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An exploratory study of “treatment” as political process: A qualitative analysis of the experiences of “involuntary clients” in public child welfare

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Case Western Reserve University, 1991
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF "TREATMENT"
AS POLITICAL PROCESS

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
"IN VOLUNTARY CLIENTS" IN PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE

by

WILLIAM DENNIS DIORIO

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Howard Goldstein, D.S.W.

Social Welfare
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
January 17, 1991
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF "TREATMENT"
AS POLITICAL PROCESS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
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CHILD WELFARE

Abstract

by

WILLIAM DENNIS DIORIO

A study was designed to explore parents' reactions to
the authority of public child welfare caseworkers.
Thirteen "involuntary clients" involved with a large
public child welfare agency in Ohio served as subjects.
Semi-structured interviews with each of the subjects
focussed on parental perceptions of "interventions" by
caseworkers and the "meaning" of the experience for each
subject as he or she became involved with, or had
children in the custody of, a public agency. Interviews
were audio tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed
through phenomenological hermeneutics. Formal reports to
the agency and the circumstances of each of the subjects,
as contained in the case record, were also
documented and interpreted. The findings indicated (a)
that parents did not know and understand the nature and
extent of the legal authority that was vested in the
agency, nor their own legal rights. Parents perceived (b) that the agency had the "power" to intervene in their families at any time and to "take" their children away, (c) that the nature and scope of the exercise of that "power" varied, depending on the assigned caseworker, and (d) that some caseworkers "violated" their "rights."
Parents perceived that being involved with, or having children in the custody of, the agency resulted in some kind of "loss" for them and their family. Parents perceived that they were constrained by the "power" of the agency, but believed they were "free" to make choices and to take responsibility for "getting their children back" or for "getting the agency out of their lives."
Most significantly, parents perceived that the only way they could regain custody of their children or "free" themselves from involvement with the agency was to "cooperate": an adaptive response that served to conceal a parent's anguish, and dissent, but intended to influence, sway, or persuade the caseworker to act in accord with the parent's wishes and interests, i.e. getting the agency to "return" children to parental custody to "close its case." The implications for further research, social work practice, and child welfare policy are considered.
In December, 1944, Hitler's Fifth Panzer Army surrounded the small, Belgian town of Bastogne and repeatedly failed to overrun its vastly outnumbered defenders, the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army.

Among the Americans was a First Sergeant.

This is dedicated to the memory of my father

DANIEL PETER DIORIO

who taught me to never give up.
PREFACE

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research problem, the purposes of the study, and the conceptual background underpinning the research questions. Chapter 2 offers a thorough discussion of qualitative research methodology, along with a description of a hermeneutic approach to the analysis, and interpretation, of data. Chapter 3 presents a profile of the parents who participated in the study, including a description of the formal "reports" that served to "introduce" them to this public child welfare agency. Extensive excerpts from the transcripts of interviews with the parents and from documents contained in each of the "case records," as maintained by the agency, offer a penetrating view of the circumstances of these families. Chapter 4 summarizes the researcher's interpretation of data gathered during the interviews and provides compelling excerpts of parents' perceptions of the agency's use of authority and "power," the "meaning" of their experiences---including the loss of custody of their children---perceptions of personal freedom, and their attempts to "resist" the agency's actions through adaptive strategies of "cooperation," "withdrawal," and "engagement." Finally, Chapter 5 provides the study's conclusions and their
implications for further research, social work practice, and child welfare policy development.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the support and friendship of William J. Cardina and Mead Wilkins. Without them, eighteen months of field work would have been unbearable and probably impossible.

Professor Howard Goldstein is principally responsible for rescuing and inspiring a tired doctoral student. I will always remember his teaching, advice and constant encouragement.

During "the decade" of my doctoral study, my wife, Mary Eileen, has given me three children, her love, and her support. With her, I can do anything.

Finally, the love of my children, Brianne, Billy, and Caitlin, has filled my life. This achievement, and anything that follows, will never be as important.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

..."As he was re-entering the next room the opposite door opened and Frau Grubach showed herself. He saw her only for an instant, for no sooner did she recognize him than she was obviously overcome by embarrassment, apologized for intruding, vanished, and shut the door again with the utmost care. 'Come in, do,' he would just have had time to say. But he merely stood holding his papers in the middle of the room, looking at the door, which did not open again, and was only recalled to attention by a shout from the warders, who were sitting at a table by the open window and, as he now saw, devouring his breakfast. 'Why didn't she come in?', he asked. 'She isn't allowed to,' said the tall warder, 'since you're under arrest.' But how can I be under arrest? And particularly in such a ridiculous fashion?' 'So now you're beginning it all over again?' said the warder, dipping a slice of bread and butter into the honey-pot. 'We don't answer such questions.'"

Franz Kafka
The Trial

I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

After a review of several national studies of the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the United States, Leroy Pelton (1978) concluded that the "lower socioeconomic classes are disproportionately represented among all child abuse and neglect cases known to public agencies, to the extent that an overwhelming percentage—indeed, the vast majority—of the families in these

1.
cases live in poverty or near-poverty circumstances" (p.610). Clearly, despite professional references to child maltreatment as "classless", the "involuntary" and "resistant" clients that are served by public child welfare agencies are primarily poor. Isabel Wolock and Bernard Horowitz (1979) studied 380 "maltreating" families that received AFDC and reported these sobering conclusions:

Our results show a consistent pattern of a world of great poverty for welfare families, one in which they and the communities in which they live are without many of the things most Americans regard as essential for a minimal standard of living. The maltreating parents have more children encountered greater material, physical, and social deprivation when they were growing up, and are currently living in even more difficult material circumstances, and are more socially isolated than other welfare families. In short, these families are the poorest of the poor. (Wolock and Horowitz, 1979, p.186).

Stephen Magura and Beth Moses (1984) surveyed 250 "multiproblem" families involved with three, large public welfare agencies, two of which delivered child protective services. Sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America, their study attempted to determine the status of each family in eleven areas of concern relative to child well-being, utilizing a client-based "outcome measure" to evaluate the provision of child welfare services. Among other findings, Magura and Moses discovered that "clients in this study repeatedly testified to the pervasive,
deleterious influence of material deprivation on their children, both directly in the area of physical child care, and indirectly in the area of parental stress, anxiety, and depression" (p.109).

In conclusion, there is evidence that a significant relationship exists between poverty and child maltreatment in the United States, thus creating a disproportionate vulnerability among poor families to public child welfare "interventions", including the abrogation of parental custody and the surrender of minor children.

While some journalists have acknowledged their plight (Zegart, 1989; Brannigan, 1989), remarkably few efforts have been made in the field of social work to document the perceptions and to understand the experiences of "involuntary clients" who are involved with public child welfare agencies. Furthermore, despite the conclusions of several studies, and the recognition of the need for such research (Bush, et. al., 1977; Giordano, 1977; Maluccio, 1979; Lagura, 1982), evaluation of the "outcomes" of child welfare service delivery, from the perspective of the parent, has been neglected or avoided.¹ There appear to be several reasons.

¹ One exception is a study by Jenkins and Norman (1975) that documented the emotional suffering, or "filial deprivation", of parents whose children had been "removed" from their legal custody and placed in
First, the absence of such research in the field of child welfare continues to reflect its historical preoccupation with "child-saving," as opposed to any truly balanced consideration of the needs, rights, and interests of parents who have "failed" to provide "adequate care," "protection," and "guidance" of their children and whose "authority" and "responsibility" has consequently been replaced with the "power"---and "benevolence"---of the juvenile court judge. The professional "discovery" of the "drift" of children in foster care, as well as public reaction to increased reports of child sexual abuse during the past decade have clearly sustained---indeed, intensified---this child-centered ideology. Even Heger and Hunzeker's (1988) recent discussion of "empowerment-based practice" in public child welfare limits attention to what agencies might do to "empower" parents to successfully assume the responsibilities of child rearing, not to reduce their vulnerability to state intrusion, to assert their rights and interests, or to seek redress of their grievances as a result of the actions, or inactions, of the agency, the juvenile court, or the child welfare caseworker, herself. In spite of this shortcoming, the authors paint a

---

compelling picture of the circumstances of the majority of parents who must contend with a public child welfare caseworker at their front door:

For a variety of reasons, the adults likely to experience the most extensive state intervention in their family life are the poor, minorities, and female single parents; they are people who already are significantly disempowered. Public agency clientele come disproportionately from disempowered groups for a number of reasons that have been explored in the literature: greater contact with public-sector service providers who are likely to report neglect and abuse, the tendency to diagnose poor children as abused and the nonpoor as accidentally injured,...and higher incidence of some types of child welfare problems in families with the fewest resources. Not only are the majority of public-agency clients from relatively powerless groups, but they can become further disempowered in the course of investigation, referral to juvenile court, adjudication, removal of their children, placement of their children with others, and ultimately perhaps termination of parental rights (Heger and Hunzeker, 1988, p. 499).

Second, the absence of such studies appears to be the result of the more general lack of interest in the development of expanded knowledge about the use of authority in social work practice with "involuntary clients." For social workers who provide child protective services on a daily basis, "practice" must proceed on the basis of general assumptions about the use of coercion and its effect on the "casework" relationship with parents accused of child abuse or neglect.

Little is known about how mandated clients perceive their in-voluntary status and what expectations they have about how their mandated social workers
will use authority. Research about client perception of these issues is a crucial next step in development of practice technology for work with mandated clients. (Hutchinson, 1987, p.594).

Furthermore, recognition of the need and importance of client-based evaluations of public child welfare service delivery may actually be deterred by the process and structure of the "professional" casework relationship, itself, especially with "involuntary clients" who stand accused of abusing or neglecting their children.

Because the worker as 'expert' controls the interactions, she may not treat clients' perceptions and suggestions with the seriousness they deserve. That is, she may listen to a client's point of view, so that she can evaluate it and translate it back to the client, rather than being open to a real exchange of views. Ironically, then, the client's participation may be sharply limited by the worker's expertise. In viewing clients as less than equal participants, workers may end up treating them with subtle, and not so subtle, disrespect. The fact that client evaluations of service are rarely done is strong evidence of how little real seriousness is given to clients' perceptions. (Rhodes, 1986, p. 168).

For example, in Magura and Moses' (1984) study, 25% of the 250 families that were surveyed expressed a "fundamental disagreement" with the child protective services that they were receiving, and as many as 60% had voiced "at least one important criticism" of the agency with whom they were involved:

The validity of these clients' perceptions may be a lesser issue than the mechanism for dealing with sincere disaffection and resentment. What recourse do clients have when they perceive the caseworker
or the agency to be unresponsive, unfair, or ineffectual? How successful can casework be under such circumstances? In foster care, case reviews are being established that help deal with such problems but in protective services no corresponding mechanism is generally available. (p.110).

Indeed, how "involuntary clients" perceive and interpret their experiences in the process of protective service delivery may prove to be critical, especially in light of current analyses of the "outcomes" of child welfare service delivery under "permanency planning", or since passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. "Recent trends away from the use of foster care underscore the seriousness of reassessing in-home services and re-unification," conclude Richard Barth and Marianne Berry (1987). "Children who have been abused or neglected and remain at home or are returned home after a brief time in foster care are the next great challenge in child welfare" (p.84). Effectively protecting those children over time may not only depend on the extent of personal "change" that has been "induced" in parents, or on the improved social and material circumstances of families, but on the nature of a parent's actual experiences as a "consumer" of protective service delivery. For example, after a "case" is "closed," how does an "involuntary client" describe the "trustworthiness", "honesty", "fairness", and
"understanding" of the public child welfare caseworkers with whom he or she was involved? After a "case" is "closed," will a parent who has been involved in mandated child protective services ever again seek, or submit to, "help" from an agency in time of need or crisis? Furthermore, if some parents are irreconcilably alienated by relentless "reports" and "investigations" of alleged child abuse and neglect or, at worst, emotionally and practically "harmed" by protective service delivery, abrogation of parental custody, or protracted involvement in mandated "case management," what does that portend for children who are ultimately "left in their own homes" after "brief" service delivery or for those who are "re-unified" with previously abusive parents? Protecting children against the risks of nonremoval or premature return to the custody of abusive families will require, among other things, the same qualitative knowledge of the process and outcome of child welfare service delivery that is crucial at the beginning: an accurate, practical understanding of the meaning of involvement with, or the reactions of parents to, the authority and "power" of public child welfare caseworkers, law enforcement officers, and the Juvenile Court in the local community.
II. AIMS AND RATIONALE

The qualitative research study has two major purposes:

1. To explore the political dimensions of the use of authority in social work practice by public child welfare caseworkers with "involuntary clients", as derived from the accounts of parents who are involved with, or have children in the custody of, a state agency.

Evaluations of social work "practice", while often mixed in controversies regarding quantitative versus qualitative approaches, are usually attempts to "measure" or "assess" the "effectiveness" of "casework", or "treatment", or to gauge the "impact" of a particular "intervention" on a specific "population" or "problem" (Geismar and Wood, 1982). It seems evident, however, that such a preoccupation with "effectiveness" and "impact" has confined analyses of social work "practice" to psychological or sociological perspectives, especially at the level of "direct services" to individuals, families, and groups. Emerging criticisms (Wilkes, 1981; Reamer, 1982; Rhodes, 1986) have maintained that attachment to a particular theory, or "technology", or frequent arguments about the paradigm for the "practice" of social work, have obscured, or neglected, other critical dimensions of this complex, institutional activity.
At the practical level, however clear or confused the matter is in the minds of social workers, ethical reasoning leads to concrete choices that influence and affect the lives of people, especially the poor. As Frederic Reamer (1983a) has observed, "Social workers repeatedly make assumptions about the determinants and malleability of clients' problems and shape interventions or treatment plans accordingly.

How we respond to these problems---whether we focus our attention on environmental determinants, health problems, or individual character---frequently depends on assumptions that we make about the extent to which people's problems are the result of factors over which they have control.

Second, the conclusions that social workers reach about the causal determinants of a client's difficulties frequently lead to assumptions about the extent to which they deserve assistance and whatever benefits or services there are to offer. (Reamer, 1983a, p. 627).

Thus, despite the illusions of "scientific" neutrality, or "disinterestedness", that are constructed by "professionals", "casework" is certainly not rendered without bias, namely, without grounding in the moral judgments of the practitioner, or the power inherent in the structure of the "casework" or "clinical" relationship. For example, Martin Rein and Sheldon White (1981) have acknowledged, "It is manifestly clear that the human qualities and moral and political commitments of an individual make a vast and crucial difference in
social work practice" (p. 9). "Casework" or "treatment" is therefore differentially constructed and allocated according to the personal proclivities, ethics, ideologies, and political beliefs of the practitioner. "Clients are not so much as advised as led by definitions and the framing of questions" (Schorr, 1985, p.181).

The practitioner may make his choices for reasons of social control; of turf, prestige, or other professional self-interest; or without any reason, simply out of habit. Recognition that these choices are open places responsibility on, but also empowers, the practitioner. (Schorr, 1985, p. 183).

From a related perspective, the nature of social work "practice" also confronts the issue of individual freedom, or the right of liberty of citizens in society, i.e. the extent to which the person, as "client", is permitted to establish his or her own goals, when the uninterrupted pursuit of those goals is perceived by "professionals" as contrary to the individual's "own good"; as "harmful" to others; or both (Wilkes, 1981; Horton and Mendus, 1985). For example, within the field of social work, Frederic Reamer (1983b) has analyzed the traditional concepts of "self-determination" and "paternalism", and posited that actions representative of the latter can be placed into three, major categories: (1) "interference with an individual's intentions or actions," (2) "deliberate withholding of information", and (3) "deliberate dissemination of misinformation".
12.

Such actions, in essence, turn on the ethical grounds for influencing, or inhibiting, individual behavior, decision-making premises that usually pervade social work "methodology" as unarticulated presuppositions underpinning the "professional" construction of "treatment" and the practice of "case management".

Coercion is usually recognized as a threat to freedom, but intervening in the life of another for their own good may be just as inimical to individual freedom. The wish to be in charge of one's own life may lead high-minded persons to think they must make it as easy as possible for the individual to realize his or her true self. One can convince oneself that, for the good of other persons, one must give them insight into what they really want or really are; one is then in a position to know their expressed wishes and help them to realize their true potential by well-known techniques of 'management' and manipulation. (Wilkes, 1981, p. 57).

Exalting "positive freedom" and a commitment to "doing good", and at worst, endowed with the statutory authority to impose moral judgments on others, social workers "intervene" in the daily lives of people through the process of "casework" or "treatment". Consequently, at the interpersonal level, in private transactions with formally identified individuals and families in relatively powerless circumstances, it is often social workers, and other "professionals", not Constitutional jurists, who decide questions of toleration, i.e. what ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals should, for whatever reason, and purpose, be subject to effective
external control, including the use of the coercive power of the state (Horton and Mendus, 1985). Thus, it is inescapable that the ethical and political decisions inherent in social work "practice," their application as "treatment," and their enforcement through "case management", have civil consequences that transcend the illusive boundaries of the "helping relationship".

2. To analyze the experiences of families that receive child "protective services" in a community, from a perspective of public child welfare "practice" as de facto "social policy" in the United States.

Alvin Schorr (1985) has argued that "power in terms of policy is not applied on a grand scale only; the term 'practitioner' implies consideration of policy in terms of clinical relationships and relatively small groups.

These may be as consequential or more consequential for the quality of everyday life than the large-scale government and private hierarchical actions that are more commonly regarded as policy. As practitioners practice policy, they may choose any of a variety of instruments. They may simply decide differently about matters that lie within their own control, they may attempt to influence their agencies, or they may take on more deep-seated and, chances are, conflict-ridden change. These are also choices that practitioners make. (Schorr, 1985, p. 194-5).

Inasmuch as the qualitative study seeks to understand the experiences of "involuntary clients" in child protective service delivery, it is destined to implicate the nature,
adequacy, effectiveness, and equity of the child welfare policy that purports to "keep families together", at least in one community. In addition, by contrasting the written accounts of caseworkers, and other "professionals," with the "interventions" that represent their "practice" in the lives of a small group of "involuntary clients", the research hopes to achieve what Howard Becker might judge to be the "perfect" foundation for the beginning of a critical dialogue: "that it is good enough that people will accept it as the best they can get under the circumstances and learn how to work with its limitations" (Becker, 1986, p. 134).

The chief audience for practical social science is not 'decision-makers' but the public, and its chief impact on social policy comes about through influencing the climate of opinion rather than supplying discrete information for those in power. (Bellah, 1982, p. 38).

III. BACKGROUND AND THEORY

A. The Unwilling: Practice with "Involuntary Clients"

At the "substantive" level, practitioners of social work have struggled with the "problem" of the "involuntary" or "resistant" client, and the need to develop more "effective" approaches with identified persons who are pressured, or compelled, to accept and respond to "social casework" or "treatment". That
"struggle", however, has not been reflected in the degree of attention accorded the "problem" by those interested in research; indeed, comparatively little concern has been generated, and only fragmented insight into the actual process of practitioner-client transaction has been achieved. The recourse for those who continue to provide direct services to "involuntary clients", particularly those encountered in the field of child protective services, is to apply the traditional impressionistic rule of "practice": "If it seems to work, then do it." Consequently, the "profession" has been sporadically urged to reconsider its approach and, in some instances, to develop a distinct practice "technology":

Practice wisdom and empirical evidence suggest that social work intervention with mandated clients tends not to be as successful as intervention with voluntary clients....Outcome studies indicate that a technology must be developed that provides some voluntary aspects to contracts with involuntary clients. This is to say that a technology is needed to turn formal authority into psychological authority. (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 590-1).

For these reasons, and others, there has been a characteristically narrow consideration of the nature, and consequences, of the political process inherent in the interpersonal transaction between practitioner and "involuntary client". For example, Allison Murdach (1980) has maintained that "bargaining" and "persuasion"
should not be construed as mere "by-products of the client-practitioner exchange", but as "important components of the helping process with nonvoluntary clients" (p. 460). She admits, however, that the use of such "techniques", even "constructively", alters the perspective of the nature of the "social intervention", and may reflect more of a "'political' rather than personal service emphasis".

Some...may feel that the processes...are not help at all, but instead a kind of power politics in which practitioners and clients strive to out-manipulate each other. In some respects this impression is correct, since often neither power politics nor manipulation can be entirely divorced from the helping process. (Murdach, 1980, p. 460).

Indeed, what is apparent upon examination of prevailing thought, and practice, by social workers is the tendency to ignore or, at best, blur, the distinction between a person's choice not to cooperate with "social casework", or "treatment", i.e "involuntariness", and the concept of "resistance", which seems to vary with the personal ideology, and sometimes theoretical orientation, of the practitioner. Murdach (1980) simply construes "nonvoluntary" situations as those "circumstances in which clients, despite their wishes to the contrary, are forced by those around them, such as parents, spouses, neighbors, and police, to seek assistance from social workers and other official helpers" (p. 458). Cingolani
(1984) wishes to abandon reliance on a single category of the "involuntary", and instead has proposed a "continuum ranging from prisoners and other institutionalized populations to...the problem drinker whose employer is pressuring him or her to seek help" (p. 442). Gitterman (1983) redirects attention from a focus on the client's behavior, or "functioning", and instead situates the causes of "resistance" within the transactional context of the "helping relationship", itself. He identifies numerous "barriers" in the process of "engaging" the client, including obstacles created by the structure of the agency; interpersonal barriers between workers and clients; "cross-purposes" in the exchange between "help-seeker" and "help-giver"; and problems of "transference" and "counter-transference".

In their practice, social workers tend to 'hear' and select those elements from a client's communication that confirm their theoretical or ideological positions, and elements that do not fit elude them....In response to the worker's subtle or unabashed efforts to influence and direct, clients have the choice between satisfying or 'resisting' the worker's preoccupations. (Gitterman, 1983, p. 128).

Goldstein (1986) avoids categorization of the "involuntary", and prefers the image of the "outwardly reluctant client". From a cognitive perspective, he expands the definition of "resistance" beyond operative socio-cultural "differences", or practical "barriers" in
the practitioner-client encounter, to include the problem of "cognitive discrepancies": the "collision of two separate worlds---each one distinguished by its separate values, beliefs, ways of thinking about reality, and approaches to solving problems" (p. 36).

What can be inferred from these perspectives, and what appears consistent with conventional practice, is the presupposition that "overcoming resistance", however construed and approached, increases the probability of "voluntariness", i.e. a person's choice, for whatever reason, to willingly seek, or accept, "help", in whatever form, and to cooperate with the provider of "social casework" or "treatment". At the extreme, such a belief manifests itself in "treatment" approaches that objectify people (Wilkes, 1981), such as Ronald Simons' description of "inducement" as a means of "exercising influence" in "therapeutic" or other "direct service" interactions:

Rewards function first and foremost to modify the action rather than attitudes of the target system. Often this emphasis is not a problem, as when practitioners are interested only in producing a change in behavior....At other times, however, social workers are interested in producing a more permanent change in the target system's behavior ---one that will continue after the intervention has ended. (Simons, 1985, p. 57).

Consequently, despite what are conceptually and practically distinct matters, it is possible that some
public child welfare caseworkers approach "resistant clients" with an ideologically-bound, rigid expectation of their unequivocal "need" to "cooperate", i.e. to admit their "failings", to "voluntarily" accept services, and to willingly commit themselves to "treatment". If imposed, such an ethical assumption has at least two important consequences.

First, it obscures, if not fully discounts, the client's political right in all situations to define, assert, and defend his or her own "needs" and "interests", especially when "cooperation" with such "services" or "treatment" threatens to compromise---indeed, jeopardize---individual freedom, including the parent's access, or relationship, to his or her own children. Second, and more importantly, it automatically defines and labels "resistance" by "involuntary clients" as individually "harmful," as an "obstacle" to "treatment"---never as legitimate political dissent in response to the possible misuse or abuse of "power" by caseworkers in the process of mandated "protective service" delivery.

Unfortunately, most social work commentaries on "practice" with "involuntary" and "resistant" clients continue to ignore, or substantially reduce, the range of political issues contained in the conduct of "treatment,"
"casework," or "case management." For example, Judith Cingolani (1984) has proposed a "social conflict perspective" of work with "involuntary clients", which she advocates is more congruent with a reconceptualization of "therapy" in such situations as a "political process": "one that involves the socially sanctioned use of power or influence in a context of conflicting interests between the client and some part of his or her social environment" (p. 442).

The worker may take several possible positions along the dimensions of conflict between individual and social environment. Each position implies the development of a different relationship between practitioner and client.... (Cingolani, 1984, p. 444).

Within the parameters of the "helping relationship", such "positions" represent a range of possible "roles", which may theoretically be placed on a continuum: at one end, the roles of "enforcer" and "negotiator" imply the practitioner's alignment with some aspect of the "social environment", while those of "advocate" and "coach" represent "identification" with the client's interests. As a "mediator", the worker is somehow concerned with both the interests of society and the client, and "searches for areas of consensus and bases for reconciliation" (Cingolani, 1984, p. 445).

None of the types of relationships...should be seen as intrinsically better for practice with involuntary clients. Each has advantages and limitations. They are options to select from,
depending on the issues to be addressed, the client's capacities, his or her perception of the situation and of the social worker, and the structure and purposes of the setting. (Cingolani, 1984, p. 446).

Needless to say, to abandon "enforced therapeutic relationships" with "resistant" persons, as Cingolani (1984) urges, and to expose the "truth about the nature of the interaction between practitioner and client," requires more than a slight modification of perspective, i.e. an acknowledgement by social workers that "sometimes the interests of the two (society and the individual) conflict" (p. 446). It requires the cognitive ability and moral willingness of the practitioner to expose his or her ethical and political assumptions, especially when the existence of such premises, thus embodied in "practice", mystifies the situations, and obviates the choices, of circumstantially powerless people (Rhodes, 1986).

What is excluded in conventional discussions of the "effectiveness" of "casework" or "treatment", and furthermore remains obscure in narrow "political" analyses of "practice" with "involuntary" and "resistant" clients are two, fundamental etho-political questions:
1. To what extent in the process of being helped to "see things clearly," should the "horizon" of the "involuntary client" be expanded to include political consciousness, an awareness of verifiable socio-political conditions, individual and collective rights, and alternate choices of action in response to those conditions?

2. To what extent should the "involuntary client," however politically conscious, be permitted to exercise behavioral choices commensurate with his or her current or "enhanced" political consciousness, e.g. to not only politically dissent, but to pursue a course of conduct in defense of his or her rights and interests, including violence and destruction of property, that may be inimical to the interests of the practitioner, the social agency or institution, or other concrete representation of the state?

\[2\] No distinctions are drawn between the various modalities of direct practice, or their respective theoretical underpinnings. What is of focus, here, is the fundamental recognition of the role of cognition in most "helping" relationships oriented to personal "change", and the presence of operative cognitive factors in the interpersonal transaction. Precisely, Goldstein (1982) has observed that "each system or method has its own explanatory framework that is offered to the client in one way or another as a new means of understanding the problem, its causes, possible goals, and so on. In the process of assimilating this framework, the client will gain a new cognitive map---or another way of perceiving and comprehending experience. Second, the interactive and essentially dialectic nature of the helping relationship induces the client to reexamine, reflect on, and perhaps redefine his formerly dependable assumptions. As feelings and their meanings, imputed causes, or ethical dilemmas are reconsidered, some measure of cognitive reorientation results". (Goldstein, Howard. Cognitive approaches to direct practice, Social Service Review, December, p. 539, emphasis added.)
In light of these questions, as inescapable civil dimensions of "practice" with typically poor and powerless individuals in society, to simply construe "therapy" or "casework" with "involuntary clients" as a "political act" within a "context of conflicting interests" is not enough. "As social workers mandated to care for others," observes Margaret Rhodes (1986), "we have more power than an ordinary person who attempts to help her neighbor.

The power makes the role paternal or maternal, rather than fraternal. We must be careful that our power is not misused and that we are not imposing on a powerless group of people standards which are not imposed elsewhere in the society. More generally, we need to evaluate the ethics of having this sort of power over others. (p. 130).

Indeed, in his analysis of psychotherapy, and psychiatry, Peter Breggin (1975) has succinctly agreed:

There is no question that the intimate world created...will influence the client's ethical and political development. The only question is 'In what direction?' (p. 374).

Clearly, in order to address these issues, one must be willing to admit that what and how much "clients," especially "involuntary" ones, "know" about their situations and how free such individuals are to act on that "knowledge", or awareness, are the fundamental political questions involved in "casework" or "treatment". Again, Peter Breggin has modeled the
perspective:

...If a client completes insight therapy without a political consciousness, he can hardly be said to have a full understanding of himself. Whether a man works for himself, the government, the schools, private enterprise, or simply lives off his family or works for her family (as most women do), this person cannot reach any self-understanding without grasping his or her relationship to the immediate social and economic system and its place in the larger political system. Political understanding is limited only as much as one's self-understanding, and one's self-understanding can only go as far as one's political understanding. The two are inseparable! (Breggin, 1975, p. 379).

Consequently, it seems important to re-examine the process and structure of "treatment" that social workers, and others, provide the poor, the mentally impaired, women, and other minorities, beginning with what can be gleaned from recent criticisms of the "professions," and "professional practice," that have emerged over the past thirty years in the discipline of sociology, the field of mental health, and among women in American society.

B. A Conceptual Framework

"Treatment" as Political Process

Figure 1 is a conceptual framework that seeks to hypothesize the theoretical linkages in a sequence of typical "treatment" decisions by "professionals" that serve to control the political consciousness of certain citizens, i.e. individual awareness of actual sociopolitical conditions and the capacity for alternate
behavioral choice in response to those conditions. The process, needless to say, is not limited to social work practice. In essence, the theory represents a synthesis of what comprise diverse criticisms of the "professions," and "professional practice," in the United States, especially medicine, and its most controversial branch, psychiatry (Freidson, 1970; Szasz, 1961, 1970; Illich, 1976; Larson, 1977; Townsend, 1980; Waitzkin and Waterman, 1981); the feminist exposition of sexual politics and the "medicalization" of women's health (Dreifus, 1978; Frankfort, 1972; Ruzek, 1978; Seaman, 1972; Reissman, 1983); and various qualitative research studies (e.g. Goffman, 1961; Cicourel, 1976; Marx, 1981; Waegel, 1984); all of which are predicated on the sociopolitical construction of deviance.

The synthesis, as a chain of "sensitizing" concepts, offers a "formal" framework in "dialogue" with the development of a "substantive" theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of social work "practice" with "involuntary clients" in the field of public child welfare. "Substantive theory faithful to the empirical situation cannot be formulated...by merely applying a formal theory to the substantive area," observe Glaser and Strauss (1967).

First, a substantive theory must be formulated, in order to see which of diverse formal theories are applicable to help further the substantive
formulation. And in its turn then substantive theory helps in formulating and reformulating formal theory. Thus substantive theory becomes a strategic link in the formulation and development of formal theory based on data. We have called the latter 'grounded' formal theory to contrast it with formal theory based on logical speculation. (p. 300).

Nevertheless, while fully resolving the "tensions" of this emerging "dialectic" is beyond the scope of the present study, the synthesis serves as a "formal" frame of reference that has informed the qualitative research, established its boundaries, and poised itself for analytical juxtaposition with any emergent, more fully "grounded" theory.

Ignoring the task of discovering substantive theory that is relevant to a given substantive area is the result, in most cases, of believing that formal theories supply all the necessary concepts and hypotheses. The consequence is often a forcing of data and neglecting of the relevant concepts and hypotheses that may emerge. Allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which of diverse formal theories may be inclusive of his substantive theories, thus enabling him to be more faithful and less forcing of his data (or more objective and less theoretically biased). This means that one cannot merely apply Parsonian categories right off, but must wait to see whether they are linked to the emergent substantive theory concerning the issue in focus. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 304).

Figure 1 posits that some behavior unambiguously violates social rules and is accorded immediate institutional punishment. Other behavior is relegated to a "residual" category, and thereafter either directly
rewarded, or exposed through various means of identification to "professional" definition. This process of social role construction, ranging from a definition of behavior in a situation to the structure of the "deviant" role, itself, has been conceptualized by Bates (1975) as a "rite of transition."

