had trouble expressing their ideas, so they asked me if I could help. I simply asked, "how would you convey what you want to say in your language?" Not surprising to me, they began beautifully integrating their language into their strategic plan. Knowing that our Native languages are limitless, I realized that my dissertation is limited because it is written in English. I wish I could write it in my Native language, but I am limited, and it

probably is not allowed. Therefore, I need to apologize to my ancestors and the Creator for writing in English. I vow to continue learning my language.

It is beyond the scope of this study to address several areas, but I will focus on the limitations involving Indigenous voices on this topic. This study does not include the voices Indigenous birth parents, grandparents, extended kin or other community knowledge holders who are deeply impacted by the child welfare system. Exploring "sites of resistance" (Lugones, 2007) and identifying how these knowledge holders experience child welfare and live their traditional lifeways would be important to know in terms of delinking from colonized child welfare systems and practices. In addition, examining how different Tribal child welfare programs, as sites of resistance, integrate culture, language, and Indigenous lifeways into their programs would provide good models for other Tribes who are seeking to reclaim and revitalize their own traditional child welfare practices and systems.

Given the recent uncovering of the remains of 215 murdered Indigenous children at Kamloops Residential School in Canada (Seneca Nation of Indians, 2021), I have been experiencing visions of how the children, families, and communities felt. I have a young daughter and I experience her feelings on a daily basis. I can't imagine the horrors our young ancestors felt as they were incarcerated and murdered in boarding and residential schools. This study does not include the experiences and perspectives of children who experience the colonized child welfare systems, who are removed from their homes. Many Indigenous communities view children as leaders and knowledge holders, and this study did not seek their important perspectives. Therefore, I would like to know how Indigenous children who experience forced removal and other interactions with the child

welfare system feel about it and their desires for the wellbeing and welfare of their own population.

These removal practices are also devastating for birth parents. As a few relative caregivers explained, they don't believe in colonial practices of removal or termination of parental rights. Another relative described how healing occurs with the family intact and that removal of the child is a spiritual trauma. Forced removal may disrupt any chance for healing and further traumatize families. This study did not address the perspectives of the birthparents who had their children removed. A deep look into Indigenous parent experiences would be important to see how theirs align with Indigenous relative caregivers in this study.

Finally, this study gave a peek inside decolonial desires for the welfare of Indigenous children, but it was not comprehensive. I would like to see more knowledge gathered about how specific tribes are delinking from settler systems and how they are living and practicing their local tribal kinship structures for a self-determined, Indigenous-centered form of child welfare.

Conclusion

> We had our own systems of justice, education, and childcare passed through many generations. Social workers have been complicit on repeated attacks on Indigenous cultural and traditional systems by removing children from their families and communities" Baskin & Sinclair, 2015, p. 4

Generations of Indigenous People know that the U.S. government and social workers implemented policies explicitly to abolish Indigenous People, knowledge systems, languages, and cultures. These were replaced with Eurocentric culture, normalized by customs that are incommensurable with Indigenous worldviews. Settler child welfare systems have replaced complex Indigenous kinship structures and continue this legacy of forced removal and assimilation (Killsback, 2019).

Indigenous scholars in social work have asserted that social workers have been both complicit and directly involved in colonial child welfare projects, including removing, separating, and implementing Eurocentric child practices (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Baskin, 2016; Sinclair, 2004). This study's significant findings add to these claims by revealing specific forms of colonialism that the child welfare system continues to impose onto Indigenous children and families. This study also provides some evidence that normalized Eurocentric worldviews, policies and practices dominate child welfare, resulting in various historical trauma responses. This study also offers ways that Indigenous relative caregivers are living our kinship teachings and practices as sites of resistance to the colonial difference (Lugones, 2007). These may serve as models for tribal nations as they resist ongoing colonialism and colonial violence. They identify sites of resistance (Lugones, 2007), and may provide ways for tribal child welfare programs to

design programs and interventions that delink from colonial ways of practice and policy. Finally, as Indigenous relative caregivers imagined their desires for decolonial child welfare, they named refusal and abolishment of colonial child welfare systems, while at the same time a complete revitalization of our lifeways.

Knowledge of past and present Indigenous child removal, historical trauma, and social work's role is foundational in truth-telling (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Haight, Waubanascum, Glesener, Day, Bussey, & Nichols, 2019). Knowledge of these events are also necessary for healing from historical trauma and colonization, delinking, and revitalizing our Indigenous lifeways for our Indigenous futures.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

We are interested in learning about the perspectives and practices of American Indian families with child protection. During our previous research, we found that the voices of American Indian families are absent from the professional literature on child protection. We believe that child welfare students and professionals need to understand American Indian perspectives and hear families' stories to provide better services to American Indian families.

SECTION 1

Traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to child protection

1. Please tell us how you came to provide care for (child's name). (Possible probes: What happened that led up to (child) living in your home? How long have you cared for (child)? What has that experience been like for you and your family? How do you feel about providing care for (child)?
2. What experiences, beliefs or teachings, led you to make the decision to care for (child(ren)?
3. What is your understanding of the ways that your tribe has traditionally dealt with issues of child protection? For example, if a parent is unable to care for a child, or if someone is harming a child? (Possible probe: what does traditional "child welfare" look like in your community? What do traditional child welfare beliefs and practices mean to you?)
4. How is your understanding of traditional practices in your tribal community similar or different from your understanding of county/state or formal tribal child welfare services? (Probe: How do you view Termination of Parental Rights? How do you view adoption?)

