

FROM TOPIC AND EVIDENCE TO ARCHITECT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF
BLACK DIASPORIC INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE RESISTIVE
STRATEGIES OF BLACK CHILD WELFARE SURVIVORS

by

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y'know they helped build a strong bitch *laughter* like unfortunately they tried to break me down instead “and still I rise” *laughter*—**Phoenix, Research Participant**

You may write me down in history/ With your bitter, twisted lies,/ You may trod me in the very dirt/ But still, like dust, I'll rise. /Does my sassiness upset you? /Why are you beset with gloom? /'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells /Pumping in my living room... /Did you want to see me broken? /Bowed head and lowered eyes? /Shoulders falling down like teardrops, /Weakened by my soulful cries?... /You may shoot me with your words, /You may cut me with your eyes, /You may kill me with your hatefulness,/But still, like air, I'll rise.—**Maya Angelou~ Still I Rise (1978)**

And um.. My grandma was praying and she like “trust in God it'll be okay”. And I walked through the door with them and then they told me they were taking me to a foster home.—**Karona, Research Participant**

But to the Door of No Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of Blacks in the Diaspora there are no maps. This door is not mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is also perhaps a psychic destination. Since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return.—**Dionne Brand~ A Map to the Door of No Return (2001, pp.2)**

But I do know that we were trying to speak for people and we were being silenced. I know that we were trying to get funding and do what we could and we were being—we were being oppressed. Our group wasn't—our group wasn't doing anything because we weren't...they weren't letting us do anything. That's what I do remember.—**Sandy, Research Participant**

Specifically, in our current political systems, political actors going under the label liberals and the left claim to be desirous and wanting a new world order. We specifically address liberals and the left because both camps claim a desire to speak with, on behalf of and for a sense of community that is bigger than themselves and both camps claim to espouse a politics guided by an ethics that is rooted in justice broadly conceived. But we turn to liberals and the left because their lofty claims have consistently and spectacularly failed Black people in North America and globally while claiming otherwise. —**Rinaldo Walcott & Idil Abillahi~ BlackLife (2019, pp. 92)**

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ABSTRACT

From Topic and Evidence to Architect: The Development of Black Diasporic Interpretive Phenomenology and the Resistive Strategies of Black Child Welfare Survivors

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This research engaged in the epistemological development from interpretive phenomenology into what is my implemented method of inquiry, which is Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology. This approach grounds itself in Black diasporic thought and the theorizing and work of Black authors, scholars, and activists to understand and describe the sensibilities, intimacies, struggle and resistance of Black people within the diaspora, often stemming from a hyper/invisibility created by the state, society, and institutions (Walcott, 2016). It takes seriously concerns around ethics and care while also being investigative by making connections between our present moment as Black people to the long history of subjugation and our continued fight for freedom.

Three Black participants of various identities were engaged to answer the overall research question of “what are the resistive strategies deployed by Black child welfare survivors?” The term *Black child welfare survivor* refers to Black people who at some point in their lives have been engaged by or taken under state guardianship, or experienced adoption. The methodology used allowed for participants’ narratives to expose the anti-Black racism and continuity of slavery and coloniality in child welfare, as well as the rigorous, sustainable, and effective methods Black child welfare survivors deploy in order to maintain themselves, their families, and their communities.

Key words: anti-Black racism, child welfare, resistance, Black diaspora, Black family

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I would like to acknowledge the radical collective work of Black people that have made it possible for me to think through and organize around anti-Black racism within child welfare. I want to thank those individuals in my life who held/hold me deeply with accountability, respect, dignity, love and learning—Idil Abdillahi, Percy Lezard, Chrys and Saget-Richard. I want to thank those comrades, co-conspirators and colleagues in the fight for our freedom and liberation.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Phoenix, Karona, and Sandy. This work is dedicated to all the Black families, children and youth who've experienced state sanctioned and enforced kinlessness. This work is dedicated to those Black child welfare survivors who may no longer remain with us in the physical as a result of the kinds of despair intrinsic in child welfare. Finally, this work is dedicated to Thaila Dixon—a comrade, sibling in the struggle, and imaginary for a different future.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been an increasing call to address anti-Black racism within the child welfare system, and how Black families and in particular Black children and youth interact with and are engaged by child welfare (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society [OACAS], 2016; Office of the Ontario Child Advocate [OCA], 2019). At the same time, and especially over the past 5-10 years, we see a more public Black radical politic coming from movements like Black Lives Matter and other grassroots organizers. This is not to suggest that Black radical thought and action globally, and locally here in Canada, have not existed until this moment, but to signal a shift in many areas of social life. For example, the founding of the Association of Black Social Workers here in Canada in 1979 by four Black women was largely in response to the anti-Black racism occurring in the welfare system including child welfare (Association of Black Social Workers [ABSW], 2019).

Recent examples exist in the organizing done by Black Lives Matter-Toronto to stop the deportation of Black child welfare survivor Abdoul Abdi was a response to the the anti-Black marriage between child welfare, immigration, and youth/criminal justice (Williams, 2018). Yet, combing through the existing and recent literature on child welfare, and looking at what generally passes for progressive politics about/in the system, it seems that Black radical thought and child welfare have yet to be brought together for something truly transformative in the context of Canada at least.

Much of the literature over the past two decades focuses on the suitability of Black children for non-Black, mostly white homes, and the overrepresentation of Black children and youth in child welfare (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; Pon, Gosine, &

Phillips, 2011). Suitability tends to focus on the successful integration of Black children and youth into largely white homes, whether foster/group homes or adopted homes (OACAS, 2016). OACAS (2016) also looked at the challenges of 'integration', often citing a lack of cultural teachings for Black children and youth.

The issue of overrepresentation captures particular attention in the Canadian context given the more recent release of statistics by Children's Aid Society-Toronto, where Black children and youth make up 46% of their youth in care yet constitute only 8% of Toronto's youth (Pon, Phillips, Clarke, & Abdillahi, 2017). While these are important issues to understanding the role of anti-Black racism in child welfare, I believe these are signals to a larger issue rather than the definition of the issue itself.

With overrepresentation seeming to be a central focal point, I also believe that it should make people ask why is it that Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies is willing to admit overrepresentation as an issue that they will address, particularly through their *One Vision One Voice* project. That it is possible that overrepresentation as a research, policy, and organizational endeavour is occlusive, and hides and distracts from the larger point. The larger issue being that child welfare is a kind of colonial and enslaving continuity for Black children and youth, and our families/communities.

The slave trade and slavery rendered Black families, Black childhood, Black parenthood, and in particular Black motherhood, as invalid and non-existent based on the non-human status assigned through the brutal practice of chattel slavery (Roberts, 1997). Slave owners regularly removed Black babies and children from their mother, even right after Black mothers would give birth, and sell them to other slave owners (Hill-Collins, 2005; Maynard, 2017; Roberts, 2002). These inhumane removals were not just about

financial gain, but also about the ability to assert anti-Black control over Black people's population growth, care of family relations, and to display generally that every moment of life, and death, is at the whim of slave owners (Browne, 2015; Maynard, 2017; Roberts, 1997).

Despite this white supremacist, anti-Black, denial of Black reproductivity there was always resistance. Black mothers routinely attempted to care for their children, including the ones who had been stolen and placed on other plantations, or Black mothers would flee plantations and seek freedom elsewhere with their children (Browne, 2015). This included a resistance to necropolitics, referring to how the state and those it imbues with the power to decide who and how one lives and dies (2015). During the slave trade and slavery, Black mothers would kill their children rather than allow slave traders/owners take, dehumanize, and/or murder their children (2015). Also, Black women would often care for children who were not their own, a practice known as othermothering, to ensure the survival of Black children and youth and therefore Black community (Hill-Collins, 2000; Roberts, 1997).

The apparent emancipation from slavery did not end the state's denial and fracturing of Black reproductivity and family. The dehumanization developed, learned, and deployed from slavery/the slave trade took a different form in state policies and practices, reconstituting this denial (Browne, 2015; Roberts, 1997; 2002). During the development of the welfare system, there were quite clear anti-Black segregationist/exclusionist laws and practices intended to relegate and maintain Black people's economic and social marginalization by excluding us from state support (Maynard, 2017; Roberts, 2002). White women's participation in this came in the

development of field of social work as they acted as agents of the state through the welfare system (Johnstone, 2018; Lee & Ferrer, 2014). As well, Black women were largely seen as unable to raise their own children and families, despite being considered only valuable as working in and raising white families (Roberts, 2002).

Much of the literature ignores and/or unarticulates this history and these continuities. While it is possible some believe that this is a history largely relevant to the state south of Canada's colonial borders, Maynard (2017) thoroughly and clearly argues this as untrue and that slavery's afterlives in Canada exist in the development and deployment of state policies and power, including child welfare. She even goes as far as to show how Canadian, largely white women, social workers have more power than police officers through their ability to enter homes without warrant based on reporting that is often problematic, and in many cases anti-Black when about Black mothers (2017).

Literature not exposing and addressing this ongoing history means that scholars, researchers, and even child welfare survivors ourselves never even arrive at discussing the presence, relevance, moments, and sites of resistance for Black children and youth, who I will call Black child welfare survivors. I myself have my own experiences of having to survive both foster care and transracial adoption—or what I call being a stolen-Black child welfare survivor. It is these personal experiences that actually brought me to this research, after navigating years of community work and education relevant to child welfare. This included volunteering at organizations like the Voyager Project and Cross Over Youth, two research projects led by white women housed at Ryerson University intended to support child welfare survivors' interconnected experiences with education

and youth/criminal justice, and being employed by the now closing Office of the Ontario Child Advocate which was led by a white man.

In all of these spaces I came to learn that Black child welfare survivors are always the topic and evidence, but we are never the architects. We are currency, and rarely in control of the exchange. So it is from this knowledge that I engage this major research paper as a personal, political, ethical, radical, and decolonial endeavour, one that centres the capacity and creativity of Black child welfare survivors. An endeavour that puts Black child welfare survivorship in conversation and concert with what Hudson and Kamugisha (2014) call the Black Radical Tradition.

The Black Radical Tradition refers to the historical practices of Black revolt against the commodification and exchange of Black labour, bodies, and life (2014). It is also a body of scholarly work that draws from this history, is deeply Black feminist, and is critical of the mutually constitutive relationship between the market and the Canadian state, and how this relationship maintains Black lack, dying, and death (2014).

The purpose of this research then is to delve into these unexplored issues, and to understand and articulate Black child welfare survivors' moments and methods of resistance against child welfare's colonial and enslaving continuities. The overall research question is: given the enslaving experience of child welfare, what are the resistive strategies—both as moments and methods—of Black child welfare survivors?

The objectives of the major research paper are: 1) Black child welfare survivors articulate the ways we navigate and challenge the child welfare system; 2) politicizing and capacity development of Black child welfare survivors; 3) create a sense of solidarity

and community by engaging participants in a process that is critical, healing, supportive, and one that fosters participant control.

The implications of understanding and articulating the contours of resistance for Black child welfare survivors are heavy and deep. But their heaviness and depth are also liberatory and transformative. It means seeing how child welfare workers, mental health practitioners, and politicians may pathologize resistive strategies to gain and maintain control over Black child welfare survivors. It means putting child welfare into conversations with the experiences of slavery and demanding a different kind of redress beyond just talking about social work practice and organizational reform. It arguably means politicizing child welfare and Black child welfare survivors to think about dismantling child welfare—to be child welfare abolitionists, a term I have yet to hear before. For participants, it means having one's experiences reframed in ways that address personal shame and blame that comes from these experiences, and instead move us to contextualized resistance and moments of collective healing.

The order of this major research paper is to first begin with discussing the theoretical framework, then the literature review, to which the critiques of existing literature are then lodged within the methodology section. In the methodology section I articulate existing critique, as well as my own, of interpretive phenomenology in order to what I then describe as Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology. Following this are the results and analyses in the chapter titled *Black Life in Child Welfare*, and finishing with the implications/conclusion titled *New Possibilities*.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This major research paper, and research design, utilizes a theoretical framework that in different but coalescing ways attends to Black peoples' experiences. I also want to mention that this theoretical framework also has a particular congruence with the methodology I propose, and I do so because without the theoretical work done by these authors and scholars I would not be able to imagine Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology. This is not to suggest these concepts, and scholarship that builds off of and centres them, do not overlap or develop off of one another. Instead, it is that they are distinct ways of looking at, thinking about, and addressing BlackLife (Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019), and it can be seen that the authors I cite and develop my analysis from write scholarship that is embedded in many/all of these concepts.

The proposed theoretical framework is: 1) anti-Black racism; 2) anti-Black sanism 3) wake work praxis; 4) Black Feminist thought/scholarship, and 5) decolonization.

Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism refers to the multiple and intersecting experiences of systemic, structural, state, and community violence deployed against Black peoples historically and contemporarily (Benjamin, 2003). Theoretically it also makes known those methods and moments of resistance made by Black people (Benjamin, 2003; Browne, 2015), therefore making other concepts possible in understanding the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors.

Walcott and Abdillahi (2019) argue that Black people exist and live in a specific way that they call BlackLife. The multiple, pernicious, vast, and deep historical ongoing nature of anti-Black racism and the forced need to resist its pathway to death is BlackLife

(2019). To be Black is to be marked for a particular kind of liveable unliveability that Canada's anti-Black and mythical multiculturalism, "diversity", and logics of white supremacy and neoliberalism formulate a certain kind of BlackLife (2019). This includes the new possibilities for politics, systems, structures, communities, and formulations of life and "humanity". Therefore, BlackLife is automatically a collective experience of this subjection and resistance, while individual Black people may participate differently in conspiring with antiBlack logics (2019). The findings chapter is titled to pay homage to and connect with their analyses of BlackLife.

Anti-Black Sanism

Abdillahi coined and further developed understandings of antiBlack sanism, referring to an interlock between anti-Black racism and psychiatry, mental health, and madness (Abdillahi, Meerai, & Poole, 2016). She states "*Blackened madness* as an embodied experience of the various exchanges one has with the social world (both private and public), the manifestations of those interactions and the (un)necessary responses in negotiating the survival and liveability of Black people" (p. 2). Blackness and Black emotionality become quickly and easily pathologized, including our resistance to the very conditions which seek to kill us (forthcoming).

