

Aged-Out Indigenous Children & Youth from the Child Welfare System

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December 07, 2020

SOCW 799: Major Paper

University of The Fraser Valley

Acknowledgements

As a survivor of St. George's Indian Residential School in Lytton, British Columbia, I offer this major paper in respect to all the Indigenous children who faced the atrocities associated with these government sanctioned institutions. I would also like to honour all the Indigenous children who have been forcibly removed from their families and communities with the goal of placement within non-Indigenous foster and adoptive homes. No child should ever be intentionally situated in an environment that systematically aims to eradicate their cultural identity.

There are many Indigenous survivors of Canada's residential school and child welfare systems. I include myself in this group. Sadly, there are also many Indigenous children that never made it. I would like to acknowledge the memory of my sister, Rena Lorraine Swakum who attended St. George's Indian Residential School from 1954-1962. She was there for me during our time together in this school.

I attended St. George's Indian Residential School from 1958-1962. However, while at St. George's, Rena became sick with pleurisy which then formed into pneumonia. Unfortunately, Rena was sent to Vancouver General Hospital too late as she succumbed to her illness at the age of fourteen.

I would like to acknowledge N kixw Stn James who looked after Rena during her illness at St. George's Indian Residential School. She painstakingly kept a cool clothe on Rena's forehead in an effort to bring her temperature down.

I would like to acknowledge Ko'waintco Michel who assisted N kixw Stn James in the preparation of the burning ceremony. This burning ceremony is an open invitation to all Indigenous people who wish to pass on personal belongings and keepsakes of those long gone to the creator, to the ancestors long past. This burning ceremony was held in late September 2020. During this recent ceremony, Rena Lorraine Swakum's school leather binder was burned.

I would like to acknowledge my husband, George and children, Shawn and Paul Swakum for their patience, understanding and consideration of time that was taken to write this paper. May the Great Spirit be with us all. K^wuk^wscemx^w (Thank you).

Kay Lavina Swakum James

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Abstract

The purpose of this major research paper is to review current literature that examines the historical context and experiences of Indigenous youth aging out of the Child Welfare System as it relates to the social construction of cultural identity. This document explores definitions of ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology, aged out youth and other meanings. The thematic analysis suggests that many Indigenous youth exiting the child welfare system find themselves struggling to connect with their cultural identities and often feeling alienated from their cultural families and communities. The critical analysis determines that reunification with cultural identity for Indigenous youth in the child welfare system is essential in maintaining connections with the families and communities from where they originated. Research finds that the majority of aged-out attendees also thought that social supports and life skills development were vital to assist them as they aged out the Child Welfare System (Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks, 2010). The paper concludes that aged-out Indigenous youth adults need to know the ontology of where they originate from because it serves to establish a positive Indigenous identity perspective that is unique from the Western ontology.

Keywords: Indigenous youth, homelessness, self-identity, reunification

Introduction:

Ontology asks, "what is reality?" (Wilson, 2008). Epistemology explores Indigenous people's cultural knowledge of who they are. Both of these terms serve to define the context of relationships between individuals, groups, and societies. It has long been known that an Indigenous person's soul or cultural spirituality is their shared history, customs, traditions, personal relationships, connections to their community, and self-perceived identity, which is their cultural ontology. However, the colonial forces treated Aboriginal peoples as children, property, and wards of the state because they saw them as culturally inferior and believed that they were unable to care for their children (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Sinclair, 2007).

The historical atrocities that followed the establishment of a colonial relationship between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples has fractured and fragmented the cultural identity of many Indigenous youth today as they struggle to live with the impacts of generational trauma alongside the pressures of relating and fitting into the world around them today. In order to understand how the cultural identity of Indigenous youth has been shaped by colonial oppression and ethnocentric assimilation policies, the following paper will utilize a social constructionist lens with a focus on ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology to present the historical context and current experiences of children and youth aging out of the child welfare system.

Impacts of Colonization: the "Indian Problem"

Since time immemorial, First Nations people were able to sustain themselves while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural identity as they gathered to dance, to have ceremonies, to have feasts, to manage a community, and practiced the life of spirituality for thousands of years (Muckle, 1998). Before the Europeans arrived in the 1490s, Indigenous people practiced their customs and traditions (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005; Muckle, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997).

At the onset of European contact, relationships between colonial government powers and indigenous people were centered around trade activities and military alliances for the French and British (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005, p.14; Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.53). However, the implications of colonization began to shift the context of the relationship with the push for expansion, development, and extraction of resources. Unbeknown to the advancing settlers and Indigenous people at that time, the colonial government adopted a policy that protected First

Nations people temporarily until they could be assimilated into mainstream society (Bennett et al. 2005, p.13). The procedure introduced was called the *Indian Act* which began with marginalization through the establishment of the reserve system. This was followed by attempts at assimilation through residential schools followed by socially unjust child welfare policies, some of which continue to exist today.

Initially, the colonial Government mutually supported the settlers and Metis peoples for the use of gathering and expanding the fur trade. However, the context of the relationship turned because the Europeans aspirations were to conquer the lands through *Terra Nullius* (Navia et al. 2018; Wolfe 2006), which directly translates into “the land is unoccupied and for the taking” (Navia et al. 2018). As such, the ethnocentric attitude behind European settlement and resource extraction was that Indigenous people were inferior on their scale in society. The colonial Government consistently made amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1867, which served to tighten the grip for the colonial government to have control and access to Indigenous lands, resources, traditions, customs, and even their children.

Contact with European explorers had a devastating impact on Indigenous populations due to both intentional and unintentional introduction of sickness and disease, bounty hunting, and starvation (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005, p. 14). According to Blackstock et al. the estimated demography research suggests Indigenous populations were decreased by 80% starting from initial contact with Europeans in the 1490s to the time of confederation in the 1800s (2005). But according to Wickwire, who researched the James Teit era, the increase of non-Natives in British Columbia is as follows: The expansion of the non-Native population in 1854; there were 1000 non-Natives in British Columbia, by 1901, the population of non-Natives grew to 128,000 that moved to British Columbia. As for the Indian population, in 1853, there were 70,000 Natives in British Columbia. By 1885, there were 28,000 Native people in British Columbia (Wickwire, 1998). With the influx of newcomers, Native people were worried about their "loss of access to resources, economic marginalization, and institutionalized racism." (Wickwire, 1998, p. 209).

To solve the "Indian problem," the Canadian Government sent Indigenous children to Indian Residential School to be assimilated into the dominant Western culture (Sinclair, 2016; Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.54), which resulted in the loss of cultural identities. For instance, according to Crey, "My father was at the school to grow up to be a little white man and to enter

the white world" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.23). To benefit their Indigenous children, some parents and grandparents encouraged their children to speak English so that the children would bypass oppression and racism (St. Denis, 2004).

Current Context of Indigenous Youth in Care

In 2014, Indigenous youth comprised about 5% of the youth population in Canada. However, Indigenous children represent approximately 50% of children in care through either foster care or adoption, which Barker et al. argues is simply an extension of Indian Residential School (2014). An important distinction to make is that most Indigenous students within the Residential school knew they would eventually go back to their communities for the summer holidays and continue learning their traditional culture (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This of course was only if they survived the atrocities and trauma associated with their residential school experiences. To keep children in place, some priests and staff would reprimand students by sticking pins in their tongues to abolish language use before they went home for the holidays. The atrocities was disclosed during the holiday breaks with Indigenous families. Some students did not go home for the holidays due to poverty; that is, because their parents could not afford to come and pick them up due to distance of the reserve from the Indian Residential School. In Victoria, British Columbia, Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) routinely uses "privacy" as a shield to withhold information from Indigenous peoples regarding their children in care (John, 2015, p. 53). Unfortunately, there are many Indigenous youth involved with the child welfare system today who are at risk of losing their cultural identity. Simultaneously, some are even adopted out of the Canadian child welfare system never to return at all (Alston-O'Connor, 2010). There is evidence that Indigenous children in Canada have been adopted out by the Canadian Child Welfare system into the United States in what Navia refers to as "wholesale exportation" whereby children were typically sold for four to ten thousand dollars (2018; Fournier & Crey, 1997). This episode of "wholesale exportation" of Indigenous children started in the late 1950s to the late 1970s which was called the "sixties scoop" (Please find table 1 of the adopted ad for Indigenous children, Stevenson 2017) (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Given the historical and present context that shapes the realities of Indigenous youth today, an important question remains: how can Indigenous youth be unified back to their cultural families and communities to be strong characters with strength-based self-identities?

Furthermore, are cultural families willing to consider new ideas of reality (ontology) and not be prejudiced by Western epistemologies?

Indigenous Definition

Indigenous is used to identify persons of Aboriginal descent. Indigenous people are also known as Indian, Native, and First Nations (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous people feel that their Indian reserves are named accordingly, such as the Nlaka'pamux, which is in the interior of British Columbia. For this document, I will mainly use Indigenous but may use the other terms periodically as found in the literature to which I refer, or that coincides with the historical time period in reference. Indigenous people can be defined as people who have witnessed, have been excluded from, and have survived modernity and imperialism.

Dominant Society

A dominant society is a group of ethnocentric people who use their power and influence over other ethnic groups. Halas and Wilson call the dominant culture “white stream” (p.35) and argues it exists and is established in Canada through ties to Christianity, heterosexism, and patriarchy (2008). The dominant society has been exercised thoroughly in Indigenous people's lives since European contact, eventually resulting in dictating Indigenous people's status on who is allowed to be considered a "status Indian" (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015). Thus, Indigenous strength-based ontology, as a result of paternalistic, oppression is a pivotal key to understanding the social construction of identity in Indigenous youth today.

Ontology

Wilson's (2008) definition of ontology is the theory of nature or existence (p.33). This word comes from the Greek: onto for being, and logos for study. It is the study of being (Chauncy, 2012, Scotland, 2012). Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and the reality of how we assume the world by assumptions (Kovach, 2009). How we examine the world is entirely different from how it exists for each of us. Because we all have different beliefs on ontology, we take it on faith from there. Ontology takes the position that it is concerned and constitutes reality; in other words, it is concerned about what is (Scotland, 2012; Crotty, 1989). The perceptions of researchers need to take note regarding perceptions of how things are and work, especially if it from different cultures can be confusing (Scotland, 2012, p.9). Therefore, ontology is asking, "What is real?" (Wilson, 2008, p.33).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the nature of thinking and knowing (Wilson, 2008). It involves a theory of how we come to attain knowledge (p.33). It has to do with our beliefs about how one might discover knowledge about the world. For example, this could be from the experience of being in the foster home setting or the Indian Residential School. Only that person who experienced attending that school would know it epistemologically. Epistemology asks, "How do I know what is real?" (Wilson, p.33).

Axiology

Axiology is the study of ethics and morals that guide knowledge and judgement in the search for what is considered worthy or of value (Wilson, 2008). For one to better understand ontology, is to review and reflect on what knowledge is worth seeking (p. 34). If proficiency itself is the ultimate goal, then going through any means of obtaining that end may be justified. If reality is fluid and the objective of the research is to change and improve this reality, then other ethical principles must be applied (Wilson, 2008). Axiology is thus asking, "What part of this reality is worth finding out more about?" and how can we use knowledge ethically, and how will it be used? (Wilson, 2008). In the Indigenous axiological approach, as we are stewards of the land: it is our responsibility to look after it.

Aged-out Youth

Aged out youth are Children of the Ministry, who have reached the age of 19 and are starting the transition out of the Ministry, to adulthood (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2020).

