Daniel Kikulwe

Racialization, Silences and the Negotiation of Power Within Child Welfare Institutions in Ontario

Abstract

This paper examines the employment experiences of racialized social workers, many of whom were immigrants, in Ontario in recent years. This article has four central objectives. First, to provide an overview of the perceptions of racialized social workers regarding the ways they are perceived and treated by supervisors, co-workers, other professionals, as well as clients and the effect that such views and treatment has on them. Second, the perceptions of racialized workers regarding the ghettoization, marginalization and disempowerment they may experience in the workplace. Third, to explain three strategies they use in managing power relations within the workplace (i.e., conformity, collaboration, and conflict). Fourth, to provide some suggestions on what must be done to improve the perceptions and treatment of racialized social workers by supervisors, co-workers, other professionals and clients. The major findings are that negotiating power relations is a complex process and includes experiences of tensions and awkward silences due to the sensitivity of the topic of race. The paper concludes that in moving forward constructively it is imperative to engage in difficult but crucial conversations that can contribute to the identification of ways to address tensions and awkward silences on matters of race in the context of social work, as well as in other contexts.

Résumé

Cet article étudie les expériences d'emploi en Ontario, au cours des récentes années, de travailleurs sociaux racialisés dont bon nombre sont des immigrants. Cet article a quatre principaux objectifs. Le premier est de fournir une vue d'ensemble des perceptions des travailleurs sociaux racialisés au sujet de la façon dont ils sont perçus et traités par leurs superviseurs, collègues de travail et d'autres professionnels ainsi que par leurs clients et l'impact qu'ont sur eux une telle perception et un tel traitement. Le second est d'identifier la façon dont ces travailleurs voient la ghettoïsation, la marginalisation et la déresponsabilisation qu'ils peuvent vivre en milieu de travail. Le troisième est d'expliquer les trois stratégies qu'ils utilisent pour gérer les rapports de force en milieu de travail (i.e., conformité, collaboration et conflit). Le quatrième est d'apporter des suggestions sur ce qu'il faut faire pour améliorer la perception et le traitement des travailleurs sociaux racialisés par les superviseurs, collègues, autres professionnels et clients. La principale constatation est que la négociation du rapport de forces est un processus complexe et qu'il comporte des tensions et des silences gênants compte tenu du caractère sensible de la question raciale. Cet article conclut que pour faire avancer les choses de façon constructive, il est essentiel d'engager des dialogues cruciaux qui peuvent aider à identifier des stratégies permettant d'aborder les tensions et silences liés aux questions raciales dans le contexte du travail social, ainsi que dans d'autres contextes.

INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Article

This paper examines the employment experiences of racialized social workers (many of whom were immigrants) in Ontario in recent years. Situated in postmodernist perspectives, this article shows that part of the negotiations of power by the study participants relates to the tensions that arise from the historical processes that have shaped race relations. This article has four central objectives, which demonstrate some of the contemporary power relations. First, to provide an overview of the perceptions of racialized social workers regarding the ways they are perceived and treated by supervisors, co-workers, other professionals, as well as clients and the effect that such views and treatment has on them. Second, the perceptions of racialized workers regarding the ghettoization, marginalization and disempowerment they may experience in the workplace. Third, to explain three strategies they use in managing power relations within the workplace (i.e., conformity, collaboration, and conflict). Fourth, to provide some suggestions on what must be done to improve the perceptions and treatment of racialized social workers by supervisors, co-workers, other professionals and clients. I conclude that engagement in difficult but crucial conversations can lead to identification of ways to address awkward silences on issues of race.

Although the focus of this article is on the experiences of racialized social workers in child welfare institutions in Ontario, the insights gleaned are also relevant to comparable groups of workers in other insitutions both in the public and private sectors. With the increasing diversity in Canada, it is important to normalize the conversations about race within various spaces, including institutions. Normalization of these difficult conversations in one organizational setting can lead to ways to address some of the racial tension that is prevalent in other organizational settings as well.

Socially and intellectually, the silence on issues of race appeals to most of us because it is comfortable to ignore this subject. Silence on this subject can also appear to mean that nothing has to be done to address the issue(s). However, for participants in this study, the silence on race was not only uncomfortable but it was also harmful because it meant that their experiences were either completely disregarded or considered unworthy of recognition and rectification. The majority of the study participants identified themselves not only as immigrants but also as racialized. The term "racialization" is used to refer to categorization based on one's skin colour.

In my fourteen years as a child welfare worker, I observed that racialized social workers did not voice their views on race. I was curious about these awkward silences, and decided to examine them within the organization structure of child welfare institutions in Ontario. One of the central objectives was to understand why they did not voice their views on race. Toward that end, the primary focus is on the

extent to which silences were a product of the forms and the negotiations of the power relationships within the context of organizational hierarchies, as influenced by society's heightened sensitivity on the topic of race.

Methodology of the Article

The data for this study were generated through interviews with fifteen racialized social workers and a focus group involving six racialized social workers (different than those who participated in individual interviews). Both the individual interviews and focus groups were conducted between October 2011 and February 2012. The twenty-one participants involved either in the individual interviews or the focus group were from varying racial backgrounds: Filipino, West Indian, African, Jamaican, Punjab and Black Canadian. Eighteen were women and three were men. Most of the participants had worked in child welfare for three to eleven years, with a broad range of work experiences from frontline to supervisory positions. The individual interviews and focus group sessions were completed in three major urban centres in Ontario. All participants were asked about their work experience with supervisors, co-workers, other professionals (i.e., doctors, teachers, lawyers, etc.), and client families within hierarchical child welfare institutions. Questions regarding the participants' work experiences within child welfare institutions were also addressed in this study. The data from the interviews were imported into NVivo software for thematic analysis. The four main themes explored were apparatuses of power, power relations, surveillance, as well as boundaries and identity. In the discussion of the study findings below, the focus is on silence discourse, which was a subtheme of the apparatuses of power theme.

