Class Divides: An Ethnographic Study of Social Service Workers in Canada

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Drawing upon narratives collected from those working in the fields of social work and child and youth work, this thesis examines the relationships forged between middle-class social service workers and low-income youth and their families. The focal site in this study is a subsidized housing complex, including a small non-profit run community center, located in a mid-sized Ontario city. Both semi-structured interviews and personal reflection were used in the collection of data. This work draws upon the existing body of literature on class and youth, with particular focus on class-based differences in values and parenting styles. Through examination of the naturalization of middle-class practices by participants, it becomes possible to re-examine relationships with working class and poor communities, and to find ways to best serve them.

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Dedication

For Jassi, Nicholas, and all of the children and youth who have impacted my life and research so profoundly.

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Chapter 1

Class and Youth in Canada as a Public Issue

1.1 Introduction

When I first met Jassi, I assumed that she was around 6 or 7 years old. She was sitting at a picnic table, a slight African-Canadian girl, with an athletic build and short, neatly braided hair. She was hesitant to speak, I had to ask her to repeat her name several times in order to include her on the community center attendance list. I later found out that she was 11. Unlike the vast majority of the children frequenting the center, she did not live in the complex. She lived several blocks away, with her mother and baby brother. She knew one of the families in the community, and therefore was left in their care when her mother worked. Jassi listened much more than she spoke. She became very attached to me quite quickly, and would often hold my hand as we walked to the local park, or the neighbouring community center which housed a swimming pool, a splash pad, and numerous new indoor facilities. Compared to the other families, I knew very little about her home life. Her mother would drop her off at her family friend's house early in the morning, before I arrived at the center. After program ended, she would either play outside with other children, or go back to a friend's house. I knew that things were not easy in Jassi's home; She often stayed overnight at other people's houses, she didn't talk a lot about her mother, and her father had passed away. Not only did she look younger than she was, but in many ways she also acted the part. She would often seek physical reassurance, and would stay by my side during activities and outings, while other girls her age ignored me in favour of their friends, crushes, and games. I appreciated her company. She never complained, fought with other children, or demanded attention. She seemed to be happy sitting in silence, watching the other children play in the splash pad, or on the playground. Sometimes, she would ask to braid my hair, or tell me stories about her friends, or her little brother. When she participated in organized activities, it was generally with girls younger than her, and even then, she never took a lead role in play.

Jassi was extremely athletically gifted, and sometimes would show me a perfect cartwheel, or would sprint to a nearby landmark to demonstrate her speed. I always reacted with awe and excitement when she did this, as it elicited such a positive reaction. Some other children, when praised, would simply respond with "yeah, I know.", or a similar statement. They had clearly been told by others in power that they held a certain set of skills, and that these were valuable. Once, Jassi ran extremely rapidly to a nearby tree, and I was genuinely shocked. I did not hide my surprise, and I exclaimed that she should be in the next Olympics. With such a simple comment, I didn't expect such a positive reaction from a girl who was clearly athletic, and had been her whole life. But she beamed, grinned ear-to-ear, and then launched into a rare, animated story of her past endeavours on her school's track and field team. It then became clear to me that no adult had ever taken a serious interest in the activities she most enjoyed.

One day, near the end of the first summer I worked at the community center, Jassi shyly volunteered a rare piece of information about her family. She said that her mother had been in the hospital, because caring for her and her little brother was too stressful for her. Jassi

emphasized that she tried her best to take care of her brother, and help out with housework, she was clearly upset. I reassured her the best I could, and she quickly returned to her sweet, silent self. After that first summer, Jassi did not return to the community center for programs often. I often think about her, and worry about how she and her family are doing. I do not know much about her specific family circumstances, but I do know that she is rarely allowed to be carefree and "childlike".

When I was saying goodbye to the children on the last day of summer program that year, my hug from her was by far the tightest, and most sincere. I let her hug me for as long as she wanted, and I knew she was one of the children who needed it the most (personal vignette, 2020)

Jassi's story is one of many individual narratives in which I have become personally invested. This kind of personal connection is both the best, and perhaps the most heartbreaking aspect of my experiences over the past two and a half years working with youth and families at a small community center in a mid-sized Ontario city. I began my work there somewhat accidentally, looking for a last minute summer job, and being drawn to working with children based on my previous experiences working at various summer camps. Up until this point, I was accustomed to working with primarily White, middle-class youth. This neighbourhood was different. As I first approached the housing complex, I was greeted by its rows of townhouses, many with cigarette butts and litter strewn around the front yards. I felt the presence of children immediately; there were bicycles and toys left out on the sidewalks, and the faint sounds of children talking and babies crying could be heard in the distance. It seemed an odd place for children to exist; the complex is located off of a very busy road, there are train tracks nearby, and along with some residential areas, much of the surrounding neighbourhood seemed to be occupied by run down auto repair shops, and empty storefronts, boarded up and covered in graffiti. The community center is almost indistinguishable from the other townhomes, save for a fading sign hung above the end unit. I knocked on the door, and received no reply. The door was unlocked, so I slowly let myself in, and found a living room crowded with mismatched furniture,

and a large, outdated kitchen. A teenage volunteer heard me enter, and directed me up the stairs. The stairway had a large and bright, but peeling mural depicting smiling people of differing cultures holding hands. I made my way upstairs, and found the office, which was one of 5 small converted bedrooms. As I left the center, I felt discouraged. I wondered how I could be expected to run full-day programs with as many as 30 kids at a time in such a small space, with an almost non-existent budget. The outside area behind the community center was equally as dismal. Toys and garbage thrown everywhere, and a basketball court with one broken net and no balls in sight. I had almost made up my mind to continue my job search elsewhere, when a bouncy 5-year-old girl with long blonde hair and a round face approached me. She asked me my name and told me hers. She pointed out her house, which was a couple doors down from the community center. She then gave me a quick hug and walked away. That brief interaction helped me to reconsider, as it seemed clear that despite my first impressions, this was community full of vibrance and joy.

I found out later that the community center is one of the nicest buildings in the housing complex. Most had 3 or 4 small bedrooms, which sometimes each housed 3 or more children. Unlike the center, many units did not have air conditioning in the summer, and there were frequent pest infestations that were often slow to be dealt with by housing management. Drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and petty theft were common occurrences in the neighbourhood surrounding the center. This seemingly bleak scene makes up the backdrop for many diverse and beautiful lives. Women gather to do each other's hair and to gossip in the main outdoor common area, families decorate their front steps lavishly during the holidays, and groups of children slip in and out of each other's households with comfort and ease. These seemingly incongruent traits of the neighbourhood are what first drew me to centering my research on this site. I was interested in understanding how class affects the youth from this community, and their

families. How do social service workers and agencies perceive the community? How do they affect change? What should their role in the community look like? These are all questions I hope to answer through my research. I also hope to effectively share stories, gathered from interviews with social service workers, as well as past personal experiences. Each of my participants have had rich personal encounters with members of the community, with whom they have formed strong, lasting bonds. I work with two goals in mind: to analyze how the social services address class struggles in communities, and to adopt an ethnographic approach to viewing this neighbourhood and those who inhabit it. It is through these anecdotes that the ordinary, difficult, beautiful lives of these people become visible. It is my greatest hope that this visibility will positively impact those in academia, as well as those in practical and policy roles, communities, and individuals like Jassi.