Professional definition of behavior in a situation results in formal labelling (Scheff, 1966, 1974, 1975), as well as the social construction of the "sick role" and "punishment role," and signifies the beginning of a sociopolitical status conversion for the citizen (Parsons, 1949; Aubert and Messinger, 1958; Mechanic, 1968; Freidson, 1979; Bates, 1975; Waizkin and Waterman, 1981). The "sick" person, for example, is (1) exempted from normal, or routine, social obligations, duties, and responsibilities; (2) not blamed for his or her condition, i.e. the "illness"; (3) expected to "try and get well"; and, most importantly, (4) required to cooperate with the decisions of technically "competent" agents, and their "treatment", whose knowledge and abilities are beyond the grasp, and comprehension, of the average citizen (Parson, 1949). Professional labelling reinforces the social definition of "residual" deviance. Thereafter, formal labelling leads to a substantive social status assignment, i.e. formal exclusion.
"Formal exclusion" is considered to be a consequent reduction of some, or all, of the social, and civil, rights, duties, obligations, and responsibilities of a person. Such "exclusion" reinforces the status attributes of the "sick" role and "criminal" role, respectively, with further reinforcement of the consequences of both social and professional labelling, including the more insidious assignment of "auxiliary status traits" which establish the basis for temporary, or permanent, social discrimination; individual practical restriction or segregation; and the development of concomitant personal tendencies toward social isolation and feelings of alienation (Hughes, 1945).

"Formal exclusion" of the person also entails a correspondent "allocation" decision. For example, a definition of "genuine disability" leads to further reinforcement of the "sick" role; a definition of a willful violation of social rules leads to the more restrictive structure of the "criminal" role. Both the "sick" role and the "criminal" role assignments are necessary precursors of the respective "treatment" and "punishment" roles. Accordingly, it is theorized that acceptance and cooperation with the structure and process of "treatment," "casework," or "case management" results in behavioral conformity, and social reward, despite the
endurance of some, or all, of the concomitants of "formal exclusion." In essence, the sequential processes of formal labelling, status assignment, and "allocation", coalesce to achieve what Goffman (1961) has referred to, in an institutional context, as "role stabilization."

Finally, it is posited that the "enforcement of social rules" through the individualized processes of "treatment" and "punishment", assuming their distinction, requires the cognitive, and often physical, control of the person. The respective "role constructions" establish the preconditions necessary for the application of various "professional" and "correctional" technologies, such as "psychotherapy," "social casework," and "counseling," within the structure of "case management", or in the extreme, the administration of psychotropic medication, electroconvulsive "therapy," hospital or institutional confinement, and the enforced isolation of prisons.

In conclusion, it is theorized that the combined cognitive and physical impact of the experience of "treatment" or "casework" in public child welfare, along with correspondent social status "degradation" (Garfinkel, 1956), and the acquisition of secondary, or "auxiliary" status traits (Hughes, 1945), serve to
influence, limit, and control the political consciousness of primarily poor parents who are vulnerable to mandated state "interventions." "Involuntary clients" are thus "objectively" handled, and subjectively "treated," resulting in the further constriction of already "narrow" perspectives of their situations of relative powerlessness in the face of protective service delivery. Therefore, "treatment," "casework," or "case management," in such circumstances serves (1) to obstruct the "visibility" of actual sociopolitical conditions underpinning family vulnerability, (2) to suppress, deter, or disperse parental dissatisfaction and dissent, and (3) to reduce the potential for "realistic conflict" (Coser, 1966), i.e. parental "knowledge" and "capacity" for direct political action in response to those conditions.
Chapter 2

Methodology

"...Any right to dispose of his own things which he might possess he did not prize very highly; far more important to him was the necessity to understand his situation clearly; but with these people beside him he could not even think."

Franz Kafka
The Trial

A public child welfare agency is a social welfare organization that is statutorily endowed with the legal authority and responsibility to investigate reported instances of alleged child abuse and neglect, to protect children, and to provide care for those who are dependent on the state as a result of a parent's inability or unwillingness to assure a child's health and well-being. Because public child welfare agencies possess the formal, discretionary power to (a) intrude in what are otherwise autonomous family relations and to (b) initiate legal action through a law enforcement agency or juvenile court that can restrict parental rights, or abrogate parental custody of minor children, these organizations routinely generate situations of conflict with individuals, many of whom are subsequently labelled as "resistant" and "uncooperative." "Noncooperation" in response to such "interventions" may therefore have as much to do with the
nature, extent, and use of authority by public child welfare agencies as it does the culpability of those "reported" for child abuse or neglect. Consequently, significant, but relatively isolated, criticisms by legal scholars have appeared over the past twenty years that have consistently acknowledged the absence of Constitutionally based procedural protection for parents who are subject to being "reported" for alleged child maltreatment, investigated by child welfare caseworkers, threatened with the loss of their children, and entangled in the civil litigation of local juvenile courts that maintain jurisdiction in such matters.

For example, in 1973, Richard S. Levine charged that "very little is known about the interaction in the 'child protection system' between child welfare agencies, the families, and the courts.

The initial intervention of agencies into family life is lacking in procedural safeguards. There is a lack of criteria for screening complaints of [parental] misbehavior, a difficulty of defining deprivation in diverse sociocultural settings, and an imbalance of power and sophistication between the child welfare worker and suspect parent. (Levine, 1973, p. 3).

Michael Wald argued in 1975 that the "process of investigation itself may have a detrimental impact on the parents and children being investigated.

...The investigation may make the parents uncertain in dealing with their children. Interviewing children can frighten them. In some instances agencies have asked courts to order psychiatric
examinations of family members under investigation. Agency contacts with neighbors may adversely affect the neighbors' attitudes toward the suspected parent(s) and children.

...Most Child Protective Service Agencies define their mission broadly to justify intervention in cases where court jurisdiction could not be sustained. Several commentators have documented the pressures agencies place on families to accept 'voluntary' supervision, even though the children in question are not suffering from a harm recognizable under the neglect statute. The agencies also often pressure parents into 'voluntarily' placing their children in foster care; many such children are never returned. (Wald, 1975, p. 1006).

Robert Mnookin (1975) thoroughly analyzed the "indeterminacy" of the "best interests" standard in child-custody decision-making, a doctrine of intractable "vagueness" that continues to defy consensus and foster suspiciousness of the power of a juvenile court judge, especially during the adjudicatory and dispositional stages of proceedings involving abused and neglected children.

Because what is in the best interests of a particular child is indeterminate, there is good reason to be offended by the breadth of power exercised by a trial court judge in the resolution of custody disputes. But the underlying reasons for this indeterminacy---our inability to make predictions and our lack of consensus with regard to values---make the formulation of rules especially problematic. In all events, the debate over rules versus discretion is best understood when the indeterminacy of what is best is candidly admitted. Moreover, examination of the reasons for this indeterminacy suggests that procedural changes in custody disputes, greater use of experts, or a change in the nature of the forum may avoid some mistakes and make the process more
fair but will not correct the underlying difficulty. (Mnookin, 1975, p. 230).

In 1981, Howard Davidson, et. al., of the American Bar Association's National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, emphatically described the need for immediate, and continuous, legal representation of parents who are named in child abuse and neglect complaints:

The potential consequences of an adjudication of neglect are severe. A parent not only stands to lose custody and control of his child, but may also be stigmatized and subjected to possible criminal sanctions. The proceedings are focussed not on any acts of the child, but rather on the conduct of the parents. Whatever relevance the parens patriae concept may have to the condition of the child, it is clearly inapplicable when applied to a parent charged with neglect, abuse, or termination. Moreover, when the formidable resources of the state are arrayed against an indigent and intimidated parent, who is without the requisite knowledge and skill to employ discovery procedures, analyze statutes, present evidence, or even protect his privilege against self-incrimination, the court takes on the appearance of a Star Chamber. (Davidson, et. al, 1981, p. 103).

Finally, a recent analysis by Marc Hardin (1988) admits that little statutory, or procedural, change has occurred in response to the "problem" of "noncooperation" by parents under "investigation" for child abuse and neglect, despite passage and implementation of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. "Although there is an extensive and well-developed body of constitutional procedural requirements in criminal
investigations," concludes Hardin, "and although there is a less well-developed set of principles generally applicable to investigations by government administrative agencies, key procedural principles governing child abuse investigations remain unsettled" (p. 499).

In many states, child protection agencies do not have appropriate investigative tools to deal with noncooperation. If agency workers cannot gather enough information to support a child protection petition in juvenile court, they may feel forced to choose between dropping the investigation and summarily removing children from their homes. In states with strict criteria for emergency removal of children from their homes, agency workers may feel forced to use false threats in order to gain access to the home and the child, or enlist the police to intimidate families into allowing entry into the home. Because there are no alternate investigative remedies, children may needlessly remain at risk, or families may be unnecessarily separated. (Hardin, 1988, 497-8).

I. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions represent the boundaries of the qualitative study:

1. How do parents react to the authority of public child welfare caseworkers?
   a. How do parents perceive "interventions" by public child welfare caseworkers?
   b. What does it mean to parents to be subject to "interventions" by public child welfare caseworkers?
An individual's "perception" is considered to be a "complex of processes that not only takes in impressions but also attaches a certain organization and meaning to them.

The perceptual process is the key to an understanding of the characteristic intentions, learnings, and adaptations of persons whether as individuals or as groups of individuals. (Goldstein, 1981, pg. 55).

While shaped by their social context, "perceptions" are assumed to emerge from a person's "frame of reference," "interpretive scheme" (Giddens, 1979), or "way of making thinking" about his or her situation. For example, Goldstein (1981) maintains that "It is the uniquely private schema that ultimately ascribes meaning to the human experience and, in conjunction with distinctive cognitive patterns, shapes the individual's knowledge of and approach to his world." (p. 154-5). Needless to say, these assumptions, and other premises, underpinning the research questions must be defined.

First, it is presupposed that a parent is not simply "responding blindly either to special inner drives and instincts or to some outer controls; rather, his understanding of and response to his world of experience are functions of certain inferential and cognitive operations.

These operations occur in the process of perception, the activities of mind and emotion that enable the individual to
apprehend, order, symbolize, and interpret his experiences. (Goldstein, 1981, p. 113).

The concept of an "interpretive scheme" suggests, among other things, that a parent's thoughts, beliefs, judgments, reasoning, and personal "theories" of moral value and moral obligation, as well as their political views of authority, power, rights, conflict, and the kind of community, and society, that is believed to exist, are embedded in "certain premises and categories of meaning" (Goldstein, 1981, p. 164).

(1) Meaning is for a subject: it is not the meaning of the situation in vacuo, but its meaning for a subject, a specific subject, a group of subjects, or perhaps what its meaning is for the human subject as such (even though particular humans might be reproached with not admitting or realizing this). (2) Meaning is of something; that is, we can distinguish between a given element---situation, action, or whatever---and its meaning....And (3) things only have meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things. This means that there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element; and it means that changes in the other meanings in the field can involve changes in the given element. (Taylor, 1979, p. 31-2).

Consequently, an interpreter can never "swim in the stream" of a person's "experience," but can only attempt to grasp what, according to (Geertz, 1979), are the "experience-near concepts" through which a parent perceives his or her "world." "People use experience-near concepts spontaneously, unselfconsciously, as it were, colloquially," notes Geertz (1979), "they do not, except
fleetingly and on occasion, recognize that there are any 'concepts' involved at all. That is what experience-near means---that ideas and the realities they disclose are naturally and indissolubly bound up together" (p. 228).

To grasp concepts which, for another people, are experience-near, and to do so well enough to place them in illuminating connection with the experience-distant concepts that theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of social life, is clearly a task at least as delicate, if a bit less magical, as putting oneself into someone else's skin. The trick is not to achieve some inner correspondence of spirit with your informants; preferring, like the rest of us, to call their souls their own, they are not going to be altogether keen about such an effort anyhow. The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to. (Geertz, 1979, p. 227-8).

Finally, the interpretation of parental "perceptions" of "interventions" by public child welfare caseworkers will be framed by two, fundamental assumptions about human conduct: "capability" and "knowledgeability" (Giddens, 1979, p. 223). "Capability, the possibility of 'doing otherwise,' is generally exercised as a routine, tacit feature of everyday behavior" (Giddens, 1979, p. 223).

People simply are not unilinear, chain-like successions of motion-events to be calculated and tabulated without consideration of the telos, the reason for the sake of which this motion is being expended. They are self-determining, albeit often inconsistent agents of their behavior. (Rychlak, 1979, p. 139).

"Knowledgeability" refers to "all those things that the
members of the society know about that society and about the conditions of their activity within it" (Giddens, 1979, p. 223). While Giddens' differentiation of "knowledgeability" from the idea of "practical consciousness" is granted, the latter must be included in an interpretation of the "meaning" of parental experiences with public child welfare caseworkers, through what Packer (1985) has referred to as "involved practical understanding":

Human action is a complex and ambiguous phenomenon. An observer of a social interaction does not have direct, unproblematic access to the unambiguous 'meaning' of the acts taking place, because people act in a situation that an observer does not share fully; furthermore they themselves do not comprehend all the pertinent aspects of their own actions. Any act, looked at in isolation from its situation, is likely to be ambiguous to the point of opacity or obscurity. For these reasons, a methodology for the study of actions must be specifically tailored to its intricacies and peculiarities. The hermeneutic paradigm takes as its starting point the fact that, despite the ambiguities, any observer has a preliminary practical understanding of what the people studied are 'up to.' (Packer, 1985, p. 1081).

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3 "It is a basic mistake to equate the knowledgeability of agents with what is known 'consciously,' where this means what can be 'held in mind' in a conscious way. An explication of subjectivity must relate 'consciousness' in this sense (discursive consciousness) to what I call 'practical consciousness,' and to the unconscious.... By practical consciousness I mean the vast variety of tacit modes of knowing how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life." (Anthony Giddens, "Hermeneutics and Social Theory", in Hermeneutics: questions and prospects. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, Eds. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1979, p. 223).
II. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Access

The public child welfare agency involved in the qualitative study was a large organization, accredited by the Child Welfare League of America, that was located in northeastern Ohio.4 At the end of 1988, the Agency had received 9,634 "reports" of alleged child abuse, neglect, or dependency, that involved 4,445 families. Caseworkers had provided "protective services" for 6,534 children in their own homes or were engaged on an ongoing basis with 2,970 families in the community. The same caseworkers were attempting to "reunify" a total of 674 children with their families, each of whom was in some form of

4 The Agency was approached as a potential site for the qualitative research because of a successful pilot study that was conducted there in April, 1986. At that time, three "involuntary clients" were selected from one "protective services "unit" and were interviewed, testing the approach and methodology of the present study. Prior to the pilot study, I had originally been acquainted with the Executive Director of the Agency as a result of his administrative supervision of my work in a federal Child Abuse Project in two other counties in Ohio in 1977. He was also aware of my appointment as the director of social services at a large public child welfare agency in another city in northeastern Ohio in 1979. Inasmuch as I had no previous relationship with this Agency, or reputation in this community, there is no doubt that both my relationship with the Executive Director, and five years of previous experience in the field of child welfare in Ohio, facilitated my initial and ongoing access to the "involuntary clients" in this setting.
"substitute care," such as "placement" with relatives, licensed foster homes, or in "group residences" under the administration of the Agency.

The Agency received approximately 64% of its almost $19 million in operating funds from a local property tax levy, with less than 17% of the annual budget being supported by federal and state programs. Over 60% of the Agency's $16 million in expenditures during 1988 was allocated for the salaries of employees and 31%, or approximately $5 million, to support the "substitute" and "institutional" care of children in the custody of the Agency.

The Agency cooperated with the project and provided an office to coordinate the researcher's field activity. Supervisors of two "protective services units" identified potential "cases" that might be appropriate for the research and caseworkers directly surveyed client interest in participation in the study. Caseworkers also provided other forms of practical assistance, such as arranging initial, introductory visits in the field with potentially ambivalent, "hostile," or reportedly "seductive" subjects. Upon presentation of signed authorizations for the release of confidential information, the researcher requested and received administrative permission to review and to photocopy the
case records of parents who were involved in the study. Neither the Agency, nor any parents who participated in the research, requested or received any money to secure their cooperation or involvement. Nor was it necessary to devise an elaborate repertoire of "tactics" to "infiltrate," "penetrate", or otherwise "worm" into the organization, as Jack Douglas (1976) has suggested is required in most field settings.\(^5\) Once "inside" the organization, the researcher was able to progressively "fit in" through what John Johnson (1975) has described as the "strategy of identity spoilage": "to construct a front of humility, to appear as a humble person who would be a regular guy and do no one any dirt" (p. 95).

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\(^5\) As a result of the pilot study in 1986, friendships developed with the supervisor of the protective services "unit" and a child welfare caseworker assigned to two of the parents involved in the preliminary research. While Jack Douglas (1976) might consider these developments an effective "infiltration" of the setting, such relationships were spontaneous and genuine, and clearly helped to "normalize" the research in the Agency (Johnson, 1975, p. 99-100). While the request to return to the Agency in 1988 to conduct the more extensive study was granted by the Executive Director, there is no doubt that my extraordinary "access" in the setting---from the beginning and throughout the field work---was facilitated and assured by my relationships with these sympathetic and supportive friends.
Because the researcher's role was expected to be the most ambiguous aspect of the study, and because qualitative field research in a public child welfare setting was certain to generate significant ethical and legal questions, a precise, written statement of the purpose of the research, the nature and implications of parental participation, the researcher's relationship to the Agency, and his commitment to confidentiality and anonymity in the management of research data were embodied in a "Voluntary Agreement of Participation." The "Agreement" attempted to address the requirements of "informed consent" and represented a binding "contract" between the researcher, the parent, and his or her assigned caseworker. In addition, the "Agreement" served to assure Agency supervisors and caseworkers that the researcher's purpose in the setting would never override his legal duties and responsibilities to "report" a potential harm to a subject or her children that might be encountered during home visits or assessed, or revealed, during the conduct of a research interview.  

6 Sec. 2151.421 of the Ohio Revised Code mandates that "any person who has reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected shall report, or shall cause such reports to be made to the Children Services Board." Physicians, psychologists, and social workers, as well as other professionals, are required to report such "suspicions," with specific penalties for failure to do so. No precedent has been established, however, that clearly defines the responsibilities of a field researcher in such circumstances. Nonetheless, it was
the "Agreement" anticipated the need for an effective means of resolving the practical problems and ethical conflicts that were expected to emerge in the researcher's relationship with each subject. Furthermore, it served to reassure each child welfare caseworker---in view of the unpredictable behavior of some "clients" and the legal "sensitivities" of most situations---that he or she could "confidently" and "wisely" place trust in the researcher's independent relationship with a parent.

2. Data Gathering

The primary methodology of the study consisted of twenty-four (24) semi-structured interviews with thirteen (13) parents receiving services from two "units" of caseworkers in the Agency's Department of Protective Services, along with one (1) interview with a parent who

decided at the outset with the Agency that the reporting of such "risks" represented a prima facie obligation of the researcher. Second, because I am licensed in the State of Ohio as an "Independent Social Worker" and "Professional Counselor with Clinical Endorsement," I judged that current ethical and legal responsibilities to report "suspicions" of child abuse and neglect, as well as the suicidal and homicidal ideas or plans that might be expressed by parents, should "override" the promise of confidentiality in the research relationship. All of the subjects were informed of these personal and practical constraints before consenting to participate in the study.
was receiving mandated services from the public child welfare agency in Mahoning County, Ohio. The interviews were conducted from March 18, 1988, through September 12, 1989. Four of the interviews occurred in an office at the Agency, while the remainder took place in the homes of each of the parents who were involved in the study.\footnote{The location of each interview was dictated, for the most part, by "catch as catch can." Since the Agency was unable to provide a conference room for the interviews, the majority had to occur in subjects' homes. All of the home visits were personally arranged, by appointment, at the convenience of the parent. Needless to say, I experienced all of the anguish and physical duress that "aggressive" field workers encounter in the community. Many parents who had verbally consented to meet me for initial, introductory visits in their homes, with or without their assigned caseworkers, failed to appear at the scheduled times. Others would answer my knock at the door with "apologies" for the illness, absentmindedness, or current "crisis" that obstructed our opportunity to talk "at the appointed time." Indeed, even less pleasant were the abrupt confirmations of always vigilant neighbors, "She's not home!" Much of this "experience in the field," at its worst, occurred during the summer drought of 1988. In short, I "soon" learned that whenever or wherever I could seize an opportunity for an interview, I did so, with due notation of the context of the exchange, but with little or no concern about my "failure" to achieve the "ideal conditions"---either at the Agency or during "home visits"---so foolishly expected at the beginning of my field work.}
of the interviews were made and thereafter personally transcribed by the researcher. The "direct tape recordings must be either transcribed fully (if the aim is to have a full record of speech and other audible events), or processed in some way (for example, the fieldworker listens to the recording, makes notes, selects excerpts, makes judgments or ratings, and so on)" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 50). After this transposition, four hundred (400) pages of typewritten transcripts were constructed to serve as primary "data" for continuous and final analysis.

In order to analyze and "check out" the "data" gathered from the interviews with each subject, information was also collected from the formal documents that were maintained by the Agency as each subject's "case record."

Checking out is a vital and pervasive part of all investigative research and is important in direct proportion to the amount of indirect evidence we are using---that is, the more we are using evidence that does not consist of our own direct experience and observations, the more we must check out the evidence. (Douglas, 1976, p. 147).

The "records" contained copies of legal documents that were constructed by the Agency or issued by the Juvenile Court; formal "dictations" or informal notations that were entered by current and past caseworkers, as well as other Agency staff, who were involved with a family;
mandated case management and "treatment" plans; and formal evaluations, and related correspondence, from private practitioners and community agencies that had been consulted or who were collaboratively involved with the parents and their children. Much of the latter, combined with written summaries from the assigned child welfare caseworker, had been submitted into "evidence" as part of the civil proceedings of the Juvenile Court to support initial complaints of child abuse or neglect and, in the situations of two parents, to strengthen a motion for the termination of parental rights to children who were in the temporary custody of the Agency.\(^8\) In essence, the "records" documented the Agency's

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\(^8\) Upon the filing of a complaint in the Juvenile Court, if a parent denies an allegation of child abuse, neglect, or dependency, Rule 29 (E) of the Ohio Rules Juvenile Procedure specifies that the Court can:

1. Direct the prosecuting attorney or another attorney-at-law to assist the court by presenting evidence in support of the allegations of a complaint;
2. Order the separation of witnesses, upon request of any party;
3. Take all testimony under oath or affirmation in either question-answer or narrative form; and
4. Determine the issues by proof beyond a reasonable doubt in juvenile traffic offense, delinquency, and unruly proceedings, by clear and convincing evidence in dependency, neglect, and child abuse proceedings, and by a preponderance of evidence in all other cases. (Emphasis added).
justification for initial and continuous involvement with a family, provided written accounts of the perceptions and assessments of the assigned child welfare caseworkers, and offered a "history" of the legal, i.e. political, circumstances of each parent in relation to the authority of the child welfare agency. Consequently, this source of "data" provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare the "perceptions" of each parent with the written perspectives of others who were "involved" in their circumstances and the "hard facts" of their situations, e.g. documentation of their legal position in relation to the Agency and the juvenile court.

In all instances, however, the parents' "case records" were not reviewed until all of the interviews with the subjects had been completed. One reason for this decision was the desire to approach each parent with a conscious, and deliberate, "humility," in order to isolate any prejudices that five years of the researcher's own practice experience in the public child welfare system may have engendered. As Jack Douglas (1976) has urged,

Rather than to relate the new experience to old ideas,... the researcher tries to de-focus, to stop thinking of his new experience in terms of prior categories and ideas. Instead of approaching the new setting with the idea that somehow the members' linguistic accounts are going to be situated or occasioned, or with some other
preconceived sociological concept or idea, the researcher goes in wide-eyed, like anyone else. (p. 120).

Equally determinative of this decision, however, were two practical obstacles. First, a tremendous amount of time was necessary to transcribe the audio tape-recordings of each interview. As a result, during data collection, the researcher relied upon selective note-taking after each interview, which served as the foundation for "deeper" investigation during subsequent interviews with the same, or other, subjects. Second, upon review of the case records of some of the subjects, it was soon discovered that recent "summaries" and informal notations by caseworkers, along with many relevant legal documents, were absent during the time that the interviews were being conducted with the parents. Consequently, while a simultaneous review of the records would have contributed to an analysis of each encounter with a subject, the typical three- to six-month delays in timely updates of caseworker "summaries" limited their utility as a means of "checking out" subject accounts or of confronting any "misinformation," "evasions," "fronts," or outright "lies" that the subjects may have presented during the research interviews. Parenthetically, the nature of the research questions, as well as the practical obstacles encountered during the field work, precluded
opportunities for extensive interviews with the assigned caseworkers, which would have served the same purpose.

Each of the semi-structured interviews was organized around a focused set of "target" questions, derived from the conceptual framework in Figure 1. This chain of "sensitizing concepts" provided the researcher with a sequence of focal points for the development of exploratory questions related to dimensions of "treatment" as "political process", as well as the more elusive notion of "political consciousness" or "political subjectivity." Concurrent with the development of the research sample and the sequential unfolding of the interviews with each subject, many of the derivative questions and emergent "rival hypotheses" were clarified, modified or discarded. As Miles and Huberman (1984) have noted, "Information gained on each question is summarized, and new target questions are posed for the next visit. Some of these come from the background research questions...and some are provoked by data collected during the visit...." (p.51). In effect, the structure of questions offered each subject a "heuristic program" (Douglas, 1985), designed (1) to open the "horizon" of a parent's "practical consciousness" to "entrance" by the researcher, (2) to expose the extent of a parent's "knowledge" of his or her political situation,
and (3) to reveal his or her self-perceptions of personal "capacity" in relation to the authority and "power" of the child welfare caseworker, a law enforcement officer, the Agency, and the Juvenile Court.

...If your purpose is to study some very complex realms of life, such as love and beauty, or the quest for a secure sense of self, then you have to give her some heuristic programs that will prevent her feeling the despair that can come from blindly groping through an immense maze and will help her to help you in your search for understanding her experience....These heuristic programs...maintain your maneuverability by telling [the subject] that 'we are interested in anything that is or might be important in understanding your life; and exactly what we will look at closely will emerge and change as we go along.' (p. 87).

The following guideline represents a complete set of "target" questions that were developed prior to, and during, interactive interviews with each of the subjects:

I. Behavior in a Situation

1. How do you behave, or "relate to," your children?

II. Social Definition of Behavior

2. What was reported to the child welfare agency about your behavior or the way you "relate to" your children?

III. Professional Definition of Behavior

3. How does your caseworker describe your behavior, or the way you "relate to" your children?
IV. Power and Locus of Control

A. Operative Awareness Context (Glaser and Strauss, 1964)

4. How do you perceive, or "see", your caseworker?

5. How do you believe your caseworker perceives, or "sees," you?

6. Does anything occur in the way that your caseworker and you "relate" to each other that causes you to change your behavior toward him or her in any way?

7. Do you do anything to affect the way your caseworker perceives, or "sees," you?

B. Political Status Conversion: Role Construction

Social (Civil) Status Conversion: Formal Exclusion

8. Do you feel "blamed" for either the way that you behave toward, or "relate to," your children, the "conditions" of your children, or your circumstances?

9. Is there anything that you have been told to do or not to do?

Allocation Decision: Enforcement of Social Rules

10. Have you been required to change your behavior in any way?

11. Do you cooperate with the decisions of your caseworker, the agency, or the orders of the Juvenile Court?

V. Physical and Mental Control

12. How much power do you believe the agency has?

(A) How difficult is it for the Agency to obtain custody, or to maintain custody, of your children?
(B) Do you understand the legal process that you are involved in or your legal rights?

(C) Should the Agency's "power" be changed in any way?

13. How much freedom or "latitude" do you believe your caseworker has in making decisions about your case?

14. What is your perception of the passage of time, or how long it takes the agency to act?

15. In your situation, do you feel free?

16. What choices, or "options," do you believe you have in this situation?

VI. Reduction of Potential for Conscious Political Action

18. Is there any conflict with your caseworker?

19. What do you do when there is conflict with your caseworker?

20. What have you learned is the best way to "deal with" the Agency?

21. As you think about your situation, how did things "turn out" this way?

By necessity, the actual process of building "friendly" relations and engaging each of the parents in "cooperative" reflection about themselves, their children, and their circumstances in relation to the Agency, required a "creative" approach. "In general, the more problems people have in discovering the truth about themselves and in communicating the truth to anyone else," observed Douglas (1985), "the more creative the
researcher must become in the situations of discovery and the communication processes by which the truth is discovered" (p. 23).

Creative interviewing...involves the use of many strategies and tactics of interaction, largely based on an understanding of friendly feelings and intimacy, to optimize cooperative, mutual disclosure and a creative search for mutual understanding. It certainly does not always start out with a high degree of cooperation; and like any relationship, including the most friendly, it always involves some potential or actual conflicts that must be assiduously and creatively managed. However, it always involves some trust and cooperation....It is always aimed in the long run at maximizing cooperation..., and it always involves concentrating on a core sample who will be the most cooperative of all those who have the experience we are studying. (Douglas, 1985, p. 25).

Consequently, as represented by the structure of the questions in the "interview guide," and by the derivative "responses" and "leads" that emerged in interaction with each subject, non-directive, "open-ended" techniques were used to facilitate greater disclosure and to assure, as much as possible, freedom of expression, a sense of "security," and the relatively unbiased "discovery" of the subjects' "personal truths."

We should always remember that people are more often frightened than dumb. They may hold fast to an absolutist attitude out of deep anxieties or simply out of fear of what the researcher, or someone the researcher may tell, will think of them if they raise all their questions, doubts and fears about what they are doing....Field researchers need to find those people who can be reassured enough by friendly trust (not necessarily just a good bedside manner) to talk about their fears and the things they have been hiding. (Douglas, 1976, p. 135).
The approach with each parent was grounded in what Jack Douglas (1985) has called the "principle of indirection:" "the less encouragement you give, the more a specific self-disclosure is likely to be the truth" (p. 137).

The whole interview situation is an indirect encouragement to self-disclosure. Setting the scene, slowly building-up intimacy, using warmth, all of these are general strategies and tactics for indirectly encouraging self-disclosures of whatever it is you are studying. (Douglas, 1985, p. 137).

With most of the subjects, however, direct "encouragement" was not necessary to "gather data." It seemed that once the research relationship was established, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given, all of the parents were immediately willing to say what was happening to them, to explain their thinking and behavior, and typically at the end of each interview, to express hidden emotions about certain aspects of their experiences. Indeed, while the interviews were meeting the goals of the researcher, certain "needs" and "ends" of the subjects seemed to be satisfied by the unusual opportunity to sit quietly and "to talk" to someone who, according to several parents,
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^9 My identification with the famous Irish-American television personality had less to do with physical appearance than tendencies of personal gesture and "interview style."
People frequently talk about the unspoken things in their nonpractical moments, the times when they 'let their hair down' over beer after work, when they sit ruminating around the fire after dinner, putting it all together, and philosophizing. It's at those times that the sociologist can see the 'practical actor' considering, talking about, and agonizing over what he himself sees as the irrationalities, contradictions, immoralities, unfortunate necessities, etc., of his practical affairs. (Douglas, 1985, p. 61).

Clearly, an important factor in gathering "data" throughout the interviews with each subject appeared to be the researcher's "success" at being friendly, compassionate, non-threatening, nonassertive, and often comedic, to the extent that he was "liked" by the parents. As Jack Douglas (1976) has observed, "The field researcher should try to be liked first and on that liking he can build powerful bonds of trust. If he isn't liked, it won't matter much whether he's trusted, he won't penetrate to the inner depths of things. If he is well-liked, he can get away with a lot, and can cover those rough spots of distrust that almost inevitably arise in any close relationship" (p. 136).

Even more important than "being liked," however, was the discovery that the nature of the "target
questions," and the opportunity to develop a relationship with the researcher, appeared to satisfy a number of the parents' pressing psychological needs. Indeed, once the purpose of the study was explained, and reinforced, and as each of the interviews unfolded, it was unnecessary for the researcher to provide a parent with an incentive to participate, to be "open," or to "trust."

