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The “Fragility of Goodness”: Black Parents’ Perspective about Raising Children in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St. John’s of Canada

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ABSTRACT

How does one measure ‘goodness’ when all ethical choices lead to evil outcomes? To answer this question, this essay uses Martha Nussbaum’s fragility of goodness, critical race theory, and data from a SSHRC-funded study, in which we critically examine the parenting experiences of Black families in Canada. Findings suggest how racist ideas in Canada function as “color-blind” laws and policies that affect the everyday lives of Black people including their parenting practices. Our study calls on child welfare services in Canada to develop a comprehensive understanding of Black parenting practices, perhaps enabling more Black children to remain home safely.

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To many online readers, the story of a young Black woman arrested for an attempted armed robbery is nothing new as too many young Blacks have been associated with such crime in Canada and the United States. To the researchers and authors of the present essay who are familiar with circumstances leading to the arrest and the sentencing of the young Black woman in question, the story reveals sorrow and informs the phrasing of the title essay: “The Fragility of Goodness.” Abigail’s story reveals the complexity and messiness of parenting as Black in Canada. (For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality of research participations all names have been changed into pseudonyms). Although not all Blacks and Whites may necessarily fit into our racial essentialism (Harris, 1990), we use socially constructed terms *people of African descent* and *Blacks* interchangeably to mean individuals born in Canada, the Caribbean, Guyana, and Africa living in Canada who trace their ancestral affinity to the continent of Africa. The term *White* is also used in a socially constructed way to mean individuals who link their ethnic ancestry to Europe.

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In the book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Martha Nussbaum recounts the story of King Agamemnon of Greek mythology. Agamemnon has to make an ethical choice either to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess of Artemis to save his army or to watch his army perish. In the end, Agamemnon makes the decision to kill his daughter and save his army. Nussbaum (1986) asks, “How does one measure ‘goodness’ when all ethical choices lead to evil outcomes?” Is Agamemnon a good person to kills his daughter to save his army or he should have saved his daughter and watched his army of hundreds of thousand, perish? Nussbaum (1986) concludes that the human “goodness” that we so claim and hope to be is fragile, and in times of tragedy, is even complex and nuanced to achieve. Nussbaum’s fragility of goodness is relevant to unpacking Abigail’s story.

We came to know Abigail and her immigrant family, more than one year before she was arrested and jailed for an attempted armed robbery, through The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) which funded our research on effective parenting among Blacks in Toronto (Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), St John’s (Newfoundland and Labrador). SSHRC is a federal research funding agency in Canada that funds postsecondary-based research and training in humanities and social sciences. Abigail’s mother (named “Thaou”) was one of our study participants. At the time of our interview with Thaou, her daughter Abigail was already in care with a child welfare agency. According to Thaou, her daughter was taken into care after child protection services received an anonymous call of possible domestic disturbances in her home. Abigail was in constant conflict with her younger siblings. After investigation and assessment, a decision was made by the caseworker to remove Abigail from her home and put her into care. While in care, Abigail became involve with drugs. Thaou, who speaks English as her third language, has a minimal degree of verbal challenges communicating in English. This challenge, to a large extent, affected her abilities to access the needed help for her daughter. According to Thaou, all her efforts to get her daughter committed to a drug rehabilitation program failed as Thaou was constantly reminded by her daughter’s caseworker that Abigail is age 19 years and therefore need to make that decision voluntarily. The idea that her 19-year-old daughter is considered old enough to decide what to do without parental input was incomprehensible and very frustrating for Thaou. One year after our first interview with Thaou, Abigail was arrested and sentenced to prison for attempting to rob a convenience store with a knife because she needed money to buy drugs.

Another relevant story was told by one of the key informant of the study, Timothy, who works as clinical social worker. Timothy recounted a heart-breaking story of a Black mother who just after three months of arriving in Canada from a war-affected country had to deal with a child welfare services

(CWS) worker who did not understand and appreciate the mother's efforts to set boundaries for her 13-year-old son who was eager to join a gang group. The Black mother was frustrated by the actions of the CWS worker, especially as the worker tried to explain to her the boundary between protecting children from harm and violating children's rights. Frustrated by what the mother perceived to be a lack of support from the CWS worker, the mother decided to spank her son. Her actions eventually prompted a CWS worker to apprehend her son and place him in a group home where he became actively involved in gang activities. The son is now in prison for committing gang-related crime:

I worked with an African mother who arrived in Canada from a war affected background. Within three months. They had not even settled down, they had not even had the opportunity to deal with the effects of the trauma from the war. . . all this woman was trying to do was to protect her son from getting involved in gang activities . She was crying to CFS for support, but they did not allow the woman to set clear boundaries in disciplining her son. The issue was the child is 13 so he can do whatever. So eventually she put her feet [sic] down [to] try to discipline her son after she was too frustrated and have not had any support despite her plea. As a result her son was apprehended. He eventually ended up in a group home, got involved in gang activities and eventually ended up in prison. Exactly the things that the mother was trying to protect her son from. When we meet she said "I wanted to protect my son, but they labeled me as a bad parent." There are so many more examples similar to this one (Timothy, Clinical Social Worker).

To be clear, the CWS worker did not approve the child joining the gang; she was against the methods used by the Black mother to stop her son from joining the gang group. However, the outcomes in these two separate stories raise a different question: Is it possible that the two children could have been "saved" from imprisonment if the help their parents sought earlier had been provided? Given the outcomes for these two children, were their apprehensions and placements in care the best course of actions by CWS? How do we assess and measure the parental effectiveness of these two mothers in the face of what happened to their children? At the time of writing this article, another child of Thaou ("John") was apprehended and put into care by child protection services. He also is showing signs of using drugs. Like the case of Abigail, all Thaou's efforts to get help for John had again been met with similar protective intervention measures that fall short in providing what is needed to rebuild her family.

These two stories represent what is becoming the new normal for refugee and visible minority immigrant parents, who in addition having no contextual lens of understanding the Canadian Child Welfare system, have to also deal with living and parenting in environment where their traditional values and methods of child-rearing are seen odds with White-based standards (Chaze, 2009). Our study as well as past studies suggest significant challenges

among visible minority immigrant parents, who feel that their abilities to maintain their parental rights are often undermined by child welfare practitioners and policy makers who often fail to recognize and respect cultural variations in child rearing and caregiving practices, especially among visible minority immigrant parents (Muir & Bohr, 2014; Peters, 2002). According to Maiter and George (2003), when child protection workers disregard the cultural and racial factors that influence prototypical parenting standards in Canada, they undermine the efficacy, function, and overall quality of parenting practices that do not comply with Western socialization touchstones. Within this context, Muir and Bohr (2014), Ramona and Cathy (2013), and Ryan (2011) appeal to CWS providers to understand the cultural disposition of visible minority immigrant parents because such action does not only improve relationship between child welfare workers and visible minority immigrant parents, but is also necessary to serve the best interests as well as ensure the safety and wellbeing of children without undermining the cultural needs of the families involved.