Methodology

Methodology asks, "What procedure can we use to acquire knowledge? It is a plan of action with tools and techniques of research. It asks questions of why, what, from where, when, and how data is collected (Scotland 2012). It is how knowledge is gained through gathering and finding things out through research. Therefore, methodology asks, "How do I find out more about reality? (Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous youth experiences

Many Indigenous youths are at a loss once they leave the Child Welfare System. To regain their identities, it is helpful if they could reconnect and reunify back to their cultural families and community. The objective of this study is to explore the experiences of aged-out

youth while they are in foster care. Furthermore, to find out and understand how they fare when they eventually return to their reserve or even why many end up homeless. The paper will follow a timeframe beginning when Indigenous children are in Residential School before shifting to a focus on government foster homes, which continued to take over the paternal responsibility duty of being parents to Indigenous children. The nationality groups that I will be focussing on will be Indigenous youth who experience inclusion and exclusion since exiting out of the Child Welfare System. The literature used will be primarily drawn from Canadian content.

The sources gathered are from the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and The University of the Fraser Valley library systems. The library systems from EBSCO AND JSTOR data electronically online were accessible for journals, books, and articles.

The main words used in those systems were "Indigenous Aged-Out Youth," and "Indigenous Child Welfare." In addition, relevant Indigenous Canadian youth information from the United States was examined if the article had relevant information content regarding adoption.

The years of publication for the sources were significant, so the author tried to keep articles and journals current from ten years backward. Sometimes this was not always possible, so, therefore, older articles were considered. The author also looked for Indigenous sources with experiences with the Indian Residential School era, such as Ernie Crey (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The primary province of interest was British Columbia. However, if the author could not find relevant literature: articles and journals from across Canada were reviewed. This includes primarily searching for peer-reviewed articles. The author was also able to access and borrow books from Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

The methodology information gathered was used for the literature and thematic analysis in this paper. Other ways that the author researched for information was through the quantitative and qualitative approaches that facilitators and researchers use including techniques such as interviews, public forums, presentations, group healing circles, which were through community gatherings. Researchers used qualitative and quantitative methods for different interactions for people or reports. Information gathering was found through qualitative approaches to be successful from First Nations youth was the best way to collect information through in-depth interviews, focus groups, community gatherings, and presentations. All this information went

back to a strength-based identity so that Indigenous youth could be reunified and reconnected back to their culture and community.

Historical Context and Literature Review

The following literature review will analyze the Canadian Federal System to find out ways to empower Indigenous youth/adults to reconnect back to their reserves and cultural identities. In 1820, the colonial Government requested that the "Indian problem" be neutralized and Indigenous peoples be moved off their traditional lands to make way for the incoming settlers (Sinclair, 2016; Episteneu, 2009; Fournier & Crey, 1997). However, the "Indian problem" did not go away as expected. Still, the colonial Government's minds were percolating to finding a solution to gain access to the Indigenous lands that were considered *Terra Nullius*, which poses that seemingly empty land is open for the taking (Navia et al. 2018; Wilson, 2008). This complicity of the mind introduced the beginnings of the *Indian Act* of 1876 (Bennett et al. 2005). This piece of legislature, which is still in place today, made a law that all Indigenous children are legal wards of the Crown and would be civilized to be like white people to fit into mainstream society (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Eventually, against their will, Indigenous people were relocated by the Government to small tracts of mostly unproductive lands (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Wickwire, 2000) called Indian reserves. The Government kept the prime spaces for European settlement, development, and access to extract and develop the resources for mainstream Euro society. From the Indigenous perspective, an axiological approach asks how can one own the land, water, air, resources as we are all here to look after mother earth? (Furtwangler, 1997). When mainstream society came into this new untouched land and called it Canada, the Europeans fought amongst themselves on who owned the rights for carving up and conquering vast sects of land. In contrast, before colonialism, Indigenous perspectives had traditionally maintained a symbolic connection to their lands, water, air, and natural ways of life because the environmental grounds looked after them providing subsistence, medicines, and places for prayer in the forests and streams.

What is the reality (ontology) of taking Indian people's lands, children, and identity? Even at this early stage in history, we ask, "Are people selfish?", "Do they know of the consequences of what they were doing?" "How can they act atrociously?" "How can they live with themselves subconsciously?"

By 1846, the new Canadian Government met and fully committed itself to open Indian Residential Schools for Indigenous children (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Wolfe, 2006). The ideology behind the residential schools was to civilize and assimilate Indigenous people to fit into mainstream society (Sinclair, 2007; Milloy, 1999; Miller, 1996). Decades later, the "wardship was the legal arm of the assimilate-genocide policy of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and nations "was found to be the reality" (Sinclair, 2016).

In their quest for a place to put Indigenous children so that assimilation can be processed, John A. Macdonald discoursed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States of America. After consultation with a representative of the U.S.A., Canadian Prime Minister John A. MacDonald decided to use the Industrial School model to teach agriculture and trade instruction for boys and domestic training for girls (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.55). Collaboratively, the churches and Government worked together in the best interest of settling "the Indian problem" through Industrial schools (p. 54). After attempting to eradicate the "Indian problem," the new country was carved up under a terminology called *Terra Nullius* by the colonial powers in coordination with the churches (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The authorities were primarily the Government in conjunction with the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Protestant churches who launched Residential institutes right across Canada (p.54). The definition of *Terra Nullius* is "empty lands for the taking" (Navia et al., 2018; Wilson, 2008; Fournier & Crey, 1997). In essence, the concept of *Terra nullius* adopts an ontological assumption in the same manner regarding Indigenous children who are wards of the Crown (Navia et al. 2018). The churches built these institutions called boarding schools on the *Terra nullius* lands, eventually calling them Indian Residential Schools. First, the Government called the residences "industrial schools" with meager academic instruction by agriculture and domestic training to equip mainstream society with a servant class.

The ideology of subordination instruction was adopted from the United States of American system (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.55). According to the United Nations, the Indian Residential School and subsequently the Child Welfare System was an act of genocide (Navia et al. 2018; Blackstock, 2009; Kimmelman, 1985). Indigenous children were left to endure numerous devastating effects during the rest of their life such as loss of identity of who they are, where they come from, the loss of language, and their axiology of self. For clarity and consistency, Indigenous children will be used interchangeably with First Nations, Aboriginal,

and Indian in this paper. This research focusses on the significance of Indigenous aged out youth. Despite the way our children have been referred to in media, in government reports and from the mouths of strangers it is vital to understand youth who have emerged from the Child Welfare System because they are people too.

Most Indigenous aged out youth are not prepared to face the challenges associated with the pivotal transition in life when they turn nineteen years old or younger while in Child Welfare Care. Some Indigenous youth leave the Child Welfare System at an earlier age of sixteen years. Their epistemology of what they know is questionable of how do they know what they know? In turn, who do they believe in society, and how do they fit in if they face alienation when they emerge into diverse communities and transition into a mainstream society based on white ethnocentric culture? For Indigenous people, when they go out into the ethnocentric mainstream, gradually, some subsume into that culture. Then again, many more Indigenous aged out youths who do not know their Indigenous identity, their demeanor of themselves is of confusion of who they are supposed to be in conjunction with how they are accepted. This confusion typically happens when they exit the foster homes or institutions. Are they white people with brown skins who have confused thoughts of which society they belong too? Therefore, epistemologically, how do they know what they know? Where did they get their experience, and whose knowledge should they believe? Should they believe in the ethnocentric society or their unknown Indigenous society?

The threshold of this paper is dealing with Indigenous aged out youth who feel disconnected from their Indian reserves as many of them experience alienation, substance abuse, and homelessness. Many of these Indigenous aged out youth have no place to go. In other words, they want the same thing all Canadians' desire: to belong to a society where they feel inclusiveness. As it is, when they were apprehended, they belonged to a community that had their own language, shared history, and traditional methods towards sustainability and existed on their own. This sustainability and subsistence were going out hunting, fishing, and learning about what kinds of medicines to use along with berries and other edible foods for a healthy diet (Muckle, 2002; Turner et al. 1990). It is not uncommon for Indigenous children to be taken care of by a large family structure, such as their grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and the community (Muckle, 2002).

History of Child Apprehension:

The ideology behind the residential school system was to "civilize" Aboriginal people through their children as they are assimilated into the hegemonic mainstream society (Milloy, 1999; Miller, 1996; Sinclair, 2007). All Indigenous children were mandated to attend industrial or residential schools between the ages of 5-15 years as they were considered legal wards of the Dominion Crown (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.54; Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). These apprehended children were treated by the Child Welfare System as *Terra Nullius* as that they are considered wards of the ethnocentric Crown (Navia et al. 2018). In the era of New Canada and the confederation of the *Indian Act*, 1876, the colonial Government treated Indigenous people and children indifferently; consequently, this is because the mainstream colonial Government thought them to be "possessing barely human status" (Wilson, 2008, p.45). The *British North American Act* constituted and charged the new colonial Canadian Government that Indian children had a right to education (p.54). The primary objective of assimilation was to "take the Indian out of the child" to subsume into mainstream society (Okanagan Alliance, 2018; Blackstock & Trocme, 2005; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Kimelman, 1985).

In 1857, the first Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia (B.C.) was built at Metlakatla (Northern B.C.) and another in the Fraser Valley (St. Mary's) (Fournier, 1997, p.54). By 1896, another forty-five residential schools were built across Canada after the success of the B.C. model in 1857. Indigenous parents and Chief and Councils were not consulted when their Indigenous children were apprehended and placed in Indian Residential schools and later foster care homes (Navia et al.2018). In some cases, it was typical for social workers to go into reserve homes during the sixties scoop to pick up Indigenous children for foster care placements when the Indigenous parents were not present (Navia et al. 2018, p. 154).

If Indigenous parents resisted sending or allowing their children to attend residential school, Indian agents hired by the Government would withhold food rations from them (Fournier & Crey, 1997; *Indian Act*, 1876). Still, when Indigenous parents resisted sending their children to residential school, they were arrested and put into jail. The Federal Government hired or appointed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and special constables, schoolteachers for duty to go onto Indian reserves to enforce Indigenous children to attend Indian Residential Schools. These individuals with similar powers as those of a Peace Officer would come from a variety of backgrounds including RCMP, school teachers, and special constables appointed for police duty

on a reserve, and even some chiefs had authorization by the superintendent (*Indian Act*, 1867, 1982). These individuals had the authority to go onto Indian reserves and remove children to attend the residential schools.

In total, there were 139 Indian Residential Schools between 1831 -1996 (Fournier & Crey, 1997). From 1897 onwards, the expansion of Indian Residential Schools spread right across Canada; as a result, generations of Indigenous people would revolve through those doors. In total, 150,000 Indigenous children attended Indian Residential Schools across the country (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2018). I was one of those Indigenous children along with my older and younger siblings. Such large scale assimilation policy had detrimental impacts on the cultural identity of those who attended and the generations that followed as they continue to face oppressive colonization through displacement, cultural domination, and systematic violence (Baskin & Sinclair 2015, p.3).

Many Indigenous parents faced an ontological and epistemological crisis as they lived with questions around their worthiness in child rearing given their parental role and responsibility was abrogated under the ethnocentric view that they were unfit as parents (French, 1967: 21).

In British Columbia, the MCFD maliciously holds "privacy" information away from Indigenous parents and Chief and Councils under Children in Care Orders (John, 2015). Currently, MCFD is not accountable to First Nations bands considering apprehended children. Indigenous parents are not heard from or offered social services such as preventive parenting skill development. By having their children apprehended, Indigenous parents were deprived of the parental role and responsibilities that come with creating a close family bond and establishing a deep cultural connection. This prohibits the development of a strong cultural identity where an Indigenous youth knows who they are and where their knowledge about the world around comes from (John, 2015, p.55). The Indigenous parents were "considered ignorant, superstitious and helpless" as they were deemed physically, mentally, and morally...unfit to bear such a complete metamorphosis" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 54). That is, the Indigenous adults were considered incapable and incompetent to be tasked with the role of assimilating their children into a Euro-Western world view which was considered ethnocentrically superior at the time. Euro-Western Canadians carry an attitude that their nationality is more important in contrast to Indigenous people who are considered pagans, uncivilized, and are a lost cause.