I doubt if the personal impact of the researcher can be a valid motivator for subjects. If the researcher could somehow be "all-loving" and well-liked, the resultant emotional tie between himself and his subjects could easily bias their reports. If one has emotional ties with the researcher, one might tell him that which one feels is pleasing to him. The researcher is, therefore, left with the subject's perception of his research as the primary motivating factor in inducing them to report valid information. Thus the research itself must somehow be perceived as need-fulfilling. The subjects...must perceive the research as helping them to gain something which they desire; to explore problems hitherto not understood and unsolved. They must feel that they are contributing to something whose completion will be quite satisfying. (Argyris, 1958, p. 34).

For most of the parents, participation in the study seemed to mean a chance to be "heard," or maybe even "to change things." For many, the interviews seemed to reduce emotional isolation and to soothe discontent and distress. Several parents initially viewed participation as a means of "helping their case," a perception that was readily dispelled upon review of the "Voluntary Agreement of Participation." Interestingly, some parental
reactions to the interviews that were later communicated to their assigned caseworkers appeared to heighten the researcher's credibility in the setting—and usefulness. For example, it was evident that one supervisor referred at least one "case" to the researcher because of the parents' intense complaints about the Agency, threats of litigation, and their "resistance" to involvement with caseworkers.

Nevertheless, while the subjects were always eager to tell the "truth" about themselves, their children, and their overall circumstances, it was never assumed to be "the whole truth." When the researcher "relies upon trusted informants to tell him the truth of what is going on," observed Douglas (1976), "he is relying, knowingly or unknowingly, upon his experience, however direct or indirect, to talk about the setting, to determine how much he should trust the informant in general, and to estimate how truthful this particular report of the informant is" (p.109).

Clearly, evidence of "misinformation," "evasions," "fronts," and even "lies" were apparent in the "data" that were "gathered" from subjects, as certainly would be expected in this or any "deviant" setting (Douglas, 1976). "Rather than being the exception," concludes Douglas (1976), "I suspect...evasiveness is the common
situation in field research:

People rarely tell the whole truth as they see it about the most important things, but they are generally being evasive or misleading rather than lying. A field researcher must understand this and the reasons for it: Primarily a fear of exposure, of being caught in a lie, and an unwillingness to appear less than absolutely 'moral' to an academic stranger. (p. 65-6).

Beyond "saving face," however, there were practical dangers for parents who chose to disclose secrets to the researcher about actual circumstances, forbidden conduct, or their plans for future action in relation to the child welfare caseworker and the Agency. Nonetheless, the majority of the subjects did so throughout the interviews, in spite of the risk that a breach of confidentiality by the researcher might jeopardize their relationships with the assigned caseworker or affect the legal status of their "case." As a result, while "evasions" and "lies" were frequently interposed with "sacred truths," at no time did the researcher confront a subject with any of his or her "obvious" contradictions or falsehoods. Indeed, to do so would have violated the researcher's "friendly relations" with each parent or, at worst, imposed even more "judgments" on those who clearly had had enough.

The sociologist who tries to put into words for his 'verification procedures' ('just say it once for the recorder, please!) what the members assume should not be put into words, especially what could be dangerous or stigmatizing for them, demonstrates
incompetence both as a common-sense actor and as a field researcher. Any researcher who understands such settings knows what evasions and lies should be told and accepted. If he doesn't accept the lies, he's not only an impolite s.o.b., but a dangerous one.... In all other research settings I've known about in any detail, lying was common, both among members and to researchers, especially about things that were really important to the members. (Douglas, 1976, p. 73).

3. Theoretical Sampling

Over a period of eighteen months, twenty-four (24) "cases" were identified by the supervisors of two "units" of protective services caseworkers in the Agency for involvement in the study. Four (4) of those "cases" were referred to the researcher by one supervisor; the remainder, or the majority, were selected by the other, who was exceptionally supportive of the study.\(^{10}\) While

\(^{10}\) Initial attempts were made to engage the supervisors of five other "protective services units" in the Agency, for the purpose of developing a sample of "parents" from the diverse "caseloads" of over thirty caseworkers. However, these efforts failed. Time constraints persuaded me to settle for "what I could get" from the two supervisors who were most responsive. In retrospect, there is no doubt that my friendship, and identification, with one of those supervisors was crucial to gaining access to the majority of these "clients," despite the possible barriers this may have created for more extensive "infiltration" of the setting. As Douglas (1976) has noted, "in-depth involvement often precludes extensive involvement. This is due primarily to the fact that in-depth involvement generally gets the individual identified with one group or setting and intra-setting conflicts make him suspect in others" (p. 110).
the researcher was offered the opportunity to actively participate in the identification of specific subjects, it was avoided. Consequently, the researcher remained "humble" and passive; all of the selections reflected the independent perceptions, judgments, and decision-making of the supervisors, based upon consultation with the assigned child welfare caseworkers. The only influence exercised by the researcher upon the selection process was the requirement that potential subjects be "involuntary clients": parents who had been reported for alleged child abuse, neglect, or dependency and who were not involved with the Agency on a voluntary basis. If more information were requested, the researcher simply instructed the supervisors to consider any "involuntary clients," regardless of personal characteristics, such as a low level of intelligence, "mental impairment," developmental disability, race, ethnicity, gender, lack of verbal ability, or degree of "uncooperativeness" with the Agency, that might otherwise "suggest" their "inappropriateness." Indeed, it was strongly emphasized that such differentiations, and others, were unnecessary, irrelevant, and should be ignored when considering a
"client's" possible interest in or potential contribution to the study. In short, it was intended that the supervisors have maximum latitude in the selection process---as an anticipatory "control" against theoretical "sensitization" or political bias by the researcher---in order for the sample to represent a group of "typical cases" that were "active" in the "units" at the time of the study.

After a potential subject was identified by a supervisor, the assigned caseworker made contact with the "client" to briefly introduce the study, to discuss the parent's interest, and to obtain verbal permission from the "client" to inform the researcher of his or her name, address, and telephone number, if available. Eleven of the twenty-four "clients" that were identified by the supervisors were never "engaged" in the study for various reasons. Some "clients" clearly expressed a desire not to participate in the research, while others communicated a willingness, but persistently avoided contact with the researcher. Two parents experienced a change of status in relation to the Agency, specifically the "closing" of the family's "active case," which dampened their interest. In several "cases," the parents were completely inaccessible, i.e. the researcher failed to independently locate the parent or was unable to arrange a mutually
convenient time for an introductory meeting. It the latter instances, it became obvious that sole reliance on the "strength" of a caseworker's relationship with a parent was often insufficient—or faulty—ground upon which to "build" a research sample. While anticipated, these "failures" nevertheless encumbered the field work in many ways, not the least of which was the extraordinary amount of time and energy expended in "pursuit" of "elusive" subjects whom caseworkers had truly believed were "interested" and "willing" to participate.

In the end, a sample of thirteen (13) subjects was created, including one parent who "voluntarily" sought services from the Agency and another who had become "involuntarily" involved with a public child welfare agency in another county. The "voluntary client" was identified by a supervisor and later included in the study to serve as an "outlier," or "discrepant case," in order to "test and strengthen the basic findings" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 237). The latter was referred to the researcher toward the end of the field work by the manager of a public housing complex in another city, who was informed of the study's focus and immediately "knew a resident" who "might want to talk" about her experiences with that agency. This subject was included and
interviewed in order to compare the findings from the primary sample with another subject in a different community.

Driven by the conceptual framework and the research questions that bounded the study, the aim was to develop a sample of "involuntary clients" who were perceived by the assigned child welfare caseworker as "resistant," "uncooperative," or "cooperative" in reaction to the "interventions" of the Agency. As expected, the extreme example of parents who were labelled as "uncooperative" or "resistant," as well as those who displayed "hostility" toward the child welfare caseworker, were represented among the subjects. Indeed, markedly enforced relationships, especially those imposed on parents after an unexpected, formal "intervention" by the Agency, e.g. the taking of children into "emergency" protective custody through the authority of a law enforcement officer, required that the researcher "creatively" forge a neutral, "friendly" alliance with the subject, based upon a clear, shared definition of the researcher's role. In other situations, there were "clients" who acknowledged that they had once been "resistant" and "uncooperative" with either a previous, or currently assigned, caseworker, or both, but who over time had become "cooperative," admitted as a result of
sustained experience with the Agency. In most of the
"cases" in the sample, however, the immediate
responsiveness of subjects had accurately been predicted
by a judgment of the caseworker's existing relationship
with the parent, i.e. an assessment of the extent of a
parent's general reactions to the caseworker and the
consequent likelihood that he or she would consent to
participation in the study. In these instances, the
researcher found most of the parents to be initially
guarded, but receptive, "cooperative," and willing to
express themselves throughout the interviews. In essence,
in spite of the constraints of time and the "obstacles"
encountered in the field, the researcher attempted---as
much as possible---to heed the succinct advice of Miles
and Huberman (1984) in constructing and developing a
sample of parents: "Go to the meatiest, most study-
relevant sources" (p. 42).

4. Analysis of Data

A. Data Analysis During Collection: Toward
Understanding

Miles and Huberman (1984) have emphasized that the
process of qualitative field work is "iterative":

Analysis during data collection lets the
fieldworker cycle back and forth between thinking
about the existing data and generating strategies
for collecting new---often better quality data; it
can be a healthy corrective for built-in blind
spots; and it makes analysis an ongoing, lively
enterprise that is linked to the energizing effects of fieldwork. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 49).

Beginning with the first interview and throughout the process of data collection—indeed, with the development of a research sample, itself—interpretations were continuously made and a "grounded" understanding began to emerge as the researcher struggled to "make sense" of his encounters with each parent.

The earlier hypotheses may seem unrelated at first, but rather quickly become integrated, to form the basis of a central analytic framework. In fact, fieldworkers have remarked upon the rapid crystallization of that framework, and some have wondered whether later fieldwork does not merely elaborate upon that framework....Beyond guiding the active search for evidence, these integrated hypotheses immediately provide a central core of theorizing which helps the researcher to develop related hypotheses as well as to prune away those not related. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 290).

As the dialogue with each parent developed, and individual "accounts" were recorded and transcribed, "sentences," or "sentence chunks," were produced and became the "units of analysis," within the context of each interview and throughout the process of data collection.

In dialogue we are really interpreting. Speaking then is interpreting itself. It is the function of the dialogue that in saying or stating something a challenging relation with the other evolves, a response is provoked, and the response provides the interpretation of the other's interpretation. (Gadamer, 1984, p. 63).
The first task was one of "explicitly adopting as the concepts of analysis the linguistic terms used by the participants themselves in designating their own acts" (Lofland, 1971). The second, more important struggle was to grasp what Lofland (1971) has referred to as the "transbehavioral" meanings of behavior by the subjects. Meanings "define, justify, and otherwise refer to behavior and are not simply a description of it; 'meanings' interpret behavior, and therefore need to be isolated" (Lofland, 1971). "The task of interpretation," notes Richard Palmer (1969), "must be to make something that is unfamiliar, distant, and obscure in meaning into something real, near, and intelligible" (p. 14). Indeed, it is the explication and understanding of "meaning" that is the central challenge of interpretive social science:

From one perspective an action has one meaning, from a different perspective it has another. Social action is understood by people in a manner that is influenced by their own interests and projects and is just not available in the same way to an objective, detached, and disinterested observer (indeed, from the hermeneutic point of view, such a stance is not possible). This plurivocity, this openness to several interpretations, does not lead into total subjectivism, however; there is not a total lack of constraint on the alternative ways of understanding a given act. Our understanding of action seems rather like our perception of multi-stable visual figures: Each act is seen predominantly in only a few alternative ways, corresponding to the typical contexts of its occurrence. (Packer, 1985, p. 1086).
Throughout the sequence of interviews with each of the subjects, two general questions organized, guided, and impelled the researcher's "grasp" of emergent concepts:

1. What were the main themes or issues that emerged during the interview with the parent?

2. What new hypotheses, speculations, or conjectures about the parent, the parent's perceptions, the parent's actions in relation to the Agency, or the meaning of his or her experiences could be extrapolated from the "version" given during the interview?

Furthermore, as driven by the research questions and the theories that informed the study, data collected during the interviews with each parent were subject to "political" analysis. As John Wax (1971) has defined it, "Power is where we find it, where we develop it, where we mobilize it, and where we focus it" (p. 275-6).

...Power is the control of a resource or resources which are essential to the functioning or survival of an individual or an organization....Power is the ability to influence behavior through the use of rewards and penalties. The most clear and succinct definition is the colloquial: 'Power is the ability to make things happen.' (Wax, 1971, p. 274).

Consequently, three additional categories served to structure the analysis of data, and to generate more derivative "target" questions, as the researcher attempted to isolate the nature and extent of a parent's "political consciousness" of his or her situation:
1. Does the parent perceive a "hierarchy," or distribution of "power," in relation to or in interaction with the child welfare caseworker?

2. What is the parent's understanding of the concepts of "rights," "freedom," "authority," "conflict," and "dissent?"

3. What is the parent's awareness, or "consciousness," of alternate political solutions, per se, to the problems of his or life circumstances and the situation of involvement with the public child welfare caseworker and the Agency?

B. Data Analysis After Collection: Generating Meaning

"People are meaning-finders," observe Miles and Huberman (1984), "they can make sense of the most chaotic events very quickly.

Our equilibrium depends on such skills: We keep the world consistent and predictable by cognitively organizing and interpreting it. The critical question is whether the meanings found in qualitative data...are valid, repeatable, right. (p. 215).

To achieve these ends, and to assure the opportunity for dialogue and methodological criticism, it is essential that the nature of the "interpretive system" employed by the researcher to "make sense" of the data be as explicit
as possible. Subsumed in this "system" are the more conventional approaches, or "tactics," of qualitative data analysis, such as the identification of frequencies, the notation of patterns and themes, the consideration of "plausibilities," "clustering" in categories, "borrowing" or making metaphors, and placing "particulars" in the "categories" of the "general" (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Finally, all of the sources of bias that influence and affect the interpretations and the conclusions of the qualitative study must be identified and carefully evaluated.

The Interpretive System

"Hermeneutics is an attempt to interpret the 'sense' of certain phenomena," observes Spiegelberg (1971).

For not only our purposive behavior but our whole cognitive and emotional life, as phenomenology sees it, is shot through with meaning and meaningful

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11 As John Johnson (1975) has noted, "Insofar as scientific research includes any personal elements, it is impossible to provide an absolutely literal description of one's methodological procedures. But given this caveat, it is still possible to enlighten our understanding of research conduct by making the procedures more explicit" (p. 91-2).
intentions. No description can leave them out, even though it may refrain from accepting them at face value. Thus hermeneutic phenomenology must aim at something different and more ambitious: its goal is the discovery of meanings which are not immediately manifest to our intuitions, analyzing, and describing. Hence, the interpreter has to go beyond what is directly given. In attempting this, he has to use the given as a clue for meanings which are not given, or at least not explicitly given....hermeneutic interpretation is a matter not of mere constructive inference but of an unveiling of hidden meanings, or at most of an intuitive verification of anticipations about the less accessible layers of the phenomena, layers which can be uncovered, although they are not immediately manifest. (p. 695).

In Richard Palmer's (1969) terms, hermeneutics is a "process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding": "something foreign, strange, separated in time, space, or experience is made familiar, present, comprehensible; something requiring representation, explanation, or translation is somehow 'brought to understanding'---is 'interpreted' (Palmer, 1969, p. 13,14). According to Taylor (1979), "This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory---in some way unclear" (p. 25).

This is not to say that all behavior must 'make sense,' if we mean by this be rational, avoid contradiction, confusion of purpose, and the like. Plainly a great deal of our action falls short of this goal. But in another sense, even contradictory, irrational action is 'made sense of,' when we understand why it was engaged in. We make sense of action when there is a coherence between the actions of the agent and the meaning of his situation for him. We find this
action puzzling until we find such coherence. It may not be bad to repeat that this coherence in no way implies that the action is rational: the meaning of a situation for an agent may be full of confusion and contradiction; but the adequate depiction of this contradiction makes sense of it. (Taylor, 1979, p. 35).

While data were not gathered through complete "immersion" in the lives of the subjects, the researcher "participated" in relatively brief, but intimate, encounters---in "deep" interviews---with each subject that sought to bring the unfamiliar and obscure meaning of their perceptions to some measure of "understanding" for him. The aggressive "outreach" and creation of the research sample, itself, was the first step toward such "practical" involvement.

'Participation' is a strange word. Its dialectic consists of the fact that participation is not taking parts, but in a way taking the whole. Everybody who participates in something does not take something away, so that the others cannot have it. The opposite is true: by sharing, by our participating in the things in which we are participating, we enrich them; they do not become smaller, but larger. The whole life of tradition consists exactly in this enrichment so that life is our culture and our past: the whole inner store of our lives is always extending by participating. (Gadamer, 1984, p. 64).

Indeed, in the absence of even limited "participation" in the lives of a representative sample of "involuntary clients," no accurate, authentic, or useful representation of a parent's experiences with a public child welfare agency would be possible.
Richard Palmer (1969) has differentiated three, historical "directions" within hermeneutics, each of which "constitutes an independent and significant meaning of interpretation": to "say," to "explain," and to "translate." In the first instance, what parents expressed, asserted, announced, or proclaimed during the interviews was taken at face value, "literally" interpreted, as the researcher documented their perceptions or "read" the "text" of the transcripts, augmented by the audio tape-recordings of the sounds of each encounter that helped to bring the encounters "back to life." Inherently, the processes of transcription, and interpretation, weaken and make helpless the "words" of the subjects.

Language shapes man's seeing and his thought---both his conception of himself and his world (the two are not so separate as they may seem). His very vision of reality is shaped by language.... language is the 'medium' in which we live, and move, and have our being. (Palmer, 1969, p. 9).

Interpretation of the "sentences," or "sentence chunks," embodied in the transcripts must therefore "call" for their "lost power," i.e. must strive to counter the implicit "alienation of language" from the "living power" of its literal expression, assertion, or proclamation by the parents, themselves. In this respect, and in Palmer's terms, the researcher is an "enabler," a "go-between": with his voice, through his writing, otherwise powerless-
--and silent---parents are able to "say," to "announce," to "proclaim," something about their experiences. The "creation" of the research "sample," the interviews with each subject, the field work, and the final report of the researcher, are thus an "enabling act," aimed at achieving a more accurate public understanding of the private perceptions of these parents, with the prayer that each account---as told to the researcher---may exist again "as a meaningful oral happening in time, a being whose true nature and integrity can shine forth" (Palmer, 1969, p. 18).

By its nature, the method of "explanation" employed by the researcher in the study offers one interpretation of parental accounts; other methods, of course, will "see" a different object. As Richard Palmer (1969) has noted, "method and object cannot be separated: method has already delimited what we shall see. It has told us what the object is as object. For this reason, all method is already interpretation; it is, however, only one interpretation, and the object seen with a different method will be a different object" (p.23).

Explanation, then, must be seen within the context of a more basic explanation or interpretation, the interpretation that occurs even in the way one turns toward an object. Explanation will certainly rely on the tools of objective analysis, but the selection of the relevant tools is already an interpretation of the task of understanding. Analysis is interpretation; feeling the need for
analysis is also an interpretation but a derivative form; it has preliminarily set the stage with an essential and primary interpretation before it ever begins to work with the data. (Palmer, 1969, p. 23).

"Explanation" of the meaning of parental perceptions, through interpretation, is therefore implicitly shaped by the choice of method, the subject, the researcher and the nature of his direct experience, and the context of each encounter with the parent. This "subjectivity," however vulnerable to criticism, should not be cause for dismissal. "There is no reason to doubt a priori," notes Herbert Spiegelberg (1971), "that the private phenomena of phenomenological intuition are shareable" (p. 667).

Even merely private phenomena are facts which we have no business to ignore. A science which refuses to take account of them as such is guilty of suppressing evidence and will end with a truncated universe....And while it is true that there is no direct access to the private phenomena, e.g. of the psychopathic and especially of the psychotic personality, the sensitive observer has enough clues for indirect and hypothetical reconstruction of these phenomena, and for the verification of his hypotheses. (Spiegelberg, 1971, p.668).

Indeed, inasmuch as the "explanatory" process, itself, only provides an "arena for understanding," according to Richard Palmer (1969, p. 24), the researcher's search for the "meaning" of parental actions could only be realized within the "hermeneutic circle":

In general, the so-called hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that in interpreting a text one must move back and forth between an overall interpretation and the details that a given
reading lets stand out as significant. Since the new details can in turn modify the overall interpretation, which can in turn reveal new details as significant, the circle is supposed to lead to a richer and richer understanding of the text. (Dreyfus, 1984, p. 71).

In essence, the researcher moved "back" and "forth" between successive interpretations of the significant "details" of a parent's linguistic expressions and his deepening "grasp" of a parent's overall "sense" of "reality," toward a progressively "richer," more accurate, or "meaningful" explanation of a parent's actions in relation to the child welfare caseworker, the Agency, and the juvenile court. "Our actions are ordinarily characterized by the purpose sought and explained by desires, feelings, emotions," observes Charles Taylor (1979). "But the language by which we describe our goals, feelings, desires is also a definition of the meaning things have for us" (p.34).

An emotion term like 'shame,' for instance, essentially refers us to a certain kind of situation, the 'shameful,' or 'humiliating,' and a certain mode of response, that of hiding oneself, of covering up, or else 'wiping out' the blot. That is, it is essential to this feeling's being identified as shame that it be related to this situation and give rise to this type of disposition. But this situation in its turn can only be identified in relation to the feelings which it provokes; and the disposition is to a goal which can similarly not be understood without reference to the feelings experienced: the 'hiding' in question is one which will cover up my shame; it is not the same as hiding from an armed pursuer; we can only understand what is meant by 'hiding' here if we understand what kind of feeling
and situation is being talked about. We have to be within the circle. (p. 34).

Finally, "translation," according to Palmer (1969), "only makes us more fully aware of the way that words actually shape our view of the world, even our perceptions. Language is clearly a repository of cultural experience; we exist in and through this medium; we see through its eyes" (p. 27). Through "translation," the interpreter attempts to bring "what is foreign, strange, or unintelligible into the medium of one's own language. Like the god Hermes, the translator mediates between one world and another" (p 27). As a result, the researcher sought to reduce the "language barrier," or in Goldstein's (1986) terms, to mediate the "collision" between his "sense of reality," or sense of "being-in-the-world"---which shapes, and is shaped by, his language---and that of a subject. Consequently, as a third "direction" of interpretation, "translation" is clearly at "the very heart of hermeneutics": the piecing together of the meaning of the parental accounts in a way that is clear and "intelligible," i.e. in a way that "speaks our language," is accessible to others, and that can lead to meaningful understanding.

What must be borne in mind is that the main function of a phenomenological description is to serve as a reliable guide to the listener's own actual or potential experience of the phenomena. It is in this sense never more than ostensive, or better, directive. Its essential function is to
provide unmistakable guideposts to the phenomena themselves. (Spiegelberg, 1971, p. 673).

The Structure of Data Analysis

Twelve "tactics" for "generating meaning" in qualitative analysis have been identified by Miles and Huberman (1984), several of which were relied upon by the researcher to further structure and systematize his attempts to "make sense" of the data. In specific, each of these "strategies" represents the conventional approach to the organization and analysis of extensive, obscure, often incoherent, data, especially for the purpose of "testing," "strengthening," or "rejecting" interpretations of the "meaning" of that data.

First of all, the researcher "counted", or noted the frequencies of occurrence of, emergent "qualities," "patterns" or "themes" within the data.

When we identify a theme or pattern, we are isolating something (a) that happens a number of times and (b) that consistently happens in a specific way....When we make a generalization, we amass a swarm of particulars and decide, almost unconsciously, which particulars are there more often, matter more than others, go together, and so on. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 215).

"Counting" provided a fundamentally descriptive, i.e. literal, means of "seeing" the "general drift of the data more easily and rapidly by looking at distributions," as well as a way of tempering the researcher's judgment of
instances of "obvious" thematic conclusion: when "something 'jumps out' at you, suddenly makes sense" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 215). Furthermore, it offered a framework for establishing confidence in the "crystallization" of "grounded" concepts, the verification of emergent hypotheses, and a means of gauging "how robust" the researcher's insights were upon comparison of recurring "qualities" and "themes" between and among parental "accounts."

As a qualitative researcher, one works to some extent by insight and intuition. There are moments of illumination. Things 'come together.' The problem is that we could be wrong. There is a near-library of research evidence to show that people habitually tend to overweight facts they believe in or depend on, to forget data not going in the direction of their reasoning, and to 'see' confirming instances far more easily than disconfirming instances....We do this by differentially weighting information and by looking at part of the data, not all of it. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 216).

Data were "clustered" during the analysis by asking such questions as: "What things are like each other? Which things go together and which do not?" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 218). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), "clustering" is a "general name given to the process of using and/or forming categories, and the iterative sorting of things---event, actors, processes, settings, sites---into those categories" (p. 219). Data were thus "clustered" in the preexistent categories
of the conceptual framework represented in Diagram 1, in wholly new categories that were represented in the data, or that emerged from the underpinning dialectic of theory and "grounded" data analysis.

Taking instruction from Miles and Huberman (1984), the researcher also attempted to "think" metaphorically throughout the collection and analysis of data. Metaphors were frequently "borrowed" from subjects and used as "powerful descriptors" of selective aspects of common parental experiences, both during and after data collection; as "data reducing devices," i.e. "taking several particulars and making a generality of them"; as "pattern-making devices," by pulling together "bits of information," especially toward the development of central themes; and as "decentering devices": as the researcher repeatedly "stepped back" or "out of" the sequential interviews with each subject to analogically ask, "What's going on here?" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 221).

The metaphor is halfway from the empirical facts to the conceptual significance of those facts; it gets the analyst, as it were, up and over the particulars en route to the basic social processes that give meaning to those particulars....In so doing, one shifts from facts to processes, and those processes are likely to account for the phenomena being studied at the most inferential level. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 221).
Finally, beyond "clustering," the researcher asked the following inductive questions: "What is this specific thing an instance of? Does it belong to a more general class?" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 223). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), "subsuming particulars into more general classes is a conceptual and theoretical activity...in which the analyst shuttles back and forth between first-level data and more general categories, which evolve and develop through successive iterations until the category is 'saturated' (new data do not add to the meaning of the general category)" (p. 223). Throughout the data collection and analysis, the researcher searched for the "deeper" or "hidden meanings" in the dialogue with each parent and continuously moved to "higher" levels of theoretical abstraction in the organization and classification of his findings.

One cannot decide in a vacuum which of these classes is 'right' or 'best.' There must be a clear linkage to the study's conceptual framework and research questions. And one must repeatedly move back down the abstraction ladder...to 'find the referent': the concrete instance that's being alluded to when a phrase...is being used in an analysis. (Miles and Huberman, 1985, p. 223).

Indeed, this process provided the "momentum" for sustained field work and, after eighteen months, signaled its end.
Sources of Bias

Qualitative researchers, more or less "immersed" in the lives of others—and usually anxious to report the "truth"—must ultimately consider the effect of their subjective experience upon the "validity" of their "findings," i.e. the accuracy, authenticity, and authoritativeness with which researchers have represented the perceptions, actions, situations, and culture of their subjects or, more problematical, interpreted the meaning of their language and behavior. As previously discussed, hermeneutic inquiry, however limited, is subjective experience and is necessary if a researcher seeks "hidden meanings," a grasp of his subjects' "sense of reality," or entrance to their "worlds," as each has constructed, sustained, and defended them. In the end, a researcher's "own subjective experience is ultimately the basis of all their imputations of meanings to the people they are trying to understand scientifically.

The subject, their own experience, is the ultimate basis for their understanding of the 'external objects' and, while they can and do try to make some partial controls on individual biases, such as lying, it makes no sense to believe it is possible to ever totally separate the subject from the object. Rather than trying to eliminate the subjective effects, the goal must be to try to understand how they are interdependent, how different forms of subjective interaction with the people we are studying affect our conclusions about them, and so on. Rather than looking at research methods as a preconceived constraint that
automatically eliminates subjective elements, methods now become an inspiration as well, an attempt to show how one can create and use subjective experience, gained from interaction with other people and from introspection, to understand them and oneself (Douglas, 1976, p. 24-5).

Inasmuch as one must acknowledge the "subjectivity" of "involved practical understanding," it is essential that the researcher (a) identify, as much as possible, the "subjective effects" that threaten the "validity" of his conclusions and (b) describe his systematic attempts to reduce such potential "contamination" in order to increase the accuracy and authenticity of his findings.

For example, the quantitative problems of "mortality," "maturation," "history," and "instrumentation," as described by Campbell and Stanley (1963), are associated with the passage of time, and are pertinent here. While twenty-five "cases" were ultimately referred to the researcher over a period of eighteen months, fifteen of the parents ultimately participated in the study. Due to "mortality," two of those subjects were accessible for only one interview, which further "reduced" the sample. Second, because data gathering persisted over an extended period of time, the subjects were influenced by a myriad of extraneous factors that undoubtedly affected their perceptions throughout the sequence of interviews, such as concurrent "mental health
treatment," involvement in "nurturing classes" that were provided by the Agency, "outpatient" drug and alcohol counseling, or that may have been caused by the more incalculable influences of personal "maturation" and experience. Furthermore, whether information was gathered from parents soon after initial "investigation," i.e. the "intake" phase of "protective service" delivery, versus later stages of family-centered "case management," including "foster care," appeared to affect the nature and intensity of some of the parents' reactions. Third, with the passage of time, it was inevitable that some of the subjects would become "sensitized" to the interviews with the researcher. "When it is realized that observers interact with those observed, it can be seen that the interaction between an interviewer and respondent, experimenter and subject, observer and informant, may itself create differences across observational encounters" (Denzin, 1970). In short, all of these problems are formidable and, at first glance, tend to support the view that "qualitative analyses can be evocative, illuminating, masterful, and downright wrong.

The data, looked at more scrupulously, don't support the conclusions drawn. Researchers double-checking the site come up with different findings. Site informants, asked to provide feedback on the findings, contest some or all of them, very plausibly. The phenomenologist chuckles, reinforced in the idea that there is no single reality out there to get 'right.' The
psychometrician, from the polar opposite stance, concludes the nonstatistical research is an albatross. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 230).

Indeed, in the face of these, and other problems, what did the researcher do?

A. Representativeness

"When we come up with a 'finding' in a field study," observe Miles and Huberman (1984), "we quickly assume it to be typical, representative, an instance of a more general phenomenon. But is it? And if it is, how representative?" (p. 231). There are four, major perspectives to consider in this regard. First of all, it has already been established that the research sample was composed of those parents who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and thereafter remained accessible to the researcher. Inasmuch as interviews were conducted with only the subjects who could be contacted, the researcher was forced to rely on a particular sample of parents whose (a) decision to participate and (b) relative accessibility differentiated them from other "involuntary clients" who had been referred to the researcher for consideration or that were served by all of the other "units" of caseworkers in this large public agency. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that those parents who were contacted were not
easily accessible. Most of the interviews were conducted in the subjects' homes, at their convenience, primarily because the parents lacked available transportation or were unable to arrange substitute care of their other children, or both. More than half of the subjects had no telephone; as a result, appointments with the researcher had to be scheduled through messages sent—-sometimes haphazardly—-by relatives or their assigned caseworkers. In actuality, while all of subjects in the study were "accessible," interviews with each of the parents only occurred because the researcher was able to aggressively "reach out" to them in their own homes, to sustain their willingness to voluntarily participate, and to build a productive relationship on the bases of "being liked" and some degree of "trust." Parenthetically, in order to "reach" the "involuntary clients" who were not "easily" accessible, but who may have been willing to participate, even more aggressive actions by a field worker would have been necessary. However, whether or not a researcher could ever engage those "clients," and many others, through ostensive collaboration—-or even limited identification—-with this or any other public child welfare agency is questionable, at best, and probably unlikely.
In order to assure the minimum requirements of "informed consent," to assess a parent's ulterior motives, and to consider their subjective effects upon the nature of the dialogue with the researcher, many of the subjects were directly asked to explain their reasons for choosing to "participate" in the study. As indicated, while two of the parents initially perceived their involvement with the researcher to be a means of "helping their case," either by gaining additional knowledge of "what to do" in their situations or by soliciting the intercession of the researcher on their behalf, these expectations—or hopes—were immediately discouraged upon the presentation, and signing, of the "Voluntary Agreement of Participation." The majority of the parents indicated that they chose to be involved in the study (a) because they wanted to "help" a "man" whom their caseworkers had described as a "student" who was "trying to get his degree;" (b) because they welcomed the opportunity to "talk to someone" about their "experiences," especially a "professor" who wanted to "know what it was like to be involved with a child welfare agency;" (c) because they wanted to express their discontent and disagreement with the actions, or inactions, of their current, or past, caseworkers; (d) because they hoped that the "success" of the study might
90.

They believed to be "wrong" with the Agency and correct what was adversely affecting them or other parents similarly situated; or (e) some combination of the above.

The following excerpts represent the explanations that were given by some of the parents to account for their decision to "participate" in the study:

I: Here's the first question,...I want to know what participating in this study of mine means to you. In other words, I am asking, what reason there is that you would have even wanted to talk to me. What's the purpose of even being a part of this?

S1: I don't know. (Said self-consciously).

S2: They just asked.

I: They "just asked."

S2: Yeah.

I: And you decided, what the heck, if they ask,...I'll just do it.

S1: Yeah.

I: But, you could've said, no. I don't want to do it.

S1: Yeah.

I: You could've said, no, I don't want some guy coming out, and particularly coming out on the day he thinks he's supposed to be here, when it's not the day that you thought he was supposed to be here (reference to caseworker's erroneous notification of appointment time to parent),...days like that! It's just, you just decided to be a part of it because [the caseworker] had asked you.

S1: I'm a nice person. (Smiles shyly).
***

I: Do you remember what this thing's all about, or what the heck I'm doing?

S: Yeah, you're from a college, you're a professor, and you're also a student. You're making reports about people who have children in the Home and people who have just gotten their children back from the Home. You're interested in what we feel about the [the Agency]. Ummm, you're...it's confidential, nobody will have my name...ummm, which doesn't make any difference.

I: Well, it should make a difference, because I think when we start talking a bit, and the questions that I start asking about your experience, you may want to say some things....

S: Well, I will say what's on my mind in front of them, so it doesn't matter....

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I: Obviously there are some reasons why you decided to let this strange guy wander around with a tape recorder in here and to sit down and talk to you. Honestly, how do you see me or the purpose of my talking to you? In other words, why are you doing this with me?! Why are you talking to me? What are the reasons or purposes? Honestly....

S: Well,...I was asked if we would volunteer to help you with your degree. And we agreed to talk to you. To give you our views,...and just talk to you!

I: So, you don't feel pressured at all, to do this.

S: No,...no.

I: So, in other words, I'm not another "line item," let's say, on this list of things (mandated requirements of the Agency) that you have to do....
S: No....

I: ...That if you say "no" to this guy, you don't have to be concerned about that.

S: No. 'Cause [the caseworker] had explained to us, before we even met you, you know, what you wanted, what we said would not get back to [the caseworker], and that, umm,...it was to help you in school. And, that,...what was said, wouldn't jeopardize us getting our kids back. What we said, what me and [my spouse] talk to you about, was kept to you, and [the caseworker] knew nothing about it. Well, it was just, you know, volunteering.

***

I: Tell me why, why are you cooperating with me, anyway?! Are you bored? Do you just need a guy to come out here and talk to you, what?!

S: Well, ahh,...because of the experience I've had, because of my whole background and educational experiences, and everything, and, umm,...I am more comfortable than probably a lot of people would be, to talk with you, but, because of that, I felt enthused and it gives me kind-of like an inner, rewarding feeling to assist on something like this. And, things about [the Agency], I feel it's important that people do need to know, there's a lot about [the Agency] that is wrong! They are not 100% wrong in what their purpose is. But, there's a lot that I feel that they are! And, I feel that I have, though I'm not working with them in the profession, that because of my background, and the way I am, and everything, I feel I have a professional attitude, you know? Which, I hope that's not something I'm being big-headed about, or anything, because I don't feel that way. But, anyway, I can, I feel I can see things...differently than the average person, 'cause my...mother feels, oh, this is threatening! And she wants to cover-up everything from juvenile, withheld, withhold everything! And withhold everything
from [the Agency]!....

***

I: Obviously you have agreed to let me come in here and talk to you, and I'm not a part of the Agency. I don't work there, I'm not paid by the Agency. I have nothing to do with your case, or your situation. Is there a reason that you decided to talk to me? Is there some reason that you even want to be involved in this?

S: Well, it's just that...all the organizations that I had come up with, it seems like we just don't, you know, we can't trust anybody, because it seems like, it seems like, they all turn against us. It seems like that they all claim that they're out to help us, but then they all...they all, they just seem like, it seems like they all...claim how they're tryin' to help us, then when it comes to the helpin', it just seems like they're...turn around and stab us in the back all at once!

***

I: O.K., I'll ask you one, final question, and then I'll scram. Why have you decided even to talk to me?

S: Sometimes..when you talk to somebody, well, ahh, she, umm, explained to me, umm, that you used to work with them (a public child welfare agency).

I: Yeah, I worked there from 1979, no, let me see, 1977 to 1982. I don't work there anymore,...and have been gone from there, really, since 1982. Umm, and as a result of some of the work that I did, in getting close to parents just like you, was the reason I had in mind for doing this study.

S: Right! That's why I wanted to, that's why I didn't mind talkin' to you.
I: O.K.

S: That's why,...you been there.

I: O.K.

S: You know? When a person's been there, you can relate, you know what I'm sayin'? You been there.

I: But, back then, I did not have children. Now I have children, I have three children. Now I know...what that feels like.

S: Yeah, yeah! You dealt with families, probably all kinds! Have big problems, you know. And that's why I said, I said, maybe he could...maybe I could find a little answers in him that I might have been searchin' for, you know what I'm saying? So, that's why I, you know, it wasn't no problem for me to talk to you.

I: Let me try to give you some answers, as much as I can, to probably only a limited extent. And that is, just about everybody I've talked to, over the last eighteen months, and, again, the majority of them...all told me the same story.

S: (Laughs briefly).

I: Now,...they've all told me the same story. They have all told me a story of frustration, and much as you've told me, striving to not only get your children back, once the agency has custody, but striving to show who you are and what you can do.

S: That's right.

I: So, what I would want you to know, which is probably as much as I can do for you, right now, is to, indeed, be aware that, unfortunately....

S: Maybe where you can't help me, maybe down the line you can help somebody.

I: That's what I'm hoping to do. I'm hoping to learn this and write about this in such a way
to do as much as I can, either now or during the rest of career, in working to try to make people aware of what some of these issues are.

S: That's what I told her, I said, where he can't help me, but sometime it's good to let off! You know, your feelings, your thoughts, your pressures, and everything, you know what I'm saying? I said, well, maybe he can't help me, but maybe someone down the line.

***

I: I asked you...what it meant for you to be involved with, or participate in this study. And, could you tell me, again what it means for you to be involved with this study; I can quote you (what was said before audio recording was in progress): "I would like people to know what social services does, and is, and their power."

S: O.K.

I: What does that mean, again?

S: They...they can come in, disrupt your life, totally turn everything around and then walk out. And they've gotten everything they want out of the situation. And you're left, usually, you know, in a mess. I mean, like I say, it's gotten to the point where I don't want to punish my children in public. Because you don't know who's watching. You don't know who's going to pick up that telephone and call. And it's too easy for people to abuse it. And I do think that, ahh, it is abused, a lot. By the public. And that [the Agency] comes out and abuses you even further.

I: I'll quote you, again: "They are too intimidating: too forceful in their tactics."

S: Right. They come into your house, and, like I, you know, like I say, [the caseworker], there are the [caseworkers] who will call you up and say, ahh, is it O.K. if I come over around one o'clock Thursday? And then there's the other ones who will call and say I'll be
there in ten minutes. Or they even just show up at your door. You know, without any warning, without any notice. And, I mean, you know, like I said before, you do not know, the average person does not know what your rights are. I always thought if they were on the other side of the door, I had to let them in,...or they could call the cops, kick the door in, and come in, themselves.

I: So, again, if I were to ask you what the end is, the product, what you would like to see as a result of my study, or whatever would come out of it, it would be what?

S: A lot of their authority, and power,...reduced. You know, to be..., not that they're way up there, and you're way down here (gesturing with hands). You get that feeling a lot from them, they know everything, and you know nothing. I mean,...a lot of times, ahh, the accusations that are made are really silly by people, like, you spank your child in front of the neighborhood. I mean, I don't see where that is abuse. But, they can come into your life and turn it around, simply because someone can call and say that. Their, ahh, power needs to be cut. O.K.?

In short, while the perceptions and motivations of the parents tended to vary, the social principle of "reciprocity" seemed to supply the answer to the question directly posed by Jack Douglas (1976): "what's in it for a subject of research?"

Generally, there isn't must more than friendly feeling and exchange, but that's a lot for most people. People do things for people they like, and the more they like them the more they do for them. But this does not mean necessarily that the more they like them the more they always 'do truth' for them. (p. 137-8).
Second, Miles and Huberman (1984) have warned of the "fieldworker's tendency to rely too much on articulate, insightful, attractive, and intellectually responsive informants...," leading to an "overweighting" of data gathered from such subjects, i.e. the "elite bias" (p. 230-1). Unquestionably, within the group of parents who were referred to the researcher by the "unit" supervisors were several subjects who met this description and who provided exceptionally cogent, compelling accounts of their experiences. For example, one subject owned a small construction company, his wife had completed one year of college coursework toward a degree in psychology, and both were apparently well enough known in the community to secure the aid of a nationally recognized football coach at the local university to assist them in their "struggle" with the Agency. Another parent claimed that her grandfather had served as a juvenile court judge in Ohio and an uncle had been a law enforcement officer, both of whom inspired her to complete three years of college in a criminal justice program. Nevertheless, in contrast with these extraordinary subjects were several, less articulate parents whose accounts during the interviews balanced and, in many ways, overshadowed, the poignancy of the "elites." For example, five of the latter parents
indicated that they had not completed high school; indeed, three of them reported less than a ninth grade education. A psychologist described one of these subjects in a report to the Agency in the following manner:

Expressively, she defines words at the 6-2 year level....Language is concrete and functional. [The parent] probably understands more than she is able to express. In conversation, she uses adult forms, and asks and answers questions. She does not indicate lack of understanding or inability to perform unless probed.

Two of the subjects were described by psychologists as functioning in the "borderline range of intelligence," with "Full Scale" intelligence quotients of 72 and 77, respectively. With regard to one of these parents, an examiner reported that "her awareness of social norms, her judgment in practical situations, her ability to evaluate past experiences, her abstract reasoning ability and finally her knowledge of simple computational facts and her ability to concentrate upon a task fell within the slow learner range, possibly suggesting impulsiveness or anti-social tendencies, literalness and inflexible thinking." Finally, one of these parents, an African-American woman, was receiving Supplementary Security Income (SSI) because of mental retardation. In short, despite what were clearly substantial differences in verbal, intellectual, and other abilities, the accounts
verbal, intellectual, and other abilities, the accounts of each these parents were equally weighted and contrasted during data analysis.

Third, if the researcher were "used" by the "unit" supervisors to mediate or "quell" the dissent of only markedly "uncooperative" or "resistant" "clients," was the sample selection biased toward that end and, therefore, potentially "nonrepresentative" of other "involuntary clients?" Furthermore, in light of the "noncontinuous presence" of the researcher in the field, and in the lives of the subjects, did the interviews with these specific parents simply reflect the isolated, situational dissatisfactions of a small group of "involuntary clients," regardless of whether or not they had been referred to the study at "random?" In actuality, only three of the parents in the sample were described as "resistant or "uncooperative" by their child welfare caseworkers at the time of referral to the researcher. For example, in the instance of a twenty year-old woman whose child was in the temporary custody of the Agency at the time, the assigned caseworker noted in a quarterly summary of "case progress":

[The parent] does state that she does want her child back and is working to get him back, however, [the parent] appears to be passive/resistant at certain times. This is proven in the fact that she
did not follow through with the [mental health center] referral.

In the situation of the other parents, a married couple, the "case" was referred to the researcher within six months after an "intervention" by the Agency in which an "intake worker"—in response to an allegation of physical abuse of a sixteen year-old child by the father—had taken physical custody of the parents' five children on the authority of an "emergency court order."

All of the children had thereafter been placed with a "foster family" who were well known to the parents. In her "assessment" at the time, the "intake worker" indicated that the "father does have an extremely explosive temper.

He was very angry about the initial message given to him that a worker was coming out to his home but later took matters into his own hand and removed his child from the foster placement. He is difficult to reason with as he does not see what has occurred as abusive.

In contrast, the "protective services worker" who was later assigned to the "case," and who referred the parents to the researcher, described the "service goals" at the time as follows:

The [parents] have been cooperative with this worker. They did not sign the case plan. To this worker's understanding, they have not received psychological evaluations, as initially ordered..., and visitations with their oldest children. . . .have been problematic due to the nature of the relationship between the [parents] and the [foster
parents]. This worker's impressions include the following:

The conflict between the four adults at times does not help serve the best interests of the five children.

The explosiveness of [the father] at times makes progress very difficult toward reunification.

The attitude and behavior of the two oldest children...have made any attempt at movement or reunification virtually impossible.

As a result, the majority of the parents who were selected by the "unit" supervisors were judged to be "cooperative" with their assigned "protective services workers" and the Agency.

While practical constraints prevented the researcher from conducting interviews with the subjects at predetermined, or regular, intervals, such "gaps" were purposeful and designed to assure that emergent themes in ongoing data analysis were not transient, or situational, but representative of consistent thoughts, beliefs, or emotions that were experienced by the parents. For example, a subject was asked the following question in a second interview:

I: When you think about yourself, and your life,...up to this point in your life,...what has this whole experience meant to you---when you stop and think about it?

S: Well, being without my the kids, it's lonely, especially when [my spouse] is not here during the day. And, but its not so bad, now, now that
I take care of four of them (through babysitting), while she's (a neighbor) at work, and at school...I help take care of her four. Which puts my mind at ease, while I'm takin' care of these four, I'm thinkin' of my three. Because her little girl is the same age as [my daughter], her boys is the same age as my boys. So while I'm taking care of them, I think about my three all the time. In a way, it's like havin' 'em here, with me, but they're not really here. I'm just thinking of them, while taking care of four more.

Eight months later, during a third, and final, interview with the parent, the question was asked again:

I: Well, what's it been like, for you,...what has this experience been like?

S: It's been rough. It's been rough. Now, it's even harder when I get 'em on the weekends, and then I have to take 'em back for the foster parents to pick up on Sunday. Or, if there's no school on Monday, we keep 'em till Monday. But it's even rougher, then, when I have to take 'em back,...because I've got 'em from Friday to Sunday. And it's most, it's almost like havin' them home, period. But, when the weekend's over, during the week, sometimes I feel so depressed, and so bored, all's I want to do is sleep all day long. But that's been hard to do for the last two weeks, me and my Mom's been out walkin' in different areas, passin' out surveys for [a local business college]. But, today, yesterday, we worked for a couple hours and today we didn't go out, at all. But, there's been days when, when I lay down and go to sleep, and sleep all day! When, this afternoon, I took off and went for a walk! Because I didn't have nothin' to do here. I didn't go to work, today. There's times,...it's rough!
B. Researcher Effects

Miles and Huberman (1984) warn that "the researcher is likely, especially at the outset, to create social behavior in others that would not have ordinarily occurred."

This, in turn, can lead the researcher into making biased observations and inferences, thus 'confounding'...the 'natural' characteristics of the setting with the artificial effects of the researcher-native relationship. Unconfounding them is like threading one's way through a hall of mirrors. (p. 232).

The researcher is prone to incalculable changes during the conduct of interviews and data analysis, especially those induced by the duress of field work or sympathetic reaction to the distress of seemingly helpless parents, which influence his conduct, consistency of focus, and ongoing interpretation of data during the interviews.

The actual situations of the interviews also presented a distinct number of factors that had to be considered. Different settings are governed by different "rules," and thus can elicit different behaviors. Whether or not an interview was conducted in a subject's home or in an office at the Agency; alone with a subject, or jointly with a spouse, grandparent, or others; required specific documentation and analysis, in order to determine the effect of these "obtrusive" or "confounding" variables upon the nature of the data being gathered. For example,
during the second interview with a Lebanese-American couple, as the researcher was invited into the living room to begin his conversation with the father, three male "friends of the family" spontaneously joined them and sat quietly as the "process" unfolded. What the father expressed in their presence was clearly different from what he shared during a later interview in the same room, when he and the researcher talked together, intimately, on a warm September evening. Indeed, an excerpt from an interview that was conducted with another parent---while her mother sat at some distance in the room, vigilant, involved---portrays such "obtrusion," as well as the effect of the researcher upon the subjects' self-presentations:

M  (Mother): I never mistreated you,...I never beat you, you never had a mark on you in your life.

S  (Parent): My Mom never touched me. My Mom's always been good to me.

M: I've hollered at you!

S: She's hollered at me, but she never laid a hand on me!

M: Dad never did wup (whip) you!

S: Dad never did wup (whip) me! My Dad and my Mom took care of me, everywhere they'd go, I'd go.

M: No babysitters for her!

S: No babysitters! I was with my Mom and Dad or I was at home.

M: Or, at her Grandma's....
S: The only thing I don't understand, ...[the Agency] is, in a way I wish God would have never had [an Agency], or the state would have never had [an Agency], ...'cause they're not worth it! If any way, I had any way, if I had a lot of money, [the Agency] wouldn't be there, right now! That's the way I feel, ...'cause they're just tearing people's families up! I would demolish [the Agency]! I wouldn't give 'em about the caseworkers! If I had the power, I wouldn't be sittin' here, I would go over there and do it! But, see, a lot of things could happen in Court ....[The caseworker], just like you read them papers, [the caseworker's] gonna bring them....

M: [The caseworker] gets her in Court and makes her look like a little dog!

S: [The caseworker] makes me look like a puppy! A puppy. [The caseworker] speaks for me, I'm not allowed to speak for myself. It's like you read in them papers, that I showed you there, umm, ...[the caseworker's] gonna pull about five, long pages of in summary, just about me and my family here. Well, I know there ain't no record on this house, or this family....

In essence, these interactive effects, and others, must be acknowledged and countered, most importantly because "they influence analysis deeply, both during and after data collection.

The researcher who has 'gone native' stays native during analysis. The researcher who has influenced the site in un-understood ways suffers unaware from that influence during analysis. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 233).

In order to "control" some of the biases associated with the researcher's interaction with, or effects on, the subjects during the interviews, four techniques were
used in the study. First, the "Voluntary Agreement of Participation" was presented to each subject and assigned caseworker in order to immediately resolve any questions regarding the identity of the researcher, his motives, his purpose in the setting, and the disposition of the information gathered during the interviews. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was intended to safeguard the parent's self-interests, as well as to reinforce the image of the researcher as detached from the caseworker, "neutral", but concerned enough about each of the subjects---as a parent, himself---to want to "learn" and to "understand what it is like to be involved with a public child welfare agency." Consequently, in the majority of instances, the parents tended to be "open" with the researcher, with little or no uncertainty about his motives and therefore little reason to present a "front" in order to defend against the "outsider."

Second, as previously described, most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the subjects. This was intended to demonstrate that the researcher was willing to meet the parents in a place that they controlled and that was convenient to them. Furthermore, "home visits" clearly reinforced the image of the researcher as an independent "agent" and tended to dispel any residual perceptions that he was in some way
associated with the Agency. While the temptation arose, no "unannounced" visits were made by the researcher; all of the interviews were scheduled in advance and with absolute respect for the preferences and daily circumstances of the parents. All of these efforts were intended to reduce the potential threat—or annoyance—of the "graduate student" or, at worst, "the professor," who had entered their lives, as well as to extinguish the need for certain situational adaptations, e.g. "tell the guy what he wants to know so he'll leave," both of which would affect the nature and substance of the data gathered from the subjects during the course of the interviews.

Third, while the researcher accentuated the importance of the study in order to generate interest, and to encourage the voluntary participation of each of the parents, such an inflation of the research "problem"—indeed, such "glorification" of the research, itself—runs the risk of eliciting exaggerated, or distorted, responses from the parents for purposes of self-aggrandizement. Indeed, this interactive effect did occur, but not because the researcher inflated the importance of the study. On the contrary, the majority of the parents, themselves, almost immediately approached the study with a perspective of its relevance—indeed,
its urgency---that affected the researcher and intensified his commitment to the purposes of the research. In effect, the research became an important experience---however transient---in the lives of these parents: the study seemed to genuinely matter to them with little, or no, need of additional reinforcement.

Last, and perhaps most important, the theories that informed the study, especially the "formal" conceptual framework from which the set of "target" questions were derived, represent the pre-existing political biases of the researcher, all of which threatened---in the absence of a scientific methodology---to "contaminate" the interviews, data gathering, and subsequent analysis. Indeed, if "plausibility" is the "opiate" of the "intellectual," as Miles and Huberman (1984) have emphasized, "absolute commitments" are the cause of the researcher's "addiction." "It is essential that a researcher not have deep emotional hang-ups," warns Jack Douglas (1976), "that is, absolute commitments about the area he is studying.

...The crucial thing is that he must not be closed to the situation; he must be open to it, able to experience it with some flexibility, lability, changeability. If he is too deeply committed to a feeling, ideology or pattern of practical action, his research will merely be a projection of his inner commitments. One should have feelings, but not passionate and well-entrenched commitments. It's one thing for a noncustomer to study massage
parlors. It's another for a nun to study them, or a politically ambitious city attorney. (p. 99).

In such instances, the findings and conclusions do not "emerge" from the data as much as they are extracted, ultimately tainted by self-acquitting inferences, fallacious reasoning, or what has been referred to as the researcher's "holistic bias": "The researcher sees all the main facets of the site 'coming together' to form a meaningful pattern---one more meaningful and more patterned than the loose-endedness and contradictory nature of social life warrants" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 231-2).

As a result, with this caveat in mind during the process of data gathering and analysis, the researcher consistently asked himself what Platt (1964) has called "The Question": "What could disprove your hypothesis?" Or, "What hypothesis does your analysis disprove?" In the end, while the conceptual framework represented in Diagram 1 was sufficiently "sensitizing," i.e. useful in the formulation of "perfect" questions related to the nature of authority, "power," and "control" in the "construction" of "treatment" as "political process," much, or all of its, inherent determinism tended to be challenged, if not disproved, by the findings and conclusions of the study. In the end, the researcher's "radical politics" gave way to the kind of methodological
standards that Howard Becker (1986) has prescribed for "those who think political sloganeering can substitute for knowledge based on adequate evidence and careful analysis": "Sociology based on the best available evidence should provide analyses that are likely to be true in the linguistic sense of not being falsifiable by other evidence, and also in the ontological sense of being 'true to the world'" (p. 85).

Good sociology is often radical. A sociology which is not good, however, cannot be radical in any larger sense. But moral sentiments do not determine scientific quality. The reverse is more often true: the quality of sociological work determines the degree to which it has a radical thrust. (Becker, 1986, p. 85).

In order to counter the effects that interaction with each of the subjects might have had on the process, and structure, of the interviews, as well as the interpretation of data, four major "tactics" were used by the researcher throughout the conduct of the field work. First, as previously discussed, the researcher avoided reliance on the accounts of the more articulate, "elite" subjects by assuring equal consideration of the perspectives of less eloquent parents, as well as others more tangentially involved in the situations of the subjects. In this regard, when possible, the researcher included a grandmother in two interviews; a "boyfriend" who, by virtue of his current relationship with the
mother of two children in the custody of the agency, became subject to Agency and juvenile court scrutiny; and two stepfathers who, despite their direct involvement in the respective "cases" of their stepchildren, appeared to defer to their wives when "dealing with the Agency." As a result, the researcher attempted to "spread out" the subjects, and other informants, in order to reduce the possibility of bias by the persuasiveness of a few (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 234).

Second, because the researcher was able to withdraw from the field and to reflect upon the nature of the data being gathered, he thus avoided what otherwise would have been a consistently strong urge to "go native." As a result of the researcher's practice and administrative experience in the field of public child welfare, it was often difficult to avoid the temptation to reveal how much he really did know, especially in response to subjects who had little, or no, understanding of their legal rights in relation to the Agency and the juvenile court. Consequently, there were many times that the researcher "retreated" from the practical risks of an interview by assuming a more "humble," and genuine, "front": that of a parent, "just like the subject," who wanted to understand his or her experiences in relation to the Agency. The latter technique not only tended to
"deepen" the communication with a subject, but helped the researcher avoid submission to an emotional need to "rescue."

S: I, I'm just worried about a lot of things right now. 'Cause they told me yesterday I wasn't going to make it full term (of her pregnancy). The baby is already in a position to be born.

I: My, how far along are you?

S: Six and a half months.

I: O.K., well, ummm,...so, obviously, you'd be worried about a premature birth. Am I correct in thinking that?

S: No,...they'll, it'll...they said the baby's healthy enough to live. But I'm just worried about [the Agency].

I: Now, having been told by [the caseworker] that they might take custody of this child at birth.

S: It's like I told him, try it and he'll have a big, fuckin' fight on his hands. I want to raise this baby if I can.

I: And what would a "big, fuckin' fight" be? What do you think you would do?

S: I'd probably end up goin' to their homes and takin' the kids and just leave. (Pause). Because I'm tired of this bullshit. And what I'm saying about bullshit, is...they said a few times, it won't be long before you get your kids back, but 90% of the things I do, they dislike. Like I never understand, there's a lot of things they do I don't dislike, I mean I dislike. You know, there's so much, they act like they are so much better than us, the people they got their kids. [The caseworker] sits here with no kids. [The caseworker] doesn't know what it's like,...and [the caseworker] says, well, if I did have kids, this wouldn't happen to me. So I asked [the caseworker], how do you know this wouldn't happen to you? You aren't that
special. It could happen to you (reference to interviewer), it could happen to anybody that's workin' here [at the Agency].

I: I know that....

S: Why can't people here, that work here [at the Agency], realize that? Like [the caseworker].

I: Maybe when [the researcher's] all done, sometime maybe in the fall or winter, when [the researcher] has had a chance to think about everything that has been said to him, maybe some people will start to understand, at least, here....

S: In the mean time, what'll we do? Those of us who don't have our kids and more and more that isn't?

I: I guess that's what is going to start to worry me. I guess that's what is going to start to keep me up at night, as I continue to talk to you, and other parents, who are involved with the Agency. I guess that's what'll be on my mind as I get on Route 76 and drive home. I guess that's my worry, and a worry that I had not thought about being there before I decided that I wanted to do this. I don't know.... But, I'll think about that, and...maybe something will happen.

S: I really pray for your sake that nothing like this happens to you.

Without fail, the majority of the subjects provided extraordinarily "open," compelling versions of their experiences, often bound by frustration and emotional pain as a result of the actual, or feared, loss of custody, and control, of their children.

S: Like I sit there and try and tell [the caseworker], but it goes in one ear and out the other. You know, I tell the Judge, he asks me questions, I tell him. You know? And it seems like, in his eyes, I don't give a shit! You
know? Well, I do! You know? I went through the nine months of labor, and the discomfort, and all this and that, but it seems like he don't believe me. And now, I've went two years without my [child].... If he didn't have, if he didn't have..., the way I put it to him, well, if you had a kid and it was in [the Agency], wouldn't you feel the same way that I'm feelin'? Well, let me ask you, Mr. Diorio, would you feel the same way I'm feelin'?

I: Well, I'm doing this study because I know I would feel that way.

S: You know, it hurts so bad, sometimes I just feel like...going away and then coming back, and then I wake-up my eyes, and he's here.

I: I can understand that feeling. I have three children of my own.

S: It's just like I'm dreamin', and it feels like, I've went to sleep and I've slept for two years, and when I woke-up my eyes, there's my son...he's home, again. But, my dream ain't never came true....And it'll probably be on and on and off and on and off, for another six years, probably. But, I hope not. I hope this last Court hearing will be the end of it. And they make a decision that I can have him in my home, and...that's the end of it....

Consequently, regular withdrawal from the field over the period of eighteen months of data collection served to "de-sensitize" the researcher: to "remind" him of the complex nature of his interaction with each of the subjects and the apparent intractable nature of many of their problems. In retrospect, this was necessary and critical to the preservation of what Jack Douglas (1976) has described as the researcher's "sociological perspective."
It is a difficult perspective for most people to take, and impossible for some, simply because they find it hard, or uncomfortable, or impossible to observe themselves either during natural experience or just after. There is nothing startling about that. Everyone knows some people are more self-conscious and reflective than others. Those who are more able to do self-reflection are more apt to make good analytical field researchers, though some who are not particularly self-reflective might be extremely good at some field research tasks (such as gaining entree, or building friendliness and trust). (p. 116).

Third, included in the sample of "involuntary clients" was a subject who---quite antithetically---had struggled as a single parent to get the Agency involved in her escalating conflict with a daughter who was twelve years-old at the time. This parent was an "outlier," a voluntary "client" who provided both discrepant and corroborative information that was compared and contrasted with the data gathered from the "involuntary clients" that comprised the rest of the sample. In essence, the inclusion of a "voluntary client" was intended to provide a "neutral" perception of the authority of the Agency by a parent who had willingly sought "help," but who had never been pressured or coerced by a public child welfare caseworker to accept services, i.e. to be involved with the Agency. "For any given finding, there are usually exceptions," observe Miles and Huberman (1984).

The temptation is to smooth them over, ignore them, or explain them away. But the outlier is
your friend. A good look at the exceptions...can test and strengthen the basic finding. It not only the tests the generality of the finding, but protects against self-selecting bias. (p. 237).

For example, all of the "involuntary clients" reported "feeling blamed," i.e. held responsible by a current, or past, child welfare caseworker for the condition or behavior of a child (1) who had become subject to a "protective services investigation" and (2) who had been "removed" from the custody of that parent because certain aspects of the condition or behavior had been attributed to some degree of parental incapacity.

In the instance of the "outlier," however, who claimed to have repeatedly---and voluntarily---sought help from the Agency because of her twelve year-old daughter's "sexual acting-out," "prostitution," expulsion from school, and frequent flights from home, she also perceived that she had been "blamed"---but in a curiously different way:

I: At no time, when you think back, did this intake worker, or anyone else along the way, did anyone blame you, or did you feel blamed for [your daughter's] problems?

S: Yeah, I felt, I felt like..they were all telling me.you have to take control of this. You have an unruly child. Umm, she has not committed a crime, as far as she has not, umm, been convicted of...breaking and entering, or anything like that, just prostitution, which is to her own self. And, this is your problem, you have an unruly child, take care of it!
For the same reasons, the researcher interviewed an "involuntary client" who was involved with a public child welfare agency in another county. Noteworthy, this subject had not been "recruited" with the assistance of the public agency in that community, but was identified and "solicited" to participate in the study because of her known "dissatisfaction" with that agency's initial "intervention" and continued "management" of her "case." Despite the "risks" of "self-selection," the researcher sought an additional, different "point of view" and to test whether or not the findings of his primary data analysis would be discovered, or "replicated," in an interview with this parent.

At the most elementary level, the fieldworker is replicating in the simple act of collecting new information from new informants, from new settings and events. New data bolster or qualify old data; in fact, one begins to collect new data in order to test the validity and generality of the old. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 239).

Fourth, the researcher attempted to "control" the effects of the encounters with each subject by "triangulating" the data that were gathered from the interviews with the written accounts, and other documentation, contained in the case records of each subject.

Stripped to its basics, triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, don't contradict it. The measures are imperfect in that the researcher usually invented them on the spot,
and we know little about their validity or reliability. They are also imperfect because they usually come from the same 'instrument,' that is, observations made or conversations recorded by the researcher alone. When the same instrument---in this case the same person---is both establishing and corroborating a finding, we have what amounts to a potential cognitive conflict of interest. (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 234).