Using these two stories as context for our discussion, we ask: How do we determine a “good parent” in an environment in which the CWS that defines the parameters of “good parenting,” according to Sonia Mills-Minster, is “built on White supremacy, racism, and colonialism, which has led to the oppression of [Black and Indigenous] children”? (CBC radio, 2016). What are the paradox and vulnerability of parenting in Canada as Blacks in the face of willful color-blind (mis)understanding of the collective history and struggles of Black parents in North America? We use data collected from an SSHRC-funded study and critical race theory to answer these questions. The discussion that follows focuses on theoretical framework that grounds the study.

Literature Review

The past 40 years have seen an increased presence of visible minority populations in Canada—6.3 million—of which Blacks are the third highest population (Statistics Canada, 2011). According to 2011 National Household Survey, there are 945,665 African Canadians in Canada, representing 3% of the country’s population (Statistics Canada, 2011). This number calls for the adoption of new approaches to how social services are delivered because many visible minority groups have different cultural and racial beliefs and traditions that have been found to influence and shape their parenting practices (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Ogbu, 1994). Children grow up within the cultures, values, norms, and worldviews of their parents, and so understanding the cultures, values, norms, and worldviews of parents will not only be in the best interest of children but also will improve the relationship between parents and CWS workers (Ramona & Cathy, 2013). According to Harris (2014), Tilbury and Thoburn (2009), and Maiter and George (2003), whereas

parenting practices across cultures may share certain similarities, cultural and racial differences in parenting goals, values, and behaviors need to be considered when constructing the meaning of effective parenting in a society. Disregard of this reality implies that certain parenting behaviors considered to be effective and functional among one group could easily be construed as “aberrant” behavior by another group (Maiter & George, 2003). For example, Hill and Bush (2001) note that whereas *authoritarian* and *harsher* parenting styles may imply out-of-control parenting to many European American/Canadian families, many African/Caribbean Canadian parents may see *permissive* and *non-punitive* styles of parenting as an abdication of parental responsibilities (Ho, Bluestein, & Jenkins, 2008)

Despite such differences in understanding and approach to parenting between European American/Canadian families and Black families in Canada, the parenting style of the latter is heavily scrutinized by child welfare agencies, which has resulted in over-representation of apprehended Black children in care in Toronto (Clarke, 2011, 2012; De Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Greenbaum, 2014; Hughes, 2014; Pon, Gosine, & Phillips, 2011). According to the *Toronto Star*, within Greater Toronto Black children are apprehended and placed into foster care at much higher rates (41%) than any other social group, aside from Indigenous people of Canada (Contenta, Monsebraaten, & Rankin, 2014). The Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable (2009, p. 8) estimates the figure to be 65% of the total number of children and youth in group care. Indeed, Margaret Parsons, the Executive Director of the African Canadian Legal Clinic, describes the current pattern of apprehending Black children into care in Ontario as “another form of racial profiling” (Contenta et al., 2014, para 5–6).

What could account for this higher level of apprehension and care placement of Black children and youth? What parenting practices are Black parents engaging in that result in this outcome? Studies have examined parenting practice among the Aboriginal population in Canada (Muir & Bohr, 2014) and two largest visible minority groups in Canada—Chinese immigrants (Chuang & Su, 2009; Gorman, 1998) and South Asians families (Maiter & George, 2003; Thandi, Gill-Badesha, & Thandi, 2013). Cross-cultural studies also have addressed parenting (Brotman et al., 2011; Forgatch, Bullock, Patterson, & Steiner, 2004; Ho et al., 2008; Lalonde, Jones, & Stroink, 2008). There is, however, a dearth of literature on the parenting practices of Black people, even though they are Canada’s third largest visible minority group. Most of the studies of Black parenting are focused on the United States; (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006), the studies available of Black parenting in Canada are centered on such topics as overrepresentation of Black children in the care of child welfare agencies (Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable, 2009) and the experiences of Black service users in the child welfare system (Clarke, 2002, 2011; Dumbrill,

2006, 2010; Rambally, 1995). Our study responds to this lacuna by being the first to explore how Black parents in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's understand and practice effective parenting.

According to Lalonde et al. (2008), Black parenting is unique because it involves layers of challenges having also to deal with the daily racism and classism that target Blacks families in North America. Peters (2002) notes that African-American parents teach their children about self-esteem, survival, self-respect, and threats of racism in society. Perhaps, in a society where it can be argued that some media constantly portray Blackness as quintessential evil (Adjei, 2013; Mullings, 2012), it is necessary for Black parents to teach their children about their cultural and racial pride: Only with such an approach can they help their children retain their self-esteem. We therefore in our study investigated whether racism does inform and shape Black parenting practices in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's.

The works of Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1968, 1971) have described three general styles of parenting that have been associated with observable outcomes in children and youth from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds: *authoritarian*, *authoritative*, and *permissive parenting*. According to Baumrind (1989), parents who rank low in warmth but high in control and obedience are typically seen to have authoritarian parenting styles. Authoritarian parents are believed to value domination of their children and punishment tactics in the correction of their children's behavior (Baumrind, 1967). In contrast, parents who exhibit high warmth and control are referred to as authoritative parents. These parents often make specific demands of their children but set limits pertaining to their children's behavior and maintain a nurturing home environment to foster healthy child development (Baumrind, 1989). Parents who exhibit warmth but set few clear limits on children's behavior are known to use a permissive style of parenting (Moten, 2004). Permissive parenting values non-punitive approaches to child rearing and often provides children with choices as a means to encourage exploration and growth (Delpit, 1988; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Gorman, using Chinese immigrants of Canada as a case study, has challenged Baumrind's analysis, observing (1998, p. 78) that "[Chinese] mothers' restrictions on their children's activities were due to their care and protection rather than their need for domination." We therefore explored the parenting styles of Black families, both to see what methods they use and to determine if parental choices are informed by the desire to dominate their children (as Baumrind suggests) or to protect their children (as Gorman argues).

Theoretical underpinnings

We draw on critical race theory (CRT) as the most appropriate framework for exploring Black parenting practices in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's. This theory emerged in the mid-1970s from the critical legal scholarship of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, which challenged racial oppression and injustices in the law against African Americans in the United States (Bell, 1976, 1979; Freeman, 1977, 1981). Today, CRT is being used in many academic disciplines, including the fields of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and social work (Clarke, 2012; Jeffery, 2005) to examine racist ideas and to challenge racial oppression and injustices that continue to prevail in Western society. In our study we employed CRT for two purposes.