The 1950s brought about an era where Indian Agents were hired by the Canadian Government to enlist children in the schools which was used as “alternative parenting institutions rather than educational facilities” (Fournier & Crey, p.82). The Indian agents who were acting in the role of social workers at the time applied inappropriate judgments that today are viewed as deceptive and racist (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The Indian agents were racially motivated as they deceptively applied inappropriate judgments against Indigenous parents. For example, children who were orphans and lived with relatives or their grandparents and/or lived in impoverished conditions was evidence enough to apprehend (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.82). The residential schools were convenient as alternative foster boarding homes for Indigenous children when education was not considered essential (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Over time, these children experienced atrocities that would go on to establish cycles of generational trauma severely impacting both their own lives as well as those of their descendants. The sexual, physical, spiritual, and emotional abuses that many experienced aimed to sever these individuals from the cultural identity and forever traumatize them into adulthood (John, 2015; Fournier & Crey, 1997; RCAP, 1996; Dussault, 1996).

When Indigenous aged out youth exited the Indian Residential School, they were poorly educated, angry, abused strangers who had no parenting skills (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Cinderina Williams, who wrote a study submitted to RCAP in 1994, argued that when these individuals returned to their reserves, "they were aliens...who formed no bonds with their families" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.82-83).

Thematic Analysis

What is Oppression?

The definition of oppression is subjugation, abuse, brutality, cruelty, injury, injustice, maltreatment, persecution, subjection, and tyranny (Breslin et al. 2016). This form of subjugation and persecution can be found within policies enacted against individuals or a group of people because of their culture or affiliation (Baines, 2017). First Nations are a culture of peoples who have historically faced subordination, discrimination, and racism through colonization. They face oppression by ethnocentric people who consider their own beliefs, values, and ways of life are superior to, and desirable than others (Bennett et al. 2005). The colonial relationship between First Nations people has historically been fraught with policies that support marginalization and

institutionalization; and the placement of children in foster care through the Child Welfare System is no exception.

Due to the stringent laws made for Indigenous people, the Indigenous people are being "made poor, and more and more restricted to their small and inadequate reservations" (Wickwire, 1998, p.215). This oppression is to empower and privilege the oppressor (The Anti-Oppression, n/d; Sinclair, 2017). The lives of First Nations people living on Indian reserves were so prevalently economically impoverished that if the United Nations Human Development Index were applied, they would rank 79th and 80th in the world (Bennett et al. 2005). Ironically, Canada is considered to be one of the finest countries in the world to live in (p.7). Unfortunately, this high quality of life is not extended to the lives of First Nations peoples.

What is Anti-Oppression?

Anti-oppression draws on several critical theories to explain how in which the profession of social work ethically practices through a framework of policies and procedures that are meant to foster equity, fairness, and social justice (Baines, 2017). The Anti-Oppression network seeks to recognize the oppression that exists in our society and attempts to mitigate its effects and eventually equalize the power imbalance in our communities (The Anti-Oppression, n/d). The following sections will review theories that have ongoing tensions as well as discuss insights.

Strength-based

The strength-based approach emphasizes an Indigenous youth's self-determination and strength as they face forces of adversity and oppression. When Indigenous youth do not fit in with biological families, communities, and cultures; then, where do they go? Most aged-out Indigenous youth tend to go back to where they feel comfortable, with peers, or find others like themselves. Unfortunately, for many aged-out Indigenous youth, this leads to the dysfunctional relationships associations which leads to homelessness, suicides and drug overdoses (Sinclair, 2007).

Since epistemology is the theory of knowledge, including assumptions about how we come to know what we know, Indigenous youth learn through socially constructed realities that are created from experience where they feel they are of a lower class in society. Thus, they must be concerned about their existence and validity (ontology) as they try to figure out what is their reality and what could be knowable from the Indigenous perspective. As a result, the ontology of reality of who they are once they are independent, Indigenous aged out youth are searching to

find out more about their origins; thus, they ask and ponder, “What is reality and where do I come from?”

For Indigenous aged out youth to gain strength, it is significant that they reach out for encouragement and empowerment from their mentors, support workers, and elders for resources, assistance, inclusion, and love (Saleebey, 1996). At the very core of developing strength, Indigenous youth must form healthy relationships with individuals who genuinely care for them. These individuals need not necessarily be a relative but simply a steadfast caring adult who helps them to move forward in life (Saleebey, 1996, p. 300).

However, history has clearly demonstrated that the lack of support and encouragement through the development of positive relationships with family and community can have detrimental impacts on the development of Indigenous aged out youth. The following section will detail this impact on Indigenous youth in Residential schools or foster homes who do not have essential life skills, parenting skills, and did not know how to transition into mainstream society once released from government care.

Interpretivism

Decades of colonialism upon multiple generations of Indigenous children has fractured and fragmented their cultural identity to the point where it severely impacted their ability to become parents themselves. For example, many showed signs of abrogating responsibility as parents" as the residential school system provided a carefree way of living without children" (French, 1967; Ing, 1992, p. 17). On the other hand, some Indigenous parents took an authoritarian approach with their children whereby they set rigid standards and strict expectations which they had previously learned from the authoritative nuns and staff at the Indian Residential schools.

From an axiological perspective, Indigenous children who grew up to be parents tended to approach parenting in a similar fashion as to what they grew up with. Some Indigenous children were whipped, strapped, and inflicted harsh discipline in Residential School while other children were ignored, neglected, and essentially forgotten (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Indian Residential School survivors did not receive tutelage on life skills or parenting skills that otherwise would have fostered their independence. They were isolated from their siblings so that bonding and inclusion could not flourish. Therefore, they did not receive nurturing or feel cared for; hence, their children were not nurtured or cared for, and the cycle continued where the Child

Welfare System takes over as the parent. As a result, the revolving cycle continues with Indigenous children in care. What follows next is the consequences that fall upon an Indigenous person being in the Indian Residential Schools or the Child Welfare System; both of which become responsible for the loss of their cultural self-identity of who they are when they return home on reserves.

Indigenous Self-Identity

One of the biggest obstacles that Indigenous youth experience is self-identity. Since most Indigenous youth are in Euro-Canadian foster homes as young children, they experience living in another culture. They live in the Euro-Canadian way of life with its values, which are ethnocentric in their minds with issues of sense of identity and loss of sense of place (Carriere, 2010). Several research projects have focused on the concerns of what cross-cultural adoption does to the adoptees psychological being of who they are ---loss of identity is always the core concern, as it is a significant loss of who you are (Blackstock, 2009; Blackstock et al. 2005; Carriere, 2007; Sinclair, 2009).

Indigenous Values

Indigenous cultural values and the development of identity is strongly tied to the ability to speak one's own language and having the opportunity to learn about stories, traditions, and participate in a myriad of spiritual practices (Scw'exmx Child & Family Services 2018, p. 48).

Language

Unfortunately, Indigenous language is continually eroding (St. Denis, 2004, p.38). The distinct use of different First Nations language has been used to maintain ancestral relationships with tribes. In British Columbia, linguists concur that there are eight different families with eight different dialects of First Nations languages that are in existence today which are the Algonquin, Athapaskan, Haida, Ktunsa, Salishan, Tsimshian, Tlingit and Wakashan (Muckle, 2002). Most linguists agree that about thirty First Nations languages have survived. In the Nicola Valley, there are two languages spoken which is the Nlaka'pamux (Thompson) and the Syilx (Okanagan) (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2018; Muckle, 2002). Stories are told to children in these languages for discipline, hunting and fishing and for everyday living. It is found that First Nations language is hard to learn because in order to use the language, it must be used daily with others who are fluent in that language. For Indigenous aged out youth, they are at a loss of the

language if they do not try to learn the language by staying on Indian reserves and participating in language classes and continually using it with others in the community.

Cultural practices

Spiritual and cultural practices such as attending a sweat lodge or being present at a pow-wow or sun dance can help Indigenous youth to generate a world view created by ontological and epistemological perspectives based on Indigenous values. Even participating in memorable ceremonies for names and welcoming new babies into the community or participating in end of life care practices truly serve to ground an individual as they learn about who they are and where they come from. Indigenous values are also instilled into the next generation through consuming traditional foods such as s'cewen (wind-dried fish) and other edible seasonal foods. There is also great significant, and value passed on through the teaching about ecology and how everything in nature is connected. As a result, Indigenous values promote a stewardship and responsibility to look after mother earth. Indigenous values are also taught through cultural activities include learning how to bead or even pick herbs and medicines (St. Denis, 2004, p. 35).

Indigenous culture also puts value in allowing one's hair to grow long and being proud of heritage and lineage. Unfortunately, Indigenous youth had their hair cut short when they entered Residential school and learning about cultural heritage was purposely ignored in any curriculum (St. Denis, 2004, p. 40). As a result, Indigenous youth were systematically distanced from their own cultural values and identity.

Family

In the patriarchal system, Indigenous men were considered the heads of the household and provided for their families. The women were the homemakers, but also the backbone of their husbands and taught their children and grandchildren (Monture-Angus, 1998). According to Fournier, the grandmother was always teaching the children (1997). She would cook wonderful things and tell them why it is so important to have respect for everything on earth that feeds them. From the time they were incredibly young, she would take them to all the feasts in the village, and carefully teach them the hereditary clan systems of their people, how the chiefs got their titles and territories. Some grandmothers were important chiefs; as their grandfathers had been a big chief in the house of Delgamuukw (Fournier & Crey, p. 66). The ethnocentric Government set up Indigenous men to be the patriarchal figure in their homes and to not listen to women. Women were considered not significant. Since women were considered the backbone of

their Indigenous communities; this strength was frowned upon when colonialism moved in (Persky, 1998).

In contemporary times, Indigenous women have educated themselves and are often now seen as the main heads of the household as they frequently become the breadwinners that bring home the groceries and pay the bills. Thus, men who had attended Residential school begin to feel devalued and dismissed as they carry around the baggage of unhealed sexual and physical abuse. Aboriginal men begin to adopt their oppressors' values and become oppressors themselves," said a Dene man, "because of the resulting self-hate and self-shame, we start hurting our people" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.145).

Indigenous food

The introduction of non-Indigenous habits and foods is instilled and ingrained in Indigenous children, upon arrival into the foster home (Episkenew, 2009). In fact, the cultural food menu of the Indigenous child is not taken into consideration at all (Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010). The Indigenous child is used to consuming dried fish called s'cewen, smoked or canned, deer meat, wild mushrooms, berries, or bannock (John, 2015). Even bannock is not an original First Nation food source. Bannock is consumed a lot, just like deep fried potato chips, which are typically a staple snack often consumed by mainstream society. Interestingly, contemporary bannock is from the Scottish folks and is a part of colonialism that First Nations people adopted when the Hudson Bay fur traders came in the 18th and 19th centuries (Colombo, 2006).

The ontology theory from the social worker's perspective is that it cannot be possible to have a proper diet from wild animals and foods, which First Nations depend on for subsistence. However, the diets of First Nations differ from the social worker's view. First Nations perspectives differ regarding childcare and the foods that they consume. For instance, before colonialism, Indigenous people came from a Strength-based Approach regarding their children. Indigenous children experienced gathering wild foods, medicines when they went out with their parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and community. The Indigenous people were gatherers of game, wild edible foods, and medicines. Diabetes was not an issue or heard off during those times.

