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**RACE/ETHNICITY AS A PREDICTOR OF TIME SPENT IN OUT-OF-HOME
CARE: META-ANALYTIC SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC SENSITIVE PRACTICE**

by

Laura Wygiera-Mitchell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through Social Work
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Social Work at the
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Abstract

It has been questioned whether minority children are disadvantaged, in that they are less likely to exit the foster care system, and on the factors that may account for any noted disparity. By the means of a meta-analytic review this study aimed to: (1) Test the hypothesis that children-of-colour are relatively disadvantaged and (2) Explore the determinants of any such observed disadvantages. Central study findings were as follows. (1) Across most outcomes, African American children were more likely to be disadvantaged. (2) African American children are more disadvantaged today than a generation ago. (3) Family structure and income account for some of the disparity, but most of the explanation remains unknown. (4) Hispanic/Latino and Aboriginal children are similarly, but not as severely disadvantaged. And (5) None of these findings are likely explainable by publication bias. Race/ethnicity clearly matters (West, 1993) in child welfare, but how so? This most important question remains unanswered.

Key words: race, ethnicity, foster care, adoption, reunification, length of stay, systemic review, meta-analysis

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Introduction

There are tens of thousands of children entering the care of North America's child welfare agencies each year. On September 30, 2002 there were 532,000 children in out-of-home care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004) while in Canada there were approximately 66,903 according to the Child Welfare League of Canada 1998/1999 statistics (as cited in Farris-Manning & Zandstra 2003).¹ While some children will exit the system through adoption or reunification with their parents or an alternate family member, various other children remain in foster care for extended periods of time and may never leave until they reach adulthood. The purpose of this study is to use meta-analytic procedures to examine the relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome for children in foster care. This study seeks to explore whether or not minority children are the victims of institutional racism as evidenced by longer stays in foster care and/or a lesser probability of experiencing a favourable discharge from care as defined by family reunification, guardianship or adoption. The study results supported a hypothesis that majority-white children have a greater probability of experiencing a favourable discharge from care.

Review of Literature

Controversy exists among researchers in regard to the various child, family and service characteristics that impact the likelihood of a foster child remaining in foster care versus a more favourable outcome such as family reunification or adoption. One particular discrepancy in the literature debates the influence that a child's race or ethnicity has upon their fate in the child welfare system. Is it possible that the colour of a child's skin could deter that child's discharge from care? Children who grow up in foster care may experience a number of different placements over time. Even those who remain with the same alternative caregiver have no guarantee that their placement will not change leaving them without a sense of permanence. There are numerous reports that children-of-colour are over-represented in the child welfare system (e.g. Avery, 2000; Brown & Bailey-Etta, 1997; Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, Needle & Park, 1996; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Palmer & Cooke, 1996) leaving one to question whether oppression of minority families prevents children-of-colour from having the opportunity to become a member of a permanent family through reunification, adoption or guardianship. Do the child welfare systems in Canada and the United States endorse an ideology whereby preferential treatment is afforded to those with Anglo ethnicity? This study will seek to explore through a review and analysis of the research literature whether or not race/ethnicity truly matters in determining the likelihood of a favourable discharge from foster care.

Origins of Child Placement

In North America, the process of placing at risk children with alternate caregivers dates back to Colonial times (Cox & Cox, 1985; Polier, 1974). The sense of community

responsibility to provide assistance to the less fortunate was born out of the traditions of England's Elizabethan Poor Laws and religious teachings. Impoverished, neglected or orphaned children were cared for in institutional settings (e.g. almshouses) or were indentured to other families. Through the indenture process children were provided food and shelter in exchange for their labour (Blanchard, 1999; Cox & Cox, 1995; Polier, 1974). Some communities even implemented a more blatant form of slavery as an alternate means to indenturing. 'Vendue' was a process by which children were auctioned off to the lowest bidder where they would then work for their keep (Cox & Cox, 1995).

The almshouses or poorhouses were essentially the first institutional placements for children. Young and old, the sick and the mentally ill were all housed together. Due to an outcry from concerned citizens, restrictions were placed on almshouses being used as a placement for children (Blanchard, 1999; Cox & Cox, 1995; Guest, 1999; Polier, 1974; Shireman, 2003). As a result, orphan asylums became commonplace in the early to mid nineteenth century and a movement in the United States led by Charles Loring Brace advocated for children to be cared for in family settings. (Cox & Cox 1985; Hacsí, 1995; Shireman, 2003). With the emergence of the anti-slavery movement "there was an emphasis on finding families for children as opposed to the employment arrangements common to indenture programs" (Cook, 1995, p. 183).

Brace's vision came to fruition in 1853 when he founded the first Children's Aid Society in New York. Children were taken off of the streets or from orphanages and sent by the trainload to rural communities in the west. These 'orphan trains', as they came to be known, continued until 1929. According to Cohen (2000), Brace's desire to place

children in family settings “began the movement toward the foster home program that we know today” (p. 21). The demise of this ‘placing out’ system was prompted by concerned citizens who felt that children were being sent too far away from their homes and by religious groups, primarily Catholic and Jewish, who objected to the placement of non-Protestant children with Protestant families (Blanchard, 1999; Cox & Cox, 1985; Hacsí, 1995; Shireman, 2003).

A similar movement occurred in Canada and was prompted by the initiatives of Joseph J. Kelso. Kelso, a journalist, was appalled by the conditions in which dependent children were residing. Kelso, following in the footsteps of Brace, lobbied against institutionalization and in 1887 helped to form the Toronto Humane Society which was concerned with the prevention of cruelty to both children and animals. Kelso was also instrumental in establishing the first Canadian Children’s Aid Society in Toronto, Ontario (Guest, 1999; Bellamy & Irving, 1981).

Apart from the concern that children were being denied their religious heritage and emotional ties with biological families were being sacrificed due to the geographical separation, expectations were changing in regard to the rights of children. Issues were raised in regard to the quality of the homes selected for the placement of children and the amount of work imposed upon the older children (Hacsí, 1995). In response to these issues, placement agencies began paying board to families “in an effort to ensure that children would not be valued exclusively for their labor” (Hacsí, 1995, p. 170).

As time progressed, there was a growth in the number of children placed in the care of child welfare agencies. In a classic 1959 study conducted by Mass and Engler that researched foster children in nine different communities, the epidemic proportion of

children who would remain in-care and were unlikely to return home or be adopted was highlighted. Foster care had become a panacea to address child welfare issues in families. Children were literally growing up in alternate care arrangements without a guarantee of permanency.

As a movement erupted attempts were made to ensure that children did not remain in foster care limbo. In Canada, although each province and territory has its own child welfare legislation and standards, included in each of these social policies is a section which highlights the need to promote permanency for children in foster care (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Government of Canada, 2003). Fein and Maluccio (1992) note that in the United States of America, “the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act and later the Adoption and Safe Families Act were designed to end the drift of children in foster care” (p. 337).

Even with these legislative directives and a strong desire to limit the amount of time children remain in-care, the hope of permanency still remains a goal yet to be achieved for many children. For example, in the United States during the 2002 fiscal year 303,000 children entered foster care. During that same time period only 281,000 children were discharged from care. Similar statistics were observed during previous fiscal years (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004). Canada, unlike the United States, does not have a universal data bank for foster care information making statistical comparisons more difficult. This may in part be due to the legislative diversity between each province and territory that establishes the age requirements which define a ‘child’ and the structure of the services that may be offered. One can conclude though that a similar pattern of children remaining in care is observed in Canada based upon the

statistics collected by individual provinces and territories. For example, in Ontario there was a 65% increase in the number of children in care on March 31, 2004 in comparison to March 1998. During this time the number of Crown Wards, children whose parental rights had been terminated, also showed an increased pattern. Even in March 2005 when there was a slight decrease in the number of children in foster care since the previous year, the percentage of Crown Wards in care was the highest it had been during the past five years. (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies – CAS Facts 2000 – 2005). It is apparent that little improvement has been made since Mass and Engler first identified this issue in 1959. Many children in foster care remain in the child welfare system and are exposed to the potential consequences of substitute care for extended periods of time. But who are the children in foster care and what are the potential consequences related to substitute care that raised concern by researchers such as Mass and Engler and others?

Children in Care

The term 'children in care' refers to children who can no longer remain living with their primary caregivers, who are generally the biological parents. "Being in care usually, but not always, signifies a legal status in which a [omit] parent's legal rights of guardianship have been limited or removed for a brief period of time or longer" (Hepworth, 1980, p. 55). Children who cannot reside with their primary family are generically referred to as foster children, a term which encompasses not only children who reside with foster families, but also those who reside in other substitute care resources. According to Curtis (1999), "there are four basic types of foster care: family (nonrelative) foster care, kinship (relative) foster care, therapeutic foster care, and residential (congregate) group care" (p. 3).

The population of children in care is quite diverse. The children vary in age. They may enter care at birth and depending on the child welfare legislation in the province, territory or state in which the child resides, can remain in care until age 16 to 21 years (Government of Canada, 2003). A large proportion of children in care are identified as having special needs resulting from a genetic, developmental or mental health disorder (Garwood & Close, 2001; Rutter, 2000).

Children in care originate from a variety of racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds although the literature suggests that there are a predominant number of children-of-colour in alternate care resources (Avery, 2000; Brown & Bailey-Etta, 1997; Courtney, et. al, 1996; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Palmer & Cooke, 1996). For example, according to Farris-Manning & Zandstra (2003) who shared personal communication with Cindy Blackstock, the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, it is estimated that approximately 40% of the children in care in Canada are Aboriginal. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (2001) would further report that the child in care population in some Canadian provinces, such as Manitoba, would be comprised of nearly 80% Aboriginal children. Unfortunately, due to inconsistent methods of calculating both children in care and Aboriginal children in Canada, accurate statistics cannot be obtained.