First, CRT was used to understand how systemic racism structures might shape Black parenting experiences in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's. Race is a disputed subject for many Canadians (Adjei & Gill, 2013). Some intellectual works dismiss any link between racism and the many decisions of child welfare workers (Barth, Miller, Green, & Baumgartner, 2001; Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009); other intellectual works assert that the overrepresentation of visible minority children in the child welfare system is inherently linked to White hegemony and the subsisting racialization of visible minority children in European American/Canadian society (Aylward, 1999; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Thobani, 2007). Here, we find Sunera Thobani (2007)'s argument useful, which states that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Black children in the care of the Canadian child protection system is inseparable from the history of White supremacy in Canada.

Notably, CRT has been consulted to better understand racial ideologies and the functionality of White supremacist thinking in bolstering the development and implementation of color-blind laws and policies that influence the day-to-day lives of Black people (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Aylward (1999) and Crenshaw et al. (1995) also argue that racism is the scaffolding that structures racialized people's lives in European American/Canadian society so much so that there cannot be any arms-length position from which to merely observe and analyze racialized experience. If we are to truly make sense of the overrepresentation of visible minority groups within the child welfare system, the history of racism that has characterized the formation and ascendancy of Canada and the United States must be acknowledged and attended to. In the Western world, racialization can be traced back to racist legacies of colonialism in which minority populations were stripped of their power, forced into slavery, and dehumanized as a way to promote assimilation and colonized civilization (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). As Saraceno (2012) argues, "Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary (based on migration of populations, politics and economics) separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and

vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (p. 8). In North America, the disregarded or forgotten White hegemony and White normativity operate within child welfare systems to formalize a “misguided standards” of rearing children (James et al., 2010; Pon et al., 2011). The use of CRT helps the research to unpack how systemic racism and Whiteness within child welfare systems impact on the parenting experiences of Black families in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John’s.

Second, CRT’s technique of “counter-story telling” is pertinent to our study. We used CRT’s counter-story technique to explore the counter-stories of Blacks about parenting practices in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John’s because CRT values narrative and counter-narrative as important sites for establishing discourses against dominant ideologies and hegemonic stances (Matsuda, 1995). In this context, Black parenting stories are counter-narratives to the official standard of what “effective parenting practices” are supposed to look like. The stories of “ordinary” Black families are important contexts for gaining insightful knowledge and understanding of what it means to parent while being Black in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John’s. We employ CRT to explore the counter-stories about Black parenting experiences in Canada. In the next section, we discuss the methodology of the study

Methodology

As already indicated, the data for this present essay were taken from an SSHRC-funded research in which we examined how Black parents in three major cities in Canada—Toronto, Winnipeg, St John’s—understood and practiced “effective parenting” and how their knowledge is similar or different from that of child welfare agencies. We employed a qualitative approach to collect, handle, and analyze the parenting experiences of Blacks in these three cities as they navigate through a web of complex cultural, social, economic and racial conditions that impact on lived realities. Six major questions guided study:

- What does “effective parenting” mean to Black parents, and how are their definitions similar or different from that of other racial groups in Canada?
- What are the usual parenting rules and regulations Black parents set for their children, and what actions are often taken if the rules are not followed?
- What are the motivations and consequent strategies for different parenting practices among Black parents?
- What are the historical and contemporary experiences as well as social and systemic conditions that inform and structure Black parenting practices in Canada?

- How do child welfare workers respond to Black parenting practices?
- What are the main challenges and concerns of raising children in Canada and how are they different from individuals' countries of origin?

We conducted our study in three major cities: Toronto (Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), and St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador). Toronto is appropriate because, first, it has the largest populations of Blacks in Canada: 57% of all African Canadians (539,205) live in Ontario, representing 4% of the provincial population. Of those in Ontario, the majority (74%) live in the Toronto census metropolitan area (399,011) (Statistics Canada, 2011); in addition, the primary investigator for this article has lived and worked in Toronto for 10 years and has a lot of contacts in the Black communities, which facilitated recruitment of participants. We included Winnipeg and St John's, despite the presence of fewer Black populations—Winnipeg (14,470) and St John's (620) (Statistics Canada, 2006)—for three reasons: 1) Black immigrants' presence in these cities has increased over the past 10 years; 2) the primary investigator for this article and two co-applicants are currently living and working in St John's, and one co-applicant lives in Winnipeg, which facilitated recruitment of study participants in these places; and 3) it will be helpful to compare the findings of effective parenting among Blacks in three cities with large, medium, and small populations of Blacks in Canada.

Our data collection occurred between September 2015 and December 2016 using a multi-faceted research design that employs three types of methods. First, we did a comprehensive review of all related literature on selected immigrant communities of African and Caribbean descent. We reviewed literature on resettlement and policy documents on integration and social capital to situate issues facing immigrants in their integration process. We also uncovered demographic information on our study communities from Statistics Canada documentations and reports. This approach allowed us to map the profiles of the study communities within the broader context of the immigrant population in Canada and regional differences between sites. Second, we carried out semi-structured interviews with 15 key informants in resettlement agencies and service providers in Toronto, St. Johns, and Winnipeg to get their views and contacts within the selected communities. Third, we conducted 100 individual interviews: 50 from Toronto, 30 from Winnipeg, and 20 from St John's in relative proportion to the Black populations in these cities, in addition to three focus group interviews., one each in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's.

Data collection

We used our established contacts in the Black communities in Toronto, Winnipeg, and St John's to recruit potential participants for the study. We used both purposive sampling and a short screening instrument to ensure an appropriate mix of Black parents of diverse backgrounds were recruited, including socioeconomic status, religion, age, gender, and ethnicity—Canadian born and immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. An in-depth interview method was employed for the data collection. The in-depth interview method was helpful, as Boyce and Neale (2006) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest, in gaining an in-depth knowledge of Black parenting experiences in Canada. The individual, focused group, and key informant interviews were semi-structured with each individual and key informant interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes and each focus group interview lasting 90 minutes to two hours. All interviews were conducted at places of the participants' choosing. With the consent of participants, all individual and focused group interviews, with the exception of three individual interviews that participants refused to be recorded, were digitally recorded and notes were taken to support data analyses and interpretation.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed by three research assistants, and we used the techniques of Warren and Karner (2015) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) for data organization and reduction. We took particular notice of Warren and Karner's (2015) suggestion that researchers working on lengthy interview transcripts (more than 500 single-spaced pages for this study) and detailed field notes in qualitative analysis must first "have an idea of where you want to end at" (p. 210). In our case, the existing literature on parenting as well as our familiarity of interview data were helpful in developing ideas of where the research "should end at" as we openly coded and recoded themes from the data according to the interview structure and emergent themes. The use of NVivo11, a software program designed to sort qualitative data, helped in the coding and recoding process. In order to avoid bias or one-sided analysis, the primary investigator worked with the co-applicants and two students in the data analysis. Participants' responses were cross-referenced with interview notes and existing literature to elicit points of convergence and divergence as well as sources of tension and pedagogic relevance. We used existing literature on parenting practices as a comparative basis for interrogating and interpreting local cultural knowledge and experiences on Black parenting practices. In order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, we gave each participant a pseudonym and removed or modified any information that might compromise the identity of participants when

reporting the findings. In addition, we edited each quote and statement of the participants to remove pause words (such as “like,” “uh” and “um”) and, where necessary, we corrected grammatical errors for fluency. In editing the quotes, however, we were careful not to tamper with the substance of the conversation.