The Sixties Scoop

Beginning in the 1960s, many Indigenous children were apprehended by the Government found themselves being "scooped" out of their communities and away from their families into

non-Indigenous foster homes (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Blackstock et al. 2005). This was no accident. Instead it was part of a strategic plan to continue the relentless effort to address the “Indian problem” to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstreams society. This strategy became known as the Sixties Scoop and it resulted in further dismantling of the Indigenous cultural identity. The definition of foster homes can be transitional homes, group homes, institutions, hospitals, child and mental health services, addictions facilities, custody centers, youth agreements and extended family placements (Ziemann, 2019, p.7). Though Indigenous youth are "scooped up" into care under the ethnocentric guise that it is in their best interest, Social Workers and foster parents fail to teach Indigenous children about their culture which has serious implications for the development of their ontological and epistemological beliefs and values. In MCFD practice, the culture of Indigenous children is not a priority while in care (Rutman et al. 2007, p. 8). Ironically, while MCFD's policy mandate is to respect and adhere to "the importance of preserving a child's cultural identity," which is seldom used in actual practice (Child Protection and the Ministry, 2014, p. 8).

Despite the Government's commitment to the preservation of Indigenous cultural identity, their policies, programs, and priorities have gaps that need to be re-examined or reassessed. For example, in the 1990s the federal government had lifted a moratorium on Delegated First Nations agencies to take responsibility of their own child care on reserves but at a price against children on reserves (Blackstock, 2005,p.16). In reality, the Delegated First Nations agencies receive on average 22% less for expenditures compared to provincial funds for non-aboriginal children in care (Blackstock, 2016). As for successful transition out of care into adulthood, the government needs to make sure youth learn about certain policies that are for their use such as life skill development, and to integrate and collaborate with their community or individual band (Federations of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010). Other consequences that show up in the lives of Indigenous aged out youth have been detrimental is having no structure in their lives; thus, some Indigenous foster youth end up in jail, which carries on is discussed next.

Foster home shuffling

Navia (2018) shares a story of a female foster youth who had been in care since a young age. Despite feelings of abandonment by her mother, she eventually learned forgiveness through a shared understanding based on a socially constructed reality. In fact, the youth's mother had also been in the child welfare system and was bounced around in about fifty foster homes

(Navia, 2018). This theme of shuffling is common. In British Columbia, 11.0% of Indigenous children in care had moved two or more times (MCFD, 2020). In the case of Alex Gervais, he had moved seventeen times in eleven years. He was shuffled through 12 placements in just two and a half years, while he was in elementary school (Morgan, 2017). He was an Indigenous youth with disabilities who was placed in various group homes, and occasionally hotels. Sadly, that is where Alex jumped to his death of his fourth floor Super 8 hotel room in Abbotsford, British Columbia (Morgan, 2017). Unfortunately, according to Morgan, data is only kept only for the first year when a child enters into the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD); hence, there is no data for the long term of how many times a child moves (2017). It is well known that Indigenous youth exit out of the Child Welfare System before they turn nineteen. They run away when they do not feel wanted and end up in unplanned dysfunctional relationships, experiencing drugs and alcohol to fit in. Thus, the revolving cycle carries on for women who have children. In addition, the state of homelessness is experienced for most if they do not reunify back to their communities.

Incarceration

Despite the Government's claim to promote the best interests of the child and the preservation of cultural identity, the reality is that many Indigenous aged out youth end up on the streets while others makes up a disproportionate group within the criminal justice system. In fact, Indigenous people hold the highest percentage of incarceration rates per capita despite only comprising only a small fraction of the total population (Zinger 2017). According to Jonson-Reid et al., many Indigenous aged out youths end up incarcerated in youth detentions for risky behaviors associated with developmental stage (2003). These Indigenous youths are often locked away in prisons or Youth detention centers away from the support of their parents or the reaches of MCFD; Jones & Kruk point out that it is well-known Indigenous youth are twice more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous youth to be incarcerated as an alternative means to deal with them (2005, p.406).

Inequity

The over-representation of Indigenous youth in the child welfare system has been thoroughly studied, documented, and discussed in academic, public, and political spheres. Despite this being considered common political and public knowledge, little has been done to actually address the longstanding systemic problem associated with this inequity. However, a

recurrent culprit that seems to perpetuate the issue is the “inequities in child welfare funding on reserves” (Blackstock 2013, McDonald & Ladd, et al. 2000).

Research indicates that there are few government-funded programs in Canada to help adoptees discover who they are, and little repatriation assistance if they are fortunate enough to locate their First Nation of a or their birth families (Fournier & Crey, p. 91). Furthermore, there are significant gaps and inequities that exist within many government policies, programs which need to be re-examined or reassessed (Blackstock et al. 2005). For instance, some policies and procedures are helpful, but some hinder successful transitions from care (Rutman et al. 2007, p.2). There was retaliation by activists who worked hard to expose abysmal discrimination of substantiated financial differences between the Ministry for Children and Family Development and Delegated First Nations Child and Family Development (Blackstock et al., 2005). Both Aboriginal bands and activists have warned that they cannot take over social services without adequate financing (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 92). Cindy Blackstock addressed the inequities of funding of First Nations Delegated Authorities receive compared to that of the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development (BC). First Nations activists need to be understood and heard; consequently, there will be public media, “where media exposure could stir concern around transparency and accountability of government officials regarding the care provided to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth” (Nadia et al., p.1).

The public will grasp the issues of financial shortfalls that Aboriginal Delegated Agencies receive compared to MCFD (Blackstock, 2016). The shortfall of funds towards a disadvantaged marginalized group will not look good for the government, who has to keep governmental facade for election time.

There is also a definite and consistent gap between the collaboration efforts of Delegated Indigenous Agencies and their mainstream Child Welfare counterparts. Repatriation work is chronically underfunded. Hall notes that no aboriginal reunification program in any province of Canada has ever received federal funding. "It's amazing that the Canadian government still refuses to be held accountable for its policy to separate thousands and thousands of aboriginal children from their families," Hall says (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.109).

Health Care

The research points out that there is chronic underfunding of First Nations Health Authorities both on reserve and off including rural and urban settings (MacDonald et al. 2000).

There is a lack of resources that is needed on reserves but the agencies need to reach out to the communities at the grass roots level of exactly what is needed such as professional counselling, parenting workshops for mothers, information sessions about the hazards of alcoholism and drugs. This needs to be done in a culturally sensitive way where there is the right atmosphere and food. Also, the safety issue of what kind of people can be in the group. Clients may have to travel out of the community to access sensitive issues because if there are perpetrators in community.

Additionally, Indigenous organizations that are struggling with “shortfalls and outright gaps” to assist Indigenous homeless youth and people that need accessible services such as therapists, consultants, and lawyers (Fournier & Crey, p. 109).

It remains discovered that aboriginal mothers of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects (FAS/FAE) children have a hard time accessing health services for their disabled children and tend to surrender their children in care for medical purposes. On reserves, there is a lack of support to assist these mothers. For Indigenous birth mothers to be successful, there is a great need for resources and services to be put in place such as addictions training, parental training, respite care, and educational assistance that non-Indigenous mothers receive (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

The Standing Committee on Health studies issues that relate to Health Canada, including bills and regulations. It has oversight of four health-related agencies, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Public Health Agency of Canada. It is the watchdog of what is allowable in the best interest of Canadians. The Standing Committee on Health Issues also recommended mandatory warning labels on liquor bottles and in bars, along with a legislated ban on glamorous “lifestyle advertising” of liquor (Fournier et al. 1997).

Unfortunately, powerful liquor corporations and lobbyist have been successful in backhanding all attempts by politicians, health professionals of not labeling alcoholic beverages (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Despite this political setback, Aboriginals and Activists continue to advocate to have alcoholic products described as hazardous to the health of unborn babies. Interestingly, Canada is the only country that does not label alcohol products as dangerous to unborn babies. In comparison, many other Western countries including the United States, Mexico, Scandinavia, and Columbia all label their alcohol beverage containers with a warning

towards pregnant women and their fetuses (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.182). Still, Canada refuses to adhere to warning labels for pregnant women (p.183).

Due to a lack of grief counseling services or substance use treatment options, many mothers had their infants apprehended in the hospital; therefore, within a year, they were back to deliver another FAS/FAE baby to replace the first child (Fournier & Crey, p.199). One mother said, “We drank with no knowledge of what we were doing to our children” (p.203). The teaching of the effects of alcoholism on fetuses could have prevented mothers from consuming alcohol if liquor bottles had hazardous warning labels.

Despite the Federal Government having a fiduciary and financial responsibilities for the welfare of Indigenous peoples, they did not address funding for programs needed but gave piecemeal parts in programs for thousands of affected children of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 182). For example, some First Nations are proving they can do a better job than Ottawa in looking after their people such as having intervention strategies of banning alcohol in their isolated reserves and taking control of their lives honorably (Lucas et al. 2004). As another example, in one Indigenous community in the Shuswap called Alkali Lake, there were rapid cases of alcoholism in that reserve which had 100% of people who drank to excess. This was indeed a crippling rate of alcoholism and dysfunction. This small Indigenous Cariboo community started a journey of community sobriety. It started with one child who was under the care of her mother, Phyllis Chelsea to stop the alcoholism. The child refused to come home as she was terrified by her parent’s drinking (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Since then, that community has been abstaining from alcohol and has become an inspiration to countless individuals and communities facing the same struggles throughout the world (Lucas et al. 2004).

Also, Indigenous people can look after their own regarding transportation. Transportation is an issue for remote reserves in regarding accessibility to health services. Indigenous people in remote areas have difficulty with inadequate medical travel funds as compared to Indigenous peoples living in urban areas. There is no funding for transportation to Sunny Hill Children’s Health Centre in Vancouver for diagnosis, even though Aboriginal people are supposed to be eligible through First Nations Health. The Ktunaxa band from West Kootenays did not wait for a formal medical diagnosis before intervening (Fournier et al. 1997: 195). They went out of their way and fundraised and sent that one little boy to distant urban appointment to be diagnosed. The

doctor said he had: Classic FAS, behavioral problems, learning difficulties, an attachment disorder, and Tourette's syndrome. In addition, according to Blackstock, some Indigenous communities have systems in place that prevent youth suicides that is so effective that suicides are substantially lower than non-Indigenous communities (2009).

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples calls for a twenty-year commitment to the renewal of the relationship between Canada and Aboriginal people, which went astray. It can be argued that some members of the Federal government never intended to renew relationships (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.217). Upon retirement in 1997, former federal Indian Affairs minister Ron Irwin remarked that he did not see the need for a significant restructuring of government relations with Aboriginal people.

Poverty

Surprisingly, Indigenous youth are typically not placed into foster care due to abuse. Rather, many find themselves involved in the Child Welfare system because of low income, inadequate housing, substance use, water and sanitation issues, and food scarcity (Trocme et al. 2004). All of these social determinants are directly connected to the issue of poverty. Sinha et al. relates these conditions as an inaccessibility of appropriate care from mainstream societies' perspectives (2011). In other words, nobody seems to care, children are more likely to be placed in care due to being Indigenous and living in poverty. According to Blackstock et al., 63% of Aboriginal families in Manitoba live below the poverty line and 53% of Aboriginal children live below the poverty line nationally (2005, p. 24).

Critical Analysis Review

In the following critical analysis section, the author will be elaborating on the axiology associated with the understanding of experiences of Indigenous youth aging out of the Child Welfare System. First, the section will discuss the theoretical underpinnings that attempt to explain why Indigenous youth are in care compared to non-Indigenous youth and the fiduciary responsibilities of Government towards First Nations peoples. Second, the paper will analyze the research findings regarding the over-representation of Indigenous youth in care and the impacts of underfunded Aboriginal Delegated Agencies as it relates to the social construction of Indigenous identity of those aging out of care. The analysis proceeds to demonstrate how Indigenous youth can indeed look after their children when preventative measures are put in place by Indigenous services. Thirdly, there will be an examination behind the historical context

of what social workers know (and do not know) about Indigenous peoples as it relates to the experiences and outcomes of Indigenous people going through the Indian Residential School. For instance, they know that Indigenous people are the fiduciary responsibility of the Crown (Fournier & Crey, 1997) and over-represent the Child Welfare System since the Indian Residential School era. Fourth, the critical analysis will converse about double-standards where other groups receive preferential treatment compared to Indigenous peoples. The theory of social construction helps to explain the critical analysis as it considers how reality is constructed based on power and influence of the colonizer versus those who are being colonized. These social constructions by those who wield power in society are based on shared or contradictory ontological understandings (Baines, 2017). For example, Indigenous Delegated Agencies are underfunded compared to non-Indigenous agencies; therefore, Indigenous agencies receive inadequate access to financial resources (Blackstock, 2005). And finally, the analysis highlights the important fact that today there are limited services or systematic and oppressive barriers facing Indigenous peoples that limits their equal and equitable participation in society. The research also identifies the important question as to why there is a lack of information about Indigenous aged out youth when they exit the Child Welfare system. The placements of Indigenous youth with Indigenous families are not favored; therefore, research needs to analyze why Indigenous homes are not available. The cultural aspects need to be put into place even though MCFD states in their policy that the preference of traditional ethnic integrity is significant for Indigenous youth.