Abdillahi distinguishes this from *Black psychiatrized mad*, referring to those who are forced to interact psychiatric institutions and systems, often becoming chemically incarcerated through forced/over medication, incarcerated in psychiatric institutions, or assaulted and/or gun downed by police officers (forthcoming). She (forthcoming) states "such individuals are seen to represent a threat—by being both Black and categorically mad—as uncontainable and untreatable outside of death" (p.2).

Wake Work Praxis

Wake work praxis refers to a form of praxis that traces contemporary experiences of Black people to the Transatlantic slave trade and slavery, while also undoing the dehumanizing embedded in these experiences, including how one theorizes, writes, and thinks about Black peoples (Sharpe, 2016).

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist thought/scholarship refers to the canon of literature written by and about Black women and their experiences of oppression and resistance at the intersections of anti-Black racism, gender, sexuality, and class, but is not limited to just these experiences (Hill-Collins, 2000). This includes the particular modes of livability Black women enforce through practices of care, love ethic, and mutual aid all for the agenda of justice and collective survival/change (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000)

Decolonization

Decolonization is the practice and process of unsettling and dismantling colonialism and its continuities by making these known and challenging them in order to create new possibilities for humanity (Fanon, 1963). Walcott and Abdillahi (2019) argue that our present moment includes a cooptation and misuse of the word decolonization, as individuals, organizations, and states continue to participate in reformist and self-serving agendas that reinscribe anti-Black racism. In this major research paper then, decolonization circles back to the Fanonian understanding of decolonization as an all-encompassing, uncompromising, and radical process to new possibilities and the refusal of those tactics that distract away from this future (2019).

As stated earlier, these concepts/theorizing/body of scholarship are mutually constitutive in a way that helps formulate a deeper and “thicker” understanding of Black child welfare survivors’ experiences, including how to engage in the research process. This theoretical framework also exposes the dearth in existing literature—social work or otherwise—to rigorously engage with, name, and substantively address anti-Black racism within child welfare. In the methodology section I will explain when and how my theoretical framework appears.

Important to take into consideration is that child welfare literature/research can be conducted and written by non-white, including Black, researchers and scholars and still participate in this dearth. This can occur for a number of possible and unknown reasons: respectability politics, power dynamics where child welfare survivors are tokenized/silenced, unintentional, or not taking serious Black radical thought/organizing. Whatever the reason, at stake is Black child welfare survivors’ freedom, and Black peoples’ liberation more generally. In the following literature review, the proposed conceptual framework is taken seriously to analyze what exists about Black child welfare survivors’ experiences, and what can be taken forward into the rest of this major research paper.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to ascertain current understandings of anti-Black racism in child welfare, particularly what Black child welfare survivors have to resist and what and how resistance is understood and articulated. This literature review is organized thematically and the themes draw from the theoretical framework proposed in this major research paper. The literature begins with organizing literature paradigmatically to critically appraise the place the authors come from, such as the journal/publishing mechanism, as well as the methodology used. I will then discuss themes that emerged from existing literature, which were: (1) neoliberal and anti-Black systemic and policy set up; (2) general issues within child welfare and for Black families; (3) anti-Black “care” for Black children and youth (4) resistance. The literature review will close with critiques of the gaps and how my proposed major research paper may begin to fill those gaps.

Through my own roles and responsibilities in community when it comes to child welfare I was already quite aware of relevant literature (OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; 2012; 2019; Snow, 2012). Also through my education background in social work I am familiar with literature that discusses the topic of anti-Black racism and/or the experiences of Black people in child welfare (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Pon et al., 2017).

From these articles I looked through their references section to see what literature they were embedding themselves in, and most did not use literature that discussed anti-Black racism in child welfare or resistive practices of Black child welfare survivors. Nor did any ground themselves in similar theoretical frameworks, other than the article

written by Pon et al. (2017). OCA (2019) in particular did not cite much literature other than its own previously produced reports, OACAS, a few news articles, and the government.

This is particularly important because the OCA (2019) report *HairStory: ROOTED* could be misunderstood as critical for addressing BlackLife in child welfare, or in general for Black youth in the province of Ontario, especially given its authors are Black youth. Having been present at the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate during the writing of this report, I can say that I personally gave them opportunity and feedback to direct them to radically different engagement. However, the little grounding in critical Black thought despite some of the offerings it provides my major research paper reflect their unwillingness to do so.

This gap could actually be indicative of the dearth in research when it comes to the specific experiences of Black people in child welfare (OACAS, 2016), where theorizing would at some point need to move beyond the issue of overrepresentation in order to think through a radically different grounding/framework.

It was then that I turned to peer-reviewed journal search engines using a mix of the key terms: “Black children and youth”; “Black youth”; “anti-Black racism”; “resistance”; “child welfare”; “Ontario”; “Canada”; “resilience”; “activism”. The mix of the terms largely gave no results specific to Black children and youth, or lead to research I already had and this would usually be about “racialized” workers or children and youth (Gonsine & Pon, 2011), and not specific to Black people or anti-Black racism. Nothing appeared for “resistance”, but when “resilience” was used in relation to “child welfare” it would lead to the articles that were largely psychosocial in their approach and

understanding, and would focus on mental health and individual interventions (Collin-Vezina, Coleman, Milne, Sell, & Diagneault, 2011; Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lepine, Begin, & Bernard, 2007; Patterson, Moniruzzman, & Somers, 2015).

The purposes of the various literature were quite similar in wanting to understand what are the issues and outcomes for children and youth in care and with child welfare itself, while also wanting to create recommendations and strategies to address these issues (OCA, 1998; 2012; Snow, 2012). OACAS's (2016) purpose was to understand the experiences of Black families with child welfare with the pre-determined goal of developing race equity practices. OCA (2019) had a particular goal of understanding Black youths' experiences across many systems, including child welfare. Clarke's (2011) purpose was to understand the experiences of Afro-Caribbean families and workers when it came to child welfare.

While Collin-Vezina et al. (2011) wanted to understand the traumatic experiences of children and youth in child welfare and the impacts on resilience, Drapeau et al. (2007) wanted to understand what contributes to resilience among youth in foster care. Patterson et al. (2015) wanted to conduct the first ever research that looked at foster care placement as a predictive factor of under/unemployment, homelessness, under-education, and experiences of mental health crisis/issues. None of the existing literature expressed a purpose of understanding, articulating, and/or developing the resistive practices of Black child welfare survivors even though the information ascertained helps begin that work.

Much of the existing literature falls within an interpretive paradigm (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; 2012; 2019; Snow, 2012), and all these arguably used narrative methodology with variations in their data collection

methods. While all used interview and focus group methods, only one utilized methods like online submissions for poetry, video, dance (OCA, 2012), and only some developed consistent community space for child welfare survivors where recommendations were developed (OCA, 1998; OCA 2012; 2019; Snow, 2012). Many articles were published through journal publications that focused on children, youth, and family studies (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Snow, 2012), and some were published through the means of the organization itself (OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; 2012; 2019). These publications are embedded within the disciplines of either social work or child and youth studies, even though the journal publications specific to these disciplines turned up nothing.

The recommendations stemming from some of the above literature should not be mistaken as actionable, as many of the recommendations that came out of OCA (1998) are repeated throughout emerging literature and it should be noted that Snow (2012) was involved in authoring OCA (1998). With only being able to speculate, this requires thinking through how recommendations are not brought to fruition in a decolonial manner, and instead they can pile up or be recycled.

This happens arguable because many of the recommendations relied on the understanding that the child welfare system and the government operate in good faith, rather than as colonial systems (Walcott, 2003). Hudson and Kamugisha (2014) describe this form of Black scholarly work, that which seeks to redeem the state and reform its systems rather than radically address and transform them, as the Black Liberal Tradition. Therefore, if many of the recommendations put forward in the literature rely upon and attempt to redeem the government, it is not radical.

Three articles were paradigmatically positivist (Collin-Vezina et al., 2011; Drapeau et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 2015), and their shared method was surveys and recruitment through the use of practitioners. These were also the three articles to fall within journal publications that were psychiatric-based and all arrived at conclusions that were about intervening with individual child welfare survivors rather than addressing the total system even when articulating the harms and trauma of child welfare. This indicates the discipline of psychology, with resilience being framed as individualistic rather than politicized, where their goal is solely about teaching young people to manage trauma (Collin-Vezina et al., 2011; Drapeau et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 2015) rather than child welfare managing how they traumatize.

The theoretical frameworks of the literature are indicative of who was involved in the research, and the conclusions they arrived at. Youth centering, which refers to the active centering of youth voice and creating safer space for youth to do so (OCA, 2012), was prevalent in much of the literature (OCA, 1998; 2012; 2019; Snow, 2012). While Clarke (2011) and Gosine & Pon (2011) discuss the experiences of Black people, whether as workers or recipients of child welfare service, neither identified or utilized an anti-Black racism theoretical framework.

Instead, they identified the use of anti-racism and anti-oppression as frameworks to developing their research and understanding of child welfare, approaches that focus on social justice and addressing racism but have been critiqued as limited theorizing that rarely attends to Black people or leads to transformative shifts (Yee & Wagner, 2013). It should be noted that both Pon and Clarke are faculty members alongside Akua Benjamin whose dissertation on anti-Black racism would have been available to them since 2003.

The only piece of literature to utilize anti-Black racism as a theoretical framework was OACAS (2016) where Benjamin was one of the Steering Committee members, and is also one of the few articles to identify Black people (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011) versus earlier articles (OCA, 1998; OCA, 2012, Snow, 2012) where Black youth could only be ascertained by what the youth were saying rather than race and Blackness being identified by the authors.

Black people and Black child welfare survivors being addressed in the research was largely connected with who developed the research and who was interviewed. The only research that was conducted by Black people was OACAS (2016), OCA (2019) Clarke (2011), Gosine from Gosine & Pon (2011), and Bernard from Drapeau et al., (2007). Aside from Drapeau et al., (2007), these were the only articles to identify Black people and address the concerns and realities of Black people when it comes to child welfare. OACAS (2016), OCA (2019) and Clarke (2011) were the only article to actively seek out Black research participants and particularly Black youth. Most articles sought the participation of children and youth who are child welfare survivors (OCA, 1998; OCA, 2012; Snow, 2012), including Drapeau et al. (2007) and Collin-Vezina et al. (2011).

However, what is interesting with OCA (2019) was their consistent use of “they, them, their”. As Hill-Collins (2000) writes, to write from the space of us/our/we forces the author to understand their place in community as a Black writer. It requires an ethic of care, responsibility, and nuance where the author openly identifies those moments they don’t share with the topic discussed (2000) so the author does not capitalize off of

experiences that are not theirs. This is important to consider when appraising, from a radical standpoint, the potential of the OCA (2019) report.

The engagement with young people and results of the research in the positivist research was indicative of their theoretical approaches. While all were not clear, the theoretical approach was quite medical model, which constructs issues of mental, physical, and emotional health as embedded in individual causes, and that responses to this state of un-health should be individually addressed (Shakespeare, 2006). Through this theoretical framework appear approaches that look at “trauma” and “impairments” (Collin-Vezina et al., 2011); “mental illness” (Patterson, et al., 2015); and “competence”, “adaptation”, and “success” (Drapeau, 2007). As stated earlier, the conclusions of these particular articles were to find ways to get child welfare survivors to deal with their trauma, or predict the impact of child welfare’s traumatic experience on children and youth. Their work was not about systemic changes, nor was there any space throughout their research design or engagement with child welfare survivors on how the system might change.

The research design, participant engagement and conclusions of OACAS (2016), OCA (1998), OCA (2012; 2019), and Snow (2012) should be drawn under more scrutiny especially because they claim a genuine engagement with youth and/or Black child welfare survivors. While these groups were involved in the research, many researchers came with pre-determined agendas that were about creating recommendations or a form of practice for a colonial system or structure. Of importance is OACAS (2016) and OCA (1998; 2012; 2019) relationship to the provincial government and/or child welfare, as both exist and mandated by provincial legislation. These governmental connection could

be one reason why the reports relied heavily on governmental reform rather than grassroots, creative, and transformative ideation.

Even OCA (2012) identifies how they came with an idea of what should be talked about, and young child welfare survivors themselves pushed other topics. This is not inherently problematic, but what becomes a problem is when the voices of young people resoundingly condemn child welfare in every single article and yet researchers want to maintain this system.

There appears to be a disconnect between what child welfare survivors were saying and the final product of the research. As Potts and Brown (2015) argue, research needs to include capacity development with research participants. However, with the literature there was no clear capacity or politicizing development in the relationship between researcher and participant, where the participants could either challenge the research process or go on to challenge child welfare.

Without going into the themes, there was no genuine interrogation of the presence and development of child welfare as colonial, anti-Black, antagonistic, and dehumanizing. The research designs were created in a way that maintained child welfare's presence, rather than attending to experiences of violence, harm, disconnection and displacement, and isolation which should have brought about discussions of different systems of caring for families.

In every single report young people at some point said to dismantle the system yet instead the researchers articulated reforming the system (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; 2012; 2019; Snow, 2012). Not attending to the demand of dismantling child welfare indicates the colonial and Eurocentric nature to the above research (Mathebane &

Sekudu, 2017) even with the presence of Black researchers. Very few spoke about the operationalization of power, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism, and those that did still suggested maintaining child welfare with only minor reforms in the system. Despite these epistemic issues, the existing literature did provide substantial information in understanding Black child welfare survivors' experiences and how we resist.

Neoliberal and Anti-Black Systemic and Policy Set Up

A consistent theme throughout the literature was a systemic and policy set up when it came to both legislation and child welfare policy that was both neoliberal and anti-Black. Given Black families are actively pushed and held in poverty, the standard of neglect is often a set up for justifying engaging Black families and apprehending Black children and youth (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 2019; Roberts, 2002). Neglect refers to and is understood as the ongoing inability to economically, physically, and emotionally care for one's child (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; OACAS, 2016; Roberts, 2002).

Neglect seemed to be a particular kind of anti-Black set up, where the functionality of the Black family is pathologized by the standard of neglect, because Black families would find other means to survive, such as having neighbours or older children care for younger children while working several jobs (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 2019). Also, the practice of othermothering is delegitimized through the standard of neglect. Othermothering refers to the long historical practice where Black women who are close to the family help raise children, whether this was a practice before or during enslavement, or due to marginalization and lack of resources (Hill-Collins, 2005). The delegitimization of othermothering occurs despite the fact that in today's

culture we are now acknowledging the need for collective/community raising of children, but largely to the benefit of white families.