In the United States on September 30, 2002 only 39% of the 532,000 children in foster care were Caucasian although according to the United States Census Bureau individuals identified as belonging to the Caucasian race account for 81% of the population. During this same time period 37% of the children in care were Black, 17% were Hispanic, 2% were American Indian/Alaskan Native and 1% were Asian. As the

United States Census Bureau indicates that African Americans account for only 13% of the general population and American Indian/Alaskan Natives account for 1%, these children are overrepresented in the foster care system. On the other hand, Hispanics who represent 13% of the general population and Asians who represent 4% are underrepresented in the foster care system. A similar pattern has existed for years (e.g. Hines, Lemon, Wyatt, & Merdinger 2004; Hogan & Siu 1988; Morton 1999).

There are a couple of explanations that may account for this overrepresentation of children-of-colour. As a correlation can be found between race/ethnicity and poverty (Brown & Bailey-Etta, 1997), the prevalence of minority children in care may be attributed to the lack of resources available to these families to ensure the well being of their children. Although children in care can originate from families whose socio-economic backgrounds vary across all classes, as is supported by the literature (e.g. Courtney, 1999; Curtis, 1999), there is a predominant number of families who would be described as poor or working class poor. Issues of poverty create stress for families, lowering tolerance levels and creating an environment for issues of neglect or abuse. Furthermore, low-income families lack the financial resources to access the mere essentials in life (e.g., food, clothing, housing), and are unable to secure the supportive services within the community, such as childcare providers, counseling or services to assist children who have special needs. Families who are impoverished also may implement coping strategies (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse) that debilitate one's parenting capacity (Pelton, 1992).

According to Cohen (2000):

More affluent families are not immune to problems of social functioning.

However, through purchased psycho-social services, private and timely medical care, hiring of family helpers (nurses, babysitters, maids, governesses, au pairs), through use of private boarding and military schools for children with real or imagined behavioral problems, or through high-cost substance abuse recovery programs (often picked up by private health insurance), upper-middle-class and rich families engage in private actions to cope with their private problems. A disproportionate number of poor people and their children see their private problems become public issues (p. 54).

As a result of poverty, families cannot provide the basic essentials for their children, so parents with low incomes may “despite their best intentions, be forced to provide inadequate physical care to their children” (Plotnick, 2000, p. 104). Pelton (1992) suggests that in an effort to address the parenting deficits, child welfare agencies focus on individual treatment issues such as substance abuse programs or child management skills as opposed to addressing poverty as an antecedent to the problem. When these individual enhancement programs fail to be effective, the issues are resolved through child placement.

Furthermore, once in the child welfare system poverty can be a deterrent to children leaving foster care. Rodenborg (2000) examined the effects of poverty related needs on the duration of foster care. With a sample of 725 children she found that children in poverty, which comprised of 500 children, had a median length of stay in care of 417 days in comparison to non-poor children who had a median length of stay of 155 days. Rodenborg also found that the foster care duration disparity increased with time so that by the censure date twice as many poor children had open cases than non-poor

children. Courtney (1994) studied the association between a family's eligibility for financial assistance and the timing of family reunification. Utilizing proportional-hazards regression analysis he found that children from families who were eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) returned home slower than the comparison group. Therefore, it is questionable whether it is in fact a child's racial/ethnic background that limits the probability for a favourable discharge from care or the family of origin's socio-economic status (SES), often shrouded by an abundance of minority families who live in poverty, that results in a less favourable foster care outcome for many children. An exploration of research findings that are both adjusted and unadjusted for social position will help to demystify this query.

A further theory to explain the overrepresentation of children-of-colour in care is related to the rate at which children exit the foster care system. Curtis (1999) believes a foster care crisis, as defined by a preponderance of children in care, is not caused by the number of children entering the child welfare system, but rather by the number of children who remain in the system for long periods of time. Based on this philosophy, it is possible that the overrepresentation of children-of-colour in care results not from an influx of minority children entering the child welfare system but from an inability to discharge these children through reunification, guardianship or adoption. Researchers such as Kemp and Bodonyi (2000) support the claim that minority children remain in foster care longer. In their study of 458 legally free children who entered care as infants they discovered that African American children and in particular African American males were significantly less likely to achieve permanence through adoption or guardianship.

In fact, Kemp and Bodonyi report that the median length of stay in care for Caucasian children was 11 months shorter than Native American or African-American children.

Courtney and Wong (1996) utilized a proportional hazards model to compare the timing of the exit from foster care to outcomes such as discharge to family, adoption and running away. They found that “being African American was associated with a significant decrease relative to other groups in the probability of both discharge to family or guardianship and adoption. Latinos were somewhat less likely to exit care to adoption than Caucasian children or children of ‘other’ backgrounds, but more likely to do so than African Americans” (p. 328). Statistics from the 2003 California Children’s Services Archive, calculated by race/ethnicity, estimated the time for half of the children to leave their first spell in care. The median length of stay for African American children placed with kin was 24 months which is six months longer than Caucasian children placed with kin. Similarly, the median length of stay for Hispanic children was two months longer than Caucasian children. For children in non-kinship placements the difference in the median length of stay remained six months longer for African Americans but the length of stay for Hispanic children exceeded that for Caucasian children by three months. Furthermore, when the estimated times for 75% of the children to leave their first spell in care were calculated, the differences between African American, Hispanic and Caucasian children increased. African American and Hispanic children in kinship placements remained in care for 15 months and 5 months longer, respectively, than Caucasians. The length of placements for African American and Hispanic children in non-kinship placements exceeded Caucasians by 14 and 4 months respectively.

The ideology underlying the numerous minority children in care proposes that families-of-colour, unlike the white majority, are oppressed (Mullaly, 2002; Palmer & Cooke, 1996). Mullaly (2002), defines oppression as circumstances in which:

a person is blocked from opportunities to self-development, is excluded from full participation in society, does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned a second-class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category of people (p. 28).

Structural or institutional oppression as reported by Mullaly (2002) “consists of the ways that social institutions, laws, policies, social processes and practices, the economic and political systems all work together primarily in favour of the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups” (p. 49). Therefore, according to the theory of oppression, children-of-colour monopolize the child welfare system as these children are victims of racism from the very organizations that are by design agents to help families in need.

A descriptive review of child welfare research by Courtney et. al (1996) and Jones (1997) cite various studies whereby children and families-of-color received fewer services or were exposed to more intrusive intervention than whites throughout their involvement with child protective services. For example, an oft-cited 1990 study by Chasnoff, Landress and Barrett examined the impact of race on the reporting rates for substance abusing pregnant women. Although the prevalence of substance abuse was similar for Caucasian and African American women as determined by screening at the first pre-natal visit, ten times as many African American women were reported to health

officials upon delivering their baby. In 1990 Fein et al. (as cited in Courtney et al 1996) investigated 779 children who had been in out-of-home care for at least two years. Through interviews with social workers and foster parents as well as administrative data reviews the researchers concluded, "Caucasian children and foster parents received more services and supports than children and foster parents of color" (p. 109). Tracy, Green and Bremseth reported in their 1993 study that minority families received significantly fewer face-to-face contacts and fewer phone and mail contacts from the service providers than their Caucasian counterparts.

Another study conducted by Rodenberg (2000) specifically questioned whether institutional discrimination contributed to differences in the child welfare outcomes between African Americans and Caucasian children. From her study sample (N= 725) she found that while 44% of the Caucasian families received professional behavioural health services (e.g. psychological assessments, mental health treatment) to match their needs, only 33% of African American families were provided services. Furthermore, Rodenberg's findings determined that 59.4% of African American families and 34.5% of Caucasian families lived in inadequate housing conditions. Of those who resided in substandard housing 35% of the African American families failed to have their housing needs identified as a problem by their caseworkers. Conversely, only 13% of the Caucasian families experienced unrecognized housing problems. Rodenberg reported similar findings in the areas of education, employment and low-income need. "In all cases, unmet need was greater for African American clients than Caucasian, suggestive of indirect institutional discrimination" (Rodenborg, 2000, p. 178).

Regardless of the theory that one accepts to explain the overrepresentation of children-of-colour in foster care the fact remains that too many children are entering the foster care system and are remaining in this system for far too long. Contrary to a common belief, children are not necessarily 'better off' being in foster care.

The Impact of Substitute Care

Although the risk of harm in the familial home may be alleviated when a child is admitted to the care of a child welfare agency, the experience of being admitted to care and remaining there for more than a brief period of time can create new hardships for a child. The very act of removing a child from their family and home environment increases the child's level of emotional trauma due to the loss of relationships to family and friends, loss of identity as a member of the nuclear family and a loss of familiar surroundings. Furthermore, children in care suffer further losses and emotional turmoil when they experience instability in their foster placement, often moving from placement to placement during their life growing up in care (Siu & Hogan, 1989). With each change in placement the child develops feelings of worthlessness and rejection. Every move is a reminder of being taken away from their family. Each re-placement is filled with good-byes to friends, surrogate families, familiar surroundings and even siblings who may be separated during the move. Chronic upheavals promote attachment disorders and teach children that relationships are not forever.

In a study by Webster, Barth and Needell (2000) the researchers tracked the number of placement moves over an eight-year period for 5,557 children who entered care before age six. Children were considered to have experienced placement instability if they had three or more placement changes following any moves that may have

occurred during the first year in care. The researchers did not include the placement changes that occur within the first year of care, as it is normal for children to experience some disruption upon their admission to care as they move from emergency resources to a longer-term placement. Webster et. al's study determined that "after eight years in care, almost 30% of children in kinship care and more than 50% of the children in non-kinship care had experienced three or more placements in out-of-home care. Clearly, children who are in care longer are more likely to experience multiple placement moves..." (p. 627). The study further revealed that African American children were 25% less likely to experience placement instability but this slight advantage may be explained by the predominance of African American children who reside in the homes of their relatives, as kinship placements tend to be more stable than non-kinship placements (Webster et. al, 2000; see also James, Landsverk & Slymen, 2004, Testa, 2001). Another study by James, Landsverk and Slymen (2004) of 430 children between the ages of 1 and 16 years at the time of entry into care determined that within an 18-month period the children averaged 4.4 placements but approximately 36% (N = 154) experienced five to seven different placements. The researchers also found that the percentage of African Americans who achieved stability in kinship homes was greater than that for Anglo or Hispanic children. For those children who are not fortunate enough to reside in a kinship placement, the risk of instability remains high.