Theoretical Approach

This section comes from a social constructionist perspective. It is the theory that human beings all share knowledge (epistemology), that bases itself on sharing and changing, as reality can be “understood to be a reflection of both external and internal constructed ways of cognition” (Baines, 2017; Stepney, 2009). On a theoretical level of understanding, Indigenous youth aging out of the Child Welfare system need assurance that their attempts at asking questions and seeking knowledge about their cultural identity are prioritized (e.g. when they ask about their biological parent’s experience within the Child Welfare System and Indian Residential Schools).

Society cannot assume that the aged-out Indigenous youth have participated in discussions about their cultural identity. They need opportunities and spaces created whereby

they can unpack the numerous injustices that they may have faced themselves as well as those vicariously experienced through their parent's traumas (Navia, 2018). Many Indigenous parents have gone through the Child Welfare System themselves or were products of the intergenerational experience resulting from the Indian Residential School system. From an ontological and epistemological perspective, these Indigenous aged out youth need to know the broader context and complex history of why they ended up in the Child Welfare system in the first place.

Prior to attempts at colonization, Indigenous children and youth were typically cared for by extended family members such as the grandmother, aunts, uncles, and the community. It was a family and community affair when they went out fishing in the summertime (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Youth were shown and taught how to set up fishing equipment by their fathers and uncles to catch, clean and prepare fish alongside their parents and relatives (Muckle, 2002). It was a shared experience that served to construct a strong Indigenous identity that is grounded in custom and tradition. In this way, Indigenous children were able to stay in their homes and community even if the parents went off the reserve for employment or were not able to care for their children or youth. As for food, when the men went hunting, all the animal was utilized, and nothing went to waste. The animal hide was scrapped and tanned for clothing, regalias, and drums. However, when colonialism began to dismantle the Indigenous cultural identity, ethnocentric axiology prohibited many of these values and beliefs to be passed on to the next generation.

The paradox of how the colonial Canadian government treats Indigenous peoples is hard to comprehend; for instance, that taking away Indigenous children away from their parents continues to be the only way to deal with the "Indian problem" as opposed to trying to get to the root of the Indigenous' systemic problems that now exist as a result of ethnocentric assumptions that created the problem in the first place. For example, Blackstock et al. references a national funding formula known as Directive 20-1 which funds on-reserve child welfare services only and requires that First Nations agencies work per provincial/territorial child welfare statutes (2005). However, since First Nations peoples are the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government, why are First Nations agencies working in agreement with provincial/territorial statutes if only to create inconsistency and confusion? This jurisdictional inconsistency is also found in cases where the Indigenous child or youth is apprehended on reserve and is put into a non-Indigenous

home. In such cases, Indigenous youth automatically receive social supports from the provincial government agency. Whereas, if the federal Government Indigenous Delegated Agency apprehended that same youth, there is a shortfall of funding to support the foster parent of that child or youth to receive social supports such as preventative services (Blackstock et al., 2005). Other shortfalls for Indigenous mothers on reserve include preventative services such as substance use counseling, caregiver respite services, support with accessing adequate transportation options, and even home visits should have been provided to the parent(s) prior to their children being apprehended in the first place. In the best interest of the Indigenous child, exploring adequate cultural foster homes should also be a primary consideration. Then, if that is not possible, the child's placement should be with the grandmother or other kin.

Another concern identified is that the infrastructures (water, sewage, etc.) on Indian reserves are the responsibility of the Federal Government depending on where the child lives. Instead of rectifying the infrastructures, the Indigenous child is instead taken out of that home, away from the parents, and sent to residential schools or non-Indigenous foster home settings.

Many parents who were sent to Residential Schools are left with deep psychological scars which can often develop into severe mental illness. They suffered abuses such as: spiritually, physically, mentally, and sexually. Ironically, they were sent to residential schools to become civilized and assimilated but in fact they eventually came out with a fractured identity and little life skills to cope in the outside world.

It is well known that Indigenous children and youth spend more time in foster care than non-indigenous children. However, it is important to consider the social construction of reality that exists for the development of these Indigenous children and youth when they in fact are more likely to be placed in a non-indigenous home (Trocme et al. 2004, p. 580).

Firstly, the reality is that the impacts of colonialism have left many Indigenous children living in poverty on reserves dependent on Government support and at risk of housing instability. They tend to have young single parents who also may have been involved with the child welfare system themselves (Ziemann, p.9). These single parents are the products of the residential school system; thus, it is most likely their parents and grandparents had attended residential school. In Indian Residential schools, atrocious maltreatment of various kinds happened and it has been suggested that to wipe out the psychological traumas, substance misuse was used to hide from how they felt and the memories of the individual acts of atrocities to ease the pain axiologically

(of worth as a human being) (Monture-Angus, 2015: p.9). There was no professional counseling available for residential school attendees. Indigenous children are twice as likely to be apprehended for neglect compared to other non-Indigenous children. Additionally, Indigenous children are known to be apprehended from their mothers immediately after birth. However, non-Indigenous children are more likely to be taken into custody for physical or sexual abuse (Blackstock & Trocme 2005, p.20). (Please find attached table 2.) Manitoba is the province that has the highest per capita of Indigenous child apprehensions.

Research suggests that the impact of apprehension on Indigenous youth begins even prior to birth. In fact, Edwards points out that many Indigenous mothers experiencing labor are informed that their yet to be born child will be apprehended and removed once born. A tragic story is shared of an Indigenous mother in Saskatchewan who was forced to sign a form asking personal questions of where she lived, source of income, mental health, and history with Child Welfare agencies while she was having deep child contractions (Edwards, 2018). After the Indigenous mother had her baby, she believed that she was taking her newborn baby home. However, when it was time for discharge from the hospital, much to her disbelief, the nurse called the government social worker agency to see if the Indigenous mother could leave with her newborn. In this case, since the Indigenous mother had an open file with Child Family Services, that was grounds in itself to call the Child Welfare Services (Edwards, 2018). The Child Welfare Agency deemed the Indigenous mother as unfit to parent her child because of trauma and oppression experienced in her own life while growing up in the government foster home system (Navia et al. 2018).

When Indigenous children are apprehended, they are typically placed in a non-aboriginal foster home. Most Indigenous children are apprehended from their homes based on neglect. Society dictates how Indigenous mothers should live according to ethnocentric ways; therefore, Indigenous children continued to be removed from their families by welfare agencies that equate poverty with neglect (Trocme et al. 2004, p. 579). This could mean lack of clean water, instability of housing, poor education on reserves, and limited resources. That is grounds to take away Indigenous children. The government chooses not to calculate poverty rates on reserves, thus excluding Indian reserves on poverty type of data (Macdonald, May 17, 2016).

The reality is that many Indigenous parents have experienced trauma because of generational oppression which results in struggles with managing their own lives let alone

raising children. They face barriers associated with inadequate housing and a lack of clean water and proper sanitation (Blackstock et al., 2005, p. 20). Many struggle with substance use issues which can be construed as a means to cope or escape reality. These issues can be detrimental to their ability to parent and ensure their child's wellbeing. However, identifying this issue only leaves us with a cyclical problem that is doomed to repeat itself to no end. The real question lies in what can we do to restore Indigenous cultural identity and address the generational trauma that haunts many Indigenous families from generation to generation?

The problem is that this ethnocentric view ignores the importance of acknowledging and attempting to understand the ontology of an Indigenous way of life. Instead, the modern colonial relationship between Government and Indigenous peoples through the child welfare system perpetuates the ontology of Indigenous reality which is shaped through an oppressive lens as opposed to one of empowerment and strength.

Research Findings

Ironically, records on statistics of Indian people on reserves are maintained through the Department of Indian Affairs. The government's year-end figures for children living on reserves increased between 1995 and 2001 by 71.5%. Usually, in Euro-Canadian western homes, many Indigenous children are subjected to white, middle to lower class homes built or ethnocentric perspective.

In foster homes, there is gross over-representation of Indigenous youth in care which represents forty eight percent of all children who have been apprehended and are considered wards of the state under the Ministry of Children and Family Development (Statistics Canada, 2013; Blackstock et al.2005). There were 9,078 Indigenous children in care on Indian reserves, according to Indigenous Service Canada 2017 Statistics. In comparison, 2007 statistics show that the number of Indigenous children was 7,859, which started with 89.67% in foster care, 4.44% in group homes, 5.89% institution, and 0% in kinship (Government of Canada). Of this number, 75.25% were in foster care, 4.40% in group homes, 2.31% in the institution, and 18.11% in kinship (Government of Canada). However, there was a significant difference when the Indigenous Service Canada Statistic started shifting policy towards prevention, which has shown a decrease from 2007 towards 2017. This means that Indigenous Services can design and deliver child and family services solutions that best suit the child's needs (Government of Canada, 2010). For instance, Indigenous Service Canada is open for discussion to see what kinds of

service needs we would like to best meet the needs of Indigenous children in care (Government of Canada, 2020). Indigenous children need to reconnect with their biological families and communities. In addition, the Government of Canada has immediately began to cover funding for actual costs for prevention services needed by parents on reserves along with intake, and assessment, legal fees, child service package and small agency cost (in all areas), as well as actual costs of band representatives and mental health for First Nations youth (in Ontario), retroactively to January 26, 2016. These are some of the preventative services that is shifting forward in the best interest of Indigenous children (Government of Canada, 2020). Lastly, this program shift is open to First Nations Child and service agencies, tribal councils, and delegated First Nations bands from the Government of Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

Research shows that when Indigenous parents have access to preventative policies, services, and programs, they can look after their children. This paradigm shift in policy discourse is more in line with a client centered, empowerment, and strength-based approach to child welfare (Alston-O'Connor, 2010). The context of service and programs that work for Indigenous people from their perspectives such as sharing circles, experiential learning, meditation, prayer, ceremonies, and storytelling (p. 57). Traditional healing processes need to start from somewhere where Indigenous parents can engage towards healing and understand they can take control of their destiny to keep their children home.

Permanency

With Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in care, there is a need to support permanency and consistency in their lives which comes through creating long-lasting and meaningful connections with caregivers without moving or shuffling between foster homes as this serves to create safe and stable environments that supports long lasting living arrangements (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010). In the absence of permanency, Indigenous youth are at risk of developing identity confusion and attachment issues as they face feelings of alienation, loneliness, abandonment, and a general lack of healthy relationships (Ziemann, 2019, p. 13; Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010, p. 9). People need to feel wanted, to belong to a family or a group. Belonging to a family or group is especially significant with Indigenous children who are impressionable. When Indigenous youth are placed in Euro-Canadian foster homes, they yearn to feel included, instead of feeling out of place. The familiar bonding ties from their Indigenous families cease once they leave their families to live in a new

environment with Euro-Canadian family care. If the Indigenous child or youth live in a different nationality, they live in a foreign and unfamiliar environment that begins to socially construct a new reality for the Indigenous youth that may lead them away from the familiarity of their cultural home and identity (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 106). This ultimately can position the child to question who they are and what is real? For Indigenous children in care, many begin to feel alone (Federation of BC Youth In Care, 2010, p.13). If they do not develop a permanent family foundation, the impact leans towards mental health issues such as low self-esteem, depression, detachment from parents, and a loss of belonging is a hindrance to their ontology being.