1.2 Public Issues Anthropology

I define this research as public issues focused, as it applies concepts of academic interest to community and individual issues and perspectives. By analyzing observations and opinions of those working within the social services, I hope to provide some potential goals; both within academia, and in the hands-on fields of social, and child and youth work. Throughout my research, I made a deliberate effort to write in a way that is both ethnographically rich, and accessible to a broad audience. Those outside of academia and social service fields are certainly part of the goal audience for this work. The families and youth discussed in this thesis are of great value to me, and I worked to make this a relevant and interesting read for them as well.

In order to create an accessible piece of writing, I have employed several different techniques. Inspiration was drawn from works which appeal to the general public, such as popular works by Annette Lareau (2011) and Ann Ferguson (2000). Both of these scholars have

written books which are popular among scholars, and recognized, at least in some capacity, in the public sphere. Their works contain valuable ethnographic and theoretical data, which is important academically. They are also very readable, and contain interesting mixes of raw ethnographic data and analysis, which make them enjoyable for non-academics. Both of these books are frequently taught to undergraduates, many of whom will likely enter fields other than academia. Works such as these which are accessible to a wide variety of people are helpful, because they can be used as teaching tools and resources for students, clients, or community policy makers. Ferguson's 2000 book, "Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity" contains brief field notes, or ethnographic vignettes in each chapter. This is a technique which I have tried to utilize to some degree in this thesis, as it proved extremely effective in Ferguson's work by provoking an emotional response in readers. If such a work were to be made available at a community center, or even a high school, it is likely that even those without a post-secondary education could learn from, and enjoy these excerpts, at least.

It is my hope that this thesis could perhaps serve a similarly dual purpose. This work adds to the current body of literature on class and youth, placing concepts from American scholarship into a Canadian context. Scholars from fields of anthropology, social work, community development, and psychology can use this research as a basis for new projects. Individuals working in social services, students, and members of the general public can also perhaps use this research to inform policy changes, programming for youth and families, or to simply expand their personal perspectives.

1.3 Public Perceptions of Class in Canada

"When too many people live in poverty, we all suffer because our province is leaving untapped potential on the sidelines" (Matthews, 2008, p. 4).

This sentiment is extremely prevalent within discourses on class and poverty. Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Matthews, 2008) not only states that a society without poverty would allow for marginalized people to realize their full potential, but also that it would allow for the privileged to lead better lives. When everyone in a society is contributing to the economy, rather than collecting government subsidies, there are more funds to allocate to all communities and services. This allows people from every social class to feel that these governmental policies will benefit not only society at large, but also them personally.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a marked increase in the study of class and youth in Canada. This scholarship covers a broad range of topics, including the values (Darbyshire, 2007; Christie, 2012), aspirations (Andres et al., 1999; Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008) and economic circumstances (Burton & Phipps, 2017) of youth and families, and interventions put in place to serve low-income communities (Shan et al., 2012; Swift & Callahan, 2002). In 2008, a plan was made to reduce poverty in Ontario. Within five years, the province's goal was to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25% (Matthews, 2008, p. 4). Numerous programs designed to minimize poverty have been put in place throughout the province, including free healthcare programs for children, the Ontario Childcare Benefit, full-day kindergarten, education subsidies for low-income students, increased food security, and after-school programming in public schools. By 2011, the number of children living in poverty had decreased from 15.2% to 13.8% (Canada Without Poverty, 2016, p. 4). These provincial changes also helped increase minimum wage, and improve housing security, and literacy and school readiness in children. Despite this move in the right direction, poverty reduction strategies often do not prove effective (Crossley & Curtis, 2006), and many children and families still face

housing and food insecurity, lack of access to social services, and earn below a living wage (Canada Without Poverty, 2016, p. 7).

1.4 Research Site and Class

The focal neighbourhood for this research is home to many people experiencing class struggles. After becoming familiar with the neighbourhood, it became clear to me that residents and staff perceive a clear divide of safe versus unsafe spaces. On one side of the complex, although located beside a busy road, there is a large open area, which many rows of houses back onto, including the community center. This space is generally considered safe, and children are allowed to play freely there. Down the hill, at the other end of the complex, there is a quiet street which leads to a small park. Although less busy, many parents do not let their children travel down the hill alone. There are fears of drug paraphernalia, and unsavoury people who may approach children. Outside of the complex, there are residential areas, composed of apartment buildings, and small houses. There are also both public and Catholic elementary and high schools within walking distance of the complex. Many children are permitted to walk to school in mixed-age groups, however some are driven the few blocks due to parents' safety concerns.

According to a report published in 2011, the focal neighbourhood has among the highest rates of low-income in the city. Just under 15 percent of people living in private households are classified as low-income, with over 25 percent of children living in low-income households (Chan et al., 2011, pp. 26-27). The neighbourhood also has high rates of people receiving significant financial aid from the government, unemployment, and single-parent households. These concerns surrounding children in low-income families have prompted the local implementation of after-school, food, and summer programs, both in schools and at community centers. The programs offered by the focal center are varied. Many target children and youth,

with others catering to families, or women. These programs all generally aim to tackle class-related struggles such as food and housing security, literacy, relationships, drug and alcohol abuse, and child-rearing. An important goal of the present research is to examine social service workers' thoughts about class and the neighbourhood, and to explore possible ways to improve local programming to fit the needs of individuals and the community.

1.5 Proposed Venue for Publication

My proposed venue for the publication of this work is "Children and Youth Services Review". This journal targets a varied audience, which will allow for all relevant academics and professionals to access this work. This will hopefully not only allow for further scholarship on youth and class, but also facilitate improvements in policy and practice in the field of social and child and youth work.