The neoliberal set up coalesces with anti-Blackness through the actual practices of child welfare workers, where investigations focus on perceived individual pathologies and inadequacies, rather than systemic and critical approaches that take into account poverty and anti-Black racism in society and particularly in the reporting that comes from daycare, education and police (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 2019).

Neoliberalism is present beyond child welfare practices, and is injected into the entire welfare system, causing dismantling of integral economic and social supports relevant to Black families, and Black mothers in particular (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Pon et al., 2017; Roberts, 2002). So as Black parents, largely Black mothers, are constructed as financially irresponsible or not physically present and caring for their children, welfare supports that could alleviate or address these issues are disappearing (Pon et al., 2017; Roberts, 2002). While not mentioned in the literature, occurring this very moment under a Ford provincial government in Ontario, and in many places throughout Canada, is a complete entrenchment of neoliberalism that will likely have a devastating impact on the operations of child welfare (Albo, 2019). We already see this impact with the Ford government closing down the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate (Collective of Child Welfare Survivors [CCWS], 2018).

General Issues with Child Welfare and for Black Families

The existing literature articulated child welfare generally as a bastion of disappointment when it comes to being a state parent. Children and youth generally

experience violence in several forms while in the care of the state, including the overuse of restraints and isolation, rape, and sexual assault (Collin- Vezina et al., 2011; Drapeau, 2007; OCA, 1998; 2012; Patterson et al., 2015; Snow, 2012). It is worth noting that outside the literature used in this review, from the time span of 2008-2017 170 youth died while in the care of the state, often by restraint and/or suicide (CCWS, 2018).

Child welfare survivors generally experience poor outcomes when it comes to education, with a high school graduation rate of 44% (OCA, 2012; Snow, 2012). Child welfare survivors are also likely to experience homelessness, poverty, incarceration in youth and adult criminal justice systems, and mental health crisis and substance abuse (Collin- Vezina et al., 2011; Drapeau, 2007; OCA, 1998; 2012; Patterson et al., 2015; Snow, 2012). Police are often used as a co-parent to deal with youth who may be struggling or acting out, often in situations that police are not required but are deployed in a way that further traumatizes youth (OCA, 1998; Pon et al., 2017).

Another issue that is often publicly discussed is the experience of multiple placements, where OCA (1998) found that 57% of youth reported five or more placements, and 101 youth reported 11 or more placements. The emotional and psychological harm of being moved around, often without any information and at the whim of child welfare workers, foster/group home staff, is associated with stunting the ability to create and maintain healthy relationships for child welfare survivors (OCA, 1998; 2012; Snow, 2012).

While no research looked at the particular experience of multiple placements for Black child welfare survivors, Sharpe (2016) discusses the ability to easily dislocate Black people from their homes and families as one of slavery's afterlives, specifically in

her term shippability. Shippability refers to the violent, disembodying, and transformational process that occurs during the forced movements onto Black peoples (2016). In child welfare we see shippability not only in the multiple placements that occur, but also in the undignifying way moving is done where child welfare survivors have their clothing and personal articles thrown in garbage bags to transport. In my own personal experience it was that all of my personal articles fit in a shoe box, no toothbrush or clothes, when I was picked up on my last day of foster care to move into my adoptive home.

For Black families, child welfare is quick to dismantle Black families and is quite unsupportive of Black parents, and is particularly antagonistic towards Black mothers (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 2019). In 2008 Black queer feminist Moya Bailey named this antagonism misogynoir, referring to the particular anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women and femme folks experience (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). This violence is steeped in tropes developed to subjugate, and maintain this subjugation, often through calling Black women and femme folks aggressive, angry, emotional, crazy, and wanting Black women to only be nurturing at self-expense no matter how they are mistreated (2018).

The recently released report by the Motherisk Commission (Beamen, 2018), exposed misogynoir in the practice of biological drug testing that was not only faulty, but targeted racialized and Black mothers. Children and youth were either apprehended or remained in child welfare on the basis of these inadequate tests (2018), and Roberts (2002) discusses the coercive nature of such tests where if a Black mother refuses to provide a sample, she is assumed to be neglectful.

This means that Black mothers who did not give samples had their children apprehended and withheld from them for this decision, despite the tests being illegitimate. Browne (2015) argues that the state's attainment and deployment of biological data is a reproduction of the marking and tracking that was used during the slave trade/slavery where branding was used to identify slaves in case they ran away.

Child welfare's misogyny against Black mothers is reflective in how child welfare workers, again largely white women, document and speak about Black mothers. Case notes and verbal discussions about Black mothers, and the behaviour of their children, describe them as "non-compliant", "rude", and "aggressive", which then come to be used as justification for asserting child welfare services and/or apprehension (Pon et al., 2017; Roberts, 2002). This includes Black mothers' disagreements with how the child welfare worker appraises and creates a plan of care (Roberts, 2002). Pon et al. (2017) provide an example of how even a Black mother naming anti-Black racism can be constructed as non-compliant and be used as justification for escalating to calling police and apprehending.

The aforementioned call to address anti-Black racism within agencies also left out how Black child welfare workers describe their experience as being unsupported and even targeted by supervisors and colleagues if they try to adequately attend to the needs of Black families (Clarke, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011). Even recently, the Children's Aid Society-Toronto, despite having an anti-Black racism unit, has had Black current/former employees lodge a legal complaint on the basis of the anti-Black racism they experience (Monsebraaten, 2018). This reflects what Walcott (2016) describes as the performance of social justice, where an organization can come to claim, and even hire people, to address

issues of marginalization but not actually want those spaces to change. An anti-Black racism unit can be created, but its work seems to be futile and performative.

Anti-Black “Care” for Black Children and Youth

Including the issues discussed in *General Issues with Child Welfare and for Black Families*, Black children and youth in child welfare experience criminalization through police being like a co-parent and experiencing extreme discipline (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; 2012). Direct anti-Black rhetoric from staff and non-Black peers, being dislocated and moved to largely non-Black spaces and places, and being held up against anti-Black tropes such as thug, unintelligent, and dangerous are common experiences for Black children and youth (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; OCA 2012). A participant in OACAS (2016) went as far as saying child welfare is a form of cultural genocide for Black children and youth, where there is nothing to support, maintain, and attend to Blackness. This means practices such as transracial adoption/placement isolate Black children and youth in non-Black, largely white homes/communities, causing a dislocation from integral knowledge about oneself in relation to Black community (OACAS, 2012; Roberts, 2002).

While in child welfare Black children and youth are likely to be pathologized and psychiatrized, and then over-medicated and misdiagnosed (Roberts, 2002; OCA, 2019). Of course, one of the discussed issues is also the overrepresentation of Black children and youth in child welfare (Clarke, 2011; OACAS, 2016). Another issue is that Black queer and Trans child welfare survivors were either being placed in homophobic/transphobic spaces or put in “safe” spaces that were anti-Black (OACAS, 2016).

Resistance

It is important to note that none of the literature discusses resistance, instead I am analyzing the literature and finding what seem to be moments and methods of resistance by child welfare survivors, including Black child welfare survivors, where they navigated, pushed back, or understood in a way that maintained survival. One form of resistance was child welfare survivors' ability to critically analyze the inadequacies of child welfare. They were able to indicate where and how the system failed them to the point of being able to give recommendations and articulating the abuses of power (OCA, 1998; OCA 2012). Black child welfare survivors were able to see through the veil of "care" and articulate the anti-Black racism in the system, and demand it be "burned down", and even go as far as to indicate slavery's continuities (OACAS, 2016).

Another form of resistance was the desire and ability to form relationships despite such a dehumanizing experience, including reunifying with biological families while articulating the failing of child welfare in supporting such families (OACAS, 2016; OCA, 1998; OCA, 2012). This is particularly reminiscent of Black peoples' ability and desire to create and maintain relationships during the dehumanizing experience of chattel slavery and the Transatlantic slave trade, as well as of how Black families separated during this time would work to and sometimes find one another (Browne, 2015; Sharpe, 2016, Walcott, 2003).

There were two particular methods that stuck out as resistance, one was where youth would intentionally "be bad" in order to be moved from bad homes (OCA, 1998; OCA, 2012), and the other was discharging themselves from care when of age to do so (OCA, 2012). The ability to manipulate being moved around is also an historical practice used by Black people, where during slavery Black people would intentionally

underperform or sabotage work in order to be considered not valuable to the slave owner and to possibly be moved (Browne, 2015; Sharpe, 2016)

The existing literature provided insight in understanding what it is Black child welfare survivors survive, but very little in the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors. Epistemically, a decolonial stance was arguably absent in all of the literature, and so with my own research I plan to not just have Black child welfare survivors articulate resistance, but engage in those areas highlighted as epistemically problematic.

To answer to research question of what are the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors amid the continuity of enslavement within the system, I actively engaged Black child welfare survivors in creating this understanding through my proposed methodology. Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology as I describe below attended to the epistemic, thematic and experiential gaps I found in the literature reviewed above. I also found consistencies with existing literature in which later sections describe the connection to Black historical and contemporary collective experiences and the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the proposed methodology that I used to conduct my research. A development from interpretive phenomenology, and those who critique the methodology, Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology is my attempt at constructing a methodology that can make sense of BlackLife in the various ways that we live and experience our lives. It is an approach grounded in the theorizing and work of Black authors, scholars, activists, and community members to understand and describe the sensibilities, intimacies, struggle and resistance of Black people within the diaspora. It takes seriously liberation, justice, ethics and care while also being investigative by making connections between our present moment as Black people to the long history of subjugation and our continued fight for freedom.

As Stoler (2016) argues, much is left out and unsaid in concepts, frameworks, and forms of research. She argues that this creates occlusions, referring to the way something is made and viewed and remade reproduces a certain kind of in/visibility as researchers, scholars, and readers (2016). Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology is my attempt to provide some kind of visibility in order to hear/see Black child welfare survivorship differently.

Critical Engagement with Interpretive Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology was the research methodology I began with, which recognizes that different people perceive the world in different ways and seeks to explore, understand, and make sense of subjective meanings of events, experiences, and/or states (Smith & Osborn, 2004). It understands that this meaning making work cannot be done without the interpretive work of the researcher, and thinks about the cognitive/emotional

aspects of interpretation. However, Murray & Holmes (2013) critique interpretive phenomenology as being constructed as divergent from discourse analysis, rather than complimentary.

One issue is that interpretive phenomenology does not account for the bodily and discursive, focusing so much on the cognitive that it refuses to generalize and attach itself to history and other experiences (Murray & Holms, 2013). By ignoring the discursive and embodied, this means researchers using interpretive phenomenology could actively leave out historical and contemporary constructions of power, dominance and subjugation that are often exposed in the language research participants and researchers use. It also means that the embodied experience for the researcher and participants gets left out of view of the topic at hand, which can irresponsibly result in a lack of considering power dynamics in the research process.

Ahmed (2006) addresses these gaps in her theorizing, where she argues that research and data is an embodied experience that carry history with them, including the production of phenomenology as methodology. Phenomenology requires “turning away from” certain experiences and embodiments to focus on others, causing a queering of those unattended aspects (2006). Therefore, an “orientation toward a queer phenomenology” is one that pulls those moments, experiences, and embodiments into view, including their histories (2006).

However, a critique I have of this understanding is who and what moments get understood as “queer” and why? Based on Ahmed’s work around queer phenomenology speaking very little on BlackLife, I suggest Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology

as a methodology that makes visible the those unseen moments for Black people, and in this specific moment for Black child welfare survivors.

Black Diasporic Thought

The following subsections outline my implementation of Black diasporic thought as a development of interpretive phenomenology.

Epistemological Groundings of Black Diasporic Thought

To build, or begin to build, this architecture I look to the work of Dr. Rinaldo Walcott and his theorizing of and about Black diasporic thought. Black diasporic thought provides me a visible path to conduct my major research paper on the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors.

Black diasporic thought refers to a way of thinking and writing about, and attending to Black people here in Canada and globally that allows for contestation, complexity, and nuance (Walcott, 2003; 2016). It means to see Blackness as pushing the boundaries of what is understood as the nation, nation-state and the nation-building project, citizenship, and human/ity (2003; 2016). It makes visible the liminality/liveability of Black people/Blackness, our constant in-between-ness/liveliness, and articulates the desires that stem from a “here nor there” subjectivity (2003; 2016). In this then, Black diasporic thought grapples with the absented-presence of Black people, and is a historical, political, social, and cultural assertion of Black peoples’ lives and the need for our liberation (2003; 2016). In the words of Dr. Rinaldo Walcott (2016), there are no foreclosures with Black diasporic thought, only new possibilities.

As mentioned earlier, my theoretical framework is in close relationship, if not mutually reciprocal, with the theoretical framework to guide the research process, while

also informing coding and analysis. While being in conversation with, as well as reflecting aspects of, Black diasporic thought these theories are foundational to the epistemological pillars for Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology. Below I describe what I propose to be Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology, including the ways in which the theoretical framework appears.

Axiological Groundings of Black Diasporic Thought

Black diasporic thought is deeply embedded in interpretivism. This means both owning and exposing my own positionality as a researcher, including my relationship to the topic of Black child welfare survivorship and the institution I am educated/approved by. This interpretivism also owns and requires an active engagement with participants to develop analyses, and engage and control the research process.

Positionality of Researcher

I am aware that my experience as a Black child welfare survivor is distinct. While my personal experiences of child welfare are ones of surviving foster care and the isolation of transracial adoption, there are other experiences when it comes to child welfare that are not mine. I did not experience group home care, multiple placements, or being funneled into the experience of homelessness or youth criminal and adult criminal justice systems, or the psychiatric system.

Instead, being placed in a white home afforded me particular class privileges and assurances of future financial and educational attainment. This does not erase the daily experiences of anti-Black racism and explosions of violence in the home that marked me, but complicates what it means for me to want to simultaneously give voice to and challenge Black child welfare survivorship. This is where positionality is important,

where I may not share certain subjectivities but I am always in relationship to other subjectivities.

Kumsa, Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Oba, and Gaasim (2014) complicate how anti-Black racism can be internalized, what they call the contours of anti-Black racism. I then, must also interrogate how anti-Black racism contours my inner workings and external realities whilst I address its contours. What is my history of anti-Black racism? What do I value and care about myself, about Black communities, and Black child welfare survivors? What is my goal, and is it a shared one amongst Black child welfare survivors, and if not why? What does it mean to move into activism, as I have over the past four years? What does it mean to be a social work student and attempt to do research? What does it mean for me to attempt to write Blackness when Dr. Rinaldo Walcott (2003, p.11) says, “[w]riting blackness is still difficult work”?

I also approach this research endeavour not from an anti-oppressive approach—as one may assume—but from an approach embedded in Black feminist thought. Specifically, through what hooks (2000) calls a love ethic or what Hill-Collins (2000) calls mutual aid. These refer to the historical and contemporary ways that Black women engage one another and broader Black community to support, care, uplift, and challenge one another (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Both have principles of respect, sitting in tension and conflict, and seeing justice as a process and not just a destination.

I argue the positionality of the researcher for Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology must be embedded in love ethic/mutual aid rather than anti-oppression for two reasons. One reason is due to anti-oppressive practice not resulting in a substantive shift in its call for social justice (Yee & Wagner, 2013), particularly for Black

people. Secondly, the researcher must actively take care throughout the entire research process for the topic one is writing, the process of writing, the implications of what one writes, and for the self and for participants.

Another way I pull myself into this paper is through being a poet. When listening to the participants I found the poetics between how they would language their experiences and other Black literary work. It is for this reason I opened the major research paper with quotes from the participants and quote from Black authors that I found were in conversation with or a reflection of one another. In this way, Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology is about thinking, feeling, and voicing intimacies between the self, participants, research topic, and the Black archive on BlackLife. The researcher must think intimately about the personal and find creative ways to bring that into view, and feel confident enough to do so.

Relation to Institution(s)

As discussed earlier, one's relationship to the institution within which they write impacts the way we research. I think it important to separate, in writing, this section from my positionality to name and hold accountable the responses of an institution that are relevant to research, the research process, and the researcher. This makes visible some of the answers to Walcott and Abdillahi's (2019) questions of what does it mean to create knowledge in our present moment. Here, the researcher should name institutions they feel relevant to their research/knowledge production.

Ryerson University is deeply relevant to my positionality. Both my Bachelor and Master of Social Work were at Ryerson University, and institution/program that claims social justice, anti-oppression, and a care for Black and Indigenous Peoples. While I have

learned much within the institution, the struggle to make liveable Ryerson's claims comes at a cost of safety as an organizer attempting to address anti-Black racism on campus (BLC-Ryerson, 2016). This work meant naming individual educators while holding the entire faculty accountable resulting in a fear of how my knowledge will be validated.

While I describe in later sections how this impacted the research process, I want to name now that issues of personal safety were paramount as a student that impact knowledge production. The possibility of backlash from individual faculty members meant I had to navigate my education completely different than how my peers did. I had deep concerns on being penalized in grades or having my research invalidated, which required me to be very conscious and intentional with who was teaching me. This meant shifting around who my instructors/supervisors were, including setting up directed studies with individual faculty as far as those from other institutions. While I believe I benefited immensely from those who were my educators this year, my peers did not have to spend time and energy on setting up directed studies or changing their schedules, which meant more time to focus on their research.

While I explain in the section on ethical considerations, the responses I received from Research Ethics Board needs to be named. Expressions of confusion, asking questions already answered multiple times, and soliciting suggestions already followed in the initial submission causes problems for the research process. This came across as invalidating the ethical considerations and safety measures I put forward to protect and benefit Black child welfare survivors to the best of my ability. It also delayed the process

of conducting my research, putting me at more of a time crunch to complete the major research paper.

It is important for me to name my role as a community organizer around the issue of child welfare survivorship. Without naming specific institutions, my role in community also provides me certain insights on what has been achieved for child welfare survivors, what changes have or have not been made, and by whom. This is why in the literature review section I name the problematic nature of putting forward recommendations that largely rely on government. As a community organizer, I know many/most of these recommendations did/have not changed the present conditions for child welfare survivors. I say this because I/we are tired of repetition that occurs and comes out of research, including recommendations (Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019).

Understanding Black Diasporic Interpretive Phenomenology

I define Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology as a methodological approach that seeks to pull into view and attend to the liminality/livability, complexities, nuances, and in/visibilities Black people experience. This includes our moments/methods of resistance that make our lives somewhat/more livable. Methodologically it also highlights experiences that occur during the research process. This includes pulling into view the researcher—in all of who we are and what we do—and the institution in which we are educated by and that ethically approves our research. This requires naming possible existing tensions between the researcher and the institution so it can be understood why certain decisions were made.

Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology centres Black people and provides an architecture that allows for specificity of topic, self, and research interest while

proscribing an intention towards liberation and freedom. It requires pulling in existing literature to not just appear in the literature review and theoretical framework sections, but to actively engage with discussions about Black subjugation and resistance in the creation of questions, and coding and analyses. As a methodological approach, it does not shy away from paying homage or signalling to other texts as I have throughout this major research paper. This is done to actually drive the reader into the Black archive and develop capacity to have a particular vision that I feel is important in understanding the analyses in this paper and its transparent and obvious orientation to decolonization, liberation and freedom.

This orientation is important because how/what I write for is not for what I call the data collection rat-race on Black pain, or to be the first to speak differently on a topic and therefore develop personal social capital. As Walcott and Abdillahi (2019) write “what does it mean to create knowledge in a post-slavery world? By this we mean the ongoing terror of the afterlife of slavery...that produces Black death...[and therefore] we must and should concern ourselves with the conditions of the writing of knowledge...” (p. 27). It is for this reason I argue that Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology takes seriously the concerns of ethics; referring to both the institutional and community understanding, care, and the development and movement of the knowledge we pull into research.

This is why in the literature review I named the availability of Benjamin’s dissertation to Pon, Clarke, and all other academics and writers because it forces us as researchers to consider the movement of research, including my own. For the above three to be present in the same institution and Pon and Clarke not use Benjamin’s work makes

us ask whose work is valued, when, its usage, and for what goal. It also has us consider our own commitment as researchers to disseminate our work to ensure access to other people, including community members, organizers, and workers.

None of this is intended as an attack. Instead, it is a deeply ethical consideration that centres the project of fighting for BlackLife. As Walcott and Abdillahi argue (2019, p. 29) “humanist and social scientists have found themselves mired in a repetitive cycle of disciplinary boundary keeping... [which] has inhibited our ability to engage critically with and produce the conditions for new imaginative worlds.” Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology is my attempt to make a break, in some way, from this cycle and imagine differently/newly.

I argue and present Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology as a distinct, but not unusual, way of thinking about and doing various aspects of research to address Black struggle and resistance. This includes how to conduct a literature review, coding and analyses, and aspects of the research design.

Here wake work praxis plays a particular role because during the literature review, and coding and analyses the researcher is actively making connections between the Transatlantic slave trade/slavery and its continuities in contemporary life. To articulate both liveability and subjugation for the specific topic one wants to engage, the researcher is required to do the heavy lifting of reading Black literature that discusses this history. This literature must be relevant both to the topic and the local/global nature of anti-Black racism and Black people’s resistance. Through wake work praxis many myths can be challenged such as Canadian benevolence, multiculturalism and inclusion.

This makes the research process more rigorous and so it was not shocking for me to be told by my classmates that I was “doing too much”, while I would argue that they are not doing near enough if their goal is to attend to BlackLife. I would suggest then that this is a methodology that can actually be too much for a researcher who has a surface understanding of Black people’s lives and history, especially within the colonial Canadian borders that actively tries to make this unknown. But it can also be a methodology that is exactly what is needed in order to read, research, and write radically different to provide new possibilities for Black people.

To explain further the appearance of wake work praxis in the research design, I begin with the theoretical or conceptual framework. One cannot use concepts and theories that reify and restructure anti-Black racism and Black struggle. To avoid doing so requires knowing the historical and contemporary relevance of theories and concepts to Black struggle and resistance. This is not to suggest that there are certain theories/concepts that are pure or bring immediate freedom, but instead certain ones can bring about avenues to recycled subjugation or new possibilities.

For the literature review there is an attentive balance required because not all those cited in my literature review were necessarily reviewed as a part of the literature review. For example, I cite Brown and Sharpe to note the similarities between experiences articulated by authors/researchers in the literature review to those historical/ongoing experiences outlined by Brown and Sharpe. I do so in order to show the relevance of history to Black child welfare survivorship. I actively pull into view connections that not even the authors within the literature review themselves make, for whatever reason this may be.

The process of coding is linked to the entirety of my theoretical framework, and I would argue Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology proscribes this. This does not mean the researcher erases or clouds what the participant says, but intimately augments them to illuminate the afterlives and capillaries of anti-Black racism and slavery.

The researcher is also coding for the following: moments the participants are understanding the research process during the interview; emotionality of the participant and researcher; and uses role of common speech patterns such as “um”; repetitions of language, phrases, or content; and researcher responses to the participant.

This is all done to highlight in the methodology section the sensibilities of the research process, and to own our role in the development of how in the moment a participant may interpret their experience as they speak to us. This pulls in the decolonial aspect to my research as it challenges positivist notions of objectivity and distance by exposing aspects that are always present in the research process—that is emotion, language, and response. Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology does not consider these benign.

For the other aspects of research design such as sampling and recruitment, data collection, methods, analyses, dissemination strategy, and ethical and other research consideration there is one important difference than what interpretive phenomenology directs. Concern, respect, and care—embedded in Black feminist thought—for the participant is of the utmost importance. Hill-Collins (2000) and hooks (2000) argue collective/communal spaces as fundamental to Black feminist communities for radical healing and organizing, so it is important for the researcher to consider creating collective spaces that can build solidarity between participants, and participant to researcher. The

researcher must be creative about this and below is how I implemented love ethic/mutual aid and collectivizing as described above. I would not expect someone else to do the exact same however it is what worked for me.

Sampling and Recruitment

The primary source of information was Black child welfare survivors between the ages of 18-29. The initial proposed maximum of participants was four, however I stuck with just three participants. There was no particular amount of time that participants needed to have spent in child welfare, and I collected demographic data related to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, educational attainment and age. This is done to show the multiple experiences of anti-Black racism and resistance in child welfare.

The age and number restrictions exist given the time and resource confines of a major research paper with a deadline within months of conducting interviews. As well, the beginning age is set at 18 years of age given the possibility to disclose something that requires child abuse reporting and impact the research in ways that I do not feel I have the institutional/faculty support to navigate these situations.

Specifically, as a Black student activist organizing to address anti-Black racism at Ryerson University through the Black Liberation Collective-Ryerson, much of this work focuses on the anti-Black racism within the School of Social Work. The responses from the School, and their inadequate attendance to this organizing work, creates an unsafe environment where I cannot necessarily rely on faculty to guide in uncertain situations relevant to ethical and safer conduct.

I used convenience sampling to attain participants, referring to the use of personal relations/networks. In the research proposal I also included snowball sampling if I could

not get enough participants. Snowball sampling is when participants pass on the research information to other potential participants who could contact me. However, I obtained three participants and found that the depth of the interviews did not require a fourth participant.

I mentioned in my research proposal that an ethical consideration to snowball sampling is how this could possibly impact the voluntary nature of consent. However it would have been made explicitly clear that disconfirming consent at any point in the research process will not impact personal relationships.

Participants

Given the history of child welfare changing the names of children and youth without their consent, it was important for me to allow the participants to choose their pseudonym. The participants were three Black women, all born in Canada, who named themselves Karona, Phoenix, and Sandy.

Karona

Karona is a 29 year old single mother who identifies as straight. Her ethnic background is Grenadian, and her educational attainment was Grade 11. Karona spent a month and a half in child welfare, and was specifically placed in foster homes.

Phoenix

Phoenix is 25 years old, Jamaican ethnic background, her heritage is mixed with white on her mother's side, and is queer. Phoenix did not graduate high school while having two years of post-secondary. She was placed in group homes beginning at the age of 13, was in semi-independent living and then independent living at the age of 16 until

she aged out at 21 years old. Independent living is where the young person lives all on their own and they are only given some resource/financial support while having a worker.

Sandy

Sandy is also of Jamaican ethnic background, her heritage is mixed with white on her mother's side, and is lesbian. Sandy just recently graduated college, was in one foster home, kinship care, then largely group homes until the age of 16 where she went into independent living until aging out at 21 years old. Kinship care refers to the practice of having a contractual agreement that biological family takes care of the child, however the family is given nowhere near the financial and resource support that foster/group homes receive (Roberts, 2002).

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods were one semi-structured one-on-one interview and two follow up one-on-one discussions. The first semi-structured interview was between 30-85 minutes and was the only audio-recorded method. As soon as audio recordings were transcribed they were deleted. The follow up one-on-one discussion was approximately 30 minutes, which was to update the participant on my coding/analyses of their transcript, including themes, and gave them the opportunity to confirm/add/subtract to the themes and give further input. This was all documented in written field notes that were destroyed after being typed.

There was meant to be a group discussion with the same participants from the one-on-one interviews that had a separate set of questions, and the intention was to discuss those questions as well as my analyses. In this space they also would have provided written consent to disseminate and ideate dissemination strategies. The intention

was to have this as a group discussion however timing and collective availability required changes so I could still engage them throughout the research process and meet deadlines.

Two other proposed forms of data collection were to have participants write in a journal about their thoughts on the topic and their experiences with the research. The intention of the journal was to provide participants a reflexive space that could be used as data if they consented, but was not intended to be data and have a bearing on the results of the research. As well, a subsequent arts-based group open to other Black child welfare survivors where “something” was created, such as a collection of poems or images that would have been led by a Black community member.

However the combination of the feedback from Ryerson’s Research Ethics Board that largely put forward questions that were answered in the original submission, the uncertain institutional/faculty support, and closing timeline to conduct the total project led me pulling these two methods. I felt it important to document these as proposed ideas, and the constraints, to show what a Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology can come to imagine and how institutional constraints/climate/responses can impact the implementation of this imagination.

An important aspect that connects to the objective of politicizing the interview process is what Shawn Wilson (2008) in their book *Research is Ceremony* describes as relational accountability during research. Actively engaging beyond asking questions with the participants is not an interruption in the research/interview process, but a transparent and ethical way to building knowledge (2008). I would argue that this accountability includes the active meaning making we do in interviews where we begin

to make the connections in the moment with participants, rather than waiting and holding this to ourselves—to politicize in the moment.

Coding, Data Analysis, and Researcher Accountability

Data analysis began with rereading the theoretical and literature review sections. This is important to ensure the researcher, through a Black diasporic interpretive phenomenological approach, pulls into all that I articulated earlier when creating themes. I transcribed the interviews and then coded. These codes were then put in charts that I ordered themes.

As I was coding I would actively make connections to my theoretical approach and literature review by writing a summary thought beside the code. If codes were not the exact same, but quite similar, I would put a broader theme beside the code. For example, “pathologization” and “criminalization” would fall under “anti-Black racism”. As codes became repetitive I would fold them into either a main theme, or a sub-theme. For example a sub-theme of anti-Black racism would be misogynoir or anti-Black sanism.

After the initial analyses was made, I met with the participants one-on-one to go through the chart of themes and codes. As stated earlier, capacity development around research is important, so I explained what codes are, and what the process of coding is. We then went into depth about what the themes are from their transcript, including the passage the themes were connected to, as well as relevant literature/scholarship. All confirmed the themes as accurate, and most of the discussion was them giving further input into those, even it was something they had already said.

Finally, after writing the findings and implications sections of the MRP, I met with the participants one-on-one to get their perspective to make changes, receive written

consent to disseminate as well as provide ideas of where/how to disseminate beyond this paper. This still allowed me to achieve my point of this process, which was to practice relational accountability, as hooks (2000) and Wilson (2008) suggest, as I believe this fundamental to Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology because it allows participants to have more control over the research.

It also gave the participants the opportunity to see how their different narratives fit together with each other, as well as with the history of Black people's subjection and resistance. Karona said she found it kind of healing to get to see the other participants' stories, and so we still see the capacity to develop community even if they did not share physical space.

The intellectual space of writing was a method of experience healing, and Sandy also described this. She said she also found it intense to see it all just written down in front of her, and that she could not believe that those were her words. The way in which I wrote their experiences together as a challenge to anti-Black racism in child welfare was also healing because it affirmed their analyses about the system and how they experienced it.

Dissemination Strategy

Dissemination is a requirement to complete the Master of Social Work program, and therefore will be submitted to the Ryerson Digital Depository. However, one aspect of this research design was that consent from participants must be given for further dissemination. Specifically, the participants were asked to sign a consent form that explains the implications of dissemination and that this could/would be something I could do for the ongoing future, and that dissemination could take multiple forms like creating

workshops or developing further scholarship/research. If not all the participants consented, then dissemination can only take the form of submitting to complete my graduate program.

This was a particularly contentious point with the Ryerson Research Ethics Board (REB) as it seemed they struggled to understand why this is an important point, and how it connects to my methodology. My argument is that this is one way to truly allow community to own research; no matter how discomforting or frustrating it may be for me to be confined on future endeavours. This is also one way that I, as the researcher, have to take care in fully explaining what dissemination is and how really it is mostly to the benefit of the researcher that we can do this. Another aspect of getting this consent will be me asking where and in what form they may want this disseminated—such as conferences, organizations, and individual practitioners.

All of the research participants wanted the major research paper to be sent to organizations and “advocates” claiming to address anti-Black racism in child welfare or the system itself. They also wanted it sent to educators at post-secondary institutions who either write about child welfare or anti-Black racism in child welfare.

Ethical and Other Research Considerations

Some of the ethical considerations have already been discussed in the above sections. An important aspect for me to consider was the best way to maximize benefits for research participants. One way was to express the hope that, if needed, participants would experience healing—which is foundational to a love ethic/mutual aid—throughout the research process (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). The Ryerson REB response was to express confusion around how this could be promised, to which I argued that healing

cannot nor could it ever be promised. Instead, I find it unethical to not consider healing based on the colonial ongoing history of research where researchers just come in to excavate narratives while leaving participants vulnerable after opening themselves up. Despite the REB's confusion on the topic of healing in research, even one of the participants found the process healing and articulated the collective space as particularly "cathartic".

Another benefit that caused confusion with the Ryerson REB was putting at the disposal of participants my networks to support them in something they may need. Specifically, this would take the form of giving them organizational or individual information of someone who could support them in many areas, such as education, business, health etc. The point was not to necessarily do this labour, but to help connect participants with spaces that would do this work. The Ryerson REB responded with questioning why this is necessary for research, to which I challenged back that if I am to graduate off their narratives, the least I can do is give them someone's contact information. Both Karona and Phoenix agreed asked for some sort of referral support, which I agreed to and fulfilled.

Confidentiality was another area that caused some odd responses from the Ryerson REB. The usual considerations were put forward to protect and maintain confidentiality: pseudonyms that participants choose to protect identity, storing data in encrypted and password-protected spaces, and requesting in the group interview that confidentiality be maintained. What caused questioning from the Ryerson REB was that I said the snowball sampling would require participants giving potential participants my

contact information, rather than the reverse, in order to give that potential participant agency in disclosing their child welfare status.

The rationale behind this being that not everyone openly identifies this experience for a number of reasons; one being that it is a stigmatized status, and I did not want participants to risk their relationships with anyone by accidentally disclosing. The Ryerson REB wanted further explanation, to which my response was to say “as per the original submission”, and almost verbatim restate what I submitted, and was finally accepted.

It may seem odd to include the Ryerson REB responses to a research proposal in the methodology section, but I believe that the very methodology I am using requires it. Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology as I am suggesting requires to expose not just child welfare as an institution, but also expose the very institution that gets to validate what research is and how it gets to be conducted, and what may bar or stall research from happening. Research Ethics Boards, and those on a Board of Ethics, are not a neutral body or empty vessels, and so it is important to document and consider this impact.

The amount of times I had to state “as per the original submission”, or “see section * of the original submission” would suggest an egregious lack of reviewing given my subsequent responses were quickly accepted by the Ryerson REB. As I said earlier, it is also important to consider the possible impact being a Black student activist whose organizing is about the very institution that gives clearance has on the REB submission process.

Researcher Reflexivity

Below I explain how/why researcher should code for when emotionality for the researcher and participants, the kinds of responses researchers have, and when participants seem to be grappling with or trying to understand the research process. However, it would be in this section that the researcher should articulate these.

When I coded for emotion, one particular code that was consistent between all three participants was laughter. Laughter seemed to appear in moments that the particular experience they were narrating was ridiculous, and this is not to take away from what could have been a painful moment. Instead it shows how deeply shocking the conduct in child welfare that it elicits laughter. But also laughter was a form of building solidarity between myself and the participant.

Another thing that was noticeable was when participants would swear. While transcribing I made sure to not filter anything, including swearing. The reason being that swearing was often used to drive a point home or highlight the importance of the particular thing said. In particular, I found that swearing almost functioned similarly to laughter, where the participant would swear when the conduct or experience was so seemingly ridiculous that it lead to swearing.

In research I think it important to document and note when/how we respond to participants. Often I would respond to participants with an “mhm”, particularly when they were providing their own analyses around anti-Black racism and child welfare. Sometimes I would joke back with participants regarding the “ridiculousness” of the conduct of individual social workers. These kinds of responses indicate the development of solidarity between research participants and me, where I was validating what they

were saying and their critical analysis while also engaging them holistically by being myself and humorous, which allowed them to be as comfortable as possible.

Also evident was the participants' active engagement with understanding the research process. Two participants accidentally used their real name and corrected themselves in the moment, while one asked specifically if I could fix that error. Another participant when told that they could contact me at any time with follow up thoughts did so to further articulate what they understood to be their resistance.

These reflect the participants grappling with understanding the research process, such as ensuring confidentiality and ensuring the data reflects their full understanding. While transcribing I noticed a consistent use of "uh", "um", and "y'know" from both the participants and I. These evidently reflected attempts to be thoughtful when responding from all those involved in the research process because they acted as a pause to think through what was to be said next.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS OF BLACKLIFE IN CHILD WELFARE

This chapter articulates the findings of the research, and the name of it borrows from the title and theorizing of Walcott & Abdillahi's (2019) book. Based on the findings from interviewing and discussing with Karona, Phoenix and Sandy, BlackLife in child welfare is exactly that—BlackLife. By this I mean child welfare reflects the expected violence, dislocation, isolation, lack, dying and death Walcott and Abdillahi (2019) articulate and argue as the historical present of Black people, or what they name as BlackLife. Which means it is also a subjective experience where Black child welfare survivors conduct, refine, and enact a particular kind of resistance due to being stolen by the state—a resistance that is inherent to BlackLife (2019).

Below are various themes pertinent to understanding the theme of resistance. It would be irresponsible to only articulate what resistance looks like for Black child welfare survivors without illustrating in full what BlackLife in child welfare was for Karona, Phoenix, and Sandy. The themes have sub-themes which I use to best authentically and specifically reflect their experiences while pulling into view connections to the collective Black experience of subjection and resistance.

It is also important to note that these findings sometimes mirror the literature review, including the OCA (2019) report. Karona, Phoenix, and Sandy's experiences describe child welfare years ago, but in some and many ways reflect that very recent report. This shows the overall need for something truly transformative instead of reformist and repetitive. It is our collective hope that these themes depict why that is.

Anti-Black Racism, Slavery's Afterlives & to Metabolize it All

Anti-Black racism was embedded in every participant's story, whether they were naming it or not. Criminalization was an obvious sub-theme as both Sandy and Phoenix described how Black youth are quick to be placed in group homes. They describe a space that largely criminalized them and other Black youth, where violent discipline was often used against them while also being a space reflecting prison carcerality. Sandy said "as soon as you're in a group home you're treated like a criminal. Uh, you come from a home where maybe you've never done anything wrong, you've never gotten in trouble before."

She would go on to say "I was treated, like I've said six or seven times, a criminal. I'd never broken the law before, you know what I mean, like I'd never done anything wrong before that but as soon as I got there I was labeled as some bad kid." Sandy's experience indicates the ways in which Blackness, Black skin, and therefore Black people are marked for a certain set of anti-Black logics, even in the face of contradictory evidence (Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019). Sandy articulates how as a Black youth she was marked by criminalizing logics despite her actual behaviours.

Phoenix described group home staff as criminalizing her capacity to challenge inappropriate and violent conduct, as well as her behaviours "that were so clearly results of trauma and repeated trauma." She describes group home carcerality: "it was really really like um institutionalized. Where they'd lock up shoes, they'd lock up your clothing, you have no access to the outside, there's locks on everything. Those were the only times I was ever around other Black kids."

Sandy and Phoenix illustrate child welfare for Black children and youth as criminalizing and carceral, and name that group homes are predominantly where Black

youth land until they age out. Both also indicated that criminalization in the group home lead to group home staff calling police and being further criminalized.

While Karona was only placed in foster care with Black families, her pathway to entering child welfare was no less criminalizing and carceral. Karona states: “there were 18 police officers and they broke windows to get in and everything, and piled up on top of my mom” and “ then they got physical with me, and they started first dragging me and then um...” Child welfare deploys police who are then quite physically violent to family members and children and youth themselves.

Using Black feminist thought as an analytic lens, particularly misogynoir, counters the narrative that it is just Black boys and men who are harmed by police and criminalization. In separate situations, all as children and youth, as three Black women they experienced the violence of and from criminalization. Three police officers were used to drag Karona into the back of a cruiser in order to separate her from her mother and grandmother. When Sandy was late for curfew the group home staff called the police and at 2am—hours after the staff called—a police officer pulled Sandy out of bed and “drapped [her] up” against a wall while staff watched.

Phoenix described being criminalized as: “they were quick—like I said they were quick to charge, um there was no mediation process, the policing—like the police themselves were extremely violent to me every single time.” Her experiences of arrest would also include being strip searched. These three Black women’s experiences reflected the misogynoiristic violence they experience, and as Sandy put it “Mind you I’d never seen them do that to any of like y’know the white kids, or anything like that. And they do crazy shit in the group homes...”

When asked to describe anti-Black racism in their experiences of child welfare, all three participants described differential mistreatment, theft of bodily autonomy and safety, and reactive and rigid dislocation from the self and Black community/family. Differential mistreatment often meant that particular privileges were given to certain children and youth that were often non-Black. If Black children and youth were being given privileges, it was because they performed being the “perfect subject.” Phoenix and Sandy separately described this subject as white, often the youth who loves and needs to be “saved”, and is not direct and challenging.

For Karona differential mistreatment appeared later as an adult when the daycare she put her daughter in called CAS on her. This occurred after the daycare’s antagonist behaviour towards Karona caused her to challenge their conduct. Karona said that had she been white the daycare staff would have respected her challenge and taken more care instead of retaliating. This then lead to differential mistreatment from the CAS worker where they did not listen to Karona when she described these anti-Black antagonisms, resulting in her being momentarily deemed neglectful. OACAS (2016) articulates that this kind of differential mistreatment from the daycare where Black mothers are seen as aggressive for challenging and then reported on and CAS validating these claims is one of the causes for overrepresentation.

Theft of bodily autonomy was described in many ways by the participants. Sandy and Phoenix described a lack of resources to take care of themselves as Black children in youth, for example lack of access to shea butter and other proper haircare products/support. All participants described not having access to appropriate food, including Karona who was placed in Black foster homes. She spoke to being Grenadian

and raised on those foods, which were different than the Jamaican food she was provided.

Theft of safety was prevalent in all of their narratives, whether speaking about the conduct of child welfare staff and social workers, other child welfare survivors, or the general public. Phoenix described experiencing physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse at the hands of group home staff, and Sandy described experiencing physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse. Karona described experiencing psychological manipulation while in her foster home, as well as sexual abuse from her peers.

The theft of safety is particularly important to consider because of the very “promise” of child welfare, which is for the safety of children and youth. As Karona put it, it is a “legal kidnapping—that’s what I call it.” This is a kidnapping that as all participants said, does not benefit Black families, children, and youth.