Now that we've spoken about child welfare, let's talk more generally about the extent to which our Indigenous views of children and youth vary from mainstream views. How do you view children and youth in your home and community? How do you support them? (Probe: how have you learned from children and youth?)

1. Has your family ever had any formal involvement with formal county/state or tribal child services?

If "yes", go to next section 2. If "no" skip and go directly to section 3.

SECTION 2

Experience child welfare systems (county or tribal)

2. Can you tell us about your experiences with formal county/state or tribal child welfare services?
3. Were you involved in the investigation process? What was your experience with that? (Who investigated? What were the findings of the investigations? How were your

family members treated (probe any issues of fairness)? How did you feel about the investigation?
4. Were you present for any court hearings? What hearings were you involved in? Who was present during these hearings? How were you treated (probe any issues of fairness)? How do you feel about your experiences in court?)
5. How did your involvement in formal child protection affect you and your family? Were there any positive outcomes? Any negative outcomes?
6. Who was most help to you during this process? How did they help? Who was least helpful? Why?
7. What is your understanding of ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act)? How did you learn about ICWA? In your understanding, were ICWA mandates followed in your case?

SECTION 3

Advice

1. What advice do you have for students studying to work in child welfare? How can they prepare to do the best possible job with future American Indian families?
2. What advice do you have for county and/or state child welfare professionals and policy makers? How can they do a better job of supporting American Indian families?
3. What advice do you have for Tribal child welfare professionals? How can these professionals do a better job supporting American Indian families?
4. If you had a magic wand, what change(s) would you like to see in government child welfare systems?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Title of Research Study: Understanding traditional child protection practices in American Indian communities.

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the experiences of Indigenous relative caregivers who have experienced the child welfare system.

Background: During our previous research, we discovered that the voices of American Indian families who experienced child protection and tribal elders were absent from the professional literature.

The purpose of this study is:

To better understand the experiences of American Indian families and elders who have experienced child protection.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study: You are invited because of your knowledge and experience as an Indigenous relative caregiver.

Who is conducting the study: This study is being conducted by researchers from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

Dr. Wendy Haight, Professor and Gamble-Skogmo Chair in Child Welfare and Youth Policy

Cary Waubanascum, MSW. PhD student, Member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.

Ruth Soffer-Elnekave, MSW. PhD student

Procedures: If you give consent to be in this study, we would ask that you:

Participate in a face-to-face interview which will last about 1-2 hours.

- During the interview, you will be asked to reflect on your experiences with child protection and offer recommendations for culturally appropriate and sustainable practices.
- We also seek your permission to audiotape the conversation, which is a requirement for participating in this research study. Recording the conversation will help us to accurately capture your reflections.
- We also request your permission to take some notes during the interview to capture our own thoughts and observations.
- Your responses to our interview questions and our notes will provide data for our study.

You also will be asked to complete a brief, demographic form asking about your tribal affiliation, employment status, education, and family.

Risks and Benefits: There are no benefits to participating in this research. This research involves no more than minimal risk, although it might raise some emotional distress when discussing your child protection involvement. The benefits that you will gain from participating in this study may outweigh your risks. Through your participation in this study you can contribute to the education of the next generation of child welfare professionals, as well as the continuing education of current professionals, on child protection with American Indian families.

Compensation: You will receive a $25.00 gift card to compensate and thank you for your participation. If for any reason you do not complete the whole study, you will still receive the full payment

Voluntariness: Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may discontinue participation or skip any questions at any time during the interview. Your choice to participate or not to participate will not have any effect on your relationship with the University of Minnesota. You may choose to withdraw from the research at any time.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

- Audio recordings of the interview will be encrypted and downloaded to a secure University of Minnesota computer drive.
- Written transcripts will be made of audio recorded interviews to allow an accurate analysis of your perspectives and experiences.
- All field notes will be kept in a safe, locked suitcase and also be downloaded to a secure University of Minnesota computer drive.
- Any identifiable personal information will be removed from transcribed interviews and field notes. Pseudonyms will be inserted for any identifiable information about all participants of this study to protect your anonymity.
- Only researchers involved in this study will have access to the interviews and field notes.
- Data collected will be used for publication and educational purposes.
- Audio recordings, transcriptions and field notes will be deleted following publication of the study but the data will be kept for a minimum of four years to be used for publication and educational purposes.

Will I have a chance to verify and provide feedback after the interview is over?

Yes. We will want you to comment on our conclusions before the study is published. We will email you the transcript of your interview to check for accuracy. You may use this opportunity to provide feedback.

Contacts and Questions: Questions about this research study should be directed to,

Dr. Wendy Haight, at the School of Social Work, University of Minnesota. Wendy can be reached at +1(612) 624-4721 or email whaight@umn.edu

Report an issue, concern, or complaint*:* This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns.

Signature of person providing consent Block

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

_____

Signature of person obtaining consent Date

_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD