THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Cultural Perceptions about Child Maltreatment among Caribbean Immigrant
Master's-level Social Workers Practicing in Child Welfare Agencies in the United States

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the

National Catholic School of Social Service

Of The Catholic University of America

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

©

Copyright

All Rights Reserved

By

Judith Rose-Wilson

Washington, D.C.

2011

Cultural Perceptions about Child Maltreatment among Caribbean Immigrant
Master's-level Social Workers Practicing in Child Welfare Agencies in the United States

Judith Rose-Wilson

Director: Susanne Bennett, Ph.D.

Social workers are an instrumental part of the child welfare system as they work
to ameliorate conditions that place children at risk. The perceptions of social workers
are crucial because these professionals are at the forefront of the decision making
process that determines whether parental behavior is child maltreatment. Yet social
workers are from different cultures and bring their own biases, values, and beliefs to
their working relationships, which may influence their professional judgments.
Informed by the theories of symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative
perspective, this qualitative research study examined the influence of culture on the
perceptions and decision making of 13 Caribbean immigrant masters-level social
workers who worked in child welfare agencies in Washington, DC, and Maryland. The
study used a purposeful sample of professionals who were raised in five Caribbean
countries, with values and norms distinctly different from American societal ideals
related to child rearing, child disciplining, and child maltreatment. Grounded theory
methods of constant comparative analysis yielded three core themes, which emerged
from categories that consisted of subsidiary contributing factors and narrative strands.
The first core theme emphasized the importance of extended family and the greater
community in supporting the expectations and norms of Caribbean cultures. This first
theme emerged after analysis of participants' perceptions of child rearing and

disciplining in the Caribbean, based on personal childhood experiences. Through examination of post-migration professional experiences in the United States, the second core theme emphasized the participants' needs for clarity and their emphasis on context in professional work. The final theme, which emerged from investigating participants' perceptions of the impact of their culture of origin on their current decision making, suggested that early cultural experiences influenced professional decision-making of these social workers, particularly related to their decisions regarding child maltreatment. The findings from this study indicate a need for specialized training for master's level social workers from diverse cultural backgrounds in their work involving child maltreatment issues.

This dissertation by Judith Rose-Wilson fulfills the dissertation requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social Work, approved by Susanne Bennett, Ph.D., as Director, and by Barbara P. Early, Ph.D., and Laura G. Daugherty, Ph.D. as readers.

_____
Susanne Bennett, Ph.D., Director

_____
Barbara P. Early, Ph.D., Reader

_____
Laura G. Daugherty, Ph.D., Reader

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Historically, social workers have been instrumental in the child welfare system by working to ameliorate conditions that place children at risk; by strengthening and supporting families; by addressing emotional, behavioral, and health problems of children; and by protecting children from child maltreatment (Liederman, 1995; National Association of Social Workers, 2005; Perry, 2006). Additionally, as mandated reporters, social workers are expected to follow state and federal guidelines pertaining to reporting and responding to child maltreatment (Annotated Code of Maryland, 07.02.07.04; D.C. Code 4-1321.02, 2008; Child Information Gateway, 2008). However, social workers from diverse cultural backgrounds who were born and raised in cultures with values and norms that are distinctly different from American societal ideals related to child rearing, child disciplining, and child maltreatment, may experience conflict in adhering to the expectations of child welfare social workers in their host country. It is therefore important to examine whether such challenges exist, and if so, whether they are related to one's culture and whether these tensions or conflicts affect child welfare social workers' perceptions and decision making.

The issue of culture and its influence on child maltreatment is a topic that has received only moderate attention. Areas of study often examine cultural differences in child-rearing (Spicer, 2010) and disciplining practices, with attempts to decipher whether

some cultural groups are more prone to child maltreatment than other groups (Ferrari, 2002; Giovannoni & Beccerra, 1979; Hong & Hong, 1991; Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996). These inquiries often explore the cultural background of parents and caretakers and examine how their characteristics influence child maltreatment. Other research interests focus on the over-representation of some cultural groups in the child welfare system and attempt to assess the reasons for and impact of this over-representation (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2006; Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, 2005; Elliott & Urquiza, 2006; Miller & Cross, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Under the umbrella of cultural competency, initiatives focus on raising awareness and sensitivity of social workers to understand the culture and history of minority children who are abused (Yan & Wong, 2005).

However, limited research exists on the influence of social workers' ethnic culture on perceptions of, and interventions with, maltreated children (Ashton, 2004). Studies have suggested that social workers perceive their clients subjectively and derive causal explanations from various sources, including personal experiences influenced by their own cultures (Dewees, 2001; Green, 1999; Lum, 1999). The current dissertation research further explores the cultural views of social workers who work cross-culturally in the child welfare system in the United States. This qualitative study examines how personal cultural values and biases of social workers affect their decision-making as child welfare professionals.

Statement of the Research Problem

Prevention and remediation efforts to address child maltreatment involve many professionals, including social workers, physicians, attorneys, teachers, police officers, and nurses. Professionals involved with this issue are expected to bring expertise, knowledge, and skills with the assumption that their qualifications will transcend cultural variations in attitudes and perceptions about child maltreatment. Nonetheless, it is evident in the literature that professionals may retain attitudes and perceptions about child maltreatment that reflect their culture, rather than their professional or agency values (Ashton, 2004; Chan, Elliott, Chow, & Thomas, 2002; Collier, McClure, Collier, Otto, & Polloi, 1999; Elliott, Thomas, Chan, & Chow, 2000; Pierce, & Bozalek, 2004; Rhee, Chan, & Youn, 2003).

The perceptions of professional social workers working with children are particularly important, because social workers are at the forefront of the decision making process that determines whether parental behavior is considered child maltreatment. It is therefore pertinent that their perceptions about the issue be evaluated. However, empirical research literature is limited regarding the influence of culture on social workers' perceptions or attitudes about child maltreatment. Instead, the literature compares and often suggests great disparities among professionals regarding their different perceptions about child maltreatment (Ajdukovic, Petak, & Mrsic, 1993; Giovannoni & Beccera 1979; Rose & Meezan, 1996; Segal, 1992). For example, Adjudkovic and her colleagues (1993) found incongruence in the attitudes and

perceptions of psychologists, social workers, prosecutors, and judges about child maltreatment in Croatia.

In addition to the lack of focus on professionals' cultural backgrounds, the literature has predominantly focused on the White workforce, although the workforce now includes underrepresented ethnic groups, as well as an influx of immigrants (Report on the American Workforce, 2001; Schmidley, 2001). Similarly, much of the literature on immigrants focuses on their roles as clients (Devore & Schelesinger, 1999; Drachman, 1995). However, immigrants are not only service consumers; they are increasingly service providers as well (Russell & White, 2001). According to the 2000 census data, more than 28 million persons in the U.S. are immigrants, and 13% of the U.S. workforce is foreign born (Report on American Workforce, 2001). Nearly two-thirds of the foreign born workforce is employed in professional occupations (Report on American Workforce, 2001).

It is important to examine how child welfare social workers from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds define, interpret, view, and make decisions about incidents of child maltreatment, because their cultural values and perceptions may bias their professional assessments and interventions. To examine these potential biases, this qualitative research examined the perceptions of social workers who immigrated to the U.S., where they were educated and worked as professionals in the child welfare system. In particular, the study focused on the views of professionals who were raised in the

Caribbean, a region of the world where discipline practices reportedly differ from those supported by U.S. child welfare laws and policies.

Previous research suggests that discipline in the Caribbean has traditionally reflected an authoritarian parenting style that depends heavily on physical punishment (Barrow, 2001; Brown & Johnson, 2008). According to Baumrind (1991), this approach to parenting focuses on control and obedience, rather than responsiveness to the needs of children or support for the development of individuality, self-regulation, and self assertion. The current research study examined whether the cultural views and authoritarian parenting style of Caribbean social workers were in conflict with the laws and regulations they were mandated to follow in the U.S. regarding child maltreatment. The study's primary focus was the potential cultural conflict that immigrant social workers experienced in their professional decision-making about child maltreatment in the United States. The following describes child maltreatment, both globally and in the U.S.

Child Maltreatment in the United States

Challenges to Defining Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment has been a persistent social problem that has been a part of society throughout the ages and is evident among all cultural and ethnic groups (Ross, 1980; Smith, 1975). One of the main complaints expressed by child maltreatment researchers is that there are no clear, uniform, or operational definitions of child maltreatment (Hong & Hong, 1991; Korbin, 1991; Portwood, 1999; Runyan et al., 2005).

Studies addressing definitional issues relating to child maltreatment often report that current definitions are vague, overly simplistic, riddled with causal explanations, and are often generated from a Eurocentric perspective (Hong & Hong, 1991; Manly, 2005; Mosby, Rawls, Meehan, Mays, & Pettinari, 1999). The likely etiology of this problem is that different professions and diverse groups devise and use definitions of maltreatment for different purposes (Hutchison, 1990; Portwood, 1999). For example, a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker may be governed by strict adherence to the legal definition of child abuse and neglect, while a researcher exploring child maltreatment issues may be afforded more discretion in defining the term (Portwood, 1999). Another reason suggested for the difficulty in developing a unified definition of child maltreatment is that social and individual value judgments are believed to be instrumental in determining whether an act is considered abusive (Belsky, 1991).

Researchers have consistently maintained that definitions of child maltreatment entail the need for precision, which is necessary to provide standards for determining when complaints of child maltreatment should be reported or investigated by CPS agencies (Giovannoni, 1989; Korbin, 1991; Rose & Meezan, 1996). Proponents of this perspective argue that definitional precision would reduce class and cultural bias, as everyone would be held to the same definitional standards in addressing child maltreatment (Haugaard, 1991; Toth, 1991). However, from a cross-cultural perspective, others have argued that definitional precision is not always culturally sensitive. These researchers argue that mental health and child welfare professionals who are entrusted

with the task of addressing child maltreatment, whether by reporting, investigating, or treating its effects, often apply Western standards of "good" parenting to judge the behaviors of other cultural groups and, subsequently, to label parental behaviors as either abusive or benign (Ferrari, 2002; Zayas, 1992). Still others, such as Hong and Hong (1991), suggest that in the translation of cultural sensitivity into practice, there must first be adequate definitions of child maltreatment that include cultural perspectives.

Despite the ambiguity regarding adequate definitions of child maltreatment, there is consensus across cultures that child maltreatment should not be allowed. Unanimity in circumstances of harsh physical discipline and sexual abuse also suggest that while cultures differ in their definition of child maltreatment, all have criteria for behaviors that fall outside the range of acceptability, and it is at this level that maltreatment is identified across cultural contexts (Giavannoni & Becerra, 1979; Korbin, 1991; Segal, 1992). Although there is evidence of consensus, especially among Western cultures, about what constitutes harmful behaviors towards children, there are some areas where there are disagreements, such as the use of physical punishment and the appropriate levels of supervision for children based on their age (Cawson, Wattam, Brooker, & Kelly, 2000).

Clearly, cultural differences add substantially to the already complex task of defining child maltreatment. Therefore, when people from different cultures coexist together, as is the case currently in the United States (Larsen 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), the potential for conflict multiplies. Under such conditions, perception of the relative value or harm of different child-rearing and disciplinary practices will depend on

the cultural background of the observer. The official view of those practices that are considered harmful to children and require intervention probably depends on the dominant culture (Lauderdale, Valiunas, & Anderson, 1980).

Policy Definitions of Child Maltreatment

With any discussion of child maltreatment, it is pertinent that its components be addressed and conceptually defined. In 1974, The United States Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The goal of CAPTA was to protect children from maltreatment by providing funding to states in order to increase identification, reporting, investigation, and treatment of child maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008; National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2004b; Public Law 93-247). The act was amended several times and was most recently amended by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-36, 6/25/03). CAPTA provides minimum standards that states must incorporate in their statutory definitions of child abuse and neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008).

CAPTA defines child maltreatment "as any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical injury, emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation," and it adds that maltreatment is "an act or failure to act which presents imminent risk or serious harm" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, in 1999, The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect compared definitions of abuse from 58 countries and found some

commonalities in what was considered maltreatment (World Health Organization, 1999).
The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) drafted the following definition:

> Child maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and or emotional ill
> treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, commercial or other
> exploitations, resulting in actual or potential harm to a child's health, survival,
> and development of dignity, in the context of a relationship of responsibility,
> trust, or power. (p. 9)

Both CAPTA and WHO definitions cover a broad spectrum of child
maltreatment, which primarily involves acts of commission or omission by parents or
caregivers and is generally viewed as encompassing physical abuse, sexual abuse,
emotional abuse, and neglect (Erickson & Egeland, 1996; National Research Counsel,
1993). WHO (1999) defines physical abuse of a child as that which results in actual or
potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of interaction, which is reasonably
within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust.
There may be single or repeated incidents (WHO, 1999). Similarly, the United States
Federal and Treatment Act, which set the minimum standards for each state, has its own
definitions of abuse. It defines physical abuse as physical injury (ranging from minor
bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting,
shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object),
burning, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of

whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008; National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2006).

WHO (1999) defines neglect and negligent treatment as the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers, and causes, or has a high probability of causing, harm to the child's physical or mental health. CAPTA (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008; National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2004b) also defines neglect as failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision); medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment; educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs); or emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs).

WHO (1999) describes emotional abuse as the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potential and in the context of the society in which the child dwells. There also may be acts toward the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or

physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. These acts must be reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Acts include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment. According to CAPTA (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008; National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2004b), emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and, therefore, CPS may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms are identified.

WHO (1999) describes child sexual abuse as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent, or is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by an activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power, and the activity is intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include, but is not limited to, the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; or the exploitative use of children in

pornographic performances and materials (WHO, 1999). Similarly, CAPTA (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008; National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2004b) also defines sexual abuse as activities by a parent or caretaker, such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Finally, WHO (1999) has a fifth category of child maltreatment not indicated in most of the literature. Commercial or other exploitation of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labor and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral, or social-emotional development.

Research suggests that child physical abuse and child neglect are the most prevalent among the types of maltreatment experienced by children (Hussey, Chang, & Kotch, 2006; Peddle & Wang, 2001). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, only professional perceptions of child physical abuse and child neglect were explored.

History of Child Maltreatment

Historically, children have been the victims of severe forms of abuse, neglect, and at times, death. In ancient Palestine, the sacrifice of first born sons was common. In ancient Rome, fathers had the right to sell or mutilate their children. In China, around 3rd century BC, it was an accepted practice to drown babies; and in ancient Egypt, children were buried alive to serve deceased persons in the afterlife (Ebeling & Hill,

1983). The exploitation and maltreatment of children also can be traced back to the developmental stages in the growth of society and the attitudes about children during these different periods. During the era of hunting and gathering, male children were exploited more often than females, because males were considered better suited to deal with the rigors and demands necessary for survival. Over time, as society became more agrarian, both sexes were considered vital for tilling the fields and contributing to the overall productivity. The industrial revolution brought further exploitation of children who were prohibited from going to school in order to work as laborers in unregulated factories (Ebeling & Hill, 1983).

In the later nineteenth century, big cities such as New York experienced an influx of people from different countries and also saw an increase in the poor, most of whom were children who lived primarily on the streets. This era brought about the first public concern for children by reformers who considered child abuse a moral wrong that would lead to social disorder (Gordon, 1988). The recognition of child maltreatment and the need to act on behalf of children was instigated in 1874 by the abuse and neglect of a ten year old girl. Mary Ellen resided in New York City in a tenement building with her adopted parents when neighbors became concerned about her wellbeing. An organization that provided voluntary services to immigrant families was contacted, and volunteers visited the home of Mary Ellen to discover that she had been neglected, beaten, and cut with scissors. However, the parents insisted that they had done nothing wrong and refused to change their behavior. Due to the fact that no official laws or agencies were

available at that time to protect children from abuse and neglect, the group brought the

matter to court under existing animal rights laws, arguing that Mary Ellen was a member

of the animal kingdom. Mary Ellen was granted protection through the courts, which

further resulted in the creation of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

Children (Gustavsson & Segal, 1994; Radbill, 1974; Tomison, 2001). This case initiated

the first public concern and response to child protection in the United States and other

countries (Tomison, 2001).

The second wave of public concern and awareness about child maltreatment came

in the 1960s through the work of a group of physicians led by Dr. Henry Kempe (Kempe,

Silverman, Steele, Droegemuller, & Silver, 1962). Kempe and his colleagues published

an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, in which they introduced

the notion of the battered child syndrome. The researchers' explanations were based on

radiological surveys that revealed untreated and fractured bones caused by physical

abuse. Kemp's work caught the interest of the media, which illuminated the issue of

child maltreatment worldwide and mobilized modern interest. The implementation of

many policies, programs, and intervention efforts related to child maltreatment was

prompted by Kempe's instrumental work (Kempe et al., 1962; Tomison, 2001).

Prior to the 1930s, early child protection endeavors were addressed by private

agencies. With the enactment of the Social Security Act in 1935, protection of children

was placed within the mandates of public social services agencies. As a result, federal

legislation was enacted, ultimately resulting in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment

Act of 1974. This act ensured coordination of policies that led to the development of programs and services relevant to child maltreatment (Gustavsson & Segal, 1994).

Current Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

In the United States in 2003, there were an estimated 2.9 million reports of child maltreatment. Of those reports, 906,000 children were substantiated or indicated as abused and neglected, a rate of 12.1 per 1000, which represented a 5.3% increase from 2002. In 2003 in Maryland, 16,688 children were substantiated or indicated as abused and neglected. In the District of Columbia in 2003, there were 4,933 referrals for child maltreatment. Of these, 2,518 children were substantiated or indicated as abused or neglected in the District, a rate of 23.2 per 1000 children (Child Welfare League of America, 2006). Similar statistics were reported in 2006, where an estimated 3.3 million referrals involving 6 million children were reported to CPS agencies. Of these, 905,000 children were determined to be victims of child abuse and neglect. An estimated 64.1% of the victims suffered neglect, 16.0% suffered physical abuse, 8.8% were victims of sexual abuse, and 6% suffered from emotional maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). In other words, child maltreatment is a major ongoing problem in the U.S.

Reports on family violence suggest that the rates of child maltreatment on a global level are just as astounding as those evident in the United States. Worldwide, approximately 40 million children are subjected to child maltreatment. In 2002, approximately 53,000 children worldwide died as a result of maltreatment. A third or

more of children around the world experienced severe physical punishment resulting

from the use of objects; 150 million girls and 73 million boys experienced some form of

sexual abuse. Approximately 100 to 140 million girls in the world have experienced

some sort of genital mutilation. In 2004, 126 million children around the world were

involved in child labor, many of whom were involved in hazardous work conditions.

Estimates from 2000 statistics suggest that 1.8 million children were forced into

prostitution and pornography and 1.2 million were involved in trafficking (World Health

Organization, 2002).

It is clear that child maltreatment is a problem that continues to plague modern

societies and includes many issues that further complicate remedial efforts. Yet it is

important to deconstruct the global topic of child maltreatment in order to carefully

evaluate each component for clues about how to reduce the number of children being

maltreated. For example, examination of the topic of child maltreatment reveals there is

a growing body of literature documenting the overrepresentation of children of color in

child welfare. The following literature suggests there may be factors related to race

and/or culture that influence views of child maltreatment.

The Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare

The discussion related to culture and child maltreatment has evolved from

research suggesting that some cultures and ethnicities are overrepresented in the child

welfare system in the U.S. In 2006, of the 905, 000 children who were determined to be

victims of abuse and neglect, 48.8% of all victims were white, 22.8% were African

American, and 18.4% were Hispanic (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Similarly, of the 509,000 children in the foster care system, 60% entered the system due to abuse or neglect, of whom 45% were White/Non-Hispanic, 26% were Black/Non-Hispanic, 19% were Hispanic, and 10% were other races or multiracial. Children of color (Black, Hispanic, multiracial) represented approximately one third of the U.S. population, but made up 60% of the children in foster care. In contrast, White children constituted 60% of the U.S. population, but accounted for only 36% of the children in the foster care system (Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, 2005).

In other words, the over-representation of minority children in child welfare is well documented, with indications there are ethnic disparities in reports of child maltreatment, in the length of time children of color spend in foster care, and in the intensity and frequency of treatment (Derezotes et al., 2005; Elliott & Urquiza, 2006; Miller & Cross, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). For example, Eckenrode, Powers, Doris, Munsch, and Bolger (1988) found in their study that for physical abuse reports, race was the only demographic characteristic that had an effect of substantiation rates. The researchers felt that race had a strong impact because race alone accounted for 8% of the variance in substantiated cases. Cases involving Black and Hispanic children were more likely to be substantiated for child maltreatment than those involving White children.

Given the statistics on children of color in the child welfare system, researchers have attempted to examine some of the factors that may contribute to overrepresentation.

Some studies have addressed over-lapping variables such as race and class. For example, Drake and Zuravin (1998) reviewed the literature related to CPS and class and found that there were several ways that bias may become a part of the decision making process for social workers. They reported that *labeling bias* involved workers looking for maltreatment among the poor because the poor were labeled as deviant just by virtue of being poor. The researchers noted that *reporting bias* was also common and involved the tendency to report suspicious cases with a bias against one group. *Substantiated bias* occurred when child welfare workers substantiated reported cases of child maltreatment based on unrelated factors such as status and race. Last, *visibility bias* occurred when poor families were reported in excess of what was proportionate to their behavior because they had greater visibility due to frequent use of public service. Derezotes et al., (2005) suggest that Drake and Zuravin's (1998) research may not necessarily have race as the main variable. However, Derezotes et al. maintain that "given the over-lap between race and class, their conceptualization is useful in thinking about race" (p. 32). The following presents further literature about how CPS social workers make professional assessments of child maltreatment.

Child Protective Services Assessment and Decision Making

Assessment

Mary Richmond (1917), who transposed the term *diagnosis* from medical literature to that that of social case work, first defined assessment by stating that "…..investigation or gathering of evidence begins the process, the critical examination

and comparison of evidence follow, and last comes its interpretation and definition of the social difficulty" (p. 216). Hamilton (1952) described it as the way case workers configure the elements in a case in order to know what to do to help. Meyer (1993) described the assessment process in social work practice "as both art and science" (p. 27). She explained that science is concerned with objective, observable data that is ordered, strictly analyzed, and can be replicated. She believed that when personal judgment comes into play, objectivity is difficult and sometimes undesirable. In explaining the assessment process, Meyer (1993) cautioned that "social workers interpret events out of personal perspectives that derive from their own life experiences and these are developed through exposure to education and professional demands that hone their capacity to be objective" (p. 28). She suggested that "when people work with people absolute objectivity is never possible" (p. 28).

Meyer (1993) postulated five key steps in the assessment process, using the *science and art* analogy. She explained that social workers are required to be systematic and sequential in the assessment process in an attempt to be objective. However, in actual practice, social workers engage in all parts of the process simultaneously. She proposed that the assessment process progresses from *science to art*. The first step or *exploration stage* involves observation, selecting, gathering, and ordering of case data. The second step or *inference stage* involves interpreting interactions, making causal connections, and cross-checking interpretations with relevant knowledge base. The third step or *evaluation stage* addresses questions about the client's functioning, strengths and

limitations, and his or her capacity and resources. In the fourth step or *problem definition,* the social worker is concerned with what is "doable" (p. 29), or what is feasible for the practitioner or setting. In the final stage or *intervention/treatment planning stage*, time frames, treatment modality, and expected outcomes are important.

Meyer's analogy of the *science* to *art* process is similar to the way social workers engage in the assessment process in their work with maltreated children. Meyer implies that the assessment process is not neat and orderly, but is rather unsystematic and messy. Meyer's explanation is important as it explains the complexities of the assessment process, which aims initially to be scientific or objective but ends up being more art or subjective. This outcome is thought to be due to interplay of social workers' personal and cultural experiences and the unpredictability of working with people.

Decision Making

Researchers Stein and Rzepnicki (1984) have suggested a conceptual model that represents a useful and well established way of characterizing decision making in child welfare. They propose that the assessment and decision making process of child welfare workers have three distinct stages. First, information is gathered using criteria that allow the social worker to categorize data into relevant and irrelevant information. Rules are then applied, which result in differential weighting of the categories. Finally, through the prior two processes, meaning is assigned to categories of information. For example, in a situation where a child was alleged to be unsupervised, the behavior of the parent is

weighed in relation to the age of the child, their self-help skills, the extent of any harm to the child, and the availability of resources.

Stein and Rzepnicki (1984) identified two models used by child welfare social workers in gathering information for the assessment and decision making process. The first model, labeled *clinical domain,* requires worker judgment in deciding whether information out of defined range is relevant to an interpretation of the information. The second model, labeled *fixed domain*, is information that remains constant over the life of the case, though it may change over time. This includes agency policies, laws, and court decisions. Stein and Rzepnicki emphasized that the distinction is made between the two domains because social workers' assessments and decision making pertaining to child maltreatment is not only influenced by fixed domains, such as the law, but depends on an interaction between the two domains.

Stein and Rzepnicki suggest that all points in the decision making process– from the initial point in determining relevant information, to the final decisions regarding what actions to take – are guided by the subjective discretion of individual workers. They caution that even with the presence of rules to guide the decision maker, social workers' judgments will still play a part in making a final decision in cases where there are ambiguities. It is, therefore, important to note that research, such as that of Stein and Rzepnicki (1984), suggests that social workers' own cultural values and biases play an important part in the decision making and assessment process, despite the presence of state and federal laws outlining what constitutes child maltreatment.

To minimize the risk of subjective opinions influencing the decision-making process, The 1974 Child Abuse and Neglect Treatment Act (CAPTA; Public Law 93-247), described above, provided the federal guidelines that set forth the minimum standards for states to use in indentifying, investigating, and treating child maltreatment. The law also identified local Departments of Social Services as the main agency responsible for addressing child maltreatment. For instance, in Maryland, the Annotated Code of Maryland, Family Law (**§ 5-702**) legislative policy stipulates that "The purpose of this [law] is to protect children who have been the subject of abuse or neglect," and the law requires "each local department to give the appropriate service in the best interest of the abused or neglected child" (Annotated Code of Maryland, Appendix A). Child welfare social workers are the primary professionals involved in ensuring that the guidelines outlined initially by CAPTA are being followed.

Research Question

Research related to child welfare has traditionally focused on the individual child and family dynamics. However, in recent years, there has been increasing interest in the characteristics of social workers in influencing outcomes in child welfare (Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur, & Zhia, 2006; Zell, 2006). Social workers have considerable discretion in making decisions related to the nature, the amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions by their agency, and they can maneuver through the system in ways that have the most direct effects on clients (Goerge, 1994; Lipsky, 1980). Yet despite professional training and the laws and policies that direct social case work, the personal views and subjective

opinions of social workers inevitably affect their decision-making about child welfare. The subjective views of social workers – particularly views affected by cultural biases – may be relevant to an understanding of why overrepresentation occurs in the child welfare system. With this thought in mind, this study explored the influence of ethnic culture on masters' level child welfare social workers (M.S.W.), by investigating how their cultural views on child rearing, child disciplinary practices, and norms about child maltreatment shaped their perceptions and decisions about child maltreatment. The research explored views of social workers who were born and raised in the Caribbean, because of the reported cultural differences between child rearing practices in the Caribbean and the U.S. The overall research question that shaped this research was:

> For masters-level child welfare social workers, born and raised in the Caribbean but practicing social work in the United States, how do their cultural views about child rearing practices, disciplinary practices, and norms influence their perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment?

Relevance of the Question to Social Work

This research study is relevant to social work on several fronts. First, as the literature suggests, social workers exert tremendous influence on the decision making process in the child welfare system. Therefore, exploring characteristics such as cultural background is necessary to determine how this variable impacts professional decisions. A second concern relevant to child maltreatment is the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system. It is important that all factors attributed to this

overrepresentation be explored. If social workers' characteristics are said to be influential, then the cultural background of social workers needs to be examined to assess its bearing on this issue. Lastly, this study is directly linked to the field of social work by virtue of the interest of study, because the research explored the perceptions and decision making of masters level social workers who exemplify the core mission, values, and ethical principles of the profession.

Researcher's Interest in the Question

This topic is of interest to the researcher for several reasons. First, the researcher's own cultural background is Caribbean, and as a Child Protective Services worker born and raised in the Caribbean, the researcher has experienced many dilemmas related to cross-cultural professional work. For example, she has witnessed differences in the discipline practices and views about child maltreatment in the Caribbean culture and those in the United States. Often, the researcher was confronted by conflicts between the expectation of the law and duties of the profession and agency and her traditional cultural practices. Through personal experience in working at a child welfare agency, the researcher felt there was a false assumption that child maltreatment laws were clear and that every social worker had similar interpretations of the law, regardless of their cultural background. In other words, interest in this issue was initiated by both professional and personal curiosity and a desire to explore whether other Caribbean social workers felt similar tensions. It is the researcher's belief that findings from this study may help

expand the dialogue and training in child welfare agencies to address cultural competency on a more comprehensive level.

Overview of Research Study

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative design, situated within a social constructionist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and it aimed to explore social workers' experiences, processes, and meanings regarding child maltreatment. The study utilized a grounded theory methodology of qualitative research that examined the experiences of 13 Caribbean social workers currently employed at a child welfare agency in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) methods of analysis were used to examine the qualitative data and generate ideas and theory grounded in the data.

Theory

Although this study followed a grounded theory qualitative design, two existing theories explain the processes explored in the interviews. The influence of ethnic culture on attitudes or actions about child maltreatment can be explained by the theory of symbolic interactionism. The basic tenet of this theory proposes that humans act on the basis of the meanings that objects hold, rather than the object's physical reality (Blumer, 1969). Berlin's (2002) cognitive integrative perspective also describes human beings as meaning makers who constantly attempt to make sense of events by assessing the kind of information they encounter and by creating patterns or schemas for organizing and

classifying the information. She proposes that cultural conditions shape schematic patterns and continue to interact with those patterns to influence perceptions, decisions, and understanding. Both symbolic interactionism and the cognitive integrative perspective informed the researcher's initial thinking about this research.

Conclusion

The aim of this introductory chapter was to describe some of the relevant components of child maltreatment, specifically related to definitions of child maltreatment, some of the difficulties surrounding its definition, and the history and prevalence of child maltreatment. The purpose of describing these components of child maltreatment was to provide the foundational context from which to explain the origins of social workers' subjective experiences and the influence of these experiences on their assessment and decision making process. Explanations of the assessment and decision making processes of social workers illuminated how social workers' perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment are not influenced solely by laws and agency guidelines. Instead, professional decisions also are influenced by personal cultural values and norms, which may be in conflict with laws in the U.S. regarding child maltreatment. In keeping with this focus, Chapter One concluded with the research question, the interest of the topic to the researcher, and the relevance of the study to the practice of social work.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature addressing parenting styles, child discipline, and child rearing practices in the

Caribbean. The chapter includes a discussion of how culture shapes people's views on parenting and influences social workers' assessments. Cultural theories, symbolic interactionism, and the cognitive integrative perspective served as the theoretical underpinning of the study, and these theories are synthesized in the following chapter within the context of child maltreatment and Caribbean culture.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter addresses perceptions about child maltreatment by examining the theoretical and empirical research related to parenting styles, disciplinary practices, and the influences on child maltreatment. The chapter further explores cultural influences on child maltreatment by examining various theories of culture and how culture shapes parenting practices, including child discipline. Literature on cultural influences regarding child discipline and maltreatment from the perspective of professionals also is examined. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the two theories that form the theoretical underpinning of this research – symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective. In this study, symbolic interactionism was used to explain how perceptions about child maltreatment are conveyed symbolically through language and communication by people in interaction with each other. Cognitive integrative perspective was used as an additional theoretical viewpoint to explain and describe how one's internal thought processes and memory systems operate to give meaning to events occurring within the environment. Together, symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the environment on an individual's cognition, perception, and behavior.

Parenting Styles, Child Discipline, and Child Maltreatment

Styles of Parenting

Over the past several decades parental practices and styles have been the focus of many researchers, particularly those interested in child development or maltreatment issues (Chao, 1994; Collier, McClure, Collier, Otto & Polloi, 1999; Ferrari, 2002; Smetana, 1995). Research on parenting styles was spearheaded by Baumrind's (1971, 1989) seminal work, which described models of behaviors that differentiated parents on the basis of the control they exerted over their children. Maccoby and Martin (1983) expanded Baumrind's typology by categorizing families based on their levels of parental demandingness and responsiveness. Baumrind's (1971) authoritative parenting style described parents who were nurturing, provided structure, reasoning, and were characterized by Maccoby and Martin (1983) as having high demandingness and high responsiveness. The authoritarian parenting style described parents who were restrictive, punitive, restricting, rejecting, and exhibited power assertive behaviors and were characterized as having high demandingness and low responsiveness. Permissive parents were described as being warm and accepting, but inept in monitoring the child's behavior, and were characterized as having low demandingness and high responsiveness. Last to be added were the rejecting-neglecting parents, who were disengaged and had little to no involvement with the child. They were characterized as having low demandingness and low responsiveness (Baumrind, 1971, 1989; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

It is important to explore parenting styles, particularly when discussing disciplining and child maltreatment, because cultural beliefs, values, preferences, and standards of "good parenting" vary, depending on the parents' cultural backgrounds (Fontes, 2002; O'Reilly, Tokuno & Ebata, 1986). For example, O'Reilly et al., (1986) found in their comparative study on parenting values of Japanese American and European American parents that Japanese parents valued well-behaved children more than European American parents, who valued self-directed children more than Japanese parents. Variation in parenting styles based on cultural values and beliefs is also evident in cross-cultural research. For instance, in the Pacific Island of Palau, a common practice by parents is to tie young children with a rope to a post when the parent is unable to directly supervise the child, such as when the parent is farming. Parents are also known to spank their children with a broom, breaking the skin, and leaving bruises when the children do not do their chores or homework (Collier et al., 1999). Additionally, in Sri Lanka, it is widely believed that physical discipline such as "caning or thrashing" is not only necessary, but good for the child. The Sri Lankan equivalent for "spare the rod and spoil the child" is "a child who is not beaten into shape is like gravy which is not stirred" (deSilva, 1981, p. 395). In Sri Lanka, physical punishment is used in varying degrees as a child rearing technique and is socially accepted as the good intention of the parent in looking out for the wellbeing of the child.

In many Latino cultures, young children are prized and indulged. Latinos value closeness and interconnectedness among extended family members and have a sense of family obligation, respect for older people, and responsibility to care for all family members. For this reason, it is important for children to be well behaved and represent the family in public (Fontes, 2002). Latino parents expect their children to follow orders and tend to be strict and authoritative, more so than Whites and African American parents (Zayas, 1992). They tend to foster closeness, dependence, obedience, and family loyalty – different from Western culture, which primarily encourages autonomy and independence (Falicov, 1998). When children in Latino families disobey, they are sometimes punished harshly. For instance, a child who curses may be slapped across the mouth (*a tapaboca*). A child who has done something that is considered stupid may be knuckled on the top of the head (*a cocotaza*). A child who has been disrespectful may be made to kneel on uncooked rice with bare knees. A young child who seems out of control may be placed in a bathtub of cold water (Fontes, 2002).

It is important to note that while many of the parenting styles and practices of other cultures may not be condoned in Western society, some Western parenting practices are considered to be unacceptable in other societies. For example, practices such as male circumcision, denying children food between mealtime, and forcing infants to cry themselves to sleep at night alone would be considered abusive in some countries (Korbin & Spilsbury, 1999).

Child Discipline

Child development theorists define discipline as a method of modeling character and of teaching self-control and acceptable behavior (Papalia, Wendkos-Olds, & Duskin-Feldman, 2006). However, the term discipline infers a negative connotation, as it also means "to maintain order which is often regulated through punishment" (Douglas & Straus, 2007, p. 304). According to Douglas and Straus (2007), many parents use discipline as a euphemism for spanking, while professionals often refer to discipline as "anything done to raise a well adjusted child" (p. 304). Discipline is a component of the parenting styles indentified by Baumrind (1971). However, physical discipline or corporal punishment is defined as "the use of physical force with the intention of causing the child to experience pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior" (Straus & Donnelly, 2001, p. 4). The line between physical discipline and child maltreatment has been assessed to be thin and is often based on the seriousness of the injuries sustained by a child (Douglas & Straus, 2007). Research suggests that many incidents of child maltreatment begin as physical discipline, but due to circumstances such as a defiant child or other factors which escalate the situation, the child ends up injured (Straus & Donnelly, 2001). For example, in a U.S. national study of cases of physical abuse reported during a two year period, Gil (1970) found that the most common type of abuse involved incidents surrounding disciplinary actions by parents. Similarly, in their study examining substantiated cases of nonsexual abuse,

Kadushin, Martin, and McGloin (1981) found that the maltreatment "almost invariably" (p.249) occurred during parental disciplinary interactions.

Despite the link between disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment to increased reports of child maltreatment, these practices continue to be widely used in many families and societies. Furthermore, these practices have been the subject of controversies and public debates locally, as well as globally (Ben-Arieh & Haj-Yahia, 2008; Irfan, 2008). On one side of the debate, the dispute concerns the effectiveness of corporal punishment or physical discipline and its consequences on children (Gershoff, 2002; Ulman & Straus, 2003). Other arguments are based on the notion that the family is responsible for raising children and not the larger society (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002). Some researchers take a moral stance and are concerned with the protection of children and treating them the same as all citizens, who should be free from maltreatment (Ateah & Durrant, 2005).

The debate over the use and misuse of corporal punishment has had important policy implications domestically in the U.S., as well as in other nations. Some countries, such as Sweden and Germany, have prohibited the use of corporal punishment (Bussmann, 2004), while others, such as the U.K., have legislated its use (Hall, 2004). In other countries, the issue has been addressed in the legal system and has had varying results. For example, in Israel the courts deemed corporal punishment to be illegal (Peled-Amir & Kadman, 2000). However, in 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada declared corporal punishment to be constitutional and allowed parents to use

"reasonable force" in disciplining their children (Canadian Foundation for Children, 2004).

The arguments pertaining to the effectiveness and necessity of corporal punishment continue to be a topic of controversy in discussions about disciplining and child maltreatment. Despite these discussions and reports of decline in its support and use (Straus, 2004), corporal punishment continues to be widely practiced by many parents (Irfan, 2008). In the United States, its prevalence is estimated to be between 60 and 90% (Straus & Stewart, 1999). Similarly, its prevalence in Canada is estimated at 51% (Oldershaw, 2002) and 90% in Hong Kong (Samuda, 1988) and the United Kingdom (Ghate et al., 2003).

Parenting and Child Discipline in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, children are highly valued and parents often report that they want the best for their children. However, this value stance underlies other cultural beliefs that serve as a guide for child-rearing and disciplinary practices. For instance, the Biblical term to "spare the rod and spoil the child" and the idea that "children should be seen and not be heard" are embedded in the value system of many Caribbean parents (Evans & Davies, 1997). Girls in Caribbean families are often protected and closely supervised to prevent boy-girl relationships; thus for girls, obedience and docility are valued. Boys are treated very differently, as they are given more independence, are encouraged to learn survival skills, and encouraged to engage in boy-girl relationships. However, boys usually tend to experience more incidents of corporal punishment. This

may be due to a combination of more liberal independence with an attempt at teaching survival skills through "toughening up" the child (Evans &Davies, 1997).

In Caribbean homes, children of both sexes at the age of four or five begin doing household chores, such as sweeping, mopping, floor polishing, and caring for younger siblings (Sargent & Harris, 1992). In their study examining Jamaican families, Sargent and Harris (1992) described their observations of a seven year old girl they called Chantelle, involved in duties that were typical of the children involved in that neighborhood. Chantelle reportedly watched her toddler and infant siblings, did light laundry and some cooking, and ran errands. Sargent and Harris (1992) reported that while both boys and girls were expected to assist in domestic chores and childcare, boys were supervised less closely than girls and were allowed to roam the neighborhoods and were sometimes not seen by the parents for days. Parents had higher expectations for girls than boys and expected them to do well in school by passing their exams and obtaining good jobs. They were supervised more and expected to remain close to home when not in school, which is in contrast to the expectations for boys (Sargent & Harris, 1992).

Some researchers have suggested that Caribbean parents rarely engage in positive guidance and direction or utilize reasoning and explanations to foster children's understanding of consequences for behaviors or to develop self discipline (Brodber, 1974; Grant, 1981). The dominant parenting style in the Caribbean has been described as authoritarian, which is characterized as repressive, severe, and often abusive (Arnold,

1982; Barrow, 1996). The disciplining is described by some researchers as inconsistent and developmentally inappropriate (Arnold, 1982; Barrow, 1996; Evans & Davies, 1997; Sloley, 1999; Smith & Mosby, 2003). Corporal punishment, "flogging," or "beating" is the most common response by Caribbean parents to perceived and actual misbehavior of their children (Evans & Davies, 1997). According to researcher Leo-Rhynie (1997), children are beaten with many different objects, such as "the hand, a stick, a belt, a tamarind (a fruit bearing plant) switch in order to ensure compliance" (p. 44). Children are also punished for many different transgressions, which include "lying, stealing, disobedience, impoliteness, not completing chores, playing in the house, crying too much, and not eating the meal that was provided" (Barrow, 1996, p. 400).

In the Caribbean, prevalence of corporal punishment has been reported both at home and in the schools. For example, in Guyana in 2005, accounts of corporal punishment reported by a government-commissioned research project revealed the prevalence at 87% at home and 53% in schools (Cabral & Speek-Warnery, 2005). Additionally, according to a statistical review by UNICEF (2007), the prevalence of physical punishment in Jamaica was reported to be at 73% and 51% in Trinidad and Tobago, respectively.

Cultural Influences Regarding Child Discipline and Maltreatment

Cultural Variations

Perceptions, attitudes, and definitions about child maltreatment are shaped by many factors, including culture (Ferrari, 2002; Giovannoni & Beccera 1979; Gough & Lynch, 2002; Rhee, Chang, & Youn, 2003; Shor, 2005; Westby, 2007), religion (Bottoms et al., 2004; Dyslin & Thomsen, 2005; Furness, 2003; Gilligan, 2009; Shor, 1998), professional backgrounds (Ajdukovic et al., 1993; Giovannoni & Beccera 1979; Portwood, 1999; Russell, Lazenbatt, Freeman, & Marcenes, 2004; Rose & Meezan, 1996; Segal, 1992; Smith-Cannady, 1998), being female (Al-Mosa et al., 2003; Dukes & Kean, 1989; Garrusi, Safizadeh, Bahramnejad, 2007; Tilden et al., 1994), being a parent (Portwood, 1998; Snyder & Newberger, 1986), and age of the observer (Dukes & Kean, 1989; Hansen et al., 1997; Roscoe, 1990; Warner & Hansen, 1994). Studies that have explored perceptions about child maltreatment in relation to these causal factors found that perceptions are mainly influenced by the background and characteristics of the observer (Ashton, 2004; Collier et al., 1999; Rhee, Chang, & Youn, 2003). Researchers also speculate that disciplining, childrearing practices, perception, and attitudes about child maltreatment are generally developed from peoples' cultural systems, which are often difficult to change (Rhee et al., 2003; Westby, 2007).

For example, in their study on pastors' perceptions and attitudes about child abuse, Rhee et al. (2003) evaluated Korean pastors, the majority of whom were immigrants who had resided in the United States for over 16 years. The researchers

found that the pastors believed child welfare laws were important in protecting children and the church should be involved in prevention and intervention, yet 83% of the Korean pastors believed child welfare laws conflicted with Korean childrearing practices. When asked what they would do upon knowledge of child maltreatment, 89.5% of the sample indicated that they would provide counseling with the parents. Only 10.5% responded that they would report parents to child protective services.

Similar results were found by Ashton (2004), who examined eight personal characteristics of social services workers, including age, gender, parenthood, mother's education, father's education, college major, ethnicity, and immigrant status. She was interested in studying the effects of personal characteristics on reporting child maltreatment. The researcher found that of the eight personal characteristics, only ethnicity and immigrant status were related to the likelihood of reporting. She found that Whites were most likely to report; Asians were least likely to report; and Black Americans, Latinos, and Black Caribbeans were in-between. Additionally, she found that the combined impact of ethnicity and immigrant status on reporting was large ($R = .44$), without looking at participants' approval of corporal punishment or perception of maltreatment. However, when ethnicity and immigrant status were combined with worker's approval of corporal punishment and worker's perception of maltreatment, the four variables together had a strong ($R = .57; p < .001$) effect on reporting. White workers, who were born in the U.S., disapproved of corporal punishment and perceived such problematic parental behavior as maltreatment. They were more likely to report

maltreatment to Child Protective Services than persons who were non-White, born

outside the U.S., approved of corporal punishment, and who did not perceive parental

behavior as maltreatment. Both the Ashton (2004) and Rhee et al. (2003) studies

suggest a strong correlation between one's cultural background and one's perception

and decision making about child maltreatment.

Theories of Culture

Culture is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as the distinct ideas,

customs, social behaviors, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or

period in time. Culture also has been defined in a variety of ways by anthropologists

and social scientists. For some, it is referred to as an organized pattern of values,

beliefs, and behaviors developed and transmitted over time by a social group (Brislin,

1993; Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006). For others, culture not only includes

values, beliefs, and ideals, but it also embraces the institutions that inform the way that

humans live (Harris, 1999). Still, for other researchers, culture is seen as only

consisting of learned ways of thinking and behaving (Bonner & La Farge, 1989), while

others highlight the influence of genetics on cultural traits (Mainardi, 1980; Boyd &

Richerson, 1985). Some anthropologists and social scientists emphasize the importance

of cognition or thoughts and ideas (D'Andrade, 1995; Durham, 1991; Goodenough,

1964), while others combine thoughts and ideas plus behaviors (Harris, 1999; Keesing,

1974).

Culture as adaptive. One of the theories of culture that has gained acceptance among social scientists is the *adaptive perspective*, which assumes that culture is a system of socially transmitted patterns that serve to relate human communities to their ecological setting (Keesing, 1974). In sociobiology, adaptation is considered as any distinguishing attribute of an organism that increases its fitness (Barash, 1982). Cultural adaptation is considered in similar terms as it is in sociobiology, based on the feature of fitness, but instead is shaped by socio-cultural factors for the correlated benefits of increasing fitness (Durham, 1991). The adaptive perspective suggests that change is primarily a process of adaptation, which amounts to natural selection. Meggers (1971) explains that like other animals, human beings must maintain an adaptive relationship with their environment in order to survive. Meggers (1971) speculates that although humans achieve this through culture, the process is guided by the same rules of natural selection that governs biological adaptation. Thus, cultural changes are based on which direction the ecological equilibrium swings. If the balance in the environment is disrupted as a result of demographic, systematic, or technological changes, changes are made through the cultural system (Keesing, 1974).

Culture as ideas. Goodenough (1957) views culture as a system of knowledge which "consists of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members" (p.167). However, he cautions that culture not only consists of behaviors or emotions but an organization of these concepts, based on internal models for perceiving and interpreting information. D'Andrade (1995)

maintains that the core meaning of culture involves shared cognition, which can be described as ideas or knowledge that is organized into schemas, models, narratives, or taxonomies. Proponents of the ideation theory make a distinction between culture as ideas and culture as human behavior. Their assumption is that culture consists of shared and socially transmitted mental entities or ideas that influence individual behavior. Proponents of this perspective propose that the relationship between ideas and behavior is asymmetrical as behaviors are not believed to influence ideas, whereas ideas are believed to influence behaviors. One argument related to the subordination of behavior is that behavior is a complex phenomenon that may be caused by many forces, including, genes, the environment, and culture itself (Durham, 1991; Goodenough, 1970). Another explanation is that ideas are forever and lasting, while behavior is transient and unpredictable. Therefore, as Durham (1991) states, "culture should be thought of not as behavior but as part of the information that specifies its form" (p. 4).

Relating these principles to discipline in the Caribbean, Smith and Mosby (2003) suggested that severe and abusive disciplinary practices in Jamaica were not only evident among parents but extended to the larger society, including other professionals and teachers. The authors provided descriptions of adult and child testimonies of severe corporal punishment at school, where children described being beaten with rulers and leather belts. The belief or *idea* that children should be physically disciplined is not only endorsed by parents and teachers in the Caribbean, but also encouraged by the legal system. A Jamaican judge, in a family court hearing,

advised a father that all the child needed to correct his behavior was "two good licks" (licks means slaps or smacks) (Smith & Mosby, 2003). Thus, the shared cultural beliefs, knowledge, and ideas about how to discipline children in the Caribbean influence the behaviors of professionals, as well as parents.

Culture as a symbolic system. Another approach to culture used by anthropologists and social scientists is to view culture as a system of shared symbols and meanings (Boon, 1972; Geertz, 1973). Scholars who subscribe to this perspective disagree that culture is in one's individual mind. Instead, culture is viewed as a system of symbols and meaning made up of units and rules about relationships and behaviors (Geertz, 1973; Schneider, 1968). The assumption is that through the use of symbols such as language, modeling, and behavioral imitation, significant and meaningful information is transmitted to individuals from one generation to the next to develop culture (Durham, 1991; Geertz, 1973). Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (2006) argue that the symbolic representation of individuals and their environments over time produces languages, codes of conduct, and social institutions. Therefore, the symbolic interactionists would argue that the use of symbols transmitted via communication and language is understood through shared meaning to create values, beliefs, and culture.

For example, part of the value system of Caribbean parents is the belief that to "spare the rod is to spoil the child," which symbolically promotes the use of physical discipline, is seen as a sign or symbol of "tough love." Parents believe that the more the child is spanked, the more they are demonstrating love and doing the best for their

children (Mathurin, Gielen, & Lancaster, 2006). Research has shown that in these societies, children accept "beatings" as a normal part of growing up. Adults often recall their experiences with physical discipline as being well deserved or for their own good, and they may remark that they "turned out okay" (Anderson & Payne, 1994; Mathurin, Gielen, & Lancaster, 2006; Rohner, Kean, & Cournoyer, 1991).

How Culture Shapes Views on Parenting

Parenting is considered to be one of the most influential variables in the transmission of culture (Harkness & Super, 1995; Spicer, 2010). According to Cauce (2008), children are not born into the world with a sense of culture, but become a member of a particular culture through interaction with parents and significant others. Therefore, in Caribbean families where gender role socialization is embedded in the culture and is facilitated by parents, children learn from a young age the behaviors and tasks that are appropriate, depending on their gender. For example, Evans and Davies (1997) described that Caribbean girls are expected to help with domestic chores in the kitchen and other areas inside the home, while boys are assigned duties such as chopping wood, trimming edges, and other activities outside the home. The researchers report that there is often a stigma against boys who perform domestic chores, as there is a fear that boys will be seen as "sissies." Therefore, according to Evans and Davies (1997), boys usually tend to experience more incidents of corporal punishment than girls.

Some researchers argue that culture should be disentangled from the historical and social experiences of parents, as this would lead to a better understanding and identification of the specific influences that culture exerts on the parenting process (Brave Heart & Spicer, 2000; McLoud et al,, 2000). Such knowledge about the unique and interactive roles of variables such as culture, ethnicity, and community backgrounds, would contribute greatly in targeting preventive efforts and intervention (Le et al., 2008). One of the main criticisms of parenting research that focuses on culture is that families from different cultures have been compared with European American families who are used as the standard, which leads to the creation of many assumptions about cultural and ethnic group differences. It has been suggested that comparisons looking at mean similarities and differences does not always take into account that some of the same parenting or child rearing behaviors may have different meanings or may be based on different parenting goals (Le et al., 2008; Mason, et al., 2004). A second criticism is that studies are often based on parenting assumptions, such as authoritative or authoritarian parenting styles. This may result in constructs and measures being studied that may not be compatible with other important cultural variables (Le et al., 2008). Many of the criticisms related to the discussion of studying parenting within a cultural context seem to be directed at studies that utilize quantitative methodologies, which focuses on mean distinctions and constructs that may not be appropriate for every culture. In a study examining research methods in doctoral dissertations, Brun (1997) found that social workers gave two common reasons to

justify the use of qualitative research methods. One reason was that qualitative methods offered a better understanding of participants lived experiences (e.g. subjective meanings and context). Another reason was the belief that the current state of the knowledge did not explain the studied phenomena. These justifications are relevant to the current research interest, because qualitative methods enabled the examination of participants lived experiences in their cultures of origin to determine how these experiences shaped their perceptions and future decision making about child maltreatment.

How Culture Shapes Assessments of Professional Social Workers

Although sparse, there is some evidence to suggest that culture impacts the assessments of professionals, particularly surrounding child maltreatment issues. Brunnberg and Pecnik (2006) conducted a study in which they compared Swedish and Croatian social workers' assessments of a 4-year old child exposed to risk in his family. Effects of the participants' cultures were investigated with respect to risk assessment, perception of the problems, tolerance of corporal punishment, and judgments and appropriateness of interventions. The results suggested that Croatian social workers had a more child-protective approach than their Swedish colleagues, who tended to be more supportive. Social workers in both countries were similar in their assessments, but differed significantly in their method of intervention. The Croatian social workers preferred removing the child from the home, while the Swedish social workers favored maintaining the child in the home with support from social services. The study

explored Croatian and Swedish cultures due to their similar histories of legal prohibition of corporal punishment (Brunnberg & Pecnik, 2006).

A similar study by Jergeby and Soydan (2002) provides further validation of the influence of culture on social work assessments. The researchers examined Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom (U.K.), and the United States (Texas) and found that social work responses to child maltreatment differed, based on the country or culture of origin. In Sweden, the social workers' styles seemed to be guidance-oriented, while in Denmark, social workers preferred early intervention strategies. Social workers in the U.K. showed a preference for partnering with other agencies, while in Texas they showed a preference for informal networking. In addition to Ashton's (2004) study, mentioned earlier, regarding disparities among social service workers, these studies provide some foundation to the view that culture has an influence on social workers' assessments and their responses to child maltreatment. However, more thorough evaluation is needed to understand how the cultural backgrounds of social workers affect their assessments and decision-making. As Ashton (2004) has proposed, "further research is needed to understand better the underlying factors within cultures that affect differences in reporting intent" (p. 993).

Two conceptual frameworks—symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective—deepen understanding of the empirical literature related to parenting, child discipline, and cultural influences of child maltreatment. As described in the following section, these theories expand the theoretical underpinning of the current study and

provide further explanation regarding how individuals derive meaning about child discipline and how parental behaviors are shaped.

Symbolic Interactionism

Definition of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that focuses on the nature of interaction, instead of personality or social structure. This perspective takes a dynamic stance, rather than a passive or deterministic one, in that people are believed to be active and constantly changing due to their interactions in society. Charon (1989) notes: "Interaction implies human beings acting in relation to each other, taking each other into account, acting, perceiving, interpreting, and acting again. Hence, a more dynamic, active human being emerges rather than an actor merely responding to others" (p. 22).

One of the founders of the theory, Blumer (1962) maintained that symbolic interactionism refers to those distinct and rather peculiar characteristics that occur between humans during their course of interaction. He stated that what makes the process peculiar is that people respond based on the *meaning* that they attach to the actions of others, rather than to the actions themselves. His statements address a salient concept of symbolic interactionism, which is the importance of what is happening *within* the individual and not just what occurs *between* individuals. The symbolic interactionist believes that humans act according to the way they define the situation they are experiencing. While the definition of the situation may be influenced by

interaction with others, it is also a result of the individual's own definition of the situation that is significant (Blumer, 1962; Charon, 2004; Manis & Meltzer, 1972).

Historical Context of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism has been influenced by many theorists and has evolved as a distinct theory in sociology through the work of scholars such as John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, James Mark Baldwin, Herbert Blumer, Manfurd Khun, William I. Thomas, John Watson, and, most notably, George Herbert Mead (Manis & Meltzer, 1972; Rose, 1962). Mead's work has been credited as being among the most influential in the development of the theory, but Blumer, a student of Mead, coined the term *symbolic interaction* and has been credited with interpreting Mead's work (Blumer, 1962; Charon, 2004).

As an educator, Mead taught at the University of Chicago between 1893 and 1931, where after his death in 1931, books were published by his students based on his ideas expressed during his classes (Manis & Meltzer, 1972). While Mead did not himself publish any clear systematic description of his theory of symbolic interaction, his perspectives were captured in four books and a few articles based on lecture notes, unfinished manuscripts, and unpublished essays (Manis & Meltzer, 1972). His books included *Philosophy of the Present*, published in 1932, and based on lectures presented in 1930 on the philosophy of history from a pragmatist perspective; *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), composed mainly of class lectures delivered to his social psychology classes at the University of Chicago; *Moments of Thoughts in the 19th Century* (1936),

comprised primarily of lectures in his classes on the history of ideas; and *Philosophy of Act* (1938), which was based on philosophical statements of pragmatism. Mead's books reflected his philosophical orientation, which resulted from his involvement in the school of philosophy known as pragmatism, which was very instrumental in its influence on his interactionist perspective. Some of the important tenets of pragmatism that permeate symbolic interactionism include the notion that human beings interpret all things, and that truth is only possible through an individual's own interpretation (Charon, 2004; Mead, 1934). Another pragmatic concept is that people use knowledge based on its usefulness to them. Therefore, every situation is a test of personal knowledge and perspective (Charon, 2004; Mead, 1934).

In addition to pragmatism, Mead was influenced by the work of Charles Darwin, who is renowned for his contribution to the theory of evolution. Darwin, who was a naturalist, believed that people should not depend on the supernatural as an explanation of nature but should understand the world on its own terms as subject to natural laws. Mead borrowed from Darwin's naturalistic perspective, in that he believed that humans are part of the animal kingdom, evolved from other forms, and are unique.

Mead further believed that the uniqueness of humans was not related to isolated individual traits, but to a combination of unexplained qualities, including a highly developed brain, the ability to reason and communicate symbolically, heavy reliance on socialization, and the ability to make subtle and sophisticated sounds (Charon, 2004). Darwin also influenced Mead by his emphasis on an evolutionary, dynamic universe.

Mead contended that everything about human beings is a process, rather than fixed or stable, as people are constantly changing. Behaviorism also influenced Mead's perspective. In fact, one of the main underpinnings of behaviorism is that humans can be understood primarily in terms of behavior, and it is from human action that humans come to understand the group and the larger society (Charon, 2004; McPhail & Rexroat, 1979).

Primary Tenets of Symbolic Interactionism

There are three primary tenets of symbolic interactionism that seem applicable to the research question for this study. These tenets include an understanding of *the self*, the notion of *the present*, and the importance of *symbols*. The following review provides a brief definition of each tenet, plus their applications to a cultural lens on parenting, child discipline and maltreatment, and the perceptions of child welfare professionals.

The self. The notion of the self as an object was one of Mead's most significant contributions to the theory. Mead's hypothesis was that humans are objects of their own actions, which involves action towards the self as one might act toward others. As humans, we get angry with ourselves, take pride in ourselves, encourage ourselves, blame ourselves, and plan for ourselves (Blumer, 1962; Meltzer, 1972). Mead regarded this ability of an individual to act toward the self as the central mechanism with which the individual deals with the world. This mechanism allows individuals to refer back to the self in relating to their surroundings, which later guides actions based on what is

observed. For Mead (1934), the self is both an object and a subject. As an object,

Mead believed that people view themselves objectively from the standpoint of others in

their environment.

Mead (1934) described the development of the self as a three-stage process. In

the *preparatory stage* or pre-symbolic stage, the child imitates others around him by

taking on their role without understanding their actions. At this stage the child does not

have the ability to symbolically imagine the self from the prospective of others and only

imitates the acts of individuals, rather than understanding their perspective. In the *play*

stage, true role-playing is initiated, and the child takes on the role of mother, father,

fireman, doctor, teacher, or those individuals who are of importance to the child, or

those with whom the child identifies, respects, or fears. In this stage, the self begins to

emerge, yet in an unorganized fashion, as the child is able to take the role of others by

directing activities toward him or herself. This is the stage in which language is being

learned, and the child is able to label and define objects with words that have shared

meaning. Objects which were originally acted towards, because of imitation, are now

acted towards according to the meaning shared in interaction with others. The child is

able to take on the role of one individual at a time. For example, a young child might

be observed disciplining or spanking her doll and taking on the role of the

disciplinarian, whom she may fear or admire in her home.

In the *game stage*, the individual is able to take on several roles simultaneously

and is able to respond to the expectations of several different people at the same time

(Mead, 1934). The individual is able to take on the role of groups of individuals (for example, the community, culture, the law) over particular roles. This interaction with others is a *generalized other*, which is a generalized role or standpoint from which the child views him or herself. This stage is the beginning of the adult self, which incorporates all of one's significant others into one generalized other. This self is more organized and less segmented, and it changes in interaction with others but does not radically change each time another significant other is encountered. The generalized other represents the common perspective of the group (Charon, 2004; Meltzer 1972). For example, a child protective services worker may play the role of the mother figure to a child she removed from his or her home due to maltreatment. She may also play the role of enforcer for the child's parents in ensuring that they do what is necessary for the child to return home. This same worker similarly may play the role of an expert witness in testifying on behalf of that child.

An additional fourth stage was added by symbolic interactionist Shibutani (1955). The *reference group stage* was suggested by Shibutani due to lack of clarity about whether there was just one generalized other or several. In this stage, the individual interacts with many different groups and has several reference groups with which he or she shares a perspective. For interactionists, the self is an object that is social in its origin and that is constantly changing and being re-defined in interaction with others. For instance, a child welfare agency may become the reference group for a

social worker providing interventions for maltreated children, while the social worker's

own culture may be the reference group from which he or she parents.

The present. Symbolic interactionism proposes that individuals are influenced

by what is happening *now*, and not so much by what has happened in the past. The past

affects action as we recall it in the present and as we apply it to the situation at hand

(Charon, 2004). Consequently, action is determined by our *current* interactions, how

we currently define these interactions, and how we think about this process, in the

present. The theory rejects any notion of human passivity and embraces individuals as

beings who interact, think, define, and apply his or her past to make decisions in the

present. For example, research suggests that parents who have experienced corporal

punishment as children tend to embrace corporal punishment as an appropriate form of

discipline with their own children (Evans & Davies, 1997). However, from a symbolic

interaction perspective, discipline with their own children is not so much affected by

what happened in the past, but how parents recall their experiences in the present. This

may explain why some parents, despite experiencing physical discipline as children,

may choose not to utilize the same technique as parents.

Symbols. A third important concept of this theory is the importance of symbols.

A symbol is described as an object, mode of conduct, or words; anything to which

people respond or use intentionally to represent something else (Charon, 2004; Mead,

1934). Symbols can also be social because they are defined through interaction with

others and are generated by individuals who are in agreement with what the symbols

represent. For example, in some societies a coin represents an object that conveys monetary value to be used in exchange for goods and services. However, in many Asian countries a coin is used for remedial purposes as well. Used in many Asian cultures as a mechanism for healing children (and adults) with certain ailments, coining involves rubbing or scratching the skin with a coin in a symmetrical pattern and leaving skin lesions that look like bruising (Chang, Rhee, & Berthold, 2008; Hong & Hong, 1991). From a Western perspective, this practice has often been misunderstood to be child maltreatment (Chang, Rhee, & Berthold, 2008; Look & Look, 1997), because the objective definition or symbolic use of a coin for Westerners did not translate into medicinal healing.

Symbols are also used for communication to self as well as others (Charon, 2004). According to Mead (1934), social interaction is a unique human activity. He believed an important part of interaction involved the process of communication, which is facilitated when meaning is generated by the gesture of one individual who causes a response from another individual. Mead (1934) believed that people act towards the world based on the meaning they derive through their symbolic communication and interaction. This hypothesis is exemplified in a study by Britner and Mossler (2002), who examined professional decision making about foster care placement of abused children. This study found that different professional groups used different criteria to make their decisions. Social workers often made their decisions regarding foster care placement based on the severity and patterns of the abuse. Judges and guardians ad-

litam made their decisions based on the likelihood of the reoccurrence of abuse and the

child's ability to recount the abuse. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) made

their decisions based on the stability of the family. This study emphasizes Mead's idea

that it is through interaction and communication that people share definitions of the

world. It is through symbols, such as language, that people are socialized, both

culturally and professionally, and gain understanding of their roles in relation to others.

Symbolic communication regarding what is defined, perceived, and deemed important

by the different professional groups influences the decisions of individuals within each

group.

<div align="center">**Cognitive Integrative Perspective**</div>

Definition of Cognitive Integrative Perspective

The cognitive integrative perspective provides an explanation about how people

develop, maintain, and change their understanding of themselves and their social

worlds. It utilizes an amalgam of frameworks inclusive of neurological, cognitive,

social, and psychological explanations of memory and the mind. According to Sharon

Berlin (2002), a social worker credited with creating the cognitive integrative

perspective, people are meaning makers and are constantly seeking and creating

meaning in an attempt to make sense of events occurring around and within them. The

cognitive integrative perspective is a re-orientation of the traditional cognitive approach

to human behavior.

Historical Background of Cognitive Integrative Perspective

The main theoretical basis for the cognitive integrative perspective is cognitive theory. "Men are not influenced by events, but by the views they take of events" (Epictetus, as cited in Ellis, 1962, p. 25). This quote from Epictetus, a philosopher in ancient Rome, marked the early beginnings of cognitive theory, which can be traced to Roman and Greek Stoic philosophers (Ellis, 1962). Plato (Plato trans., 1993), one of the ancient Greek philosophers, also expressed an interest in cognition. For Plato, ideas and thoughts were based on cognitive processes. He believed that if people failed to apprehend a particular idea, it was not because they lacked ideas but that their perception was obscured (Broughton & Freeman-Moir, 1982). Since the days of the ancient philosophers, the principles of cognitive theory have been postulated by a number of pioneers who added their own unique perspective to enhance the development of modern cognitive theory.

The principles of cognitive theory further evolved in the 1960s with Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy. Ellis' theory proposed that irrational or unrealistic thoughts produced distorted and disturbed emotions and behaviors. He maintained that it was the task of the therapist to show clients that their internalized sentences were unrealistic and could be controlled and replaced with more rational sentences by trying new experiences and behaviors (Ellis, 1973; Werner, 1982). Ellis (2002) explained in an interview with *North American Journal of Psychology* that Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) uniquely says that much of human disturbance is created by people saying: 1) "I

prefer to do well and be approved and loved by others, and I absolutely have to do so," and 2) "Because I prefer you to treat me kindly and fairly, you absolutely have to act that way" (p. 4). For Ellis, the first of these two irrational beliefs leads to depression, despair, and anxiety, and the second to anger and rage (Ellis, Shaughnessy, & Mahan, 2002). Simply put, Ellis (1973) maintained that one's emotions and behaviors were guided by one's thought system.

In the 1970s, Aaron Beck introduced a set of principles and cognitive therapeutic techniques appropriate for addressing the major disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and phobias (Beck, 1976; Calvert & Palmer, 2003). A psychiatrist, Beck originally trained as a psychoanalyst and proposed that thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and the environment are each capable of influencing each other. He observed that people have a host of skills and techniques available that they can utilize across a range of situations. Much of therapy, Beck says, is helping the client to advantageously utilize techniques already available to address problems. Beck is credited with applying a cognitive model of therapy for treating depression, anxiety, problems with children, such as ADHD, substance abuse, schizophrenia, psychosis, obsessive-compulsive-disorder (Beck, 1976; Beck & Emery, 1985; Calvert & Palmer, 2003; Reinecke et al., 1996). Beck argued that negative automatic thoughts, generated by dysfunctional beliefs, were the cause of depressive symptoms, instead of depression being the cause of an individual's negative personal views. Beck explained his idea of the cognitive triad as negative thoughts that are often about the self, world, and future.

A negative view of self involves individuals seeing themselves as worthless or deficient; a negative view of the world involves seeing one's environment as overwhelming or filled with obstacles. A negative view of the future involves seeing it as hopeless and believing that no amount of effort will result in change (Gonca & Savasir, 2001).

In formulating the cognitive integrative perspective, Berlin sought to merge the positivist traditions of research methods with more constructivist practice strategies (SSA Centennial, 2008). Berlin launched her career in social work as a member of the child care staff at the Children Home Society in Seattle, Washington. While in Seattle, she received her masters and doctoral degrees in social work and social welfare and focused her dissertation research on cognitive-behavioral models of practice. While on the faculty of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration from 1983-2007, her interest in cognitive psychology and feminism formed the basis of her clinical models of social work practice, which emphasized the benefit of cognitive theory for the treatment of oppressed and underserved groups (SSA Centennial, 2008; Harms, 2002). Berlin's (2002) book, *Clinical social work practice: A cognitive integrative perspective,* is based on research and her personal experience as a social work practitioner and builds on traditional cognitive therapy methods to respond to the role of current life conditions and interpersonal events in creating and revising meaning.

Primary Tenets of Cognitive Integrative Perspective

        Cognitive integrative perspective is different from other cognitive theories because it is based on three main ideas. First, it emphasizes social sources of meaning; second, it relies on memory models for understanding how the mind works; and finally, it integrates different therapeutic approaches for altering the nature of incoming cues (Berlin, 1996). Berlin (2002), suggests that people's negative interpretations of the meaning they make of their lives are not only due to cognitive distortions, but are also influenced by environmental, social, and interpersonal factors that are often ignored by traditional cognitive theorists. Meaning is often generated through automatic mental processes that operate beyond awareness. Berlin (2002) suggests that people are often conscious of end products, such as feelings, conclusions, judgments, intuitions, and recognition, but are not aware of the mental operations that create the products. Individual perceptions and the meaning made of events – such as who individuals are, where they stand in relation to others, their prospects and operations – are influenced by two main factors. These factors are the nature of the information that individuals encounter and the patterns or systems that individuals create for organizing and classifying the events (Berlin, 2002; 1996).

        Sources of meaning. Berlin (2002) emphasizes two sources of meaning. One is the subjective interpretation of information or the personal, which is supported by traditional cognitive theorists. The second is the objective information itself or environmental factors. Information that individuals encounter and organize comes from

personal and environmental sources. The personal perspective involves the internal

dialogue and experiences that constantly occur within individuals. Berlin (2002)

suggests: "We are always thinking, feeling, acting, experiencing in forms that are

conscious and perhaps intentional, as well as forms that are out of our awareness and

unintentional" (p.10).

In discussing how the mind works to store and organize information through

memories that can later be retrieved for meaning making, Berlin (2002) describes the

Associative Network Model. She states that "our minds works to encode incoming

stimuli and thereby transform them into internal mental representations (or codes or

symbols) that are stored in memory, retrieved in remembering past occurrences, and

used to encode similar configurations of the stimuli" (p.45). She further argues that the

more pathways of association are linked together or the more ideas are repeatedly

paired together, the more dependent ideas become on each other. Therefore, because of

the related associated feature of the network structure, we tend to remember related

concepts together (Berlin, 2002). As a result of repeated similar experiences, people

learn about expectations, how to relate to others, and how to understand their own

needs. These recurring experiences are stored in memory and retrieved to understand

new events that become progressively more elaborate and abstract.

For example, it is well documented in the literature that parents who maltreat

grew up in environments where maltreatment occurred (Egeland, 1993; Egeland et al.,

1988; Hunter & Kilstom, 1979). Therefore, from a developmental perspective, children

who are repeatedly exposed to severe corporal punishment are constantly storing and retrieving information evaluating these behaviors as normal and acceptable that thought becomes linked to form their stable core beliefs as adult parents. The end result is that when these adults are faced with new events similar to their experiences as children, their core beliefs about discipline and child-rearing are unconsciously activated and similar parenting practices are likely to occur.

Memory models. Information processing theorists argue that organizing systems or schemas can be explained in terms of procedural memories or knowledge (Teasdale & Barnard, 1993; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Procedural knowledge involves putting together memories that are similar. Teasdale and Barnard (1993) explain that procedural memories are those that determine what sensory, semantic, or motor elements go together to make a cognitive emotional meaning or behavioral response. Berlin (2002) describes procedural memory as "encompassing the inborn and experienced based know how that allows us to process information automatically by transforming it, copying it, and arranging it into recognizable thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (p. 59). Once our memories for cognitive, emotional, or motor patterns have reached this automatic or procedural stage, they are very hard to change, and the more we organize information according to a particular pattern, the more abstract and automatic the pattern becomes (Berlin, 1996). Therefore, information about appropriate or abusive parenting, child-rearing, and disciplinary practices, once organized, stored, and retrieved automatically in memory, becomes very difficult to change due to the

intricacy of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns. This is demonstrated in

the literature which shows that child maltreatment is cyclical (Kalmuss, 1984;

Herzberger, 1990). Parents who discipline harshly tend to transmit these behaviors

from one generation to the next, which results from difficulty in changing the

information stored in memory pertaining to severe disciplinary and child rearing

practices. Individual personal experiences are not only a function of memory systems,

but are also a function of social experiences derived primarily from relations with others

(Cross & Marcus, 1994: Berlin, 2002). Magnusson (1990) and Berlin (2002) maintain

that the meaning we make of events is shaped by the values, roles, norms, and

relationships of the socio-cultural context in which we develop our thinking patterns

and in which we continue to operate. While there is freedom for individuals to develop

their own personal realities, this social experience perspective argues that the socio-

cultural messages that people receive from infancy onward play an important role in

shaping and organizing memory patterns. Berlin (2002) further explains that culture

provides a preformed set of beliefs or meta-schemas that shape individual ideology

about what is good, normal, appropriate, deviant, or real. Berlin's explanations may

explain why individuals in one culture have different perceptions about child

maltreatment than individuals in another culture. Child rearing practices, such as

spanking a child with a broom and breaking the skin, slapping a child in the mouth,

pulling a child's hair, and putting a child in cold water, may be considered maltreatment

from a Western perspective. However, in some Latino and Palauan cultures, where

these disciplinary practices are customary and accepted, the behaviors are not viewed as maltreatment (Collier et al., 1999; Fontes, 2002). Berlin's explanations also explain why an authoritarian parenting style is not considered child maltreatment in Caribbean culture, although Caribbean child discipline is harsh compared to U.S. standards.

Conclusion

Prevention and remedial efforts to address child maltreatment involve many professionals, including social workers, physicians, attorneys, teachers, police officers and nurses. Professionals involved with this issue are expected to bring expertise, knowledge, and skills with the assumption that their qualifications will transcend cultural variations in attitudes, perceptions, and decision making about child maltreatment. Nonetheless, it was evident in the literature that professionals may retain attitudes and make decisions about child maltreatment based on their respective cultures, rather than their professional or agency values (Ashton, 2004; Chan et al., 2002; Collier et al., 1999; Elliott et al., 2000; Pierce et al., 2004; Rhee et al., 2003). However, the literature suggests that further research is needed to determine how culture influences professional perceptions and decisions about child maltreatment (Ashton, 2004; Rhee et al., 2003), which was the focus of this study.

Cultural theories, symbolic interactionism, and cognitive integrative perspective served as the theoretical underpinning of this research. These theories were important in helping to dismantle the complexities of child maltreatment. The theories of culture were useful in explaining the different vantage points of cultural theorists and provided

some perspectives that were complimentary to the main theories of symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective. Symbolic interactionism explains how cultural values about parenting, child-rearing, and discipline are influenced by the interaction of individuals in a society, through symbols such as language, communication, and modeling. Furthermore, the theory explains how the *generalized other* or *reference groups* of individuals have an impact on their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, which influence their perceptions and decisions about child maltreatment. Cognitive integrative perspective is useful in explaining how social workers' perceptions about child-rearing, discipline, and child maltreatment are associated with schemas formed by repeated exposure to cultural information. This information becomes linked together to form core beliefs that are often unconsciously activated and difficult to change.

The main focus of this chapter has been to introduce and explain the theoretical framework that formed the basis for describing how culture influences social workers' perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment. The following chapter will provide a step by step description of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study followed a qualitative design in order to explore the impact of culture on Caribbean MSW social workers' perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment. Chapter one described some of the policies and legal definitions of child maltreatment along with the challenges in defining such a comprehensive concept. It also highlighted some of the difficulties and limitations of the literature in addressing perceptions about child maltreatment. Chapter two provided the theoretical and empirical framework to explain how individuals make meaning of events based on the information they receive from their social environments. It provided the theoretical basis for explaining how social workers may perceive and make decisions about child maltreatment based on social and internal processes. Chapter three provides the methodological foundation for the research by explicitly explaining the design of the study, including the philosophical underpinnings, the reason for doing a qualitative study, sampling, the ethical considerations in doing a qualitative study, and the importance of rigor and trustworthiness.

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative design, situated within a social constructionist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as it examined Caribbean social workers' cultural experiences, processes, and meanings regarding child maltreatment. The study used a grounded theory methodology that explored the experiences of Caribbean social workers

employed at child welfare agencies in Washington, District of Columbia, and Prince

Georges County, Maryland. Grounded theory methods were used to analyze the

qualitative data with the aim of generating ideas and theory grounded in the data (Glaser

& Strauss, 1967). The study had as its focus the following specific research question:

> For masters-level child welfare social workers, born and raised in the Caribbean
>
> but practicing social work in the United States, how do their cultural views about
>
> child rearing practices, disciplinary practices, and norms influence their
>
> perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment?

Justification of Design

In looking at the problem of child maltreatment, specifically related to the impact

of culture on professionals' perceptions, it is evident that the literature is limited. Focus

in this area is often concentrated on the attitudes of different professionals from a specific

culture (Ajdukovic et al., 1993; Segal, 1992). For example, Segal (1992) compared the

perceptions of social workers, physicians, lawyers, and the general public in Japan.

Similarly, Ajdukovic and her colleagues (1993) examined the attitudes of psychologists,

social workers, prosecutors, and judges about child maltreatment in Croatia. Not only is

the literature limited and focused in a particular area, but the research methodology is

predominantly quantitative (Ajdukovic et al., 1993; Ashton, 2004; Giovannoni &

Beccera, 1979; Rose & Meezan, 1996; Segal, 1992).

There is some indication that quantitative methodologies do not provide the best

means of exploration when looking at perceptions. Studies that utilize quantitative

methods to explore perceptions about child maltreatment only show differences without contextual information about the causes of the differences or how and why differences occur. In the Segal (1992) and Adjukovic (1993) studies mentioned above, the results from the former study showed no differences in perceptions among the different professional groups. The latter study showed incongruence in perceptions about child maltreatment among the professionals in the study. Therefore, the task of looking at perceptions and getting a concrete understanding of how ones' culture can shape perceptions about child maltreatment may be addressed best using qualitative methods.

In his study looking at the utilization of qualitative research methods, Brun (1997) found that social workers gave two common reasons to justify the use of qualitative research for their doctoral dissertations. One reason stemmed from the fact that qualitative research offered a better understanding of participants lived experiences, such as subjective meanings and context. Another reason was the belief by researchers that the current state of the knowledge did not explain the studied phenomena. These justifications are relevant to this study examining participants' lived cultural experiences in their countries of origin and the impact on their current work experiences as child welfare social workers. This type of exploration can best be facilitated by qualitative methods.

Philosophical Orientation of Design

According to Guba (1990), the purpose of the constructivist paradigm is "not to predict and control the real world nor to transform it, but to reconstruct the world….in the

minds of the constructors" (p. 27). Guba and Lincoln (1994) further acknowledge that this philosophy is idealist; that is, they assume that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals. The constructivist ontology is relativist and pluralist, meaning there are multiple, often conflicting constructions and all are meaningful. In utilizing a constructivist epistemology that is subjectivist (Guba, 1990), the inquiry begins with the issues or concerns of the participants and unfolds through a dialectical process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This process involves an interaction between inquirer and respondent and includes analysis, critique, reiterations, and reanalysis, which eventually lead to a joint construction of a case. Qualitative methods seem the most complementary and best fit to the constructivist paradigm, which espouses relativism, subjectivity, and a dialectical process (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study, which examines how Caribbean social workers' cultures influence their perceptions and decision making related to child maltreatment, can be best explored utilizing a constructivist paradigm. With this paradigm, the question about how we know reality is answered from the perspective that there are many realities. There are many different ways of knowing and many source of knowledge, which is subjective and based on the unique interpretations and perspectives of individuals. From a constructivist paradigm, people's definitions and constructs of child maltreatment are known and developed in many different ways. Thus, one person's perspective about child maltreatment may be influenced by his or her culture, meaning what this person believes and understands about maltreatment stems from his or her cultural beliefs and values. In

a similar vein, another person's knowledge and beliefs about child maltreatment may stem from experiences of being abused as a child. Thus, the constructivist paradigm provides a solid foundation for the basis of this study.

In keeping with the constructivist methodology of being hermeneutic and dialectic, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that "individual construction can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents" (p.111). The authors argue that hermeneutic techniques are often compared and contrasted through a dialectical exchange (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This process as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) is consistent with the methodologies of qualitative research (Chamaz, 2006; Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Grounded theory was utilized as a method of analysis in looking at how culture influenced perceptions and decision making of Caribbean social workers. Grounded theory was first introduced by researchers Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss (1967) and involves a systematic approach to conducting research. The approach begins with induction, simultaneous data collection and analysis, systematic comparisons, and supports a developing theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theorists have proposed that this method of doing research is consistent with a constructivist philosophical framework of being relativist, reflexive, and dialectic (Chamaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

This research study design was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Committee on Human Subjects of The Catholic University of America. The following summary outlines further details of the research methods.

Sample

Sample Parameters

This qualitative study involved a purposive sample of 13 child welfare social workers employed at 4 different child welfare agencies in Prince Georges County, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. All the participants were born in a country in the Caribbean where they were raised before immigrating to the United States. The youngest participant was age eight at migration while the eldest was 29. Additionally, all participants received their MSWs in the United States and were employed at a child welfare agency. This sample was purposive due to the strict parameters of the study (Patton, 2002), which was limited to MSW social workers who were born and raised in the Caribbean and who were employed at a child welfare agency at the time of the interviews. Social workers who fit these specific criteria were limited and had to be selected purposively through acquaintances who knew someone that fit the specified requirements for the study.

Sampling Strategies

Snowball sampling strategies were employed in recruiting participants. A snowball sampling approach uses existing study participants or key informants to recruit future participants from among their acquaintances (Heckathorn, 1997; Patton, 2002).

The researcher initiated the sampling process by sending the IRB approved invitation email (Appendix A) to a group of six acquaintances who, along with the researcher, were part of an established support group consisting primarily of Caribbean social workers. The email was also sent to other acquaintances believed to have access to potential participants. None of these initial acquaintances participated in the study, but they were asked to send the emails to individuals who fit the criteria described in the invitation letter. Seven participants were referred from acquaintances, while the remaining six participants were individuals referred by the participants themselves. Participants who were referred by acquaintances primarily initiated contact with the researcher. However, participants who knew individuals that fit the study criteria often spoke with those individuals first and obtained approval for the researcher to make contact.

Data Collection

Setting

Interviews were conducted by the researcher in participants' homes or offices, based on the participant's preference. The researcher was the sole data collector in this study. Nine participants were interviewed at their offices, three were interviewed at their homes, and one was interviewed at her request in a quiet area outside a restaurant. Prior to the interviews, the IRB-approved consent forms (Appendix B)were emailed to the participants for their review. Participants also received a reminder email a day or two prior to the interview and a thank you email following the interview.

The length of each interview was between 1 ½ -2 hours in length. Prior to the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to sign the consent after acknowledging that they had read the consent and had no additional questions. The researcher also signed the consent in the presence of the participants. Once the interviews were completed, all tapes were labeled with numbers that referenced the date participants were interviewed. Thus, a participant interviewed on May 22, 2010 had his or her interview tape labeled 5222010. All tapes and signed consents were stored in a locked file cabinet. Transcriptions of the tapes were completed by professional transcribers hired by the researcher, who requested a signed confidentiality statement. All tapes were returned to the researcher upon completion of the transcriptions.

Interview Guide

Participants were interviewed using an IRB approved open-ended, semi-structured interview guide constructed from questions raised by the literature and from the researcher's personal and professional experiences (Appendix C). Questions were centered on the main spheres of participants' demographics, participants' cultural and personal views on child rearing, child disciplining, child maltreatment, and child abuse laws. Probe questions were used to gain clarification and depth of questions.

After transcription of the pilot interview, which was completed by the researcher, additional questions were added to the interview guide to include participants' views on child supervision and neglect as well as their agreement or disagreement with work-agency rules or regulations and their reasons. This change was supported by the

researchers' chair who also reviewed the transcription of the pilot interview. Following

these additions, the researcher deviated minimally from the questions in the interview

guide, unless new or important information was presented by the participant that needed

further exploration or clarification.

Ethical Considerations

The issue of child maltreatment is a sensitive topic that evokes very strong

feelings for many people. Thus, as a researcher, ethical considerations were paramount

throughout the research process. Concerns about ethical issues were especially pertinent

due to the diversity of sensitive issues that were addressed in this study. One issue was

that of culture. The fact that the participants shared cultural values and practices about

child maltreatment that sometimes varied from the dominant culture made these

interviews particularly sensitive. Therefore, respecting the dignity and worth of

participants' cultural values, beliefs, and practices was an important ethical principle that

was in the forefront of the researcher's mind at all phases of the research process

(interview, transcription, coding, data analysis).

An additional ethical concern related to the confidentiality of participants

involved the fact that all the participants worked in some capacity to protect and ensure

the overall wellbeing of children. Therefore, the researcher bore the responsibility of

treading carefully by ensuring that a balance existed between the responsibilities to make

sure that the entire process was true and respectful to the participant, and at the same time

consistent with social work values and ethical principles pertaining to reporting and

responding to child maltreatment. As explained by Padgett (1998), "licensed clinicians who are also researchers cannot give absolute guarantee of confidentiality because they must abide by mandated reporting laws" (p. 376). The tension between encouraging participants to explore their cultural values, while maintaining the ethical obligation to report maltreatment, was diffused by always ensuring that participants carefully read the consent form that addressed the researcher's obligations.

Another concern related to confidentiality had to do with informed consent, which clearly explained the purpose of the research and how the data would be managed following its use. This provided assurances to participants that their identity would remain anonymous and that all tapes would be stored in a locked file. In addition, the researcher created a quiet, protected, environment in which to interview participants, which was vital to the process of maintaining confidentiality (Padgett, 1998).

A third ethical consideration involved reflexivity. Qualitative scholars have defined reflexivity in several different ways. For example, Hertz (1996) defines reflexivity as "a continuing mode of self analysis that permeates every aspect of the research process, challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture and politics of those we study" (p.5). Similarly, Chiseri-Strater (1996) maintains that to be reflexive "demands some self-conscious awareness and the process of self scrutiny" (p.115). The use of reflexivity in this study was important for two reasons. One, the interest and basis for the study rested in the researcher's own experience and struggles as a Caribbean child welfare social worker, practicing in the United States. The researcher

was interested in exploring whether other Caribbean social workers had similar experiences. Additionally, the researcher had some preconceptions as to what participants' experiences would be. Preconception is defined by Malterud (2001) as "previous personal and professional experiences, pre-study beliefs about how things are and what is to be investigated" (p. 3). The researcher was sensitive to her preconceptions in two ways. One involved a thorough examination and reflection of some of the researcher's preconceptions, which involved multiple discussions with the researcher's chair prior to the interviewing phase of the study. As Malterud (2001) suggests, "this situation can be avoided by declaration of beliefs before the start of the study" (p. 4). In addition, the researcher wrote in her research journal after each interview as a way to explore and address preconceived ideas. Qualitative researcher Peshkin (1988) argues that researchers should systematically seek out their own subjectivity throughout the research process and "should be aware and observe yourself through reflective notes to yourself" (p. 17).

Another important area where the researcher had to be reflexive and always conscious of the research process involved the researcher's own cultural experience. The researcher had to constantly be aware of the fact that she was from the same country and culture as some of the participants. Pillow (2003) describes researchers who chose to do research in "their own cultural, sexualized, ands racialized communities" as being "insiders" (p. 182). This "insider" or emic approach follows the anthropological tradition of striving to understand culture from the native point of view (Malinowski, 1922).

However, Pillow (2003) and Bernal (1998) cautions that this "dual identity" (Pillow, p. 182) could create positions of power which can further shape and challenge the research process. Therefore, by constantly communicating with the study chair and reflexive journaling, the researcher was able to minimize some of the risks of utilizing an emic approach, while maximizing the advantages.

Data Analysis

The data for this study is comprised of transcribed interviews from 13 participants, in addition to field notes and demographic information of individual participants. One additional interview was used as a pilot and was not coded, but was assessed and used instead as a mechanism for improving the interview guide. The 13 interviews that were the basis of this study were loaded into Atlas-ti (version 6), which is a Scientific Software computer program used for analyzing qualitative data. Atlas-ti was used to manage, organize, and facilitate the coding of the data. In utilizing a grounded theory approach to data analysis, open coding was accomplished by conceptualizing the data and going through each transcript, one sentence at a time. Each idea was given a discrete name or code that represented what the participant was saying within the context of when and how it was being said. As codes were generated, a constant comparing and contrasting of the codes was undertaken to limit repetition and, more importantly, to generate an exhaustive list of codes. Additionally, as each code was created, code definitions were assigned in order to give clear and consistent meaning to each code. A total of 87 codes were produced from open coding. Following open coding, axial coding

involved eliminating open codes that were extraneous to the research question and

collapsing other open codes that were similar in nature. Subsequently, eight families or

groups of codes surfaced from axial coding, and from these families, the codes were

collapsed still further so that three main *core categories* of information emerged. The

core categories consisted of the salient factors from the eight families. The meaning or

theme of the data within each of these three core categories emerged and became

apparent through extensive examination of the data and inductive conceptualization. In

other words, after deconstructing or taking apart the data, the data was then reconstructed

into three essential themes. Eventually, in the third core category of information, the

theme that emerged actually combined the themes in the first two core categories. The

data, which was systematically retrieved and recoded, was managed by consistently

saving and maintaining revised information in Atlas.ti.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Rigor according to Drisko (1999) is the coherence of the research question,

philosophical base, purposes, methods, and conclusions within the qualitative study.

Drisko (1999) provides further clarifications of rigor by suggesting that it involves the

completeness and clarity of study methods employed in the research report. In applying

his explanations to this research, the following conclusions can be drawn by examining

the purpose, epistemological framework, and methodology of the study. One, the

purpose of this study created a harmonious marriage with the epistemological framework.

The purpose of the study involved exploring the cultural perceptions and decision making

of Caribbean MSW social workers about child maltreatment, which was done in a constructivist, interpretivist framework. Drisko (1999) reports that interpretivist researchers view reality as socially constructed and interpreted by the individual in context. In line with these views, the focus of this study was to examine the socially constructed reality (from participants' culture) within participants' current context (MSW social workers practicing in a child welfare agency). This is best explained by Drisko (1999), who states that "interpretivists find meaning in subjective experiences which is located in changing social contexts. As a consequence, both current and past social contexts are pivotal as the interpretive basis for understanding experiences of self or others" (p. 18). Additionally, the purpose and epistemology was a goodness of fit with the methodology of a qualitative grounded approach. Drisko (1999) reports that the method of interpretivist research is flexible and naturalistic, samples are purposive, and data collection is flexible with open-ended questions. The research methods employed in this study were consistent with an interpretive, constructivist framework. Flexibility in data collection was evident when additional questions related to supervision and agency practices were added to the interview guide following the initial interview. Another example of flexibility was evident in those instances when the researcher asked a question that was not on the interview guide in order to get a deeper understanding of what the participant was saying at the time. An inflexible research methodology would have pre-generated questions that could not be altered once the research process began.

In keeping with Drisko's suggestion, all interviews were done in a naturalistic setting involving participants' homes and work settings, which are comfortable environments where people naturally go about their everyday tasks. The sample was purposive due to the specific criteria of the study, which required MSW social workers who were born and raised in the Caribbean and practiced in a child welfare agency. Additionally, keeping in line with this methodology, open-ended questions were employed in order to allow participants to respond to questions in a manner that was natural and consistent with individual participants personality styles.

Additional strategies for ensuring rigor and trustworthiness have been proposed by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2008). They suggested a verification process which entails checking, confirming, and identifying errors before they are built into the analysis of the research. The techniques proposed by Morse et al. (2008) for improving rigor and trustworthiness were done at several stages throughout this study. One phase involved the checking and confirming of the transcribed data. Most of the transcription was done by a professional transcriber who experienced some challenges because most of the participants had foreign accents. Therefore, each transcribed interview had to be checked for errors and misinterpretations by the transcriber. This process also continued throughout the coding and data analysis phase. During the coding phase, the researcher was constantly involved in cross-checking the meaning assigned to each code with the participants' statements to ensure that the essence of each sentence was maintained in the code. Thus, whenever subsequent statements received the same

code, the researcher would check the last sentence utilizing that code with the current sentence to ensure that the code was utilized in a similar manner. The process of checking and confirming was also utilized in the data analysis segment of the study. For example, during the process of axial coding, the researcher consistently checked codes that were eliminated and collapsed to ensure that the ones eliminated were not significant and the ones collapsed were relevant.

There are three main threats to trustworthiness specific to qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), they include reactivity, researcher bias, and respondent bias. Reactivity refers to the researcher's presence in the field causing interference. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher's point of view is tainted to the extent that it impacts study criteria, such as choice of participants and interview questions. Respondent bias occurs when participants respond in a manner they believe is expected by the researcher.

To improve rigor and trustworthiness, qualitative researchers (Lincoln & Guba 1989; Padgett, 1998) suggests that certain techniques, including prolonged engagement, audit trail, member checks, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and triangulation, are necessary. This study employed audit trail, triangulation, and peer debriefing as strategies for further improving rigor and trustworthiness. *Audit trail strategies* were utilized through every stage of the research process so that the data collection process could be reviewed when necessary. This included keeping thorough record keeping of signed informed consents, discrete labeling of interview tapes, note keeping of

participants demographic information, note taking after each interview in a field journal,

memo writing during the coding process, and note taking during advisory meetings with

the research chair. The audit trail process was consistently communicated and verified by

the research chair. *Peer debriefing strategies* were employed through regular contact

with the research chair, in addition to feedback from the dissertation committee, who

collectively served as peer debriefers. The researcher provided regular updates on the

progress of the study at each stage of the research process, which facilitated questions

and recommendations from committee members regarding the research question,

interview guide, theoretical framework, methodology, ethical considerations, and

trustworthiness. A *triangulation* technique was utilized by using three different theories

as the framework to guide the study. Symbolic interactionism provided the theoretical

basis for explaining how interacting individuals in society shape the individual person

and influence his or her decisions and behaviors through symbolic communication.

Cognitive integrative perspective explained how people make meaning of events through

subjective interpretations of objective information they receive from the environment.

Theories of culture provided perspectives that were complementary to the main theories

of symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective.

Conclusion

This study utilized a grounded theory qualitative approach situated within a

constructivist epistemology, ontology, and methodology. The study question sought to

address how culture influenced the perception and decision making of MSW social

workers employed at child welfare agencies in Maryland and Washington, DC. In order

to improve the cohesiveness of the research question, philosophical base, and

methodology of this study, several measures were taken to decrease threats to

trustworthiness and increase rigor. Particular emphasis in this study was given to the

ethical considerations and the reflexivity of the researcher. Chapter four, which follows,

outlines the study's findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings drawn from the narratives of the13 Caribbean-born social workers who participated in this study. These narratives described participants' experiences of being born and raised in the Caribbean. In response to the study's research question, they discussed their cultural views about child rearing practices, disciplinary practices and norms, and how these practices and norms influence their perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment.

To organize this material, three core categories were formulated. The first category focuses on the perceptions of Caribbean cultural views on child-rearing based on participants' experiences in the Caribbean prior to migrating to the United States. The second category articulates the social workers' perceptions about their professional experiences in the United States. The third category centers on how participants' cultural backgrounds have influenced their professional decision making about child maltreatment issues.

Overview of Analysis

To understand the components of the participants' narratives, this study used grounded theory methods. Charmaz (2006) describes grounded theory methods as "products of emergent processes that occur through interaction and where researchers construct their respective products from the fabric of the interactions, both witnessed and lived" (p. 178). Consistent with this description, this chapter captures the views of

participants' pre-emigration lived experiences and how these experiences have continued to affect their professional work as child welfare social workers in the United States The main areas of inquiry led to responses that fell into the above mentioned core categories. Core categories are described by Strauss and Corbin (1994) as representing the main ideas of the research. They have the greatest explanatory relevance and highest potential of linking all of the other categories together. The core category must be "the sun standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 124).

Each core category consists of a number of factors. For instance, the first category focuses on perceptions of Caribbean cultural views on child rearing and is comprised of four factors (expectations of children, unacceptable behaviors of children, discipline, and supervision of children). These factors were conceptualized based on narrative strands that surfaced in participant reports and reflections. Thus, as an example, the factor "expectations of children" was formulated based on the narrative strands of respect, obedience, positive family representation, and education that emerged with regularity in participants' narratives. The factors for the second category—perceptions about professional experiences in the United States— include perceptions about physical discipline, clarity about the laws on child abuse and neglect, and agency regulations in the U.S. The factors for the third category—the impact of Caribbean culture on these social workers' perceptions about child maltreatment and professional decision-making—include the impact of culture on

perceptions about child maltreatment and the impact of culture on professional decision making.

Table 1

Emerging Themes from Core Categories

Categories	Themes
Category 1	Theme 1
Perceptions of Caribbean cultural views on child-rearing	Cultural expectations are supported by community and family
Category 2	Theme 2
Professional experiences in the United States	There is a need for clarity and context in professional work
Category 3	Theme 3
The impact of Caribbean culture on professional experiences in the United States	Early cultural experiences are interwoven into current professional practices

After organizing the data into core categories based on their main factors, further reflection revealed a theme for each of the three core categories. Table 1 above outlines the core categories and their emergent themes. These three main themes that emerged from the core categories were: (1) communities support cultural expectations and norms; (2) participants emphasize clarity and context; and (3) early

cultural experiences are interwoven into current professional practices. Each core

category and the theme that emerged from it provide the focus for a cohesive

explanation of the findings in this chapter. The following table describes the

participants.

Table 2

Personal Demographics of Participants

Descriptor	Frequency
Gender	
Female	12
Male	1
Parental status	
Children	9
No children	4
Country of Origin	
Antigua	1
Barbados	1
Haiti	1
Jamaica	8
Trinidad	2
Age at Migration	
Pre-Teen (7-8)	2
Young Teen (12-15)	4
Older Teen (16-18)	5
Young Adult (Over 18)	2
Current Age	
25-30	3
31-35	3
36-40	2
41-45	4
46-50	1

Description of Participants

The 13 participants in this study were licensed, MSW social workers who at the time of the study were employed at a child welfare agency in either Prince Georges County, Maryland, or Washington, DC All participants reported they migrated from the Caribbean islands of Antigua, Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad, and 12 of the 13 were female. Table 2 on the previous page provides a brief description of participants including gender, parental status, country of origin, and age at migration.

Perceptions of Caribbean Cultural Views on Child-rearing:

"You were Owned by the Whole Community"

Research suggests that children are not born into the world with a sense of culture, but become a member of a particular culture through interaction with parents and significant others (Harkness & Super, 1995; Spicer, 2010). Therefore, the child rearing practices of parents become the mechanism through which children are taught appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Cauce, 2008). In this study, the first core category that emerged from the inquiry was the participants' perceptions of Caribbean cultural views of child rearing practices and expectations that parents had of children in Caribbean cultures. The following discussion presents participants' understanding of the behaviors that were expected from children and others that were considered unacceptable and often led to disciplinary measures. This core category is comprised of four factors that were frequently discussed by the participants. They were: (a)

expectations of children; (b) unacceptable behaviors; (c) discipline; and (d)

supervision of children. The analysis of the core category of perceptions of Caribbean

cultural views on child-rearing and its factors substantiated and contributed to the first

of the three main themes, that *participants' communities support the cultural*

expectations and norms for how children should behave. See Table 3 for a description

of the factors and narrative strands of core category one.

Table 3

Core Category One: Factors and Narrative Strands

Factors	Narrative Strands
Expectations of children	Respect
	Obedience
	Positive family representation
	Educational achievement
Unacceptable behaviors	Talking back to adults
	Antisocial behaviors
	Acting like an adult
Discipline	Use of community discipline
	The use of discipline in schools
	The use of objects for disciplining
Supervision	Community supervision
	Supervision by older children
	The lack of a concept of neglect

Expectations of Children

This first factor is of particular relevance in addressing child maltreatment issues as a matter of cultural beliefs and values, which may vary depending on parents' cultural backgrounds (Fontes, 2002; O'Reilly, Tokuno & Ebata, 1986)). This section presents the participants' views of the expectations that Caribbean parents had of their children and how these expectations reportedly contributed to the discipline and, at times, maltreatment of children. In discussions about this factor, the participants' stories returned repeatedly to several narrative strands which flesh out how participants understood this factor of expectation. These narrative strands included the importance of *respect, obedience, positive family representation,* and *educational achievement*.

A particularly powerful narrative strand was the reported importance of *respect* for ones' elders. Twelve participants in the study reported that respect for elders was one of the primary expectations that adults had of children. They reported that respect was not only reserved for parents, but should be shown to all adult members, authority figures, and members of the greater cultural community. Particular emphasis was given to older people and authority figures such as teachers. As one participant [512] stated:

Children are really expected to respect their peers, especially their older siblings; they are expected to respect society as a whole. They are expected to respect especially their elders, and anyone who was older – auntie, aunts, your

parents, grandparents, school teachers, Sunday school teachers, your neighbors who were older than you, and so on – elders period…. you are really, really expected to be respectful. Respect is a big thing.

Participant [519] stated similarly that "children are expected to be respectful of all adults, not just your parents, but adults as a whole." Another participant [602] echoed the same sentiment: "They're to be respectful and obedient to all adults, not just to their parents, but to all adults."

Many of the participants agreed that children should be respectful to adults and that this behavior should be reinforced and supported. As participant [512] further explained:

You know in terms of respect, I definitely believe that it's key to learn that at a very young age. Especially, you know, respect for elders, respect for your siblings, respect for your parents, respect for society as a whole. Because we are members of society, and I think...whether we want to call them values or not, those are essential as we live in a society. And children need to learn that at a young age. I think trying to teach them that at a later age is a lot harder.

Another narrative strand that surfaced in the reports of half of the participants was the expectation that children should be *obedient*. Participants described obedience as children doing what they were told by adults, without any discussion or opinions expressed. This statement by participant [518] explains the general sentiment of this cultural value:

Especially when you are younger, you obey your parents.... I remember in

class in graduate school, one of the things that came up was how I left Jamaica;

you know, why I came here. And I came here because my parents told me

that's what I would be doing. And someone asked, did it occur to you to say

"no"? No, it didn't occur to me to say "no." That's not even an option. My

parents tell me that's what I'm doing at 17, and that is what I do.

A related component of the expectations for obedience and respect was the

expectation that children should to be seen and not heard or that they should speak

only when spoken to. Children should take a stance of quiet obedience and never talk

back. Participant [425] explained in response to the question of how children are

expected to behave culturally:

…pretty much seen and not heard; you need to know your place. In other

words, if two adults are engaged in conversation, you are expected to wait your

turn, not interrupt. Even with members in authority, maybe like teachers or

professionals, you are expected to defer to them, not really voice too many

opinions.

Participants indicated that children were expected to respond to adults instead of

initiating conversations and were not expected to express opinions which could be

considered argumentative. For example, one participant [528-2] said: "You weren't

supposed to ask questions. I think in my view, children weren't given a voice."

Another participant [528-3] stated, "you're not supposed to talk to grown-ups and

answer back to grownups. You pretty much had to do what anybody told you to do and it wasn't just the parents. I mean you were owned by the whole community."

A third narrative strand that emerged from participants' accounts was the expectation that children should *publicly represent their families in a positive light* through good behavior. This idea was described by some of the participants as presenting the positive teachings of parents and elders at all times, even without the direct presence of a parent or authority figure. According to participant [523], "generally in public you have to look as if you have some type of upbringing because you reflect your parents. So if you don't reflect them [positively], you get in trouble." Another participant [602] had similar sentiments: "you are to conduct yourself as if you are with your parents, even if it's a different adult, any type of older adult or elder or so forth."

A fourth narrative strand in participants' discussions was the value of *education*. Education was not only mentioned in relation to cultural expectations, but in other areas which will be later elaborated. From participants' discussions of their experiences, it seemed that education was important throughout the culture. Many of the participants specifically mentioned education as being an important cultural value and expectation of children. Participant [522] said: "education was high, was a high priority for children." This was echoed by several other participants who said: "it is expected that children go to school" [517]; "…go to school, get an education and, I

guess, be productive" [602]; and "always make sure you do your studies, they are very big on education and respect" [429-1].

In summary, participants' reports highlighted four narrative strands that helped to explain the main Caribbean expectations of children, which helped in understanding their early childhood experiences. Participants noted *that respect for elders, obedience, and educational achievement* were held in high regard. Participant discussions about these perceptions and memories of childhood experiences reflected the theme that gave meaning to this first core category. This first theme that emerged was that *community and family supported the expectations* of the culture. Everyone indicated that the community should help ensure that children adhered to what was expected. If a child was disobedient or did not positively represent their family publicly, then friends, neighbors, and even unrelated individuals would intervene.

Unacceptable Behaviors

Within Caribbean cultures, certain behaviors were defined as inappropriate and culturally unacceptable. This second factor is especially important in the context of this study, as these behaviors often triggered disciplinary measures. Participants' reflections raised three narrative strands that were of particular importance in understanding this factor. These included *talking back to adults, antisocial behaviors,* and *acting like an adult*.

Talking back to adults was reported by eleven participants as a behavior that was considered disrespectful and highly unfavorable. This is strongly related to the

respect category discussed above. Since Caribbean cultures most highly value respect, then disrespect, or "talking back" as most participants stated it, would be considered highly unacceptable. Participant [429-1] explained it this way: "disrespecting adults is unacceptable; talking back to your parents is not acceptable." Further explanation was provided by participant [519]: "People call it back-talking your parents or adults; over here you probably call it arguing; it's not acceptable…it's actually very cultural because talking back could mean negotiating. But that's not really encouraged." Participant [528-1] also stated that it is "not acceptable, displaying disrespect for adults, speaking back to an adult if they are talking to you, cursing at an adult.…"

Another important finding to note is that participants disagreed with this cultural norm. Participants believed that not allowing children to talk back to adults or express an opinion, negotiate, or argue had a negative impact on children which could last into adulthood. Participant [519] explained her disagreement:

> First of all, what you do when you do that is take away, eliminate a lot of opportunities to teach children something. That's number one. Number two: the children don't learn to express themselves. They don't learn to negotiate because arguing a lot of times or talking back is really a process of negotiation. So there are actually skills that suffer as a result of that teaching. So I don't agree with that.

Similar disagreements were expressed by participant [602]:

For the most part...I would probably say [it] is definitely different [from what] I have learned in being in America.... If you have a say in my culture, I guess it's considered talking back or "being womanish." But here, you still have some input and have a dialogue, and that's the part I would say I don't agree with: the fact that you were to comply without having a say.

Participant [528-2] shared the sentiment of the others by expressing her disagreement, but indicated that her family was one of the few in her culture to allow talking back. This participant noted that she was the exception to the cultural norm and stated:

What I don't agree with is children not having a voice to speak when they are young, and I say that because, unlike some of my counterparts and friends, my parents raised us to have a voice. So many times where a parent or grandparent may say something, a child is not supposed to answer back. We were encouraged as long as it was said respectfully; whereas for a lot of kids around me, other friends, no questions, you didn't ask questions. You were told: "this is the way it is!"

Another narrative strand that surfaced in participants' reports was the unacceptable nature of *antisocial behaviors*. Participants' references to antisocial behavior seemed to represent the antithesis of *positive public representation of the family,* as antisocial behavior would negatively reflect on the family. Six of the 13 participants indicated that behaviors such as fighting, stealing, lying, or cheating were

unacceptable behaviors for children in their cultures. As participant [522] explained, "I guess fighting with the intent to injure would probably be something that is not acceptable." Similarly, participant [517] reported: "crime, any kind of crime…to be a thief, yes to go and steal people's things that don't belong to you. Stealing is, yes, very unacceptable." Participant [518] also mentioned that "doing something criminal, especially criminal behavior is considered unacceptable."

A third narrative strand in five participants' reports articulated the cultural disapproval of children *acting like an adult*. This was defined as a child who exhibited age-inappropriate adult behaviors, considered unacceptable by Caribbean cultural standards. In particular reference to girls, this was termed as being "womanish" or exhibiting behaviors of an adult woman.   Similar to the description of participant [602] above, participant [425] explained:

> I think the emphasis is on children being children. It may be perceived differently in other cultures, but I think that the premise is that they want you to be a child, to behave like a child, do what children do, and you're okay. If you start asserting yourself, then that's perceived as being an adult, being womanish, and that's frowned upon.

Participant [528-1] provided further clarification, but also echoed the sentiment of some of the participants who were in agreement that acting like an adult was unacceptable.

As a child you are really supposed to behave as a child, and if you are a child then someone was put in authority of you, and that's an adult, regardless if that person is your birthparents, your relative or not. Because you are a child, it is expected that you behave in a childlike manner. So to not do that is totally unacceptable.

It should be noted that this narrative strand of *acting like an adult* was almost always raised in the context of girls' unacceptable behavior. Participants who discussed these issues only talked about girls and never boys, which seemed to represent their culture's sexist stance on this topic. For instance, participant [522] reported: "Having boyfriends before time, meaning if you were under the age of 18, that was frowned upon." Several participants said that girls involved in sexual relationships were considered adult-like and, therefore, culturally unacceptable. As participant [512] said, "Women really have to be careful how they conduct themselves in terms of, you know, boys and so on. So some behaviors like cutting class to go spend time with your boyfriend secretly would be like a no-no." Participant [602] also stated it would be inappropriate "if a young lady is in the streets hanging with the wrong crowd, you know those types of things." Another participant [528-3] noted his observations: "They don't let girls go as fast as they do boys. They allow boys to kind of do their thing. But the girls are reined in a little bit more."

In summary, *unacceptable cultural behaviors* emerged as a central factor when these participants discussed their perceptions of Caribbean culture and child-rearing.

Participants indicated that behaviors that were considered unacceptable often were addressed by disciplining the child. Again, the narrative strands that revealed this factor further reflected the core category of views on child rearing, and they can be understood via the theme that the *family and community supported cultural expectations.* Thus, the entire cultural community was united on the need to discipline children for their unacceptable behaviors.

Physical Discipline

The third factor that emerged in descriptions of participants' perceptions of cultural childrearing practices and norms was the role of physical discipline. Discipline is defined by theorists as a method of modeling character and of teaching self-control and acceptable behavior (Papalia, Wendkos-Olds, & Duskin-Feldman, 2006). However, Douglas and Straus (2007) indicate that many parents use discipline as a euphemism for physical discipline or spanking. This latter view was supported by participants in this study. All 13 participants reported that they were physically disciplined or spanked as children, which was considered by all to be the cultural norm. Only one participant reported that physical discipline was the exception in her family and was not her own family's norm. However, many of the participants reported that physical discipline was the primary disciplinary measure employed by most parents. When discussing this factor, three narrative strands emerged as of particular importance to the participants, including the *use of community discipline, the use of discipline in schools,* and *the use of objects for disciplining*.

Participants reported that *discipline could be administered by anyone in the community.* As participant [519] reported, "whipping, not just [by] your parents, but by your neighbor, the lady down the street" was common, and "we were disciplined by spanking." Participant [528-2] agreed and elaborated further:

> Anyone could do it. As long as they were adults, and if you were caught doing anything wrong. It could be Ms. Jane down the street that sees you doing something. She may not beat you, but she is going to correct you. Now you didn't go home and complain that Ms. Jane corrected you because chances are great that your parents are going to turn around and beat you. That is the practice.

Similarly, participant [528-1] reported: "You got your butt whopped, you get whipped, and you get beaten. Unfortunately it would be by your parents, teachers. Frankly, in my lifetime, it was parents, teachers, neighbors, whoever wanted to discipline me had unspoken authority, and it was acceptable."

A second narrative strand was the common use of *physical discipline in school.* Spanking in schools was described by participants as being an acceptable Caribbean cultural norm, in contrast to contemporary U.S. norms. For instance, as participant [429-1] described:

> You get a beating even in school. When I was in Jamaica, I stayed between 2nd and 3rd grade. We used to get beaten by the teachers, you know. It wasn't nothing. We would go home and tell our parents and get another beating

because you shouldn't have done what it was you did, so that was basically our

discipline. There wasn't timeout, or let's talk. It was just you get a beating.

Participant [425] shared similar memories: "In my school, physical discipline was

okay. So I remembered times when my classmates would get spankings. Well, we

didn't call it spanking; we said you would get beat."

A third narrative strand that arose in the narratives was the *use of objects* to

discipline children. This narrative strand appeared in the reports of many participants,

most of whom objected to this manner of discipline. Some thought that the use of

objects may have crossed the line at times from discipline to maltreatment. Participant

[602] noted the emphasis on physical discipline and the use of objects to discipline.

She said: "Definitely when we were with my grandmother, we were physically

disciplined and it was not limited to the belt. It could be a switch from off the tree; it

could be her hand. It was always discipline, there were no conversations, and there

was no timeout." Participant [523] also reported being spanked "with a belt or with a

ruler or with the guava branch. They used to get these really thin branches that sting,

and so we got whipped with that." Participant [517] elaborated further by saying that

"they would break a broom stick, like when they beat you until the broomstick breaks;

you can't even sit." Or, she added, "they would throw their shoes at you; whatever it is

they find, they threw it at you. They didn't even look at things if they had a container

in their hand.... they just throw it at you."

Participants generally disagreed with the use of objects to discipline, which they reported could be any physical object. Some participants expressed annoyance and confusion as to why objects were used on children given the increased potential for harm. Participants explained that when objects were used in the disciplinary process, those were the instances when they felt that discipline crossed the line into maltreatment. An example of a participant who was puzzled as to why certain objects were used on children and disagreed with this phenomenon described a particular object used in her culture to discipline children:

> They sell a whip that is made of leather so it's made out of animal skin. I don't believe it's meant to use on humans. I've seen it used on like a donkey or something, you know, just to demonstrate. But I think sometimes I've also seen it used on humans for discipline and that stuff leaves a mark that will never come off. I don't agree with that.

Another participant who also questioned the logic of using an object for discipline stated, "No one ever taught my grandmother that it's not okay for her to use a piece of tire to hit me. It was not warranted." She added, "I was a skinny little thing…I mean I was literally almost bones. It just didn't even make sense."