The focus on silences reveals how the discussions of the day-to-day work experiences faced by racialized child welfare workers were stifled. Silence heightened the inability of the research participants to engage in the discussions of their inner feelings about case matching, case planning and management, overrepresentation of racialized children in care, as well as professional incongruence. The day-to-day work experiences and the silencing of participants within child welfare institutional hierarchies are examined more deeply in the sections that follow.

For purposes of anonymity, participants' names appearing in this paper have been changed. Quotations are included to capture the essence of the participants' stories and perspectives.

Organization of the Article

The article is organized in five sections. The first section above summarized the objectives of this article and the methods used to gather the data. The remainder of this article consists of the following four major sections:

Beginning with section two, the article provides a brief overview of theoretical perspectives of post-modernist thinkers on power relations. More specifically, it provides an overview of postmodernist theoretical and historical insights regarding racial hierarchies, which are useful in analyzing the contemporary nature and forms of power within modern-day child welfare institutions in Ontario. However, the theoretical insight can also be a basis for understanding the manifestations and negotiations of power relations in other types of organizations in Ontario and elsewhere.

The third section provides an overview of the experiences and observations of racialized social workers who participated in the interviews and focus group regarding the significance and effect of race in their work life in terms of professional incongruence, which shows how their work is devalued by supervisors, co-workers, other professionals and clients. The third section also discusses the issues and concerns of workers regarding ghettoization, marginalization and disempowerment, as well as silent discourses they experience in the workplace.

The fourth section provides an explanation of three distinct strategies: comformity, collaboration and conflict. All are utilized, to some degree, by racialized workers in managing power relations within their respective organizations.

The last and concluding section proffers some observations regarding the importance of dealing with race and power relations within organizations.

POSTMODERNIST PERSPECTIVES ON POWER RELATIONS

In this section two of the article, I demonstrate that many postmodernist thinkers focus on themes of power that are germane to race and racial identity. Lewis (2000) argues that the issue of power becomes central because groups and individuals are differently positioned within systems of social classification and in the organization of social relations. These social classifications help maintain power imbalances. McWhorter (2004, 48) argues that Michel Foucault's work on race suggests that the concept was politically interesting from its inception or early theorization. As Foucault argues, the notions of power and knowledge are intrinsically connected. As such, the knowledge that emerged out of Enlightenment epistemology has been perceived as being hierarchical and dualistic. It was the Enlightenment that promoted the ideas of equality, tolerance and fair play, but it was also responsible for the creation of western notions of racial and cultural superiority that justified and legitimated racial domination (Pfeffer 1998, 1383). Individuals outside the western hemisphere were believed to lack knowledge. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, race discourse took on a new dimension and the term race became absorbed in practices that evolved from European and American Enlightenment perceptions. In taking on a new dimension, race discourse shifted from simply referring to social

groupings to a state of hierarchization, which was legitimatized by scientific methods that valued and devalued particular groups (McWhorter 2004, 49). Historically, racial hierarchization has justified colonization (Smith 1999, 59) and slavery. The contemporary social inequalities can be traced throughout history. Contemporary work settings and relationships are representative of Foucault's idea of power and knowledge where the philosophical assumption is that institutions are apparatuses that preserve particular norms through power and dominant ways of knowing.

In today's institutions, individuals are not only performing institutional activities, but they are also engaged in power relations that have been historically shaped and maintained through dominant social ordering based on racial identity. It is through these work relationships that institutional activities are completed. Within these relationships, as Hugman (1983, 417) suggests, we should think of power not as a property of the actor, but as a feature of the social relationship between the actors. Within these work relationships, reinforced by institutions, individuals begin to understand themselves differently from others. Our way of seeing the other mirrors our history of social differences based on race and other marginalized identities. Historical racial relationships are manifesting themselves in many contemporary organizations including child welfare institutions as discussed in the section below regarding the work experiences of some racialized social workers.

EXPERIENCES OF RACIALIZED SOCIAL WORKERS IN ONTARIO

Participants in the study indicated that they had three major forms of negative experiences in their work experience—status/role incongruence, ghettoization and disempowerment (primarily through lack of involvement in case matching) and silent discourse. These themes are the main focus of this section three of the article. Status or role incongruence, a term adopted from the work of Proctor and Davis (1994), refers to difference between people's expectations of what types of individuals either normally perform certain roles or are ideally suited to perform certain roles or are best qualified or suited to perform certain jobs and those who are not. Silent discourse refers to major issues and options regarding the day-to-day work-related activities that are unspoken and unarticulated but remain important pieces and/or experiences of work. The terms ghettoization and disempowerment are used in this article to show how there is an implicit expectation that racialized workers provide services to only the individuals with similar racial identities. These processes of ghettoization are typically seen in social work practices in the form of case matching, which is further explored in this paper. In general, the study participants made several important observations regarding the prejudicial perspectives and behavior of supervisors, co-workers, other professionals and clients that adversely affected them.