Attempts to cope with the various losses associated with the placement or re-placement in out-of-home care can result in emotional or psychological problems that if left untreated can lead to attachment disorders or self-harm (Eagle, 1993; Charles & Matheson, 1990; Palmer, 1996; Johnson, 1998; Steinhauer, 1991).

According to Eagle (1993),
when therapeutic intervention is offered after placement ...such treatment tends to focus on the situation that led to placement (i.e., the abuse and its effects), whereas the child's reaction to being separated from his or her family may receive little or no attention (p. 320).

In addition to separation issues, children may require therapeutic intervention to address maladaptive outcomes resulting from the experience that led to the child's removal from their home (e.g., abuse, neglect). In fact, the prevalence of mental health problems for children in foster care exceeds that which would be expected in the general population (Garwood & Close, 2001; Landsverk & Garland, 1999). A study by dosReis, Zito, Safer and Soeken (2001) examined the medical histories of 15, 507 youth between the ages of birth to 19 years. The results found that the prevalence of mental health disorders among foster children was twice that of youth receiving social assistance and 15 times more common than youth receiving other types of aid. Unfortunately, treatment programs to support the child's emotional well-being are currently difficult to access, due to a lack of available services resulting from cutbacks in publicly funded mental health services.

As Pithouse and Crowley (2001) note in their study regarding the quality of placement services, the waiting period for a first appointment can be six months or longer and challenges occur when the child's problem doesn't fit the available services. Should the child belong to an ethnic minority the prospects for receiving mental health services are grimmer. Significant differences were noted by race and ethnicity for court ordered mental health service utilization by 142 foster children in a study conducted by Garland and Besinger (1997). "Caucasian youth were more likely to receive orders for

psychotherapy and to have documented use of psychotherapy than were African American and Hispanic youth, even when possible confounding effects of age and type of maltreatment were controlled” (Garland & Besinger, 1997, p. 651). These findings are consistent with those of Benedict, White, Stallings and Cornely (1989), Close, (1983) and Garland, Lau, Yeh, McCabe, Hough and Landsverk (2005) who report that minority children receive fewer supportive services than majority-white children. As a result of these unmet needs, children are prone to develop long-standing psychological disorders.

Yet another misfortune experienced by children in care is the impact resulting from a lack of placement resources. As the number of children entering out-of-home resources continues to rise, the availability of placement resources decline. This shortage of available caregivers reduces the likelihood that children will be matched to homes or treatment resources that will meet their needs (Mattingly, 1998; Waterhouse & Brocklesby, 2001). As a result, children are placed in homes that do not meet their ethnic or cultural needs and who are ill equipped to deal with their treatment issues. Caregivers receive children outside of their placement preference and the boundaries of their strengths and limitations. Therefore, children receive the best ‘available’ care that may not meet their physical, developmental, emotional or psychological needs as opposed to the best possible care to nurture their growth and development. Some foster caregivers, although recognizing their limitations, may maintain the child in their home out of necessity or obligation, but at the expense of both the child and the foster care resource. Other placements result in disruptions, which compound the stress and trauma experienced by children. As yet another loss is experienced the child’s ability to trust in caregivers and to form healthy attachments is negatively affected.

This issue of supply and demand has placed a strain on the foster care system. The impending results are detrimental to children who are not appropriately matched to resources or who are geographically isolated from their family, friends and surroundings as there is a lack of foster caregivers in the child's home community. A substantial geographical relocation is often accompanied by a transfer in school placement which can further compound the problems for a child who is already facing academic challenges. Depending on the distance between the child's placement and their family the scheduling of visitation cannot be flexible. Children of various ages may endure lengthy periods of time commuting to familial visits and miss out on extracurricular or recreational opportunities in order to accommodate the travel arrangements. Furthermore, it is difficult to work toward reunification of the family unit when quality time together is sparse.

At a cultural level, children in care are oppressed when they are placed in environments that are not matched to their cultural needs. Children transitioning into foster care need to eat foods that are familiar to them, speak their own language, receive health remedies that they are accustomed to receiving and participate in cultural or religious traditions. Due to a shortage of foster homes and in particular a shortage of diverse foster homes, children are placed in alternate care resources that differ from their social culture. For example, only 22% of Aboriginal children are placed in Aboriginal foster or adoptive homes (Child & Family Canada, 1991). As if the stress of experiencing abuse or neglect or leaving one's family is not difficult enough, children are placed in a foreign environment, where not only the people are strangers, but the customs may be unfamiliar as well. When children are removed from "situations in which care providers and social contacts have similar behaviours, values, and traditions – they no

longer possess the support and familiarity afforded by these social institutions” (Urquiza, Wu and Borrego, 1999, p. 88).

Some organizations, such as the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), have taken a firm stance in favour of maintaining the ancestry and ethnic culture of children. In this association’s 1972 position statement on trans-racial adoption it strongly opposed the placement of African American children in white homes for any reason. The NABSW believed that the socialization of Black children, including ego formation and coping techniques to combat racism, could only be obtained through positive identification with other Blacks by being placed with Black families (NABSW, 1972). More recently, the NABSW maintained its position to secure culturally compatible families for children in care prior to giving consideration to non-African-American resources and advocated, among other things, for the recruitment of African-American caregivers (NABSW National Steering Committee, 2003). A similar position had been adopted by the Native culture and is formally recognized in legislation such as the Indian Child Welfare Act in the United States and provincial child welfare legislation in Canada. Within these legislative policies is a mandate to preserve the Native culture of Aboriginal children and to seek out, where possible, substitute families that share the Native ancestry.

The fate of many foster children has not changed substantially since the early days of foster care. Similar to their predecessors, current foster children continue to face geographical separations from all that is familiar and are exposed to less than optimum treatment because there are no other options available. Like the foster children from days

gone by many will not be released from this fate until they reach an age of independence when they can leave the child welfare system.

Foster Care Drift

A common occurrence experienced by many placed in the care of a child protection agency is referred to as 'foster care drift'. Foster care drift is a concept first identified by Maas and Engler in their 1959 study of foster children to reflect the numerous children who remained in foster care for extended periods of time. Mass & Engler noted that many children grew up in foster care leaving "only when they came of age, often having had many homes – and none of their own – for ten or so years" (p. 356). Furthermore these researchers believed that

children who move through a series of families or are reared without close and continuing ties to a responsible adult have more than the usual problems in discovering who they are. These are the children who learn to develop shallow roots in relationships with others, who try to please but cannot trust, or who strike out before they can be let down (p. 356). ... These children for the most part, are denied the birthright of every American child – the right to a happy and secure childhood, enabling them to make full use of their inherent capacity (p. 378).

This classic study highlighted the need for child welfare agencies to address permanency issues for children. Mass & Engler prompted child welfare agencies to recognize that the needs of children aren't merely resolved upon being apprehended. Ensuring a child's physical safety through removal from an abusive or neglectful environment was no longer enough. The goal of ensuring the emotional well-being of children could not be achieved if there wasn't a consistent caregiver to build a trusting relationship through

which the child could meet their emotional needs. Children without a guarantee of stability and belongingness are not afforded the opportunity to let down their defenses and build trusting relationships or focus their energies on resolving emotional issues. It had become apparent that the days of drifting through the foster care system in a state of limbo, without a sense of permanence, was a barrier to the child's emotional development.

As a result of Mass & Engler's (1959) study, numerous researchers sought to identify the child, family or service characteristics that would predict which children would remain in care from those who would experience a favourable discharge to family, relatives or adoptive parents. Given the overrepresentation of children-of-colour in the foster care system many researchers have included race and/or ethnicity as a variable in their studies. Unfortunately previous studies have been quite diverse leading to a variety of different findings. According to Glisson, Bailey and Post (2000) who qualitatively reviewed 15 studies that attempted to predict determinants of time in foster care, the problem stems from the various research methodologies utilized and the "generalizability of findings is limited by the inconsistent selection and operationalization of independent variables, making it difficult to compare the studies' findings" (p. 256).

As an example, while each of the sample studies for this meta-analysis examined an association between race/ethnicity and duration of foster care, the definition of the outcome variable differed amongst the studies. From a sample of 54 studies, 18 studies examined variables that were determinants of foster children reuniting with their parents or family members, and five studies examined variables that were determinants for foster children being adopted. Eighteen studies failed to specify a route of discharge, focusing

solely on the length of time spent in foster care, while the remaining studies included more than one route of discharge from care. The studies also utilized different sample sizes ranging from 34 to 404,416 children and different criteria for inclusion in the sample. While some studies included children from all age groups in their sample others focused only on children under the age of six years. Even the racial comparators were operationalized differently with some studies comparing children from distinct racial or ethnic classifications (e.g. African American, Hispanic) while others combined children into one of two comparison groups entitled 'minority' and 'non-minority' children. Depending on the study, children of mixed parentage may or may not be included in the sample. If they are included there does not appear to be a consensus on how to incorporate them into a sub-sample of children whose lineage belongs to only one race or ethnicity.

Furthermore, methodological differences were noted between the various studies that explored determinants of foster care drift. For example, studies such as Barth, Webster and Lee (2000), Courtney (1993) and Needle (1996) utilized retrospective studies while other researchers (e.g. Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993; Avery, 1999; Chen, 2001) conducted studies with a cross-sectional design. Given that the latter methodological approach includes children who have been in the child welfare system for some time along with those who have recently entered care, and as a cross-sectional study provides merely a moment in time 'snap shot', the findings may appear questionable due to the methodological limitations even if the results are valid. Sampling differences also exist between studies with some studies utilizing random samples while others select their sample based upon convenience. Even the manner in which the

findings are reported are not similar between studies as researchers chose different statistical measures to test their hypotheses. The task of comparing studies that have utilized different statistical measures is much like comparing apples and oranges. As a result of such definitional and methodological inconsistencies across studies, the findings regarding the relationship of race/ethnicity and favourable foster care outcome have been quite varied.