Again, because of practical constraints, the records were not analyzed until the field work had been concluded. Nonetheless, the perceptions of the caseworkers that were finally available and documented in detailed "case summaries" allowed the researcher to contrast the accounts given by the parents with a perspective "of the same event" that had been recorded by the assigned caseworker. In addition, the researcher was able to make "sense" of the actual circumstances of the subjects by analyzing copies of juvenile court documents, which in many instances revealed the extent to which a parent understood the scope of the agency's "authority," his or her legal rights, the requirements imposed upon them through a mandated "case plan" of "services," and their overall legal status in relation to the Agency and the juvenile court. Therefore, the final data analysis was neither dependent on, nor blinded by, the nature of the researcher's interaction with each of the subjects throughout the course of the interviews in the field.
5. Ethical Issues

As previously discussed, the "Voluntary Agreement of Participation" that was read and signed by each subject, the assigned child welfare caseworker, and the researcher, anticipated many of the significant ethical issues that surfaced during the eighteen months of field work. Inasmuch as this contract clearly defined the researcher's identity, role, relationship to the Agency, and use of information obtained from a subject, as well as the parent's role, right to withdraw from participation, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, there was little or no evidence of conflict in the researcher's relationship to either the subjects or the assigned child welfare caseworkers in any such respect.

Noteworthy, however, and most important to an understanding of the analysis to follow is the promise of anonymity that was given by the researcher to each subject at the beginning of their involvement in the study. As Jack Douglas (1985) has emphasized, "when you want to get the unvarnished truth..., you almost certainly want to have a contract of absolute anonymity" (p. 64). Indeed, there is no doubt that some of the parents involved in the study were willing to disclose specific information to the researcher because of this
basic guarantee, especially (a) their perceptions of their assigned caseworkers, and other Agency staff, and (b) information about their actual behavior, plans, and personal problems that had been—and may continue to be—consciously withheld or obscured by their "front" of "cooperation" with the Agency's expectations and demands.

Consequently, the data supporting the report of the findings and conclusions of the study have been "laundered," to borrow Douglas's (1976) term, in order to protect the identities and interests of the parents who were involved in the study and who may continue to be "involuntary clients" of the Agency. While accurate, detailed transcripts of the interviews with the subjects are available, the researcher edited and organized the parents' accounts in such a manner as to prevent attribution of specific perceptions to particular "clients" who, because of their candor, might otherwise be at risk of "harm." While this decision sacrifices the poignancy of an accurate, thorough, and complete study of each "case," the researcher's prima facie obligation to protect the interests of the subjects was, and must continue to be, overriding.
Chapter 3

The Parents

You're behaving worse than a child. What are you after? Do you think you'll bring this fine case of yours to a speedier end by wrangling with us, your warders, over papers and warrants? We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this, must be quite well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no mistake about that... .

_Franz Kafka_
_The Trial_

Who are these parents? How have they come to be involved with this public child welfare agency? Throughout the interviews and the analysis of data, it was essential for the researcher to successfully "grasp" the situations of the parents: their "sense" of "self" in their "world," their life situation, and the incident, or events, that gave rise to an "intervention" by the public child welfare agency. "Grasping is a semi-conscious, largely presymbolic perception of the overall nature, interrelatedness, and truth of the setting," Jack Douglas (1976) has emphasized, "it is what St. Augustine had in mind when he noted that everyone knows what time
is and how to use it, but no one can tell us what it is.

The ultimate grasp of a setting, probably never achieved, is the Zen ideal of being able to subconsciously or 'automatically' react in complex, artistic, ways, as in a sword fight or an athletic game where one reacts physically without thinking much about it. Anybody who takes the time to think out in words how to fight with a sword is dead, just as anyone who has to think out how to dribble or shoot a basketball is going to lose, and just as any researcher who has to think out what is funny about a joke in the research setting before he laughs isn't making it—-he doesn't grasp the setting. (p. 123).

Needless to say, the researcher's "grasp" of a parent's "sense" of "self" in his or her "world" did not turn on his ability to "pass as a member," nor rely on the "identity" of a parent that may have been "constructed" by an assigned caseworker, or others, in the process of "treatment" or "case management." As previously emphasized, it depended on the researcher's ability to become intimately "involved with"---indeed, to "understand"---a parent during the sequence of interviews. In addition, upon "triangulation" with a subject's "case record," the researcher was able to "grasp" something about a parent's overall life situation, especially a "sense of" a family's circumstances prior to having become involved with the child protective services system. In essence, the researcher attempted to "move with" the parents in an empathic "shadow dance," in order to "enter" their
"worlds" and to "grasp" their situations in relation to the public child welfare agency:

Man is not just present to the world, as an autonomous and non-involved subject; he is totally involved in it. He is Being-in-the-world (Dasein). The world, moreover, is that field or region which is my concern or care. The world has a character of 'mineness'; not because of the I-pole of some transcendental ego, but because the world that is present to me (with me) is my concern, the field of my involvement. (Fontana and Van de Water, 1977, p. 124).

This kind of "practical understanding" was important for several reasons.

First, previous research has indicated that the majority of families who become "entangled" with public child welfare agencies are poor, relatively "powerless," and therefore disproportionately vulnerable to the "interventions" of public child welfare agencies. In order to confirm or refute such findings, it is necessary to accurately describe the situations of the parents, and the children, who were involved with the Agency and who participated in the study.

Second, it is often claimed that primarily poor, or "marginally functioning," families become the "involuntary clients" of public child welfare agencies because of heightened social and professional visibility. "The 'visibility' factor appears to be an especially strong determinator of whether a child welfare agency is
likely to investigate a particular household," observed Richard Levine (1973).

...The indigent's frequent visits by social workers and other 'do-gooders,' make them peculiarly accessible to inquiry and surveillance. Thus, vulnerability to government largesse and intrusion seem to be commensurate with one's class in society. (p. 5).

It is, therefore, important to identify any personal traits, or the presence or absence of factors in the behavior, and circumstances, of the parents in the sample that may have distinguished them from others in the community or contributed to their identification and "referral" to the public child welfare agency for "investigation" of suspected child abuse, neglect, or dependency.

Finally, in view of a public child welfare agency's discretionary authority to "intervene" in the momentary situation of any family that happens to be "reported," it is essential that mandated or "coercive" "interventions" not "impose standards" on "involuntary clients" that other parents in the community do not have to meet (Rhodes, 1986). Indeed, subsequent ethical decisions by child welfare caseworkers to "investigate" or "intercede" on behalf of a child may impose specific "standards" on parental conduct, set various requirements for child care, demand certain changes in the practical circumstances of the family, or all of the above. As
Catherine Alter (1985) has acknowledged, public child welfare "investigators" face numerous difficulties during the "initial diagnostic phase" of decision-making:

First, there exists neither a theoretical nor clinical framework to help child protection workers apply the legal standards established in their state laws....There is, therefore an attendant absence of interdisciplinary standards upon which to base sound judgments....Because the initial decision is difficult....and because concrete criteria are lacking, workers often rely on cultural and personal biases..., or make decisions based on 'exhaustion, emotionalism, or personal values about child rearing....'

The second problem concerns the question of fairness. Because of the lack of consensus concerning diagnostic criteria, there is a concomitant disagreement about what factors workers should use in decision-making....and inconsistency within and between jurisdictions concerning what constitutes abuse or neglect. (p. 100).

As a result, it is important to document the formal "reports" that were made to the Agency regarding the behavior or situations of the parents, and their children, and the initial "interventions" of caseworkers assigned to "investigate" those "complaints." As much as possible, what follows is an attempt to "objectively" describe some of the parents and their circumstances, as the researcher encountered them, while preserving the accuracy and authenticity of information gleaned from the case records of each subject through extensive citation and quotation.
The Parents

I. Monica

Monica was a twenty-two year-old, caucasian, divorced woman who was pregnant with her third child at the time of her involvement in the study. Both a four-year old daughter and twenty-month old son had been in the temporary custody, and care, of the Agency for approximately seventeen months. A number of things are noteworthy about Monica, her life circumstances, and her situation in relation to the Agency.

During a mandated psychological evaluation, Monica provided the examiner with the following "relevant history":

[Monica] was the second of five siblings born in [the city] to a lower-class family with an alcoholic, irresponsible father and a rather volatile, aggressive mother, who was also an alcoholic and drug addict. Her father left the family when she was one year old and [Monica] had had no contact with him until she was fourteen. Her mother tried to take care of the children while working as a cab driver and a barmaid. However, [the Agency] stepped in and took custody of the children because of the mother's irresponsible and abusive behavior when [Monica] was thirteen years old. She said, 'I got high with my mother when I was a little girl. After [the Agency] took us, I still visited my mother twice a week to get high.' She was sexually abused first by her uncle (mother's brother) at the age of eight or nine and by her father at the age of fourteen. She dropped out of school, moved to [another state], and got married when she was sixteen years old. 'All my life I wanted
somebody to love me.' She had a daughter from this marriage which resulted in divorce after two years because of her husband's threats toward her daughter. She returned to (the City) and started to live with her mother.... Her mother 'kicked me out' and kept her daughter for a few months, but she went back and got her daughter; 'my little girl was getting high because of my mother's smoking pot.' She moved in with a couple who has five children. At the time, she was pregnant for the fifth time (three of her pregnancies resulted in miscarriages), and gave birth to a baby boy....

The same examiner reported that Monica had obtained a "Full Scale I.Q. of 77 on the WAIS-R," a "performance" that "falls within the borderline range of intellectual functioning." Monica completed only eight years of formal education.

Indeed, Monica acknowledged during her first interview with the researcher that she had been "taken" from her mother when she was a child and had been in the custody and care of the same agency for an extended period of time.

I: How old were you when that happened?

M: Well, the first time my Grandmother took me, I was ahh...maybe ....five or six years old. And she had me for a few years and my Mom would come over to see us, and she'd lock us in the basement...my Grandmother would. And that's been a fear of mine.

I: Let me ask you this, then, because it would seem to be important, too. And that is, as much as you can recall, what it's like---to use your words---to be "taken?"

M: (Pause) Well, when I was taken from my Grandmother, my Grandmother made us very happy.
She...was good to us because my Mom couldn't take care of us, and at the time we didn't understand, we cried, and we would want to be with my Mom,...but,...but, that's natural. You know. When I was that young, umm, I didn't really care. I knew I missed my Mom. I loved my Mom. My Mom was my "Mom," and nobody really could take her place. Ummm, when I was seven years old, I ran away from...to my Mom's house, I even got there when it was a long distance to her house, because I have been over there about every day. I ran away from Grandma's, from Grandma's to my Mom's, because I loved her. And, I...she let me drink with her, but I thought that was cool. You know, I kinda do things with Mommy. Mommy let me do what she was doin'. At the time, I didn't know it was bad, I didn't care....As long as I was with Mommy.

I: Well, why don't we just stay with you, then,...in terms of our talking here. When did you then come to live at [the Agency institutional facility]?

M: Umm, I'm not sure how old I was. Ummm, I can't tell you how old I was. But, I was.... (Pause) I think I...I think I was about twelve, thirteen, years-old, if I can remember. I got into a lot of trouble, and [the Agency] came and took me. And, ahh, I was here first, and then [the Agency institutional facility]. Umm, at the time, I did party a lot...what happened....I do remember that as soon as I got to [the Agency facility], we walked in, we got to a recreation room, it was like a living room, next to it was a kitchen and then the office, where the two people worked there, they were homemakers---or whatever you call it---and there were bedrooms, there would be a bunch of bedrooms here and a bunch of bedrooms there, umm....

I: How long were you in the custody of the Agency?

M: Well, I don't know, because I kept runnin' away. Umm, it was real easy to get out of there. They'd lock the doors at night and we'd break open the screen, and jump out the window, and go down to the corner, get a ride from somebody, the same person every time, I won't
where it was at or who he was, the same person, this person would give us a ride to ...where we was goin', and on the way, we'd party somewhat..., he'd drop us off and we'd go our own way.

During the same interview, Monica told the researcher that she was planning to move to a nearby city to share an apartment with a friend. Curiously, in less than two years of involvement with the Agency, Monica's "case record" revealed that she had lived---with and without her children---in eleven different places in the community, at least half of which were the homes of friends. Prior to the last interview, however, she had secured an apartment on the second floor of a large, somewhat dilapidated building, where the researcher found her busily painting the walls in preparation for the birth of her third child. Access to the apartment could only be achieved through a narrow, dark stairway:

I: The way things have always unfolded here, and particularly in relation to the agency, do you believe that life is in your control, that you can actually do things to make things happen in your life, or do you feel that things that happen in life are pretty much out of your control?

M: Right now?

I: Right now, as we sit here.

M: This is my control (gestures to surroundings of apartment).

I: This, meaning what? This apartment?

M: My apartment. I had moved in here, when I moved in here the walls were peeled. I scraped
the walls, I re-painted. This apartment was a dump. You ask anybody on this block! This apartment was a total dump. The walls was peeling, ahh,.... Everything about this place was totally f***ed! Excuse my language....

I: Well, you don't see me falling off this couch....

M: The kitchen was a pukey green. I mean, you know, and I did this, this is my control. But, [the Agency] tells me who I can have here and who I can't have here. Like I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend.

Inasmuch as Monica was six months pregnant, she was "unemployed" and not seeking work. At the time of her involvement in the study, she was receiving Aid to Dependent Children in the amount of $254.00 per month, and an additional $149.00 in Food Stamps. She told the researcher that she had previously worked as a waitress and "dancer." In contrast to this limited disclosure, a child welfare caseworker had made the following notation in a "case summary" after four months of involvement with her:

Since this worker has had the case, Monica has held numerous jobs. In October, she was working for an agency in which she went door to door soliciting donations for the Toxic Waste problem. She lost that job and went to work at [a restaurant]. Again, she lost this job and went to work at [a restaurant] in [a local mall]. That job only lasted a few weeks also and most recently she had been working at [a local health spa], however, she has also lost this job.
The caseworker assigned to her at the time of the study made the following observation in a summary of "service goals":

Monica has been working, most recently at [a convenience store] where she had been fired and throughout the summer at [a local lounge] and [tavern] and other bars which feature exotic dancing. [Monica] states that she is not involved in prostitution as other members of [the lounge's] employees were but she since quite [sic] that job and is now looking for a job following her [convenience store] employment. She explains her termination from [the convenience store] as that there was too much money in the cash register one night which is in violation of the store's policy as a preventative measure they keep as little cash in the register as possible.

Monica openly admitted to the researcher that she was an "alcoholic" and "drug addict," and had been "ordered" by the juvenile court to "submit to urinalysis testing as indicated by [a local substance abuse treatment agency] and demonstrate that she is drug free through such testing."

M: I used, umm, I've used a lot in my past....At the time that this all occurred, I was doin' some Coke, and smokin' pot and drinkin'...but I'd only drink at night-time, but isn't no justice, you know, 'cause I was still drinkin'. Ummm,...I got into it too much, after my divorce....I got into partyin' a lot stronger than I did. When I was a kid, I 'partied,' you know, it was casual 'partying,' you know, it wasn't constant 'partying'....And after my divorce, and through my marriage, I started gradually 'partying' more and more, because my husband was an alcoholic and I started into drinks and I got him doin' drugs, and in exchange he got me the alcohol. Ummm, a bad situation. But it was the only situation I remember, everybody I've ever known growin' up
done drugs, that's all the people I've ever been involved with, they're drug and alcohol users.

In a court document that was filed just prior to Monica's participation in the study, the Agency petitioned the Court for permanent custody of her son—based upon Monica's "decision" to "permanently surrender" him for adoption by his foster parents. She explained her reasoning in a letter that was written on the Agency's stationery:

To Whom It May Concern:

I [Monica] think my son...will have a better life with [the foster parents].

[The foster parents] can give him the love and family he needs. They love him very much and [my son] is happy with [the foster parents] and I dont [sic] know him and feel that he is better off with the family hes [sic] with.

I would like for [the foster parents] to adopt [my son] and raise him as there [sic] own. I may be his mother but I am not his Mommy. [The foster mother] however is his Mommy. He loves her very much and She Loves him.

I do realize what I am doing and I feel very strongly about it. I understand that I will not see him I will no longer be apart of his life and I fully except [sic] that Decision.

I would like it to be noted that I do love my son and I will never forget him but I have no right to their little boy anymore and its out of love!

[Monica]

In the same document, the Agency requested continued "temporary custody" of her daughter, because Monica had "not complied with the Comprehensive Reunification Plan,
namely a positive evaluation from the [local substance
abuse treatment agency]."

I: That would suggest to me that you don't have
too many choices, too many options....

M: Right, I have to follow, O.K., I can
deal...with..., umm,
getting a place to live before I get her back,
O.K. That's important, I can deal with that.
But, they expect me to go to counseling at
[local substance abuse treatment agency], which
costs money. O.K. They expect me to have drug
tests, which cost money, money that I have not
got, and I cannot dish out, not at the
moment, if I want a place to live with my kids.
And me and this baby.... 'Cause I'll be damned
if I'm giving this baby up!

The Reports

Monica was nineteen years-old when she was first
"reported" to the child welfare agency by her mother.
The Agency received the original "complaint" by
telephone, which resulted---two days later---in an
"intervention" by a child welfare caseworker:

MGM [maternal grandmother] called from older
daughter's...home. MGM is known to [the Agency]-
-long history--last closed [case] in September.
She cried during most of the phone call. She
said [a man] told her to call us. Her
daughter, Monica, who is 19 & 7 months pregnant
has a 2 year old [daughter] that she neglects.
MGM lives with them because financially she has
to. Mother doesn't clean house, constantly eats
but doesn't do dishes, screams at 2 year old all
the time but doesn't watch her. MGM
has to keep her bedroom door locked because 2
year old gets into everything. One day 2 year
old pulled chair up to stove & was eat [sic] out
of pan cooking on stove. MGM rescued her when
mother wouldn't & took child to her bedroom &
locked herself & child in so child would
not get hurt. Mother is always watching T.V. or with one of her boyfriends. No father in the home. MGM has nerve damage & can not do a lot of house work. Mother returned to [the city] in June & gave MGM notarized statement giving her custody & MGM would like to take child & leave. Child is not kept clean & has bladder infection. Father of child mother is carrying is.... MGM seemed upset & confused. She wants help for her grandchild, reminding us that mother was in [the Agency's] care 6 years ago.

Less than two weeks after the initial "complaint," the Agency received a second "report," by telephone, from the "maternal grandmother," who expressed the following concerns:

(1) The house is filthy and there are mice.
(2) The baby smokes pot all the time. (3) A man...has moved in with his 17 year old son and buys wine for her 16 year old son and also gives wine to [Monica's daughter]. (4) There are strange people in the house. (5) She is recuperating from a hysterectomy and an automobile accident and unable to perform household responsibilities. [The maternal grandmother] also stated that her daughter, Monica also gets high all the time and that, at age 13, she was a heroin addict. [The maternal grandmother] indicated that she would testify to these things in court.

Ten days later, a social worker from a local hospital made a third "report" to the "investigating" caseworker, who made this entry in a "case summary":

...I received a telephone call from...[a] social worker at [the local hospital]. [The social worker] was calling to report that Monica was hospitalized in the perinatal unit because she had gone into premature labor. [The social worker] indicated that she did not have any particular concern about Monica but that Monica had told her of her involvement with [the Agency] and she felt obligated to report Monica's hospitalization.
Approximately two months after the original complaint, Monica's "case" was "closed" by the Agency. In a "closing summary," the "investigating" caseworker concluded that she was "unable to substantiate any neglect" of Monica's daughter:

I do believe, however, that [Monica's daughter's] situation is far from ideal and that, more than likely, she will come to the attention of the agency at a later time. Monica is a very well meaning young lady and I believe she tries very hard to provide a good environment and appropriate care for her child. However, the history of Monica's own upbringing is poor and I believe that at some point in time a crisis will develop and this situation will again be referred to [the Agency]. For the time being, however, there does not appear to be any particular service need.

Four months later, a social worker at a local hospital made a fourth "report" to the Agency:

Caller states Monica left her child with her sister.... Monica has left her child [daughter] with her sister approximately five times prior to this time. Caller is concerned because [Monica's sister] is presently recovering from a C-section (which occurred 15 days ago) and the caring for this extra child may be extremely hard on [Monica's sister]. Child's mother has a past history of heroin addiction. Child is presently complaining of a "belly ache" and has a possible history of bladder or kidney problems (according to [Monica's sister]). [Monica's sister] has no idea where Monica is. [Monica's sister's] baby was born premature and may be admitted to [the hospital] today because baby isn't gaining weight. [Monica's daughter] and [Monica's sister's] other child...are being watched presently by the MGM [maternal grandmother] who is also not in good health.
The following morning, Monica's sister telephoned the Agency with information that comprised a fifth "report":

Caller is concerned that her niece, [Monica's daughter], may have been sexually abused. Last night, MGM [maternal grandmother] found [Monica's daughter] masturbating (with fingers in vagina) in front of caller's son. Since child is only three, caller feels child has been sexually abused. Caller wanted to take child to hospital and have her examined. Caller does not know whereabouts of child's mother. Caller also stated that child was complaining about pains in stomach.

Finally, later that evening, another social worker at the local hospital contacted the Agency with the sixth "report" regarding the family:

Caller states three year old [Monica's daughter] was brought to Children's Hospital by the MGM [maternal grandmother] and MA [maternal aunt]. The mother, Monica, took the child to the grandmother's and left her there saying her son's father's girlfriend was trying to kill her. Mother did take son...with her. This was last Tuesday. Mother has not been back since. Child told grandmother "it hurts" pointing to her vaginal area. Child inserts fingers into her vagina. Melissa tried to stroke her two year old male cousin's penis, "like she knew what she was doing." The exam by [a physician] reveals a ruptured hymen. Mother has previous addiction with cocaine and heroin. She drags the children around with her wherever, somewhat transient lifestyle.

Two hospital social workers also contacted the "investigating" caseworker and "reported," according to the "case record," that "Monica had gone to [the Hospital] to find out what had happened to [her daughter].

After meeting with her mother and sister..., who were also at the hospital, an argument occurred in which [the hospital social workers] intervened.
[One hospital social worker] indicated that Monica reeked of alcohol and was not at all cooperative. All family members were sent to [the Agency] for interviews.

On that day, through an Ohio Rule of Juvenile Procedure,\(^\text{13}\) Monica's daughter was placed in the substitute care of the Agency by a law enforcement officer, for her "protection, until further investigation." Within twenty-four hours, the caseworker requested that the juvenile court grant "emergency temporary custody"\(^\text{14}\) of

\(^{13}\) Rule 6 of the Ohio Juvenile Rules of Procedure specifies the following: "A child may be taken into custody: (1) pursuant to an order of the court, (2) pursuant to the law of arrest, (3) by a law enforcement officer or duly authorized officer of the court when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child is suffering from illness or injury and is not receiving proper care, or is in immediate danger from his surroundings, and that his removal is necessary, (4) by a law enforcement officer or duly authorized officer of the court when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child has run away from his parents, guardian, or other custodian, and (5) where, during the pendency of court proceedings, it appears to the court that the conduct, condition or surroundings of the child are endangering the health, welfare, person or property of himself or others, or that he may abscond or be removed from the jurisdiction of the court or will not be brought to the court."

\(^{14}\) Rule 13 of the Ohio Rules of Juvenile Procedure specifies the following authority and power of Juvenile Court:
  (A) Temporary disposition: Pending hearing on a complaint, the court make such temporary orders concerning the custody or care of a child who is the subject of the complaint as the child's interest and welfare may require.
  (B) Temporary orders: Pending hearing on a
Monica's daughter and son to the Agency:

The mother admitted to having had 'a few beers' and some friends with her indicated she had also used crack earlier. Mother stated she knew nothing of the sexual abuse and could give no clues as to who was responsible. She felt her mother and sister were blaming her for the sexual abuse of [her daughter], and, she in turn made accusations that the maternal grandmother's boyfriend could have abused her child. In the interview with the maternal grandmother, she also admitted to use of marijuana, and this coupled with the conflicts between she and her daughter, it was decided that [Monica's daughter] should be placed in an emergency shelter home. In view of the [Agency's] concerns regarding the sexual abuse of [Monica's daughter], the mother's complaint, the court may issue such temporary orders with respect to the relations and conduct of other persons toward a child who is the subject of the complaint as the child's interest and welfare may require.

(C) Emergency medical and surgical treatment: Upon certification of one or more reputable practicing physicians, the court may order such emergency medical and surgical treatment as appears to be immediately necessary for any child concerning whom a complaint has been filed.

(D) Ex parte proceedings: Where it appears to the court that the interest and welfare of the child require that action be taken immediately, the court may proceed summarily and without notice under subdivision (A), (B), or (C).

(E) Hearing: notice: Wherever possible, the court shall provide an opportunity for hearing before proceeding under subdivision (A), (B), or (C) and shall give notice of the time and place of the hearing to the parties and any other person who may be affected by the proposed action. Where the court has proceeded without notice under subdivision (D), it shall give notice of the action it has taken to the parties and any other affected person and provide them an opportunity for a hearing concerning the continuing effects of such action.
history of drug abuse and lack of appropriate supervision, we are requesting emergency temporary custody of both [Monica's daughter and son] with medical and dental consent. As [Monica's son] was unavailable, and still remains in the mother's care, we would further request an order to convey for him.

At a hearing two weeks after "emergency temporary custody" of Monica's daughter and son had been granted to the Agency, the juvenile court heard the following "assessment" and request from the "investigating" caseworker:

According to family and friends, Monica has a history of drug abuse including marijuana, cocaine, "crack," and alcohol. Monica admits to use of marijuana and alcohol currently and past use of cocaine. [The Agency] has requested a drug evaluation at [local substance abuse treatment agency] and the earliest possible appointment is [in ten days].

Monica is currently staying with various friends and has been unable to supply [the Agency] with her exact whereabouts. She has stayed with about 4-5 different friends since [emergency custody of her children was granted]. Monica states she secured employment at a [restaurant] and she works irregular hours.

In view of the fact that Monica has no permanent housing as yet, that she has a history of drug abuse and providing inadequate care and supervision of her children, and that there are indications that [Monica's daughter] was sexually abused, [the Agency] is requesting temporary custody of her children...until a drug assessment can be completed and she is able to provide a plan for her children. After completion of a drug evaluation and securing of housing, [the Agency] will look at the provision of homemaker services to evaluate Monica's parenting skills.
II. Betty

Betty was a twenty year-old, caucasian, single woman who was living with her parents in their small, older home at the time of her involvement in the study. A nine month-old daughter was in the legal custody of her father, with whom she had been since birth. A two year-old, bi-racial son had been in the temporary custody and care of the Agency since he was six months-old. At that time, Betty had signed a "Voluntary Agreement for Custody,"\textsuperscript{15} which gave the Agency legal control of her son

\textsuperscript{15} Sec. 5103.15 (A) (1) of the Ohio Revised Code specifies that "The parents, guardian, or other persons having the custody of a child, may enter into an agreement with any public children services agency or private child placing agency, whereby the child is placed without the approval of the juvenile court in the temporary custody of the agency for a period of time of up to thirty days, except that an agreement for temporary custody can be for a period of time of up to sixty days without court approval if the agreement is executed solely for the purpose of obtaining the adoption of a child who is less than six months of age on the date of the execution of the agreement....At the expiration of an additional thirty-day extension period and at the expiration of the original thirty-day extension period if the agency does not request an additional thirty-day extension, the agency shall either return the child to his parents, guardian, or other person having custody of the child or file a complaint with the court pursuant to Sec. 2151.27 of the Revised Code requesting temporary or permanent custody of the child. The complaint shall be accompanied by a case plan prepared in accordance with Section 2151.412 of the Revised Code."
for a period of thirty days. Two weeks later, the Agency requested and received "emergency temporary custody" of him from the juvenile court. That custody was "continued" by the court through three monthly hearings until "temporary custody" was granted in an "adjudicatory hearing." Rule 2 of the Ohio Rules of Juvenile Procedure defines an "adjudicatory hearing" as "a hearing to determine whether a child is a juvenile traffic offender, delinquent, unruly, neglected, or dependent or otherwise within the jurisdiction of the court or whether temporary legal custody should be converted to permanent custody."

Sec. 2151.011 (A) (13) of the Ohio Revised Code specifies that "temporary custody" "means legal custody of a child who is removed from his home which custody may be terminated at any time at the discretion of the court or, if the legal custody is granted in an agreement for temporary custody, by the person who executed the agreement."

Rule 2 of the Ohio Rules of Juvenile Procedure defines a "dispositional hearing" as "a hearing to determine what action shall be taken concerning a child who is within the jurisdiction of the court."

Sec. 2151.011 (A) (12) of the Ohio Revised Code specifies that "permanent custody" "means a legal status which vests in a public children services agency or a private child-placing agency,
that the researcher attempted to engage Betty in the study during most of that time. It was not until the Agency had filed the "motion" for "permanent custody" of her son that she "suddenly" became "willing" to participate, primarily because she hoped that her contact with the researcher might somehow "help her case."

Betty had completed only nine years of formal education, but was studying for her "high school equivalency" diploma at a local business college. She was unemployed and indicated that she was not seeking work. Inasmuch as she resided with her parents, and her children were in the custody of others, she was not entitled to either General Assistance or Aid to Dependent Children. However, she remained eligible for hospitalization insurance through the Medicaid program. Betty indicated that her parents were providing her with approximately $150.00 per month to help her with personal expenses. At the time of the interview, she was "waiting" for notification that an apartment was available for her through a federal subsidized-housing program:

all parental rights, duties, and obligations, including the right to consent to adoption, and divests the natural parents or adoptive parents of any and all parental rights, privileges, and obligations, including all residual rights and obligations."
The Reports

Betty had been involved with the Agency for approximately two-and-a-half years when she agreed to participate in the study. According to the "case record," Betty made the initial "report" to the Agency in order to "complain" about her treatment by her parents:

Betty is an unmarried, pregnant 18 year-old. She was referred to this agency by herself for alleged abuse by her parents. Betty turned 18 years old [approximately two weeks ago]. Her child is due [in one month]. This referral is on her unborn child.

At the time, Betty was "living with" Robert, the eighteen year-old father of her child; his parents; an aunt; and two siblings; all of whom were described as "accepting" of the Agency's "involvement." After two days of "investigation," a caseworker made the following "assessment":

...This worker is concerned about the limited intellectual ability of both the parents and the PGP’s [paternal grandparent]. But, I believe that the emotional makeup of the family and their ability to care for one another, more than makes up for their limited intellectual capacity. However, I think it is important for this agency to be involved with mother and father and unborn child, at least initially, as a lot of changes will be happening in their lives and I am not sure that the PGP’s, are able to adequately help them. The MGP’s [maternal grandparents] would probably be detrimental to raising this child or helping raise this child. MGM does not allow Betty, mother, to be an adult. [The maternal grandparents], on the other hand, do see that both mother and father are growing up and that they have to be adults. It is for these reasons, limited intellectual ability,
potential for MGM's involvement, and needing to allow Betty (mother) and Robert (father) become [sic] adults, that this case will be transferred.

The ongoing worker should assist mother and father in securing a place of their own, learning to live on their own, and care for their child. The ongoing worker needs to make sure that mother, Betty, does not succumb to any bribes or rules that MGM may try to place on her.

Three months later, an unidentified woman made the second "report" to the Agency:

At 10:05 p.m. caller phoned [the Agency] regarding a 2 month old baby who allegedly is 'jerked around by mother who yells a lot' also. Caller states father who is a heavy drinker and drug user 'beats on the mother.' Father is Robert.... Baby is [Betty's son].... Mother is Betty....

A third "report" was received by the Agency approximately two days after the last one. The assigned child welfare caseworker recorded it in the "case summary":

...the Agency did received [sic] a referral on this family. The police were called and sent out both Saturday and Sunday night with both reports being unsubstantiated. It should be noted however, the previous weekend, there was a fight between Robert, his father, and Betty. During this fight the police were called; however, no charges were pressed against Robert. He did break his father's wrist. It is suspected that he was either drunk or had been on drugs.