Experiences of Racialized Social Workers Related to Status Incongruence

Racialized social workers who participated in the interviews and focus group noted that the most significant challenge they encountered in the workplace that adversely affected them was the phenomenon of status or role incongruence. Proctor and Davis (1994, 319) note that in the United States, racialized workers in clinical settings faced what they call "status incongruence," meaning that there is an expectation that certain racial groups are least likely to achieve academic training that would qualify them to perform what is considered a professional job. Brand (1999, 89) argues that historically, racialized workers engaged in work that "befitted" their class and race. For example, research completed by Bernard, Lucas-White, and Moore (1993) as well as Glenn (1992) shows a recurrent pattern of racialized women engaged in domestic work and professional caring tasks. Yan (2008, 326) concludes that when racialized workers are confronted with 'status incongruence,' they seem unprepared to deal with the dilemma of having to prove professional competence. Our perceptions of racialized workers' occupational status evince our imagining of the world of professional work and who is qualified to hold certain jobs in society. Society holds that certain individuals are suited for certain jobs that have been socially defined and legitimated (Vago 2003). To a large extent, the occupational status contradictions that racialized workers experience are indicative of Foucault's idea that power operates everywhere. In this study, power manifested itself in different work relationships as perceived by the participants. Racialized social workers who participated in the interviews and focus group session noted that the phenomenon of status or role incongruence demonstrated itself as skepticism regarding their credentials and competence from four major groups of people with whom they interact—their supervisors, co-workers, other professionals, and their clients. Their observations related to their experiences regarding each of these groups are described in turn below.

Skepticism and Devaluation by Supervisors

The delegitimization of racialized worker knowledge in the context of supervisor/ worker dynamic is neatly captured by Sue's comment when she indicated that, "my authority [work] is not taken very serious because of my racialized identity." She went on to say that "your work is needed, but you become invisible in the work relationship and decision making processes." What emerged from the interviews and focus group was how racialized workers in positions of authority in child welfare are also marginalized because of their social positioning in society. The irony is that racialized workers are perceived as "cultural experts" who have authority and ability to judge behaviours of ethnic families. However, they are not allowed to perform actual management, control, and supervision, a responsibility that lies in the hands

of those with power in child welfare institutions (Hutchinson-Reis 1989; Lewis 2000). This issue of exclusion from the decision-making process is further elaborated in the section on ghettoization and disempowerment. Here it is critical to note that the exclusion experiences reflect how racialized child protection workers have been drawn into discourses that define the problems of families using their "cultural expertise" as a source of knowledge. Bernard et al. (1993) write that the "unspoken expectation is that racialized workers are representing their communities and that they are the experts who must have all the answers related to this or that group" (267). The dilemma is that this knowledge is valued only to the extent that it informs decisions, but the decisions themselves are not made by the so-called "cultural knowledge experts." In other words, the frontline workers (cultural experts) are left to implement policies in which they lack a voice (Ayon and Ainesberg, 2010). Expecting workers to be "cultural experts" also can be a "great disservice" to families because cultural misunderstandings can occur as a result of the differences between racialized workers and parents (Dutt 2003). This picture of a "cultural expert" excluded from the case decisions and planning also raises the question of how child welfare can include families, particularly marginalized ones.

Skepticism and Devaluation by Co-workers

In some co-worker relationships, there were overtones of questioning the knowledge of racialized workers, which one can argue is another way of establishing who is knowledgeable and who is not. As John stated, "my colleagues also hold the same assumptions [as supervisors] about me that I lack the understanding of the changing Canadian cultural system." This questioning of knowledge is subject to interpretation, but connects to the dominant/non-dominant power dynamics within these worker/worker relationships. What is noted in this study is that the discussions of race divisions were few and far between when participants described their social dynamics with their colleagues. The limited discussion of the complexities of the social divisions in terms of worker/worker relationships is unsurprising because participants acknowledged that they need their child protection teams and colleagues for support. However, it is fitting to conclude that the questioning of racialized workers' knowledge by co-workers also was associated with systems of social classification based on racial differences and hierarchization.

Skepticism and Devaluation by Other Professionals

Participants noted incidents of skepticism and covert questioning of their knowledge and professionalism not only by their supervisors and co-workers, but also by other professionals, sometimes referred to as collaterals. As Cathy, a focus group participant, reported, some participants were mistaken as clients by other professionals:

"when I walked into court, the lawyer felt that I was the mother [client]. So, in her mind, a racialized person cannot be a worker, so they must be a client." She went on to say that she did not feel that she fit the profile of a social worker and that it took a few minutes for people to realize that she was a professional. Participants described work relationships with other professionals, such as medical doctors and lawyers, as being intimidating because of the perception that these professions were highly regarded by society. Kim, a focus group participant, stated that in a consultation with a lawyer, she never voiced any opinions or ideas. This may have been because of the status attached to lawyers or it can also be argued that Kim's introvert characteristics could be symbolic of the larger societal power relations based on race that tend to create awkward silence. According to Kim, race was part of the issue because possessing a racialized identity has historically meant that individuals cannot possess consultative or decision-making power. This is another example where a discussion of racial issues could have been beneficial to process the struggles faced by racialized workers.

Skepticism, Devaluation and Resistance by Clients
Several participants also indicated that clients are skeptical of the racialized workers' occupational status and competence and tend to be resistant to their suggestions on how to deal with various issues. Participants indicated that most clients, like supervisors and other professionals, tend to exhibit their prejudicial perceptions of and resistance to racialized workers primarily subtly and covertly. Such perceptions and behavior by clients compound the adverse effects of the exclusion and prejudicial devaluation that racialized individuals constantly experience in their work environment. Other studies have also indicated that the occupational status and competency of racialized workers are challenged by client families served by child welfare services (Proctor and Davis 1994).