Some studies found that minority children have less favourable outcomes than majority- white children. Glisson, Bailey and Post, (2000) concluded that minority children from their sample of 700 had a 42% lower probability of leaving custody than white children. Albers, Reilly and Rittner (1993) sampled 404 foster children in Clark County Nevada to determine which characteristics were associated with a longer length of stay. The researchers determined that fewer Anglo children were in care after three years than African Americans. Smith (2003) also concluded that African Americans were disadvantaged. In her study of 1,995 children who were eligible for adoption from 42 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico her findings revealed that African American children were 23% less likely than other races/ethnicities to exit care for adoption.

Yet not all researchers would agree that minority children experience less favourable outcomes. Zullo (2002) compared the reunification rates for children across six different types of out-of-home placements. In his study of 1397 cases Zullo utilized Cox's partial likelihood model and determined that some, but not all minority children, remained in care longer than whites. In particular, African American children transitioned home at rates that were 64% of Caucasian children. Asian and Native

American children, who were categorized together, exited care at a rate that was 54% of Caucasians children. Zullo found no significant difference between the exit rates of Hispanic and Caucasian children. Davis, Inger, Landsverk, Newton and Ganger (1996) made a similar conclusion in their San Diego study of 925 children who were 12 years of age or younger. After completing a logistic regression model Davis et al.'s study determined that although Afro-American foster children were less likely than Anglo-Americans and Hispanics to be reunited with their families, the probability of reunification for Hispanic children was not significantly different from Anglo-Americans.

There are still other studies that have examined favourable outcomes for foster children and concluded that there is no difference between minority and white-majority children. Benedict, White and Stallings (1987) conducted a longitudinal study on a sample of 689 children to assess the impact of race on a child's length of foster care stay. Their study found that there was no significant difference in the length of stay between white and black race children when controlling for other family and child characteristics. Blanchard (2000) also found that there was no statistically significant relationship between a child's ancestry and family reunification in her sample of 100 minority and non-minority New Jersey children. Researchers such as Chen (2001), Priebe-Diaz (1999) and Vogel (1999) found similar results in their studies that examined the impact of race/ethnicity on a favourable foster care discharge.

While there are studies that have concluded some, if not all, minorities experience a favourable foster care discharge as often as majority-white children, there are others who have found that the outcome for minority children may be more favourable than that experienced by whites. In a study of 458 infant foster children Kemp and Bodonyi

(2000) examined the length of stay from placement until permanence, which was defined as adoption or guardianship. According to the study findings African-American children are 57% less likely than Caucasian children to achieve permanence. Conversely, Hispanic children were 1.7 times more likely to achieve permanence in comparison to Caucasians. Grogan-Kaylor (2001a) also noted that Hispanic children can fare better than white children when comparing the determinants that affect a child's return home within a four-year period. After analyzing a sample of 16,886 children Grogan-Kaylor found that race/ethnicity did have an effect on the rate that children in care were reunified. Although black children were less likely than whites to be reunited, Hispanic and children of 'other' races were more likely to reunite than white children.

To further complicate the varied findings surrounding the relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care discharge was the suggestion that other moderator variables may explain the likelihood that a child remains in foster care. Harris and Courtney (2003) employed a Cox Hazard Model in their study that examined the interaction of race/ethnicity and family structure on the timing of family reunification. From their sample of 9,162 children, they concluded that African American children are reunited with family slower than Hispanic or Caucasian children only when comparing single-parent families. When the interaction between two-parent families and race/ethnicity was analyzed the researchers determined that African American children were estimated to return home at approximately the same rate as Caucasian children. Hispanic children, though, were at a slight advantage for reunification with a rate that was one-fifth faster than either African- Americans or Caucasians. The researchers highlight that previous studies that fail to take into consideration the interaction between race/ethnicity and

family structure may result in a misrepresentation of the association between race/ethnicity and the timing of family reunification.

Other researchers who have explored the determinants of foster care discharge have identified additional factors that prolong or expedite a child's discharge from care. For example, Barth, Webster & Lee, (2002), Harris & Courtney (2003) and Kemp & Bodonyi, (2000) have found that gender impacts the rate that children are discharged from care with males remaining in care longer than females. Courtney, Piliavin and Wright (1997), Needle (1996) and Tash (2002) would argue that a child's age is related to foster care discharge while Rodenborg (2000) would state that a lower socio-economic status deters a child from leaving care. Barth, Snowden, Broeck, Clancy, Jordan and Barusch (1986) found that more frequent worker contact increased the likelihood of family reunification. Albers, Reilly, and Rittner (1993) found that workers with a social work degree are more successful in moving children on to permanence than those with other degrees. The list of potential determinants of foster care drift as identified in the literature is vast, and similar to the race/ethnicity debate, the findings regarding these variables are inconsistent across studies.

Given the conflicting findings among the studies that explored the relationship of race/ethnicity and foster care discharge, one was left to question whether a child's lineage actually contributed to foster care drift. What also remained unclear was how relatively important race/ethnicity is, per se, in comparison to other factors (e.g. social position, family structure, child's age etc.) when trying to explain the ever increasing presence of minority children in foster care. Therefore there was an outstanding need to explore the relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome to gain evidence-based

knowledge to guide interventions that will address the overrepresentation of minority children in care. There was also a need to find the truth as to the association of foster care outcome and race/ethnicity from a sea of research with conflicting findings. A study design was needed that could somehow make the comparison of prior studies more comprehensible. Thus, a meta-analysis was warranted.

Problem Formulation

Study Purpose

Through the use of meta-analytic procedures this study seeks to determine if a child's race or ethnicity is associated with exiting the foster care system in a timely fashion to an outcome such as family reunification, guardianship or adoption. This study ultimately asks whether institutional racism exists within the child welfare systems of North America as evidenced by minority children remaining in care for a longer period of time than majority-white children.

Numerous studies have attempted to identify which child, family and service characteristics impact the likelihood of a favourable discharge from care but as a result of inconsistent findings the current empirical information failed to address an existing gap in the knowledge base. Attempts to find the truth amongst the current research, by means of across study and between study comparisons, has proven difficult due to the methodological challenges posed by the extant variability between studies. As a result child welfare agencies and program funding sources were left to their own devices to address the issue of foster care drift based upon the diverse research findings. By conducting a systematic empirical review of the existing literature the guesswork is removed. This researcher is not aware of the existence of any previous study that has systematically analyzed the research on race or ethnicity and foster care discharge. Therefore, the present study provides timely information necessary for the advancement of child welfare services. In order to be fiscally responsible, funding sources need to know the predictors of foster care drift so that the limited available funding will not be wasted on programs that are ineffective. More importantly, the present study seeks to

test whether minority clients in child welfare are treated differently thereby raising awareness upon which to build future interventions to address foster care drift.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study will answer the following research question: 1) Is there a greater likelihood that majority-white children will experience a more favourable foster care outcome than minority children as defined by a) a shorter length of in-care stay; b) reunification with family; c) guardianship; or d) adoption? The central hypotheses for this study take into consideration the two underlying theories; one which suggests that racial minorities receive differential treatment and one which assumes that a family's socio-economic status is a better predictor of foster care outcome than race or ethnicity. These central hypotheses can be stated as follows. 1) Being from a racial/ethnic minority is significantly associated with a less favourable foster care outcome. 2) Even when adjusting for the family's SES, the association between race/ethnicity and foster care outcomes will be both significant and unfavourable for minority children.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilizes a meta-analytic design. According to Glass (as cited in Wolf, 1986):

Meta-analysis refers to the analysis of analyses . . . the statistical analysis of a large collection of analysis results from individual studies for the purpose of integrating the findings. It connotes a rigorous alternative to the casual, narrative discussions of research studies which typify our attempts to make sense of the rapidly expanding research literature. (p. 11)

A meta-analysis “shifts the focus away from simply determining whether an effect is statistically significant towards determining both the direction and magnitude of an effect, and thus provides a more meaningful indicator of the relationship” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 441).

Unlike traditional literature reviews that at best provide a subjective comparison of various studies, a meta-analysis empirically analyzes the findings of prior research by first converting the statistical findings of individual studies to a common denominator. By pooling and averaging the individual effect sizes, the researcher is then able to compare outcome effects both between and across studies. By calculating the effect size, the meta-analytic process determines not only whether a relationship between the independent and dependent variable actually exists but also measures the size of that relationship. Thus, a meta-analysis provides a greater level of knowledge than a mere narrative overview.

Study Sample

The study sample was derived from a search of computerized data bases including Community of Scholars: Social Science, Digital Dissertations, Family Studies Abstracts, Health Sciences, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Social Sciences Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts and Violence and Abuse Abstracts. The following keyword scheme was utilized to conduct the search: (Black OR African American OR Native OR Aboriginal OR First Nations OR Asian OR Hispanic OR Latino OR race OR ethnic*) AND (foster care OR child welfare OR child protection) AND (adoption OR reunification OR length OR duration OR permanenc*).

The study sample included both published and unpublished studies in an effort to control publication bias. Therefore, a search for dissertations, conference papers and studies on the World Wide Web was completed to complement the search for published material. In addition, the bibliographic lists of all relevant studies were reviewed for other studies to include in this research project. As a further attempt to seek out Canadian studies contact was also made with a well-known Canadian child welfare researcher, Nico Trocmé on October 21, 2004.

The study sample was limited to those studies that examined the length of foster care stay or determinants of foster care discharge. The studies had to include race or ethnicity as an independent variable and be Canadian or American in origin. As presented in the literature review, Canada and the United States share similar foster care roots. It is believed that this similarity in their foster care systems will allow for generalizability of the findings. It should be noted, though, that a literature search resulted in a predominance of American studies. An inability to locate Canadian data for

this study proved futile. The lack of available Canadian research itself identified a need for further investigation and will be discussed later. Only studies in which the data was obtained from 1980 until present were included in this study. The year 1980 was chosen as a parameter because the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was implemented in the United States during that year. Given that there is a predominance of American studies and as this Act was imposed to reduce the incidence of foster care drift, it is believed that earlier studies may not reflect a current depiction of the length of foster care stay for children.