Chapter 2

Class Divides: An Ethnographic Study of Social Service Workers in Canada

2.1 Introduction

This work considers the perspectives of those working in the field of social services, who engage specifically with low-income children and youth. Through their stories and perspectives, I aim to provide a contemporary Canadian perspective of how those working with low-income youth perceive and interact with communities. The primary goal stated by the organization running programs within the focal neighbourhood is to improve the lives of community members, by "walking alongside", or working *with,* rather than *for* residents. This goal was often brought up in interviews, which led me to wonder whether this is something that is being achieved within this community, and what this kind of relationship might look like in practice. Through contrasting participants' own experiences with how they view those of the children and youth, it becomes possible to understand common biases within the social services, and to figure out how to better serve low-income communities.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 Participants

Participants in this project are all Canadian-born women, currently living and working in the city in which this research takes place. Most are in their early to mid-twenties, with one participant in her thirties. All but two participants are White, and all of them speak English as their primary language. All participants describe their families as middle-class, or upper-middle-class, and many have received significant financial support from their families well into adulthood. Most participants have worked in several different roles within the community center,

as well as with other organizations targeting youth. One participant does not work directly at the center, but is familiar with the site, and has worked in similar settings with low-income children and families. All of my participants have received at least a bachelor's degree, within the fields of the arts, humanities, social work, or community development. Most work part-time, casual hours at the center, and some have worked full-time during summers. One participant was a social work co-op student at the time of her interview, and my oldest participant has not worked regularly at the community center for several years, but was a regular staff member for around a decade, and continues to maintain a close connection with the organization and community members. The organization does offer some training opportunities for staff to better connect with communities, however most learning is done through practical experience.

2.2.2 The Site

The housing complex is home to a wide variety of people. Generally these people fit into 2 distinct categories: those passing through, and permanent residents. Some individuals or families need subsidized housing temporarily, and utilize the housing anywhere from several months to several years, but then move on. These people are sometimes new immigrants, who are working on gaining employment, or are sometimes single parents, elderly people, or those currently without full-time employment. Generally, these families are more private, and do not utilize the center's resources. Occasionally a child will attend a program from one of these families, but this rarely happens on a regular basis. This makes sense, as these families do not see this as their permanent community, but rather as a stepping stone. Many of these families are also dealing with other issues, which may impede their ability or desire to utilize community services: language barriers, addiction, divorce, unemployment. The permanent residents and their children are far more likely to integrate themselves into the community by interacting with community

center staff, and attending the programs offered. Many of these people seem to have little in common, other than their economic circumstances. There are some recent immigrant families in this group, but most are Canadian citizens. There is a core group of around 20 families who regularly utilize the center's services, most of whom have several children, and have generally been living in the complex for at least several years. These families are mostly White or Black, with one Chinese-Canadian family, and a few recent immigrant families from various South-Asian countries. Most of these families have 3 or more kids, and many have adult children and grandchildren living with them as well. There are also certain residences where many children who may or may not be related often stay. For example, one older woman in the neighbourhood often cares for her granddaughter, but also frequently has 5 or 6 other children and teenagers staying in her home as well. I have seen as many as 12 children living in one home, which likely only has 3 or 4 small bedrooms. The occupations of the residents in the complex are quite varied. Many work minimum wage (retail, restaurant, factory) jobs, often for long hours, including on evenings and weekends. Many families have at least one non-working parent on long-term government benefits (i.e. disability, unemployment, childcare benefits). Among non-immigrant parents who I have spoken to, most have not completed post-secondary education, and some have not completed high school.

The community center offers a variety of programming, all organized by the governing non-profit organization. These include youth drop-in nights and events, after-school programs for children, food donation programs, and informal therapy groups. The programs with which my participants are most familiar, and therefore the ones which I focus on in this thesis, are the after-school programs, and youth drop-in nights.

There is a marked need for children, teenagers and young adults in the community to have access to a safe space to spend their afternoons and evenings. For youth, their homes are often crowded, and outdoor spaces in the community, while relatively safe during the daytime, can be dangerous in the evenings. The center offers food, and space to chat, play games, and watch movies two evenings a week for those aged 12 to around 20. For school aged children, the center offers a few evenings a week of free childcare for parents, as well as providing food and helping children with homework. For parents who are wary about the center, this is also an opportunity for them to gain indirect exposure. Children often will pick up donated food on their parents' behalf, and will relay any important information between staff and their parents.

2.2.3 History of Childhood and Class in Canada

An important aspect of this research is understanding how the middle-class upbringings of participants affect the interactions they have with low-income children, youth, and families. In Canada, and worldwide (Harriss, 2006), there is a complicated history of such relationships.

By the early 20th century in much of Canada, there was a thriving middle class composed of a variety of business owners and salaried workers (Baker, 2001). A particularly notable shift around this time was a surge in women's rights advocates. Earlier in history, many women had little free time, as they were needed on farms or in the home. For the first time, suddenly there were women whose husbands were able to earn enough money to support their families comfortably, even sometimes allowing for the addition of hired help. This shift was further supported by the increased availability of birth control among the middle-class, and the reduced need to have large families to help out with household and farm work. Along with regular domestic duties, women regularly busied themselves with charity work, and socializing. These women "… sought to reform the morals of immigrants, the poor, and the working classes by

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promoting temperance, preventing prostitution, and protecting women and children in factories, in their homes, and on the streets" (Baker, 2001, p. 88). This was the beginning of a national trend for the middle- and upper-classes to scrutinize and provide aid for the working classes and poor. These families continued to have many children, despite dealing with high rates of single-parent households. Middle-class run charities very often had strict criteria for who was allowed to access their services and financial aid. This contributed further to class disparities, and made it hard for people to achieve upward social mobility. Women's participation in both world wars marked a shift in the labour force, and began to pave the way for gender equality. Post World War II, the beginnings of a welfare state were in the works, and many social assistance programs were put into place, particularly for women and children (Baker, 2001, pp. 93-94). Despite these systems created to combat poverty, there were still barriers in place for many working-class and poor families, particularly female-headed single-parent households.

In 1990, it was found that childless couples saved an average of 12% more money during their childbearing years than those with children. In 1999, the cost of raising a child in Canada from birth to 18 years was close to $160,000 (Baker, 2001, p. 102). These figures only continue to increase, making it difficult for low-income families to afford to live, let alone save for their and their children's futures. In the 19th century, schools, and institutions such as children's aid societies appeared, and attempts were made to increase awareness of appropriate childcare techniques (Baker, 2001, p. 169). By the early-mid 20th century, most children under the age of 14 were in schools, and were prohibited from performing labour, except "…as a form of education or as a sort of game" (Zelizer, 1994, p. 97).

The introduction of these supports marked many policy changes in Canada. Beginning in the early 20th century, specific welfare programs emerged, providing unemployment and childcare

subsidies, specifically for "at risk" families (Baker, 2001, p. 275). Despite these social services becoming increasingly available, Canada still is home to numerous barriers for the working-class and poor. "Unlike many European countries, Canada has alternated between moderate Liberal and Conservative governments that have emphasized business interests rather than a more equitable redistribution of income or greater social well-being" (Baker, 2001, p. 279). Conflicts between federal and provincial governments, as well as a lack of laws requiring "…the voices of labour or women to be heard…" inhibit much needed national change in policy (Baker, 2001, p. 279). The overall lack of effective action from the Canadian government puts pressure on non-governmental agencies and individuals to reduce poverty, despite lacking adequate funding and resources. Canadian social policy, as well as dominant societal views, are the basis of current thought and intervention. The class divide is ever present in Canada (Foster & Wolfson, 2009), and it has been a lasting trend for people of privilege to want to provide help to those less privileged. An increase in the legal and social power of institutions such as schools has continued the narrative of middle-class life being something that all Canadians should want to work towards. This has been difficult in both historical and contemporary times, as institutions frequently create and sustain barriers for the most vulnerable members of society.