Indigenous youth require family stability instead of being bounced from foster home to foster home and ideally should have the same consistent connection to the same social worker whenever possible (Ziemann, 2019, p.10). Otherwise, when they exit the Child Welfare System, sometimes when they go back to their reserves to unify with their families, they may face an identity crisis in relation to how they are expected to function as an aged-out Indigenous youth returning back to the reserve. There is a definite need to belong as:

"Belonging to me is home. It is people who accept me for who I am and my faults and still be accepted unconditionally; it gives me the strength to get through obstacles in life" (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, p.13).

For some Indigenous youth, it depends on how they are accepted back to their reservations. For others, they tend to have a hard time unifying with their parent(s), elders, and community as many end up leaving the reserve. Despite obstacles, it is essential for Indigenous youth who exit the Child Welfare System to fit into society; to experience inclusion rather than being excluded. They need life skills training and a support system while in care before aging out. This is a significant concern since 1000 youth annually leave the Child Welfare System without a family to go to (Ziemann, 2019).

Despite knowing that such high numbers of Indigenous youth exit the child welfare system on an annual basis, the question remains: where do they go? Unfortunately, there is a lack of qualitative and quantitative data on the outcome of these youth. The Ministry for Children and Family Development and BC should explore out-of-the-box approaches to make

sure youth leave care with stable mentorship (p.14). Despite the lack of research and data around Indigenous youth who have aged out of care, we suspect that the prospects are grim given the constant flow of media attention around Indigenous youth suicides, drugs and alcohol, loneliness, isolation, and alienation. Economic insecurity is also an important issue given many Indigenous peoples live below the poverty line (Blackstock et al. 2005, p. 24). One possibility is that resource knowledge and education about financial resources is not well known.

Education

Even though a disproportionate amount of Indigenous youth find themselves living in care and off-reserve, they remain the fiduciary responsibility of the Federal Government. Since the Indigenous child is a "Status Indian," they are eligible to be taking advantage of education benefits. Before the youth exits the Child Welfare System, they should be engaging with the Education Department of the band they belong too. In this way, they can find out significant financial and educational benefits at the age of majority to further pursue their economic future (Fournier & Crey, 1997). They may also be eligible to attend college or university which could include financial support for room and board, tuition, books, and supplies.

What Social Workers Know

For the overall welfare of Indigenous youth, our Government knows better; it just needs to do better (Blackstock et al., 2020). As for Social Workers today, they have full access to knowledge about residential schools through their education given their predecessors were involved in the process of placing Indigenous children (Fournier & Crey, 1997). It is important to note that child welfare social workers were aware of the historical maltreatment as a value-based profession ethically bound to promote the best interests of their clients. While the maltreatment that happened to Indigenous youth through the Residential School system and Sixties Scoop was created and later recreated through an ethnocentric policy framework established by the colonial Government, it was supported by Social Workers who turned a blind eye to the atrocities in which they participated in.

Many Indigenous youth continue to live in non-Indigenous foster homes, institutions while in care (Blackstock et al. 2005; British Columbia Children's Commission, 1998). Please see Table 2 attached. Social workers knew about maltreatments that went on in residential schools. They routinely served on admission committees and adjudicated child welfare

placements in residential schools (1996, Blackstock, 2008; Fournier & Crey, 1997) One could argue that the over-representation of Indigenous youth in care kept the social workers very busy processing the caseloads that they did not have time to properly screen potential foster homes nor monitoring (Fournier & Crey, p.84).

Research shows that many Indigenous children are not placed in Indigenous homes on or off reserves; however, the unanswered question remains as to why are Indigenous families not recruited off reserves? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that social workers have access to this knowledge but are powerless to do anything about it due to the high caseloads and staff shortages. Social Workers know that the government's main strategy was to eradicate Indigenous culture, knowledge and spirituality and assimilate the young Indigenous children into mainstream European culture (Blackstock et al., 2005, p.14).

From the mid 1800s era onward, it was the fiduciary responsibility of the federal Government to indoctrinate, eradicate and assimilate Indigenous children, which was run by Indian Residential Schools. In 1947, the Canadian Welfare Council (CWC) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) argued to the Senate and the House of Commons that the integration of Indigenous children would be adequately taken care of under their organizations (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 83). The CASW argument was that "Indian children who were neglected lack the protection afforded under social legislation available to white children in the community" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.83). At the time, these professional bodies believed that they could save Indigenous children from poverty and neglect. The CWC and the CASW convinced the federal government to make amendments in the *Indian Act* that Indigenous children were their prerogative (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This rational and shifting of Government jurisdiction essentially opened the door authorizing Provincial "non-Indigenous Social Workers to trespass" unto Federal Indian reserves and apprehend Indigenous children in the supposed child's best interest (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 84).

Gratefully, the Government offloaded their fiduciary responsibility of Indigenous childcare to the mainstream Canadian Welfare Council as the eager Social Workers needed employment (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 84). Thus, child apprehension on reserves became a ready-made market (Fournier & Crey, 1997) for Western mainstream society Social Workers. There was a need for the stabilization of long-term careers for Euro-Canadian Social Workers. Therefore, since 1947, Social Workers knew that Indigenous children were a ready-made

industry that currently still exists today. With caution, the new program was handled in a specific way because they did not have a formula as per child capita payments from 1947 to 1959 (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

In 1959, only 1% of all children in care were Indigenous; however, by the end of the 1960s, 30% – 40% of Indigenous children were in mainstream Euro-Canadian foster care, even though Indigenous children represent 4% of the national population. Such drastic changes beg the question: Was the shift in statistics a result of an offloading of the “Indian problem” to provincial jurisdictions from Federal responsibility due to the adject failure of the Indian Residential School system?

Social workers were well aware of the residential schools in the form of “a joint submission to the Senate and House of Commons in 1946 from CASW and CWC (Blackstock, p. 29, 2009; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015, p.5). The social workers knew about the abuse that was happening in residential schools. Still, they noted, “We feel they [residential schools] were well-rounded places of Indian education, especially in that they meet special needs” (Blackstock, 2008, p.29; Fournier & Crey, 1997).

This ethnocentric world view carried over into the Sixties Scoop. Currently, social workers are aware of the over-representation of Indigenous children in the Child Welfare System which continues to grow and becomes evermore complicated as time goes on (Blackstock et al. 2005, p.30). Indigenous children were “Scooped up” by non-Indigenous Social Workers in their best interest to be cared for by non-Indigenous homes; however, these non-Indigenous Social Workers were discouraged by not having Indian Residential information, did not have resources to address poverty, intergenerational grief and loss and parenting skills on reserves; therefore, the only option was to apprehend Indigenous children (Blackstock et al. 2005). Thus, once the Indigenous children were placed in the non-Indigenous foster home, the overzealous Social Workers were so pleased with themselves for securing non-Indigenous foster homes, they told the foster parents that teaching Indigenous children their Indigenous culture was waived (Sinclair, 2007). The fact of preserving the children's culture and lineage was considered not essential. Paradoxically, MCFD claims that the best interest of the child includes attention to “the importance of preserving a child's cultural identity” (Child Protection and the Ministry 2014, p.8). When the Indian Residential Schools started closing down in the 1940s, the CASW and the CWC continued to perpetuate alternative forms of assimilation and cultural genocide in an effort

to eradicate the Indigenous cultural identity (Alston-O'Connor, 2010; Baskin, 2011, 2015; Blackstock, 2009, Sinclair, 2004). The policies may have been different, but they were built upon similar values and beliefs.

In the 1970s, Indigenous Child and Family agencies started to develop community based systems to take control of Indigenous children on reserves in an effort to enhance the growth of children and their development of a positive cultural identity (Blackstock, 2005). However, there were systemic barriers which limited success including inadequate financial resources and discrimination marginally (Blackstock, 2005, p.12). For example, there was little effort by Child Welfare authorities and the Federal government to combat and address the structural factors on reserves such as poverty, multigenerational traumas from residential schools, unemployment, and sub-standard housing conditions (p. 16). The Federal government knew the shortfall of financial funding offered to Indigenous Child Welfare Agencies since they have jurisdiction over resources for Indigenous children in care (Blackstock et al. 2005). Furthermore, MCFD has abundant health resources for Indigenous children in their care but do not provide the preventative resources for Indigenous parents who live on Indian reserves, so that they could eventually get their children back into their responsibility (Blackstock et al. 2005, p. 28).

The caseloads of the non-Indigenous Social Workers are overwhelming because they did not have the time to properly screen potential foster or adoptive homes (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 84). Thus, some Indigenous children were treated as slaves, endured physical and sexual abuse, which were atrocities to the children (Carriere, 2007; Fournier et al. 1997). No wonder there is such trauma and abuse among Indigenous youth in care that suicide is prevalent. It is because for too many Indigenous youth it is the only way out of their cognition (Blackstock et al. 2005, p. 12; Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 106). At the time of apprehension, most Social Workers thought they were doing the Indigenous youth a favor by setting them up in an excellent middle class white foster homes but behind closed doors of many foster homes, it was a different story as follows (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.85). In one example, a young Indigenous woman (Mary Longman) claimed that she was isolated and vulnerable. She was beaten, sexually abused and used as a slave in the non-Indigenous homes (Fournier & Crey; 85). In her healing journey, she used art to tell her story which hangs for all to see. She called her exquisite paintings series “*Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing*” which represents white Social Workers

apprehending Indigenous children (p. 85). Longman eventually was able to reconnect with her siblings, who shared similar foster care stories.

MCFD can easily determine through their statistics that Indigenous youth are shuffled or bounced from different foster homes all the time. For example, there is the substantiated paradoxical documentation of Richard Cardinal, who committed suicide, asking for "help" written in his blood. He had spent 13 years moving in and out of 28 different foster homes (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005, p.12; Navia et al. 2018). Despite this high-profile case catching the media's attention twenty years ago, we still do not have public available information or records on trends of Indigenous youth in care or how many times they had been shuffled around by MCFD. MCFD only keeps records of the first year that Indigenous youth are in care (Morgan, 2017).

Research repeatedly show that Indigenous children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to enter the Child Welfare System. Furthermore, the Child Welfare system had higher rates of mortality than non-Indigenous when they were in the system. Mortality is a known concern in Indigenous child intervention systems in many jurisdictions and speaks to the many challenges faced by Indigenous populations in Alberta and the rest of Canada (Alberta Human Services, 2014, p.24). Gaps in the system need to be brought to the forefront and addressed.

Gaps of the Indigenous Aged Out Youth

Consultation

Research clearly indicates that there are obvious gaps in the Child Welfare System. For instance, there was no consultation of any sort regarding apprehended Indigenous children of the planned procedures of placements and adoptions. Historically speaking, the Child Welfare system makes structural decisions without the consent of the Indigenous parents and their community leaders (Johnston, 1983; Timpson, 1995; RCAP, 1996; Saskatchewan Indian, 1977; Sinclair, 2007). As such, the Child Welfare System needs to be more sensitive and inclusive in terms of consulting with Indigenous families and the band and collaborate in the best interest of the child.

Placement

Apprehended Indigenous children's immediate foster home placements are in non-Indigenous foster homes in their best interest (Sinclair, 2016). It was thought that the precedence of bonding with the foster parent was more important than their cultural heritage (Sinclair,

2016); thus, cultural sensitivity was abated and dismissed (Sinclair, 2016). Generations of children suffer psychologically needlessly of their well-being while in care; then in the long run, this causes confusion in their lives after exiting the Child Welfare System.