Studies that utilized a qualitative design or quantitative studies that lack sufficient detail to make an accurate racial/ethnic group comparison were excluded from this study. In the event that more than one study relied on the same data, a decision regarding which study to include was based upon codeability. The study that contained the most information for effect size calculations would be chosen for the sample over less detailed studies. If two or more studies relied on the same data and were equally descriptive, the study with the most current publication date would be utilized for the analysis.

A preliminary search of the databases utilizing the keywords produced approximately 300 studies. After eliminating studies that did not comply with the inclusion criteria and incorporating those studies that were located through a bibliographic review, the search produced a sample of 54 studies.

Analytic Plan

In order to compare the studies in the sample, each individual study was coded to identify pertinent information for across study and between study comparisons. Each study was coded by identification data (e.g. publication year, type of publication),

research design characteristics (e.g. cross sectional/retrospective/prospective cohorts, sample size), participant race/ethnicity and foster care outcome (e.g. adoption, reunification, long-term foster care, guardianship or other). In addition, as the literature review has suggested that variables other than race and in particular socio-economic status, may be determinants of foster care drift, moderator variables (e.g. SES, age, gender, urbanity, family structure) were included in the codebook. As an example, although it may be of interest to find that the pooled main effect of race is significantly associated with the length of foster care stay, greater knowledge is obtained if this relationship remains statistically significant once adjusted for socio-economic status. Such results would dispel the theory that poverty, not race/ethnicity, accounts for the disparity in foster care discharge. Therefore, in order to account for the potential impact of moderator variables on the relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome study findings that were both unadjusted and adjusted for moderator variables were recorded accordingly. All variables included in this meta-analysis are outlined in the study's codebook (see Appendix).

An effect size was calculated for each white/non-white comparison for every foster care outcome that pertained to a) length of care; b) adoption; c) reunification or d) guardianship. Subsequently one single study may report findings on more than one foster care outcome and/or more than one white/non-white comparison. If a single race/outcome hypothesis fit the inclusion criteria for this research it was treated as a separate study for analysis. As a result, the total 'lines of data' for this study will exceed the number of total studies in the sample.

Given that the tests of statistical significance used in the sample studies vary from one study to the next (e.g. χ^2 , M , OR) a standardized effect size was required to allow for comparisons between studies that aren't measured on the same scale. The scale free metric chosen for this study was the odds ratio (OR). The odds ratio was selected as the preferred effect size metric as it is conducive to studies in which both variables are dichotomous and it describes the relationship between the odds of an event occurring (e.g. children experiencing a favourable outcome or not) (Cooper, 1998). Therefore the metric for each individual study was converted to an odds ratio scale for ease of comparison. An OR effect size greater than 1 indicates that the hypothesis is substantiated in that whites experience a more favourable foster care outcome than non-whites. If there were two different measures of the same outcome variable then the arithmetic mean of the two calculated effect sizes was used in this meta-analysis.

Once coded each study was entered into an SPSS database for statistical computation. Prior to analysis the data was visually checked for data entry error. Where necessary, due to a small sampling of particular variables and/or diversity of the information collected, the data was re-coded to allow for study comparison. For example, the data collection years were re-coded to reflect the most recent year of the data collection range. The age of the participants, originally recorded by age ranges, was also re-coded into groups that best reflected the various age groupings. Similarly, the study location was re-coded into geographical regions as opposed to various combinations of cities and districts. Given that the sample consisted of a small number of Hispanic (n = 20), Latinos (n = 29) and Hispanic/Latinos (n = 1) these individual categories were combined into one group entitled Hispanic/Latino.

Analysis of Results

Descriptive Statistics

The review of the effect of race on a favourable foster care discharge is based upon 183 study hypotheses (N = 183) from 54 individual studies. The descriptive statistics of the sample are outlined in Tables 1 – 5.

Table 1			
Descriptive Profiles of Study Types and Contexts: Percentage Distribution (N = 183)			
Study Type		Study Sample Context	
<u>Publication Type</u>	%	<u>Urbanity</u>	%
Journal Article	61.2	Mixed	74.3
Dissertation	18.6	Urban	20.8
Web-based report	12.6	Rural	4.4
Thesis	7.7		
<u>Publication Year</u>	%	<u>Region</u>	%
1983 – 1989	4.9	West	57.9
1990 – 1994	10.9	National	20.8
1995 – 1999	18.6	Mid-West	5.5
2000 – 2005	65.6	Northwest	4.9
		Northeast	4.4
		South-Southeast	4.4
		Southwest	2.2
<u>Mdn</u> = 2001, <u>M</u> = 1999, <u>SD</u> = 4.44		<u>Data Collection Year</u> ^a	%
		1980 – 1989	6.6
		1990 – 1994	25.1
		1995 – 1999	59.0
		2000 – 2002	9.3

^a Data collection year spans were quite diverse so they were re-coded into the above groupings utilizing the most recent data collection year (e.g. 1987 – 1992 becomes 1990 – 1994). Studies whose data collection years preceded 1980 were not included in the study.

The sample represented a cross-section of both published and unpublished material thereby protecting against publication bias. Almost two-thirds of the studies in the sample (61.2%) were obtained from professional journals while the remaining studies (38.9%) were from unpublished sources. A majority of the studies (65.5%) were published in the 21st century although the sample included representation from the past two decades. The data upon which these studies were based was predominantly collected between 1995 – 1999. The increase in the number of studies that have explored the determinants associated with foster care outcomes over the past 25 years suggests that there is an increased interest and desire to resolve the issue of foster care drift. Almost all of the studies (94.1%) drew their samples from mixed urban/rural or strictly urban locations. Very few studies (4.4%) focused solely on rural communities. Over half of the sample studies (57.9%) were conducted in the Western United States of America while a smaller proportion (20.8%) utilized national samples. The remainder represented a scattering of studies from throughout the U.S.A. There were no Canadian studies in the sample although every effort was made to locate Canadian studies through computerized searches, bibliographic searches and contact with a well-known Canadian researcher in the area of child welfare.

Table 2		
Descriptive Profiles of Study Research Design Characteristics: Percentage Distributions		
<u>Research Design</u>	<u>Randomly Selected</u>	86.3 %
Retrospective cohort	73.8 %	
Prospective cohort	13.7 %	
Cross-sectional	13.6 %	

Nearly three-quarters (73.8%) of the sample were retrospective studies (Table 2). There was almost an equal distribution of cross-sectional (13.6%) and prospective (13.7%) studies. Most of the studies in the sample (86.3%) randomly selected the participants for their research.

Table 3			
Descriptive Profiles of Study Participants and Program Types: Percentage Distributions			
<u>Children's Age</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Kinship Care</u>	<u>%</u>
Newborn – 1 year	8.4	Yes	22.2
Newborn – 6 years	18.6	No	42.4
Newborn – 12/13 years	12.6	Mixed	35.4
Newborn – 12+/13+ years	60.5		
<u>Sample Gender (% Female)</u>			
37 – 39%	2.4		
40 – 49%	32.9		
50 – 59%	61.2		
60 – 69%	3.5		
<u>Mdn = 52.0; M = 50.7; SD = 5.1</u>			

Table 3 describes the profiles of the study participants and program types. The children that were sampled ranged from newborn to 21 years. Approximately one-third (27%) of the studies limited their sample to children under the age of 6 years. A smaller proportion of studies (12.6%) included children in their sample whose ages spanned from infancy to early adolescence of 12 or 13 years. The majority of the studies (60.5%) sampled children from all age groups. The participants in the sample studies lived in a variety of foster care placements ranging from regular foster care, including group and/or institutionalized settings, to kinship/family care whereby the child was placed in the care

of a relative. While some studies differentiated between those children placed in kinship (22.2%) and non-kinship (42.4%) placements, other studies included children from a mixture of all placement settings (35.4%). A majority of the studies (94.1%) included nearly an equal number of males and females in their sample ($Mdn = 52.0$; $M = 50.7$; $SD = 5.1$).

The descriptive profiles of the study sample sizes are outlined in Table 4. The total sample sizes for the various racial/ethnic comparisons ranged from 34 – 404,416 children ($Mdn = 3,871$; $M = 26,139$; $SD = 63,336$). Over half of the study hypotheses (56.3%) had a sample of 2,500 or more while approximately one quarter of the study hypotheses (24.1%) utilized samples of 25,000 or more. Only a small proportion (10.3%) utilized a sample of 99 children or less.

Individually, sample sizes for the white-majority sample varied from 15 – 175,099 children ($Mdn = 1,908$; $M = 11,107$; $SD = 23,533$). Almost one-half of the study hypotheses (48.4%) involved a white-majority sample of 2,500 children or more while 20.3% utilized a sample of less than 100 children. The African-American sample size ranged from 20 – 132,345 children and shared a similar break down to that of the white-majority. Over two-fifths (41.5%) of the study hypotheses involving African-American children included a sample of 2,500 or more while 18.5% used a sample of less than 100 children. The Hispanic/Latino sample ranged from 17 – 21,116 children ($Mdn = 1,985$; $M = 1,349$; $SD = 4,635$). Although 40% of the Hispanic/Latino studies utilized a sample size of 2,500 or more children there weren't any Hispanic/Latino samples comprised of 25,000 or more. Slightly over two-thirds (34%) of the Hispanic/Latino study hypotheses utilized a smaller sample of less than 100 children.