2.3 Methods

For this study, seven participants were interviewed. These participants were identified through my personal connections from working at the site. Each participant was interviewed via video call, with interviews lasting between half an hour and an hour. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions about participants' experiences working with youth and the agencies that serve low-income communities. Each interview was transcribed with the help of a transcription service, and then key themes and topics for analysis were identified. To maintain

anonymity, all names in this thesis are pseudonyms, and all identifiable information is omitted. This research is by no means all-encompassing of the views held by social service workers. There are certainly many demographics not represented in this sample, and even among my participants, there are outlying opinions. The conclusions drawn from this research represent common themes which emerged in my research, as well as in the literature.

Another technique utilized in this work is the use of my own personal stories and vignettes. These stories illustrate my personal experiences interacting with other center staff, and members of the community. This is a way in which I access the point of view of an eighth social service worker, myself. These vignettes are a way to reflect on intimate stories from the community, in addition to those of my participants. These focus on the children and youth of the neighbourhood, as they are part of a community which is often marginalized and ignored. In addition to providing the individual thoughts of my participants, I also wanted to include vignettes which serve to make individuals in the community more visible. Hopefully these can serve to better situate the reader in relation to my work as a researcher, and my involvement with the youth.

Before beginning my interviews, I was cautiously optimistic. I knew many of the people I would be speaking to, and those whom I did not know personally, I had been connected to by a mutual contact. I felt like an insider, having worked myself for a social service agency for over 2 years, in addition to years of work with children and youth in other settings. I did not anticipate the classic issues which ethnographers seem to face so often: a stubborn, unwilling participant, discomfort, awkward silence, and disappointment. These were my peers that I was interviewing, people who were generally female, middle class, educated, and enthusiastic to participate.

As I began my interviews, I started noticing certain patterns emerging. Participants were extremely helpful, and would happily discuss their own upbringings, and their perceptions of the neighbourhood, and the youth. When I asked for specific examples however, I was generally met with wide stares and roundabout answers. One participant looked horrified and asked, "You want me to name them?" (Courtney, 2020), when I asked her to speak about specific youth from the community.

I began to realize that the people I was interviewing were conditioned to speak and answer questions in a certain way. All of their education and training taught them to speak positively of the youth and parents, and to place confidentiality above all else. Despite my reassurances that all names and identifying details would be changed to preserve anonymity, they were still reluctant to be fully transparent with me. The people who I was talking to through the computer screen were completely transformed from the people I had casually chatted with at work countless times. There were no offhand comments about how annoying a certain child was, or how difficult the organizations they had worked for could be. Rather than giving me their unfiltered, honest answers, they often were concerned with giving me the "right" answers, as they know how important a masters thesis is. This was certainly an attempt to be of help to me and my research, as well as perhaps a way of demonstrating their own cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

With this being said, it is also important to consider my own positionality as a researcher. Being a White, female graduate student, who was raised in a middle-class household, I cannot truly grasp the experiences of those living in this community. I, like many community center staff, worked there for one summer, running programs for children, and since then have worked part-time running child and youth programs while in school. Therefore, I lack insight into many

of the programs run through the center, as do many of my participants. I only am able to comment on programs which I have observed, and what has been told to my by participants. This is not all-encompassing, but hopefully provides a glimpse into this community, and the staff working to improve it.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

By drawing upon a few key works, I was able to identify theories which are most relevant to the present research. Annette Lareau's "Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life" (2011) played an integral role in understanding class replication, and how difficult it can be to achieve social mobility. Lareau's research shows that American middle-class parents "cultivate" their children's interests through extracurricular activities which often take up much of a child's time. These parents also are extremely involved in all aspects of their children's lives (Dyck, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013), and this intense involvement often lasts well into the child's twenties. As a result, middle-class children tend to receive post-secondary education, and hold jobs similar to their parents'. Working-class and poor parents, on the other hand, lean more towards a style of parenting where children are permitted and expected to manage their own learning, play, and conflict resolution (Guest, 2013; Lareau, 2011). This kind of parenting is found to produce extremely independent children, however, it is difficult for them to cross the class barrier, and achieve an income better than that of their parents (Kendig et al., 2014; Swartz, 2008). This social replication occurs because of many factors, including education, values, goals, finances, and geographic location. The primary finding of Lareau's (2011) research is that children's lives, supported by the parenting that they receive, schooling, extracurriculars, and social interactions, are largely predetermined by the social class they were born into.

Adrie Kusserow's 2004 book, "American Individualisms" not only provides another point of view on class replication, but also demonstrates how marginalized populations can be judged by those in power as holding beliefs of lesser value than their own. Kusserow's work here examines different ways in which American families experience and practice individualism. Middle-class parents tend to favour a "soft" individualism, which places emphasis on self-expression, and gentle nurturing of a child's individual interests and talents. Working-class and poor parents adopt "hard" kinds of individualism, which encourage children to be tough, protect themselves, and resolve conflicts independently from a young age. This class-based difference in values is, as shown by Lareau, due to many different social, economic, and personal factors. However, because children are entrenched in these beliefs from birth, they appear as fully natural, as part of their habitus. Children are raised by parents who hold a certain set of class-determined values, and are surrounded throughout their lives by many other people (teachers, coaches, peers, neighbours, coworkers) who share these same beliefs. Therefore, Kusserow explains that the concept of misrecognition is important. Because members of the middle-class see certain ways of thinking as so natural, and as the "only" or the "right" way, they see other ways of being as unnatural or wrong. Rather than seeing a working class-parent who has endured many difficulties and barriers teaching their children to be tough in order to succeed, they see a "bad" parent, who is failing to instill in their children the value of self-expression and (soft) independence. Working-class and poor individuals also see the values with which they were raised as being natural, however due to their lack of social and economic power, any judgments they make about the middle- and upper-classes do not hold the same weight as those made about them.