Supervision of Children

The fourth factor that emerged as an important component of cultural views on child rearing was the supervision of minor children. The issue of supervision was important in the context of this study due to its relationship to neglect as a component

of child maltreatment. As participants discussed their childhood experiences in the

Caribbean, they explained how children were supervised. They also explained how

the culture handled situations of neglect. Three narrative strands emerged from these

discussions, including the importance of *community supervision, the role of*

supervision by older children, and *the lack of a concept of neglect*.

According to many of the participants in this study, the importance of the

community in child-rearing translated to an assumption of *community supervision*.

Participants explained that children in their cultures were peripherally supervised

regardless of age and that this casual type of supervision was considered acceptable

because parents understood that the community assisted with the rearing and

supervising of the children. Thus, parents were not concerned if children were home

unsupervised or went unaccompanied about their everyday activities, such as walking

to and from school or taking the bus. Participant [519] explained it this way:

> Oh everybody supervises the children – communities and the neighbors.
>
> Anybody supervises the children. There's never an identified person to
>
> supervise the kids. It's just the entire community. So if your parents are off
>
> working and the neighbor doesn't work and they are home, they'll keep an eye
>
> [on the children] and then they report. If you do anything, they report to your
>
> parents.

Another participant [518] substantiated this statement:

I think it's more like the community raising the children....Even if your parents

are not really supervising you per se, if you are walking down the street and

any adult sees you doing something, you know it will get back to your parents.

It was also explained that it was not always necessary for children to have caretakers

due to the informal expectation that everyone supervises.

Another narrative strand that contributed to the understanding of this factor

was *supervision by older children*. Participants reported that as a community,

everyone kept an eye on the children. However, more formal arrangements often

involved older siblings, as well as non-related older people in the community.

Culturally, it was expected that older children would supervise the younger ones.

Participants explained that there were often no age requirements for older children to

supervise younger ones, as long as the child was mature enough to provide direction

and care. As participant [522] explained:

Children are supervised by supervising themselves or being supervised by an

older sibling or an older child or anyone who is older or a neighbor. There

aren't any strict policies on supervision there. There are children as young as

five years old who are supervising and who are deemed by the primary

caretaker as being responsible for supervising a child younger.

Additionally, older siblings who frequently provided care to the younger ones were

described as being "parentified," or children who acted in the capacity of an adult

caretaker. Culturally, it was accepted for these parentified children to act as adults only during instances of childcare, but unacceptable outside of these arrangements.

However, another narrative strand helps explain the cultural disregard for supervision: the cultures' *lack of concept for neglect*, in contrast to the United States. Neglect was not a term that was used. As one participant [523] explained: "For it to be child neglect, there would have to be a definition of child neglect." Another participant [528-2] clarified further:

> It's not addressed [laughter] if you're being neglected; it's nobody's business but your immediate family's. If your parents can't take care of you, then you go stay with your grandparents. If your grandparents can't take care of you, then you go stay with your aunt. If your aunt can't take care of you, just keep moving and moving and moving until someday you're old enough to go off on your own.

Based on these participants' accounts, it appears that the issues of supervision and neglect are addressed informally in families and communities.

Summary

A review of the participants' Caribbean cultural views on child-rearing, the first core category, found that four factors emerged from descriptions of their lived experiences in the Caribbean prior to migrating to the United States. Participants focused on cultural expectations of children and behaviors that were considered

unacceptable, which were important factors in disciplining. In addition, participants also discussed how children were supervised in the Caribbean.

In brief, participants explained that there were clear and concrete expectations of children which were reinforced by all facets of the community. There was clarity within the culture about what behaviors were considered unacceptable. Individuals who did not comply with cultural expectations or were consistently involved in unacceptable behaviors suffered the consequences, which primarily involved physical discipline in the form of spanking. There was a clear expectation that the entire community was central to the discipline and supervision of the child.

The supervision of children was also carried out through community support and involvement. Informal supervision was the cultural norm and involved neighbors and family casually watching out for the children as they independently explored their communities. More formal supervision was the responsibility of older adults or older children in the home. Participants believed that the informal supervision of children stemmed from not having a cultural concept of neglect, which was not a term used in Caribbean cultures when participants were children.

The first major theme emerged from participants' discussions related to this first core category and emphasized that the *extended family and the greater community supported the cultural expectations and norms of the culture.* Core expectations of children, including *respect for elders, obedience, and educational achievement,* were encouraged and reinforced by parents, neighbors, and teachers.

Similarly, unacceptable behaviors, such as *talking back to adults*, *antisocial behaviors, and adult-like behaviors*, were discouraged and addressed by family and community members. This same involvement by the community was also evident in supervising children. The theme participants emphasized repeatedly was that the community and the family supported and reinforced cultural expectations and norms. In other words the village was responsible for raising the child (as expressed by the famous African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child"). This collective approach of the community to reinforce cultural expectations and discourage unacceptable behaviors is not as evident in Western societies, which tend to be more individualistic in their approach to child rearing (Huijbregts, Leseman, & Tavecchio, 2007). One participant [528-3] captured the essence of this first major theme by stating: "You were owned by the whole community."

Professional Experiences in the United States:

"There is Ambiguity"

This section discusses findings related to the second core category, participants' professional adult experiences in the United States, post-migration, and how this experience affected the participants' perceptions about physical discipline and child abuse laws. All 13 of the participants in this study were licensed professional social workers who earned their Masters in Social Work (MSW) graduate degrees after migrating to the United States. Participants received their MSWs from universities within the United States and were practicing as social workers at the time

Table 4

Professional Demographic Information of Participants

Descriptor	Frequency
Licensure	
LCSW-C	6
LGSW	7
Agency of Employment	
Child and Family Services	6
Prince Georges DSS	4
Private Agency	3
Job Type	
CPS worker	4
Foster Care	4
Child Welfare Supervisor	5
Length of Time at Current Agency	
Less than 1 year	7
1-5 years	2
6-10 years	3
Over 10 years	1
State MSW was received	
Maryland	4
Washington DC	1
Virginia	1
Pennsylvania	1
New Jersey	1
New York	2
Connecticut	2
Michigan	1
Length of time out of graduate school	
1-5 years	4
6-10 years	6
Over 10 years	4

of the interviews (see Table 4 on the following page for further professional

demographic information). This section addresses the participants' perceptions of

their experiences as professional social workers employed in child welfare agencies in

either Prince Georges County, Maryland, or in Washington, DC. Results relate to two

factors: *perceptions about physical discipline* and *perceptions about child abuse laws*,

as described in the following table.

Table 5

Core Category Two: Factors and Narrative Strands

Factors	Narrative Strands
Perceptions about physical discipline	Definition of physical discipline Conditional support of physical discipline Personal use of physical discipline
Perceptions about child abuse laws	Limitations of the laws in addressing cultural diversity Concerns about parental education and disempowerment Legal shortcomings and barriers to consistent response The tendency of the law to ignore context

Perceptions about Physical Discipline

As previously indicated, all 13 participants stated that they were physically

disciplined as children. It was therefore important to determine what participants'

views were regarding physical disciplining given their status as professional social

workers in the child welfare system. Three narrative strands emerged in discussions as particularly important to perceptions about physical discipline: *definition, conditional support of its use,* and *personal use of physical discipline.* The narrative strands provided two distinct *definitions of physical discipline.* One definition involved the actions, practices, and perceptions of physical discipline from the standpoint of their cultures, while the other definition was from the standpoint of the social workers in their current professional and personal situations. From the perspective of the cultures in which participants were raised, physical discipline was defined as spanking with the use of a hand, belt, switch, or other objects by any caretaker or adult in a home setting, in the general public, or at school. Ten participants reported that they were in agreement with the use of physical discipline. When these participants described disciplining their own children or stated that they agreed with physical discipline, their definitions involved spanking with a hand on the bottom or other areas of the body without injury or bruising and without harming the self-esteem of the child in the process. As participant [523] stated, "I think it's fine. Some type of discipline is necessary regardless of what you choose to do, once it's not something that's injuring the child or you are not abusing them. You are not compromising their wellbeing or anything."

A second narrative strand about physical discipline that emerged was the *participants' conditional agreement* with the practice. While 10 participants said they were in agreement with the use of physical discipline based on the contemporary

definition provided by participants, each explained that there were special conditions under which they believed physical discipline should *not* be administered. Five participants reported that physical discipline should not be done in anger without explicitly stating the reason for the spanking, and felt that aggressive, hurtful, and unreasonable discipline was most unfavorable. Participant [518] cautioned: "Parents have to be very much in control of themselves if they are going to use physical discipline. You cannot be angry if you hit your child." In addition to anger, six participants indicated that physical discipline should not be extreme or cause any injury or harm to the child. For instance, participant [517] said:

> I think kids need to be spanked. I think that- yes. The Maryland law says, as long as you don't break the child's skin or you don't go overboard. And I feel that before you spank a child, you should tell them why you're spanking them, the reason behind it. You don't just spank them and definitely don't spank them in anger.

In support of the assertion of participant [517], three other participants also believed children should know why they are being spanked or disciplined. In addition, five participants disagreed with spanking or action which negatively affected the child's emotional status or self esteem. As explained by participant [523]: "I don't agree with it, if it causes injury – if it's something that is messing with the self-esteem of the child."

Related to this narrative strand of conditional agreement were the discussions of alternative measures for disciplining. Several participants stated their beliefs that parents had rights to discipline their children in their own homes, but the majority of participants preferred alternative disciplinary practices, with physical discipline being used as a last resort. Of the eight participants who discussed alternative measures, half believed that in their cultures, physical discipline was utilized more often due to either a lack of knowledge regarding alternative discipline techniques or the cultural environment did not support alternative measures. For example, participants explained that at the time they were being raised, due to economic difficulties many parents lacked the ability to purchase items such as cell phones and video games or to provide an allowance for their children. Thus the concept of withholding these items as an alternative means of punishment was nonexistent. As participant [523] explained: "There is no allowance to withhold, we didn't grow up with allowance." Other participants explained that the physical environment also acted as an inhibitor. For instance, telling a child they can't go outside to play was not a useful option. Participant [519] further elaborated on why such methods were counter to the concept of alternative discipline:

In America people will withhold a child's privilege to go outside. People don't really do that in Jamaica because we live outside, really. Yes, you're inside for meals or when it's close to bedtime, or if it's raining. It's not something that parents would say "you're grounded; you can't go outside to play." Who does

that? In Jamaica you don't even want a child indoors, they make the house

dirty.

The other four participants who discussed alternative measures indicated that they

were in support of alternative measures of discipline first, with physical discipline

being a last resort after other measures have failed.

Of the participants who were in agreement with the use of physical discipline

as a disciplinary measure, two participants supported physical discipline, but *only* in

situations to warn a young child of danger after verbal warnings were ignored by the

child. These two participants (528-2 and 518) felt that barring those extreme

situations, children should not be physically disciplined and alternative measures

should be utilized. As participant [518] expressed:

When you think of a young child going toward a stove and you tell him "stop,

stop," and they're still trying, and that if you don't tap their hand, they'll do it,

and suffer the consequences. From that point of view, I understand. Outside of

that, I think you should be able to talk to your children.

Although many of the participants tempered their support of physical

discipline with conditions, three stated firmly that they did not agree with using

physical discipline under *any* circumstances. Demographically, these three

participants were raised by their grandmothers, left Jamaica at ages 13, 16, and 18, and

currently work for a public child welfare system. Two of the participants indicated

being severely maltreated physically and sexually as a child, while the third provided

limited personal history. Participants cited the following reasons for their disapproval

of the practice: 1) high probability for maltreatment while administering physical

discipline; 2) the high link of physical discipline to aggression in children, and 3) the

ineffectiveness of physical discipline in affecting change in children. As participant

[429] asserted:

> I think it's wrong when children are physically disciplined. I think there is a
>
> high level of possibility that they may become violent…I think that Jamaica is
>
> stereotyped as a violent culture in reading the newspaper, as there are a lot of
>
> murders. I think it's almost like there is no conscience, you don't see it as
>
> being wrong. I truly believe that stems from childhood.

The final narrative strand that emerged to explain perceptions of physical

discipline was its use with their own children. Of the 13 participants, only nine had

children. Four of the nine reported that they utilized physical discipline (i.e.,

spanking) as a mechanism for *disciplining their own children*, but after using

alternative measures and only as a last resort. Additionally, participants' definitions of

physical discipline consistently involved the use of hand, *no* use of objects, and *no*

resulting injuries. Two participants did not believe in the practice and did not use

physical discipline with their own children. Additionally, two participants indicated

that although they believed in physical discipline, they did not utilize this practice with

their own children. These two participants who supported the practice but did not use

it with their own children cited the increased risk for maltreatment and the possible

repercussions, which could cause them to lose their social work license, as reasons for

not using physical discipline. One of the nine participants who agreed with the use of

physical discipline only for safety reasons also did not use physical discipline as a

method of discipline. Of the four participants without children, one adamantly

disagreed with the use of physical discipline, two agreed with its use, while the fourth

agreed only when there were safety concerns involved.

View of Child Abuse Laws and Agency Regulations

The second factor related to the professional experiences of MSW participants

in the United States was their views on laws protecting against child abuse. As

indicated in Table 3, the social workers in this study were employed at public or

private child welfare agencies in Maryland and Washington, DC. From this diverse

group, all 13 participants reported that they were in agreement with the child abuse

laws. The child abuse laws referenced in this study specifically involved laws that

addressed physical abuse and neglect (such as Maryland's Family Law §5-701 which

describes what constitutes physical abuse of a child). Participants reported that they

believed the laws were necessary and important to protect children. Despite their

agreement with the child abuse laws, ten of the 13 participants disagreed with aspects

of the laws which they felt were ineffective and needed improvements. Four distinct

narrative strands emerged from participants' stories in the context of this factor:

limitations of the laws in addressing cultural diversity issues, concerns about parental

education and disempowerment, legal shortcomings and barriers to consistent response, and *the tendency of the law to ignore context*.

Five participants stated that *cultural diversity issues were not adequately* addressed or incorporated in the laws. For instance, participant [522] explained the following, referring to the United States:

> We are a nation that is constantly growing and we have to take that into consideration and look at the cultural components. This is a nation with many different cultures and times have changed and there are many factors that one should consider. The law should be revised constantly and should not be one set document.

Participant [518] had similar comments: "I think we have to be aware that culture plays a part in how people parent. I think as agencies we don't factor that in because we try to look at what the law says."

A narrative strand that surfaced in several reports evoked the need to *improve parental education and mitigate parental disempowerment*. Two participants believed that the laws *needed to incorporate an educational aspect* for parents, which would be preventative and proactive, instead of punitive. For these participants, parents who initially get in trouble due to inappropriate discipline should be educated and taught safe alternative practices. These participants argued that more focus was placed on prosecution and punishment, rather than on education. Three participants perceived that the laws had a *disempowering effect on parents*, who they believed felt trapped.

According to these participants, many parents perceived that due to some of the constraints of the child abuse laws, parents were apprehensive in their disciplinary practices. For example, parents were concerned about being reported to Child Protective Services for even reasonable disciplinary measures. As one participant explained: "I understand their feelings of disempowerment. Parents feel disempowered that their children hold all the cards in terms of childrearing and the parents are expected to deal with whatever" [512].

Another key narrative strand that emerged from participants' stories focused on *legal and regulatory shortcomings and barriers to consistent response* by those involved with families. One barrier mentioned by five participants was the discrepancies about physical discipline in laws. These participants indicated that different states and jurisdictions and even different professionals were inconsistent about whether it was appropriate to use physical discipline. They argued that some states and jurisdictions in the United States have interwoven in their child maltreatment laws that it is inappropriate to use physical discipline. Yet, in other states and jurisdictions, physical discipline is accepted as long at the child is not injured. As Participant [429-1] reports: "I guess with physical abuse there is ambiguity which may be jurisdictional. Some people say don't use belts, others say use belts but don't leave marks. So I think it's jurisdictional as opposed to universal." Two of these participants also noted that child abuse laws lacked clarity so that they were perceived differently by other professionals working with maltreated children.

These participants reported some frustration, especially related to physical abuse cases they believed were appropriate for prosecution, but were told otherwise by legal professionals. It was the participants' belief that professionals such as prosecutors had different definitions for physical discipline and physical abuse than did the social workers.

Another legal shortcoming participants identified was the lack of clarity in laws pertaining to neglect. In particular, participants reported that the law was especially deficient pertaining to supervision. This area was of special concern to participants who indicated that the lack of clarity related to aspects of supervision and neglect often created inconsistent responses by different social workers to similar maltreating occurrences. Four participants referenced the lack of clarity related to the age at which children can be left alone at home. Participants in Washington, DC explained that leaving children under the age of 18 unattended was considered neglectful, which differed from the laws in Maryland and surrounding jurisdictions. Participants believed that variations in how laws were applied jurisdictionally often caused increased ambiguity among social workers. As participant [528-3] explained: "They're not clear and they don't follow a specific rhetoric. Depending on who it is and what the maltreatment looks like, they [the parent] could end up going to jail, but then may not." Another participant [429-2] discussed some of the differences among the jurisdictions pertaining to neglect: "As far as neglect, I know in DC [Washington,

DC] you can't leave any child at home under 18, but I heard, for example in Prince Georges County, it's 8 and then in some other jurisdictions it's different."

Although participants expressed disagreements with certain aspects of the laws, collectively they agreed that the laws were necessary to protect children. Participant [523] summed up the perspective of many of the respondents by saying: "I think I agree with it [the child welfare laws] for the most part because if I didn't agree with it, then I wouldn't be able to even function in child welfare…That's the basis of what we do in child welfare."

A final narrative strand that emerged from participants' narratives was concern that the *laws did not take context into account.* Three participants argued that the laws often focused on content and not context, which they believed was an important criterion. The participants indicated that the relevance of context was especially necessary when working with immigrant families. This concept relates to participants' perception that diversity issues were not addressed by child abuse laws. For example, participant [602] explained:

> America is very open to people of other cultures coming, and I don't think that sometimes they hear parents of other cultures out and look at the whole family situation. Instead, they're only trained to look at that one situation, and they don't look at the situation as a whole.

This ideology was supported by participant [518] who argued: "Instead of assuming that everything has a criminal intent, that the motivation was to harm the child (which

is not necessarily true), you should be willing to work with parents and see where parents are."

This perceived suppression of important context seemed to underpin expressed disagreements with agency regulations and practices. Participants voiced concern about disparities primarily in three areas: (a) removal of children; (b) suitable placement of children once they are removed from their biological parents; and (c) reunification of children with their biological parents. Eight participants discussed one of these three areas as points where they disagreed with their agency's regulations or practices in addressing these issues. Three of the eight participants disagreed with their agency regulations regarding removal of children, which they believed could be inappropriate in certain situations. As participant [522] reported:

> One case is where there was a gun found in the home of a child, who accidentally shot the other child in the arm. Both parents were there but the gun belonged to the father. There were lots of weapons in the home. After they did a thorough assessment, the social worker found that the mother did not need parenting or substance abuse classes. It was the dad who was an alcoholic and had the weapons in the home. The children were removed. That case I think could have been worked differently, where the father could have been asked to leave the home for a certain period and employ services within the home so as to keep the family stable.

Participant [528] provided another example: "As an investigative worker, we had to remove kids from homes when they were left alone, even if they were 16, 17. I find that to be totally ridiculous." Her claims were supported by participant [519] who added: "I think it's ridiculous to remove these teenagers."

Another important point of contention regarding agency rules involved participants' strong disagreement with their agencies' criteria for placing children. Three participants explained that they did not agree with the high standards used to determine whether a child could be placed with a relative after being removed from the primary parent. Participants who addressed this issue believed that some standards were unreasonable and unnecessary and prevented good-intentioned relatives from being alternative caretakers. Participants argued that issues such as limited sleeping space and income were used as standards to determine whether a relative was an appropriate caretaker. According to these participants, relatives were often denied the opportunity to care for a child who was placed in foster care with strangers. Participants against these practices believed that the optimum choice for these children would be placement with an interested relative. Participant [602] elaborated:

> Those rules often annoy me, like each kid needed a bed. No one could sleep on the floor. I don't know if this is a hard and fast rule or agency rule. Kids of a certain age difference couldn't share a room, therefore this relative who has come forward and wanted to take their family member and keep them in the family or keep them in the community couldn't get approved, or they don't

have an income. They rely on public assistance so they can't take the child. I

think family is important regardless of the situation.

Finally, two participants reported that their disagreement stemmed from their

perceptions of their agency's lack of support to reunification efforts. These

participants argued that reunification efforts were at times hampered by situations such

as those similar to the ones described by participants concerned with agency rules

regarding removals. For instance, some parents were prohibited from being reunited

with their children due to insufficient resources such as furniture or housing. These

participants argued that their agency provided limited support to assist in these areas

which they believe was unfair, given the barrier for parents to be reunified with their

children.

Summary

The focus of this section was to address the second core category of

participants' experiences as adult social workers in the United States. The first factor

that comprised this category was perceptions about physical discipline. Key narrative

strands that emerged to define this factor included *definitions of physical discipline,*

conditional support of physical discipline, and *their personal use of physical*

discipline. Ten of the participants indicated their agreement with physical discipline,

which they all experienced as children. However, participants' support of physical

discipline was under specific conditions, such as a parent not being angry at the time

of the discipline, not injuring the child, explaining the reason for the discipline, not causing emotional harm, or only disciplining under situations of danger.

A second factor in this category was participants' perceptions of the child abuse laws. Narrative strands that surfaced in participants' accounts that defined this factor included *limitations of the laws in addressing cultural diversity issues, concerns about parental education and disempowerment, legal shortcomings and barriers to consistent response,* and *the tendency of the law to ignore context*. All 13 of the participants were in agreement with the child welfare laws, which they felt were necessary, but ten disagreed with some aspects of the laws. Participants did not believe the laws were clear, especially around issues of supervision and neglect. Participants were generally in support of their agencies' regulations, but had some disagreements that included removal of children, their agencies' criteria for placing children, and reunifications effort.

In exploring participants' perceptions related to physical discipline and child abuse laws, the second of the three main themes emerged. The core theme or common thread interwoven throughout this section is the *participants' focus on the importance of context and the need for clarity*. In their discussions of the child abuse laws, a consistent issue was the lack in these laws of clarity and recognition of context. Participants perceived that parents were punished for maltreating behaviors instead of getting clarity through education on the impact of the maltreatment. Participants also discussed a lack of clarity related to whether physical discipline should be used, as

well as how physical discipline and physical abuse are defined by different states and professionals. Lack of clarity was further emphasized in areas of supervision and involved discrepancies among states and jurisdictions regarding the definition of neglect. The issue of context was prominent in participants' disagreement with their agencies' regulations. For example, participants' frustration was evident in their beliefs that agencies did not look at the context of the situation before removal of children, placement with family members, and reunification efforts. Participants perceived that situations such as some removal of children could be avoided if parents' unique contextual situations were explored, instead of looking at the overarching legal guidelines. In other words, they recognized that "there is ambiguity" in the laws, and culturally competent social workers should give precedence to context and "look at the family situation at a whole.

Impact of Caribbean Culture on Professional Experience in the United States:

"My Culture has influenced the Way I Think"

This section will address the last core category of social workers' views on the impact of their Caribbean heritage on their current experiences as adult professionals in the United States. Thus far, the findings have focused on the core categories of participants' experiences in the Caribbean prior to migrating to the United States, as well as their experiences as adult professional social workers. The focus of this section is to address findings that make up the third of the core categories; that is, how participants' childhood experiences in the Caribbean have affected their professional

experience in the United States. Two factors emerged from the interviews related to this core category: (a) the impact of culture on perceptions about child maltreatment, and (b) the impact of culture on professional decision making (see Table 6 on the following page).

The Impact of Culture on Perceptions about Child Maltreatment

Participants discussed their culture's impact on their perceptions or personal opinions regarding different aspects of their work with maltreated children and the families involved in the child welfare system. In particular, they discussed different phases of their work and critical points of intervention, such as the process of removing children, working with children while they were in foster care, or working

Table 6

Core Category Three: Factors and Narrative Strands

Factors	Narrative Strands
The impact of culture on perceptions about child maltreatment	Respect Pursuing an education; being productive The lack of cultural competence Perceptions of physical abuse Perceptions about neglect
The impact of culture on professional decision making	Removal of children Understanding the immigrant experience Support of family centered practices

with families during the reunification process. Participants also discussed their

perceptions about how their coworkers intervene and practice with children and

families in the child welfare system. These discussions yielded the key finding that

participants' perceptions were not always aligned with their practices and decision

making relative to child maltreatment. There were instances when participants held

views that were influenced by their cultures, but they responded or intervened in ways

that were more aligned with social work and American cultural values. As a result,

participants explored how they believed their experiences of being born and raised in

the Caribbean affected their perceptions about child maltreatment. Five narrative

strands emerged in participants' accounts that related to this factor, including *respect,*

pursuing an education and being productive, the lack of cultural competence,

perceptions of physical abuse, and *perceptions about neglect*.

One important narrative strand that arose in the context of this factor

concerned *respect*. Three participants reported that the issue of respect or lack of

respect affected their perceptions of some of their clients. These participants

explained, for example, that their disapproval of the way foster children interacted

with their foster parents was influenced by their own cultural backgrounds. They

believed that some of the behaviors of foster children towards their foster parents,

such as smoking in the home, having boyfriends, and cursing, were inappropriate and

disrespectful. They said they felt some support and understanding of foster parents

who responded to disrespectful behaviors by asking the foster children to be placed

elsewhere. As participant [528-2] explained:

> I understand the parent's perspective because in my culture that's disrespect,
>
> and I'm raised that if you're in someone's house and you are a child, you
>
> respect the rules. You may not like it. Smoke outside, but don't bring it inside
>
> the house. It's a sign of disrespect. If you're going against the rules it is
>
> blatant disrespect.

This sentiment was supported by another participant [518] who stated: "I think

children are just more disrespectful to their parents, you know. I think that's still hard

for me because I don't expect that from children…. We see that from the ones who

have been abused and neglected."

These participants noted that they had a dual understanding from the

standpoint of the foster parent as well as from the perspective of the foster children.

Participants explained that they understood the emotional and psychological struggles

of the foster children, but they also understood the viewpoints of the foster parents,

who they believed had to act, based on the level of the disrespectful behavior of some

foster children. They acknowledged that they saw some of the behaviors of the foster

children as disrespectful because of the intolerance of such behaviors in their cultures.

Views about respect affected their views of coworkers. Participants explained

that as a result of their cultures, they also perceived some of their coworkers'

behaviors towards superiors as disrespectful. One participant [523] explained: "Even

calling your supervisors by their first names – you hardly see that from a person with West Indian background. We will always put Miss or Mr. in front of it, even if they say it's okay." Participants who addressed this issue believed that lack of discipline, including an absence of spanking, contributed to later adult behaviors that were disrespectful.

The second narrative strand that emerged in discussions that reflected on when participants felt their culture's influence revolved around getting an *education and being a productive* member of society by working hard. Three participants thought that some of the parents they work with around maltreatment issues did not value education, which they believed was a detriment to their children. These participants stressed that educational neglect was a special area of concern; they felt many parents did not take full advantage of the access to education for all children in American society. Participants said that in their cultures many children did not always have access to education due to limited resources. However, they indicated that Caribbean parents were still aware of the importance of education and made every effort to ensure their children received some education, despite limited resources. Participant [519] explained her perspective regarding the importance of education: "Like not sending the child to school—I feel very strongly about this one. [I am bothered by] a seven-year-old who has never been to school in a country like this, where you have Head Start and you have all these resources." Similar statements were provided by participant [518] who expressed her views about parents accused of educational

neglect "…especially when you have as much as kids can get here. Education is free. How can you not send them? How could you think that was something that you didn't have to do?"

Two participants also reflected on how some parents were not *being productive*. They perceived that some parents were too reliant on the government for assistance and support, which sometimes aggravated their circumstances and contributed to maltreatment. These participants discussed parents' reliance on the welfare system and being unwilling to work hard and contribute to society. Participants acknowledged that their perceptions were influenced by their culture's emphasis on having a strong work ethic, relying less on the government, and more reliance on the family and community. The participants explained that their cultures supported parents going to work, as neighbors or family members would watch their children, while in the United States such support was not readily available. Participant [518] elaborated:

> I don't know if it's cultural just to Jamaica because I think a lot of people from the third world countries are going to have that idea that you don't rely so much on the government system to take care of you and what you have is family, because who else is going to help you?