The comments of participants in the interviews and focus group regarding status/role incongruence reflect the normalized and broad societal assumption that members of certain groups, determined by social location and identity, cannot fulfill certain roles. Although the trend is changing, it also has to be acknowledged that, historically, social work and other professions have been predominantly occupied by nonracialized individuals (Proctor and Rosen 1981; Rossiter 2005; Swift 1995), which partly explains the perceptions held by members of the dominant group.

Ghettoization and Disempowerment (Primarily Through Case Matching)
Participants suggested that although prima facie case matching seems like a positive and proactive strategy that values the cultural knowledge that a racialized worker can bring to a case, it is not always a good strategy. Some suggested that in some instances it is a bad strategy that is not beneficial either for the clients or the workers.

Participants identified three key problematic aspects of case matching. First, most participants did not perceive themselves as "cultural experts." This has been clearly documented in previous research (Dutt 2003, 14). Case matching is problematic because racial similarity with families does not always translate into cultural similarity or familiarity. In Mary's view, agencies need to focus on how to better serve families in ways other than simply relying on case matching as extensively as they had to date.

Second, participants indicated that in the long term, case matching disadvantaged workers because they were perceived as having competencies and knowledge only to intervene with diverse communities. The result of intervening with families only from particular communities meant limited opportunities for workers to move easily into other positions that required broader work experience and knowledge. The knowledge racialized workers have is either minimized or completely dismissed and traps them in institutional spaces where they are silenced and excluded. Some researchers describe this process as ghettoization of racialized social workers, implying that their role is only to connect mainstream institutions to racial communities (Lewis 2000; Li 2001, 24; Reitz 2001, 348). The perceived lack of broader mainstream work experience by racialized workers also reveals how power is subtly maintained within institutions by privileging particular knowledge and practices.

Third, participants also indicated that case matching raised another problem insofar as their connections and rapport with families meant little because the actual workers were excluded by supervisors from case decisions and planning. For example, Jennifer explained that "even if as a worker, you are working with the family...the power is held in the supervisor position/role. It is not me." The feeling of powerlessness and exclusion from case planning and decision making expressed by participants has been also documented in several research studies (Lewis 2000; Morrel 2007). Some participants noted that exclusion from case decision making was not only about a worker's inability to voice their opinions in helping families, but it was also about a hierarchical power structure in which key decisions were made by a particular group or class of supervisors and other child welfare managerial staff who believed that simply by virtue of their position within the organization they were rendered qualified to make case decisions without even consulting the workers. Indeed, some participants noted in some instances they would be invited to join a case planning conference only to find out that decisions about the family had already been made by the supervisors. Participants felt that they were only conduits to diverse families and communities that agencies would not otherwise easily access. As a way of balancing power dynamics at these meetings, Eric invited community professionals to meet with the child welfare decision makers (supervisors/managers) when he had to discuss issues facing immigrant families. Some of the other participants used a similar strategy.

The lack of discussion of these issues within institutions inhibited the participants' ability to perceive such practices outside of race. For the participants, there was simply no other way to describe their exclusion from case planning and case management, other than viewing these issues and concerns from a racial lens; it was a continuation of the long history of racial hierarchization in a profession in which the racialized workers' knowledge and experiences were not properly or adequately valued. However, it is important to note that exclusions from case planning and management was not limited to racialized workers. Those who have worked in the profession, including the author, know all too well that such exclusion from case planning is also common among nonracialized workers, particular new child protection workers.

Experiences of Racialized Social Workers Related to Silent Discourse

To reiterate, silent discourse refers to the day-to-day work-related activities that are unspoken and unarticulated but remain important pieces and/or experiences of work. The objective here is to explain their experiences related to silent discourse in general, and their experiences related to silent discourse on race and race-based issues, as well as those related to matters involving them, namely the status incongruence pheonomenon and ghettoization and disempowerment, and matters involving their clients such as the high proportion of racialized children in care.

Silences Regarding Race and Race-Based Issues in General

According to participants, there was silence within social settings and institutions regarding the topic of race. Race was erased through institutional silence yet it was an identity from which participants could not escape. Many participants wanted their respective institutions to acknowledge that race and racial differences were part of the social identity that determine social structures and relations. However, there was an institutional culture of being respectful, diplomatic, and biting your tongue. According to the participants, these expected practices of worker respect and diplomacy reflected an inherent colourblind approach, which in itself was a disrespectful notion because it disregarded the social divisions that make up society. Participants also suggested that a colourblind approach hides the power imbalances based on racial differences, as well as the institutional practices that maintain racial discrimination. Their observations confirmed postulations in the extant literature that a colourblind approach is a practice that moves away from confronting racial injustice and its impact on marginalized communities (Galabuzi 2010, 28; Proctor and Davis 1994, 316). Proctor and Davis add that the effect of silence at the organizational level can also mean that when an incident of racial injustice occurs, it easily becomes an isolated incident between a perpetrator and a victim, rather than an organizational

issue. The silence about racial issues serves institutions in the process of issue avoidance by not paying attention to the concerns that affect racialized workers such as the high proportion of racialized children in care.

Silences on the Number of Racialized Children in Care

Some participants involved in the interviews and focus group indicated that there were awkward silences regarding the high numbers of racialized children in care—a problem that, in their opinion, should receive attention both within their organizations and the public realm. In devoting attention to that issue, the focus should be on the determinants of the high numbers of children in care. Available American studies demonstrate poverty as the determining factor for the overrepresentation of racialized children (Kim, Chenot, and Ji 2011, 1236; Tilbury and Thoburn 2009, 1102). However, American and Canadian studies by Coulton, Korbin, and Su (1999, 1026) and Trocmé, Knoke, and Blackstock (2004, 579) respectively, show that it is difficult to separate race from poverty when examining the overrepresentation of racialized children in care. Dora, a participant who held a supervisory position, expressed concern that the existing organizational rules, protocols and norms did not allow for significant discussions regarding what accounts for the overrepresentation of racialized children in care, particularly in major Canadian urban centres. Of particular concern for her was that there was not enough discussion of the relative importance of socio-economic, cultural, and organizational factors as determinants of the overrepresentation. In terms of organizational factors, Dora questioned whether sufficient attention was being devoted to the rigid rules and procedures that guide the admission of children into care, which do not provide enough flexibility in reviewing cases and a variety of alternative solutions in eliminating or at least minimizing some problems.

Challenges In Dealing With Silences

Participants indicated that racialized workers have challenges in dealing with silences and particularly in deciding how to deal with the silences. In reference to these challenges, Alisha said: "what I just learned is to be more diplomatic and not to voice my feelings, especially when there is tension in the room." Throughout the interviews, many participants frequently used the terms "respectful," "diplomatic" and "biting your tongue", raising the question of what is and what is not allowed in discussions about race issues. These terms not only reflect the unwritten organizational rules, but also demonstrate how power operates in terms of "governing the self." Self-surveillance was clearly taking place in terms of what could be said and could not be said. Interestingly, some participants who were vocal about racial issues had been approached by their racialized colleagues and told that they had appeared too force-

ful in their expression of marginalization. There was a sense that the strong views expressed by those with "big mouths," particularly when it came to race, prevented other workers from moving up in the power hierarchy within their organizations.

Others expressed regret about being silent. They saw themselves as having contributed to the status quo and reducing the possibilities of raising questions about the complex nature of their identities and issues of equality. As Sue said, "I regret not pushing the envelope because in my silence I maintained the status quo. I did not push the envelope because I needed a good job after child welfare." Sue's comment reflects her feelings of disappointment because she failed to point out the limited attention racial issues were given within her organization.

However, there was also frustration about those who were "hotties," as Alisha referred to herself, meaning workers who were verbally assertive and in some instances even aggressive in discussions of racial issues. When they did speak up on racial issues, their pain was exacerbated because they did not know where to go within their organization to address these issues. This is not to suggest that there were no avenues to do this in some agencies. What can be said is that there was a sense that workers should not get too "hot," meaning verbally expressive about race. At the same time others expressed regret at being "cold," meaning nonresponsive to marginalization.

Not "being hot" and not "being cold" point to an implicit expectation on the part of the organization —"disciplinary power"—that workers will calmly complete their jobs within the existing institutional hierarchies and conform to and internalize the organizational social values of respect and diplomacy. This leads to a muting of race issues. This conformity raises questions about respect. For whom? For what? A remark by Eric was rather disconcerting but demonstrates the fear that exists in relation to discussions of race in the context of child welfare work. He stated, "the issue of racialization within child welfare spaces is not easily overt or visible. We even have a fear if we are serving a black family to stand up for them sometimes because we fear that we are going to be seen as radicals."

STRATEGIES USED BY RACIALIZED WORKERS IN NEGOTIATING POWER

This section of the paper poses the question of how racialized workers negotiate power when faced with the aforementioned challenges of colourblindness, professional incongruence, ghettoization and disempowerment, case matching and the overrepresentation of racialized children in care. In addressing that question, this paper is influenced by Medina (2011, 9) who uses Foucault's theoretical perspectives to argue that power coexists with resistance or put simply, wherever power prevails, there is always a possibility of resistance. Participants in the interviews and focus

group for this study suggested that racialized workers negotiate power using the three alternative strategies that entail varying degrees of resistance: conformity, collaboration, and conflict. Before explaining those three strategies, it is useful to note that this typology is influenced by some typologies in the existing literature that suggests that there are also other ways that power is negotiated to allow marginalized groups to cope with domination. For example, in his book, *Challenging Oppression and Confronting Privilege,* Mullaly (2009, 83) examines coping mechanisms for marginalized groups and cites several scholars, including Frantz Fanon, who describes that subordinated populations show a pattern of compromise, flight, and fight when dealing with domination. According to other scholars, like Dominelli (2002), marginalized groups respond to domination through acceptance, accommodation, and rejection in negotiating power relationships. The typology of strategies used for analytical purposes in this paper is influenced by the aforementioned typologies, but it is slightly different and adopts the language of conformity, collaboration, and conflict when responding to power.

Conformity Strategy
Many participants noted that comformity is the most prevalent strategy used in negotiating power. Conformity refers to the negotiation that constitutes expected respect that symbolizes the obedience and conformity to the hierarchies and dominant practices within institutions. Conformity also means operating within the institutional hierarchies with limited dialogue that can result in individuals becoming objects of the exercise of power. According to Du Bois (an African American scholar of the early 1900s), racialized people experience a divide between how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by the dominant group (Ladson-Billings 2000, 259-260). Scheurich and Young (1997) describe double consciousness as a coping response to domination. They argue that people of colour grow up learning to look at themselves neither through their own eyes nor through the eyes of their own race, but through the eyes of the dominant culture, which include policies and practices. The result of this historical dominance is that the styles of thinking, acting, speaking, and behaving of the dominant group become the socially correct or privileged ways of thinking, acting, and behaving.

Participants acknowledged that conformity was one of the ways they dealt with power relations within their respective organizations. They were in effect conforming both to written rules as well as to the unwritten rules and norms of the organizational culture espoused by and propogated by supervisors and co-workers. Part of the conformity of the participants was engaging in practices of self-surveillance where participants practiced methods like respect, diplomacy, and biting their tongues. Conformity was essentially dictated by the perceived potential problems

that racialized workers would face if they did not conform. Clearly then, much of the comformity as well as the silence of racialized workers in conforming has to be understood in the context of the vulnerability and potential risk they face when speaking up. The transformation of silence into language and action can lead to punishment (Hooks 1984, 42). The problem with conformity is that as Pinderhughes (1989) argues, it hinders the ability to implement the systemic changes necessary to bring about racial equity.

Collaboration Strategy

Collaboration was also a strategy used by participants. They indicated that when this strategy is used by racialized workers they become involved in finding ways to work with several parties including supervisors, coworkers and collaterals to support clients. Collaboration included workers sharing their knowledge with others, including supervisors, co-workers, and other professionals so that the best supports were provided to families and children. This became reciprocal because nonracialized workers also shared their knowledge with racialized social workers. As Hugman (1983, 278) argues, sharing ideas can be sustained within social relationships—and I would add social work relationships—both laterally and hierarchically to have meaningful discussions about race. The analysis of the collaboration techniques used by racialized child welfare workers reveals closer work relationships with colleagues to assist immigrant families. Collaborating with nonracialized co-workers was a different experience for participants because it did not involve case assignment and case matching by supervisors. It became a collegial work relationship to help families. Focus group participants felt that collaborating on these cases was helping families because their nonracialized colleagues could better understand parents from other countries.

Participants also acknowledged that they needed child protection teams and colleagues for support. Co-workers could be tremendously encouraging in challenging situations, but this was not the general rule, as reported by Alisha. Participants also stated that they had heard of horrible experiences from other colleagues regarding poor relationships with co-workers that led to isolation. Studies have suggested that child protection work is undervalued and social isolation from colleagues can add to these work complexities (Anderson and Gobeil 2002, 4). Isolation can manifest itself in the form of physical and social exclusion. For racialized workers, isolation from colleagues can be frustrating within work places (Essed 1991; Yee 2007). For example, Alisha stated that "marginalization is subtle. It is camouflaged....I still have to do what I have to do. I can see the coldness in colleagues." Existing academic literature shows that collegial support can help to address the day-to-day challenges of child welfare work. To survive in such a demanding work environment requires what Korczynski (2003) calls "communities of coping" for workers.

Conflict Strategy

Participants noted that conflict also occurs as part of the negotiation process. Contestation creates tension within different work relationships, including those of supervisor/worker, worker/worker, worker/family and worker/collateral. The participants noted that part of the negotiation was about individual attitudes and actions. Alisha stated: "it is not for me to deny that there is no differentiation or marginalization." Discussion of the challenges of negotiating power relationships revealed deep issues about and tensions regarding race. When discussing areas where change should occur, some participants mentioned that antiracism training was needed, showing that this matter continued to be a challenge for child welfare. Various researchers—Dumbrill and Maiter (2003, 27), Proctor and Davis (1994, 316), Stubbs (1984, 6), Woldeguiorguis (2003, 282), as well as Reid (2005)—note racial tension and issues in social work. However, the need to discuss these concerns suggests that they remain unresolved and require further attention. However, the need to discuss these concerns suggests that they remain unresolved and require further attention, which leads to Sullivan and Tuana's (2007) question of whether a utopian optimism of racial justice will ever be achieved. One can also question whether it will ever be possible to have an egalitarian society despite the continued efforts of social justice advocates. In my view, equality, justice, and fairness are ideal notions of Enlightenment epistemology and will never be realized in the face of dominance and power inequality. The discussion of these issues in my research reflects the ongoing individual and collective struggles against racism.

The participants questioned their relationships with others (supervisors, coworkers, other officials and clients). Their stories reflected experiences of powerlessness when they were excluded, discriminated against, and marginalized. Admitting powerlessness was not a sign of weakness because they found ways to question the nature and structure of their work and found ways to practice through a negotiated process within the various work relationships.

The negotiation of power by racialized child welfare workers through conformity, collaboration, and conflict raises the so-what question or "what does this study mean?" There are power relations which participants openly discussed but there was a lack of clear answers on how to address these issues, which demonstrates the complexities of these matters. The hesitancy to discuss race also made these social issues invisible and helped to maintain the status quo. Furthermore, injustice, inequality, and power are well entrenched. Given the complexities of power relations and the silence on race as discussed in this paper, it is difficult to find solutions or provide any meaningful answers to the innermost questions posed by the participants. But going forward, a few suggestions are worth mentioning.

Conclusion

In this final section, I argue that the paper advances the view that the contemporary racial tensions are traceable in the historical ideas of the Enlightenment. The main focus is to demonstrate that these racial conflicts continue to be expressed in modern-day social and work relationships. What is most problematic is the tendency to mute these racial issues within organizations and institutions as in the example of dismissing and ignoring of racialized social workers' experiences of status incongruence, devaluation, and ghettoization. Crucially, this marginalization results in social discomfort where many individuals are unable to express their innermost feelings about race and racial relationships within the workplaces. As demonstrated in this paper, conformity, collaboration, and conflict become ways in which racialized workers negotiate power in their child welfare work and practice.