Another lens through which the middle-class views the working-class and poor is that of "adultification". Ann Ferguson's book "Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity" (2000) describes how teachers and other school staff see certain students (poor and Black) as being capable of making responsible decisions, and therefore are harder on them than they are on other (middle-class and white) students. When middle-class children break the rules, it is seen by staff as a natural part of growing up, and is therefore easily forgiven. However, when poor children break rules, it is seen as the beginning of a life of drugs, crime, and other misdeeds. The poor children are not seen as innocent, misbehaving children, but as young criminals who should know better, and therefore should be harshly punished. Ferguson makes note of how surveillance, discipline, and power in schools are used to harshly punish marginalized youth, while pardoning others. A 2015 study conducted in Toronto, Ontario revealed that large Canadian cities are following the precedent on surveillance and discipline that has been set by the United States. This causes huge disparities between youth, as school surveillance systems are connected to systems of police, government, and immigration and customs (Salole & Abdulle, 2015, p. 129). North American children and youth who are already marginalized are punished by those in power for not conforming to the norms set by a middle-class society.

2.5 Data and Analysis

A pervasive finding which appeared throughout my research was the naturalization of middle-class practices. A common perception among participants is that the children in the neighbourhood hold too much responsibility within their families (see Appendix A). Much like the way "Western" ideals are normalized (Ameeriar, 2017), so are those of the middle-class. During interviews, it was mentioned that parents in the neighbourhood are put in a tough

situation, where they have few good alternatives to asking their children to contribute heavily to the family. However, this is still seen as unfortunate. Participants would rather see children and youth follow a similar trajectory as they, middle-class individuals, have. One social work student who has worked at the center for many years, Diana, talks about how working part-time at the community center is only a financially viable option for her due to the extensive financial support she continues to receive from her parents. Diana grew up in an upper-middle-class farming family, and was encouraged to do things about which she was passionate, without worrying about financial limitations. When talking about the youth, Diana says, "they should be in school, they should be in extracurriculars" (Diana, 2020). This statement shows the assumptions made about the responsibilities of parents when it comes to the financial support of their children. The "right" way to grow up is to be surrounded by not only love and support, but also opportunities to excel academically, socially, and through extracurriculars, without significant financial stress. This sentiment is demonstrated through the story of a young neighbourhood boy:

As a 12-year-old, Nicholas is caught in between two worlds. I saw him first as an eager, but reserved little kid. A small, African-Canadian boy with short hair, often with designs shaved into the sides of his head. He approached the community center, curious, slightly suspicious of new faces in his neighbourhood, his community. Soon, he was greeted by 2 of his friends, and they launched into dramatic and animated stories of past community workers, and expressed their interests: swimming, basketball, dodgeball, and making slime. He has a cheeky grin, which he often uses to get what he wants, and often plays in a very carefree, child-like way.
In other ways, Nicholas seems very grown up for his age. He has an older brother, and he often hangs out with his teenage friends. They are nice kids, but also have been exposed to a lot: violence, drugs, encounters with police, family struggles. They are very cautious about who they open up to, and in a way, seem to utilize Nicholas and his youthful charm as a kind of gatekeeper between their world, and the community center. Nicholas frequently will hop into the kitchen, flash a quick smile, and ask for extra food, pizza, pop, gum, or money. More often than not, his requests are granted. Even when denied, he will guiltily smile again, and then return to his friends.

I have had conversations with coworkers and community members who express worry about Nicholas getting caught up in the world of drugs. They see him and his friends, many of whom

can often appear hostile or unfriendly to outsiders, and see a life of drugs and theft ahead of him. However, despite the fact that many of the older boys, and likely even Nicholas, have witnessed drug use and sale, they prefer other kinds of currency: YMCA passes and candy.
Nicholas will frequently come into the community center looking for these commodities, and if unsuccessful, will turn elsewhere. When asked about these ventures, Nicholas will initially show some reservation. As soon as I demonstrate that I am not trying to get him in trouble, he will smile and happily recount stories of how much money he has made from his latest sale. One Halloween, he and his friends and brother were out in the rain for hours, collecting as much candy as they could in pillow cases. They had gathered so much, that they had to return home several times to empty their cases to make room for more candy. They saw this candy as a business opportunity, more than just a sweet snack. For months, they were able to sell and trade the candy, as well as using it as a bribe for younger children, to get them to do what they want. Even the older boys, with their tough exteriors, were giddy with excitement on Halloween, and jovially discussed what they had gotten, and what they hope to do with it. Nicholas was an integral part of this. Standing at around 5 feet, with boyish features and a slight figure, he looked young enough to trick-or-treat, or innocently request pool passes or free food. He embraces this role, and with his quick wit and frequent grins, is able to generally get what he wants.

Nicholas, as well as having several young nieces, has a baby sister named Grace. With his mother working, and his father out of the picture, the responsibility of caring for 1-year-old Grace is often passed along to the 12-year-old. He frequently brings her along to youth events at the community center, and she has adapted well to being taken care of by a variety of children, family members, friends, and community workers.
One day, Nicholas was watching Grace, and she was denied entrance to the center, as it was a youth event, and there were concerns for her safety, should Nicholas get caught up with his friends and stop watching her. Nicholas was told to go home and watch her there until his mother returned from work, or until he found another suitable caregiver for his sister. I personally felt that it was somewhat unfair that this 12-year-old was being denied access to a safe place to hang out, eat, and do homework due to childcare responsibilities. Nicholas seemed slightly annoyed, but left for a couple minutes, and returned without Grace, and proceeded to grab dinner, and play video games with his friends. Grace had been left outdoors, and a 7-year old girl from the neighbourhood had been asked (perhaps bribed with candy or other forms of currency) to watch the baby until her mother returned. Being 7, and having no younger siblings of her own, the girl only vaguely watched Grace, as she continued to play with her friends. This kind of passing off of care is frequent in the community, as children and young teenagers often fail to fully consider the safety of the younger children in their care. I remember feeling angry after this incident; not with Nicholas for passing off his responsibility or his mother for leaving him in charge, but with the systems that caused them to take these actions. Nicholas' mother had no choice but to leave her son in charge, as she had to work, and could not afford to hire a babysitter. Nicholas understandably did not want to miss out on a fun and safe night of dinner and games with his friends. It also wasn't the community workers' faults, as there were liability issues surrounding an unsupervised toddler roaming the center.
Events like this one signify the cracks in the systems in place to protect youth. Nicholas could have a safe and enjoyable night, but only if he passed on the responsibility of caring for his little sister to another child. His desire to relax and have fun outweighed the fear of harm coming to Grace, or punishment should his mother become aware of his actions. The young girl told to

watch the baby did not protest, as she is used to these kinds of events happening. Despite being aware of Nicholas' lack of responsibility, his mother entrusts him with the care of her toddler. Community workers see a 7-year-old caring half-heartedly for Grace, but prefer to watch her out the window and be ready to intervene if necessary, rather than reprimand Nicholas or insist on his return home (personal vignette, 2020).