A third narrative strand referenced by participants concerned their perceptions about the *lack of cultural competence* on the part of their coworkers when dealing with maltreatment issues. Five participants perceived that their American-born coworkers

were not culturally competent to deal with families from different cultures and believed this had an impact on the decision-making of their coworkers. Participants believed that their own status as immigrants gave them an understanding that their American coworkers usually lacked. A few participants referenced what one participant [602] termed "good enough," which she defined as follows: "It's not the best solution, but it's good enough. I think sometimes people don't understand the 'good enough' solutions for the betterment of the family." These participants argued that because of their cultural backgrounds, they understood that certain conditions may not be ideal for a child, but they are "good enough" to prevent removal of the child from the home or to reunify the child with their parents. They explained that given their cultural experiences of often less than ideal situations, they understood that children could be safely maintained at home with family. Because many of their American counterparts did not have these experiences, it was hard for American-raised workers to understand the concept of "good enough." As participant [602] further explained:

> I don't think all of them have the same experiences....I don't think it's a hit to them or anything against them, but I think just because they don't have the same experiences, sometimes there are families that have to do things this way.

Another participant [519] elaborated the "good enough" concept this way:

> They'll say, "Oh, there are not enough beds for the children." Like Caucasians will say, "you may have six or seven children and you have probably three

beds." They'll make a note of that and put it as a negative thing. "The children don't have adequate sleeping arrangements." I know back home, there are three of you in a bed because all your cousins came from the country and are staying with you for the summer and you all sleep, you know? But they tend to look at that a little bit differently. They'll think you don't have adequate housing, if you have two bedrooms and it's seven of you in the two bedrooms.

Another area of concern for participants who discussed this issue of cultural competence was the lack of training social workers received for work with diverse families around maltreatment issues. Participants believed that some of the social workers that they worked with were inadequately prepared to address the special circumstances of the immigrant families. These participants felt that their own cultural backgrounds assisted them in better understanding immigrant families and their situations. As participant [512] stated, "I can tell you as a supervisor, I need to supervise my staff. I can tell you that some of them do not know how to work with immigrant parents. That's the scary part." She elaborated further on how her cultural background can be advantageous. "Because I am an immigrant—absolutely, that I will tell you—I have an awareness that I use towards my advantage." As indicated by this participant, the awareness and understanding of the immigrant experience significantly influenced how the participants intervened or practiced in child welfare, which will be addressed more thoroughly in the subsequent section on decision making.

A fourth narrative strand that contributes to the understanding of how participants perceive their native culture's influence focused on their *perceptions about physical abuse*. While participants believed that many of the disciplinary practices—primarily physical discipline—they experienced as children were abusive, they still believed in the value of physical discipline as an important part of child rearing. Participants believed that physical discipline could be effective and useful if objects were not used and if children were not injured or physically abused during the process. Others perceived that having experienced and witnessed physical discipline and physical abuse within their cultures, and later working in a culture where child discipline was viewed differently, their early experiences provided a baseline from which to make comparisons. These participants believed that by comparing and contrasting their past and current experiences, they were able to recognize that the use of physical discipline in their cultures of origin was excessive, abusive at times, and lacked the use of alternative disciplinary measures. As participant [517] explained:

People are becoming aware that the way we were raised was not good. Not the best way. It is okay not to do physical discipline alone and there are other avenues. Children are psychologically damaged from their upbringing.

Additionally, participants believed that their ability to compare and contrast across cultures, along with their knowledge and education in their area of practice, provided them opportunities to change some of their personal perspectives about disciplining. As stated by participant [429-1]: "At least you have the knowledge. You have the

option, so if you choose to continue to physical discipline, that's fine. Or maybe it won't be as severe as you normally would if you didn't have the information."

Participants reported that they did not perceive certain incidents as abusive, even though the law or their colleagues might view those same situations as abusive. Participants explained that these situations did not involve incidents which were severe or clear instances of abuse. However, participants perceived that their cultures' endorsement of physical discipline influenced their current acceptance of physical discipline, which in turn had an effect on the way they viewed some allegations of physical abuse. Participant [429] elaborated:

Part of me does not see anything wrong with spanking. I just have a limit to spanking. But some of my colleagues would say no spanking period. Like, if there is an incident of spanking, they would report that or remove the child from that situation. They view that as maltreatment. I definitely think my culture has influenced the way I think about maltreatment, because some incidents of what some might view as maltreatment, I don't necessarily view as maltreatment. I just have this line in my head that one has to cross in order for me to consider it maltreatment.

A fifth and final narrative strand that elaborated how cultural affected perceptions about child maltreatment focused on *perceptions about neglect*. Ten participants addressed child supervision and neglect issues from a cultural standpoint. As previously discussed, participants explained that neglect was not a term used or

acknowledged in their cultures at the time they were being raised. In contrast, they thought that supervision in the United States consisted of more formal arrangements, with identified caregivers, and that parents were considered neglectful (in some jurisdictions) for leaving children ages 18 and under alone. Participants explained that they saw the value of both Caribbean and American perspectives regarding child supervision. Based on the cultural support of the community and family, some believed that the more relaxed attitudes about supervision in Caribbean cultures were appropriate and understandable. Additionally, they stressed that this ideology was further reinforced by the absence of a legal understanding of the concept of neglect. In other words, if parents were neglectful, there were no consequences. Thus, these participants believed that the use of family and community supports was most appropriate in their cultures of origin. However, participants believed that American culture placed more emphasis on independence, the nuclear family, and less value on neighbor and community support. Therefore, it was more appropriate for supervision of children to be a more formalized process, with consequences for neglectful parents.

Three participants reported that their attitudes regarding issues of supervision and neglect were not as strong as the attitudes of their American counterparts. These participants reported that they tended to be more relaxed about what they believed was adequate supervision versus neglect. Participant [429] explained: "I am a little more relaxed than some of my colleagues would be about the supervision thing because I grew up in a culture where they were leaving 9–10 year olds with younger children to

watch, which is more looking at maturity level." However, participants did point out that though their attitudes and perceptions at times were inconsistent with laws regarding neglect, their actions and decision-making were consistent with the laws.

The Impact of Culture on Professional Decision-making

This section will address the factor of the impact of participants' cultures on some of their decision-making in the process of their child welfare practices, based on the laws and policies in the United States. In this study, many of the participants were aware of how their cultures influenced both their perceptions of maltreatment and their professional decision-making. Participants explained that as professional child welfare social workers, they knew the requirements of their jobs and operated within the scope of the law. However, there were particular situations where their responses and decisions were influenced by their cultural backgrounds and perhaps differed from the responses of American-born professionals. Three narrative strands emerged when participants were discussing this factor, including decision-making around *the removal of children, understanding the immigrant experience, and support of family centered practices.*

Narratives clearly reflected struggles by the participants around the *removal of children.* Seven participants reported that they found it difficult to remove children from their homes. These participants reported exploring all possible alternative interventions, with moving children being the last resort. For example, participant [519] said:

Just recently I had this case where it was really on the brink of removal. We had a family team meeting and they [the agency] really were trying to pressure me to do a removal on the case. I didn't do a removal. I didn't think it would be fair to the children. I don't believe in removals anyway, if I don't have to. Maybe culture in that case had an influence because there were all these family members. I believe personally from the get-go, once a call comes in, have a family team meeting. Get the family members involved.

These participants felt that their respective cultures influenced their emphasis on maintaining the family unit. They reported that removal of children was contrary to the embedded cultural value. They indicated more willingness to remove children when the incidents of maltreatment involved severe repeated abuse. However, participants reported that they were reluctant to remove children for initial reports of neglect or when the allegations involved insufficient supervision of teenagers. Other areas where participants were reluctant involved allegations of neglect due to parental substance abuse or educational neglect. Participant [528-1] explained her experience, which addressed the two latter areas. Her experience involved a drug addicted mother whose baby was born addicted to marijuana.

The law pretty much states that whenever a baby is born with any kind of substance that you remove them and put the kids in foster care. I don't value marijuana as high on the drug list and that's clearly because of my cultural background. If I don't see any other maltreatment or neglect issues and all I'm

seeing before me is that you smoked marijuana and this baby was born with

marijuana in its system, I'm not going to remove your whole family. I'm going

to work with you at home, especially if based on my investigation you have a

child who is doing well in school, and the school tells me you were there for

every meeting, and you come to school when they call you. The child is neat,

you have food in your house, and your house is neat and clean, No!

Another narrative strand found in these participants' discussions was an

understanding of the immigrant experience, which they maintained affected their

decision making practices in different ways. For instance, 12 of the 13 participants

made some reference to the fact that their childhood experiences of being raised in the

Caribbean helped them to utilize this knowledge in their work with clients.

Participants reported that having first-hand knowledge of Caribbean culture helped

them to make important strides with clients who shared similar cultural experiences.

Participants' use of this shared cultural knowledge was most apparent in their work

with immigrant families around issues of physical abuse. Immigrant parents

reportedly have a difficult time understanding why injuries or bruises are considered

child maltreatment. Participants reported that these parents were often viewed as

being difficult and non-compliant, when in fact there were differences in cultural

perspectives that were shaping their interactions with children. According to the

participants, in many Caribbean countries, bruises and injuries were often the outcome

of physical discipline which was supported by the greater cultural community. Unless

a child was seriously injured or hurt, intervention by the police was infrequent. Participants reported that their cultural understanding of their clients' viewpoint and their ability to convey that understanding was usually central to the clinical relationship.

Participants further conveyed that having knowledge of their culture's expectations of children, including behaviors that were acceptable and unacceptable, provided a foundation for a shared understanding with immigrant clients, which parents often appreciated. Additionally, the shared cultural understanding often motivated these social workers and their clients to come up with alternative or creative measures that had positive outcomes for immigrant clients. For instance, participant [512] explained:

Actually, I think my cultural background helps me to understand more. I think working with immigrant families to help them understand, "so I know you are trying your best, and we definitely want to work with you. In this country you can't do this. We want to work with you to do whatever." Not so much passing the blame, but really to empathize. "Okay, this is the only way you know probably, but it's not the correct way." And really encourage them to look into parenting classes. It could be that's an awareness that I have to carry with me, that this is my background and this is how I grew up, and I have to make sure I don't let that get in the way of servicing the child the right way. But also I use that sometimes to be like "wait a minute, this is a cultural issue,

it may not be what we think." And sometimes it works both ways that it can help the family.

Participants noted that this shared cultural knowledge could enhance their work with families but could also create ambivalence with the dictates of law were clear. Some participants noted that they were well equipped to help families better understand and work within the U.S. system to encourage parental cooperation during interventions such as removal or reunification of children. Other participants expressed ambivalence about instances when a clear violation of the law had occurred, but they still attempted to find alternative ways to respond that resulted in less negative consequences for the client. However, participants reported that when the laws were clear about the appropriate response, they responded according to the demands of the laws, though they may have felt hesitant or ambivalent. For example, participant [429] described her struggles with an immigrant client who physically abused her child.

> She was a Trinidadian mom and had four kids. One was very hyperactive and I must say she was trying a lot of different alternatives. One day, I think she got overwhelmed and hit the little boy in the face with a wooden spoon. I felt ambivalent about making the report because on one hand she was working with us. A big part of it was cultural because we both had the Island thing. She was really trying not to do what her parents did, but what she knows how to do was to go straight to spanking him. She was really trying to be different

and so I identified with her in that way. Just a mom trying to do different things. So I felt very conflicted when I was making that report because that would mean they would do an investigation.

Participants noted that this shared cultural knowledge could facilitate better investigations due to a concrete understanding of the reasons why immigrant parents may exhibit abusive or maltreating behaviors. This perspective assisted participants in their decision-making in two ways. First, participants reported that they often look at past behaviors to determine whether a parent was truly maltreating as opposed to just one incident. Second, participants reported that if they had to intervene by removing a child, they looked at the extended family as well as the nuclear family. Participant [602] explained her practice when making decisions:

I would say definitely my culture has caused me to be more inquisitive and more investigative. Like what happened? What led to that? Has this happened before? What is the school saying about them? What did the house look like? Where do they go to church? And it's also guided my practice even with kids as a frontline foster care worker to always be, like, who are the family members? Is there anyone else that could take these kids?

In summarizing how an understanding of the immigrant experience has influenced her practices, participant [528-1] also explained:

I do think your culture helps you to be more sympathetic... [because] you identify with people of your similar culture. And so you kind of understand

their circumstances and situation. And I think it's kind of in you to make sure

that justice is served and they understand. You know, maybe it's biased.

A final narrative strand found in participants' discussions focused on the

importance of *mobilizing family members and community resources in working with*

maltreating families. Participants felt their tendencies to utilize family-centered

measures was influenced by their culture's emphasis on the family and community

raising the child. Participants' personal experiences in their cultures of origins, in

which many of their early social experiences involved the inclusion of the entire

family unit, also supported the importance of family and community. Nine

participants reported being raised by extended family members either alone or with a

combination of extended family members and their parents. Only four participants

reported that they were raised primarily by their mother and father. The finding

revealed that of those four participants who reported being raised primarily by their

mothers and fathers, three did not specifically indicate that they used a more family-

focused approach in their practice with maltreated children. In contrast, six of the nine

participants who were raised by extended family members specifically expressed the

importance of a family-focused perspective in their practice. In general, all the

participants reported having frequent contact in their childhoods with extended family

members including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Participants believed

that family cohesion and strong extended family bonds were a part of the culture,

which they thought may have had an influence on the way they perceived their clients'

situations and the way they practiced. As participant [522] explained: "...because I'm from a culture that is community-oriented, family-oriented... I tend to be family oriented, community-oriented." Similar experiences were reported by participant [512]:

> My background is very family-oriented. My dad has seven brothers and three sisters, and they all have eight kids….So we grew up close knit, like our cousins are like sisters and brothers, instead of cousins. So the way we were raised everyone has always looked out for me, my uncles, their wives, they just look out for me like I was their child. So when I'm a foster worker, I consider these things.

Participants further explained that their cultural value of maintaining the importance of family and community support has permeated their practice decisions in different ways. For example, participants' reported that they were motivated to exhaust every effort to locate family members before placing children in foster care. As participant [582-2] stated:

> I'm looking at the whole picture. Tell me of a cousin or an aunt or someone, even if the person is not in the District; tell me someone who is even in North Carolina, somewhere in the United States that you've had some associations with. So I'm looking at the total picture and that's the influence of my culture because of my mental picture back in Jamaica.

Others indicated that their hesitancy to remove children was based on their cultural experiences where the community would step in and address the situation without the need for the authorities to be involved. Participant [519] elaborated:

My decision to *not* remove goes back to my [early family experiences]. I am from a big family, right? ...Parents went to work and then the neighbors took care of you and that type of stuff. So I believe in the strength of that, that communal kind of living and caring for each other. I believe it's more effective.

Finally, for the participants who explicitly indicated that family and community centered practice was the foundation from which they worked, they said that their focus primarily involved maintaining children in their own homes. Participants reported that they operated within the guidelines of the law to facilitate this goal, although it was not always possible. However, at the core of their decision making practices, they believed in keeping the family system intact, regardless of whether the children are removed from the home or can be maintained in the home with supportive services to prevent reoccurring maltreatment.

Summary

Discussions related to the impact of culture on the two factors of perceptions about child maltreatment and professional decision making yielded several important findings. In discussions focused on the first factor, participants believed that culture influenced their perceptions in the areas of *respect, pursuing an education and being*

productive, the lack of cultural competence, perceptions of physical abuse, and

perceptions about neglect. Regarding *respect,* participants reported that their belief

that some foster children were disrespectful to their foster parents emerged from their

cultures' disapproval of disrespectful behaviors of children. Participants also

perceived some of the behaviors of their coworkers towards superiors as disrespectful,

a belief that was further linked to the high value that the cultures and participants

placed on respect. In addressing their perceptions about *education,* participants

admitted that their cultures influenced their high regard for education and their

perceptions that some parents with whom they work did not make adequate use of the

educational resources available in the United States. Additionally, participants

believed their cultures' emphasis on a strong *work ethic* contributed to their focus on

clients who were dependent on governmental support, which they thought contributed

to incidents of child maltreatment. They noted the *lack of cultural competence by

their coworkers*. In contrast, participants thought they possessed more cultural

competence because of their own cultural experiences. Their understanding of the

immigrant experience helped them to understand their clients' situations in a different

light compared to their American counterparts.

Further assessment of how their cultural experiences have affected their

perceptions caused some participants to acknowledge that the physical discipline they

received as children was abusive. However, these participants still believed in the

value of physical discipline (i.e., spanking) without the harmful component of physical

abuse. Others believed that their views about physical discipline and physical abuse were altered by examining their past experiences in the context of their current practice. In terms of *neglect,* participants believed that the difference in attitudes about neglect between the two countries was understandable. They thought that the way neglect was handled in the Caribbean versus the United States was suitable because of the cultural differences in the two countries. That is, family supports are available in the Caribbean, which protects against neglect, but there is less family support in the United States.

For the second factor, participants reported that culture influenced their professional decision making with regards to *the removal of children, understanding the immigrant experience, and support of family centered practices.* Participants reported that it was difficult for them to *remove* children from their homes. In addition, participants reported that their *understanding of the immigrant experience* helped them to make important strides with clients with whom they shared similar cultural backgrounds. Finally, participants' indicated that their professional decision-making practices were primarily focused on *family and community-centered practices* which was influenced by the strong communal relationships they shared with family and community members in their cultures.

The discussions about cultural influences on perceptions and decision-making revealed that *early cultural experiences influenced present-day professional decision-making*, the third theme of this study. Participants' perceptions and decisions were

clearly influenced by some of the norms and expectations supported by Caribbean cultures. This last theme is especially important, as it incorporates the prior two themes of *community support of cultural expectations,* in addition to *the importance of clarity and context* in social workers' professional practice. Evidence of the other two themes were reflected, for example, in participants' emphasis on respect and getting an education as being important in the way they perceive and work with families. Similarly, *participants' emphasis on the clarity and context in their professional work* (theme two) was influenced by early cultural experiences. In fact, the importance of clarity and context was interwoven throughout participants 'discussions about physical abuse, neglect, coworkers' practices, and understanding of the immigrant experience, which were all narrative strands that helped develop this last theme.

Therefore, it is evident that all three themes are interrelated. Values and norms considered of high importance in Caribbean cultures, and which were a part of participants' early experiences, are interwoven in social worker's perceptions and decision-making about child maltreatment. In other words, these Caribbean-American social workers operate from a bi-cultural internal frame as they make their professional decisions regarding child maltreatment. As one person stated: "My culture has influenced the way I think." Yet for these social workers, their culture included their Caribbean upbringing as well as the culture of their American social work profession.

Chapter Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter revealed the power of participants'

memories of their early childhood experiences in their countries of origin to influence

their adult professional experiences as social workers post-migration. These findings

document how these child welfare social workers from the Caribbean perceive and

make decisions about incidents of child maltreatment. The findings indicate that their

perceptions and decision-making were influenced by: (1) cultural expectations

supported by community and family supports; (2) the need for clarity and context in

professional work; and (3) early cultural experiences interwoven into current

professional practices.

The findings from this study suggest that many of the social workers'

perceptions and decision-making in situations of child maltreatment rest on the

perceived importance of maintaining children within their families. Most of these

social workers made decisions by examining the family's situation in its entirety,

instead of taking a fragmented perspective. Finally, social workers acknowledged that

the norms held in high esteem by their Caribbean cultures about child rearing and

discipline influenced their early perceptions, which then became interwoven into

current perceptions and professional decisions about child maltreatment.

Chapter five will present an in-depth discussion and analysis of these findings

based on the theory presented in chapter two. This discussion will include further

explanations of the core themes and an assessment of how symbolic interaction and

cognitive integrative theories are relevant to these findings. Limitations of the study

and recommendations for future practice, policy, and research will be presented.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study encompassed several dynamic components that were used to decipher the response to the research question: For masters-level social workers, born and raised in the Caribbean but practicing social work in the United States, how do their cultural views about child rearing practices, disciplinary practices, and norms influence their perceptions and decision making about child maltreatment? In exploring the complex phenomena of cultural expectations, cultural discipline, and supervision of children, an intricate story emerged from participants' narratives. Social workers' accounting of their early cultural experiences provided a backdrop for understanding how they perceived certain physical discipline, child abuse laws, and agency practices within the United States. Furthermore, participants' explanations about how prominent cultural values discreetly influenced their perceptions and decisions about child maltreatment provided the foundation for a rich reporting of their stories.

This chapter will expand upon the discussion of the three themes, which evolved from the findings presented in chapter four. These themes are essential in understanding the influences and indicators of how social workers from the Caribbean perceive and make decisions about child maltreatment. Next, the findings will be addressed within the context of the two theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter two—symbolic interactionism and cognitive integrative perspective—as both frameworks deepen the understanding of the complexity and significance of these

themes. Subsequently, this chapter will explore how existing theories can be expanded

to include this study's findings. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the

study's strengths and limitations, as well as implications for future policy, practice, and

research.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

As the stories of the 13 social workers who participated in this study unfolded,

three main themes emerged as influences to their perceptions and professional decision

making: 1) cultural expectations were supported by community and family supports;

(2) the importance of and need for clarity and context were emphasized in their

professional work; and (3) early cultural experiences were interwoven into their current

professional practices. These fundamental themes provide the basis for understanding

how social workers from diverse cultural backgrounds perceive and make decisions

about child maltreatment.

Cultural Expectations are Supported by Community and Family

The social workers in this study ranged in age from eight to 29 when they

migrated to the United States from five countries within the Caribbean and thus

experienced significant development in their countries of origin. Participants reported

that they learned key cultural lessons about what their cultures expected from children,

and the consequences of not adhering to these expectations. They indicated that from

their earliest ages, they understood what behaviors were considered to be acceptable,

which were unacceptable, and what the consequences were for non-compliance. They

noted that not only were attitudes towards what children should do (or not do) rather universally understood, there were rather fixed expectations about how the community at large, not just the family, took part in the raising, supervising, and the physical disciplining of children.

The literature supports participants' reports about these shared cultural expectations. For instance, Smith and Mosby (2003) report that Jamaican child-rearing practices include physical discipline administered by professionals, such as teachers, as well as parents. The authors provided adult and child testimonies of severe corporal punishment at school, where children described being beaten with rulers and leather belts. Physical discipline was also encouraged by the legal system. The authors provided an example of a Jamaican judge in a family court hearing who advised a father that all the child needed to correct his behavior was "two good licks" (Smith & Mosby, 2003). Participants noted that their cultures supported physical discipline and, in some cases, child maltreatment. They understood these practices to be the norm during their childhood years, reinforced by family, friends, and the community at large.

Clarity and Context Emphasized in Professional Work

The second major theme that surfaced in this study was the emphasis that social workers placed on the need for clarity and the importance of context in their professional work with maltreated children. In many ways, this desire for clarity and the embrace of context mirrored the cultural values that so strongly influenced them in their work. Their narratives clearly delineated clarity within Caribbean culture about

appropriate behaviors and responses to noncompliance; the narratives simultaneously delineated flexibility within Caribbean cultures in the understanding of family, which was integrally tied to the broader context of the community.

The desire for clarity was apparent in participants' frustration with the inconsistencies in different states' or jurisdictions' laws and regulations regarding the use of physical discipline as a disciplinary measure and in the definitions of supervision and neglect. This ambiguity meant that there was a great deal of latitude and inconsistency in the potential responses of professionals in responding to maltreating occurrences. Participants noted the necessity of having clear indicators as to whether physical discipline was appropriate or not. Participants also believed that discrepancies existed in the laws pertaining to supervision and neglect. However, based on their early cultural experiences, participants had come to rely on consistency and clarity exemplified in their cultures of origins with regards to the supervision, expectations of children, and disciplining by parents. Consequently, as professional social workers addressing issues of appropriate child rearing, discipline and child maltreatment, clarity was essential for the participants. The ambiguity the social workers found in the United States thus contrasts sharply with the clarity in definitions about behavior and the consequences of non-compliance that they inherited from their lived experiences, and thus their discomfort with this lack of definition should not be surprising.

Similarly, the participants' emphasis on the importance of considering context in part reflects their family- and community-centered understanding of how children

should be raised, an understanding encoded in Caribbean culture. A frustration for many of the social workers was the focus of the law on content instead of context when responding to child maltreatment. Participants believed it was important that the issue of context be addressed in child abuse laws, especially in work with immigrant families. They reported that understanding the context of immigrant parent discipline or supervision could provide information on how best to address incidents of child maltreatment. Support for this perspective has been noted in the literature (Hong & Hong, 1991). Participants placed special emphasis on maintaining children at home with their families and argued that the context of each family's situation should be analyzed prior to removals, placements, or reunification. They recalled that in their cultures many families had limited resources which caused issues such as overcrowding, yet these situations were not considered to be neglectful or inappropriate. Thus, participants believed that if children could remain safely with their parents or relatives, there should be flexibility in the application of some standards.

This emphasis on clarity and context, then, can be seen in part as replicating culturally-rooted paradigms of child rearing. Additionally, the narratives also revealed how the participants themselves demonstrated flexibility in their re-definition of certain values within a new (that is, the American) situation. Within the context of their original cultures, participants' definition of physical discipline involved spanking a child using any object on any part of the child's body without regard for injury. In contrast, social workers from the same cultures, now residing and practicing in the U.S.,

had a different definition that involved spanking a child on the bottom with a hand, without inflicting injury. What is noteworthy is that participants' definitions of physical discipline had changed, although they continued to use the same language utilized by their culture of origin. Largely, participants were quick to agree that they supported physical discipline, yet they also reported specific context and conditions of their support, which was inconsistent with the Caribbean cultural definition.

Early Cultural Experiences are Interwoven into Current Professional Practices

The third and final theme involved the impact of participants' early childhood experiences on their current perceptions and decisions about child maltreatment. Their cultural values and experiences were intricately interwoven into their perceptions and practice decisions about child maltreatment. As professional adults now working with parents, children, and coworkers in the child welfare system, these social workers continued to hold the ideals of respect and education in high esteem, which affected their views of their client families and coworkers. The findings suggested that participants' decision-making around child maltreatment issues was significantly related to maintaining family systems. Participants' Caribbean heritage fundamentally emphasized the rearing and disciplining of the children by family and the community.

At the same time, many of these cultural values had been modified or worked in concert with participants' professional values. This combined or dual effect was evident in their beliefs that their own status as immigrants provided a better understanding than their American counterparts in addressing the needs of diverse

populations. In their opinion, their experiences helped them better understand the context of specific situations of maltreatment, such as the concept of the "good enough" family environment, yet they still recognized that child abuse laws that promote the safety of children are essential. Likewise, while their reluctance to remove children seemed to stem from the high value that Caribbean cultures placed on family, their professional training ensured that they were more willing to remove children for incidents where physical abuse and neglect were severe and recurring. It is also worth noting that their emphasis on maintaining family ties whenever possible is congruent with American child welfare policies that emphasize family preservation.

In summarizing and interpreting these three themes, it is also necessary to examine them through the theoretical lens of symbolic interaction and cognitive integrative perspectives. The following section will interpret the findings from both theoretical viewpoints discussed in Chapter Two.

Application of Theory

Symbolic Interactionism

The lens of symbolic interactionism is helpful in understanding the rallying of the community to ensure that the traditions and practices of the culture are followed. Two of the main assertions of symbolic interactionism are that interacting individuals shape their society and that humans respond based on the meaning attached by society to the actions of others, rather than the action itself. In looking at the findings, it is evident that in the Caribbean cultures in which the participants were raised, the culture

imposed specific meaning to certain behaviors. For instance, participants confirmed

that talking back to adults, displaying adult-like behaviors, and not attending school

were reflective of the cultural interpretation of the behavior as being disrespectful or not

living up to parental and cultural expectations. The meanings attributed by the culture

to these behaviors made them unacceptable to individual members of the society. As

explained by participants, interactions with members of their larger community

supported the expectations or defined as right and necessary the administration of

discipline for these unacceptable behaviors.

This accepted cultural imposition of meaning is further understood through

another important tenet of symbolic interaction – Mead's concept of the *generalized*

other. Charon (2004) describes the generalized other as the conscience of the group

that individuals are expected to follow in social interactions. It is not merely adhering

to people's individual rules, or the rules of others, but accepting the norms of society as

a whole. This principle was reflected in the findings in which 10 of the 13 participants

supported the use of physical discipline. Although the participants had specific

conditions under which they supported the use of physical discipline, they generally

agreed with the guidance of the generalized other of their cultures of origin, though this

guidance may have differed from that of their professional training. On the other hand,

it is apparent that the findings support the premise of symbolic interaction that

interacting individuals shape society. Through the process of interaction and shared

understanding, the disciplining of children, which primarily involved utilizing physical discipline, helped shape the cultural norms of Caribbean societies.