Table 1 gives an overview of the participants whose voices are discussed in this article.

In all, the voices of 18 Black parents and four key informants were used in this article. With the exception of one participant, all other 21 participants have completed high school with majority (86%) possessing at least a post-secondary degree. With the exception of one participant, all other 21 participants, whose voices were used in the present article, can express themselves clearly in English language. This fluency could be the fact that almost all the participants were born in countries where English language is the official language of communication and also the fact that most of them have lived in Canada for more than five years. In the discussion that follows we share some of the related study findings.

Findings

Conceptualization of effective parenting

As already note in the literature review, research has revealed that Western conceptualizations of appropriate parenting practices tend to place visible minority immigrant parents at a disadvantage because minority persons are expected to assimilate their culturally grounded and value-laden parenting approaches to the approaches used by the majority and favored based on hegemonic standards (Maiter & George, 2003). According to Ards and colleagues (2003), cultural differences in child-rearing practices as well as differences in socioeconomic status between service users and service providers ultimately influence under- and over-reporting rates within the child protection environment. Over-representation of Black children in the child welfare system has been attributed to the notion that there is one way to raise a “normal” child appropriately (Muir & Bohr, 2014). In this assumption, cultural differences in child rearing and parenting practices may be judged as being abhorrent and thus involvement in child protection services is believed to be warranted (Bornstein, 2012). It is important, therefore, to understand how Black parents themselves understand and operationalize “effective parenting.” In our study, we asked participants to explain how they conceptualize effective parenting.

Black parents have different understanding on what constitutes effective parenting. Among the common themes that emerged from the question, “What does effective parenting means to you?” include “positive

Table 1. Overview of Study Participant Characteristics.

Pseudonyms	Birthplace	Education	Occupation	Family structure	Children, <i>N</i>
Diane	Ghana	Postsecondary—master's degree	Corporate sector—skilled	Two parents	3
Marcia	Ghana	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled	Two parents	2
Janet	Nigeria	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled	One parent	2
Gina	Nigeria	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	Two parents	1
Nora	Kenya	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	One parent	2
Sophia	Nigeria	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	student—master's degree	One parent	2
James	Tanzania	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled	One parent	1
Esther	Ghana	Postsecondary—College diploma	Private sector—unskilled	One parent	1
Agnes	Liberia	High school diploma	Private sector—unskilled	One parent	5
Belinda	Jamaica	Postsecondary—master's degree	Student—doctoral degree	One parent	2
Susan	Ghana	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Corporate sector—skilled	Two parents	2
Christian Sally	Ghana Nigeria	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled Corporate sector	Two parents One parent	2 2
Wilson	Barbados	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled	One parent	1
Martha	Nigeria	Postsecondary—master's degree	Corporate sector—skilled	One parent	2
Marcus	Trinidad	Postsecondary—bachelor's degree	Public sector—skilled	One parent	1
Elizabeth	Jamaica	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	N/A (key informant, not asked)	
Leslie	Sierra Leone	High school diploma	Private sector—unskilled	One parent	2
Olivia	Kenya	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	N/A (key informant, not asked)	
Moses	Ghana	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	N/A (key informant, not asked)	
Thaou	Eritrea	N/A	Private sector—unskilled	One parent	4
Timothy	Sierra Leone	Postsecondary—master's degree	Public sector—skilled	N/A (key informant, not asked)	

relationship” and “communication” with one’s child. Diane a Ghanaian-Canadian argues that effective parenting is about having a positive relationship with one’s child. This positive relationship while it incorporates discipline boundaries, it does not ignore the existing legislations on parenting procedures:

Effective parenting to me I see it as a Black woman having a positive relationship with your child or children from the get go and at the same time establishing boundaries and discipline through the systemic I will say probably some of the policies that we are aware of. But the core is the relationship, establishing a relationship with your child (Participant Diane).

Marcia, another professional middle class Ghanaian woman builds on Diane's conception of parenting by arguing that "positive relationship" with one's child must be tied with a goal on what a parent wants from the child and most importantly put in place guidelines to help the child reach that goal:

I think every mother has a point where they will want their children to be at or to reach. And so when you have that as your focus, you try and guide your child through those whether milestones or steps to be able to get to that point. And so when you are looking at that how do I talk to my systemic relationship. What kind of relationship do I have to have with my child in order to get there so those are the steps you go through. You should have something in mind, I want the good or better things for my children so then I have to do this and put these steps or measures in place (Participant Marcia).

Connecting positive parental relationship with a particular set of goals for the child was consistent in the responses of many Black parents about what effective parenting means to them. Janet, a Nigerian woman shares similar views as Marcia:

I believe effective parenting to me is having a positive relationship with your child or your children. And having goals and helping them through as they are growing making good choices, positive choices and helping them to achieve that goal that you have for them. Being respectful, understanding, going to socially and get along and able to talk to people positively. I think that training to your child to me is effective parenting (Participant Janet).

Two women—Gina, a Nigerian-Canadian, and Nora, a Kenyan-Canadian—focus on "communication" as an important pillar in conceptualizing effective parenting. Gina and Nora argue differently that parents need to learn how they communicate with their children so that the children can easily approach them and talk openly about anything:

Effective parenting is communication. Your kids MUST be able to talk to you. You should come to their level. Parenting here to us is a project (Participant Gina).

From my perspective, effective parenting means hearing the children and being their friend. It means encouraging them to constantly come to you when they have issues (Participant Nora).

For Sophia, a Nigerian-Canadian mother, effective parenting means raising children to be responsible adults. This approach includes showing them how to take responsibilities and play a part in household chores. Although

her child is age 9 years, she teaches him how to make his bed, clean his room and wash dishes—actions she acknowledges will not happen in the house of her friends who are White Canadians:

If you come to my house, my 9 years old will make the bed, clean his room, and wash dishes. . . You understand. So, I'm still an African parent in that way. Like my friends [White] Canadian, will not send their 8 years old or 9 years old to do these things. They will say, "Oh no, she can't do it." The Canadian ways most of the things I don't like (Participant Sophia).