Within the community, it seems to be normal, and even expected, for children to participate in economic and childrearing tasks. The position taken by my participants however, is quite different. Their middle-class upbringings, socialization, and education have led them to find issue with a 12-year-old acquiring and selling candy, or having to watch his baby sister. Without perhaps meaning to, they are perpetuating the standards set by those in power, and imposing them on populations where they are not reasonable, nor desired. Within middle-class families, it is often appropriate for children and teenagers to participate in safe, supervised activities which are tailored to the child's unique interests (Dyck, 2012; Lareau, 2011). This is often not the case within low-income families. In order for the middle-class to "walk alongside" these communities, this power dynamic needs to be changed, along with the kinds of programs and supports offered.

Linda Burton's 2007 piece "Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model" exemplifies this sentiment held, consciously or unconsciously, by many members of the middle-class. Burton uses the term "adultification" to describe the tasks and roles given to low-income children and youth in their homes. These often include housekeeping and childrearing duties, as well as providing economically or emotionally for their parents. Burton, as well as participants, frames this as an unfair hinderance to children's growth and development. Low-income families often are put in situations that require this kind of "adultification", including having limited childcare options, working long hours, or having a physical or mental illness. These circumstances often put parents in a position where it is

convenient or necessary to have their children take over household tasks and family roles. Burton (2007) describes both positive and negative outcomes resulting from these responsibilities. Youth who are treated as, and expected to behave like adults often demonstrate self-confidence, empathy, problem-solving skills, and high levels of responsibility. These youth can also become narcissistic, hyper-vigilant, and experience mental health issues (Burton, 2007, p. 333). Despite there being clear positives to this kind of child-rearing, it is the potential negatives which are the focus of the middle-class. During interviews, despite youth being described as resilient, vibrant, brilliant, and tough, the focus was often on how academic performance and social relationships are negatively impacted by youths' home lives.

Institutions such as that governing the community center clearly see this "adultification" as an issue as well. Many programs for youth are designed to bring in as many individuals as possible, and give them a space to relax, socialize, eat, and participate in activities common in middle-class households. Staff often will be the ones cooking, cleaning up, and organizing activities; taking on parental roles. When in the community center, it is known among the youth that they have very few responsibilities, and that most if not all labour will be taken care of by staff members. In many middle-class camps and programs, the importance of responsibility and leadership are emphasized; youth may help with cooking, cleaning up, and activity planning and set-up. The center, even when running programs which cater to teenagers and young adults, tries to place more emphasis on fun and relaxation, as it is assumed that they have too much on their plates at home. The thoughts on this from staff members are exemplified by Florence, a young woman of colour who works part-time in many different roles, saying casually in reference to a young boy's home life, "you're 14 years old, why are you walking your siblings to school when you could be at home gaming?" (Florence, 2020). The fact that "gaming" is seen as the natural

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and positive outcome for these children is interesting. Perhaps if a middle-class child spent all of their time playing video games, it would be seen as lazy and entitled, they may be encouraged to help out their parents with things like walking a younger sibling to school. These low-income youth, however, are seen as lacking these fun, middle-class experiences, and therefore family responsibilities are seen as hindering rather than helping their development. However, the vast majority of societies worldwide, as well as "Western" societies until fairly recent history, do not subscribe to this current, middle-class notion of "childhood" (Lancy, 2015). Children, often at very young ages, work, take care of children, and travel long distances unaccompanied. To the vast majority of the global population, a phrase such a Florence's would appear extremely strange. A 14-year-old is old enough in many societies to get married, reproduce, work, and extensively help their family. Levels of responsibility during childhood vary greatly by culture and family circumstance (Ochs & Izquierdo 2009; Orellana, 2009). My participants, however, saw a childhood of playing video games, and focusing on education and socialization, as ideal, and to be expected.

When explaining what the youth at the community center are missing, one employee, Abbey, who currently holds a full-time position at the center running programs for children and youth, described them as lacking "that extra umph" (Abbey, 2020). This statement encompasses the beliefs that social service workers in this project hold. Abbey was explaining how younger kids often suffer emotionally due to the fact that their parents are often absent, and they tend to unload a lot of their emotions and stress on the kids, who are "emotional sponges" (Abbey, 2020). Older youth are also described as suffering, often displaying reading and writing difficulties due to missed school, lack of parental involvement in schooling, or distractions and stress at home. Abbey saw the kids and youth as "kind, loving, and vibrant" (Abbey, 2020), but

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as lacking this necessary "umph". This can be interpreted as parental involvement, love, nurturing, and support; all important parts of a typical, middle-class upbringing. Using Lareau's model of concerted cultivation, children are seen as needing support, guidance, love, and careful cultivation of their individual skills and interests (2011). Many of the youth in the neighbourhood enjoy playing basketball, for example. In the central circle within the housing complex, there is a basketball court, and basketballs are generally available at the community center. It is extremely uncommon to enter the neighbourhood and see an empty court. Parents rarely, if ever, intervene in these games, the court is a completely youth-governed space. Youth are allowed to play with their friends uninterrupted, which could be seen as being just as valuable as participating in adult-governed teams and games. However, when asked about their hopes for future community center activities, several participants mentioned wanting to provide opportunities to the youth to attend basketball games at local colleges and universities. The youth show interest, and often skill, in basketball, and therefore staff want to expose them to the game being played at a higher level, hopefully leading to more serious involvement and interest, and then possible sport scholarships, and motivation to achieve good grades in high school and attend post-secondary institutions. Currently, the neighbourhood youth are perceived as having potential, but lacking something critical. Abbey sees her role as a social service worker as aiming to provide "that extra umph" (Abbey, 2020), by providing opportunities and support that she sees as lacking in the majority of youth's households (see Appendix B).

These perceptions by social service workers demonstrate that working-class parenting styles and values are seen as being less valuable than what is typical within middle-class society. Florence describes an encounter with a 5-year-old boy from a low-income family:

one kid, who was five years old, and he had a knife. So he was in the kitchen, and he was

in time out while I was cooking breakfast for the kids, and he was supposed to be in one

place and I turned my back on him and he come up behind me and he had like a knife and

it wasn't a- like a butcher knife, but it was still a knife, and he was like 'I'm going to kill

myself with it'. And he was five… and so when I call that parent and that parent like was

just like, 'okay', like 'just send him home'. And I'm like, 'no, like we need to talk about

like what he's saying, like this isn't fine. He can't have suicidal thoughts'. And he was

serious. Like he was holding it and he was like 'I'm gonna put it in my neck', and he's five

years old. So it like it makes you wonder, like what's happening at home (Florence, 2020).

This behaviour was attributed to negligent parenting, and family issues not being dealt with

"properly" by the boy's parents. The parent's response to the situation was seen as being

uncaring, cold, and uninterested. It is possible that the parent did not feel comfortable discussing

their son's behaviour with a relative stranger in her early twenties, who had little to no formal

training in how to deal with such situations. The value-based judgements placed on this parent by

Florence demonstrates the type of psychologization common among members of the middle-

class. Kusserow (2004) describes how schools and other middle-class institutions create a clear

boundary between what is good parenting, and what is not; she writes,

[a]round the preschool classroom were a sprinkling of small poster-size pieces of paper

with different ways a teacher or parent could phrase something so as not to hurt the child's

self-esteem. For example, one phrase might be: 'It's not that you're bad, Megan, it's that

what you've done is bad.' (p. 46).