While participants maintained their Caribbean cultural values pertaining to physical discipline, they attempted to adjust these principles to fit the standards acceptable in the U.S. and for their profession – reflecting the influence of their adopted culture. For instance, when they immigrated to the U.S., they redefined their definition of physical discipline, making the definition more flexible (i.e., was used as a last resort), more controlled (i.e., no objects used and discipline by a hand on the bottom), and less severe in terms of consequences (no injuries or harm to the child's self esteem). This shift in participants' values away from the guide of their culture of origin is in line with symbolic interactionism. Participants' primarily immigrated as young teens (ages 12-15) and older teens (ages 16-18) and were between the ages of 25 and 50 when interviewed. Additionally, although seven participants' indicated less than one year of experience, the other six reported between 1 and 10 years of social work experiences. Therefore, since migrating, they have interacted with individuals in the U.S. whose cultural guide is less accepting of physical disciplining. Participants have also interacted with individuals in their professional circles and have come to share the generalized other perspective of their social work values. Also noteworthy is the influence of participants' academic or educational guide as all are masters-level social workers educated in the U.S. Consequently, adjustments have occurred to their former cultural guide derived from their culture of origin regarding disciplining and child

rearing. Nonetheless, even though their expectations and disciplinary practices have shifted to incorporate their new social and professional cultures, participants still accept and hold in high esteem the essence of their original cultural values pertaining to physical discipline.

Another example of this shift in the acceptance of one's new generalized other was reflected in the findings where two of the participants reported that they did not practice physical discipline with their own children, although they agreed with the use of physical discipline in general. These social workers acknowledged that they have maintained their cultural beliefs about physical discipline, but based on their current interactions with members in their profession, their meaning attributed to the practice has changed. For these participants, engaging in physical discipline with their own children meant that their career would be placed at risk due the potential for child maltreatment, which could involve them losing their social work license.

This shift or tension between belief systems is also explained by the symbolic interactionism perspective. While the definition of the situation may be influenced by interaction with others, it is also a result of the individual's own definition of the situation that is significant (Blumer, 1962; Charon, 2004; Manis & Meltzer, 1972). Therefore, while these two social workers may have been influenced by the interactions of others in their former cultural communities and in their current professional practice, it is the meaning that they currently attribute to the act of physical discipline that guides their present practice of not engaging in physical discipline with their own children.

Influence from participants' Caribbean cultures resulted in their agreement of physical discipline, while influences from their profession resulted in their recognition that physical discipline has the potential to be harmful to children. Participants' own definitions resulted in them not utilizing the practice due to the potential for them to lose their licenses.

Another example of how the findings support symbolic interactionism is reflected through the concept of the *present*. Symbolic interactionism suggests that the hermeneutic lenses through which we see present situations are greatly colored by events from our past. The theory proposes that the past intervenes when we recall situations in the present and as we apply it to the situation at hand (Charon, 2004). The findings suggested that three of the participants adamantly opposed the practice of physical discipline. Two of these three social workers reported they received severe maltreatment as children. For these participants, their negative experiences in the past are shaping factors in the present, in terms of helping them refute any benefits of physical discipline to children.

Cognitive Integrative Perspective

Although symbolic interactionism provides a broader sociological view of the findings, there are other salient points that can best be explained through the more narrowly focused psychological Cognitive Integrative Perspective. Berlin's (2002) cognitive integrative perspective expands upon traditional cognitive theory in its explanation of how people develop, maintain, and change their understanding of

themselves and their social worlds. Like traditional cognitive theory (Beck & Emery,

1985), it surmises that people are meaning makers and are constantly seeking and

creating meaning in an attempt to make sense of their situations. The meaning of an

event is derived subjectively from one's internalized thinking patterns, both those of

one's individual experience and the shared values, roles, norms, and relationships of the

socio-culture context in which one lives.   However, unlike traditional cognitive theory,

Berlin asserts that meaning is also derived from a second source – the objective nature

of information to which one is exposed. Conclusions are drawn from an internal

dialogue that integrates the objective with the subjective. Participants' revised and

varied acceptance of Caribbean cultural support of physical discipline can be seen as

exemplifying this process. From a cognitive integrative perspective, participants

incorporated into their own memory structures the values and perspectives of the

Caribbean cultural support for the use of physical discipline. Participants' lived

experiences in the Caribbean was received and stored in participants' memories; similar

patterns were constantly being retrieved and reinforced from a variety of social sources

in their cultural environments. As a result, the resulting schema reflected the

acceptance of physical discipline as the appropriate response to inappropriate behaviors.

However, due to their unique experiences, many of the participants who

responded to information gathered from their cultures of origin made meaning of this

information in different ways. Some participants' meaning-making involved the

support of physical discipline in a few instances, such as getting the attention of child

who would otherwise hurt himself. For others, meaning-making involved the support of physical discipline to include its use with their own children, but as a last resort. Still, others made meaning in ways that supported its use but did not utilize the practice with their own children due to the negative impact it could have on their careers. Finally, other participants experienced physical discipline as objectively unsafe and potentially dangerous for children. That is, they responded in the present to physical discipline in a way that was discrepant with their internal and socially constructed schema. For these participants, their experience of the objective nature of physical discipline as dangerous resulted in their disagreement with the use of physical discipline personally or professionally.

As stated above, cognitive integrative perspective predicts the storage of cultural values and information in memory. Berlin (2002) proposes that "we are always thinking, feeling, acting, experiencing in forms that are conscious and perhaps intentional, as well as forms that are out of our awareness and unintentional" (p.10). She further suggests that people are often conscious of end products, such as feelings and conclusions, but are not aware of the mental operations that create the products (Berlin 2002).

The findings in this study regarding the decision making of social workers reflect Berlin's suggestions about how individuals store cultural memory. The participants' narratives made clear that, for example, the importance of family and community was a cultural value that was stored in participants' memory. Moreover,

this information was further reinforced and sustained by participants' current professional and social cultures in the U.S. But participants varied in the "recall" process. Some participants made intentional meaning of this stored information by placing high regard for the inclusion of family and community centered interventions in their practice decisions. They recognized the link between being raised in an extended family unit with their preference for allowing children to remain with their families, instead of removing them. For these social workers, these decision making strategies were conscious and intentional. However, for others, similar decisions were made related to sustaining the family system, but the actual cultural or professional influences were outside of their awareness. Conversely, other participants exhibited similar interests in maintaining family connections, but had different meaning-making regarding the reasons. For instance, the participant who indicated that he exhausted every effort to prevent removal of children, said he understood the perspectives of the children, given his own background of being maltreated.

An Enriched Theory

As previously indicated, the findings suggest that early experiences related to child rearing and discipline from individuals' cultures of origin significantly influence how people perceive and make decisions about child maltreatment. As a result, three observations emerged from the data to enrich existing theory about how culture influences decision-making and professional judgment. The findings suggest that certain important premises or cultural values remain influential in current perceptions

and decision making. Second, these values are held in high regard despite the availability of alternative and opposing values. Finally, although people may continue to maintain and uphold their original cultural values, they find creative ways of altering the values they found to be negative in order to make them more appropriate to their current situations.

In addressing the first observation, it was evident that values such as respecting elders and educational achievement were held in high regard. The high level of importance designated by the culture and participants played a key role in determining how social workers perceived situations of child maltreatment. Furthermore, values such as the importance of family and community in Caribbean societies influenced participants' decision making in obvious and discreet ways. Participants understood and were able to explain the connection between being raised in a family oriented society and how those experiences influenced their decisions. In addition, there was evidence that participants utilized their early family-oriented experiences to affect change with their clients in implicit ways. For example, participants' discussion of the immigrant experience and how they utilized that understanding to assist immigrant parents resulted from important Caribbean cultural values which dictate that families and communities take care of each other. Participants found ways to take care of their immigrant clients by explaining American rules about child rearing, disciplining, and child maltreatment in ways parents could understand.

A second observation from this study is that essential values from an individual's culture remain relevant despite alternative or conflicting values suggesting their ineffectiveness. This was apparent in the continued emphasis that participants still placed on relevance of physical discipline despite their work in a field where the consequences for inappropriate or excessive use of the practice was consistently evident. Similarly, despite having knowledge of alternative and useful measures, participants continued to believe in the value of physical discipline. This continuing relevance of earlier values was also reflected in participants' ideals about supervision of children. Some participants admitted that they still maintained a relaxed attitude and made lenient decisions concerning supervision of children (particularly teenagers), regardless of legal mandates and knowledge of the negative consequences of leaving children unsupervised.

Finally, the findings in this study also suggest that even though social workers continued to uphold fundamental values of their cultures of origin, they attempted to find ways of altering and incorporating new value stances from their current culture. Social workers still held on to cultural values that were of high importance to them. But, they also attempted to alter the negative parts of those key cultural values in order to create a better goodness-of-fit with their current professional and social cultures. In their discussions about physical discipline, participants retained their interest in the practice but clearly revised their definition of its utility to assimilate their professional value stance. An inherent social work value is to maintain *the dignity and worth of the*

person. Therefore, from that perspective, children must be free from behaviors that are abusive, neglectful, and exploitive. However, the integration and influence of participants' cultural values—where physical discipline is viewed as an appropriate disciplinary option—continues despite the views of their profession. Participants continued to view the practice as acceptable if used appropriately, when necessary, after exhausting alternative measures, and if it did not harm or injure the child's emotional or physical wellbeing.

These three observations surfaced as consistent explanations about how social workers from diverse cultural backgrounds perceive and make decisions about child maltreatment. The observations are not in contrast to the perspectives of Berlin or the theory of symbolic interactionism, but the findings give richness and more specificity to existing theoretical concepts.

Limitations of the Study

As previously discussed, this study utilized a grounded theory methodology of qualitative research that examined the experiences of masters-level, Caribbean-born social workers employed at child welfare agencies in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. These 13 social workers from five different Caribbean countries were recruited through snowball sampling strategies. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study is that given the sampling technique used, and the emphasis on a smaller, more focused sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. Additionally, the perspectives of the participants that represented the five Caribbean countries do not necessarily reflect the

perspectives of other social workers from the same countries. This again was due to the sampling strategy and size limitations. Further, the perspective and decision making of these participants cannot be generalized to social workers born and raised in other Caribbean countries and practicing in the United States, because there are cultural diversities among the countries. As a result, perspectives about expectations of children, disciplining, supervision, and attitudes about child maltreatment may differ from one Caribbean country to the next. An additional limitation was that only one male social worker was part of the sample size. Other male representation may have pointed to trends or other rich contextual information on differences in perspectives and attitudes about child maltreatment based on gender.

In addressing the issue of diversity, all the participants in this study were Afro-Caribbean or Black. Caribbean literature indicates that the Islands of the Caribbean have a wide array of diverse groups of people with different ethnicities. The Islands are comprised of the offspring of African slaves, indentured laborers of Chinese, Indians, and Portuguese as well as arrivals from more diverse nations such as Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Other colonists and occupants of the Caribbean include people of European descendants from countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Franck, Spain, and the Netherlands. This initial diverse group have since integrated and formed a new cohesive breed of people that are now representative of Caribbean or West Indian people (Barocas, 2011; Premdas, 1996; Oostindie, 2005). Given the diversity in ethnicities of people from the Caribbean, a reflection of this variety in study

participants would have provided a richer reporting of their stories. Finally, despite the tendency of qualitative studies to be less concerned with large sample sizes, this study consisted of only 13 participants. A larger sample size would have greatly improved the quality and texture of the overall study.

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Despite the limitations of this study, the themes that emerged from the findings have important implications for practice and policy decisions pertaining to diverse social workers involved in the area of child maltreatment. The issue of child maltreatment continues to be a serious social problem that needs to be addressed from many different angles. In examining the manner in which social workers from diverse cultures perceive and make decisions, as well as the influences behind those decisions, the groundwork as been set to address child maltreatment by looking at the impact of variables such as culture, gender, and experience on decision making.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have many implications for improved social work practice in the area of child maltreatment. The data suggests that despite agency and legal guidelines to assist social workers in investigating, assessing, and treating families involved in the child welfare system, other information is used in the decision making process. Social workers come from a multiplicity of backgrounds and experiences, including ethnic, cultural, and religious environments. Therefore, it is pertinent that these diverse experiences be thoroughly examined to determine the impact on the social

workers' perspectives and practices. The findings indicate that Caribbean social workers retain values from their cultures about child rearing and discipline that can be in conflict with American values and expectations for child rearing and disciplining. The data also indicate that social workers make necessary cognitive adjustments in order to remain true to their cultural values, while at the same time incorporate and maintain the values of their current professional and social cultures. This tension between the pull of social workers' cultural values and the push of their professional/social ideals suggest important implications for teaching and training new social workers.

It may be necessary to incorporate more substantive and comprehensive courses on diversity that involve multiple classes as social workers advance in their academic programs. The findings suggest the need for graduate courses where students have the opportunity to explore their own values. During the learning phase of the student social worker, if these important cultural values about child rearing, child discipline, and child maltreatment are thoroughly examined, then the opportunity exists for them to realign their perspectives to fit more cohesively with U.S. cultural norms. Social workers from diverse cultures would be afforded the opportunity to consciously examine their values and process their perceptions and feelings, which could impact their practice decisions later when they become professional social workers.

Similarly, new social workers should be afforded opportunities to address and reduce any tension that may exist between their cultural and professional values. The

process should involve exploration of the new social workers' cultural values and the impact on the social worker by integrating and applying practice theories learned in school with practice knowledge learned in the field. In addition, the process should explore with social workers a variety of appropriate techniques that would be respectful of their cultural values while at the same time maintain the professional values and societal standards for protecting children.

Thus, diversity trainings academically or professionally should incorporate other mechanisms for studying cultural groups instead of only addressing it from a macro perspective. They should also seek to examine those unique perspectives and value stances pertaining to expectations of children, child rearing, and discipline that are culturally significant for a particular group. Plus, ethnically-diverse social workers should be provided the platform to address and discuss their feelings and perspectives as members of a particular cultural group.

Implications for Policy

One of the major themes in this study indicates that social workers found the laws, agency procedures, and practices of other professionals inconsistent. This was in contrast to the social workers' cultural norms and practices pertaining to child rearing and discipline which provided clearer guidelines. The findings also suggest that many participants' felt their cultures had no concept or definitions for child maltreatment. Thus, for participants, not having *any* definitions for child maltreatment in Caribbean cultures and not having *clear* definitions for child maltreatment in the United States was

significant, and this lack of clarity has serious policy implications. This suggests that U.S. child welfare laws should be consistent at the federal and local levels. This is especially important for new social workers who rely on the laws and agency policies for guidance on making decisions for reporting, investigating, and intervening on incidents of child maltreatment. As suggested by participants, if the age at which a child is neglected if left alone is 7 in Maryland, but 18 in the District Columbia, then this gap and inconsistency in the laws create conflicting practice decisions for similar maltreating situations. It therefore seems apparent that the laws and policies that guide practice decisions need to be clear and consistent across the different States.

Additionally, the findings imply that improvements in child maltreatment policies and laws are needed in the area of cultural competency, specifically how these policies and laws govern involvement with immigrants and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants perceived that their American colleagues who did not have a diverse cultural perspective often responded differently and more punitively to immigrant clients. Participants maintain that their responses were often different as a result of their experiences in their cultures of origin. Given these important discoveries, there seems to be a need for policies that would mandate or direct child welfare agencies to examine their interventions and practices with people from diverse backgrounds. This policy implication is twofold. One, policy makers should consider instituting child welfare training to new immigrants which would involve clear guidelines of acceptable American childrearing and disciplinary practices. Ideally,

these training programs would be taught by individuals with the same cultural

backgrounds who have knowledge of inappropriate cultural practice that would conflict

with American practices. Additionally, these programs could be assimilated in varying

arenas such as schools and churches. Second, improved policy decisions are necessary

to address adequate and comprehensive competency trainings for social workers which

could be incorporated in their academic and professional training in the process of them

becoming practicing social workers.

Implications for Future Research

This study was innovative in its effort to determine how diverse social workers

perceive and make decisions about child maltreatment.   Consistent with qualitative

studies, the findings yielded rich, deep data from which important themes emerged.

However, for a more comprehensive understanding of how social workers' early

experiences in their cultures of origins impact their current decisions in their

professional practices, the following recommendations are presented. Qualitative

research inclusive of a more diverse Caribbean population would create more depth.

Thus, individuals from varying ethnic backgrounds in the Caribbean such as Chinese

and Indian should be considered in future research endeavors. Additionally, more

equity in the sample of men and women may present expanded results. Finally,

research that capitalized on the strength of both qualitative and quantitative methods is

highly recommended. Not only would the findings provide contextually rich data, but

inferences from the findings could be generalized to others in the Caribbean populations

studied. Further, exploring other cultures besides Caribbean, such as African American or European American backgrounds, might create a more extensive picture as to the interplay of culture on perceptions and decision making relative to child maltreatment.

Conclusion

Child maltreatment continues to be one of the most prominent social ills of contemporary society. Despite measures aimed at addressing its effects, children continue to experience high incidents of abuse and neglect at the hand of their caretakers. Thus, a challenge for modern society is to move beyond a focus on the effects, such as the overrepresentation of some groups of children in the child welfare system or how to reduce the amount of time children spend in the child welfare system, to examine other factors as well. These factors involve examining the decision making of the professionals who respond to incidents of child maltreatment. This study attempted to contribute to this endeavor by looking at how the culture in which Caribbean social workers were born and raised had an impact on their decision making. The results suggest that having an understanding of the child rearing and disciplining techniques of a particular culture can provide insight as to how social workers from diverse groups may intervene on behalf of maltreated children. Similarly, understanding what values are important to the members of a particular cultural group provides important indications as to how they will respond to maltreating situations, socially and professionally.

This qualitative study provided a rich reporting of participants' lived experiences in the Caribbean and how those experiences followed them to their current experiences as professional social workers. As their stories unfolded, they centered around three main themes. These themes suggest that family, community, clarity, context, and early cultural experiences are important influences to the perception and decision making of Caribbean social workers. From that standpoint, it is suggested that policy and research efforts aimed at addressing various aspects of child maltreatment seriously explore some of the other influences of culture on social workers' perceptions and practice decisions. This exploration could have significant implications for the teaching and training of social workers from diverse cultural backgrounds as they pursue a profession steep in its emphasis on enhancing the wellbeing of all human beings, particularly the wellbeing of vulnerable and maltreated children.

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Invitation to Participate in Study

Social Workers who have a Masters Degree in Social Work, who were born and raised in

the Caribbean, and who are currently employed by a child welfare agency in the

Washington Metropolitan Area, are now being recruited for a research study. The focus

of the study is to understand how culture influences social workers' perceptions and

decision making about child maltreatment. This study will involve one interview, of one

to two hours in length, at a time and location convenient to you. The researcher is

interested in your views about child rearing, child disciplining, and child maltreatment

based on your experience of being born and raised in the Caribbean. Findings from this

study may be useful in the development of a child welfare training model for increasing

cultural competence among social workers.

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like additional information,

please contact:

Judith Rose-Wilson, LCSW-C at (301) 430-0648 or (301) 909-2037

If you know of anyone who may be interested in this study and fits the criteria,

Please forward this information.

This dissertation research study is in partial fulfillment of requirements for a

Ph.D. in Social Work at

The Catholic University of America

Washington, DC

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Each interview will begin with the following statement:

"As we have discussed, I am a doctoral student at The National Catholic School of Social Service, and I am studying the perceptions and decision making of Caribbean American M.S.W.'s currently employed at a child welfare agency. I am interested in seeing how social workers' cultures impact their perceptions and the decisions they make relating to child maltreatment, and I appreciate you volunteering your time for this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about the consent forms you received prior to this interview, we can address them now. I would also like to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary. If at any point during this interview you wish to stop your participation, please inform me and we will stop. If all your questions have been addressed, and you are comfortable with the information outlined in the consent, we can sign it and begin the interview.

First, I will be asking you some demographic questions, just to get some information about your background. That will be followed with some questions about your views on child rearing and how your culture has influenced that."

Interview questions

The interview will be initiated by asking the following questions. Questions with probes will be initiated from the original question and will also address relevant issues expressed in interviews from previous participants. They are designed to gain a more in-depth

response to the initial question, if the probe issue was not fully addressed by the participant.

I. Demographics

1. When and where did you receive your Masters Degree in Social Work? And why did you decide to become a social worker?

2. Are you licensed as a clinical social worker? How long have you worked in child welfare, and how long have you been at this agency?

3. Why did you decide to work for the Department of Social Services?

4. In what country were you born, and in what country were you raised?

5. In your family, how many children were there, and who were the main caregivers who raised you?

6. What age were you when you came to the United States to live and how long have you lived in the U.S.?

7. How would you describe your cultural background?

II. Child Rearing

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about child rearing, particularly child rearing in the country in which you were raised.

1. How are children expected to behave in your country?

    Probe: What is expected from children in your culture?

2. Do you agree with those expectations? Why?

    Probe: Do you disagree-Why?

175

3.   When are attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of children considered to be

unacceptable?

Probe: Why do you think these behaviors are considered unacceptable?

III.   Discipline

1.   When you remember your early childhood years, how were you and other

children you knew disciplined by their parents or other authorities, such as

teachers?

Probe: What was that like for you or other children at the time?

Probe: Were other children disciplined more harshly than you?

2.   In general, what are some of the discipline techniques of adults toward

children in your country today?

*Probe: What are your perceptions about the discipline techniques that are

utilized in your country today?*

*Probe: Are there any discipline techniques in your country that you don't

agree with? Why or why not?*

3.   Are there people in America from your country that discipline as though

they were in their home country?

Probe: What are your views about those families?

176

4.   In comparing disciplinary practices in your country to disciplinary

practices in the U.S., how would you describe some of the similarities and

differences?

Probe: Which set of practices do you prefer and why?

5.   What is your perception about corporal punishment?

IV.   Child maltreatment

1.   Can you explain from the perspective of how you were raised, what were

instances of child maltreatment?

Probe: Do you agree with this viewpoint today? Why or why not?

Can you explain from the perspective of your country, what are some of

the factors that contribute to child maltreatment?

Probe: Why do you believe these factors contribute to maltreatment?

2.   What is the Child Welfare System like in your country?

3.   How is child maltreatment addressed in your country?

Probe: How is addressed formally by the public system?

Probe: How is addressed informally in homes or communities?

Probe: What happens if a maltreated child comes to the attention of the

authorities?

Probe: Are children ever removed?

4.   Do you agree with the way maltreatment is addressed in your country?

Why or why not?

5. In comparing the way child maltreatment is handled in your country compared to the way it's handled here, what are the similarities and differences?

6. What do *you* perceive to be situations of child maltreatment?

    Probe: Provide examples of three incidents or situations that from your perspective are considered child maltreatment.

V.   Child abuse laws

1. What are your views about child abuse laws in the United States?

    Probe: What are the parts of the law that you are in agreement with or disagreement with, and why?

2. How comfortable do you feel about the clarity of the law in adequately and appropriately addressing child abuse and neglect?

3. In your work as a child welfare worker, what have been some situations where you determined there was abuse or neglect, but you felt uncomfortable, uncertain, or ambivalent making the finding?

    Probe: What would you have done if you were in your country?

4. How has your decision on a particular case been affected by your cultural background?

VI.   Closing question

Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not covered about how your cultural background and personal experiences in the

Caribbean have affected your perceptions of child maltreatment and your

decision-making as a social worker in child welfare

Appendix C

Consent Form

CUA

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

Name of the Study: Cultural Perceptions about Child Maltreatment among Caribbean Immigrant Master's-level Social Workers Practicing in Child Welfare Agencies in the United States

Investigator: Judith Rose-Wilson, M.S.W.

Research Supervisors: Susanne Bennett, PhD; Barbara Early, PhD; Laura Daughtery, PhD

Research Supervisors: **Purpose:** I understand the purpose of this research study is to explore the influence of culture on the perceptions and decisions of Caribbean American M.S.W. child welfare workers. This study is being carried out in partial fulfillment for the requirements of a Ph.D. degree in social work at The Catholic University of America.

Procedure: I am aware that I am being asked to participate in this study because I am a M.S.W. who was born and raised in the Caribbean. I also am employed at a child welfare agency in the Washington Metropolitan area. I understand that I am being asked to participate in one interview that will be audio recorded and transcribed by the investigator. I am aware that participation in this interview is completely voluntary. I understand that this interview will last from one to two hours. The audio recording, transcription, and investigator's notes from this interview will be kept in a locked safe. They will remain in the sole possession of the investigator. After five years, the tapes and notes will be destroyed.

Risks, Inconveniences, and/or discomforts: I understand there are no known risks for participating in this study. I understand that I may experience some discomfort in discussing my experiences. If I feel any discomfort during the interview, the investigator will offer to provide me with a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers for a referral. I understand that I may choose not to answer any particular question or choose not to participate. I may end the interview at any time without any penalties. I understand that the interview will be scheduled when and where it is convenient for me. I understand that the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicions of harm to you, to children, or to others.

Benefits: I understand that my participation in this research may not benefit me directly. The information obtained may be useful in the development of a child welfare agency training model for increasing cultural competence. I am aware that I will receive no monetary compensation for my participation.

Confidentiality: I understand that all information collected for this study will be kept confidential. I understand that any identifying information will be removed at the point of transcription. I understand that direct quotes from my interview will be published, but that my name will not be attributed to the quotes. I understand that findings from this study will be published from the interview. My name will not be used in any publications. I understand that research records, like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by federal authorities.

I have read the above information, and I am satisfied with my understanding of this study and its possible risks and benefits. My questions about this study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the research study as described. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Name   Date

Phone number to call Judith Rose-Wilson if questions arise: (301) 430-0648 0r (301) 909-2037. Any complaints or comments about your participation in this research project should be directed to the Secretary, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064; Telephone (202) 319-521

References

Ajdukovic, M., Petak, O., & Mrsic, S. (1993). Assessment of professionals' and

nonprofessionals' attitudes toward child abuse in Croatia. *Child Abuse and*

Neglect, 17, 549-549.

Al-Moosa, A., Al-Shaiji, J., Al-Fadhli, A., Al-Bayed, K., & Adib, S. M. (2003).

Pediatricians' knowledge, attitudes and experience regarding child maltreatment

in kuwait. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 27*(10), 1161-1178.

doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.09.009

American Heritage Dictionary: *Second college edition*. (1991). Boston: Houghton

Mifflin Company.

Anderson, S., & Payne, M. A. (1994). Corporal punishment in elementary education:

Views of Barbadian schoolchildren. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 18*(4), 377-386.

doi:10.1016/0145-2134(94)90040-X

Annotated Code of Maryland-Appendix A 07.02.07.04

Arnold, E. (1982). The use of corporal punishment in child rearing in the West Indies.

Child Abuse & Neglect, 6(2), 141-145.

Ashton, V. (2004). The effect of personal characteristics on reporting child maltreatment.

Child Abuse & Neglect, 28(9), 985-997. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.03.012

Ateah, C. A., & Durrant, J. E. (2005). Maternal use of physical punishment in response to

child misbehavior: Implications for child abuse prevention. *Child Abuse &*

Neglect, 29(2), 169-185. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.10.010

Barash, D. P. (1982). *Sociobiology and behavior* (2nd ed.). New York: Elsevier.

Barocas, D. (2011). *General Caribbean history overview*. BellaOnline Caribbean culture

site. Retrieved from http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art415.asp

Barrow, C. (1996). *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and perspectives.* Kingston,

Jamaica: Ian Randle.

Barrow, C. (2001). Contesting the rhetoric of 'black family breakdown' from Barbados.

Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 32, 419-441.

Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology,*

4(1), 1-103.

Baumrind, D. (1989). Rearing competent children. *Child Development Today and*

Tomorrow, 23, 349–378.

Baumrind, D. (1991). Parenting styles and adolescent development. *Encyclopedia of*

Adolescence, 2, 746-758.

Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders.* New York: Meridian.

Beck, A. T., & Emery, G. (1985). *Anxiety disorders and phobias: A cognitive*

perspective. New York: Basic Books.

Beck, A. T., & Rush, A. J. (1985). A cognitive model of anxiety formation and anxiety

resolution. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 7*(1), 349-365.

Belsky, J. (1991). Psychological maltreatment: Definitional limitations and unstated

assumptions. *Development and Psychopathology, 3*(01), 31-36.

doi:10.1017/S0954579400005058

183

Ben-Arieh, A., & Haj-Yahia, M. M. (2008). Corporal punishment of children: A multi-generational perspective. *Journal of Family Violence, 23*(8), 687-695. doi:10.1007/s10896-008-9193-4

Berlin, S. B. (1996). Constructivism and the environment: A cognitive-integrative perspective for social work practice. *Families in Society, 77*, 326-335.

Berlin, S. B. (2002). *Clinical social work practice: A cognitive-integrative perspective.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bernal, D. D. (1998). Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. *Harvard Educational Review, 68*(4), 555-583.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blumer, H. (1962). Society as symbolic interaction. In A. M. Rose (Ed.), *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (pp. 179-192). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Bonner, J. T., & La Farge, M. (1989). *The evolution of culture in animals.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Boon, J. A. (1972). Further operations of "culture" in anthropology: A synthesis of and for debate. *Social Science Quarterly, 53*(2), 221-252.