Sophia was not alone in assigning her children household chores. We noted in our research that many Black parents have certain forms of duties they assigned their children as a part of their training to become responsible adults. We need to understand that these household chores are assigned to Black children to teach them the importance of responsibilities and services and not necessarily a form of abuse to punish the children. What is becoming apparent here is that whereas Black parents believe in establishing positive relationship with their children and even encouraging open communication with them, they also insist that an effective way of parenting Black children must include parental guidelines, support, and training to make them "responsible" adults. Such understanding of effective parenting no doubt informs and shapes Black parenting style. In the theme that follows, we discuss the preferred parenting styles of Black parents.

Preferred parenting style

In the literature review, we reference Baumrind's typologies of parenting styles. Although our participants did not neatly categorize their parenting styles as described by Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1968, 1971), they generally appear to gravitate towards and shift in between authoritarian and authoritative style of parenting.

James, a Tanzanian-Canadian father describes Black parenting style as "a learning curve" as Black parents become more aware of the differences between White Canadian accepted style of parenting and what is accepted in one's country of origin:

One of these challenges may be the transition from how the parent[s] were parented to a new system in this country. A lot of parents are struggling about how not to do things their ways or they may get reported to the schools or CFS. Most African parents grew up in collective cultures where there was a presence of extended family members but here parents are alone (Participant James).

Indeed, Black parenting style is a learning process as many Black parents first learn about parenting from the way they were raised as children. The changes come as they relocate to Canada and become aware of the various legislations around parenting as well as other forms of parenting style. Most participants

recalled the “strict” parenting they experienced from their parents, which they said was out of “love” from their parents all designed to make them turn out better. Diane, for example, explained that the knowledge of authoritarian parenting style of many Black parents came through their lived experiences as children who were raised by parents with authoritarian style of parenting:

I think from what I have seen or maybe I will say observed, we tend to be too strict on our children. We see it and most of it is because of the way we have been raised back home to create that distance between us and our children (Participant Diane).

Esther, another Ghanaian-Canadian, concurs with Diane’s point:

It depends also on where we are coming from. I mean growing up or you know people older than fifty, their upbringing is different. It is that authoritarian kind of parenting style. Where it is one direction, I say this and that is it. So the child doesn’t have, they are not giving the opportunity to explain the reason why they do certain things (Participant Esther).

Gina, a Nigerian-Canadian agrees with both Esther and Diane:

All my siblings had to go to university before getting married. My mum was the disciplinarian. She used her hands and mouth a lot. Whatever my parents did, were later shown as out of love. So, the things that I learned from my parents, has influenced my parenting style here in Canada (Participant Gina).

What is interesting is that Gina does not conceptualize her parenting style as “authoritarian” but as “love parenting,” which is similar to what she received from her parents:

We will call our parenting “love parenting” just like our parents did. We convey strong messages with signs and sometimes we spank but not violently (Participant Gina).

Gina’s parenting goal is to raise her children to be independent and strong. Thus, to achieve that she has to create what she calls “pseudo-suffering” to help the children grow:

We have started teaching the kids, the seven- and five-year olds, how to bath, wash dishes, fix their rooms. We are also getting them involved in cooking, and we taste their bread. We want to raise children who are “independent” and “strong.” It is necessary to create “pseudo-suffering” to help them grow (Participant Gina).

Gina’s concept of “pseudo-suffering” was intriguing to us. However, a closer look to her term reveals nothing sinister, no cruelty, no unusual treatment, or no punishment, but an effort to guide and to train her children to be responsible adults. To achieve that she takes actions and inactions that sometimes appears to create inconvenience for her children but which in the long run she believes is necessary for their collective well-being and progress to become responsible adults. Agnes, a Liberian-Canadian subscribes to Gina’s “pseudo-suffering” mantra. Agnes believes children must

be exposed at the early stages of their development to the principle that all actions have consequences:

I try not to scream because I do not believe in yelling. I don't believe in argument. I just believe that in life kids need to go through consequences if they do not do the right thing. I try to tell that every good deed pays. That is how I put it to them. If you behave well. . . You are going to get good results. If you behave badly, you get bad rewards (Participant Agnes).

Participants were unanimous in describing their parents' parenting practices, especially spanking as "not abuse." The Christian Pentecostals among the participants quoted the Biblical phrase of "spare the rod and spoil the child" as their parents' justification for spanking them which was *not* "abuse." Indeed, the 2004 Supreme Court of Canada by majority ruling (six of nine justices) concluded that the provision in the "Spanking" law Section 43 of the Criminal Code, which reads:

"Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances"—does not infringe a child's rights to security and does not constitute cruel and unusual treatment or punishment (Barnett, 2016, p. 1).

From Gina and Agnes' perspectives, Black children cannot be raised to be independent and strong-minded if they do not understand what taking responsibilities means. Teaching Black children the importance of taking responsibilities imply making them understand actions have consequences.

Belinda, a Jamaican-Canadian also broaches the term "helicopter parenting" to describe the parenting style of some Blacks. *Helicopter parenting* is a process whereby Black parents constantly and closely monitor the movements of their children:

Well so far as I understand it, "helicopter parent" is one who is always hovering, one who is in always in eye sight, almost in hand reach of the child and defending the child to other adults to teachers, in system especially in helicopter parents would not send the child out in the yard to play but will then sit and watch the child as he or she plays and that mother will negotiate play days and will be there constantly. The mother is always looking for what the child is thinking any other time, they are quiet and when they are not thinking they are engaging in conservation in the thoughts and all the thoughts are been developed that is too much work for me (Participant Belinda).

Suffice to say that Gina's, Agnes', and Belinda's parenting practices do not define the overall parenting styles of the Black community. For example, Diane, who previously admitted was raised by parents with authoritarian parenting style, recommends that Black parents should vary their parenting style to create a more positive relationship with their children. Although Diane does not completely reject authoritarian parenting style, she suggests

some flexibility and variations that opens up possibility for good relationship with children: “We can still be strict but we can also allow them to be comfortable around us and establish that positive relationship.”

Susan and Christian, a Ghanaian-Canadian couple support Diane’s suggestion. Their parenting style is taken from the best from Ghana and the best from Canada:

For our parenting, here, we took the best of both worlds. The best from Ghana, and the best from here. For the children who are born here, the onus is on the parents to change their parenting style. The lifestyle here for children is about participation (Participants Susan and Christian).

Regardless of the varied preferred parenting style of our participants, what remains constant is that all participants have the collective well-being of their children in minds when they opt for a particular parenting style. Whereas some participants’ preferred parenting styles were influenced by their own history and even religion—the parenting styles used by their parents to raise them as children—almost all of them adopt their present parenting styles to respond to the environment in which they live. In the theme that follows, we discuss the rationale behind the preferred parenting styles of Black parents.