Less than three months later, after Robert had attempted suicide, a fourth "report" was made to the Agency by a social worker at a local hospital:

Caller stated that Robert (Dad 18 yrs.) and Betty (Mom 18 yrs.) have a child...under 2 yrs. They live with Robert's family. Betty does not care for the baby at all. Betty only cares for the child when [Robert's mother] forces her to. Betty is getting
thrown out of the house but the baby can stay with [Robert's mother] until Betty gets settled.

Robert has a learning disability and is addicted to drugs. When Robert is on drugs he is violent. Two weeks ago Robert wanted to chop up the baby with a knife but Mom stopped him.

Two weeks later, the caseworker documented the following events:

...Betty called this worker and stated that she wanted to sign voluntary custody over to this agency. At that time, Betty stated that her mother (maternal grandmother) had been drinking, and signed herself in [a state mental hospital] due to a misunderstanding between her and a neighbor woman (the misunderstanding was that [the maternal grandmother] thought her husband was having an affair with the young neighbor girl). It was decided, when Betty signed over voluntary custody, that the following needed to occur:

1. Once again, Betty needed to attend parenting classes.
2. Betty needed to find safe, secure, stable housing for her and [her son].
3. Betty needed to stay in this housing for approximately 6 months at least.
4. Betty needed to find appropriate supportive networks to encircle herself.

...It should be noted at this time, that maternal grandmother is very upset with the placement of [Betty's son] into foster care. However, maternal grandmother is ready to blame Betty for all of the problems that occur within the home. It should be noted maternal grandmother has a history of drug and/or alcohol dependency. At the present time, maternal grandmother is unable to seek help and admit to her problems.

In contrast to the caseworker's version, during the first interview with Betty at her parents' home, she provided
the researcher with her retrospective account of the same three week period, as well as an opportunity to "grasp" the situation that gave rise to her signing an "Agreement for Temporary Custody" of her son:

...[The caseworker] would come out [to Robert's home], you know, then I came, and I had moved home [with maternal grandparents], in with my son, here. Because my ex-boyfriend [Robert] tried to commit suicide, he tried to jump off the Westlake Bridge. And I couldn't handle that, he was chasing me and my son around the house with a knife. So, I leave, and come here. Well, ... I brang the baby to my Mom, I slept here, and the baby slept there, I fed the baby, the baby had clothes, the baby had everything he needed, it wasn't like, ahh, what do you call it, didn't have no clothes, or anything. He was well taken care of. And then, umm, ... one night I got mad at my Mom and Dad and I left, and I got in a cab, and went my Aunt's, it was like... six feet of snow outside. And the baby was like, only three or four weeks old. And I let and went all the way to [the other side of town], to my Aunt's house. And, umm, ... I came back home with the baby, and next thing I know, here's the cop's knockin' on my door! At eleven, twelve, one o'clock in the morning! Well, we got a report that you're beating your son.... So, I had to strip all his clothes off, so they could check him. And, umm, ... so they checked him, and they said, well, we don't see no problem here. So, thank you, officers! I said, well, do you know who made the call? All along, I know who made the call! So, this went on about... two, three weeks, straight on, every single day, Monday through Sunday. Well, I was gettin' tired of it. So, I called Robert. Robert, I said, you better tell your God-damned family to leave me the hell alone! Robert was in [the city hospital], and in the... crazy ward. And one night, the baby's layin' here, well, thank God the baby wasn't layin' here, ... somebody threw a brick through the window! Well, I thought they was tryin' to kill my son. Me and my son was in there on the couch, and ... the brick comes through the window.... I, still, to this day, I don't know how, any idea who did it. So, my Mom went away for awhile, my Dad was workin', while I was unpatient (sic) I didn't wait for my Dad, like my mother
suggested, and I called [the Agency], and they came and got him and took him to the [Agency's group home]. And, then, like three weeks later, I got a letter in the mail saying, well, you have to come to Court! Before I even went to Court, they already had temporary custody of 'im!

III. Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a thirty-three year-old, caucasian, married woman who lived in an aging, white "mobile" home that rested along a winding road, among several small, single family houses, in a partially-wooded area of a township located outside of the city. At the time, she was "separated" from her husband, Tom, as a result of an allegation made by her fifteen year-old daughter, Tammy, that her father had "sexually abused" her while visiting Tom's "ex-stepfather" in another city. Tom had reportedly been "ordered" by the investigating police department to not visit, or "stay overnight," at the family's home, pending the outcome of a "secret indictment" by the Grand Jury in the adjacent county. At the time, Tammy was living with her maternal grandmother. Tammy's three month-old son, Michael, and her sister, Barbara, who was thirteen years-old, remained at home with Elizabeth.

While she claimed that she had completed three years of college toward a degree in "criminal justice," Elizabeth indicated that she had never really worked.
Her husband had been unemployed for almost two years. When the family was intact, they received Aid for Dependent Children in the amount of $464.00, with an additional $305.00 per month in Food Stamps. The family was renting the "mobile home" at a cost of $250.00 per month. All of the family members were insured under the Medicaid program. Overall, Elizabeth told the researcher that she believed that her family was financially "worse off" than other people her age, that their income was "poorly" meeting or "taking care" of their needs, that there was "never" enough money available for "those extras" that were desired, and that her family would probably "not" have enough money in the future to meet their needs.

During the first interview, Elizabeth described the circumstances and problems that existed in the family prior to the initial "intervention" by the Agency. In effect, her account offered her "version" of the "way things were" during her marriage and throughout the rearing of her children:

E: ...I have, for many years, tried to get the law to assist me in the fact that...my husband, after we were married a few years, became an alcoholic. And, he is in great denial and neglect to his family,... in many ways. Umm,...and grossly, financially,...to their basic, living, survival needs. And the law has not helped me, ahh, to be able to...have financial control that, that, he is,...alcohol- ahh, chemically dependent, and unable to control that...for the benefit of the children,
be able to stay alive! In order to eat! So, I resorted to...a point, having to leave him, because, I was working, when I with, before that separation,...I could not make enough money to keep things rolling. We were Court-evicted from our home. I kept the utilities on, and food in the house when I was working. And then I quit working, thinking it would force him...to, at least, pay the rent, and keep utilities on, and there was food in the home for the children. But, it didn't, I was having to scrounge, so badly, going off to these emergency services, in desperation,...and everything, I couldn't even,...he was, you know, was making good money.... My point of it all, is, the only abuse...that I believe that this man has made to his children and family his what...basically, umm, deprives them, and then the emotional, emotionally, they're greatly deprived, and...harmed, also. Severeley, emotionally, you know, the thing is....

I: In this situation, right now,...do you feel free?

E: Do I feel free?

I: In your life.

E: No. No, never have I, with [the Agency's] involvement, because I'm on pins and needles all the time. Umm, I blame it on alcohol, I was always a perfectionist, and, ahh,...the first...quite several years, I'd say, ten years...of...our marriage, before I started declining in the fact, and a number of years later I realized...that...um, that's how I kept my home, and the organization in my home. Umm, the cleanliness in my home. I began to..., well, I did, always after it began, ahh, my husband's absence in the home because of his drinking, and, ahh, I began to resent it, because it grew and grew and grew. And, he was never there! Ahh, I became destituted and lost of hope...for betterment, for, ahh, improvement. And, ahh,...so did the children, which is a lot of the reason why my eldest daughter, when she was young, before she went to school, has such strong bonding to her father. I feel everything that she does
now, all the problems that she's going through, and we're having with her, and everything, and I did for her, ahh, evolved from that. Then, his denial...of...of her, because of his drinking. Is number one, and the only priority that he has. Umm,...why her, then, involvement, which I feared it, and tried talking to him about it. Because of her emotional needs that she turned to sexual involvement, submitting to sexual involvement with boys! And,...she didn't talk to anybody about the problems, and everything, and so, she tried to help the problem, and feared and talked to her Dad about it, that if he didn't start taking time with her, and sharing interests, with her, interest in her, and her life, and encouraging her, in her life, that she would resort to this. And,...he didn't believe it! He said it was a crock of shit, you know! A crock of shit, whatever, and that kind of stuff. And, among other things, and, ahh, but I knew that! Because,...umm, I was..., I had this strong bonding, emotional need and attachment to my father, but he always worked the second shift my whole growing-up! And, umm, I felt, and I had problems within my home,...when I was a teenager. Also, which made a difference, too, that I would not have bonded so strongly, so close to my husband at sixteen, if I had a relationship with my father, a normal, good relationship with my father.

Indeed, almost seventeen months before the first "report" was received by the Agency, a psychiatric social worker at a local mental health agency reached the following conclusions after Elizabeth voluntarily sought help for her "problems" with Tammy:

Twelve year-old Tammy was referred by [a] private psychologist.... Mother described presenting problems beginning approximately two years ago as a drop in school grades, being disrespectful, stealing from the home, and lying. Mother implied marital difficulties, indicating that father continues to use alcohol, even though he was treated for
alcoholism, I believe [approximately three years ago]. Mother reported symptoms of anxiety and depression herself. Tammy has recently returned from a four and a half months stay with a maternal aunt in Florida, having become disrespectful and destructive (sic) there. Mother describes Tammy's attitude as more positive than before Tammy went to live with the aunt, with mother wanting to make sure Tammy's attitude continues to remain positive. Individual treatment is recommended for Tammy, with parent counseling for parents. ...If parent counseling appears feasible..., I would suggest foci to include effective parenting methods, communication of feelings and greater awareness of Tammy's emotional needs.

In contrast, another psychiatric social worker at the same agency reached the following conclusions after an "intake" interview with Tammy:

Tammy presented as a very attractive somewhat depressed twelve year-old. It seemed in talking with her that she is experiencing a great deal of turmoil in regards to the conflict between her parents. Although Tammy would say that it is not her fault that there are problems in the home, this worker is not convinced that this is how she actually feels. Tammy seems to have a rather hopeless helpless attitude, as she stated several times throughout the interview, 'I don't know what to do.' The recommendation for Tammy is for individual therapy to help her draw boundries (sic) between herself and her parents' problems and finding more effective ways of coping. Also, a psychiatric evaluation may be necessary in the future, as Tammy does appear to be very depressed and there is concern about her difficulty with sleeping and eating.

At one point in the initial interview with the researcher, Elizabeth recalled why she chose to "stay in control" when Tammy was being questioned by the caseworker and a uniformed police officer regarding separate, but almost simultaneous, "reports" of her alleged sexual abuse by an uncle and physical abuse by
her father. Her explanation produced a brief, but insightful, "recollection" of "childhood" that offered the researcher an opportunity to "grasp" some of its "meaning" for her: its importance to her "sense" of "self" and its effect upon the nature—and form—of her reaction to the authority of the public child welfare agency:

I: If you can think back, why—and this may be an unusual question, and you're going to get more of these questions...from me—but, why did you choose to "stay in control"? When you think back to that situation....

E: Trying to show what kind of person that I am..., and I do respect the law, I do respect the court system. I was raised in that environment, even, maybe more so than even the average person...that...was raised...to... follow and respect the law. Because, I feel that it may be even stronger within me, and...like I, like I told you...about growing up in the environment..., ahh, the family environment, and everything, like my Grandfather was...his stage of life was associated, he...ahh, for many years, before I was born, he was a deputy sheriff. And, probably when I was about ten, twelve years-old, he became, ahh,...juvenile officer of [an Ohio County]. As different from [this County], they don't have as great a staff in law enforcement, I don't know if he was the only one, but, it's not, if he wasn't,...but, he did have a major authority role in that Department. And, then, it ended-up, though, that he was the, ahh,...the main role in that Department. You know, and he handled, ahh, we'd hear about some of the cases that he would handle, circumstances, he'd even use them, not person's names, but cases, and happenings, and circumstances, or...family environment things, and interactions that involved, that the law was involved with, or had to do, and everything, as examples to us. As we were growing up.
I: You say that that experience influenced the way you responded in that situation, when the caseworker came....

E: Right, you know, and my value, in that, and...like I had an uncle that was very close, you know, ahh, a lot of little girls...have...growing-up, a favorite uncle...that they idolize...and love, like, or are infatuated with. And, I did have an uncle like that, that was like that to me. And, like when I was five years-old, I was...determined, and committed in my mind, that when I grew up, I was gonna marry him. And, after he, he was fifteen when I was born, to express the age difference, but, umm, when he graduated from high school, he went into the Navy, for, ahh, five years. And, then when he got out, he applied to the city police department, and was on that, that was...City Police Department. And then, he later, then, was hired onto [another] Police Department, and then, ahh, at some point, became a detective, and then he was hired in Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana, with IRS. Later, and then, umm,...then at a, he was there for a number of years, and then he later took another appoint-- ahh, appointment in New York, with IRS,...as a private agent. And, ahh, retired...at...age 42. Umm, forced to by medical doctors, because of stress on his heart. And, ahh, less than a year later, he had a heart attack and died. And, he, encouraged me, with my desires, because I had already begun college then, in law enforcement, or social education, too,...everything,...to come to New York, and he would help direct me through the channels, as far as employment, or career. At, umm,...now I've lost track of my point, that I was getting to....

Noteworthy, after an interview with Elizabeth at the Agency, a caseworker who had "investigated" the first "reports" about the family added the following "history" to the "record":

She did share that she, her sister and [a brother] had all been sexually abused by their father when they were children. She had called some of her relatives in [another part of the State] who have 'legal connections' and reported the abuse to them. Although they came to [the city] immediately, stating they would handle the situation, they did not talk to her father about the abuse and by all she could observe, did nothing to help or her siblings. Elizabeth indicated that she never reported this to the authorities as her family was very proud of their name and the children had been raised to protect the family reputation. She said that her great-great-grandfather had been written into the history books as some noted military person, and this was a source of pride and the reason they were always taught not to besmirch the family name.

The Reports

The first "report" was made to the Agency by a "therapist" who had been counseling Elizabeth and Tammy for approximately six weeks because of continued problems in their relationship, especially difficulties that both parents were experiencing in attempting to "manage"

Tammy's oppositional behavior:

Caller has been seeing child, Tammy, and mother [for six weeks]. Mother suspected abuse. Child told caller that she has been sexually abused by her maternal uncle, Edward,...since she was very young. The abuse started with fondling. The last incident was intercourse and happened last winter. There was no force involved.

Edward lives in Pennsylvania and the abuse occurred on visits to Ohio. Mother and child are both protective of the uncle and would not give his last name. Tammy and mother are afraid of what will happen if other family members find out about this, so mother wants worker to call before coming out.
The "record" indicates that the "investigating" caseworker had a telephone conversation with Elizabeth the next day, and then interviewed her at the Agency two days later. According to the "case summary," Elizabeth had "stated" that Tammy "was not willing to talk" to the worker; moreover, Elizabeth was perceived at the time as "resistant to arranging an interview" with Tammy. Consequently, the caseworker noted the following in a "summary":

In attempt (sic) to gain Elizabeth's agreement to interview Tammy, the therapist and I made plans for her to discuss this again with Elizabeth and Tammy at their next appointment [in the three days]; and then the therapist and I would plan to interview Tammy in her office at their appointment [five days later]. However, the therapist called me [after the appointment with Elizabeth and Tammy] to tell me that both Elizabeth and Tammy were refusing to talk to me. Tammy had commented that mother told her she didn't have to talk to anyone if she didn't want to. The therapist talked to Elizabeth about the fact that her attitude was influencing Tammy; however, this had little effect. The therapist plan to continued (sic) seeing Elizabeth and Tammy two times per week and it was hoped that we could eventually get some cooperation.

Four days later, the second "report" was made to the caseworker by the therapist:

...At 3 p.m., the therapist contacted me stating that Tammy was currently in her office reporting that her father had beat her with a belt last evening.... Tammy had belt marks on her right thigh and buttocks. The therapist stated that the marks were fairly clear but not necessarily severe. She had not yet discussed this with Elizabeth but Tammy felt that her mother would be angry and that if she were forced to go home that day, that her father would be angry and beat her again. According to Tammy, father had been drunk when he beat
her and her mother had witness (sic) the beating but did nothing to intervene. Therefore, Tammy was fearful of returning home, especially since [the Agency] had to be called. Tammy also reported that she had been spanked with a belt approximately one week ago but had not been bruised. Prior to one week ago, she had not been spanked for approximately two years; however, prior to two years ago, she was spanked frequently with a belt and almost always had marks.

As a result of Tammy's accusations that she had been "sexually abused" by her uncle and "beaten" by her father, the Agency was given "custody" of her by the investigating police officer through the authority of an Ohio Rule of Juvenile Procedure.19 As the "investigating" caseworker noted,

Officer Watkins met me at the therapist's office and we interviewed Tammy together. Tammy was quite cooperative in discussing both the physical and sexual abuse and police reports were filed on both. In view of Tammy's statement that she did not want to return home and she feared another beating, Juvenile Rule 6 was invoked and Tammy was taken to [a local hospital] for documentation of the marks and a sexual abuse exam was done at the same time. Tammy voiced no objection to this sexual abuse exam although she was apprehensive.

The marks on her thighs and buttocks were documented (See pictures in case record) and the sexual abuse exam revealed no concrete evidence of abuse. Her hymen was intact and there was no scaring (sic) to the vagina. [The physician] felt, however, that she was telling the truth and most likely had been sexually abuse (sic).

19 See Note 13, supra.
During the initial interview with the researcher, Elizabeth provided a long, detailed account of the events and circumstances that precipitated Tammy's "beating," the substance of which was corroborated in her "case record" at the Agency:

I: Can you tell me about the circumstances or the situation that existed then a couple of years ago when you were involved with them first?

E: O.K., at the time, my eldest daughter was thirteen years-old, and after she turned thirteen, like in February,...so that was [two years ago], umm,...she...her and I started having interacting difficulties...together, as far as parent ruling and authority, and, there was, and, ahh,...when she would get all p-ed off with me, and everything, ahh, well, sometimes it would be because of that, and other times, I was unaware of the reason, because we didn't have a spat or an argument prior to it happenin', but she would disappear from the home, without my knowledge. The first time, she climbed out her bedroom window, and I caught her, when she was doing it, because we had been in an argument and I told her, I either told her, I don't remember for sure, to stay in her room, since she was so upset. I took her food to her room, and as I was going to her room, I heard...her...I heard a plop out the window, when I opened the door, and looked in, she had removed the screen in her window and had climbed out the window. And I tried to catch her, but I couldn't catch her, and, ahh, I went outdoors, and everything, and she was out of sight. Umm, I think, we ended-up at the police department on that occasion. Umm, but, umm,...throughout that year [two years ago], she had a repeatedness of this, and...she kept, I kept putting discipline measures down on her, grounding, phone restrictions, things like that. And, each time it happened, and then when she was found and caught, she did not return home upon her own accord,...she, either I would find her or either the police would find her and comprehend her, you know, she would not return until,
usually we would find her before the night was over-with. You know, sometimes she would leave early in the day, but by the time, sometimes that evening, after night-time, and dark, and everything, she would be found, ahh, if not before then, but usually it would always be at least evening at some time. And, umm,...then, so, finally, and she hadn't had a spankin', she was age, thirteen, she hadn't had a spankin' from her father for in three years. But, he finally sat her down and talked with her and told her that if she pulled it one more time, because we had been trying everything else,...he was gonna...beat her ass, is the way he put it. And everything, and, ahh,...and he, you know, said, he promised, but he didn't always follow through...on such comments, you know? And, so, he gave her, gave her his word, and promised that he would, no matter what, that she could expect it. So, one week later, he did do it, again, and I notified him, he wasn't living at home at the time,...and, I notified him, I couldn't find her, and everything, and asked for his help, and so, he said,...that when she was found to let him know, and he would be here, and he did. And he was so upset, she was in her room and he was in the living room talking with me and rampaging, and he was so upset about having to do it! But he said he told her he would, he promised her, he give her his word, he said it was guaranteed, so he felt that he had to follow through. On this particular occasion, especially. And, so, anyways, he finally, he kept tellin' me he didn't want to do it, he didn't want to do it, so finally, he told me to go call her from her room to the living room, and I did, and so, he reminded her, again, of what he had told her and, in accordance with her behavior, and so then, he had her stand in the middle of the living floor, took off his belt, and he whacked her several times across the buttocks, but he hit her nowhere else. Well, it left welts on her behind, but was not, which was upsetting, it was upsetting for me to see her, than to cry and scream, you know? But,...when I, when I was being raised, that was the, ahh,...one, ahh, big...how do you say that? ...That was one of the big...measures of discipline,... in my generation. You know? And, so, I've
always avoided that, but it just seems like after a point, you have no other choice, they won't comply with anything else. You know, and it worked very well, when I was growing up. I did not ever, you know, whether I knew it was wrong, or not, before I did it, but when I got caught, and I was disciplined in that way,...never, again, did I ever do it,...because I didn't want that to happen, again. You know, and I didn't ever need medical attention. And, of course, neither did my daughter, at that time. You know? But, then, it did leave, we, I'd already had her involved in counseling, her and I, and, ahh, we had an appointment the next day. And he grounded her for two weeks, in addition to it, at that time. And she, she asked him, does that mean that she could not see, go to the counseling appointment the next day, and he said, no. And, then he mellowed-out, he had been hollering at her, and he mellowed-out and told her, no, that he didn't mean anything like that, that she could go, because that was for her good, you know. It wasn't a social...restriction. And, so, she said, alright, that's all I wanted, needed, to know. So,...the next day, at the counselor's, she told the counselor about it,...then. Of course, the counselor's forced, because of the law restrictions on their license, to call [the Agency] and let them know. She had showed the counselor, which I did not know, yet, at that time, that she did have welts on her bottom. And,...ahh, anyways, for me, it was nothing major, because...I was accustomed to that...that was..., you know, it was just a...life standard. My grandfather retired...about ten or twelve years ago, as head of Juvenile Court in [another Ohio county]. This is the way he raised his family and grandchildren, when my grandfather was a very major influence upon my life! You know, he would not...you know, hurt his children or any of his family members, or teach his children to be that way with their children, but as far as discipline, it comes to a point where it takes that measure of discipline. And,...before...the generations prior to the present generation growing-up, in our family history, very responsible, honest, productive adult lives, you know, and
everything,...I mean, you didn't think there was anything wrong with getting whipped, didn't think of it as child abuse! Child abuse is somebody,..., that they are hurt sexually, that they need medical attention,...ahh, you know, unless their body is just mauled...so badly that, you know, you get a bruise on your butt or legs, or your parent grabs you by the arm and there happens to be a bruise there, or something like that, not considered abuse! But, today, [the Agency], any tiny little thing, anyway..., so the caseworker, ahh, contacted the police department, had a police officer come, and they---right from the counselor's office---took my daughter, from me, temporary, ahh, custody, emergency temporary custody, it's what the results was....

I: What did you think of that?

E: Oh, gosh! It was dev--..., I mean, the worst thing, ever, in somebody's life, I don't know, being not a father, but I know a lot of fathers, yes, it would be just as horrid, as to a mother, but the majority of mothers, at least, just natural, natural instinct, you...would...fight, till death, in protection...for restricting, you know, you, your child to be torn from you. That's how strong the emotions are. You would kill to protect your child, or for your child to be torn from you! I mean, that,...ummm,...the caseworker that handled it at the time, ummm, I hated her! You know, she, ahh, I thought she was very wrong! To do that! I mean, I mean, morally wrong. Umm,...I loved my child, her father loves her, and everything, we only did...what...and, 'course I, you know, I, I didn't fight against it, you know, so, that makes me responsible, and part of it, too. But, that, to...for...good, hopefully, for her! You know, that then this would end, finally, end...her...behavior. You know? 'Cause we were, when she would be gone, we would be terrified whether she would be found in a ditch or the swamp, you known, which is...you know, live right next to..., or, ahh, drug off somewhere into a car, and her body found later, like you hear every day on the news! You know. She...was trying to..., as a lot of kids do,
when they start getting, when they get into that age range, and they're, and everything, they're wanting to grow-up, you know, it's just a normal thing in their life, they are not all-the-way grown up, as an adult, and they can't go against a parent, or their home rulings, in doing it, take it a step at a time! This is what I expect of my kids, and try to teach them, and I know, from my own experience, I know it's hard to accept, but they have to learn to trust and to... to trust their parents, that they know what's best! And to accept it, you know, and to talk with them, if they want to talk. You know? Or, if they don't understand something, and I try to explain, a lot of times, things, and, I've had a lot of criticism...from... other parents... of especially, family, especially, umm... well, my husband has criticized me for that, and like, a, umm, the, the elder generation... above me, my family, that I am wrong in doing that, 'cause I try to explain to them... what the reason, why, for their security, for their safety, for their welfare. Why these restrictions are on them, or these rules, or that, because I care! You know? And I don't want anything to happen to them, and everything, and, ahh... or risk them to be in a risky situation. And, umm,... I, you know, I've been criticized for doing that because they feel, O.K., that you... don't... have to explain, because you're a parent. You don't have to give them excuses, or reasons, that you just tell them! And what you say, that's the way it is! You know? And, you know, and if they don't want, if they don't want to, ahh, mind, if they don't want to do what you say, you bust their... behind! I've... been criticized a lot, for not doing that more often, especially then they were younger. Which is... that, I've been told, is why now I am having... major problems with my children.

An "addendum" to the "case summary" that was recorded by the "investigating" caseworker revealed that Elizabeth had made what was, in essence, a third "report"
to the Agency regarding Tammy. In specific, Elizabeth had informed the caseworker that her younger daughter, Barbara, had confided that Tammy had been "touched inappropriately" by a "relative" of her husband's "ex-employer," approximately two months before the initial report to the Agency. Again, a local law enforcement agency was notified of the "report," the caseworker interviewed Tammy regarding the alleged incident, and the following outcome was entered in the "case summary":

I spoke to Tammy at [a local group home for adolescents] that same evening regarding this issue. According to Tammy, he did not touch her breasts or between her legs either under or through her clothing. He tried to get her to go into a secluded room in the finished basement where there was a bed. He had grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close to him and motioned for her to go into the room. She understood what he meant but he did not make any specific request for her to perform any act. Tammy states she pulled away from him and got away.

Despite investigations by the caseworker and police officers from two local jurisdictions, neither Tammy's allegations of sexual abuse by her uncle nor the "inappropriate" contact with the aforementioned man, were ever "substantiated."

Elizabeth also made the fourth "report" to the Agency, shortly after Tammy's son was born. As a result, another caseworker was "assigned" to the family to provide "protective services" in what was considered a
"case" involving an "unwed mother." During the initial interview with the researcher, Elizabeth remained candid throughout her recollection of these circumstances:

I: Now the second case,... in other words, that first situation resolved itself, and then you called them, you called them, yourself,...[approximately two months ago]....

E: Right! With great hesitation, because of the previous experience!

I: But, obviously, you chose to do that, anyway,... I mean, you came to the conclusion to do that.... How did you get to that conclusion, that,... that "I'm gonna call," after that first experience?

E: ...Well,...I...began, you know, having the thought, in consideration for myself, but, then, with in sharing that, and the reasons why, I was concerned about my daughter..., myself, and with the things that had been happening, and everything. And, fearful for her, and I was fearful...for...her baby, my grandchild,...umm, because of her repeatedly deserting him...in my care, though, in my home, she left him, and in my care. But, still,...she was deserting him, but like she would deny the fact that she was deserting him, because she knew that I would take care of him!

I: The baby was born, the baby is three-and-a-half months old?

E: Yeah, the baby was born....

I: O.K....

E: ...And today's....

I: And, you would have called the Agency, then, after about a month?

E: Yeah, when he was about a month old, I forget exactly, now, how old he was. He was about a month old, umm,...and I...wanted...them...to help me to have custody of the baby, at least
until she was of age, and showed that she was reliable, and responsible, that the baby, that she, you know, ... for the baby. And,... I didn't want to take him away from her! I was willing and offered to her, you know, she still had to live at home, anyways, and everything, and I would... help and assist her, and she still could continue her... regular life, and everything. But, I would be here, she could still attend school, and the whole works, and everything, and I would be here, to take care of the baby while she was at school and to share being a parent... with him, the first several years of his life.

The fifth, and final, "report" regarding the family was received one month after Elizabeth had informed the Agency of her concerns involving Tammy's son. As previously indicated, it was still being "investigated" when Elizabeth became involved in the study. In that instance, Tammy's "friend" had telephoned the Agency and "reported" the following situation:

Caller states Tammy ran away from home over the past weekend and she is now at caller's home. Caller states the child is afraid to go home because of the physical abuse parents are inflicting. Caller states Tammy has a 2 month old baby... who is currently with Tammy's parents. Tammy is afraid for her baby around her father as Tammy told caller that father has sexually abused her in the past by touching her in places and had intercourse with her approximately three weeks ago. Tammy also mentioned an uncle had sexually abused her the last time being two years ago. Tammy states her sister may have been molested by the father as she will not go near him. Tammy at present has no bruises but did have bruises in the past.
Joseph and Emily were a caucasian, married couple of Lebanese-American descent. Joseph, forty-one years-old, had emigrated to the United States when he was seventeen. He was a high school graduate and owned a small construction company in the city. Emily was thirty-six years-old, had completed one year of college toward a degree in psychology, and had recently become employed at a local bank. The couple had five children: Julia, fifteen years-old; Mary, thirteen; Joey, eleven; Jeffrey, eight; and Michael, five. All of the children attended parochial schools. They lived in a modest, frame house in a middle-class neighborhood, easily located---at the time of the first interview---by the company "pick-up" truck that bore Joseph's last name. They estimated that their home was worth $55,000 and reported a mortgage payment of $259.00 per month. All of the family members were covered by private health insurance. While Joseph claimed that his annual income was $45,000, Emily "refuted that"; the researcher was not certain of the family's actual income, only that the couple had been experiencing serious "financial problems" for more than a year. At the time of their involvement in the study, Joseph and Emily acknowledged that their
income was "not sufficient" to meet emergencies and that their overall expenses had become "so heavy" that they could not meet their payments. Accordingly, a caseworker had noted in the Agency "record" that the "MGM [maternal grandmother] has helped out financially (house in her name)."

When Joseph and Emily became involved in the study, Julia and Mary had been in the "temporary custody" of the Agency for approximately four months, for several reasons, but originally as a result of an "altercation" between Julia and her father in which Joseph was accused of "physical abuse." Like their sisters, Joey, Jeffrey, and Michael had been in "emergency custody" for thirty-nine days because of the same incident, until just before Christmas when the boys were "returned" to their parents by the juvenile court. Sitting in the living room of his home---in the presence of three Lebanese men of various ages---Joseph offered his criticisms of the most recent "intervention" by the Agency. More importantly, he provided the researcher with his first opportunity to "enter" Joseph's "world": to "grasp" his values, beliefs, and concept of "family."

I: Let me ask you the hardest question. And, it's even a stupid question, but I'll ask it, anyway, because I want to make sure I ask you. Why did it affect you so much, why does it mean so much to you? Obviously, we are talking about your children, I can understand that....
J: I'll tell you why, because when you work your life out, for your children.... See, you have to understand where I come from. I was not raised in the United States, I don't knock it! To each, his own, I always said that! If, ah, your father, at eighteen years-old, wants to tell you to get the hell out of here and go to work, that's his prerogative! In our culture, you gotta follow our culture! ...I am not a holy man! Do you understand? I believe, I am Catholic, but I am not what you call a Holy Bible carrier. But, I still believe in 'honor thy parents'.... You, I believe, if your father had a loaf of bread, and he give you only half of that loaf of bread, he's doing good to you because that is all that he has! You follow what I am saying? So, you cannot condemn the father if he does not give his son a Cadillac...(interruption by men leaving the house). (Returns to the interview)...My culture says honor thy parents. My culture said, your parent will give you his blood, family ties is number one. Family ties, nobody get in between, just like Italian! Nobody get in between family. When the system start gettin'...(interruption by children entering the room), when the system starts puttin', you say the system, but it's not the system, it is the people that run the system, start puttin' a daughter or son against their parents, the wife against the husband, and the husband, a man against his sister, and kids,...that's bad! You live in a lawless country! I'm sure they might say, oh, look what's happening in Lebanon! Lebanon, prior to the war, was not like that. Outside elements fought it. I feel bad for it. You know, I came here long before the war. I was raised on love and care, my Dad hit me! But you don't call me, you don't call him an abuser! I will give my right arm, right now, to get my Dad back! And I never, ever, back-talked to my Dad, or insulted him, or called him names, never! And nobody, man alive would call my Dad a name while I'm livin'! That's what I believe in!