As we move forward, we cannot deny that race remains an extremely challenging matter given the deep social complexities that are fundamental to our social existence. While being interviewed by Andrew Davidson (2012) on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Clarence Jones (professor at the University of San Francisco and former attorney and speechwriter of Martin Luther King, Jr.), discussed how ineffectually and uncomfortably race is being dealt with in the United States. Jones' comments apply equally to Canada. Interview and focus group participants noted that race is regularly dismissed and ignored because the topic is uncomfortable for many people. Race and racial differences have not been normalized because they provoke complex discussions and emotions, but one cannot remain inattentive to or trivialize the issue. Race is one of the key features in the organization of social relationships (Lewis 1997, 53) but yet it is regularly avoided, which never resolves the issue.

The development of human rights legislation regarding race and other marginalized identities has been a landmark in the struggle to create an inclusive Canadian society. While we continue to struggle with race, the human rights legislation can be a foundation to bolster the dignity deserved by every individual member of our society. However, federal and provincial/territory human rights legislation can only go so far towards achieving inclusion, justice, and equality. Mullaly (2009, 73) argues that bias and prejudice cannot be legislated against, making it difficult to eradicate inequality and injustice. Given that challenge, it is imperative to continue to work on addressing the silencing of racial issues within institutions because the lack of recognition of racial differences erodes the legal protections afforded by human rights legislation to marginalized groups. Institutions are well positioned to play a major role in promoting justice. One major role they can play is to facilitate difficult but crucial conversations on race and racialization, so that we can shift from silence to con-

structive communication. As Pendry (2012, 408–9) points out, engaging in such conversations about race and racialization will help to minimize the miscommunication specific to these issues. What is less recognized is that through difficult but crucial conversations, histories and experiences of racialized workers, particularly within the supervisor/supervisee relationship, can be explored. Similarly, conversations that facilitate sharing of information can also help nonracialized supervisors and workers (who may be mistakenly perceived as harboring racial bias and ignoring the experiences of racialized groups) explain and affirm that they support establishing a healthy and constructive organizational culture.

Addressing the issue of silence in the working relationships between supervisors and workers parallels the difficult conversations that social workers must have with families to build better relationships and resolution to problems. Ideally, the supervisor/supervisee dynamic must be relational where there is a positive working relationship and good communication. More importantly, it is not what we currently know or have experienced in our prior interactions but rather the desire to learn, grow, and change through the exchanges of stories that can occur in difficult but crucial conversations. In this exchange of stories, the intent is to discuss issues and options rather than to focus on individuals.

Academic research conducted independently by Pendry (2012, 411), Ayo (2010), and Cook (1994) explores issues of race within the context of the supervisor/supervisee clinical work relationship. In his work, Pendry argues that it is always the responsibility of the supervisor, as a person in a position of influence and power, to create a work environment that allows for the discussion of race issues. Ayo also maintains that race should be addressed in the supervisor/supervisee relationship. Cook concludes that race does not have to be avoided as a "social stigma." The Ontario child welfare system has not been inattentive to these challenges of racial inequality. Some child welfare agencies in Ontario have developed or are in the process of developing anti-oppression policies (The Ontario Child Welfare Anti-oppression Roundtable 2009; also discussed by Pon, Gosine, and Phillips 2011, 386). Such developments are a good step for creating a work environment where discussions of racial issues can occur as these institutions grapple with issues of diversity and difference while serving a changing population and seeking ways to provide culturally appropriate and effective services for families.

References

Anderson, Madeleine, and Gobeil Shalan. 2002. *Recruitment and Retention in Child Welfare Services: A Survey of Child Welfare League of Canada Member Agencies.* Ottawa: Child Welfare League of Canada.

Ayo, Yvonne. 2010. Addressing Issues of Race and Culture in Supervision. In *Mirrors and Reflections: Processes of Systematic Supervision,* eds. Charlotte Burck and Gwyn Daniel, 225–248. London: Karnac.

Ayon, Cecilia, and Eugene Ainesberg. 2010. Negotiating Cultural Values and Expectations within the Public Child Welfare System. A Look at Familismo and Personalismo. *Child and Family Social Work* 15.3: 335-344.

Bernard, Wanda Thomas, Lydia Lucas-White, and Dorothy Moore. 1993. Triple Jeopardy: Assessing Life Experiences of Black Nova Scotian Women from a Social Work Perspective. *Canadian Social Work Review* 10.2: 256-273.

Brand, Dionne. 1999. Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles on the Sexual Division of Labour. In *Scratching the Surface: Canadian, Anti-racist Feminist Thought,* eds. Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson, 83-96. Toronto, ON: Women's Press.

Cook, Donelda. 1994. Racial Identity in Supervision. *Counselor Education and Supervision* 34.2: 132-41.

Coulton, Claudia, Jill Korbin, and Marilyn Su. 1999. Neighborhoods and Child Maltreatment: A Multilevel Study. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 23.11: 1019-1040.

Davidson, Andrew. 2012.Can Black America Withstand an Obama Loss? Interview with Clarence Jones. *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,* 5 November.

Dominelli, Lena. 2002. *Anti-oppressive Social Work Theory and Practice.* Basingtoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dumbrill, Gary, and Sarah Maiter. 2003. Developing Racial and Cultural Equity in Child Welfare. *Ontario Association for Children's Aid Societies Journal* 47.2: 27-31.

Dutt, Ratna. 2003. Cultural Expert Role is Harming Ethnic Minority Staff and Clients. *Community Care* 4.

Essed, Philomena. 1991. *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Trans. Charles L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press.

Galabuzi, Grace. 2010. Measuring Racial Discrimination in Canada: A Call for Content and More Inclusive Approaches. *Canadian Journal for Social Research* 3.2: 24-44.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 1992. From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproduction Labor. *Signs* 18.1: 1-43.

Hooks, bell. 1984. *From the Margins to Center.* Boston: South End Press.