Adoption

Thousands of Indigenous children were adopted out needlessly into non-Indigenous homes and not heard of again until later in life (Carriere, 2005). Some were not ever heard from again. The result of being excluded from the paternalistic development of policy as it relates to Child Welfare, and the implications of these practices have undoubtedly brought on deep psychological and physical impacts to the Indigenous cultural identity. It was found that many Indigenous adoptions were unsuccessful. Thus, alienated Indigenous youth became runaways, turning to street life for support, experiencing anxiety and culture shock (Alston-O'Connor, 2010).

Further Research Needed

Research indicates that there are limited efficacy services for Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, there is a general lack of information pertaining to the experiences and outcomes of Indigenous youth leaving the Child Welfare System (Carriere, 2005, 2007). Despite understanding the policy and disastrous outcomes of the Sixties Scoop, the contemporary question of today remains: “Why Indigenous homes are not considered and recruited?” After all, there is a definite need for Indigenous foster children to be living in Indigenous homes because this becomes a place where a child can learn skills from an Indigenous perspective and be proud of their cultural heritage.

If MCFD states in their policy that Indigenous cultural identity is significant to Indigenous youth, then cultural considerations and appropriate supports need to be actualized. Unfortunately, Euro-western agencies limit the efficacy (resources) amongst Indigenous. The effectiveness of resources is limited, and First Nations Delegated agencies continue to be underfunded. These agencies need adequate, efficient access to financial resources, or the continued marginalization of Indigenous will continue (Blackstock & Trocume, 2005, p.12). In adoption, Indigenous children's best interests remain questionable as they are often poorly matched to prospective parents who may not understand the necessity or be equipped with the skills required to support a youth developing a close connection with their cultural identity (Carriere, 2007, p.58).

The age-old tradition of customary adoption on reserves would be a welcome approach for Indigenous children and youth with financial support such as respite, preventative workshops, and community support from elders through weekly parental activities (Alberta Children's Services, 1997; D'Aguayo, 1995; YTSA, 2001). On a positive note, Indian agents, in the earliest years, who were responsible for "neglected" children did seek help from extended family or relatives on reserves. This age-old First Nations tradition arrangement was called "custom adoption," which should be brought back (Fournier & Crey, p. 82). Financial Support is needed for First Nation Adoption Programs (Carriere, 2007, p.58) to run effectively and sustainably. Adoption Registries (Carriere, 2007, p.58).

Veto issues need to include consultation with First Nations communities and parents regarding adoption (Fournier et al. 1997, p. 59). There needs to be an openness for adopted persons and birth parents. For instance, adopted persons need to know the history of their birth parents who were apprehended and forced to attend Indian Residential schools (Fournier & Crey, 1997). These Indian Residential schools did not teach children to be parents. There was no sharing, loving, nurturing environment in those cold brick buildings. When the residential school children went home, they were cold, confused people who were psychologically, sexually, mentally, spiritually abused and still sired and bred children (p.83). Their experience at residential school did not prepare them to be parents. To forget their horrendous experiences, they turned to alcohol to blur the images of abuse ingrained psychologically in their mind. In this way, adoptees could contact birth parents later in life if they chose too. Adoption Social Work Practice with First Nations bands need:

- Relinquishment Counseling on reserves for parents who gave their children up for adoption due to poverty and youth. Encouragement to provide as much information about the parent's family and health histories is essential for the adopted child (Carrier, 2007).
- Photos: Adoptee and foster children request pictures of birth parents, siblings, or extended family and community. Not all adoptees or foster children have a Life Book prepared for them.

The Life Book should be mandatory for all Indigenous foster and adoptees.

- Information of birth fathers: it is imperative to get information from birth mom, so when the Indigenous child exits the Child Welfare System, this is available for research of their beginnings of origin (Carrier, 2007).
- Indian Status Registration: When “status” Indigenous aged-out youth leave the Child Welfare System, they should receive information about their status lineage and how that came to be. They need to be aware of the benefits that can come from being an Indian on or off Indian reserves. The information session could be set-up through local bands for orientation or the local Indian Friendship Centres.
- Cultural Plans: Cultural plans should be mandatory for adopted Indigenous children. Plans are information put together so that the adopted Indigenous child could maintain contact with his/her First Nation community and culture. Since these informative plans contain provisions to keep in touch with the child’s Indigenous parents and community, therefore, the informative arrangements are signed off by the adoptive parents, and the representative of the band, the child, belongs too (Carrier, 2007).

Reunification and Cultural Identity

For aged-out Indigenous youth to reunify back to their reserves and communities, many are searching for answers of who, why, when and how did they arrive on this earth. They are soaking up any kind of information they can access if welcomed and acknowledged to get to know who their relatives are and how they are connected to access this information through elders, presentations, workshops and spiritual cultural protocols of their band. The feeling of inclusion is needed to feel valued, welcomed, and listened to. The history of family and where their people came from is significant of originality.

Elders typically adopt a strength-based approach to promote reunification through the sharing of oral traditions and weaving stories from the past in an effort to hold the culture together for future generations (Saleebey, 1996). Indigenous people, Elders, and Spiritual people have an ontology and epistemology relationship with mother earth, the four directions, and animals. The culture is all taught through smudging, dancing, oral stories, and discipline through narratives.

The experiences of Elders and Indigenous ancestors can be described as “talk to everything else.” In other words, everything has a place contextually and has a connection and

relationship with the individual (Bull, 2017). In contemporary times, for too long has the voice of youth not been heard or taken seriously. They are not taken seriously of feelings, questions, and curiosities that arise. For youth to be in unity with their First Nations band, they need to be involved with activities and collaborations of how to make decisions in their best interest of how things work. To feel a genuine sense of belonging could entail being on boards or groups with adults as mentors. On one reserve, an Indigenous adult asked, “What would you (youth) think if we went back to the good old days?” The Indigenous youth thought for some time, and said, “We do not think we want to go back into the past and would rather stay in the present.” This answer shocked the Indigenous Elders; therefore, they asked, “why is that so?” The youth’s response was, “Why would we want to go back to the good old days because all we hear is negative things said about First Nation people, and about the wars.” In response, the Indigenous Elders never thought about all the negativities because that was all the Indigenous youth knew through history.

Without efforts to promote reunification, how can we expect Indigenous youth to be aware of the connections their ancestors have with astronomy, botany, geology and that the past Indigenous people had their technologies? Since Indigenous cultural ontology is not ingrained while Indigenous youth were in care; they were at loss of their identity during their transition and reunification with their cultural communities. For example, in astronomy, their ancestors used star constellations to map areas and to teach them when it was the best time for planting for ceremonial occasions. Indigenous ancestors knew that the earth was round and not flat. Conversely, many early Europeans pre-Columbus thought that the world was flat. Other fascinating technologies of the past were that the Indigenous people knew how to waterproof their homes to keep dry from the elements (Bull, 2017). Youth and children need to learn and hear all these positive stories if they are to establish a healthy cultural connection within their Indigenous identity. Also, Indigenous peoples knew what kinds of medicines to use for ailments of sorts which could be arthritis, cancer and colds. They knew exactly which type of tree or roots to use (Turner et al. 1990). Strong reunification with this information would be beneficial for aged out Indigenous youth that they did not have access to knowledge from elders in their communities.

Pre-European contact, Indigenous people within the Fraser Canyon of British Columbia once lived as a thriving populace in harmony with nature and the world around them. At the

Fraser Canyon banks of the mighty Fraser River, many fluent Nlaka'pamux people fished and took advantage of nature's fare of the great sockeye. "The Fraser River was an excellent source of food, where fishing sites were abundant and excellent: it supported a dense population of Nlaka'pamux people in one area that is extraordinary as anywhere in the world" (Fournier & Crey, 1997). These activities of fishing still happen today but are now regulated by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Today, Nlaka'pamux children continue to be taught at fishing camps of fishing techniques, prepping the fish for harvest, which could be drying or canning with their parents. It is these activities that aged-out youth miss while in care. They need to be reunified back to the river, to the land, to the peoples' ways of life and nature. The ontology and epistemology of just being, of nature, and the feelings of belonging; that is how one feels when fishing, with fresh air, and being with family. The reunification that aged-out youth miss is these activities when in foster care.

Other abundant food sources in that area are huckleberries, wild mushrooms, wild potatoes, and berries. These food sources are still used today, with the sockeye fish and wild meats for subsistence. Sadly, the environment has taken its toll; as a result, pollution has taken over the rivers, and the resources have thinned down the forestry, which wild animals depend on for safety and forage. Indigenous people were respectful of each other and took care of each other versus in today's technology, where Indigenous people are dependent on the dollar. There were ways of discipline that is not the same as European-Western ways. These are the types of oral stories that should have been in books about earlier First Nations describing the rich, earlier harmonious years instead of the atrocities that Indigenous people endured in Indian Residential Schools. That should not have been the Indigenous history Indigenous youth should be reading. They should be reading about the harmonious way of life that their ancestors lived.

That of living with nature, having respect for Mother Earth, the waters, and the environment is a way of Indigenous life. That is what they should be proud of learning. First Nations people must and can find strength in their ability to love, nurture, and care for their children using traditional ways (Ing, 1992). First Nations who experienced atrocities in Indian Residential Schools and foster homes must talk about it for healing to begin.

Also, while I am certain that success stories of aged-out Indigenous youth aging out of care do in fact exist, I have found it difficult to come across research of written success stories of

aged out Indigenous youth. Nonetheless, there is a need to seek out these stories and learn from them.

There are few government-funded programs in Canada to help adoptees discover who they are, and little repatriation assistance if they are fortunate enough to locate their First Nation birth families (Fournier & Crey, p. 91).

The mid-twentieth-century apprehension of aboriginal children greatly compounded the spiritual and cultural losses suffered by First Nations people in the time since contact. As an elder sadly asked the B.C. government at a 1992 hearing:

"Where are our artisans, our weavers, fishermen, medicine people, dancers, shamans, sculptors, and hunters? For thirty years, generations of our children, the very future of our communities, have been taken away from us. Will they come home as our leaders knowing the power and traditions of their people? Or will they come home broken and in pain, not knowing who they are, looking for the family that died of a broken heart?" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.93).

Recommendations

Research consistently concludes that there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare System and Indigenous adults in the criminal justice system.

Therefore, the author proposes the following recommendations:

- That Delegated First Nations Child Welfare funding be acknowledged and distributed efficiently, effectively, and equally so that First Nations children can stay home with their parents instead of being placed in non-Indigenous foster homes. Indigenous mothers need preventative support services such as parenting skill development, substance misuse, information on the hazards of alcohol on fetuses, and intergenerational counselling on mental effects of residential school and the Child Welfare system, along with policy changes. To access appropriate supports, there is a need for all levels of Government to adequately fund the programs that deliver such services (Blackstock, 2009).
- When Indigenous youth are in the Child Welfare System, the Ministry for Children and Family Development should look at integration and collaborate with the youth's band as a priority in terms of cultural sensitivity and reconciliation. There are education funds

available for field trips and educational supplies and health through the Federal Government (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2020).

- That the Minister of Justice, Attorney General, Public Safety and Solicitor General convene a Justice Summit, within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action on justice to deal specifically with Indigenous Child Welfare matters of Delegated Aboriginal Authorities receive adequate equity funding.
- Indigenous bands have access to information to the numbers of children in care under Continuing Custody Orders (CCO).

That biological parents, along with band support collaborate with MCFD in the best interest of the apprehended children to address the needs of resources so that reunification is imminent.

- To ensure extended family has supports required to take on the care of an Indigenous Youth that had been apprehended by the MCFD in B.C.
- Establishment of comprehensive life skills programs in conjunction with education around Indigenous cultural identity and community.
- Adequate funding and promotion of further Indigenous research.
- Further collaboration in good faith between Western and Indigenous perspectives as it relates to child welfare, education, and the criminal justice system.
- There need to be appropriate professional discussions with the Federal government and First Nations Child and Family Organizations to develop evidence-based solutions to address any inequities in child welfare funding for reserves.
- Indigenous youth be given every opportunity available to participate, engage and interact with Indigenous traditions and ceremonies in an effort to preserve cultural practice and establish strong and healthy Indigenous cultural identity in the youth. For instance, there are volunteer positions needed at community cultural Pow-Wows, sweat lodges, healing lodges, cultural walks examining plants with children at band schools, and storytelling with the elders.