The rationale behind the preferred parenting styles of Black parents

In our study, we were particularly interested in the rationale behind the preferred parenting styles of our participants. For example, what is the rationale behind Gina’s adopted “pseudo-suffering” or Belinda’s “helicopter parenting” parenting style? Why Agnes would want her children to understand the principle of “actions have consequences” at the early stages of their development? We ask our study participants to explain and justify their parenting styles. Some of the participant’s preferred parenting style was influenced by the way their parents raised them. For example, Gina’s present parenting style was informed and influenced by what she received from her parents. She believes that her parents’ parenting style worked effectively in raising her (as a child) and her siblings and therefore worthy to emulate: “Whatever my parents did, were later shown as out of love. So, the things that I learned from my parents, has influenced my parenting style here in Canada.”

Gina also understands that her parents raised her and her siblings in a different environment and therefore a wholesale borrowing from her parents’ parenting style without adjustment may have debilitating effects. Thus, going forward, Gina has tweaked her parenting style to also prepare her children for racism and discrimination in her new environment—Canada:

I think that racism plays a role a complicated “sneaky” way. We teach our children not to forget. We teach our children not to dwell too much on racism but on who they are. But there is stereotyping of immigrants and it has serious effect on our parenting abilities (Participant Gina).

The role of racism and discrimination in shaping Black parenting styles of Black parents consistently resurfaces in our study. For example, Belinda, the parent who uses ‘helicopter parenting’ to describe Black parenting style, argues that her parenting practices are tailored to inform and prepare her children for the realities in the world. This approach means that, in a society that is deeply rooted in racist and discriminatory practices, her children need to be prepared for and most importantly how to respond and deal with it:

I am trying to parent to protect so I have to teach my children that racism impacts me and I know will impact my boys. And so I cannot just parent because that is what it is here because if I was in Jamaica, I will parent one way but as I mentioned to you my parents parenting style has to be adjusted to accommodate the impact and force, the negative forces of racism and of under expectation if that makes sense (Participant Belinda).

Sally, a single mother originally from Nigeria agrees with Belinda. She believes it is her responsibility to teach her children to be aware of the workings of racism and discrimination so that they are not caught unaware about them. In fact, Sally considers she has failed in her parenting duties if her children are not equipped with tools and skills to deal with systemic racism and discriminations:

Of course because you have to understand in life we all will works based on our experiences you know. When people are used to experiencing a certain kind of treatment based on their color, or based on wherever they come from, you begin to learn how to fight back because you see that that particular system is putting you at a great disadvantage. I feel like we as parents, we owe it to our kids to prepare them for what is ahead. You know, I feel like you have to, you can’t just be ignorant about everything. Because if you are ignorant about everything then when something happens you will blame yourself. Because it’s not like you didn’t know about it, you know about it and you didn’t do anything about it. (Participant Sally).

Part of preparing Black children for systemic racism and discrimination is also to challenge their goals and ambitions about life. In a society that has lower expectations for Black children, Black parental responsibilities are to “push” Black children beyond the low bar set for them by their schools and dominant hegemonic discourses. According to Belinda, it is her responsibility to parent her children to be self-motivated and aim high for life:

The system, society expects nothing much demands, nothing much from Black children and so it is the mothers who must remind them that they are to dream and to dream high, the mothers have to remind them of that (Participant Belinda).

Wilson, a Barbadian-Canadian father shares the thought of Belinda. Wilson notes that the Black world is a world that contains many negative images that destroy Black self-image. From the images presented in books to everyday dominant public discourses, Blacks are made to look and feel inferior and unwanted:

“The everyday racism that they face, the books and the schools, they don’t read nothing from their own people. They don’t even know who they are (becomes passionate), they don’t even know that they belong to kings and queens. Now look at all the crime that gets promoted, all the drugs, all the negative music that’s only promoting drug dealing, hooking sluts. What, they supposed to buy into what, academics that’s not here right now sense (Participant Wilson).

Thus, for Wilson, Black parenting style must offer counter-narratives to the dominant hegemonic discourses that attack Black self-images and identities.

Martha, a Nigerian-Canadian mother also notes that her parenting style is tailored to respond to Black realities in Canada. For example, she parents her children in a way that put fears in them when dealing with people in authority. Martha argues that her knowledge of what Police officers can do to Black children—shoot to kill prematurely or arrest and get them imprisoned—had informed and shaped how she raised her children:

The police shoot this kid. So you raise them to say you know what you have to obey the authority; you know, if a police stops you, try to stay away where you are going to have a conflict with the police and if a police officer stops you try to obey them. So they kind of put that fear in the kids because of what is going on. Because any time you look at the radio it’s always a Black kid being killed, you know, police is always. . . you can even be driving by and just being in a good car they [police officers] can stop you just knowing that there is a Black kid in that car (Participant Martha).

Marcus, a Trinidadian-Canadian father shares similar views with Martha. He noted that he is aware of many Black parents who take similar stance not to allow their children go out at certain time or with certain people for fear that their lives may be in danger when they are allowed to go:

I would hear Black parents making comments to me where their Black boys are concerned by saying I’m not gonna allow my son to go out at night after 8 o’clock because I’m afraid for his safety if he’s met by police or I’m not gonna allow my daughter to go with a group of friends to this event because I’m afraid that the group may be painted with the same brush and she would have an adverse outcome. So Black parents, those of African descent do gauge the community the environment and parent their kids accordingly for in their mind the best interest of their children to avoid any adverse outcome whether it be safety or whether it be reputation or whether it be you know psychological kinds of injury (Participant Marcus).

It appears preferred parenting style among Black parents are influenced by Black parents’ perception of what exist in their environment. Thus, in an

environment where Black children are easily harmed, killed, or imprisoned for standing up for their rights, “a permissive style of parenting” that allows children to see the world as a place to be explored unhindered by rules and regulations (Baumrind, 1968) is considered by many Black parents as a recipe to get their children killed or imprisoned before they grow into adulthood. Further, we also noted that some of the participants came to Canada as refugees, who have been exposed to the “dangerous life” of living in war-torn communities with one’s children. In such environment, one needs to have a closer supervision of one’s children. Every unaccounted minutes about the location of one’s children could mean something tragic. Such parents are hypervigilant on their children. Suffice to say that those parents when they relocate to Canada, find it very difficult to break such old habit and may want to have a closer supervision for their children, something Belinda terms as “helicopter parenting.” Yet there is more. In an environment of constant threat to Black life—threat from Black on Black gang violence and police officers’ brutality—Black parents do not have the luxury of raising their children to act independent and exercise uncontrolled freedom. As some other studies have asserted, Black families valued and used authoritarian parenting style as an important parenting tool to instill respect and care in Black children (Olafsson, 2000; Revie-Pettersen, 1998). Unfortunately, the fear of losing children to new “strange” cultural environment leads to “over-protection,” which itself brings “conflict” with children that get child welfare service workers involved. In the theme that follows, we discuss how child welfare service workers respond to Black parenting style.