Hugman, Richard. 1983. *The Relationship between Organizational Structure and Occupational Ideology in Social Services Departments.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Lancaster.

Hutchinson-Reis, Michael. 1989. And for Those of Us Who are Black? Black Politics in Social Work. In *Radical social work today,* eds. Mary Langan and Phil Lee, 165-177. London: Uwin Hyman Ltd.

Kim, Hansung, David Chenot, and Juye Ji. 2011. Racial/Ethnic Disparity in Child Welfare Systems: A Longitudinal Study Utilizing the Disparity Index (DI). *Children and Youth Services Review* 33.7: 1234-1244.

Korczynski, Marek. 2003. Communities of Coping: Collective Emotional Labour in Service Work. *Organization* 10.1: 55-79.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 2000. Racialized Discourse and Ethnic Epistemologies. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* 2nd ed., eds. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 257-77. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Lewis, Gail. 1997. *Living the Difference: Ethnicity, Gender and Social Work.* Doctoral dissertation, Open University.

———. 2000. *Race, Gender and Social Welfare: Encounters in Postcolonial Society.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Li, Peter. 2001. The Market Worth of Immigrants' Educational Credentials. *Canadian Public Policy* 27.1: 23–38.

McWhorter, Ladelle. 2004. Sex, Race and Bio-power: Foucauldian Genealogy. *Hypatia* 19.3: 38-62.

Medina, José. 2011. Toward a Foucauldian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-memory, Epistemic Friction and Guerrilla Pluralism. *Foucault Studies* 12: 9-35.

Morrel, Paul. 2007. Power and Status Contradictions. In *Revisiting the Use of Self: Questioning Professional Identities,* ed. Deena Mandel, 71-86. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc.

Mullaly, Bob. 2009. *Challenging Oppression and Confronting Privilege.* 2nd ed. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Pendry, Nick. 2012. Race, Racism and Systemic Supervision. *Journal of Family Therapy* 34.4: 403-418.

Pfeffer, Naomi. 1998. Theories in Health Care and Research: Theories of Race, Ethnicity and Culture. *British Medical Journal* 317.7169: 1381-1384.

Pinderhughes, Elaine. 1989. *Understanding Race, Ethnicity and Power: The Key to Efficacy in Clinical Practice.* New York: Free Press.

Pon, Gordon, Kevin Gosine, and Doret Phillips. 2011. Immediate Response: Addressing Anti-native and Anti-black Racism in Child Welfare. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 2.3 & 4: 385–409.

Proctor, Enola, and Larry Davis. 1994. The Challenge of Racial Difference: Skills for Clinical Practice. *Social Work* 39.3: 314–323.

Proctor, Enola, and Aaron Rosen. 1981. Expectations and Preferences for Counselor Race and their Relation to Intermediate Treatment Outcome. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 28.1: 40-46.

Reid, Michelle. 2005. First Nation Women Speak, Write and Research Back: Child Welfare and Decolonizing Stories. *First People's Child and Family Review* 2.1: 22-40.

Reitz, Jeffrey. 2001. Immigrant Skill Utilization in the Canadian Labour Market: Implications of Human Capital Research. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 2.3: 347-378.

Rossiter, Amy. 2005. Discourse analysis in social work: From apology to question. *Critical Social Work* 6.1.

Scheurich, James Joseph, and Michelle Young. 1997. Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased? *Educational Researcher* 26.4: 4-16.

Smith, Linda. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London: Zed Books Ltd.

Stanfield, John. 1993. Epistemological Considerations. In *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods,* eds. John Stanfield and Dennis Rutledge, 3-15. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stubbs, Paul. 1984. The Employment of Black Social Workers: From Ethnic Sensitivity to Anti-racism? *Critical Social Policy* 4.12: 6-27.

Sullivan, Shannon, and Nancy Tuana. 2007. *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance.* New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Swift, Karen. 1995. *Manufacturing "bad mothers": A Critical Perspective on Child Neglect.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

The Ontario Child Welfare Anti-oppression Roundtable. 2009. *Anti-oppression in Child Welfare: Laying the Foundation for Change. A Discussion Paper.* Toronto, ON: The Child Welfare Anti-oppression Roundtable. http://www.torontocas.ca/app/Uploads/diversity/oacasjournalw09aocwarticle.pdf.

Tilbury, Clare, and June Thoburn. 2009. Using Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Indicators to Measure Child Welfare Outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review* 31.10: 1101-1106.

Trocmé, Nico, Della Knoke, and Cindy Blackstock. 2004. Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Child Welfare System. *Social Service Review* 78.4: 577-600.

Vago, Steven. 2003. *Social Change.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Person Prentice Hall.

Woldeguiorguis, Isa. 2003. Racism and Sexism in Child Welfare: Effects on Women of Color as Mothers and Practitioners. *Child Welfare* 82.2: 273-288.

Yan, Miu Chung. 2008. Exploring Cultural Tensions in Cross Cultural Social Work Practice. *Social Work* 53.4: 317–27.

Yee, June. 2007. *Examining System and Individual Barriers Experienced by Visible-minority Social Workers in Mainstream Social Services Agencies.* Toronto, ON: CERIS.

DANIEL KIKULWE is Assistant Professor at the University of Regina, Faculty of Social Work. His areas of academic interest include families, immigration, and child welfare practices and policies. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children and its applicability to the global south, as well as kinship care trends in Canada are important foci of his work. He is a co-editor of *Child Welfare Transformations: Interdisciplinary Practices, Field Education and Research* (University of Regina Press, 2016).