This legal kidnapping comes in the wake of all the violence described above and lead to a described theft of self. Lorde (1984) describes her experiences of metabolizing anti-Black hate as a child and how she had to learn and unlearn the impact this hate had on her. All participants described a similar kind of metabolism as they said their experiences of child welfare impacted them for the rest of their lives. Karona stated:

It was very traumatic. Um...and the scars lasted until adulthood...I was sleeping walking, I was screaming in my sleep, I started withdrawing socially of course. Um. These are things that are still very present in my life. I used to be a very outgoing personality, and I’m not the same person I am anymore y’know. Sometimes I even say that I’m a shell of a person because I don’t feel like who I was meant to be basically. They took me off of the path of who I was meant to be, I feel. And that’s something you can’t get back.

Phoenix expressed a similar kind of impact and theft:

...but was talking to my partner and I just had this overwhelming sadness and we were talking about something and I'm like "yo they just fucked me right up and just threw me right into society and said figure it out"...I had to figure out how to build meaningful relationships with people, I had to figure how to trust, I had to figure out how to have a sense of emotional awareness or sense of self and identity, and community. I had to figure all things out just abruptly.

Sandy's sentiments of child welfare mirrored Karona and Phoenix:

Honestly I don't really have relationships and I think it's because I was moved around so much. Like I probably have two friends that I've known for five years. Other than that I've never been able to keep friends, I've never been able to like stay in a relationship. A healthy relationship. My family like, I'd rather just stay away and probably because a lot of the time I was separated from them right. So yeah, relationships I'm not good with those. I'm more of a loner.

These three excerpts reflect how Black child welfare survivors come to be stolen from themselves through being moved and violated during their time in the system. The ability to dream, form relationships, and even feel how one wants to is stolen during their legal kidnapping. This occurs in tandem to being taken away from Black community and family in ways that fractures their relationship with their Blackness.

Sandy and Phoenix in particular described that the theft of bodily autonomy as connected to being taken from Black community and family. Without integral knowledge on how to care for oneself, including on how to navigate anti-Black racism, they were left to figure out and fend for themselves. Both participants described how anti-Black racism as also relevant to their apprehensions away from their Black family as mixed-raced with white. Specifically, that child welfare laboured to have Phoenix and Sandy maintain relationships with their white family, but was rigid in taking them away from their Black family. This was despite the fact that their Black family continuously attempted to care for them.

Karona's experience both as a child and single mother reflect the reactivity to apprehend quickly, or take systemic steps such as verifying neglect in order to make apprehension easier. As Karona describes, this reactivity results in not taking into account the context or information from Black parents who are explaining what happened or are challenging a White narration of events. Essentially anti-Blackness both justifies and results in child welfare workers to not or unhear particular things that contradict their evaluation of Black parents due to their reaction as seeing Black parents as already at fault.

Again, it is important that three Black women articulate this experience. For Karona particularly white women were largely her abusers through their anti-Black deployment of child welfare, whether as the reporter or child protection worker. As Karona put it: "And you have this legislation that gives CAS workers more power than a police officer. The police officer knocks at my door I can turn him away and say "where's your warrant?" CAS worker comes in. They don't have to show me any paperwork, they can just walk right in and take my kid."

These thefts from body, self, and community have further implications on their lives as Black people in an anti-Black nation and world. Black parents in the Canadian context often focus parenting on dealing with anti-Black racism (Adjei, Mullings, Baffoe, Quaicoe, Abdul-Rahman, Shears & Fitzgerald, 2018). This includes giving and teaching affirmations and a love for Blackness, navigating anti-Black experiences, and being conscious of the presence of race and racism in situations (2018).

All of the participants described how the above experiences were exacerbated by anti-Black sanism, particularly of what Abdillahi (forthcoming) coined Blackened

madness. For Sandy and Phoenix, anti-Black sanism meant their rightful expressions of emotionality in the face of anti-Black and unkind behaviour were quickly pathologized while also criminalized. Both described being put in inappropriate facilities for mental health causing them to feel more unsafe and mentally/emotionally unwell.

Phoenix spoke of being Black psychiatricized mad through being overmedicated to the point of addiction and having to get herself off the medication herself at the age of 16 when she went into independent living. So not only did she have to survive the anti-Black climate she grew up in, she had to survive their attempts to silence her through medication, while also survive the effects of such medication, all as a teenager.

Karona described anti-Black sanism in how white women daycare and child welfare workers would describe and treat her. They would describe Karona as overly emotional and often decontextualize her reactions to their anti-Black conduct. As described by Karona:

so y'know if you're Black and you're a woman and you're confident and you can speak for yourself that's a problem. You're aggressive. If you're able to use your voice, you don't even have to be yelling but as long as it's loud, y'know and assertive you're yelling and that's "threatening to us", and "you're scaring us". All of a sudden it's it's, you're the aggressor. If you speak up for yourself you're an aggressor. So, yeah

The daycare even went as far as trying to narrate Karona as volatile to her subsidy despite the fact that Karona's subsidy had nothing to do with the child welfare investigation. So here we see the daycare attempt to deploy anti-Black sanism to have Karona lose her subsidy. The child welfare workers conducting the investigation were aware of this and did nothing, and therefore their inaction further supported anti-Black sanism.

Given anti-Black racism intersects widely and deeply with other forms of oppression (Hill-Collins, 2000; Walcott, 2003; Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019) it was important to further unearth these interlocking experiences. All participants articulated that as Black women/girls their experiences were particular. Karona discussed the interlocking experiences of misogynoir, anti-Black racism, and classism as a single-mother, particularly with how the daycare and child welfare workers' unwillingness to listen to her. She also implicated the medical system with the MotherRisk Commission (2018), and therefore the medical system's use of referral and surveillance of Black parents' bodies.

Phoenix articulated how ableism, referring to the specific oppression towards Disabled peoples, intersected with anti-Black racism. She argued that child welfare cares more about the needs of white children and youth, so any needs that Black children and youth have are thrown to the side. This or ableism and anti-Black racism intersect through notions of how trauma should appear, and so Black children and youth are quickly pathologized or deemed less intelligent.

Phoenix also discussed child welfare's refusal to engage in conversations of sexuality as not just deeply homophobic and heteronormative, but blatantly dangerous. She argued that child welfare worker's fear that sexuality was too triggering to discuss for those who experienced sexual abuse, lead to a blanket non-discussion. This left children and youth to figure out on their own with whatever resources they could find. For Black child welfare survivors, the anti-Black belief that Black people are more homo/transphobic meant Black children and youth were largely excluded from thoughts, discussions, and resources about sexuality and gender identity.

When I asked the question of what these experiences, and the general experience of Black families, with child welfare reminds them of when we think about the historical experience of Black people within seconds they all said slavery. Karona said child welfare is “meant to oppress us. Continue oppression...it feels like they’re trying to separate us from our families on purpose.” Phoenix took this even farther and named the usages of child welfare to oppress Black and Indigenous Peoples in similar ways:

Uh, slavery. *Laughter* It reminds me of slavery. It also reminds me of the resi—dare I say, the residential schools of the Indigenous Peop—there was residential schools for Black youth in Canada, um but it does remind me of that. The whole cul—the whole thing of like being ripped away from a family because a family is just inadequate, and then being stripped of every culture, of everything you understand to try to assimilate but not entirely assimilate because you’re still not seen as one of them. It’s very reminiscent of slavery.

Sandy’s response when discussing child welfare’s reproduction of slavery was to say “Like the white kids just sit back and relax while the Black kids do all the fucking cleaning and shit.” It is imperative to connect their analyses and experiences to the ways in which slavery continues to contour the present day reality for Black child welfare survivors.

The ongoing fracturing of Black families and denial of Black parenthood, the shippability of Black children and youth into largely white or heavily institutionalized/carceral spaces, the violence deployed against Black children, youth and families, and the cumulative anti-Black impact reflect slavery’s afterlives in child welfare. As Karona stated “Well it’s made for money, off of us. That’s what it’s for.” Child welfare’s refusal to support the families directly reflect the racial capitalism—the commodification and extraction of Black people, Blackness, and our resources—that slavery/slave trade formulated and enforced (Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019).

The ability of these participants to name their experiences of multiple forms of theft reflect where child welfare is really at when it comes to Black community. We would never argue to anti-oppression slavery, so we must ask ourselves what exactly the supposed incremental changes in child welfare do and who do they serve. Particularly, the multiple systems implicated in this theft as well as organizations not effectively decolonizing child welfare play a role in maintaining slavery's afterlife.

Interconnected Theft & Social Justice Performativity

All of the participants implicated multiple systems, structures, and institutions that make anti-Black racism alive and well in child welfare, and theft easy, possible, and sustained. Karona's experience of theft implicated the police, and as an adult when child welfare was involved the day care was implicated. Sandy's experience implicates the police and the education system. Phoenix's experience implicates police, the criminal justice system, as well as she articulated how immigration status puts Black child welfare survivors in even more of a vulnerable position. Just take the case of Abdoul Abdi mentioned earlier.

When asked how effective organizations claiming to address anti-Black racism in child welfare are, the participants were critical, cautious, and lacked faith in their results. Sandy said "Well honestly it's embarrassing", and Phoenix said "I don't find it effective. I find these organizations to be creating band-aid solutions that can be easily dismantled and not well through—and not thought through very well." Karona discussed her experience of being investigated and finding out that there was meant to be an anti-oppression lead to support the case worker in understanding the anti-Blackness in the daycare's referral.

The anti-oppression lead went on leave and the children's aid agency decided not to temporarily fill the position. Karona said "they claim it's very different now, it's not what it used to be in the 90's, [but] it's exactly the same except for they've put in measures for anti-Black racism that they're not, that they're not keeping up with."

Their evaluation of "social justice", "equity and diversity work" expose who this work is really for. In Sandy's words "They just want to look good. Be it that I don't know, plaque on the wall or that recognition on their resume or LinkedIn account." Here we can connect the absence to name the experiences of Black child welfare survivors in previous literature despite the fact that it is their/our very experiences that result in funding and resources for these organizations in the first place.

Phoenix's experiences also outlines the very critiques I made in the literature review section regarding the use of recommendations that rely on a colonial government.

Um, I don't find them effective. At some point I think, I think to some degree there is a—it's good, but as we've seen this year work that I did fucking 10-8 years ago and changes that we made through policy are now just gone. Um, have been flipped around and changed, and then redacted basically...The Ford government. *Laughter* Because of the Ford government. But um even before Ford there was—things started to become minimal. Like, things that were just being neglected because again, their inability to be more radical and activist based. Everything's about advocacy, but you're not protecting the things you're putting in place. I also just think that it's just temporary solutions, and there's not enough transitional supports.

The use of "incremental change", compromising of ethics, liberalism, and centrist politics often results in little for the safety, autonomy, and support of Black people (Samudzi & Anderson, 2018). Phoenix described what was missing:

Um they miss key elements, they do not include the folks that need to be at the table, they have an unwillingness to be more radical, they have unwillingness to be more creative. Um, you can't—I don't think that while you still have people in positions of power and working within these institutions that inflict violence on young people, to then work with them to

create change. They need to be fucking thrown out and then those positions need to be filled with proper fucking people.

Phoenix also described her experiences as a Black queer woman where these organizations would tone police, appropriate, and exclude her unless they could benefit from her knowledge and experiences. The lack of radical and ethical energy, combined with self-serving agendas and anti-Black racism leads to what Walcott & Abdillahi (2019) describe as a failure to pass the Black Test.

The Black Test simply suggests that any policy that does not meet the requirement of ameliorating the dire conditions of Black people's lives is not a policy worth having. This proposal is a challenge to rethink the very grounds of a desired national and global transformative change—where it begins and where it ends...The Black Test requires us to think another and different world now. (pp.91-92)

Based on what the participants describe and the critiques I also put forward, it seems most research, organizational endeavours, advocacy, and policies and policy changes do not pass the Black Test. However, this should not be shocking because as Phoenix argued, BlackLife is often an afterthought instead of at the centre. To not pass the Black Test is to be implicated in the intricacies of how anti-Black racism and slavery's afterlives remain. Sandy describes the impact of this on Black child welfare survivors, stating:

The end of the day is what it makes people want to do or not want to do, like people don't want to volunteer and give their time because they feel like it's a waste of time and then people get discouraged from trying to like fight the power so to speak...Y'know people—nobody wants to fight right, because they get played.

By not passing the Black Test while actively being anti-Black these organizations are draining necessary energy for decolonial and radical work within child welfare. But given the interconnected systems at work they are also hindering decolonial and radical transformations in other systems too.

Unaccountable Accounting & Social Work

Neoliberalism's entanglement with social work, and therefore child welfare, means that Black people come to be documented in particular ways. These forms of documentation, or accounting, for Black people is not to serve our livelihood but in fact to serve the financial interests of the state (Walcott & Abdillahi, 2019). This means that while social workers are actively accounting for particular aspects to substantiate their agenda that participants see as directed to fragment Black families, they are simultaneously 'unaccounting' for other things that would expose the violence of child welfare.

All the participants indicated the various ways child welfare unaccounts aspects of their experiences, and therefore attempts to remain unaccountable. Karona's experience as an adult being investigated was particularly illuminating. She described the child protection worker as inappropriately trained in just understanding the bare minimum, such as how to put in a car seat because the worker admitted she did not know how.

This same worker did not document nor address Karona describing the daycare as antagonistic, lying, and problematic. She also found the worker dismissive of her strengths as a parent and ignored evidence that directly contradicted the daycare referral and the standard of neglect that would subsequently be temporarily verified by the agency.

Phoenix described being accounted as a bad youth as unaccountable to how the system antagonized, violated, and neglected her, and this issue coming particularly from white staff. She found that group home staff in particular could essentially do and say

what they wanted without consequence. Sandy described a similar kind of lack of accountability stating: “And then they lock em up, like fuck guys you brought us here and now you’re treating us like y’know like we’re invading the place.”

At stake here is that only certain people come to hear and attempt to address the conditions Black child welfare survivors experience. Based on the critiques put forward by the participants and I throughout this MRP, it is increasingly evident that who listens and resists is largely Black child welfare survivors and those of a radical ethic to BlackLife.

It would be irresponsible to not make the connection to the unaccountable accounting occurring in child welfare and the broader practice and education of social work. When asked how social work education and practice are implicated, all of the participants were heavily critical. Karona described that based on her experiences as a child and adult dealing with child welfare, the investigations were poorly conducted, one-sided, and deeply anti-Black. This included child welfare workers who do not pay attention to the harms occurring in foster/group homes.