Table 4			
Descriptive Profiles of Study Sample Sizes by Racial/Ethnic Groups: Percentage Distributions			
Combined Sample Total	%	Racial/Ethnic Sample	%
<u>Sample Size</u> (n = 174)		<u>White-majority Sample Size</u> (n = 153)	
34 - 99	10.3	15 - 99	20.3
100 - 499	14.4	100 - 499	9.8
500 - 2,499	19.0	500 - 2,499	21.5
2,500 - 24,999	32.2	2,500 - 24,999	38.6
25,000 - 404,416	24.1	25,000 - 175,099	9.8
<u>Mdn</u> = 3,871; <u>M</u> = 26,139; <u>SD</u> = 63,336		<u>Mdn</u> = 1,908; <u>M</u> = 11,107; <u>SD</u> = 23,533	
		<u>African-American Sample Size</u> (n = 65)	
		20 - 99	18.5
		100 - 499	18.4
		500 - 2,499	21.6
		2,500 - 24,999	26.1
		25,000 - 132,345	15.4
		<u>Mdn</u> = 1,481; <u>M</u> = 12,559; <u>SD</u> = 28,492	
		<u>Hispanic/Latino Sample Size</u> (n = 50)	
		17 - 99	34.0
		100 - 499	12.0
		500 - 2,499	14.0
		2,500 - 21,116	40.0
		<u>Mdn</u> = 1,985; <u>M</u> = 1,349; <u>SD</u> = 4,635	

Unfortunately only 10 study hypotheses included Native/Aboriginal children.

The Native/Aboriginal sample ranged from 33 - 9,230 children (M = 3,838; SD = 4,642).

Twenty per cent of the Native/Aboriginal study samples included less than 100 children. Another 40% of the study samples ranged from 100 - 499 children while a subsequent 40% had a sample size of 2,500 – 9,230 children.

Effect Sizes – Majority-white vs. African American

A pooled effect size (ES) was calculated for each separate foster care outcome (e.g. reunification, adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care, other) and for a combined outcome category entitled 'disadvantage'. This latter category, which incorporates all of the various foster care outcomes, measures the probability that African American children are more likely to be disadvantaged by remaining in care as opposed to exiting by way of reunification, adoption or guardianship. An effect size was calculated for the likelihood that an African American child would be disadvantaged. Also recorded were any individual outcomes that statistically differed from this overall effect. The results for these effect sizes as well as any other moderating factors that are statistically significant or neared statistical significance are displayed in Table 5.

The findings reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between the foster care outcomes of African American and majority-white children. African American children are 60% more likely to be disadvantaged by experiencing a less favourable foster care outcome (OR = 1.60; $p < .05$). This is quite a significant difference between these two populations and supports the belief that race/ethnicity is associated with foster care drift.

Only four studies adjusted for the socio-economic status of the majority-white vs. black sample. Of these four studies, two studies pertained to an outcome of long-term foster care and two studies pertained to an outcome of reunification. The sample size

ranged from 201 – 890 children with a combined sample size of 2,421 children ($M = 605$; $SD = 290$). All of the studies used a random sample except the study with the largest sample size. This same study also used a cross-sectional design while the remaining studies were retrospective ($n = 2$) or prospective ($n = 1$).

<u>Study Outcomes</u>	<u>Number of Studies</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>
Disadvantage ^a	65	1.60**
SES-adjusted	4	2.39*
Family-adjusted	3	1.35**
Long-term foster care ^b	15	2.02**
SES-adjusted	2	1.59*
Guardianship ^b	6	0.74**
Year of Data Collection**		
1980 – 1986 ^c	6	1.23
1990 – 1994	18	1.92
1995 – 1999	34	1.41
2000 – 2002 ^c	7	2.07
Age of Child**		
Newborn – 1 year	4	1.55
Newborn – 6 years ^d	11	2.24
Newborn – 12/13 years	7	1.67
Newborn – 12+/13+ years	39	1.42

^a Overall effect across all outcomes = reunification, adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care and other.

^b These outcomes differed significantly from the overall effect.

^c The unadjusted OR differs significantly from all others; Duncan's multiple means test.

^d The unadjusted OR differs significantly from all others; Duncan's multiple means test.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$

Note. Primary study odds ratios were weighted by study sample sizes (Greenland, 1987).

When the probability of experiencing a less favourable outcome was adjusted for socio-economic status, the between group difference was maintained suggesting that

African- American children are still less likely to exit care but the odds of being disadvantaged only neared statistical significance (OR = 2.39; $p < .10$). This implies that factors other than poverty alone account for the differential effect when exploring a foster care outcome measure between African American and majority-white children.

Three studies adjusted for family factors (e.g. one parent vs. two-parent families). Two of the studies were retrospective and relatively recent, covering the data collection years of 1992 – 1996. Both of these studies used large random sample sizes ($n = 6,578$ and $n = 2,516$) and included children spanning the ages of 12+ years. The third study utilized a prospective design and a smaller non-random sample ($n = 689$). Although the children in this sample ranged from 0 – 18 years, nearly 50% of the children were preschoolers. This study was also somewhat dated, spanning the data collection years of 1980 – 1986, which were the years immediately following the legislative changes to reduce foster care drift. After adjusting for family factors, African American children were still 35% less likely to be reunified, adopted or discharged to an alternate family member acting as a guardian (OR = 1.35; $p < .05$). Therefore, although the parental configuration of the child's family may impact the probability of a favourable discharge, the existence of a differential outcome based upon other facets of one's race/ethnicity is maintained.

When individualizing discharge measures two outcomes differed significantly from the overall 'disadvantage' effect. Interestingly, these two outcomes of long-term foster care and guardianship supported opposing views in regard to the fate of African-American foster children. Fifteen studies explored the relationship of race/ethnicity and long-term foster care. Similar to previous findings, there was a statistically significant

difference between black and white children. African-American children were twice as likely to remain in foster care than their majority-white counterparts (OR = 2.02; $p < .05$) and when the odds ratio was adjusted for socio-economic status, the between group difference once again was maintained although it only neared statistical significance (OR = 1.59; $p < .10$). Conversely, the six studies that explored exit to guardianship found that African-American children fared better than their white majority counterparts (OR = .74; $p < .05$). While the fate of African-American children is bleak if awaiting reunification or adoption, the prospects for discharge to a guardian are favourable.

Statistically significant differences were also noted between the various years of data collection and between the age groups of the children upon admission to care. More recent data collection years revealed a greater racial/ethnic difference between African-American and majority-white children than previous years. African Americans from samples that were drawn from the year 2000 onward were twice as likely to have a less favourable discharge from care. This indicates that the gap between whites and blacks is widening.

In regard to the effect of a child's age upon admission, African American children between the ages of birth to six years were significantly more likely to be disadvantaged than those from other age groups (OR = 2.24; $p < .05$). When the age grouping included only infants or older children the differential effect was reduced. The difference in the probability of favourable discharge for very young and older children of black or white heritage was more closely related although African American children are still disadvantaged.

Effect Sizes – Majority-white vs. Hispanic/Latino

Fifty-four studies explored the difference between majority-white children and Hispanic/Latino children in regard to foster care outcome. The findings that were statistically significant or neared statistical significance are displayed in Table 6. This meta-analysis determined that Hispanic/Latino children are 25% more likely to be disadvantaged than majority-white children but this finding only neared statistical significance. (OR = 1.25; $p < .10$). None of the studies adjusted for socio-economic status and an effect size was not calculated for any other factors given that an insufficient number of studies were available for meaningful comparison. Separate foster care outcomes for reunification, adoption or guardianship, when comparing Hispanic/Latino and majority-white foster children, did not differ significantly from the overall effect of being disadvantaged.

<u>Study Outcomes</u>	<u>Number of Studies</u>	<u>Odds Ratio</u>
Disadvantage ^a	54	1.25*
Region**		
National	11	1.21
Mid-West ^b	2	2.72
West	39	1.20
Northeast	1	1.00
Northwest	1	0.54

^a Overall effect across all outcomes = reunification, adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care and other.

^b This group's unadjusted OR differs significantly from all others; Duncan's multiple means test.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$

Note: None of these studies adjusted for SES in any way.

Note: Primary study odds ratios were weighted by study sample sizes (Greenland, 1987).

A difference was noted, though, between the various geographic regions in which the foster children were residing. Children from the mid-west United States are significantly less likely to experience a favourable discharge than children from other areas (OR = 2.72; $p < .05$). These results should be interpreted with caution given that there were only two studies in the mid-west sample with a combined sample size of 2,239. Furthermore, the study with the larger sample ($n = 1960$) only included infants, which may have impacted the findings. For example, given the increased vulnerability of very young children the reunification process may have been deterred to ensure the child's safety.

Effect Sizes – Majority-white vs. Native/Aboriginal

Only ten studies compared the foster care outcome for Native/Aboriginal and majority-white children. Based upon this small sample a Native/Aboriginal child is 16% more likely to experience a less favourable discharge from foster care than a majority-white child (OR = 1.16; $p < .05$). There were no individual foster care outcomes that differed significantly from the overall effect. None of the studies in this sample adjusted for socio-economic status. The small sample and a limited number of moderating variables preventing further analysis of this racial comparison group.

Discussion

The current study pooled and averaged the findings of 54 independent studies (183 study outcomes) that analyzed the association between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome. This study sought to determine if majority-white children experience a more favourable foster care outcome as evidenced by a shorter-term stay in foster care or a higher probability of reunification with family, guardianship or adoption. These particular outcomes were deemed to be more favourable given the propensity for permanency within a family setting, a facet uncharacteristic of foster care which is often fraught with on-going separation and instability. Furthermore, this study systematically explored the relationship of other hypothesized determinants of foster care discharge in an effort to identify which underlying factors may contribute to any observed racial/ethnic disparities.

The study inclusion criteria spanned a period of 25 years and included any North American study, published or not, which explored race/ethnicity and foster care outcome. Although this inclusion criteria was quite liberal not one Canadian study was located, highlighting a large gap in the Canadian child welfare knowledge base. Of the 54 studies, most of which utilized large retrospective samples, several key findings were made.

This study has demonstrated that children do receive differential treatment within the foster care system as minority children are more apt to experience a less favourable outcome than their majority-white counterparts. In fact, the disparity can be quite vast as evidenced by a large 60% difference in the probability of experiencing a favourable discharge from foster care between majority-white and African-American children. Although Hispanic/Latino children fared slightly better than African-Americans they

were still 25% less likely to experience a short-term stay in foster care or be discharged to family or adopted. A similar trend was noted with Native/Aboriginal children and although the effect size was smaller (OR = 1.16; $p < .05$), it is suspected that this may be attributed to a small sample size rather than a more favourable outcome.