Once the Europeans realized this, they acknowledged and conceded that the only way to gain full control of what they viewed as uncivilized Indigenous children, they would need to rescue and assimilate them by removing them from their Indigenous biological parents.

Unfortunately, this practice further delivered harm onto the Indigenous children who would

suffer PTSD symptoms from generation to generation when the Indigenous children became wards of the dominant majority government. Indigenous children have been wards of the Crown (Fournier & Crey, p. 54) since the incorporation of the *Indian Act* policy. The Department of Indian Affairs made Indian Act policies for Indian people starting in 1889. This Indian Act was used and incorporated in Indian Residential Schools; consequently, where the Indigenous children were enforced to attend, from the ages of three to fifteen years of age (Ing, 1992). The attendance to these schools would impact them significantly from the abuses they received from untrained and unskilled perpetrators (Fournier & Crey, p.120). It was the policy of the Indian Affairs Department that all Indigenous children were wards of the Government whenever an Indigenous child was born. That child did not belong to heathen uncivilized Indigenous parents. If the Indigenous parents refused to send their Indigenous children to the Indian Residential Schools; consequently, the parents were incarcerated (Peters, 2018).

The MCFD has an agreement with Delegated Aboriginal Family agencies to provide Child Welfare Services. The Delegated Aboriginal Authority is still under the stringent mainstream Government even if it is provincial or territorial. The MCFD still has the power to go on reserves and apprehend children. The Delegated Aboriginal Family agencies have many services for Aboriginal families to keep children on the Indian reservation in an Indigenous environment with their extended families such as parents, elders, and on-going cultural activities. These cultural activities could be language classes, beading, drumming, learning about the botany of plants that are edible or medicinal, creating cultural regalia clothing for pow-wows ceremonial events, attending events such as naming ceremonies, and oral story time.

However, Delegated Family agencies do not have the same funding formula as the provincial or territorial agencies. The funding allocated is considerably lower (Blackstock, 2016). These inequities towards Delegated Aboriginal Agencies on reserves hinders the agencies from being successful of providing adequate services for mothers so that they could keep children at home in their care. The Federal Government knows that Aboriginal Delegated Agencies do not have enough funding for children and families for social services such as intervention and prevention, on-reserves which is explained further. Intervention and prevention services are alcohol and drug intervention, Fetal alcohol and effects information for mothers, respite services, consistent home visits, prenatal care information for mothers, life skills to support high risk youth (Scw'exmx Child & Family Services Society (SCRSS, 2018). It is

important that these resource services are provided by Indigenous staff to get the information through in an cultural sensitive way. There is a substantial shortfall of funds in contrast to the Ministry for Children and Family Development. In the long run, the shortfall sets up Delegated Aboriginal Delegated Agencies to provide inadequate support for Indigenous parents.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (FNCFCS) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) met with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND) for one year starting from March 1, 1999, and ending on March 31, 2000 (Blackstock, 2016). The working group discussed remediation to address the overpopulation of Indigenous children in care. However, after ‘empty rhetoric’ and unmeasurable time lapse, in 2007, the FNCS AND AFN filed a complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Blackstock, 2016). DIAND was not planning on moving forward, implementing plans towards a remedial action plan to rectify the problem discussed in the earlier March 31, 1999- March 2000 meeting (p. 287). There were seventeen recommendations for reform of Delegated Agencies so that Indigenous people could have access to social services such as intervention and prevention that other non-Indigenous children receive, and First Nations jurisdiction be recognized (Blackstock, 2016). The recommendations have not adhered to that was suggested at the meeting with the First Nations Child Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations (Blackstock, 2016). Even though the Department of Indian Affairs, Assembly of First Nations, and the First Nations Caring Society collaborated for one year on financial inequities of economic evidence, the government of Canada had no plans to mover forward to rectify the monetary shortfalls.

As it is, the dominant DIAND did not plan to let go of the purse strings. Still, on behalf of Indigenous children, FNCFS and AFN kept on working to have the overrepresentation of children rectified so that future children can enjoy living with their Indigenous parents. The apprehension of Indigenous children has been going on too long: in 1907, one doctor, called Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, was silenced for speaking out against the Government about the inhumane ways Indian children were treated (Blackstock, 2016). Dr. Bryce was hired by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1907 to investigate the living conditions in Indian Residential Schools. What he found was that Indian children were maltreated and living in deplorable conditions. When he made his finale critical report with alarming recommendations: he was silenced and was fired. Since then, this idle of a man has been an inspiration to activist Cindy Blackstock. She earnestly carries on the destiny of representing the lost generations of

Indigenous children in care. She said, “It’s not enough to care, but it’s what is done to rectify (Blackstock et al., 2005). Research needs to have longitudinal studies to find out how Indigenous aged out youth are faring once they exit the system. They need to be reunited and be strength-based with their identities of who they are with Indigenous parents and communities and feel like they belong instead of being homeless. The young people who experienced the Child Welfare System need to understand that “dysfunction is through the experiences of where their parents came from.” After all, these dysfunctional behaviors did not come out of nowhere (Okanagan Alliance, 2018, p.18).

Conclusions

Historically, Indigenous peoples were considered an “Indian Problem” because they lived on traditional lands which were claimed by colonial powers that sought to conquer and control through a system of *Terra Nullius* which means ‘nobody’s land’ or “empty for the taking” (Navia, 2018). However, these lands were not empty for the taking. This axiological concept was simply a cultural assumption imported from overseas. Later, this same oppressive ideology of *Terra Nullis* was extended to include Indigenous children as they were stripped from their communities and cultural identity in a concerted effort to legally turn them into wards of the Crown (Navia, 2018, p. 154). However, much like the land, Indigenous peoples should have never been considered ‘empty for the taking’. This ethnocentric assumption has resulted in a devastating loss of cultural identity to Indigenous youth aging out of the child welfare system today.

In the 400 years of colonial relationship between Indigenous and Non Indigenous peoples, many attempts have been made through various colonial powers to slowly and silently absorb Indigenous peoples into Canadian society resulting in an unjust relation (Alfred et al. 2005). Starting in 1947, the Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers persuaded the colonial government that “Indian children were neglected and lacked protection under social legislation that white children receive” (Fournier & Crey, p. 83). Without hesitation, the colonial government changed the *Indian Act* to allow social workers on Indian reserves to ‘save’ Indigenous children with a free rein of ethnocentric judgement (p. 34); thus making them wards of the crown and essentially proving that these children are indeed ‘for the taking’. The result was a fracturing of indigenous cultural identity which has resulted in decades of systemic issues such as overrepresentation in both the child welfare and criminal justice systems, social

inequities, family dysfunction, poor health outcomes, and higher rates of poverty, substance use, and suicide.

Today, Indigenous youth aging out of the child welfare system face intrusive mainstream society's perspectives of their ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology. Despite mainstream government's intent to shield First Nations life in their best interest, through trials and tribulations: most times, the government failed to do the job.

Indigenous people were forcefully being "made poor as more and more were restricted to their small, inadequate reservations"(Wickwire, 2018, p. 215). Therefore, in many cases, Indigenous children became apprehended from parents whose only crime was poverty and being Indigenous (Trocme et al. 2004). However, the root of this impoverished state of living (low income, inadequate housing, substance use, unclean water and sanitation issues) goes back to the fiduciary responsibility of the colonial federal government. Instead of fixing the Indian reserves impoverished state of living, they apprehend Indigenous children and place them in non-Indigenous homes. Once in the Child Welfare homes, the Indigenous children become disconnected from their strength base of culture, language, axiology of self-identity and leave the system searching for their ontology, epistemology of who they are.

There needs to be work done for Indigenous Delegated Agencies and Provincial Child Welfare Ministries to work collaboratively in the best interest of Indigenous children. Indigenous aged out youth should be able to reach out to their communities of origin and be included in cultural activities with the full recognition and support from Child Welfare agencies. In this way, they could integrate into the community and learn about other benefits that they are entitled to such as education and health when they exit out of the Child Welfare system.

The inequities of funding also must be addressed so that Delegated First Nations Welfare receive adequate equity funding with the goal of supporting Indigenous parents access culturally appropriate services and resources. There needs to be recruitment for Indigenous foster homes with both organizations collaboratively on and off reserves. Indigenous children in provincial Child Welfare care need to be reunified back to their cultural families and communities while they are in care. They must be taught to be proud of their culture and learn about the positive aspects that their communities have and learn about the atrocities that their parents, grandparents, relatives and the impact of intergeneration effects from Indian Residential Schools. Only then, can aged out Indigenous youth learn about why they ended up in the Child Welfare system in the

first place. Learning about their parent's historical past, Indigenous youth could gain better understanding of sharing and caring which is integral part of their inherent culture. The purpose of this major research paper is to review current literature that examines the historical context of Child Welfare including Indian Residential Schools and the impacts on Indigenous youth in the current Child Welfare System as it relates to the social construction of cultural identity.

Table 1

Selling the Sixties Scoop: Saskatchewan's Adopt Indian and Metis Project



**SAFE!
IN YOUR HANDS**

Your hands could hold the future of a Metis child. Without parents, without a home free from prejudice and full of love, these children of Indian Heritage face an uncertain future. If you have such a home and would like to adopt as your own a Metis boy or girl, then you can become part of AIM.

Consider a part Indian child you are thinking of entering your family. The problems are very small and the rewards are very great.

Children should be treated with the respect which is due to their innocence of the world.

ADOPT INDIAN METIS Centre AIM
2340 ALBERT ST., SASK. SASKATCHEWAN TELPHONE 523-8551

OUT OF NOWHERE, INTO HERE...

Once this child's life and future was uncertain, lonely. He faced the problems of a Metis child growing up without parents to guide him. Now he lives in a home full of love, free from prejudice. If yours is a childless home, or if you want to complete your family, there is a little Metis boy or girl longing for you. You can become part of AIM and give your lives new meaning.

Prospective adopting parents can rest assured that children offered for adoption are carefully evaluated, to ensure, as far as is humanly possible, that they are in every way normal.

I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be without children.

ADOPT INDIAN METIS Centre AIM
2340 ALBERT ST., SASK. SASKATCHEWAN TELPHONE 523-8551
DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE
A FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL ADOPTION AGENCY

Stevenson, A. 2017

History Dept. at University of Saskatchewan

Table 2 Primary Form of Maltreatment by Aboriginal Status from Substantiated
Or suspected Maltreatment, 1998

	Aboriginal	Non- Aboriginal	Other visible minority
1 Physical abuse, punishment	8%	22%	35%
2 Physical abuse, other	8%	12%	11%
3 Sexual abuse	5%	12%	5%
4 Failure to supervise child at risk of physical harm	41%	17%	19%
5 Physical neglect (failure to provide adequate physical care)	7%	5%	4%
6 Other neglect (failure to supervise child at risk of sexual abuse, medical neglect, failure to provide treatment educational neglect, emotional neglect and abandonment)	11%	9%	9%
7 Emotional maltreatment	7%	11%	6%
8 Exposure to domestic violence	9%	14%	13%
Total	614	2,114	431

Source CIS-98:
N=3,159

Notes: Unweighted sample, excludes: (1) Investigations in Quebec (N = 2,309), where aboriginal and ethnic identity data were not collected. (2) cases of children not residing with a biological parent (N=225), (3) unsubstantiated investigations (N=1,969), and (4) other eligible cases where aboriginal and ethnic identity were missing (N=10). Chi sq = 244.31, df =8, p<001

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