Likewise, during the same interview, Emily revealed the her strong "sense" of "pride," the "meaning" of her
religious "faith," and the ends that she was seeking in "raising" her children:

...Let me tell you one thing about that! The people that call down to the Juvenile Court, the character references I can get in writing, the bond money I can get put up by well-known people that know me very well, neighbors, pediatricians, doctors, dentists, people that have lived with me, the Mayor, who do you want?! Who do they want?! The character references I can get...I pride myself on my honor, being an honorable person, my kids have been brought up in the Catholic faith, very strict with them. I'm a devout Catholic, but I don't go around on a soap box, because these kind of people turn more people off than they turn on. You can live your life that way, and see who you bring along with you. And this is how I raised my children, with a fear of God, and a love and respect for Him. And I want them to have love and respect for their family.

The Reports

Six "complaints" about the family had been received by the Agency in six years. The first "report" was made when Julia, the eldest daughter, was nine years-old, or almost five years before Joseph and Emily became involved in the study:

Anonymous male stating he had concerns for Julia. Apparently Julia and his daughter are in school together and Julia had missed some days last week. She came to school [today] and had black and blue marks on legs, chin, and forehead. Child told caller's daughter that father had beaten her up.

During the initial "intervention," the caseworker noted that the "child [was] very fearful of talking with the worker.
School was about to report [the] situation to [the Agency] because Julia had voiced concern to [the] school counselor. Child did not want anything bad to happen to family members. Initially denied any marks but did finally show worker mark on calf and leg. There were no marks on face. Child states also hit on arm with belt. Apparently this is the [first time] hit with [a] belt. Has been hit with hand--- gets punished 'Only when I (child) deserve it.'

After a one month "investigation," and "brief service delivery," the Agency "closed" the "case."

Three months later, at the beginning of a new school year, the principal made the second "report" to the Agency regarding Julia:

[The principal] related that Julia is being physically abused by her mother. He said when [the Agency] was previously involved Julia was very reluctant to be truthful. At that time [the principal] felt the abuser was the father. [The principal] said father has calmed down and now mother is physically abuser (sic) toward Julia. [The principal] said there are presently no marks on Julia and [the principal] does not consider this an emergency situation. [The principal] would like the previous [Agency] worker...to handle this referral as he feels Julia would be more apt to talk with [the previous worker] and family would (or could) be helped to see this as a follow-up to previous referral. [The principal] would like worker to schedule time to come to school on Tuesday or Friday AM (next week) when the counselor is in the building.

After two interviews with Julia, and consultation with the school counselor and principal, the same caseworker reached the following conclusion:

Julia had some concern that her mother had been picking on her lately. However, in discussion with her it was learned that relatives had been visiting long term and this seemed to be root of problem.
Emily seems to be a perfectionist and leans on her oldest daughter to help out. It was decided to sit back and see if situation corrected itself, which it did after relatives left. Julia did indicate that mother got a part-time job working 4 to 9 p.m. a few days during the week and that Julia would be "the babysitter" even though father would be home.

There was no documented contact by the caseworker with Joseph and Emily. After a month of "service delivery," the "case" was closed.

Thirteen months later, when Julia was twelve years-old, the third "report" was made to the Agency by the school:

At 2:04 p.m. a call was received from [the elementary school]...regarding physical abuse of Julia by Julia's mother. Julia told her teacher, her tutor, and [the school counselor] that last night she and mother got into an argument and mother hit Julia repeatedly with a crutch. Julia has bruises on her arm, hand, and has a swollen finger. Julia is also complaining of a sore knee and leg, although no marks can be seen on the knee and leg. Caller states that the school has reported physical abuse of Julia by parents on two previous occasions when Julia had bruises. Call states that there seems to be frequent fights, and turmoil in the home. The parents are Lebonese (sic) and refuse to accept that there are limits of discipline according to the law. The parents were in therapy last year, but are not currently.

A different caseworker "investigated" the "report," interviewed Julia at the school, and observed that "there were obvious bruises on her arm and hand and she did state that her finger did also hurt.

At this time Julia was very adamant about me not speaking with her parents until after the Thanksgiving Holidays. She stated that they were going to have a special Thanksgiving dinner and she did not want this interrupted due to [the Agency's]
involvement. I explained the position of [the Agency] that we must take action with this immediately and also we would be calling the police and having a doctor document the bruises. Our position was that this was necessary due to the past abuse which was not documented by hospital personnel....Emily did admit hitting her child with a stick. She stated that Julia and her brother were fighting with a crutch and she took it and hit Julia with it. She stated that she did not feel the punishment was severe and stated that she does not appreciate anyone telling her how to discipline her children. It was very hard for the principal and me to state that there are laws to protect children with regards to physical abuse and there are certain standards that one must adhere to. She stated that she and her husband are from a different culture and they are used to physically disciplining their children. I responded by saying I acknowledge that there are cultural differences within family discipline practices. However, I did state that the laws that we must all abide by are that of the county and state in which we are all residing. I also stated that it would be necessary to have the marks documented by a doctor and also a police report made. Again the family was somewhat upset with this but did comply....

Emily and Joseph state that these problems with Julia escalated since the last time [the Agency] intervened. They state that Julia thinks that she can run their household because she can manipulate her parents into thinking that they are not allowed to physically discipline her. They also have very strong feelings with regard to the fact that there were bruises on Julia before, and no documentation was done.

This family states that Julia is very steadfast on getting her own way. She is very stubborn, and also manipulative. The family also blames her for much of the other children's deviant behavior. They state that the other children are also talking back to the parents and are beginning to get out of control. Julia seems to be very much a scapegoat for all the problems that are wrong with this family.
future that these physical means are directed towards the bottom and not in a hurting manner. It is also hoped that this family will start attending counseling where they have already contacted [a psychologist] for the possible counseling in the future for the family and the child.

Eight months later, when Julia was thirteen years-old, the fourth "report" was made to the Agency by a different principal during the spring of that school year:

[The agency] received call with concerns for Mary and Julia.... Caller stated Julia said last night mother was slapping her sister Mary and literally pulled out her hair; when Julia tried to stop her mother, her mother turned and hit her, but her thumb (it is swollen today) and child has small scratches on her body. Mother also pulled her hair....Julia stated she wanted to talk to someone.

Once again, a different caseworker "investigated" the "report" and entered the following "assessment" in the "case record":

Children are all attractive, well-groomed and appear healthy. Julia did not have any marks to indicate physical abuse had occurred. Mary denied that she had her hair pulled by mother or was slapped by her.

Communication between Julia and her mother was observed to be very poor. Other children were very supportive of their mother and accused Julia of not being truthful. Joseph has refused to meet with worker; therefore no interaction between father and children has been observed.

Worker first interviewed Julia and Mary together at school in the presence of [the school principal]. Both girls agreed that the incident of the previous day occurred as a result of the two of them quarreling, Mary being sent to their room (Julia left downstairs) and Julia refusing to sit as a punishment. Julia was very agitated and verbal about what had occurred, stating that she was
talking about--I'm mad!' She stated that Emily 'sat on her, bit her thumb (she stated that it was sore but worker did not see any signs of it being swollen or the skin broken---Julia stated she did not feel it needed medical attention), scratched her (Julia had one small scratch on her thumb), spit on her and pulled her hair.' 

Mary was very angry that Julia had gone to the principal and that worker had come to the school to talk with them. At times she cried and at other times she would sit with her arms folded, a scowl on her face, looking down, and refused to talk. When she did talk, it was aimed more towards Julia rather than responding to worker.

There was quite a bit of arguing between the two girls. Mary denied that her mother had abused her in any way and blamed the entire incident on Julia being mouthy, stating that all the family problems were Julia's fault because she is mouthy. Mary stated, crying, that all she wanted was to have a happy and normal family and Julia was ruining everything. She stated that Julia 'invites' their mother to hit her. Mary stated that their mother is a good mother and denied Julia's accusation that Mary gets beaten every other day. Several times she called Julia a liar.

Julia insisted that their mother is abusive to them, especially her, and that she wanted to leave home. She stated that mother beat her the previous day (she had no marks) when she intervened to keep Mary from being beaten. She had a tape of part of the incident; however, it was not very loud and worker could only hear yelling---no threats or physical violence.

Three weeks after the "investigation" began, the "case" was "closed" by the Agency because the "abuse" had been "unsubstantiated."

Twenty months later, the fifth "report" was made to the Agency at 10:40 p.m. by a "female relative." Julia was fifteen years-old at the time:
Caller stated that Julia called stating she was beaten tonight by father. Caller states most of the time, it is mother who beats Julia. Julia is the primary caretaker of all the children, and has been a 'slave' since she was 7 years. Parents are never home, leaving Julia with children. Caller did not know what child was beaten with, or if child had marks.

The following day, another "report" was received by the Agency from a counselor at the high school, where Julia was in the tenth grade:

Child, Julia, 15 years, has a bruise on her ear. Last night child and father got into an argument and father hit child. Last week, mother hit Joey, 10 years, and he has a bruise on his leg. Joey tried to stop mother, but couldn't. Joey goes to [a parochial elementary school]. Julia says the abuse is an ongoing problem and has been reported to [the Agency] in the past. Parents always lie and nothing is done.

For the third time, a different caseworker was assigned to "investigate" the "reports" to the Agency. The caseworker interviewed Julia at the school in the presence of the principal, guidance counselor, an Agency "case aide," and Mrs. Ramone, a woman who was a relatively recent acquaintance of Joseph and Emily, and their children. With respect to the latter, the caseworker noted in the "case summary":

...She stated that she has been family friends with Joseph, Emily, and the children for some time. She stated she has been concerned most recently although she has been concerned in the past regarding the abuse and the responsibility placed on Julia. Mrs. Ramone felt that Julia was in charge of the younger siblings quite frequently.
Thereafter, the caseworker made an immediate "assessment" and "intervened" in the situation:

...At that time this worker and case aide...observed Julia to have bruising to both ears. It was felt that an emergency order would be requested and Officer Wilson from [the city police department] took a report. He and Sergeant Jones stated that 'by past and present practice the child was in no eminent danger in order to be removed.' Sergeant Jones made the statement that the culture shock for the children would be worse for them to move from their private schooling to the [Agency's group home] and would not grant Rule 6.\textsuperscript{20} At that time this worker had phoned [the Juvenile Court] and was given a verbal emergency order\textsuperscript{21} for all five children or for three children if it was determined that the younger children were not victimized. Julia had expressed an extreme concern about the timing of the emergency order as it was her sister, Mary's, birthday and she did not want to wreck Mary's birthday party. Julia asked that if anything were to be done that it would be done the following day.... [The Juvenile Court] granted this request and made the verbal order effective on [the next day]. At that time this worker did write up a court summary and was granted a written emergency order of custody.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} See Note 13, supra.

\textsuperscript{21} See Note 14, supra.

\textsuperscript{22} The following are excerpts of the written "request" that was submitted to the Juvenile Court:
"[The Agency] is requesting an Emergency Order of Temporary Custody with medical and dental consent of the...children: Julia, Mary, Joey, Jeffrey, and Michael. This request is based on the substantiated abuse of Julia, and alleged abuse of Mary and Joey. There are concerns about the youngest children after learning of abuse of the older children....In an interview with Julia...she reported that she and her father argued about her use of the telephone and he subsequently hit her in the ears. Child has
Following the filing in Juvenile Court this worker proceeded to [the parochial elementary school] to interview the four younger children. At that time I indicated who I was and where I was from and Mary admitted to knowing what was about to happen. It was a condition of the previous discussion with Julia that Julia would not inform her siblings what was to take place so that the birthday party not be disturbed, however. Mary stated that Julia did share the information with her and Mary confirmed the abusive nature of her parents towards she and her brothers and sister. Joey, Jeffrey, and Michael were very quiet and withdrawn during this interview. They did not relate any information. When Joey was questioned about the bruise on his leg, he stated that he thinks he fell, possibly in the shower. Following the worker's interview with the children, worker...did take the children down to [the Agency] Clinic for their admissions physical. This worker and case aide...did proceed to [the family's] home and attempt to discuss the allegations with the parents. The parents were not home at that time and these two workers proceeded to the Ramone home as Mrs. Ramone had volunteered herself as a potential placement for all five children. At that time this worker and worker [case aide] did observe the Ramone home to be adequate for the care of the five...children. We proceeded back to the agency with Mr. and Mrs. Ramone in

bruises on both ears as a result. Julia alleged that it is usually her mother that is abusive to she and the other children. Julia states the abuse is usually preceded by the parents arguing. They argue about finances and the children, according to Julia. Last week Julia attempted to stop mother from beating Joey, and she believes he received a bruise on his leg as a result of the altercation with mother.... There is previous [Agency] involvement with this family dating back [four years]. In the five referrals [the Agency] has received...each have alleged abuse, four of them physical abuse. Marks have been documented on Julia [three years ago]. The family is Lebanese and believes they are using appropriate discipline. They are somewhat resistive to counseling and intervention in the past."

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order to pick up the children for placement.

In contrast, during the first interview with the researcher, Joseph and Emily offered their version of the incident that precipitated the Agency's "intervention."

Their explanation was consistent with the one that was voluntarily given to Agency caseworkers immediately after "emergency temporary custody" of the children had been given to the Agency by the juvenile court:

J: Now I remember, I had two phones in the house. One (daughter) was sitting on one phone, the other was sitting on the other phone. And, I always said, you know, I don't like sittin' on the phone. If you want to talk, talk, get it over-with, and that's it! I said, alright, get off the phone. They both got off. I go down to my computer, I'm working. I looked up, I see the phone stretched back here. My oldest daughter got back on the phone. Which, all this came...after...Mrs. Ramone started butting into my life. Do you know what I'm saying? She started telling us things...we are Lebanese, we are, ahh, what you call it, ahh....

E: ...Lebanese freak....

J: ...No!...That's not the word, too. We are, ahh,...from old ages....

E: ...Dark ages....

J: Dark ages. She started putting these into her head. Now you're talking about fourteen, fifteen year-old girl, you know, and twelve, thirteen year-old girl, I mean, anybody could switch their minds! So now, my daughter wants to rebel against me! I said, get off the phone, again. She did. Five minutes later, I looked, the phone stretched, again. Not even five minutes, the whole incident didn't take fifteen, twenty minutes. The phone stretched again, I said, I told you, get off the phone! She did. So, the third time, I said, get off the phone, and go to your room. She did. I
sit by my computer, doing my work, downstairs, I pick up my phone to make a phone call, she's on my phone! I said, what'd I tell you?! Get off the phone! Enough is enough, you are driving me up the wall! I hang up, I made my call, I finish my work, one of my guys came in, he said, Joseph, can I borrow some money, I said, sure, what do you need? I'll go and get it for you. I went up the bedroom to get it for him. The minute I walk into my bedroom, she's layin' on my bed, with the phone in her hand. I screamed at her, I said, hang up the damn phone, I told you! And stay off of it! She hung up, she looked at me, she said, ahh,...I hate to say it, because I'm not putting my daughter on trial here, you know.... She said something to me I didn't like, I slapped her.

I: What did she tell you, so that I can understand....

E: She said, "God damn it...."

J: She said, "God damn it, son-of-a-bitch, don't embarrass me in front of my friends on the telephone!"

E: ...In front of a guy....

J: I have never, ever heard, I smacked her. She cussed me, again. I smacked her. I said, you'll never get the last word in this house! She cussed me again, I slapped her good..., I slapped her, I imagine, about three or four times. I had a ring in my hand. Whether I marked her ear or not, I don't know, I didn't look, I didn't care! You asked for this, you make your bed, you lay in it! You ask for this, you get it! And do you call that abuse?! That, to me, abuse is I walk in, I just look for what you did, to beat you! That's abuse! That's not abuse! Whether I left mark, or not! Whether I left mark or not, it's still not abuse in my book! So, ahh,...I get up, I put my clothes on, and I go out to play gin,...nothing happens. Next morning, I think she told her mother, Daddy hit me, or something....
E: ...What are you gonna do about it? And I asked her, she said, Dad hit me, what are you gonna do about it? And, I will be honest, I saw the mark,...because I know her, she tried this before, and we had witnesses. [The family physician] said, she's a very manipulative child. I said, Julia, you should not talk to your father like that, she told me what she said. I said, you shouldn't talk to your father like that. It's wrong.

Finally, Joseph and Emily were candid in their discussion of their reactions to the Agency's "intervention" and the court's abrogation of custody of their five children:

I: So, on Wednesday, they took emergency custody, but you have me confused, maybe because I'm just thinking about everything you're saying to me.... But, you say, then, they came back?

J: They send them home they didn't take them! They took the custody, I didn't even know they took custody!

I: You didn't know they took the custody?

E: My son said something to me, my 11 year-old, when he was going out with friends, he said, Mommy, Julia is going to go with Aunt Cecilia (Ramone) for the rest of her life. And he asked me not to go out this one evening before this happened. And I said, oh, honey,...I thought he was kidding! I didn't pay attention to him. The 11 year-old!

J: We had no idea what was going on.

I: They took emergency custody on Wednesday and on Thursday....

J: They picked up the children.

I: They picked the children up, so between Wednesday and Thursday, the Agency had emergency custody of your children and your
children came home, just like any other day....

J: Yeah, just like....I had birthday party for my daughter. I did not know what was going on!

E: Right! Her thirteenth birthday.

J: What you call, emergency custody, you know, if I,...what is emergency custody? If I feel you are in danger, I take emergency custody. Right. So, if I feel if you are in danger, I don't send you to the place that you are in danger...where you, how do you say, risk your life. I will take you that day, that minute! They didn't do that. They said, well, we'll let them go, because we had the birthday party. So, anyhow, we come in, we start calling here, you know, to see what happened, then,...[the caseworker] called. I have your children.

E: We didn't hit if off with her at all.

J: I cussed her out and hung up. I'm not going to let that bitch talk to me.

E: Which he probably should have talked to her, I did go down there that night to talk to her, but he wouldn't.

J: And, ahh, five minutes later, the Ramone's called, which the Ramones are the foster parents...which is supposed to be a friend, you know. He said, I have your children here. I said, I want to ask you one question, only, when did you know about it? See, I been around and I know government doesn't work that fast. You know. It, you don't just go downtown and get things done in five minutes and get it over-with. I knew it didn't work that fast, everything has to be planned. What did you know about it? He wouldn't answer, I said, I just ask you a simple question, I said, when did you find out about this? He said, yesterday. I said, you son-of-a-bitch, you come and eat in my house, too?!

Through two, subsequent "hearings," the juvenile court reaffirmed its original decision to grant the
Agency "emergency temporary custody" of all five children and to maintain them in foster homes. Furthermore, during the second "hearing," the court "ordered," among other things, a "psychological evaluation" of each child. In a subsequent report that was submitted to the court by the Agency, a "clinical psychologist" concluded that "many of Julia's and Mary's psychological symptoms appear to be the direct result of their chaotic and unstable home environment.

Thus, both girls were reportedly exposed to domestic violence and were forced to endure frequent physical and emotional abuse. Due to these traumatic experiences, Julia and Mary began to have a sense of helplessness, accompanied by feelings of anger and despair. In addition, they have developed intense feelings of frustration which they ventilate by fighting with each other as well as their younger brothers. Further, Julia has coped with the situation by trying present herself as strong and capable. She has also attempted to regain a sense of power in her life by behaving in a controlling manner toward others. However, her depression and anxiety easily break through. Similar to her sister, Mary, too, has attempted to mask her feelings but her style is to hide behind a cheerful, problem-free exterior. In addition, she used school in the past as an arena within which to obtain a sense of worth and belonging. However, subsequent to Mary's recent disclosure of the abuse, her defenses have broken down and she has begun to express in school as well the anger and resentment she feels. Indeed, both girls are quite depressed at this time.

The same "examiner" perceived that Joey was experiencing "feelings of low self-esteem, rejection by others, and depression."
In addition, there appears to be an underlying theme of submission to others in authority, especially parental figures. Joey appears to deal with conflict by withdrawing, either physically by hiding in his closet, or mentally through fantasy.

Jeffrey's performance also suggests feelings of depression and a desire to please others. He also appears to feel caught up in a struggle between adults for love and attention. Finally, testing indicates that Jeffrey is frustrated due to his inability to please others through his efforts.

V. Darlene and Edward

Darlene was a twenty-seven year-old, caucasian woman who had been married for approximately two years to Edward, a forty-eight year-old, caucasian man. This was the second marriage for each of them. Darlene had three children: Bobby, seven; Matthew, five; and Shelley, who was almost three years-old at the time of the study. At the age of thirty-four, Edward met his first wife, a fifty-six year-old woman, whom he divorced after a marriage of approximately ten years. Darlene and Edward were married shortly after Shelley was born. During a court-ordered psychological evaluation, the following personal "history" was gathered during a "clinical interview" with Darlene:
Her childhood could be characterized as being chaotic and filled with both physical and emotional abuse. She indicated that her mother physically abused all four children. Darlene was always much closer to her father. Her parents experienced severe marital discord for a number of years and finally divorced.... Shortly thereafter, Darlene left home and went to live with the Thomas family. No legal custody changes occurred, although Darlene does refer to the Thomas's alternately as her 'adoptive' or her 'foster parents.' Darlene contends that she was frequently beaten by Mrs. Thomas. She indicated that she met her first husband, Benjamin Walker, at the Thomas's. Her report states that she was also dating Mrs. Thomas' grandson, William Mitchell at the same time she was dating Benjamin Walker. She learned that she was pregnant and Mrs. Thomas 'made' her marry Mr. Walker, event though she was not certain which of the two men was the father of her child. She gave birth to her first child, Bobby, and returned to live with the Thomas's. She received assistance with child care responsibilities from Mrs. Thomas. In addition, Darlene reports that Mrs. Thomas used to sleep with young Bobby. Darlene and Mr. Walker were divorced soon after the birth of their third child, Shelley. The paternity of all three children is somewhat questionable as Darlene continued to date Mr. Mitchell even after her marriage to Mr. Walker up until the birth of her third child.

Darlene had completed only nine years of formal education and reported to the researcher that she had never been employed. While Edward had graduated from high school, at the time of the initial interview, he was unemployed, but attending vocational school. At the last interview, he had reportedly been working for six months as a "machinist" at a local "tool and die" company and was "bringing home" approximately $212.00 per week. Previous to that time, the family was receiving an
unspecified amount of Aid to Dependent Children, General Assistance, and Food Stamps. It is noteworthy that all of the children were in the "temporary custody" of the Agency at the time of the parents' involvement in the study; consequently, the family was no longer receiving ADC and their amount of Food Stamps had been reduced. Furthermore, Darlene reported that the couple was not covered by any health insurance.

When the researcher first met Darlene and Edward, they had just moved to, and were refurbishing, a two-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a duplex in an older neighborhood in the city. Entrance to the apartment could only be gained from the rear of the home by means of a somewhat treacherous set of open, wooden stairs that ascended to a back porch. The couple received no rent subsidy and were paying $350.00 per month for the apartment, including their utilities. At the time of the interviews, Darlene believed that the amount of money they had was "poorly" meeting their needs; they were "barely able to meet" their payments; and there were "insufficient" resources to meet "emergencies." While she admitted that the couple needed more "financial assistance," Darlene felt that she and her husband were "doing about the same" as other people their age and in their circumstances. Accordingly,
Darlene was convinced that her children had always "had everything":

...If you'd see their rooms, I still ain't got all their clothes put away. I mean, they got clothes runnin' out their ears! And I don't have enough room to put 'em. And it's like, when they come home, all the ones that they got now, will come home with 'em! And I have to find places for those! So, it's just...they always had...everything. They've got toys...upstairs. Each one of them has two toyboxes...of toys. All the boys' toys are in two toyboxes...together. Shelley has her two toyboxes. They've got books. They've got different things, like before Bobby started kindergarten,...I spent forty-five dollars on them! And I figured they'd go through Bobby, and they'd go through Matthew, and then they'd go through Shelley. Then,...put 'em up and they'd go through the grandchildren! So, they're the hardback, and they're really interesting....Edward was sittin' there readin' one, one night! (Laughs). He was sittin' there, I said, don't you know about the alphabet, yet?! But, they have all kinds of learning books, and different things. So, they've always had everything. They've always got new toys. It's like, when Edward came around in November [four years ago],...he left his first wife. He had a Sears Credit Card, and everything.... He had a Sears Credit Card, and put a hundred dollars worth of toys on the credit card...for the kids! It was just the two boys, then. I was pregnant with Shelley, and..., then I had bought 'em stuff. And they had stuff from my Mom and Dad. They had stuff from my foster parents. They had stuff from my brother, he went and spent, almost a hundred dollars on clothes for 'em.... And got 'em...matching outfits. What one had, the other one matched. He bought 'em three or four outfits, three or four pairs of pajamas, underwear, socks,...everything matched! So, they've always had everything!

In contrast, a psychologist at a local mental health center "evaluated" Darlene and reported the following
"results" and perceptions to the juvenile court:

Darlene achieved a Full Scale I.Q. [Intelligence Quotient] of 72 on the WAIS-R [Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale--Revised] that places her in the borderline range of intellectual functioning....In general, her scores indicate that she has difficulty learning in a wide variety of environments. She appears to have difficulty evaluating and utilizing practical experience. In addition, her test performance indicates she performed best on tests that measure her visual motor coordination. Her abilities were markedly below average on tests that measure her general range of ideas, her ability to conceptualize on an abstract and concrete level, and her ability to concentrate and reason. Her scores indicate that she has poor awareness of the social environment and has difficulty in the areas of social perception and judgment. Additional scores suggest that Darlene may have problems with self-control and impulsivity. She used a random approach to problem solving consisting of trial and error responses instead of approaching tasks in a planful manner.

Darlene has produced a highly defensive MMPI [Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory].... The results indicate that Darlene deliberately tried to avoid answering the MMPI frankly and honestly and that she was very reluctant to disclose personal information. Her test results indicate that she is attempting to avoid or deny unacceptable feelings, impulses, and problems. Instead, she is trying to present herself in the best possible light and to appear better off psychologically than is, in fact, the case. She attempted to deny even the most common human faults and was not willing to admit to possessing minor faults, dishonesties, aggression, or weakness of character.

The Reports

The first "report" to the Agency regarding the family was "confidentially" made by Darlene's mother, approximately seven months before the couple became
involved in the study:

Caller states that Shelley is kept in her high chair all day. The mother will take her out of the chair for a nap. The child is always dirty. She also has a cigarette burn on one of her forearms caused by a babysitter accidentally. The caller blamed this on the mother for being careless and not offering proper supervision. The home is also in poor condition. The caller only said the bathroom ceiling was falling through.

A caseworker assigned to "investigate" the "complaint" made a "direct contact" with Darlene, Matthew, and Shelley at their home on the same day; interviewed the "babysitters"; and after Shelley was examined in the "emergency room" of a local hospital, filed a "police report" regarding the allegations:

Shelley was seen at [the local hospital] ER [Emergency Room] [two days after the "report"] to see if the doctors could determine what type of burn she had on her arm. This apparently could not be determined.... Even though Shelley's burn and the explanation given were suspicious, [the local police department] did not feel they could be of much assistance in clearing this up. [The local police department], therefore, will not do any official investigation but will assist in assuring the parents cooperate if necessary.

Noteworthy, the caseworker entered the following "description" of the family's "home environment" in a "case summary":

The family resides in a two-story, side-by-side duplex.... The interior and exterior are in need of much repair. Furnishings and housekeeping standards are poor. During both of my unannounced visits the house was cluttered and the carpet, furniture and wall were dirty. There are holes in the walls with plaster falling out. There is
a large portion of the bathroom ceiling that has fallen down with pipes exposed. The landlord is, reportedly, in the process of repairing this.

Ten days later, and while the caseworker continued to "investigate" the initial "report," a second complaint was received by the Agency from an "anonymous" Head Start teacher:

Caller saw cut marks and a purple bruise on child's (Matthew) eye [two days ago].... Child said mother and stepfather were fighting and step-father hit him. Caller discussed this with mother and mother said step-father did not hit the child, but gave no other explanation. When I questioned caller about why this wasn't reported earlier, she said she reported to the main office.

Again, the "case record" revealed the following account of the caseworker's "investigation" of the family in response to the teacher's "report":

Shortly after receiving the second referral regarding the scratches near Matthew's right eye, I again went to the home. This time Edward was home with the three children. After I explained who I was, he asked that we speak privately in the front room while the children watched TV. When I asked about the scratches near Matthew's eye he called Matthew into the room. Matthew said his brother had pushed him off the bed and he hit that side of his face. At that point Edward got up and pointed out that the cut under the eye he had done accidentally with his fingernail. He had gone into the boys' room in the dark to settle them down. He went to reach for Matthew on the bed to give him a swat on the behind and Matthew backed up. When Edward had gone to reach for him again, Matthew moved forward and his fingernail caught him under the eye accidentally. At that point Matthew said, "Yes, that's what happened," but still contended that the scratch on the side near his temple was from Bobby pushing him off the bed. The area below the eye was darkened and I would guess was a result of the nail scratch under the eye. Bobby denied he had pushed Matthew but it was obvious they had at
least been jumping around when Matthew fell. In regard to the parents fighting, Edward admitted that he and his wife did fight and that he had hit her several times in the past. The night that Matthew's eye had been scratched he and his wife had had a fight later and Edward had hit her, leaving her with a black eye. They had fought because Darlene had gone to the neighbor's to play cards and did not get home until very late. He feels that she should spend time with him in the evening (at least be home by 11:00 p.m.) as he is at school all day and they only see each other in the evenings. Edward explained that Darlene has angry outbursts when she will yell and throw things with no warning. He then, with prior warning to me, demonstrated what these outbursts look like. He said that, for the most part, when he has struck Darlene he has done so to bring the outburst to a halt. He stated their arguments mostly occur when the children are upstairs in bed but he realizes that the children can hear what is going on.

Finally, in the caseworker's interviews with Darlene, an "assessment" was made of her "functioning," and the family's overall situation, that justified "transfer" of the "case" for "ongoing protective services" by the Agency:

Darlene presents with a very flat affect and tends to deny or minimize problems even when openly confronted. She is very well defended and quickly comes up with explanations to rationalize away the problems. There are obvious marital conflicts that affect the entire family but she does not seem committed to resolving these for herself or her children. After lengthy discussion, she did at least verbally agree to attend counseling. Her care of the home and children seems to be very lackadaisical, however, the school's description of her as overly involved with her children is an inconsistency. It would seem that she probably keeps Shelley in the high chair for the majority of the day and I saw no evidence of appropriate nurturing with any of the children. We have received no previous referrals on this family and it seems unrealistic to think she merely presents as overly attentive to her children at school and
is neglectful at home.

After spending over an hour and a half discussing the problems and the need for counseling, Darlene contacted my supervisor three days later, stating she did not understand why [the Agency] thought they should go for counseling. She stated that she and her husband had already resolved their problems (she agreed to be home by 11:00 p.m. from now on) and that she saw no need for counseling....

The ongoing worker will need to:

(1) Continue to encourage Darlene and Edward to become involved in marital counseling to reduce the incidence of domestic violence and/or impress upon the parents the affects (sic) of domestic violence on the children.

(2) Work with Darlene in educating her about child development issues and learning more effective parenting.

(3) Monitor the home situation and encourage Darlene to improve her housekeeping.

(4) If the landlord does not make necessary repairs (the bathroom ceiling and holes in the walls) within a reasonable time, the ongoing worker may want to contact the Health Department to see if they can help to get the work completed.

Less than two months later, while the "protective services worker" was "on vacation for a month," an "anonymous female" made a third "report" to the Agency that was immediately judged to be "unsubstantiated:"

No gas. No heat for last three days. Three young children in home.

Disposition: family has heat as I spoke with mother and father. Parents indicated heat has never been turned off.
Within two days, a fourth "report" was made by an "anonymous" person:

Caller stated that early this morning Bobby was locked in a closet by parents. Child was hollering and screaming to be let out. Just before caller called Bobby was supposedly put in the basement. Again child was hollering and screaming begging parents to let him out. Caller stated that [the Agency] has been involved with this family.