Bottoms, B. L., Nielsen, M., Murray, R., & Filipas, H. (2004). Religion-related child physical abuse. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 8*(1), 87-114.

Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (1985). *Culture and the evolutionary process.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

184

Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & Spicer, P. (2000). The sociocultural context of American Indian

infant mental health. *World Association of Infant Mental Health Handbook of

Infant Mental Health, 1*, 151-179.

Brislin, R. (1993). *Understanding culture's influence on behavior.* New York: Harcourt

Brace.

Britner, P. A., & Mossler, D. G. (2002). Professionals' decision-making about out-of-

home placements following instances of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect,

26*(4), 317-332. doi: 10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00311-3

Brodber, E. (1974). *Abandonment of children in Jamaica.* Institute of Social and

Economic Research, Jamaica: University of the West Indies.

Broughton, J. M., & Freeman-Moir, D. J. (1982). *The cognitive-developmental

psychology of James Mark Baldwin: Current theory and research in genetic

epistemology.* New York: Ablex.

Brown, J., & Johnson, S. (2008). Childrearing and child participation in Jamaican

families. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 16*(1), 31-40.

doi:10.1080/09669760801892110

Brun, C. (1997). Process and implications of doing qualitative research: An analysis of 54

doctoral dissertations. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 24*, 95-112.

Brunnberg, E., & Pećnik, N. (2006). Assessment processes in social work with children

at risk in Sweden and Croatia. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 16*(3),

231-241.

Bussmann, K. D. (2004). Evaluating the subtle impact of a ban on corporal punishment of
children in Germany. *Child Abuse Review, 13*(5), 292-311. doi:10.1002/car.866

Cabral, C., & Speek-Warnery, V. (2005). *Voices of children: Experiences with violence*.
Guyana: UNICEF.

Calvert, P., & Palmer, C. (2003). Application of the cognitive therapy model to initial
crisis assessment. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 12*(1), 30-38.

Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada. (2004) 1 S.C.R. 76,
2004 SCC 4.

Cauce, A. M. (2008). Parenting, culture, and context: Reflections on excavating culture.
Applied Developmental Science, 12(4), 227-229.
doi:10.1080/10888690802388177

Cawson, P., Wattam, C., Brooker, S., & Kelly, G. (2000). *Child maltreatment in the
United Kingdom: A study of the prevalence of abuse and neglect*. London:
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2006). *Alliance for race equity*. Retrieved from
http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare/top-five/places-to-watch-
promising-practices-to-address-racial-disproportionality-in-child-welfare.pdf

Chan, J. S., Elliott, J. M., Chow, Y., & Thomas, J. I. (2002). Does professional and public
opinion in child abuse differ? An issue of cross-cultural policy implementation.
Child Abuse Review, 11(6), 359-379. doi:10.1002/car.76

Chang, J., Rhee, S., & Berthold, S. M. (2008). Child abuse and neglect in Cambodian

    refugee families: Characteristics and implications for practice. Child Welfare,

    87(1), 141-160.

Chao, R. K. (1994). Beyond parental control and authoritarian parenting style:

    Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training. *Child*

    Development, 65(4), 1111-1119.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through*

    qualitative analysis. London: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Charon, J. M. (1989). *Symbolic interactionism.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Charon, J. M. (2004). *Symbolic interactionism: An introduction, an interpretation, an*

    integration (8th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, P.L. 93-247 (1974).

Child Welfare League of America. (2006). *National fact sheet*. Retrieved from

        http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/nationalfactsheet06.htm

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2008). *Mandatory reporters of child abuse and*

    neglect: Summary of state laws.   Retrieved from

    http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm.

Chiseri-Strater, E. (1996). Turning in upon ourselves positionality, subjectivity, and

    reflexivity in case study and ethnographic research. In P. Mortensen & G. Kirsch

    (Eds.), *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* (pp. 115-133).

    Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

187

Collier, F., McClure, F. H., Collier, J., Otto, C., & Polloi, A. (1999). Culture-specific

    views of child maltreatment and parenting styles in a pacific-island community.

    Child Abuse & Neglect, 23(3), 229-244. doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(98)00129-X

Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (1994). Self-schemas, possible selves, and competent

    performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*(3), 423-438.

    doi:10.1037/0022-0663.86.3.423

D'Andrade, R. G. (1995). *The development of cognitive anthropology.* Cambridge,

    United Kindom: Cambridge University Press.

Child Abuse and Neglect: Reports of neglected children, DC Code 4-1321.02, (2008).

de Silva, W. (1981). Some cultural and economic factors leading to neglect, abuse and

    violence in respect of children within the family in Sri Lanka. *Child Abuse &*

    Neglect, 5(4), 391-405.

Derezotes, D. M., Poertner, J., & Testa, M. F. (2005). *Race matters in child welfare: The*

    overrepresentation of African American children in the system. Washington, DC:

    Child Welfare League of America.

Devore, W., & Schlesinger, E. G. (1999). *Ethnic-sensitive social work practice*. Boston:

    Allyn & Bacon.

Dewees, M. (2001). Building cultural competence for work with diverse families.

    Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 9(3), 33-51.

    doi:10.1300/J051v09n03_02

Douglas, E. M., & Straus, M. A. (2007). Discipline by parents and child

    psychopathology. In A.R. Felthous & H. Sass (Eds.). *International handbook of*

    psychopathology and the law (pp. 303-318). New York: Wiley.

Drachman, D. (1995). Immigration statuses and their influence on service provision,

    access, and use. *Social Work, 40*(2), 188-197.

Drake, B., & Zuravin, S. (1998). Bias in child maltreatment reporting: Revisiting the

    myth of classlessness. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 68*(2), 295-304.

Drisko, J. (1999, January). *Rigor in qualitative research.* Juried paper presented at the

    annual conference of the Society for Social Work Research, Austin, TX.

Dukes, R. L., & Kean, R. B. (1989). An experimental study of gender and situation in the

    perception and reportage of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 13*(3), 351-360.

    doi: 10.1016/0145-2134(89)90075-6

Durham, W. H. (1991). *Coevolution*: *Genes, culture, and human diversity*. Palo Alto, CA:

    Stanford University Press.

Dyslin, C. W., & Thomsen, C. J. (2005). Religiosity and risk of perpetrating child

    physical abuse: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Psychology and Theology,*

    33(4), 291-298.

Ebeling, N. B., & Hill, D. A. (1983). *Child abuse and neglect: A guide with case studies*

    for treating the child and family. MA: PSG Incorporated.

Eckenrode, J., Powers, J., Doris, J., Munsch, J., & Bolger, N. (1988). Substantiation of child abuse and neglect reports. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 56*(1), 9-16.

Egeland, B. (1993). A history of abuse is a major risk factor for abusing in the next generation. In R. Gelles & D. R. Loseke (Eds.), *Current controversies on family violence* (pp. 197-208). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Egeland, B., Jacobvitz, D., & Sroufe, L. A. (1988). Breaking the cycle of abuse. *Child Development, 59*(4), 1080-1088.

Elliott, J. M., Thomas, J. I., Chan, J. S., & Chow, Y. (2000). *Professional and public perceptions of child abuse and neglect in Singapore: An overview*. Singapore: Singapore Children's Society.

Elliott, K., & Urquiza, A. (2006). Ethnicity, culture, and child maltreatment. *Journal of Social Issues, 62*(4), 787-809. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00487.x

Ellis, A. (1962). *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy.* New York: Lyle Stuart.

Ellis, A. (1973). *Humanistic psychotherapy: The rational-emotive approach.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ellis, A., Shaughnessy, M. F., & Mahan, V. (2002). An interview with Albert Ellis about rational emotive behavior therapy. *North American Journal of Psychology, 4*(3), 355-366.

Erickson, M. F., & Egeland, B. (1996). Child neglect. In J. Briere, L. Berliner, & T. Reid (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (pp. 4-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Evans, H., & Davies, R. (1997). Overview of issues in childhood socialization in the Caribbean. In J. L. Roopnarine & J. Brown (Eds.), *Caribbean families: Diversity among ethnic groups* (pp.1–24). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

Falicov, C. J. (1998). The cultural meaning of family triangles. In M. McGoldrick (Ed.), *Revisioning family therapy* (pp. 282-294). New York: Guilford Press

Ferrari, A. M. (2002). The impact of culture upon child rearing practices and definitions of maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 26*(8), 793-813. doi: 10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00345-9

Fontes, L. A. (2002). Child discipline and physical abuse in immigrant Latino families: Reducing violence and misunderstandings. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 80*(1), 31-40.

Furness, S. (2003). Religion, belief and culturally competent practice. *Journal of Practice Teaching in Health and Social Care, 15*(1), 61-74.

Garrusi, B., Safizadeh, H., & Bahramnejad, B. (2007). Physicians' perception regarding child maltreatment in Iran. *The Internet Journal of Health, 6*(2). Retrieved from http://www.ispub.com/ostia/index.php?xmlPrinter=true&xmlFilePath=journals/ijh/vol6n2/child.xml

Geertz, C. (1973). The growth of culture and the evolution of mind. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 55-87). New York: Basic Books.

Gershoff, E. T. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*(4), 539-579. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.128.4.539

Ghate, D., Hazel, N., Creighton, S., Finch, S., & Field, J. (2003). *The national study of parents, children and discipline in Britain*. London: Policy Research Bureau.

Gil, D. G. (1970). Violence against children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 33*(4), 637-648.

Gilligan, P. (2009). Considering religion and beliefs in child protection and safeguarding work: Is any consensus emerging? *Child Abuse Review, 18*(2), 94-110. doi:10.1002/car.1059

Giovannoni, J. (1989). Definitional issues in child maltreatment. In D. Cicchetti & V. Carlson (Eds.), *Child maltreatment: Theory and research on the causes and consequences of child abuse and neglect* (pp. 3-37). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Giovannoni, J. M., & Becerra, R. M. (1979). *Defining child abuse.* New York: The Free Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2002). Constructivist grounded theory. Paper presented at the *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 3*(3), 1-15.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York: Aldine.

Goerge, R. M. (1994). The effect of public child welfare worker characteristics and turnover on discharge from foster care. *Child Welfare Research Review, 1*, 205-217.

Gonca, S., & Savasir, I. (2001). The relationship between interpersonal schemas and depressive symptomatology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 48*(3), 359-364. doi:10.1037//0022-0167.48.3.359

Goodenough, W. H. (1957). Oceania and the problem of controls in the study of cultural and human evolution. *Journal of the Polynesian Society, 66*(2), 146-155.

Goodenough, W. H. (1964). *Explorations in cultural anthropology: Essays in honor of George Peter Murdock.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Goodenough, W. H. (1970). *Description and comparison in cultural anthropology*. Chicago: Aldine.

Gordon, L. (1988). Frustrations of family violence social work: An historical critique. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 15*(4), 139-160.

Gough, D., & Lynch, M. A. (2002). Culture and child protection. *Child Abuse Review, 11*(6), 341-344.

Grant, D. R. B. (1981). *Life style study: Children of the lesser world in the English-speaking Caribbean. Volume II: Ecological characteristics of the target areas*. Kingston, Jamaica: Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

Green, J. A. (1999). *Cultural awareness in the human services: A multi-ethnic approach.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Guba, E. G. (1990). *The paradigm dialog.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gustavsson, N. S., & Segal, E. A. (1994). *Critical issues in child welfare.* CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Hall, W. A. (2004). The United Nations convention on the rights of the child: The United Kingdom's efforts to comply. *The University of West Los Angeles Law Review, 37*, 106-221.

Hamilton, G. (1952). The role of social casework in social policy. *Social Casework, 33*(8), 317-323.

Hansen, D. J., Bumby, K. M., Lundquist, L. M., Chandler, R. M., Le, P. T., & Futa, K. T. (1997). The influence of case and professional variables on the identification and reporting of child maltreatment: A study of licensed psychologists and certified masters social workers. *Journal of Family Violence, 12*(3), 313-332. doi:10.1023/A:1022852921883

Harkness, S., & Super, C. M. (1995). Culture and parenting. *Handbook of Parenting, 2*, 211–234.

Harms, W. (2002). Berlin's social work theory garners prize. *The University of Chicago Chronicles*, *22*(4). Retrieved from

http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/021107/berlin.shtml

Harris, M. (1999). Theories of culture in postmodern times. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Haugaard, J. J. (2008). Defining psychological maltreatment: A prelude to research or an outcome of research? *Development and Psychopathology, 3*(01), 71-77. doi:10.1017/S0954579400005101

Heckathorn, D. D. (1997). Respondent driven sampling: A new approach to the study of hidden populations. *Social Problems, 44(2),* 174-199.

Hertz, R. (1996). Introduction: Ethics, reflexivity and voice. *Qualitative Sociology, 19*(1), 3-9.

Herzberger, S. D. (1990). The cyclical pattern of child abuse: A study of research methodology. *American Behavioral Scientist, 33*(5), 529.

Hong, G. K., & Hong, L. K. (1991). Comparative perspectives on child abuse and neglect: Chinese versus Hispanics and Whites. *Child Welfare, 70*(4), 463-475.

Hunter, R. S., & Kilstrom, N. (1979). Breaking the cycle in abusive families. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 136* (10), 1320-1322.

Hussey, J. M., Chang, J. J., & Kotch, J. B. (2006). Child maltreatment in the United

States: Prevalence, risk factors, and adolescent health consequences. *Pediatrics,*

118(3), 933-942. doi:10.1542/peds.

Hutchison, E. D. (1990). Child maltreatment: Can it be defined? *The Social Service*

Review, March, 60-78.

Irfan, S. (2008). Childrearing practices among south Asian Muslims in Britain: The

cultural context of physical punishment. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,*

28(1), 147-161. doi:10.1080/13602000802011192

Jergerby, U., & Soydan, H. (2002). Assessment processes in social work practice when

children were at risk: A comparative cross-national vignette study. *Journal of*

Social Work Research and Evaluation, 3, 127-144.

Jimenez, J. (2006). The history of child protection in the African American community:

Implications for current child welfare policies. *Children and Youth Services*

Review, 28(8), 888-905. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2005.10.004

Kadushin, A., Martin, J. A., & McGloin, J. (1981). *Child abuse-an interactional event.*

New York: Columbia University Press.

Kalmuss, D. (1984). The intergenerational transmission of marital aggression. *Journal of*

Marriage and the Family, 46(1), 11-19.

Kean, R. B., & Dukes, R. L. (1991). Effects of witness characteristics on the perception

and reportage of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 15*(4), 423-435.

Keeping Children and Families Safe Act, P.L. 108-36 (2003).

Keesing, R. M. (1974). Theories of culture. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 3*(1), 73-97.

Kempe, C. H., Silverman, F. N., Steele, B. F., Droegemueller, W., & Silver, H. K. (1962). The battered-child syndrome. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 9*(2), 143-154.

Korbin, J. E. (1991). Cross-cultural perspectives and research directions for the 21st century. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 15*(1), 67-77. doi:10.1016/0145-2134(91)90010-B

Korbin, J. E., & Spilsbury, J. C. (1999). Cultural competence and child neglect. In H. Dubowitz (Ed.), *Neglected children: Research, practice, and policy* (pp. 69–88). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lamborn, S. D., Dornbusch, S. M., & Steinberg, L. (1996). Ethnicity and community context as moderators of the relations between family decision making and adolescent adjustment. *Child Development, 67*(2), 283-301.

Larsen, L. J. (2004). The foreign-born population in the United States: 2003. *Current Population Reports*. Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Lauderdale, M., Valiunas, A., & Anderson, R. (1980). Race, ethnicity, and child maltreatment: An empirical analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 4*(3), 163-169. doi:10.1016/0145-2134(80)90004-6

Le, H. N., Ceballo, R., Chao, R., Hill, N. E., Murry, V. M. B., & Pinderhughes, E. E. (2008). Excavating culture: Disentangling ethnic differences from contextual influences in parenting. *Applied Developmental Science, 12*(4), 163-175. doi: 10.1080/10888690802387765

Leo-Rhynie E. A. (1997). Class, race, and gender issues in child rearing in the Caribbean. In J.L. Roopnarine & J. Brown (Eds.), *Caribbean families: Diversity among ethnic groups* (pp. 25-56). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Liederman, D. (1995). Child welfare overview. *Encyclopedia of Social Work, 19*, 423-424.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1989). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications.

Look, K. M., & Look, R. M. (1997). Skin scraping, cupping, and moxibustion that may mimic physical abuse. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 42*(1), 103-105.

Lum, D. (1999). *Culturally competent practice: A framework for growth and action.* Pacific Grove, CA: Cole Publishing Company.

Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. *Handbook of Child Psychology, 4*, 1-101.

Magnusson, D. (1990). Personality development from an interactional perspective. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and measurement* (pp. 193-222). New York: Guilford Press.

Mainardi, D. 1980. Tradition and the social transmission of behavior in animals. In G.W.

    Barlow & J. Silverberg (Eds.), *Sociobiology: Beyond nature/nature*? (pp. 227-

    255*).* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Malinowski, B. (1922). Ethnology and the study of society. *Economica, 2*, 208-219.

Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The*

    Lancet, 358 (9280), 483-488.

Manis, J. G., & Meltzer, B. N. (1972). *Symbolic interaction: A reader in social*

    psychology. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Manly, J. T. (2005). Advances in research definitions of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse*

    & Neglect, 29(5), 425-439. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2005.04.001

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954-

    969.

Mason, C. A., Walker-Barnes, C. J., Tu, S., Simons, J., & Martinez-Arrue, R. (2004).

    Ethnic differences in the affective meaning of parental control behaviors. *The*

    Journal of Primary Prevention, 25(1), 59-79.

Mathurin, M. N., Gielen, U. P., & Lancaster, J. (2006). Corporal punishment and

    personality traits in the children of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. *Cross-Cultural*

    Research, 40(3), 306.

McLoyd, V. C., Cauce, A. M., Takeuchi, D., & Wilson, L. (2000). Marital processes and

    parental socialization in families of color: A decade review of research. *Journal of*

    Marriage and the Family, 62(4), 1070-1093.

McPhail, C., & Rexroat, C. (1979). Mead vs. Blumer: The divergent methodological

   perspectives of social behaviorism and symbolic interactionism. *American*

   Sociological Review, 44(3), 449-467.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Meggers, B. J. (1971). *Amazonia: Man and culture in a counterfeit paradise.* Chicago:

   Aldine-Atherton.

Meltzer, B.N. (1972). *Symbolic Interaction*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Meyer, C. H. (1993). *Assessment in social work practice.* New York: Columbia

   University Press.

Miller, A. B., & Cross, T. (2006). Ethnicity in child maltreatment research: A replication

   of Behl et al.'s content analysis. *Child Maltreatment, 11*(1), 16-26. doi:

   10.1177/1077559505278272

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2008). Verification

   strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research.

   International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1(2), 13-22.

Mosby, L., Rawls, A. W., Meehan, A. J., Mays, E., & Pettinari, C. J. (1999). Troubles in

   interracial talk about discipline: An examination of African American child

   rearing narratives. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 30*(3), 489-521.

National Association of Social Workers. (2005). NASW *standards for social work*

   practice in child welfare. Washington, DC: NASW.

National Clearing House on Abuse and Neglect. (2004b). *What is child abuse and*

   neglect?

   Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

National Clearing House on Abuse and Neglect Information. (2006). *Child maltreatment*.

   Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

National Research Council. (1993). *Understanding child abuse and neglect*. Washington,

   DC: The National Academies Press.

Oldershaw, L. (2002). *A national survey of parents of young children.* Toronto: Invest in

   Kids Foundation.

Oostindie, G. (2006). *Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in honor of Harry Hoetink:*

   Netherland: Amsterdam University Press.

O'Reilly, J. P., Tokuno, K. A., & Ebata, A. T. (1986). Cultural differences between

   Americans of Japanese and European ancestry in parental valuing of social

   competence. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 17*(1), 87-97.

Padgett, D. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and*

   rewards. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Papalia, D. E., Olds, S. W., & Feldman, R. D. (1982). *A child's world: Infancy through*

   adolescence. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Patton, M. Q. (Ed.). (2002). *Qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peddle, N., & Wang, C. T. (2001). Current trends in child abuse prevention, reporting, and fatalities: The 1999 fifty state survey. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

Peled-Amir, T., & Kadman, Y. (2000). *Saying no to corporal punishment of children*. Jerusalem, Israel: National Council on the Child.

Perry, R. E. (2006). Do social workers make better child welfare workers than non-social workers? *Research on Social Work Practice, 16*(4), 392. doi:10.1177/1049731505279292

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity one's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-21.

Pierce, L., & Bozalek, V. (2004). Child abuse in South Africa: An examination of how child abuse and neglect are defined. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*(8), 817-832. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.09.022

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(2), 175-196.

Portwood, S. G. (1999). Coming to terms with a consensual definition of child maltreatment. *Child Maltreatment, 4*(1), 56-68. doi:10.1177/1077559599004001006

Portwood, S. G. (1998). The impact of individuals' characteristics and experiences on

    their definitions of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 22*(5), 437-452.

    doi: 10.1016/S0145-2134(98)00008-8

Premdas, R. R. (1996). *Ethnicity and identity in the Caribbean: Decentering a myth.* The

    Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies. Retrieved from

    http://nd.edu/~kellogg/publications/workingpapers/WPS/234.pdf

Press, G. A. (1993). *Plato's dialogues: New studies and interpretations.* Lanham, MD:

    Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Proctor, B. D., & Dalaker, J. (2002). *Poverty in the United States: 2001 Current*

    population reports. Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Radbill, S.X. (1974). A history of child abuse and infanticide. In C.H. Kempe & R.E.

    Helfer (Eds.), *The Battered Child.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reinecke, M. A., Dattilio, F. M., & Freeman, A. (1996). *Cognitive therapy with children*

    and adolescents. New York: Guilford Press.

Rhee, S., Chang, J., & Youn, R. S. (2003). Korean American pastors' perceptions and

    attitudes toward child abuse. *Journal of ethnic and cultural diversity in social*

    work, 12(1), 27-46.

Richmond, M. (1917). *Social diagnosis.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Robbins, S.; Chatterjee, P.; & Canda, E. (2006). *Contemporary human behavior theory:*

    A critical perspective for social work. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Rohner, R. P., Kean, K. J., & Cournoyer, D. E. (1991). Effects of corporal punishment, perceived caretaker warmth, and cultural beliefs on the psychological adjustment of children in St. Kitts, West Indies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53*(3), 681-693.

Roscoe, B. (1990). Defining child maltreatment: Ratings of parental behaviors. *Adolescence, 25*(99), 517-528.

Rose, A. M. (1962). *Human behavior and social processes: An interactionist approach.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rose, S. J., & Meezan, W. (1996). Variations in perceptions of child neglect. *Child Welfare*, *75*(2), 139–160.

Ross, C. J. (1980). *Child abuse: An agenda for action*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Runyan, D. K., Cox, C. E., Dubowitz, H., Newton, R. R., Upadhyaya, M., Kotch, J. B., Knight, E. D. (2005). Describing maltreatment: Do child protective service reports and research definitions agree? *Child Abuse & Neglect, 29*(5), 461-477. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.06.015

Russell, M. N., & White, B. (2001). Practice with immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 9*(3), 73-92. doi:10.1300/J051v09n03_04

Russell, M., Lazenbatt, A., Freeman, R., & Marcenes, W. (2004). Child physical abuse: Health professionals' perceptions, diagnosis and responses. *British Journal of Community Nursing, 9*(8), 332-338.

Ryan, J. P., Garnier, P., Zyphur, M., & Zhai, F. (2006). Investigating the effects of caseworker characteristics in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28*(9), 993-1006. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2005.10.013

Samuda, G. M. (1988). Child discipline and abuse in Hong Kong. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 12*, 283-287.

Sargent, C., & Harris, M. (1992). Gender ideology, childrearing, and child health in Jamaica. *American Ethnologist, 19*(3), 523-537.

Schmidley, A. D. (2001). *Profile of the foreign-born population in the United States 2000.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Schneider, D. (1 968). *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Segal, U. A. (1992). Child abuse in India: An empirical report on perceptions. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 16*(6), 887-908. doi: 10.1016/0145-2134(92)90090-E

Shibutani, T. (1955). Reference groups as perspectives. *American Journal of Sociology, 60*(6), 562-569.

Shor, R. (1998). The significance of religion in advancing a culturally sensitive approach toward child maltreatment. *Families in Society, 79*, 400-409.

Shor, R. (2005). Professionals' approach towards discipline in educational systems as

    perceived by immigrant parents: The case of immigrants from the former Soviet

    Union in Israel. *Early Child Development and Care, 175*(5), 457-465.

    doi:10.1080/0300443042000266268

Sloley, M. (1999, November 17). Parenting deficiencies outlined. *The Jamaica Gleaner*

    Online. Retrieved from http://jamaica-gleaner.com

Smetana, J. G. (1995). Morality in context: Abstractions, ambiguities and applications.

    Annals of Child Development,10, 83-130.

Smith, D. E., & Mosby, G. (2003). Jamaican child-rearing practices: The role of corporal

    punishment. *Adolescence, 38*(150), 369-382.

Smith, S. M. (1975). The battered child syndrome--some research findings. *The Journal*

    of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health, 95(3), 148-153.

Smith-Cannady, M. E. J. (1998). *A comparative study of professionals on knowledge and*

    attitudes regarding child abuse. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Collection for

    Wayne State University. Paper AA19915733.

Snyder, J. C., & Newberger, E. H. (1986). Consensus and difference among hospital

    professionals in evaluating child maltreatment. *Violence and Victims, 1*(2), 125-

    139.

Spicer, P. (2010). Cultural influences on parenting. *Zero to Three, 30*(4), 28-31.

    Retrieved from http://zerotothree.org/

SSA Centennial (2008). *Sharon Berlin.* Retrieved from

http://ssacentennial.uchicago.edu/features/features-berlin.shtml

Stein, T. J., & Rzepnicki, T. L. (1984). *Decision making in child welfare services: Intake*

and planning. Boston, MA: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N.K.

Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273-285).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Straus, M.A. (2004). *The primordial violence: Corporal punishment by parents, cognitive*

development, and crime. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Straus, M.A., & Donnelly, D. A. (2001). *Beating the devil out of them: Corporal*

punishment in American families and its effects on children. Brunswick, New

Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Straus, M.A., & Stewart, J. H. (1999). Corporal punishment by American parents:

National data on prevalence, chronicity, severity, and duration, in relation to child

and family characteristics. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 2*(2),

55-70. doi:10.1023/A:1021891529770

Teasdale, J.D., & Barnard, P.J. (1993). *Affect, cognition and change: Remodeling*

depressive thought. Hove, England: Erlbaum.

Tilden, V. P., Schmidt, T. A., Limandri, B. J., Chiodo, G. T., Garland, M. J., & Loveless,

P. A. (1994). Factors that influence clinicians' assessment and management of

family violence. *American Journal of Public Health, 84*(4), 628-633.

Tomison, A. M. (2001). A history of child protection: Back to the future? *Family Matters, 60*, 46-57.

Toth, S. L. (1991). Psychological maltreatment: Can an integration of research, policy, and intervention efforts be achieved? *Development and Psychopathology, 3*(01), 103-109. doi:10.1017/S0954579400005149

Ulman, A., & Straus, M. A. (2003). Violence by children against mothers in relation to violence between parents and corporal punishment by parents. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 34*(1), 41-60.

UNICEF. (2007*). Progress for children: A world fit for children, statistical review*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. (2004). *National characteristics*. Retrieved from www.census.gov

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2006). *Summary of child maltreatment*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm06/summary.htm

United States Department of Labor (2001). *Report on American workforce.* Washington, DC: Bureau of Statistics.

Warner, J. E., & Hansen, D. J. (1994). The identification and reporting of physical abuse by physicians: A review and implications for research. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 18*(1), 11-25. doi:10.1016/0145-2134(94)90092-2

Werner, H. D. (1982). *Cognitive therapy: A humanistic approach*. New York: Free Press.

Westby, C. E. (2007). Child maltreatment: A global issue. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 38*(2), 140-148. doi:10.1044/0161-1461(2007/014)

World Health Organization. (1999*). Report of the consultation on child abuse prevention*. Retrieved from http://www.yesican.org/definitions/WHO.html

World Health Organization. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/summary_en.pdf

Yan, M. C., & Wong, Y. (2005). Rethinking self-awareness in cultural competence: Toward a dialogic self in cross-cultural social work. *Families in Society, 86*(2), 181-189.

Zayas, L. H. (1992). Childrearing, social stress, and child abuse: Clinical considerations with Hispanic families. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 1*(3), 291-309. doi:10.1007/BF01073955

Zell, M. C. (2006). Child welfare workers: Who they are and how they view the child welfare system. *Child Welfare, 85*(1), 83-103.