Florence clearly would have liked to see the parent acting "appropriately" concerned with

their child's behaviour. This demonstrates that Florence would like to be seen by this parent as

an expert within this context, and therefore have her advice and opinions taken seriously. This would also imply that she does not see the parent as being fit to make decisions about their child's well-being and care (Escobar, 2012; Li, 2007). By failing to use middle-class language, focusing on protecting a child's sense of worth, low-income parents come to be labelled as bad parents, and are perceived as not loving or caring for their children.

Personal connections are seen by my participants as extremely important, as many of the children lack adults in their lives who engage with them in the "correct" ways. One past community center employee, Courtney, who was my oldest participant, emphasizes the enduring nature of these relationships. Several years after leaving her regular position at the center, one of the youth she had worked with was murdered, and she talked about how she was able to reconnect with many of the youth over this tragedy. She also said that youth continue to contact her even now, reaching out for support during hardships, and sharing their joy with her surrounding new jobs or relationships. When asked about her most positive experience working at the organization, Courtney told a story about how three teenage boys pooled their money together to buy her a holiday gift, although "…not a single one of them celebrates Christmas" (Courtney, 2020). This solidified for her that she was positively impacting the youth, and that they appreciated her efforts to build strong relationships with each of them. Another participant, Brenda, described her relationship with community youth as "kind of like a yin and yang", and as "symbiotic" (Brenda, 2020). She also discussed a personal relationship with a community member named Ruby. Ruby is an African-Canadian woman in her early twenties, who recently was able to pursue post-secondary education in early childhood development. This was partially due to Brenda's willingness to give her relevant work experience at the community summer camp. Ruby had been the primary caregiver for her toddler brother since his birth, and because of

that had missed out on certain educational and work experiences as a teenager. Ruby's existing

relationship with many of the neighbourhood kids made working with them difficult at times, but

Brenda saw the importance of allowing her to have the experience, as well as helping her earn

money for school. Other participants also mentioned specific children or families who they felt

attached to, and often spent extra time and resources with these individuals. Abbey jokingly said

in her interview, "I totally have favourites", before launching into a passionate tale about two

siblings who she considers family, and "would take a bullet for" (Abbey, 2020).

These positive relationships took precedent in the majority of interviews. However, feelings

of distrust and uncertainty are present in the community as well. Florence described a situation

where two 12-year-old boys had fought during a camp program, and one father intervened,

> He ran downstairs right at the end of camp. So like, as camp was closing down and there
>
> were like maybe five or six kids left, and he was knocking on our doors and he's like, 'let
>
> me in, and I'm going to fucking kill you' (Florence, 2020).

This kind of reaction to this situation clearly does not fit within middle-class ideologies,

which emphasize communication, and calm self-expression. Certain parents are more receptive

to advice and criticism from staff, and are rewarded for this compliance. The families who

struggle to trust staff generally do not spend a lot of time at the community center, and staff

members tend to focus their time and energy on those most receptive to forming lasting

relationships. This seems to foster an environment where distrustful individuals are somewhat

neglected by the organization, and do not have the opportunities afforded to more trusting and

receptive community members. This also likely plays a role in why youth are such an emphasis

of staff's efforts. Young children are often comfortable interacting with a variety of strangers,

and older children and youth are aware of the benefits (namely, food) reaped by attending

programs at the center. As positive relationships are formed between children and staff, the children and youth are exposed to middle-class values and goals.

When speaking of their own goals, and those set by governing agencies, participants stated that they do not want to be seen as fixing a problem, and then leaving, but rather working with communities to identify and resolve issues, as well as placing preventative supports in neighbourhoods. This recurring theme led me to question why participants think that people in the community are facing the struggles that they are. Emily, a social work co-op student working at the center, spoke about how the transition from adolescence to adulthood can be very "othering" for youth. They are able to see disparities between themselves and their middle- and upper-class peers, and they can feel hopeless and overwhelmed thinking about the future. She then quickly added, "it can also go the other way" (Emily, 2020), explaining that young adults can be inspired by their difficult (from social service workers' perspectives) upbringing, and work extra hard to get out of the cycle of poverty. Emily also stated that "walking alongside" people was helpful, because it helps them "become self-sufficient" (Emily, 2020). These statements seem to me to be very revealing of the attitudes held by many of my participants, although not always explicitly. The words "become", "hard work", and "inspired" stand out as implying that, at least to some extent, that people choose to be working class or poor, and they can choose at any time to live a middle-class life. This also implies that financial success is the ultimate goal, and that alternate life pathways are not as valid as the one taken by the majority of social service workers. If those who achieve upward class mobility are "inspired" and "hard workers", then by default, are those who do not lazy, uninspired, or hopeless? Could someone not work hard to achieve a GED, a working class job, a similar life to their parents? Is sending youth the message that they have to work to be "better" than their parents the goal? Similar to the

concept of a "culture of poverty", participants seem to believe that those living in the community hold specific beliefs which inhibit them from achieving success (Lewis, 1966; Wu, 2014). If willing members of the community (specifically children and youth) are exposed to people who hold typical middle-class values and beliefs, then they will be able to break out of their current "culture". Within this neighbourhood, despite there being many challenges, most families have their most basic needs met. Some families, thanks to food and housing subsidies, have enough disposable income to buy new electronics, nice clothes, and fast food. Even those who cannot afford such luxuries have the safety and comfort of a tight-knit community who all seem to do their best to help one another. It is of course valuable to seek higher education, stable employment, and financial freedom. However, communities will be better served if those working in social services are able to recognize their own limitations and biases, and accept and learn from experiences different from their own.

2.6 Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice

Through the analysis of data from this study, as well as from the existing body of literature, several conclusions are able to be drawn. Middle-class social service workers see the value in organizations' taglines such as "walking alongside". They find it important to form lasting bonds with children and youth from the community, and even attempt to fill real or perceived parental absences in children's lives. However, participants are also entrenched in the values and beliefs of their own upbringings. Middle-class ideologies which emphasize communication, self-expression, and freedom are prevalent among participants, and they often attempt to "improve" the lives of community members through promoting these. Certain community members, such as youth and children, are targeted for these interventions, due to their perceived potential, and their

openness to change. While well-intentioned, these interventions often create a power imbalance, and create expectations for communities which are not realistic, nor desired.