A couple of anomalies were noted whereby two foster care outcomes differed significantly from the overall effect. African-American children were twice as likely to remain in long-term foster care. There are a couple of plausible explanations for this finding. The first rationale is merely based upon the relationship between the various exit outcomes. If an African-American child is substantially less likely to exit care through adoption or reunification with parents, as in the current scenario, then it is only reasonable to conclude that the child would have a much greater probability of remaining in care. The second possibility to explain a larger trend of long-term care may have connections to the debate surrounding trans-racial adoption. Deliberations regarding the merits of trans-racial adoption have been on-going since the initial position statement of the National Association of Black Social Workers was made in 1972. Although the NABSW never intended that children be denied permanency at the expense of same race adoption, one questions if the goal to preserve racial integrity may have resulted in extended time in care while awaiting a family who racially matched the child.

The second anomaly pertained to the discharge of African-American children to guardianship arrangements. The study findings determined that African-American children were more likely to be discharged to a legal guardian than their majority-white counterparts. This finding did not hold true for Hispanic/Latino or Native/Aboriginal children. One questions why this particular outcome is so much more apparent for

African-Americans. Guardianship, depending on the state, has varied definitions although in general it refers to children being placed in the custody of someone other than the parents (e.g. aunt; cousin) who then assumes the legal responsibility to make decisions regarding the child. It may or may not be accompanied by a subsidy and families may or may not receive on-going supportive services from a child protection facility. It would be worthy to further explore this trend toward guardianship for African-American children as there appears to be some underlying factors, whether financial, cultural or service related, that support the discharge of children from care and provides them with a long-standing family alternative. By identifying these currently unknown factors, it may be possible to replicate the scenario for other children thereby increasing the number of children who are able to leave care.

Although attempts were made to explore various factors that could account for the racial/ethnic disparity in foster care outcome, a review of potential moderating variables was limited. Not all of the studies adjusted for other possible determinants of foster care discharge and those that did tend to focus on personal and/or familial characteristics of the child and their family. Therefore the resultant sub-sample restricted the opportunity to explore a more diverse range of moderating factors, and in particular organizational or service related factors, as these variables were either not available or not apparent in a sufficient number to complete a meaningful analysis. This meta-analysis was able to determine that a couple of family background characteristics, namely SES and single parent households, account for some of the difference noted in the foster care outcome between blacks and whites but much more is yet to be known about other social constructs that perpetuate the foster care disadvantage experienced by children-of-colour.

Given the debate surrounding poverty as a determinant of foster care discharge it is surprising that so few studies accounted for the economic circumstances of families. The pooled effect size of those studies that did account for social position suggests that other factors beyond one's income account for the difference noted between minority and non-minority children. This finding only neared statistical significance and was based upon a relatively small sample size that referred to African-American comparisons only and two different foster care outcomes. It is therefore recommended that socio-economic status, as a determinant of foster care drift, receive additional attention in future studies in an effort to further explore the theory that poverty, not race/ethnicity, accounts for the abundance of children-of-colour who remain in the foster care system.

This study does give credence to the findings of Harris and Courtney (2003) in regard to family structure although the results were not identical. Harris and Courtney found that the reunification rates for blacks and whites are similar when taking family structure into consideration. This study found that after controlling for the number of caregivers in the primary family there was a slight decline in the odds of African-American children being disadvantaged. Although family structure accounted for some of the difference noted between majority-white and African-American children, as had been suggested, a racial disparity still remained.

Although this study confirms the theory that children-of-colour are more apt to remain in the foster care system as opposed to being discharged to family or adoption and supports the findings of some previous researchers (e.g. Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993; Courtney & Wong, 1996; Rodenborg, 2000) who have found that institutional discrimination in foster care is apparent, there is still much yet to be learned if this issue

is to be eradicated. If resolutions are to be implemented to address the inequity it is imperative that the sources of the discrimination be more clearly defined.

There are many questions left unanswered as to the underlying sources of this racial/ethnic disparity in foster care and as has been suggested by Glisson, Bailey and Post (2000), the inconsistent selection and operationalization of variables within the independent studies has only added to the confusion. For example, little in particular is known about the impact of organizational factors on foster care discharge. Does it make a difference if the caseworker shares the same race/ethnicity as the client? Do agencies that promote multicultural training expedite the rate at which children are discharged from care? Are there particular programs or service modalities that promote a more favourable outcome for children-of-colour? Are racial/ethnic minorities less likely to be disadvantaged if services are offered in-home vs. in-agency? Would a different outcome be observed if families were provided more concrete services (e.g. food, child care, transportation services) as opposed therapeutic intervention or parenting programs. If the funding body diverted funds to support subsidized guardianship or adoption would there be fewer children-of-colour in care? These questions and many others remain unanswered.

Although further studies are needed to clarify some of the unknowns in regard to the racial/ethnic disparity experienced by minority foster children, implementing change does not need to wait until future research is conducted. Change can start now with every one who is involved with the implementation of child welfare services to minority children and their families. Child welfare staff can educate themselves on racial/ethnic diversity in order to gain a better understanding of the culture and needs of these families.

The white middle-class values and standards by which families have been measured in the past can be pushed aside and replaced with ethnic sensitive standards.

More effort can be made to collect information on the racial/ethnic backgrounds of clients both for the purpose of acknowledging that everyone is different, so that services can be amended accordingly, but also to build, step by step, a database where one previously fails to exist. Child welfare agencies can recruit, where possible, staff from diverse backgrounds to complement the racial/ethnic population that is being served. If staff with various racial/ethnic backgrounds cannot be recruited for employment perhaps individuals in the community from various racial/ethnic backgrounds could act as consultants to staff who are working with minority families.

Pilot projects could also be undertaken whereby monies are redistributed to unique programs aimed to address the racial disparity for foster children-of-colour, followed by program evaluations to test their success. Management teams should lobby the government for out-of-care subsidies that will support extended family members who wish to care for their kin but lack the financial resources to do so.

Until such time that resolutions are implemented and the sources of racial/ethnic disparity are further clarified, children-of-colour will continue to endure the negative impacts of substitute care. As a result many children will continue to be exposed to geographical separations and less than optimum placement resources and treatment, due to limited availability. Furthermore, as noted by Mass and Engler (1959) these children may never be released from this fate until they reach an age of independence. Unfortunately, although time marches on, the current reality for many minority children in foster care still shares similarities to their foster predecessors from days gone by.

Hypotheses Support

The following is an overview of this study's research question and hypotheses and the corresponding findings as based upon the outcomes of this meta-analytic study. Any findings that are counter hypothetical will be displayed in bold print.

- Is there a greater likelihood that majority-white children will experience a more favourable foster care outcome than minority children as defined by a) a shorter length of in-care stay; b) reunification with family; c) guardianship; or d) adoption?

RESULTS:

- ✓ Majority-white children were compared to African-American, Hispanic/Latino and Native/Aboriginal children to determine which race would experience a more favourable foster care outcome. When comparing the overall disadvantage effects majority-white children consistently fared better, (OR = 1.60, OR = 1.25 and OR = 1.16 respectively). There is a greater likelihood that majority-white children will experience a more favourable foster care outcome.
- ✓ When comparing individual foster care outcomes, apart from the overall outcome effect, one foster care outcome was statistically

significant but not in the direction anticipated. African-American children have a greater likelihood than majority-white children to be discharged from foster care to a legal guardian who is not the child's parent (OR = .74).

- Being from a racial minority is significantly associated with a less favourable foster care outcome.

RESULT:

- ✓ Based on a compilation of all foster care outcomes racial/ethnic minorities are significantly associated with a less favourable foster care outcome. The hypothesis is supported.
- ✓ When comparing various individual methods of foster care exit, one racial minority surpasses all others when exiting to guardianship. African-American children who are discharged to a guardian fare better than all other race/ethnicities in this study. This was the only anomaly as all other exit modes favoured the white majority. **When examining individual modes of exit the hypothesis was not supported.**

- Even when adjusting for the family's SES, the association between race/ethnicity and foster care outcomes will be both significant and unfavourable for minority children.

RESULT:

- ✓ Very few studies adjusted for SES and all of the studies that were adjusted pertained to the comparison between African-American and majority-white children. After adjusting for socio-economic status, a differential outcome in support of majority-white children was maintained and neared significance suggesting that African-Americans are more likely to be disadvantaged. The hypothesis was supported although the finding only neared significance.

Strengths and Limitations

This study is original and timely given the emphasis on reducing foster care drift both from a child well-being and fiscal perspective. A review of the literature failed to locate any previous attempts to systemically integrate the findings related to one's race/ethnicity and the discharge from foster care. Therefore existing efforts to address the problem of foster care drift have been based on biased beliefs founded on conflicting research studies that may or may not be accurate. Unlike previous studies that individually have examined the relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome this meta-analysis, by design, culminates the findings across studies to determine if this relationship is truly significant. Furthermore, this study not only identifies the strength of this relationship in light of other personal, familial and service forces, but it also accounts for any contextual influences (e.g. sample size, research design, year of study) that may impact the findings. All of this data provides practical information that advances the knowledge base beyond the confines of more traditional research methodologies.

The results of this study will be of interest to those working within the child welfare field at all levels. This study assists in identifying the relative weight of race/ethnicity and foster care outcome in relation to other personal, familial or service factors (e.g. family structure, placement type). By identifying racial/ethnic biases and other determinants of foster care drift, this study seeks to raise the consciousness of child welfare staff thereby prompting a change in case management practices and promoting client advocacy. At a funding level, governments can become more fiscally responsible by ensuring that funded programs and services actually address the needs of those clients

who are more apt to experience foster care drift. As a result, all children, regardless of race/ethnicity, may finally have an equal opportunity to obtain a sense of permanence through reunification with family or adoption.