Responses of child welfare services to Black parenting style

Given the idealized Western mindset of child rearing, extreme parental control tactics have not been accepted as appropriate in North America because such approaches are perceived to be dehumanizing and infantilizing (Herz & Gullone, 1999). Further, parenting styles that do not conform to Westernized standards have been critiqued for fostering negative behavioral outcomes in children, including aggressive behavior, reduced emotional functioning, and lower levels of self-confidence and academic performance (Scales, 2000; Terry, 2004). Mounting unease surrounding the child welfare system has been further substantiated by questions around workers’ adherence to procedural standards and conceptualizations of parenting “appropriateness.” As noted by Trocmé, there is a lack of standard for child protection workers working with families, which necessitates a heightened quality of care required for all service recipients (Contenta et al., 2014). Despite the development of numerous practice guidelines, procedural manuals, and risk assessment tools to standardize decision-making in the field of child protection, no single risk assessment

tool can be all-inclusive nor can all workers' clinical judgment be the same (Goddard, Saunders, Stanley, & Tucci, 1999). Determination of harm continues to be variable across CWS as workers attempt to reconcile ambiguous standards of "appropriateness" with subjective notions of threat or risk. Even indicators of family readiness for file closure appear unclear as concrete standards of appropriate family dynamics are not operationalized nor are they truly customizable to family diversity (Ontario Child Protection Tools Manual, 2016). In our study, we ask Black parents to respond to how CWS workers react to their parenting style.

Embedded in the seeming tensions between Black parenting practices and the activities of child welfare agencies and their partner institutions (e.g., schools, law enforcement agencies, health workers) is unexamined systemic racism, whiteness that impacts how Black families are treated. Stories from Black parents and key informants clearly point to institutional racism and whiteness that sometimes operate as color-blinded policies, rules, practices, and politics that impact how Black families are reported for child abuse/neglect and investigated by child welfare agencies workers, and decision-making process. There is also reality that some CWS workers want newcomers to fit into the mode of mainstream western parenting style, leaving no room for negotiations. For example, a racialized CWS worker recounted a story that borders on cultural ignorance, cultural arrogance, and downright racism. In this story, a Black Jamaican parent's attempt to incorporate her cultural and religious values into her parenting practices was met with rude behavior of a White child welfare service worker:

There is a Black family, the case was transferred to me, that's how I know this. There was a family, and in the Caribbean family in Jamaica, I'm just finding this out, that when they have a baby, in the baby's crib, at the foot, they will normally put an open Bible, and they leave it at the edge of the crib. And really they just feel it's a way of protecting the baby when the baby is sleeping. We had a White Canadian worker going at the time and one of our policies is that in the crib, nothing should be in the crib, just the folded sheet and the baby. Not a blanket, not a pillow, not a book, nothing, the worker then asked the mother to remove the Bible and she [the mother] explained what the Bible is for, the worker then later on requested for psychological assessment on the mother (Elizabeth, Child Welfare Service Worker).

The concern in this story is not the fact that the child welfare service worker demanded that the Bible should be removed from the crib, but the way the worker went about it. The worker could have explained the child policy to the Jamaican mother without resorting to drastic measures such as requesting a psychiatric evaluation of the mother. It should be noted that asking for a psychiatric evaluation of a Black mother is another way of suggesting that she is mentally incapable of being a parent, which in itself is considered offensive, ableist, and racist. Leslie, a Sierra Leonean-Canadian father, also

shares his frustration with CWS for disregarding his cultural values in parenting. Leslie lost custody of his children because to the child welfare service worker, he was abusing his child with rice in the morning and also yelling at the child:

We don't leave our culture behind because we have come to a new place. But this leads to cultural conflict here. When a social worker came to my home, I was accused of feeding my child rice in the morning. I was also accused of yelling at the child, which was considered as verbal abuse (Participant Leslie).

In another situation, as narrated by Olivia, a child welfare service worker, a key informant, a Black mother shaved her daughter's hair—a practice that is common among African parents especially to protect their children from getting lice. Her daughter cried at school after her colleagues started teasing her about her new haircut. The school called CWS to report child abuse. Fortunately in this particular case, a Black social worker advised her colleagues to close the case because shaving a girl's hair is common practice in Africa:

I know for instance now if I talk from a child protection stands there have been situations where you find the protection worker from a different culture especially the Canadian culture [White Canadian] taking for granted situations. A very quick example is a mum had shaved the child's hair. The school calls and says the child has been abused because the child came to school bald headed and she is a girl and the child was crying because the other kids were laughing at her. . . So they [White child welfare workers] were saying she has abused the child by shaving off the hair, so I told them no we do that all the time I shave even my hair, and so we closed the file (Participant Olivia).

Speaking of cultural misunderstanding is also the question of “language” and how it is understood in Canadian context. For example, Moses, a Ghanaian-Canadian social worker recounts a story in which a Nigerian father was arrested for threatening to “kill” his child:

“So this man was arrested for threatening for using the words, “You are my child; I brought you into this world, I will kill you.” He was arrested. Luckily I was doing the investigation, so I started laughing because I have lived in Nigeria and I know how, so I was telling them, he doesn't hate the child, it is the way of life—they say that. If you want to do that to Nigerian children or African children, then all African parents will be apprehended because they say that; we need education to know how to use certain words, and the lucky thing is many cases come to me when they are within the African way and I am able to educate them—you know, educate the whole family, everything, and honestly the law is into your hands, you have to do it at your own discretion (Participant Moses).

Moses has some words of advice for White CWS workers to rely on their Black CWS workers for education when issue of language comes up for investigation. For example, the word “spanking” is not part of the everyday

vocabulary among many Black immigrant families. This term means that the word “beating” is used interchangeably with “spanking” among many Black immigrant families. Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada allows “spanking” as a discipline method so far as it does not cause or use to cause harm; “beating,” in contrast, is an assault that elicits different kinds of responses. The inability of Black immigrant parents to differentiate these two terms is itself a major issue in our study findings.

Discussions

Black parenting practices are unique and have become what Gayatri describes as “the useful yet semi-mournful position of the unavoidable usefulness of something that is dangerous” (Spivak, 1994, p. 5). Black parenting practices involve raising Black children about survival, self-respect, and the threats of racism in society. Black children are taught about how to conduct themselves when interacting with people in authority, such as police, teachers, social workers, and other state-sponsored institutions and agencies, because any act of open resistance can be read as a threat that can result in either imprisonment or shooting to death. Unfortunately, this practice of raising Black children within the confines of “racial rules of engagement” in Canada has often been misunderstood as “bad parenting” practices by child welfare agencies, resulting in high level of apprehension and placement into care of Black children.