The connection to the broader practice and education of social work for Karona was that something is clearly missing in the classroom. Without a formal body or mechanism to make complaints and with clear gaps in social work education on anti-Black racism and the harms of social work and child welfare, Black child welfare survivors and Black families are left being “unheard”.

Phoenix and Sandy both described the “goodness” in social workers, where largely white women join the field with good intent but do not acknowledge or actively address the violence they perpetuate. They described social workers as dangerous

because of their inability to be radical and centre Black child welfare survivors, so instead they perpetuate violence to maintain themselves as professionals rather than dismantle a violent practice and system.

Phoenix also implicated the possibilities for non-white social workers, including child welfare survivors, to perpetuate violence or not be able to dismantle the system. Either these social workers become entangled in the violent logics and practices of the system and deploy them, or they become burnt out and burdened with doing all the difficult work in these organizations. It is important to strongly consider Phoenix's qualifications to give such an evaluation based on her over a decade of volunteer/paid work addressing problems within and the problem that is child welfare.

Resistance

So with all of this context, this deeply anti-Black system that has come to reproduce colonial and enslaving logics and experiences, we arrive at resistance. It was important to detail the context of child welfare based on Karona, Phoenix, and Sandy's experience in order to understand what resistance is and is not. Especially with the performance of social justice, it is important to articulate resistance within a decolonial framework. That the methods and moments of resistance for the participants challenge and disrupt this violence while also providing a vision into potential new possibilities.

Walcott and Abdillahi's (2019) discussion on what they call an ethical politics of life provides an imperative and timely description to fold these moments and methods of resistance into. They state: "We believe that an ethical politics of life demands a radical approach to dissolving inequality or at least radically ameliorating it...the kind of political logic that we are calling for requires a different understanding of the world and a new

imaginary that exceeds this world, as we presently know it, experience it and live it” (pp.94-95).

Both Sharpe (2016) and Browne (2015) articulate the kinds of resistive practices Black people would deploy during slavery and the slave trade to refuse internalizing and experiencing these violent practices. Whether it was fleeing, fighting, supporting and nourishing other Black people, and/or developing community these kinds of resistive strategies are relevant to an ethical politics of life and the moments and methods of resistance for Black child welfare survivors. Phoenix mirrored their analyses stating: “resistance for other youth are continuing to survive, stealing for what you need, yelling what you need, acting out—acting out I put in quotations, and getting out of jail or doing whatever. Like all of it is just an act of resistance to the system, to the institution.”

This means that there are almost two sets of resistive strategies, one which are the daily acts of resistance against the dehumanization of anti-Black racism in child welfare and the other being the collective organized struggle against anti-Black racism in child welfare. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive and both are constitutive of an ethical politics of life.

One very evident strategy of resistance was the critical analyses all the participants held. While child welfare obviously had an impact on the overall health of all the participants, there was a particular way they could resist fully internalizing the anti-Black violence they experienced. All discussed how when they were in child welfare they actively refused how child welfare workers would talk about them and their families.

Phoenix described her understanding, stating “I guess at a young age understood what was right and what was wrong and a lot of unjust shit happens in group homes that get away with.” Through this she was able to challenge in the ways she felt necessary.

As an adult being investigated, Karona actively challenged the daycare and child welfare workers’ narrative that constructed her as a bad, neglectful mother. Much like hooks’ (1992) work around the oppositional gaze, the power to deconstruct anti-Black narrative constructs around their lives meant that they could think through other ways to resist, as well as insert other narratives about child welfare.

All participants described their acts of refusal of apprehension as resistance, even if child welfare successfully kidnapped them. Phoenix and Sandy described going into Independent Care at the age of 16 as a form of finding freedom, even if it came with isolation. As Sandy said “think when I got my independence is when I just...my foot was down.”

Karona described her physically resisted apprehension:

I was just trying all kinds of stuff so I was hanging onto the wall and then they got me over their head, there was about four of them that picked me up, and there was like this bristol board thing with like like pins, and like not flyers I don’t know if it was stuff for related to the police office, but flyers and papers and I was hanging onto that and I was literally ripping it out from the wall and my nails and my fingers started to hurt. And um... so they finally got me outside cuz I just, it’s ten year old me against, against four grown adults lifting me over their head so of course they won that battle. Then getting me into the car was another battle because I was putting my feet, like stretching it out so that um...it wouldn’t go through the door and um...once they got me in the car, my, I was tiny and the old police cars the window doesn’t go all the way to the door, so I was able to reach my hands through and open the door and finally they got tired of me escaping essentially and when they got me inside they, they I don’t know if it was a child lock I don’t know what but I wasn’t able to open the door anymore.

Karona also described the parent visits where she would talk to her mother about fleeing and escaping as a part of her resistance. Sandy also described her refusal of

apprehension, “For me when I felt I had asserted myself...fuck I probably thought that’s what I was doing when I was AWOLing all those times.” By going missing and being late for curfew, Sandy was able to resist the time constraints that would isolate her. The participants acts of refusal of apprehension invoke the history that Sharpe (2016) and Browne (2015) articulate of how Black people resisted slavery and the slave trade by either planning to flee, or actually escaping in particular ways.

The ways in which these participants navigated child welfare also resisted the dehumanization fundamental to BlackLife in child welfare. Karona described her resistance as being able to remove herself from the space where sexual abuse was happening by staying at the dry-cleaning as a part of her resistance. Phoenix described getting arrested for challenging unjust treatment from staff, whether that was towards her or other child welfare survivors, as resistance. Again, this is a radical act to challenge knowing there is risk, experiencing that risk, and continuing to challenge.

Sandy and Phoenix both articulated a similarity in their resistance to navigate child welfare. Both described how having capacity to understand and manipulate on one end causes privilege but on the other provided them with resources. Phoenix described knowing her rights as a way of knowing how unjust child welfare was, and her ability to assert those rights sometimes protected her and got her resources. Both also articulated how being vocal was a double-edged sword where child welfare does not necessarily support or nourish this ability, but on the other was one of the ways they were able to survive. When Sandy first entered child welfare she was able to get Black foster parents because she asked for it.

All participants articulated certain moments and methods of resistance that implicated a collective organized struggle against anti-Black racism in child welfare. Karona's experience of egregious anti-Black racism in the child welfare investigation against her was disrupted and dismantled by Black community. Karona made the decision to reach out to a Black community activist, who was able to direct her to another Black queer community organizer who also understood social work and child welfare.

This decision, as she described, saved her from the verification of neglect:

And um...he completely dismantled their whole case. He's like you know "we're social workers, we're not doctors. How did we get from here to here? How did we get from the shoes were too small to they're impacting her development"...my advocate was like "no no no no, you guys said that you were going to do this letter. This was not Karona's idea, this was your idea for the letter and you said that the letter was going to be this, this and this." So um what ended up is—and it took a long time for this end result because there was a lot of bs going on. Um, so finally we received an email stating that um they were reopening the file to attach code to basically would say that it was not verified and um they tried it again. They said um "that the shoes weren't, as to your recommendation, that the shoes were not too small". And my advocate—like you can't get anything by him. He caught that too and he corrected them, and um so yeah we're still waiting for an update but basically um it's been reversed and we're the first people to have the verification reversed. So I'm very grateful, I'm thankful, I'm overwhelmed basically every time I think about it.

This passage reflects the possibilities of collective struggle through the very radical and investigative practice of this advocate. By doing this Karona had her experiences of anti-Black racism validated while also gaining capacity in understanding the failings of the investigation. This experience resonates with Hill-Collins (2000) argument that collective development amongst Black women and those the most marginalized within the Black community leads to a specific kind of radical consciousness that can and attempts to produce more ethical and just conditions for Black people.

Sandy described a similar kind of gain as part of her resistance came through meeting another Black queer child welfare survivor who brought her into community organizing. Not only did this help her understand the violent environment child welfare is, it also helped her resist metabolizing the anti-Black racism that can lead to self-blame and doubt. Through this Sandy was also able to articulate that two Black queer people she met that are both a part of and against social work indicate a new possibility when thinking through a practice and system that attends to BlackLife.

Phoenix described community organizing as a fundamental part of her resistance both within and beyond child welfare, particularly with other Black child welfare survivors.

Um, a lot of stuff with child welfare activism was more grassroots and self-starting with myself and other people *laughter. Co-founding other organizations [organization], [organization], um doing some work with [organization], attending Black Lives Matter protests. Um, creating a space for Black folks in tattooing, like I think in all of that is just my continued resistance of the system. And if, y'know they helped build a strong bitch *laughter* like unfortunately they tried to break me down instead “and still I rise” *laughter*.

Noteworthy in what Phoenix articulates is the comparison between her resistance and experiences to the poem written by Maya Angelou. Much of the poem largely resonates to how all three Black women describe their resistance and experiences, and indicates the radical nature of how Black women articulate themselves to disrupt the anti-Black racism.

The resistive strategies in reaction and challenge to BlackLife in child welfare outlined in this section are not exhaustive. Nor are they representative of the complete repertoire of moments and methods of resistance that bring us towards an ethical politics

of life and radical transformation when caring for Black families. Instead, the experiences and resistance of Phoenix, Sandy, and Karona illuminate specific practices that can be easily demonized and pathologized in order to maintain child welfare as a system. By articulating these moments and methods as resistance, the participants provide us one pathway forward when thinking through new possibilities.

CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION & NEW POSSIBILITIES

Through my proposed methodology, Black diasporic interpretive phenomenology, I was able to unearth and articulate the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors. The process was deeply intentional and ethical when thinking through how to produce new possibilities in the research process. This process made it safe enough for all three participants to make the exact same demand: dismantle child welfare. Not because it is broken, but because it is doing exactly what it was designed to do.

This is the case and therefore any form of practice that maintains child welfare, including social work, is an engagement in reproducing colonial and enslaving logics, systems and experiences. All three participants described a practice that learns from the anti-Black violence of social work and child welfare. Phoenix described the need for workers to align with radical Black child welfare survivors and our practices of resistance if they truly want to see transformation. With hesitation, good social workers seem to be the ones who distrust and actively dismantle social work as a profession while supporting the new possibilities and imaginaries provided by Black child welfare survivors.

These participants imagine a state and system that attends to the intricacies that often lead to Black families being interacted by the state, such as poverty, housing, education. They imagine a system that apprehension is an honest last resort, and maintaining/reunifying Black families take precedence. They imagine a system that does not reproduce the very violence that they were apprehended for in the first place, and a system that if apprehension does occur that child welfare survivors thrive rather than experience lack and despair. They imagine a system that is deeply accountable to Black

community, where mechanisms are put into place for when unjust, anti-Black conduct occurs that it does not require the luck of an advocate to have accountability.

Arguably, these Black women demand a different way of thinking about and attending to BlackLife through their experiences of child welfare. Their demand is a part of the new possibilities that could lead us to a substantively different life. But these are radical and laborious possibilities that require more than just Black child welfare survivors' resistance. All others must fall in line and behind their demands and resistive practices, or get out of the way. These Black women embody a practice of "we have nothing to lose but our chains" (Shakur, 1987).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flyer



Ryerson University

Research Participants Needed

The Resistive Strategies of Black Former Youth in Care

Are You:
A person who identifies as Black, between the ages of 18-29, and a former youth in care (child welfare)? This can include adoption.

If you answered yes to the above then you can participate in a completely voluntary study for a master's research paper that looks at how Black youth from care understand and describe resistance when it comes to experiences of child welfare.

You will be asked to participate in two individual interviews, one of which is audio recorded, of approx. 1-1.5 hours each, and a focus-group interview of approx. 2 hours in length.

If you are interested please contact:
Josh Lamers (Master of Social Work Candidate)
carl.lamers@ryerson.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board
REB File# 2018-037

APPENDIX B

Script for Recruitment



REB File# 2019-037

Recruitment Directly From Me

Hello,

As you may know I'm doing my Master of Social Work at Ryerson University and a component of it is that I have to complete a major research paper, and the supervisor for the project is Professor Purnima George. I am contacting you to see if you might be interested in participating in my research study that looks at the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors. Participants are to be between the ages of 18-29, and identify as Black and previous placed within child welfare (foster/group home, residential care, or adoption).

If you agree to volunteer you will be asked to participate in two one-on-one interviews (1hour to 1hour and 30 minutes) the first one being audio recorded and the second just a follow up of my analysis of your interview, and a group interview with other participants (2hours).

Your participation is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate it will not impact our relationship, or your relationship with Ryerson University.

This study has Ryerson REB approval.

Snowball Recruitment Script

Hello,

I'm reaching out to you on behalf of Josh Lamers who is in his Master of Social Work at Ryerson University and a component of his program is completing a major research paper. The supervisor for the project is Professor Purnima George. I am contacting you to see if you might be interested in participating in his research study, which is Ryerson REB approved, that looks at the resistive strategies of Black child welfare survivors. Participants are to be between the ages of 18-29, and identify as Black and previous placed within child welfare (foster/group home, residential care, or adoption).

If you agree to volunteer you will be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews (1hour to 1hour and 30 minutes) the first one being audio recorded and the second just a follow up of Josh's analysis of your interview, and a group interview with other participants (2hours).

Your participation is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate it will not impact our relationship, or your relationship with Ryerson University. Josh wanted me to connect with you rather than me just give you his contact information just in case you don't typically openly identify your experiences with child welfare. Publically identifying is not a requirement at all, and if you are interested feel free to email him at:

carl.lamers@ryerson.ca

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Identity-related Questions:

- How would you describe your ethnicity?
- How would you describe your gender identity?
- How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- What level of education do you have?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- How would you describe the child welfare system?
 - Probing questions:
 - How would you describe child welfare's relationship with Black families, and Black children and youth?
- How would you describe your experiences with child welfare?
 - Probing questions:
 - If you don't mind disclosing, what kinds of spaces were you placed in?
 - How did you navigate these experiences?
 - Have you done work to connect with biological family, and if so what has been that experience? Did child welfare help and/or support?
- How would you describe anti-Black racism in your experiences with child welfare?
 - Probing questions:
 - When we think of oppression, what other experiences have you had? Such as homo/transphobia, ableism, and/or sanism?
 - How did you navigate these experiences?
 - How did this impact you?
- Despite the common issues in child welfare, what kinds of relationships were you able to form during and after child welfare?
- When we think about organizations that are claiming to tackle issues within child welfare, how would you describe your experiences with these organizations and the effectiveness of this work?
 - Probing questions:
 - How have you navigate these experiences? What was the impact, and what shifted this impact?
- What role do you think social work as a profession plays in all of this?
- Thinking about resistance, how would you describe resistance when it comes to being a Black child welfare survivor?
 - Probing questions:
 - What has this looked like for you?