Although the results of this study are based on American data suggesting that the findings are more prevalent to the United States, given the similarities between the two foster care systems the information still has merit in Canada. This study demonstrates that there is a relationship between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome in the United States of America, opening the door to speculation that a similar pattern could exist elsewhere. When one considers the various Canadian articles highlighting the plight of Aboriginal children and the statistics which reflect the abundance of Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare agencies, it would not be presumptuous to believe that racial/ethnic minorities in child welfare institutions in Canada also experience less favourable foster care discharges than the white majority.

This study is limited, though, given the lack of Canadian studies in the sample. With the issue of foster care drift first being highlighted in 1959 by Mass and Engler, it is extremely surprising that not one Canadian study could be located. Perhaps, as Canada is considered to be a cultural mosaic, there is a belief that a problem does not exist; that race is not a factor impacting foster care discharge. Yet, in order for such a belief system to be sustained, there would need to be empirical knowledge to support this claim. As no such evidence exists, one questions the rationale for this lack of research.

Do Canadians prefer to remain ignorant and not know whether racial/ethnic minorities are treated differently from the white majority? Do Canadians fear that the results of such a study may not bode favourably with the cultural mosaic concept that

supports cultural diversity and equal opportunity for all Canadian people regardless of one's race or ethnicity? Do Canadians already suspect that a child welfare system fraught with differential treatment of minorities already exists but prefer to feign denial in an attempt to maintain the status quo? Some may suggest that Canada is interested in knowing more about the association between race/ethnicity and foster care outcome but the lack of a universal database whereby race/ethnicity is recorded poses a barrier to conduct research. Although it is true that child welfare agencies in Canada are often negligent when recording client race/ethnicity and there is not a universal database in Canada to collect child welfare statistics, the failure to rectify this known dilemma only raises further questions and suspicions. A failure to respond to this record-keeping dilemma only seeks to endorse any preferential treatment of those with Anglo ethnicity. More effort needs to be made to address the overabundance of Canadian minority children in care through empirical studies that will explore the association between race/ethnicity and foster care drift.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One objective of this systematic meta-analytic review was to determine whether or not minority children experience a less favourable foster care outcome as evidenced by longer foster care stays and a lesser probability of being discharged to family or adopted. The study findings confirm that across most foster care outcomes minority children are disadvantaged in comparison to their majority-white counterparts. Furthermore, this study attempted to clarify the underlying determinants that may account for an observed foster care difference. Although this study was able to clarify the existence of some factors that impede children-of-colour from experiencing a more favourable outcome the current study ultimately highlighted the degree to which very little is known about the factors which contribute to the observed racial/ethnic disparity.

For example, further research is warranted to ascertain the impact of a family's SES on the probability of foster care discharge. There is also a need to explore other determinants of foster care discharge and in particular those characteristics of child welfare agencies themselves, including their employees and the services they provide. This area is grossly under researched and although it may be uncomfortable to turn the spotlight on ourselves as child welfare agents, it is a necessary task that should have occurred before now. As a future consideration it would also be beneficial if prospective researchers became more standardized when defining their variables so as to build a common database whereby information may be critically compared and further analyzed. A common frustration during this review process related to an inability to explore some hypothesized determinants of foster care drift due to the sub-sample being too small.

As previously mentioned, the results of this study reflect the reality of the American foster care system as a search for Canadian data was futile. It is anticipated that a comparable pattern would be observed in Canada but based upon the numerous Aboriginal children within the Canadian child welfare system it is quite probable that an even larger effect size would exist. Canadian research in this area is much needed and the probability that children-of-colour receive differential treatment within the Canadian foster care system will never be confirmed until such time that studies are conducted utilizing Canadian data.

The findings of this study support the belief that children-of-colour are oppressed and victims of institutional racism. Institutional racism as defined by Mullaly (2002) includes circumstances whereby individuals are blocked from opportunities and social systems work in favour of the dominant group at the expense of others. Foster children-of-colour are not ensured the same opportunity to live in a family setting where they can build long-standing trusting relationships. They are denied the intrinsic right to security and belongingness that placement with a permanent family can bring; a right that is much more frequently afforded to the dominant class. Children-of-colour are more likely to remain in the foster care system and bear the negative impacts that substitute care imposes. This gross disparity between minority and non-minority children is only growing larger as evidenced by the increased effect size noted when comparing studies with more recent data collection years to those from the past. The time for action is long overdue.

Eliminating racial disparity in foster care starts with consciousness raising. The onus is on social workers, particularly those working in the field of child welfare, to bring

the plight of children-of-colour to the forefront and to advocate for change. In Canada, at a provincial level, universal statistics need to be gathered in regard to the race/ethnicity of child welfare families so that issues of racial/ethnic disparity cannot be denied. It is also recommended that further research be conducted to identify the social constructs that pose barriers preventing children from experiencing more favourable foster care outcomes. Future studies should not be limited to personal and familial descriptors, as doing so would suggest that the problem stems from the individual as opposed to institutional and societal systems that are fraught with inadequacies. Child welfare agencies need to be sensitive to the needs of racial/ethnic minorities and be prepared to offer services that accommodate cultural diversity. Funding bodies need to re-evaluate how existing monies are dispersed and divert funds into prevention and support programs as opposed to an ever increasing foster care system; a system that will always continue to be a part of the problem, not the solution.

Appendix A

Codebook for Primary Study Data Extraction

Study Identification:

Study ID # _____

APA Citation

Research Design:

- 1 Cross-Section
- 2 Retrospective cohort
- 3 Prospective cohort

Random Selection:

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

Ecological:

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

Location/Place: _____

Urbanity:

- 1 Urban
- 2 Rural
- 3 Mix
- 4 Not Identified

Data Collection Years: _____

Sample – Race/Ethnicity:

Total: _____

1. White/Anglo: _____

8. Latino: _____

2. Black: _____

9. Hispanic: _____

3. Asian: _____

10. Hispanic/Latino: _____

4. Pacific Islander: _____

11. Aboriginal/Native: _____

5. Asian/P.I.: _____

12. Multiracial: _____

6. Minority: _____

13. _____

7. Non-Minority: _____

14. _____

15. _____

Sample - Age:

Median: _____

Sample - Gender:

Percentage of girls: _____

Mean: _____

Age Range:

1. _____

6. _____

2. _____

7. _____

3. _____

8. _____

4. _____

9. _____

5. _____

10. _____

Sample – Other Characteristics:

% with Special Needs: _____

% from Single Parent: _____

% with Sibling in Care: _____

% residing in Kinship/Relative Care: _____

% residing in Regular Foster Care _____

% residing in Group Care: _____

% AFDC (Welfare) Eligible: _____

Sample included only 1st admission/spell
in care:

0 No

1 Yes

2 Unknown/ Not Specified

Sample included Juvenile Justice in
children:

0 No

1 Yes

2 Unknown/ Not Specified

Sample included siblings:

0 No

1 Yes

2. Unknown/ Not Specified

Racial Type Comparison:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. White/Anglo – Black | 9. White/Anglo - Minority |
| 2. White/Anglo – Hispanic | 10. Minority – Non-Minority |
| 3. White/Anglo – Latino | 11. _____ |
| 4. White/Anglo – Hispanic/Latino | 12. _____ |
| 5. Non-Hispanic – Hispanic | 13. _____ |
| 6. Hispanic – Black | 14. _____ |
| 7. White/Anglo – Asian | 15. _____ |
| 8. White/Anglo - Amer. Indian/Native | 16. _____ |

Placement Outcome Measure:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Reunification | 7. Reunification or Adoption |
| 2. Adoption complete or in process
Guardianship | 8. Reunification or Adoption or |
| 3. Guardianship/Family Placement | 9. AWOL/Run Away |
| 4. Guardianship/Reunification | 10. _____ |
| 5. Long term foster care | 11. _____ |
| 6. Emancipation | 12. _____ |

Unadjusted Race/Ethnicity Outcome:

OR = _____ . _____ r = _____ . _____

p – level: 1. NS 3. p < .01
 2. p < .05 4. p < .001

Adjusted for SES (income, education, AFDC eligibility, or occupation):

OR = _____ . _____ r = _____ . _____

p – level: 1. NS 3. p < .01
 2. p < .05 4. p < .001

Adjusted for Other Factor(s):

OR = _____ . _____ r = _____ . _____

p – level: 1. NS 3. p < .01
 2. p < .05 4. p < .001

If so, which factors (check all that apply):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Family Structure | 13. Reason for Placement |
| 2. Frequency of Family Visitation | 14. Placement Resource Type |
| 3. Urbanity of Primary Residence | 15. Special Needs –
intellectual/psychological |

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 4. Services provided to Family | 16. Special Needs – physical |
| 5. Age of Primary Caretaker | 17. Caseworker experience/training |
| 6. Age of child at admission | 18. Caseworker ethnicity |
| 7. Child's Gender | 19. No. of Caseworkers |
| 8. Year of admission | 20. Frequency of Caseworker
Visits/Contacts |
| 9. Prior admission(s) to care | 21. Caseload size |
| 10. Pre-placement services | 22. _____ |
| 11. No. of alternate care placements | 23. _____ |
| 12. Sibling(s) in-care | 24. _____ |

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Footnotes

¹ As each province and territory in Canada is governed by its own child welfare legislation, the definition of a child in care including the age of majority for service termination varies throughout Canada. Furthermore, statistical reporting procedures differ throughout the country so that required data or reporting timelines in one area of Canada may differ elsewhere. Due to these diversities Canada does not have a central database to collect child welfare statistics. Therefore, it is difficult to determine an accurate number of children in care in Canada and to compare statistics from one province or territory to the next.

Vita Auctoris

Laura Wygiera-Mitchell was born in 1963 in Chatham, Ontario. She obtained her B.S.W. degree from the University of Windsor in 1988. She is a candidate for the Master's degree in Social Work at the University of Windsor with plans to graduate in October 2006. Laura has worked in the field of child welfare for the past eighteen years and is currently employed by Chatham-Kent Children's Services, as a child protection supervisor.