In the literature, we read the works of Baumrind (1966, 1968) who noted that parents who use authoritarian parenting style lack warmth and love, and indeed value punishment tactics as a means to enforce control over their children. In our study findings, just like the earlier findings of Gorman (1998) among Chinese families, we noted that Black parents’ exhibition of “controlling” behaviors actually convey parental care and love to protect their children from “external harm,” versus a parental need for domination. Our study findings agree with Rudy and Grusec’s (2001) study among African American parents that they rely on authoritarian parenting style to protect their children from threats that exist in high-risk neighborhoods and to shield them from the harsh reality of the world of racism and discrimination. In fact, Black parents in our study view permissive and non-punitive styles of parenting as a resignation of parental responsibilities and a recipe for signing the death warrant or endorse imprisonment of their children.

Hughes (1999, p. 608) argues that oppression lies not only in the barriers put before certain bodies but also in “corporeal and *inter-corporeal* norms and conventions” that these bodies are subjected to. Thus, understanding the content and composition of child welfare legislation and practice guidelines is critical to understanding how culture plays a role in the investigation process and the decisions to remove children from the care of their parents.

In fact, some of the cases for which Black parents were investigated by CWS workers, which even resulted in apprehension and placement in care, could have been avoided altogether if CWS workers have had some cultural knowledge and understanding of the Black parenting practices. Although we do not suggest that the seemingly discriminatory practices by child welfare personnel are necessarily intentional, we maintain that until differential cultural norms regarding parenting practices are viewed and even acknowledged favorably within White-dominant cultural ideological CWS, the high level of apprehension and placement into care of Black and Aboriginal children in Canada are in no way of slowing down. What is also disturbing in our findings is that the high level of apprehension and placement in care of Black children has itself created a growing mistrust and distrust of CWS workers among the Black communities. The mistrust and distrust further hinders adequate flow of information from Black parents under investigation to CWS workers, which itself affect the effectiveness of CWS workers' investigation as workers have to rely on the little information they received to make important decisions about Black families.

In our research, we became aware of how racist ideas function as “color-blind” laws and policies to affect and shape the everyday lives of Black people including their parenting practices as they exist in Canada. Our reliance on CRT as the theoretical underpinning helped us to understand and unpack how color-blindness or “racelessness” essentially ignores the social realities of Blacks inequitable experienced within relationships and systems and structures of powers. We took particular interest in the civil rights and social justice advocates who remind us that color-blind approaches to practice simply construct an alternative form of oppression that manifests as institutionalized racism in slightly more subtle and indirect ways (Blair, 2008; Leach, 2005; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). We noticed in our study that the child welfare agencies have adopted policies and practices that falsely assumed that what “works for White people, works for all people” (Dominelli, 1989, p. 396) and to use the words of Jeffery (2005, p. 421) Child welfare policies and practices are “positioned in a vacuum, unimplicated in reproducing unequal power relations... Skills such as counseling, interviewing, and assessment are seen as discrete, separate from any entanglements they might have with issues of difference, power and racism.” What this means for practice is that color-blind approaches to practice support blanket interventions and “band-aid” solutions by failing to recognize how the practices and systems within the CWS are a part of the problem (Jeffery, 2005). We are in agreement with Christie's (2010, p. 211) work that we must be “critiquing policy in a way that illuminates how the implicit, and explicit, positioning of the ‘other’ by the white gaze, often results in the reinforcing of white dominance.” Example, in our analyses of *The Protection and In Care Policy and Procedure Manual* of Department of Child, Youth and Family

Services in Newfoundland and Labrador—a manual often considered to be “the Bible of reference” for child protection services in the Newfoundland and Labrador’s province—we were particularly intrigued that the acknowledgement page, which thanks contributors to the manual, had no mention of Aboriginal groups nor visible minority groups. Implicitly, the guidelines for parenting in the province have been written by predominantly Whites (if not all Whites) and is expected to guide and “guard” the parenting practices of all other non-Whites. Put it differently, Whiteness has taken up the majority of space and power within child protection services in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in so doing has coerced Aboriginal and racialized people (often dressed up as “support”, or latterly, “empowerment”) into normalizing themselves by gravitating closer proximity towards the ideals of White parental norm. We therefore call on CWS to utilize multi-dimensional ways to assess the quality of racialized parenting abilities while shifting away from the institutional entrenchment of White, middle-class normative ways of parenting.

Conclusions

In child welfare practice, the primary goal is to service maltreated children as to ensure their safety and wellbeing (Mennen & O’Keefe, 2005). In Canada, child welfare legislation attempts to balance the protection of children from abuse and maltreatment with the rights of parents to raise their children and to abide by culturally distinct practices and expressions embedded in their ancestral roots (Rusk-Keltner, 1993). Moreover, governmental laws, regulations, policies, and procedures aimed at ensuring child protection have a duty to support parental rights to privacy as well as to safeguard families against unfounded accusations and allegations of abuse (Tisdall, 1996). We acknowledge and agree that balancing parents’ rights to raise their children within their culturally sanctioned environment and ensuring children safety and protection remains a complex, difficult, and “messy” task for CWS workers.

As we noted in the title of this article, the measure of “goodness” in times of tragedy can be fragile even for those who act with best of intentions. Just as we acknowledge that CWS workers act having the best of intentions for the Black children, we similarly want to mention that Black parents equally act with the best of intentions for their children. As one mother, who was previously investigated by CWS for spanking her son, told us in a workshop we did for visible minority immigrant parents in St. John’s Newfoundland: “I carried my son behind my back and run for three days and three nights in the bush while guns were being fired at us in order to bring him to a place of safety—are you now questioning my motherly love and care because I have spanked my child?” (Workshop participant, Angela). Of course, we do not by any means suggest that all Black parents are

“responsible enough” to be given freedom to parent their children in ways they deem fit. In fact, in some cases, the apprehension of Black children is the best course of action to safeguard and protect Black children. What we hope to establish is that in many cases newcomer families may require a different approach to assessment as many of the widely accepted indicators of “risk” for child maltreatment in Canada may not be reflective of risk in Black families (Earner, 2007; Lavergne, Dufour, Trocmé, & Larrivée, 2008). We conclude by borrowing the words of Kike Ojo, the project manager of *One Vision One Voice: Changing the Child Welfare System for African Canadians*:

We’re trying to resolve the gap in services, enhance service effectiveness, and improve how staff are trained to do their jobs... the only way to achieve these goals is by intricately understanding the reality of the people we work with (Ojo, 2016, para. 4).

We hope that our study findings will help CWS better understand the perspectives of Black parents, perhaps enabling more Black children to remain home safely. Even where apprehension and removal become preferred action, we hope the CWS will develop strategies that would make better use of the potentials that birth parents possess in order to enhance Black children’s lives.

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