The conclusions drawn from this study provide a much needed Canadian perspective to advance the current body of literature on youth and class. This research also focuses on a social service agency, which is an institution created for low-income youth and families. This provides a nice contrast to the work constantly being done in schools, as they are generally much more helpful to middle- and upper-class children (Lareau, 2011; Ferguson, 2000). By providing some insight on how the workers at such agencies think about youth and class, it becomes possible to see what may or may not be working within low-income communities. It is important for those working in social service organizations to be aware of their own biases and positionality. Letting go of the notion that middle-class life is the only valid pathway is vital when working with low-income communities. It is clear that personal relationships play a huge role in what makes programs successful. By nurturing individual personalities and goals, it will allow people to reach their full potential on their own. Additionally, it is important to design programs for older youth and adults, as well as children. If a child's parents, older siblings, and role models are successful (whatever their personal definition of that may be) and happy, then children will be more likely to follow suit as they transition into adulthood. Rather than criticizing parenting styles and people's home lives, it is more constructive to focus on positive aspects of different choices and values, as this will more likely lead to strong, lasting relationships with communities and individuals. Certainly, there needs to be more work done which directly focuses on low-income individuals, as well as work which considers race, immigration, gender, and other significant factors from a Canadian point of view. Additionally, more governmental support needs to be provided to low-income communities, in order to reduce the current burden placed

on individuals and social service agencies. It is my hope that this research can be a part of larger networks of research placing value on diverse life experiences, and truly working with communities, rather than against them.

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Appendix A

Perceptions of the Community by Social Service Workers

Throughout my research, there were many different perceptions of the community and its members made by participants. This list of quotes by no means encompasses all perspectives, however, it is meant to provide some examples of the themes discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These quotes demonstrate the negative stereotypes often associated with the housing complex, as well as the opinions of staff members as they pertain to parents and youth in the neighbourhood.

"I think there's like an element of discrimination because you'll kind of hear them talk about, um, discrimination of like living in this particular neighborhood that we've worked in and I've worked in… like the kids feel like they look- they're looked down on for living in a particular neighbourhood. And I find that also when I bring up to kind of other people, they ask me like, where's my job. I find I kind of get, um, that stigma and negative impression, like, 'Oh really you work there?' Or like I've had like, my friends would come pick me up after work, if we were going to get food, or ice cream or something, and they'd say like 'Oh you work here, like, I'm scared just picking you up'. When you get to know the community, you feel really safe and connected with people" (Diana, 2020).

"Um, yeah, so I actually noticed even, um, myself when I was a youth outreach worker for the first several months that I worked in the neighborhood probably about the first four or five months, um, I wasn't supposed to run any programming or do anything like that. My job was purely just to be out there and be on the ground. So I would take pizza and sit in the parking lot 'til midnight and like just being out. I even noticed myself when police would come through or security or whatever it may be to do their rounds, I would get questions in ways that I definitely would not be questioned, um, if I was saying in my- my neighborhood here where I live or whatever, but I always thought that was really interesting" (Courtney, 2020).

"Some families I see, they do need the food programs 100% so they come to food program very often. Um, A lot of them though do mainly need childcare. That's pretty much what it gets down to is a lot of youth are in close proximity to other youth and they're involved with other youth of all ages. And you know, sometimes parents don't necessarily want their five-year-olds hanging out with the 19-year-olds, and the 19-year-olds don't want a five-year-old hanging out with them. So it's kind of like, it's good to have program where we can target different age groups and have them come to the center, do something productive or not productive, whatever we want to do that day" (Abbey, 2020).

"All our kids are awesome. Um, just it's, um, mixed experience. I think, um, a lot of the children bring kind of complex backgrounds and challenges just from like, um, the poverty and kind of racism and discrimination and all, like, the really difficult things they've had to experience really young. So I think they're really resilient. Some of them kind of have a tough shell because of it, but, um, yeah, like amazing kids and um, yeah, they're really good creative, fun, smart" (Diana, 2020).

"We've got a lot of kids, um, that have had to take on kind of responsibilities that are more mature than their age because of like social class and like lack of income. So we've had kids that have had to take on jobs that aren't just their kind of own personal, disposable income they're, um, subsidizing their whole family, um, just with their part time job, um, I've seen kids who have had to, um, take time off school, um, to work part time jobs. They need the money more so than, um, they need the schooling… I've also seen, unfortunately, kids that have gotten into other ways of making money that aren't necessarily through part time jobs, like dealing drugs and those kind of things. So it really kind of affects, it becomes like a big priority for them where it shouldn't have to be for kids. Like they should be in school, they should be in extracurriculars, but, um, there's that, and then I find that, a lot of the girls especially, are taking on more, um, childcare roles. Um, because parents are working or they're burnt out from work or stuff like that. So you're seeing girls that are, um, always taking care of little siblings, boys too, but more so girls and yeah but, social class affects them a lot" (Diana, 2020).

"Every family has their issues. But I feel like for the underprivileged kids, their families battle with a lot more issues like that I've seen, like, it's just very clear, there's medical issues, there's mental issues, there's housing, like welfare. And you can just tell like some parents, all the time the parents would come in like rushing, and they're like, 'I have to go now, I have like a job interview'. So like, I think they're dealing with a lot more external stressors, at least from what I can see. And then I think that translates into how the kid is feeling, right? Like if you're spending 90% of your time worrying about this, this, and this, and 10% of your time goes to your kid, and then your kid needs like maybe a hundred percent every time but doesn't get that" (Florence, 2020).

Appendix B

Perceptions by Social Service Workers of Their Role Within the Community

Examining how social service workers perceive their own role within the community is an important aspect of this research. These quotes are meant to further illustrate how staff members form relationships with youth and their families.

"I think like little things like that is kind of my, my impact and my purpose in the organization. Um, I do though think that like, whether it be me or somebody else, like, I honestly just have all of the belief and love for these youth that like, I really don't think they necessarily need us, but like want us there, which is such a beautiful feeling. Um, so I think they would be fine with, or without me, but the thing that like, I get to connect with a good few of them, so that they're kind of like, 'Oh yeah. She's like my big sister. She kinda changed my life a little bit'. Cause they've definitely been changing mine, like since day one" (Abbey, 2020).

"I always wanted it to be very open where they could speak and ask questions about things. So a lot of things that we talked about were things like sexuality or, um, people who were trans because a lot of times at their home, given culture and religion, they were hearing certain things. So opening up a space for them to talk about it and get real information. They would talk about drug use, and from a harm prevention, harm reduction standpoint, I would say, 'okay, like who are you getting it from? And where are you getting it?'" (Courtney, 2020).

"The underprivileged children always needed, like, I felt like a mother sometimes… two of them used to actually call me mom. Like they were just like 'you're my second mom'. And so I feel like they were always looking for figures. Like my co-worker, he was the only black male and all of our kids were mostly, um, of the black race. So they always looked up to him, and they were always just like, 'you're like my dad', and like 'you're like the dad I never had', and stuff like that" (Florence, 2020).