APPENDIX D

Consent Agreement

RYERSON UNIVERSITY **Consent to Participate in Research**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

The Resistive Strategies of Black Child Welfare Survivors

RESEARCHERS

This research study is being conducted by Josh Lamers, Graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at Ryerson University. Faculty supervisor is Purnima George of the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

This research intends to explore and articulate the strategies and methods that Black child welfare survivors use in the context of child welfare. This includes conversations of child welfare-related agencies and organizations, experiences with non-Black child welfare survivors, and will also ask questions related to relationships, healing, and connections to gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and ethnicity. This study specifically seeks Black child welfare survivors between the ages of 18-29, and includes multiple experiences of child welfare (foster/group home care, residential care, and adoption). The number of participants sought is maximum 4 Black child welfare survivors.

WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO

The timeline of the study is between April 2019-August 2019. You are being asked to participate in an initial one-on-one interview that is audio recorded. After this interview is transcribed and main themes extracted, you are being asked to meet a second time to discuss the themes connected to the transcript and give your feedback.

There will also be a group interview of the individual participants that is only documented in writing and will then be typed, and written notes destroyed. As well, participants will be asked at the end of the group interview to confirm the written themes written down to confirm their relevance/accuracy, and asked to sign a consent to disseminate form.

The interviews will take place at 424 Yonge Street, Toronto, ON at the Office of the Black Liberation Collective-Ryerson and is a private room. The initial interview is expected to be an hour to an hour and a half. The follow up discussion will be 30 minutes to an hour, and the group interview will likely be closer to two hours. Timing of arts-based project is dependent upon actual activity decided by the group.

RELEVANT INFORMATION ON PROCESS OF RESEARCH

The research design is not definitively set, and wants to actively engage in the thoughts and suggestions of research participants. What this means is if there are issues/suggestions relevant to the overall design expressed by one participant, you are consenting for this suggestion to be shared, if relevant, to other participants as well as Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board who must confirm any changes.

As well, during individual interviews, and any point deemed by participants during the research, I may stop a recording to ask if what was just disclosed is something they want officially transcribed, and/or altered (such as names of organizations). This is not meant to police what is said but rather to provide optimal security as decided by you. During the interview processes, including the group interview, discussions do not just focus on race and child welfare survivorship, and may include discussions of gender identity, sex/sexuality, relationships, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and Mad-identity. In these moments, I may also pause the interview process to clarify any need for absenting or altering transcripts for safety purposes.

Finally, the research design may use snowball recruitment, which means that I may approach you if I cannot find other research participants, and you may approach other Black child welfare survivors who you think may be interested. This will include a briefing conversation, script to send/use, and poster that you can send. Please circle your response to possibly being contacted for snowball recruitment:

Yes, I consent to being contacted and engage in the outlined role of snowball recruitment.

No, I do not consent to being contacted for snowball recruitment.

INFORMATION ON MYSELF AND ROLE AS RESEARCHER

Unlike other research projects, given my background as a Black child welfare survivor the interviews will include my own participation to probe further into experiences and analyses during the actual individual interview process. This will be done in a non-disruptive and respectful manner, and is intended for more active engagement between researcher and participant.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any point up to the actual submission of the completed major research paper. If your recruitment came through a personal relationship between myself and/or another participant, your withdrawal of consent will not negatively impact those personal relationships, relationships with researchers: Josh Lamers and Purnima George, nor your relationship with Ryerson University. This includes any supports that were asked of during research process. As well, withdrawal of consent does not need to come with a reason.

If during the group interview you would like to withdraw consent you can stop my facilitation and/or pull me aside for a conversation to express this. You would have to leave the group interview given the confidential nature of the other participants. Withdrawal of consent will follow with the immediate deletion of data collected from

you, within a deadline of maximum two days. By consenting to participate you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

As a participant you will be provided with a transcript of your interview at any point in the research process. As well, the finalized submission will be made available to you if you would like to review, and you will be given ample time before actual submission. As well, you can withdraw from the research process at any time and still like any data collected from you to be considered a part of the study. Any analyses made off this data will be conveyed to you upon voluntary consent to review.

Finally, your rights are paramount to any potential personal relationship, and any breach/trespass during the research process should be taken to the space you see fit. This includes my research supervisor, the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board, and the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Contact information for all of the above will be provided.

DISSEMINATION

Participants will be asked in the group interview to sign a consent to disseminate form, which confirms that you consent to me using the information from the major research paper beyond its required submission to the Ryerson Digital Depository.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Given this is a research process for a major research paper many of the benefits are embedded in the process itself. However, you should know that the benefits for me as a researcher in many ways do outweigh that of the research participant. Below outlines the two in the premise of transparency.

Benefits for Research Participants

- Politicization and capacity development through critical discussions of the experiences of Black child welfare survivors and the spaces we enter
- Capacity development by getting to actively assess the research process, and learn about/from Black scholarship
- Participate in knowledge production that centres the capacities and knowledge of Black child welfare survivors
- Community development by getting to engage other Black child welfare survivors, as well as getting access to and produce in arts-based space with Black community member
- Self-development through access to supports from myself in areas of education, health supports, and/or employment, which the participant can be connected to and will be determined through correspondence before the one-on-one interview begins and is recorded. This includes access to a Black community member whose work is in healing and support, and will be made available upon request.

I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study, and there is no payment for participation or reimbursement.

Benefits for Researcher

- Upon completion of research, graduation with Master of Social Work. This includes the possibility of presenting research findings, publications, and other research potential. This includes the benefits of travelling, networking, and career

development. The participant is consenting to the researcher at least submitting and having the major research paper posted on the Ryerson Digital Depository, as this is a requirement by Ryerson University.

- Capacity and community development through learning from and engaging with other Black child welfare survivors

CONSENT TO RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM RESEARCHER

A part of this research design is to support research participants as much as I can within my capacity as a social work practitioner and student. This support is free, is not contingent to consent or withdrawal of consent, and will not be included in any publication or thought of as data. However, there are limitations to the supports I can provide and require me mostly connecting to other organizations, and in the case of emotional support the Black community member. Before making those connections consent will be asked and documented in field notes so to ensure confidentiality, including me giving you the contact information for you to then connect. It will not be disclosed that you were a participant in the study, but rather a community member I've met that was seeking support in whatever way needed. Kind of supports are dependent upon an initial discussion of what you may want from me beyond my role as researcher.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU

The risks of the study are low, however being asked personal history and experiences and engaging in critical conversations can bring about emotional and psychological stress/discomfort. As stated earlier, a chosen Black community member can be made available to you, along with conversations with myself if you so wish (and won't be considered data). As well, any data that you would like removed can be at any time, and questions you wish to skip can be skipped.

As well, there is a risk of being identified through the narratives you give including if you identify specific agencies and/or organizations. You will be asked if you would like those names to remain, and during the feedback period you can have things be less specific. As well, you will be asked to decide a name for yourself in the research as the "code" to your data.

Finally, in the group interview there is the risk of you being identified and confidentiality breached by other participants. All participants will agree to confidentiality, and nothing specific to someone's story will be considered data from these spaces. The group interview is more about broader themes of Black child welfare survivorship, and will be clarified before the space closes and participants leave.

YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE: CONFIDENTIAL

As stated earlier, confidentiality is paramount and you will choose a "code name" associated with your data. It is not suggested to use one's real name in cases of current/future employment. Any moments where confidentiality may be breached, such as after the group interview where the themes will be connected to individual interviews and analyses, and the feedback is sent you will be asked beforehand if you consent. If you do not consent to this being shared before submission, the section and any information relevant to you will be removed while other participants review. The only time confidentiality may be broken is, as per the Duty to Report, where I am legally bound to

report to the appropriate authorities if you express or present an immediate danger to yourself or others, or a child is involved and is in danger.

HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE PROTECTED AND STORED

Your information, including consent forms, will be kept digitally on my personal devices that are password protected. All folders will be encrypted and password protected, and any form with real names will not be in connection to individual data. Only you will have access to your transcript upon request, and any documents/information collected that is not in the final submission will be destroyed upon confirmation of the submitted major research paper. The deletion of this data will happen within a maximum three-day period after confirmation, and will be communicated to you that the major research paper is finalized.

QUESTIONS

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

Josh Lamers: carl.lamers@ryerson.ca

Purnima George (Faculty Supervisor): p3george@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board

c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation

Ryerson University

350 Victoria Street

Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

416-979-5042

rebchair@ryerson.ca

The Resistive Strategies of Black Child Welfare Survivors

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

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

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

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E

Dissemination Consent Form

**RYERSON UNIVERSITY
Consent for Researcher to Disseminate**

By signing this consent form, you are consenting to the information in the major research paper to be used beyond its required submission to the Ryerson Digital Depository. This can include, but is not limited to: being presented at conferences, used to develop workshops, further developed in other research, and included in other publications.

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

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Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX F

Key Terms for Study

Ableism: refers to discrimination towards people within the Disability community. It can be through actions as well as underlying beliefs and attitudes in favour of “able-bodied” people. Ableism is the cultural, political, social, and economic exclusion and marginalization of Disabled peoples, resulting in policies, practices, attitudes, institutions, and structures that privilege able-bodied peoples. Disabled peoples can be “marked” by diagnosis, but also by perceived (whether real or imagined) bodily and mental differences.

Anti-Black Racism: refers to the systemic, institutional, structural, and individual devaluation, dispossession, and dehumanization of Black peoples. This occurs both globally and locally, as well as culturally, politically, socially, and economically and is woven into the fabric of every society. The contemporary experience of Black peoples is inextricably linked to the history of the Transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and segregation and impacts every sphere of our lives including (but is not limited to) immigration, education, child welfare, health care, and policing. Anti-Black racism is both overt and subtle, and in Canadian society often is embedded ideologies of liberalism, multiculturalism and rarely addressed in co-opted notions of “diversity” and “inclusion”. Theoretically, anti-Black racism demands that we address the oppression of Black peoples in the multiple forms it exists due to the multiple identities that we hold, and that liberation only comes when we’re all liberated. Anti-Black racism as a theoretical lens also looks to acknowledge and (re)surface the ways in which Black peoples resist our oppression, both historically and contemporarily.

Child Welfare Survivor: the use of the term survivor is to note that children and youth are placed in a system that is inherently oppressive, and those within the system actively navigate to remain alive and challenge the situations they’re placed in. “Surviving” contextualizes actions taken by oppressed peoples/groups that may seem “wrong”, “contradictory”, or “pathological”.

Colonization/colonialism: refers to the violent process of invading, taking over, and taking of land and resources which often requires the genocide and dispossession.

Homophobia: refers to the hate, disrespect, erasure, discomfort, and dehumanization directed toward queer people.

Indigenous Peoples: people who historically and presently suffer from being colonized and dispossessed from their original lands, territories and resources resulting in extreme forms of economic, social, cultural, and political marginalization.

Forced Settler: refers to diasporic people who migrate due to the many effects of colonization and imperialism, and so “choice” to move comes out of a necessity to survive. This also includes the history of the slave trade and indentured labour that stole people from their lands.

Liberation: refers to living in a world that is equitable, accessible, and genuinely inclusive and is absent of oppression and injustices. It is both an endpoint and a process without an ending, and demands a world where when wrong happens these wrongs are adequately attended to. Liberation means to live in a world without fear of persecution, death and lack due to the identities you hold. Liberation is the ability to be at home in our bodies, and Walcott (2003) says home for Black peoples is an ethical space.

Misogynoir: refers to the hate and disrespect of Black women that is deeply embedded in various systems, and is social, cultural, political economic. manifestation of gendered anti-Blackness directed at Black women.

Neoliberalism: refers to systems, structures, policies, and practices that resurface liberalism and favours free-market capitalism. Through this logic/ideology, individuals are meant to be completely responsibility for their care and the state intervenes/supports as little as possible. This manifests in the clawing back of resources such as child support, education, and giving financial resources to marginalized communities. It also manifests in the “just pull up your bootstraps up” logic that demands people work hard, which ignores how oppression operates to deny equitable access. From this logic we see the “perfect” worker, student, citizen who the state cares about and acknowledges, while deeming those who don’t fit this mould as bad, unfit, etc.

Sanism (also known as mentalism)/anti-Black sanism: a form of discrimination and oppression against people who have been engaged by the psychiatric system (diagnosis, counselling, institutionalization). This discrimination may or may not be described in terms of mental disorder or cognitive impairment, and also can come from assuming someone has a diagnosis. Sanism can look like denying people privacy, freedom, mobility, as well access to employment, education, etc. Anti-Black sanism refers to the specific experience of sanism for the Black community where the intersections of anti-Black racism and sanism intersect to cause overrepresentation in institutionalization, inadequate care, as well as murders from police.

Settler colonialism: is a form of colonization where the focus goes beyond just resource extraction, but is also the ongoing process of by which people claim land as their own, operating under and through the notion of discovery which further disappears Indigenous Peoples and their original relationship to the land and the life that comes with it. It is important to differentiate between settler colonialism and external colonialism (the above definition) because settler colonialism has a different impact on Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island (what we understand today as the Americas) today. This is deeply embedded in Canadian institutions and processes that interact with Indigenous Peoples based on our history of settlerhood.

Sexism: the structural and systemic oppression of women

Transphobia: refers to the hate, disrespect, erasure, discomfort, and dehumanization directed toward Trans, gender non-conforming, and gender diverse peoples. While this happens in individual interactions, it is also deeply embedded at the systemic, structural,

and institutional levels. Other terms that you can look up for information: transmisogyny, cissexism.

White supremacy: refers to both a system and a logic where white people, history, worldviews, and systems are intentionally and violently enforced, privileged, and embedded in society, policy, procedures, and practices.

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