The Agency immediately telephoned the local law enforcement agency and, while "officers went out," they "called back and stated that Bobby was not at home."

Three days passed and an "unannounced home visit" by an "investigating" caseworker failed to locate the parents. The next day, the same caseworker made "telephone contact" with Darlene:

She said police had checked that night and 'referral' [fourth complaint] was unsubstantiated. She did say that Bobby has problems at bed time and they close their door and he cries....

One month later, at 6:08 p.m., Edward made the fifth "report" to the Agency:

Caller is stepfather to the children and states mother walked out on him and he cannot care for children. Mother left, stating she wasn't coming back, took money, and left health card. Caller states he needs help, someone to come to his home ASAP (as soon as possible).

Called back at 6:20 p.m. Mother was home, had gone to pick up medicine for child. Father would not talk to me!

Thirty-six minutes passed and the Agency received the sixth, and most significant, "report" from a police officer:
At 6:56 p.m. received call from Officer Smith requesting S.W. (social worker) come to [the local hospital] because [the] children were being brought into Hospital. Bobby allegedly had received a whipping today according to him and officer (whipped with a belt) watch [sic] was seen by medical staff at [the local hospital]. Boy allegedly ran outside without shoes and pants on to neighbor's house. Neighbors called police. Neighbors state Bobby is always the one parents hit on. Parents also allegedly lock child in basement with dogs, one being dead for 4-6 days in house. Parents denied hitting Bobby with anything but an open hand and locking kids in basement. They admitted they did lock them in their bedrooms.

Stepfather, Edward, told Bobby he was going to put him in [the Agency group home] and to pack up his clothing.

Bobby had possible belt marks on right leg. 4 year-old [Matthew] plays with knives---he attempted to cut his neck in past according to the mother. The 4 year-old has done this before. 4 year-old also has marks that are fairly new all over his back.

Pictures were taken at [the local hospital] and by our nurses at [the Agency] of all 3 children. S.W. [social worker] should request Medical report and copies of pictures.

Police report with this material. Agency received Juvenile Rule 6. Officer states there was no hot water for bathing. House was a mess.

The following day, the seventh, and final, "report" was received by the Agency, once again from an "anonymous female":

Caller says mother's 3 children were taken away by the police [yesterday]. Caller suggests we talk to the neighbors, and that they can verify that the children were locked in closets, locked in the basement, and made to go to bed at 5:30 p.m.
During an individual interview with the researcher, Edward offered his "assessment" of Darlene and his perception of the family circumstances that "justified" his "report" to the Agency:

I: You made reference to the incident that essentially caused the children to come into the custody of the Agency. That was, specifically—you correct me, of course, if I'm wrong—Darlene using a belt to punish one child....

E: ...Bobby....

I: ...Bobby,...do you think that behavior (by Darlene), in and of itself, was sufficient, as far as grounds are concerned, for the Agency to take custody, or....

E: Yes, I do. Yes, I do, ahh,...Darlene wouldn't, ahh, hadn't...been takin' a belt to just beat Bobby, she whipped him, and she didn't whip him very hard. But, Darlene, herself, has temper tantrums, and, ahh, I've talked to [the caseworker] about this. And, Darlene, herself, gets frustrated to the point where she just wants to throw everything aside, and just walk away from it! And raising children, you just cannot do that,...if you really care about the children,...and wish to raise them. Ahh, Darlene still has the temper tantrums. Ahh, she just throws things aside, sometimes, and says, I just want to leave. Ahh, the latest incident,...ahh, was over the weekend. And, I believe it was Saturday night or Sunday night. Ahh, I believe it was Saturday night. Anyhow, Darlene was, has a sister down on, in Virginia. And her sister was having a baby, Darlene has talked to her sister, long distance, a number of times. And, then, has, has talked to her mother. And, ahh,...she has argued with her mother over the past week about when Helen, her sister in Virginia, when she has the baby, who should her sister call first. Darlene though, by calling her everyday, down in Virginia, she would have a sister, her sister would give her the phone call first, when she had the baby. Well, her sister had
the baby. Called her mother, first. Her mother, then, calls Darlene over the telephone about two o'clock in the morning. And, ahh,... Darlene gets very upset, because her mother found that she had the baby at eleven-thirty at night, and her mother called Saturday night, I believe, and her mother called her two o'clock Sunday morning. And, ahh, Darlene was very upset because she didn't hear about the baby first, she slammed the phone down, and she says, I want to go take a walk! And, I first told Darlene, no, I don't think that's a good idea. And Darlene says, well, I just said I want to go and take a walk. Well, two o'clock in the morning is a bad time to take a walk any place, but especially for a woman. In the city..., because you hear about all that is going on at two o'clock in the morning. Well,... Darlene got upset, went into the living room, sat herself down on the couch, she left the bedroom, and went into the living room, and sat herself down on the couch. Pretty soon, she come back and says, you want anything from the store? There's a store down on the, not too far from where we live at,... that's open, twenty-four hours a day. I said, no, she says, well, I'm going down the store, can I get you whatever, would you like something? So, I told her to get me a couple of candy bars. I finally gave up on the thing about trying to convince her to stay home. Well,... she took a walk. But, she could care less, exactly, she wanted to give up, right there, her frustration had set in, she wanted to give up, she put on some... shower slippers she had, and not shoes. She took a walk. She came back with a black eye,... bloody nose, puffed-up face, hand marks all over her back, blouse ripped! Darlene came into the house, the house, of course, was dark. And, she says, you don't want to see me like this. And, so, I turned on the light, I figured something had happened, you know. So, I turned on the light and I proceeded to get dressed and called the police. We made out a police report, and they took Darlene down to the [city hospital]. We was down there at six o'clock in the morning,... and we went home, right back to the house. These things happens [sic] to Darlene because if Darlene had stayed home, they would have never happened. But, these things
happened to Darlene because of the frustration she feels, she all of a sudden just gives up, and just wants to leave things and just go! Ahh, at the time that Bobby was with the Miller's, we were having sex. And, ahh,...Darlene was unable to have a finish, and, ahh, Bobby was banging, we had the bedroom door closed, and Bobby was banging on the door. Now at six, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, it's a bad time to have sex. But, Darlene, for some odd reason, wants me to pay less attention to the children and actually more attention to her. It's like an attention-grabber, you know. And, the children have picked this up. Bobby has definitely picked this up. And, there isn't a time that Mom and Dad can go into the bedroom even at two, three o'clock in the morning without Bobby sneaking down the steps, where we lived at, and finding out what Mom and Dad's doing. Because, then, he wanted the attention. A lot of the things the children have picked-up on have come from their mother, Darlene, herself. And, umm,...ahh, at the time, Bobby was whipped, Darlene was just, he was whipped because of Darlene just wanting to give up. She was unable to finish, Bobby was banging on the bedroom door. Ahh, she got up, all of a sudden, just left the bed, ahh, ahh,...and she took a belt, one of the boy's belts, Bobby's belt, Matthew's belt, Matthew's in pre-school, I believe they wear belts to hold their pants up, instead of suspenders. She took Bobby's belt and whipped him. And, then, she just threw a fit! She said, I'm leaving! And, at that leaving, ahh, this is what made her give up, and get off the bed and whip Bobby. That one to throw all of the responsibility away, and just leave. Well, she ripped off her necklace, and so forth, and I thought she wasn't comin' back.... So, I called [the Agency] and said, my wife has left with me with three children! Well, she went up and got Shelley's medicine. And she came back and handed me Shelley's and told me she was leaving again. I says, tell me about, I'm calling [the Agency]! I said, you either stay here with the children to learn how to take care of them, or they're going to take 'em. And, that made her stop, and stay. [The Agency] called me back, and during this
process, apparently Bobby went next door, to Mr. Thomas' house. Ahh, the landlord's house, ahn,...but, she, ahh,...that made her stay, and [the Agency], the lady had called back and said, well, if your wife leaves, again, give us a call,...and, ahh, I said, O.K., fine. Apparently, they just put this incident aside. And when Bobby had run next door, of course, the woman over there dislike Darlene, and was Darlene's girlfriend, and she had told the police officers that he had been over there for three hours and about him being beaten. So, again, [the Agency] had to intervene, and apparently the same lady that I talked to, that colored woman, was the one that was down at [the local hospital], and she was the one that said we'll take the children away. Like I said, [the protective services worker] said she apparently over-reacted and, if it was up to him, he would just talk to us about it. But, in a way, I'm kind of glad all of this, you know, is working itself out. It'll take a little bit of time, and I miss the children,...but it's working itself out. And, I'm just not trying to make everything perfect, as [the protective services worker] thinks I am sometimes. At the same time, I'm trying to get [the protective services worker] to point out that certain things, to point us in certain directions. If, ahh,...if [the worker] thinks we need a marriage counselor, and definitely thought we needed parental guidance classes,...so he pointed that out to us. And,....

In contrast, during her initial interview with the researcher, Darlene not only confirmed Edward's version of the circumstances that led to Bobby's "whipping," but described her longstanding difficulties in managing her children's behavior:

I: So, the place to start here, Darlene, would be just for me to ask you to tell me what your situation is right now, in relation to the Agency.

D: Well, I smacked the oldest one...with a belt.
I: And the "oldest one" is how old?

D: Six.

I: And the name of that child?

D: Bobby.

I: Bobby.

D: Uh-huh.... Well, I hit him, with the belt, and when I went to hit him, I was aiming for his butt, and he turned around, and I got him on the leg. Well, then I had hit Matthew and got him on the leg, too. Matthew's the five year-old. And, so, the oldest one, Bobby, had ran next door, to my foster Dad's, where we lived on West Auburndale. And they saw it, so they called the police up. So the police took us down to [the city hospital]. From there, the doctors looked at it, they called a lady from [the Agency], and she come out and then she decided on taking them away from me...just because I, this is the first time I ever...you know, hit 'em with a belt, using my hand did no good. I hurt myself more than I hurt them. And, I could put 'em in a corner, they'd ignore me. Or, I could take the television away, they'd ignore it. And then Bobby had this, he's smart. You know, he's got a good brain, and everything, and he's just one of these at the age of being curious, wanting to know what Mommy and Daddy are doing in the bedroom with the door closed. He always came to the door, he beat on it! He wouldn't stop until one of us opened the door. This was after he was put to bed at night. Well, after the police took 'em, I had called [the protective services worker], because he didn't know anything about 'em being taken, he hadn't got a message yet. And, [the protective services worker] told me if he had been 'on call' that night, they wouldn't have been taken from me, they would have been sent back home, because he knew what the situation was. He knew that Bobby had this behavioral problem. Because he was babied by my foster mother. Anything he wants, he got. If it was a new pair of shoes, or a toy, he got it. Where Matthew was left out...the five year-old. He
was left out. If they went anywhere, they took Bobby...and left Matthew at home.

I: When you say your "foster mother", who are you referring to?

D: Mrs. Thomas.

I: And she....

D: She worked through [the Agency] for a long time. She raised,...I think, twenty-three in the [Agency's custody and care].

I: So at one time she had Bobby and Matthew in her care?

D: No,...Bobby, mostly, ahh, stayed at her house, 'cause she could afford cable T.V., where there was Nickelodeon [children's television program], which he liked to watch all the time. Where I couldn't afford it...at that time.

I: When Bobby did stay with her, it was at a time when it was done informally, in other words, it wasn't done through the Agency....

D: No, no, he just, you know, he got attached to 'em, since bein' around 'em since birth, you know, and he just more or less got attached to 'em...as 'grandparents.'

I: And they live close to you?

D: Yeah. Right next door. But when Bobby, when I was pregnant with Bobby, I lived with them. And after I had Matthew, I decided to rent one of their apartments, which they owned on Tod Avenue...right next door to theirs. And Bobby more or less got to the point where they had cable [television], he was gonna stay over there...more than stayin' at home. One time he stayed over there for three months straight, only comin' over to the house off and on long enough to say 'hi' and 'bye.' And he just mostly stayed over there, but when Mrs. Thomas got sick, in July [two years ago], it got to the point where he had to stay me, he...come out one day and told me that I wasn't his mother, that Mrs. Thomas was his mother, not me. And then it got to the point where I had
to try and explain to him that it was not his mother, I was his mother, I carried him for nine months, and not her. So, finally when she got, became ill, and had to be in and out of the hospital for seventy-two days, he realized he had to stay with me. Then it got to the point where he was picking on Matthew, the five year-old. He would hit on him, push him around. And Matthew didn't know what to do, he didn't know if that was my brother or is he just somebody who's come to visit me. 'Cause Bobby was always over there, and never over there. But Bobby did stick up for Matthew...a lot. Another kid would hit on Matthew, then Bobby would stick-up for him. And then it got to the point where they would play together. Other times they would just get into arguments, fight, throw things at each other,...punch each other! Play with knives. It got to the point where I just started locking everything up! And, in the middle of the night, they'd get up, get into the refrigerator! I'd have a big tupperware bowl with five pounds of cheese, and they could get it, you know, when they want it, to snack on, because it was in a bowl, all they had to do was take off the lid. Then it got to the point where they would get up, anywhere from two, three, four o'clock in the morning, and raid the refrigerator! One morning, we got up, the whole five pound block of cheese was gone! They ate it! What they didn't eat, strung all over the house...in the dining room. And then they'd tear up the house. And a couple of times, I would make them help clean what they did. They'd go out and pour cereal out. They'd make their own breakfast and then throw most of it on the floor, or they'd get the Kool-Aid, pour it all over the floor! Then I'd have a big mess to clean. But it's more or less, now Shelley, now she's just the opposite. If I tell her to do something, she'd do it.

During the same interview, Darlene recalled "what happened" when the Agency "took" her children:

D: Well, when Bobby,...I had went to the drug store, I told Edward I had to run out and get
Shelley's cold medicine, 'cause the one that the doctor had called in wasn't doin' any good.... So I had got off the phone, talkin' to the doctor, and he was callin' in the prescription at Revco. And,...I had sent Bobby and Shelley up to their room, because it was bedtime. They usually went to bed anywhere from eight to eight-thirty,...because they always got up early...around five, six o'clock in the morning. So, I'd put 'em to bed between eight and eight-thirty. So I'd sent 'em pu to bed, and Edward was upstairs. Or he could've been in the bathroom, and Bobby had went out the door, the other two were up in their rooms. But Bob's the one that went out the side door, and over there, and, umm,...there was a colored woman, stayin' with my foster Dad. And she was more or less taking over the house. And she had it in for me, anyway, 'cause I wouldn't pay rent...for an apartment that wasn't being fixed the way it should be fixed. And I had turned it in to the Health Department. And that made her, that made her even more mad. And it was posted. The Health Department put a poster up there, and how many days they had to fix it. So then, after Bobby had went over there, and I come back from the drug store,...I went up to their room to check on 'em. And Bobby wasn't there, he wasn't nowhere in the house. And I had asked Edward, and he said, well, he was just up here a few minutes ago. So I called next door. And Betty answered the phone. I said, 'Is Bobby there?' She said, 'yeah.' I said, 'Well, send him home.' She said, 'If you want him, come and get him.' So I sent Edward over to get him, and by the time Edward went out the door to go over and get him, the police were there. And they were questioning me about...did I hit Bobby with a belt? I said, 'Yes, because he was misbehaving.' He wouldn't listen by me telling him, and I said, he was supposed to be in bed, anyway. And he [the police officer] goes, 'Well, we have to take you [to the city hospital], and have him checked.' So there was like three or four doctors that checked him. And,...we had to go in the social worker's office, and, the lady went in, looked at 'em, and then, she come back, and talked to us, and that's when she said, 'We're gonna take 'em.'
I: What kind of mark or injury was there to Bobby?

D: Just a very little...like, mark, right here [demonstrates] on his leg. It was very visible. And, like I told you, [the protective services worker] said, you know, it didn't hurt him. Because [the protective services worker] said that Bobby, he [the worker] wouldn't even know how to handle Bobby! Because he's...got spoiled so much from my foster parents.

I: So when you went to this Betty's house, this is the foster mother that you spoke of before...?

D: My foster mother is dead, my foster Dad is still alive. Betty is just a colored woman that moved in with my foster Dad.

I: When you went there, though, the police were there. You say that the police told you that they were going to have to take Bobby to [the city hospital]?

D: ...Take all three of them to be checked at [the city hospital].

I: All three of them, not just Bobby.

D: It was all three, because...Matthew and Shelley were in the house, where I was.

I: Your home.

D: Yeah, and Bobby was next door. Well, then they said that they had to take all three of them to be checked at [the city hospital]. So we got in the police cars, the two of them, and I rode with...Shelley and Bobby. And I think Edward had Matthew in the other one. And we go back there, and we're sittin' there, and they made me and Edward go out of the room...while the doctors talked, checked them over. And we was taken to this social worker's room, to talk to the police officer and that.... But in the mean time,...there was...we had dead dog in our house. That we've been tryin' to get rid of, we called the dog pound, they wouldn't come and get him, 'cause they're not allowed to come on public property. We called the police out,
they said there was nothin' that they could do. And this Sergeant that was there that night that they took the kids, gave my husband a number to call. So my husband called 'em, and said to put the other one, the dead one, in the garbage bag, and set him out there so they could find him. Well, we did, and the garbage man picked up the dog, too. Which they could have got into trouble for, but they didn't know a dog was in there. And we called and had the other one taken away, because she started foaming at the mouth. So, they were in the basement. So [the protective services worker] said, that's not one of the reasons, it was just because I had hit Bobby with the belt.

One day after the police officer had "taken custody" of the children through the authority of an Ohio Rule of Juvenile Procedure,\(^23\) the "protective services worker," on behalf of the Agency, requested and was granted "emergency temporary custody"\(^24\) of all three children by the juvenile court, on strength of the following "grounds":

The family was a protective service case and this worker had recently been in the home [four days ago]. Apparently, the allegation of abuse [of Bobby] was indicating the need for medical attention at [the city hospital]. The supervision issue was also raised.

In regard to the abuse, there were visible marks on both boys, and both state that they had received a whipping with a belt by mother.

\(^23\) See Note 13, supra.

\(^24\) See Note 14, supra.
Seven days later, the "protective services worker" requested "temporary custody"\(^{25}\) of the children for the following reasons:

The abuse of the older two children has been substantiated. Both parents have acknowledged the validity of the initial allegations.

Darlene and Edward are cooperative and have visited all three children at the agency.

Counseling for Darlene and Edward can begin at [a local mental health center, and the oldest child possibly Matthew will be seen at [another mental health center]. Darlene is also agreeable to attend a parenting skill class.

Both parents are in agreement with the custody request and realize the need for better housing. The current residence besides housing a dead animal is infested with mice and in need of structured repair. The Health Department has finally notified the landlord and a 90-day deadline has been issued.

The parents have stated that if the children are returned to their care too quickly that the same problems will occur again.

\(^{25}\) See Note 16, supra.
IV. Ronni

Belying her twenty-four years, Ronni was a "petite" woman with the physical characteristics of a fourteen year-old. During the initial interview, she proudly told the researcher that "Hawaii is my native land." She was in a "common law" marriage to Raymond, a twenty-five year-old man of African-American descent. The couple had two children, a two year-old boy and a one year-old girl, both of whom were in the "temporary custody" and care of the Agency at the time of the first interview. Ronni told the researcher that she had "completed" high school and was employed on a part-time basis as a "teacher's aide" at a local day care center. However, the latter information could not be confirmed. Ronni also reported that Raymond worked as a "busboy" at a local restaurant. Ronni and Raymond had both graduated from the local school for the mentally retarded and were "presently enrolled and involved with" a "sheltered workshop" administered by the county mental retardation agency. Ronni received Supplementary Security Income (SSI) in the amount of $354.00 per month and, when her children were in her custody, $254.00 in Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC). She reported that Raymond also received $354.00 each month from SSI, but his payments sometimes varied because of his earnings from employment. The family was
reportedly not eligible for Food Stamps. All of the family members had health insurance coverage under the Medicaid program.

Ronni sat in a toddler's chair during the first interview, often straining for relief from a "tired" air conditioner embedded in the front wall of the living room. Among other things, she confided that the couple was planning to move from their small, one-bedroom apartment, but was uncertain of their destination. According to the "case record,"

Mother and father have been together off and on for approximately six years. Mother did have a previous pregnancy at age 19 which she terminated by abortion. Mother states that she did this as she felt she was too young to provide for a child at that time.

Both mother and father are stated to be in the mild range of mental retardation. Mother's I.Q. is 52 and father's is between 58 and 64.

At the time of the second interview, the family had leased a relatively modern, two-bedroom apartment, but were paying $350.00 per month for rent. The only furniture in the living room was an old sofa and a small table that served as a pedestal for the telephone. As her children wandered back and forth between the kitchen and the barren room, Ronni sat on the sofa with the researcher and lamented her original decision to remain in the city:
It's like...what, it's like..., if I woulda, knew the troubles that I was goin' to go through when I carried my first son,...I never would have stayed here in [the City], I would have, I woulda moved out of [the City], and would'v moved to a different state where I woulda never had to deal with these problems, because...where I come from, we never had to deal with these problems, people runnin' in and out of your life!...And where I come from, people don't come, people don't come into your house and just nose, just nose into your business, and nose into your private affairs. What I, what I, the way I feel, if I woulda had, if I woulda knew that I was goin' to have to go through this kind of life, with my two kids, fightin' everybody off, just to keep my kids, and havin' to worry about who's goin' to come to my door...next, wonderin' what's goin' on with me and my boyfriend, wonderin' how me and my boyfriend are gettin' along,...then, I woulda never came down here.

The Reports

The first "report" was made to the Agency by a staff person from the county mental retardation agency, almost two years before Ronni's involvement in the study:

Caller states Ronni is MR [mentally retarded] but more developmentally disabled (i.e. EMR [educable mentally retarded]). Ronni goes to [the agency's "sheltered"] workshop 5 days per week and earns money there and also receives SSI. Caller states Ronni is pregnant and due to deliver [in approximately one month]. Caller states Ronni wants to keep child. Caller feels due to MR, [the Agency] should be involved and possibly provide a homemaker and work with mother regarding child's needs, etc. Ronni is aware of referral [to the Agency]. Ronni lives with her stepfather.... I spoke with [the casework supervisor on duty] and she stated referral could not be accepted until
child is born at which time [the Agency] could act immediately. Caller was given information regarding what [the casework supervisor] said and agreed to call again after child is born.

Less than six weeks later, the second "report" was made to the Agency, this time by the local hospital:

[The Hospital] social worker called to refer Ronni to [the Agency] because Saturday she gave birth to an infant. Mother and father are both MR [mentally retarded]. [The social worker] feels that [the Agency's involvement is necessary in order to reinforce mother's infant care. There are other significant others involved:

Jean Smith, Case Manager, [Sheltered] Workshop
Vincent Bennings, Workshop ([father's] worker)
Parent and Children's [Education Program]
Wick (sic) [Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)]
Alice Mathews, payee SSI $336 ORP [Organization for Retarded Persons]
Gladys Winslow is a friend who has volunteered to help.
Walter Baker, Advocate, [Sheltered] Workshop

There is poor family support and mother and father need assistance until they feel secure in knowing they can handle the parents (sic) role.

Vincent Bennings, [father's] case management worker, wants the [assigned Agency] worker to contact him before face to face [contact with the parents]. He wants to be involved in the situation.

In the "case summary," the "investigating caseworker" recorded the following "history" and "definition" of the family's "problem":

Mother states that her own mother has been in and out of the family situation and that mother has lived with her stepfather for the past many years. Mother states her biological father lives in Arizona as do several of her siblings. Mother
states that she does not have much contact with her own family. Maternal stepgrandfather...is not having contact with the family at this time. Mother states that maternal stepgrandfather does not approve of Raymond because Raymond is black. Mother then stated that stepfather kicked her out of the home in [approximately two months ago]. Father comes from a family of four children and he states that his mother is alcoholic. She is involved with the family at this time, however, both mother and father state that PGM [paternal grandmother] is a source of stress for them, however, they would like for her to be involved with her grandchild. Father states that he, too, was kicked out of his home [approximately two months ago] and both mother and father state that PGM was not very accepting of mother and her pregnancy. Now, however, PGM wants to be very active with the family and her grandson. (It should be noted that Jean Smith, [sheltered] workshop case manager, informed me that there has recently been a charge filed against PGM for misuse of Raymond's SSI funds.)

In speaking with mother and father, they appeared delighted to be parents and to care for a newborn child. They appear quite sincere and genuine in their request for assistance and willingness to learn and cooperate.

As this is a unique family situation, as there is no neglect/abuse per se, however, because of the parents' mental retardation they will need a great deal of assistance. They will need assistance in terms of the baby's overall care and providing for the baby on a daily basis and meeting the baby's needs which most people would take for granted.

Furthermore, the caseworker made specific recommendations in the "service plan" for the family:

In working with this family the ongoing worker will want to consider the following goals: Insure that Family Life is involved with the family. Insure that Walter Baker, advocate, and Jean Smith, [sheltered] workshop case manager, continue to make home visits. Follow through with the homemaker request that I have initiated, help parents understand the overall needs of their son and how to meet them. Both mother and father will
greatly benefit by explanation, demonstration and education regarding their child's needs.

In contrast, during the second interview, Ronni offered her perception of the Agency's initial "investigation" and the consistent involvement of the county mental retardation agency:

From the time that we, from the time that my baby was born, from the time my first baby was born, they all scattered in like a damn...web of bees! Wantin' to know how Ronni and Raymond are goin' to raise this baby! How are Ronni and Raymond going to be able to take care of Ronni and Raymond? How's Ronni and Raymond going to be able to take care of their personal life? How's Ronni and Raymond going to be able to do their social life? How's Ronni and Raymond going to be able to budget money? And take care of a baby, when they're slow learners?

Two months later, a third "report" was received by the Agency from an "anonymous male":

Caller said he just talked with mother and he heard child screaming and crying. Mother said the father was 'hitting on' the child. Caller has never seen the baby, but says he is mother's stepfather. Mother attended [the local school for the mentally retarded] and worked in the [sheltered] workshop until the pregnancy. Caller was very upset and started crying and said, 'Please don't let this baby get hurt.'

While the "case record" indicates that the ongoing "protective services worker" had taken a "homemaker out to meet" the family on the following day, no written disposition of the third complaint was apparent in the "case summary." The caseworker assessed, however, the
"current situation" of the family:

This worker would like to note that Ronni is five months pregnant with her second child. Both parents have stated to this worker that this pregnancy was not planned. Our agency has kept this case open on a protective basis due to both parents being retarded. Also, this worker feels this family would benefit from our support system.

Almost seven months later, the fourth "report" was anonymously made to the Agency at 11:10 p.m.:

Caller states she had finished conversing with mother, who was physically abusing her children, as well as verbally abusing them. The youngest child is 9-10 months old. Caller had concerns for children's safety. [The City Police Department] were sent out at 11:12 p.m. Worker attempted to locate 609 Mayfield Avenue and could not find this address. [Two days later] [another worker] received a call from police stating that 609 Mayfield did not exist.

Again, there was no indication in the "case summary" that the assigned "protective services worker" made contact with Ronni in response to the fourth "report."

No further "reports" about the family were received by the Agency over a six month period. However, the "case summary" revealed that three, major "staffings" of community agency professionals were convened during that time to discuss the family's situation. At the first meeting, representatives from the "sheltered workshop" and county mental retardation agency, along with the "protective services worker" from the Agency, exchanged information and "addressed" the following "concerns":
The concerns were addressed at this staffing that Raymond as well as Ronni need outside counseling other then (sic) in their home. (Professional counseling). It was also felt at the staffing that other concerns was (sic) raised as (1) both parents are immature; (2) It was felt that both Ronni and Raymond are having marital problems; (3) It was also a concern that Raymond as well and Ronni have request (sic) for their check to no longer be sent to ORP [Organization for Retarded Persons]. It was also a concern with [the mental retardation case management agency] what was our role and duty as [the public child welfare] agency. This worker did inform the staff that (1) My role as a social worker was to monitor the family's situation closely as I was in the home on a weekly basis.... I also explained to the staff that there were other times I spent in the home but this was my regular scheduled appointment with this family. It was also [the mental retardation case management agency's] feelings as well as myself that Raymond needs engaged in the family situation as well as Ronni due to he (sic) being part of the family.

It was brought out in the staffing, this worker was made aware that Raymond's mother...had ran (sic) up their telephone bill $90.00. Also their mother was entoxicated (sic) and went to Ronni and Raymond's home. Supposedly, [Raymond's mother] had a confrontation with her male friend and ended up in Raymond's and Ronni's home after a knife. It should be noted that her male friend was stabbed by her as well as Raymond's mother did threat (sic) and shook the knife at Ronni and [the oldest child].

It was also or has been alleged that Raymond and... Ronni's mother had an affair with each other. This worker was also made aware on this at the staffing. Supposedly, this is the reason why Ronni's mother left her husband.

One month later, nine community agency professionals, including the "casework supervisor" and "protective services worker" from the Agency, met in the second "staffing":

...The [county mental retardation agency] was sharing concerns at that point was (1) Budgeting; (2) Finances; (3) The concern with WIC [Women, Infants, and Children Program]. and get Ronni reevaluated that was non compliance (sic). Concern also was around the issue of considering giving Raymond a raise on his job [at the "sheltered" workshop]. They were going to consider giving Raymond a raise if he attend (sic) work 100% of that month.

[The representative] from Parent and Children's Education Program did share her concern and stated that she would help Ronni out with nutrition (sic) on Wednesday. It should be noted that the oldest child... is in Parent and Children's Education Program from 12:30 to 4:00 daily. It should be also noted that on Thursday's (sic) afternoon mother attends Parent and Children's Education Program from 1:30-4:00 p.m. along with the youngest child.

It was also brought out that on Tuesday's from 10:00 to 12:30, the [mental retardation case manager] is in the [family's] home. Also it was also brought out that the homemaker is in the home twice a week on Wednesdays and Friday's. Also, it was brought out that the ["protective services worker"] is in the home weekly on Wednesday's from 11:00 to 12:00 p.m. Also this worker is in the home more but just noting the regular contact and the scheduled appointment time.

Twenty days later, the final "staffing" was held at the "sheltered workshop":

At that time, we talked about some goals for Raymond and Ronni. Both [the county mental retardation case management agency] as well as our agency felt that both Raymond and Ronni would benefit from counseling. This worker would like to note that this was a team decision. Raymond was and stated (sic) that he did not want to go through counseling because he doesn't feel he needs it. As stated to both Raymond and Ronni as a worker I feel that they both are in need for some professional counseling to help them deal
with their problems and also when a problem arises.

Finally, in the "case summary" of the six-month period of service delivery, the "protective services worker" offered the following assessment:

The strength area in both Ronni and Raymond as this worker sees them as (1) they are willing to be involved with our agency.

The weak area is that this worker sees both Ronni and Raymond feeling that they do not need all [the county mental retardation agency, Organization for Retarded Persons, Human services, Homemaker Services, Parent and Children's Education Program] involved in their life.

Almost twenty months after the first "report" to the Agency, and while the family continued to receive "protective services," according to the "case summary," Ronni telephoned the caseworker and "stated she wanted to voluntarily place her children under the custody of [the Agency].

It should be noted that this was regular time for me to meet with Ronni for a home visit. After this worker arrived at the home, Ronni stated to this worker that she had had enough of her male live-in boyfriend, Raymond. Ronni stated to this worker that she wanted to give her children up to the Agency until she could get herself together. This worker could observe with talking to Ronni for a long period of time that she was highly upset with Raymond. She reported to this worker that Raymond jumped on her the previous Friday night because she would not give him any money. This worker did talk with Ronni asking to her to resolve problem (sic) and this worker was very concerned about her being so upset and wanted to know from her if she felt if this was a good idea for her to give up her children. Again,
Ronni stressed to this worker that she was really upset with Raymond and she was willing to discontinue the relationship. Again, Ronni stated to this worker that she wanted to give up her children just temporarily until she could get herself together.

I did explain to Ronni that I would have to get her to sign a volunteer form for our agency to remove the children. This worker did explain to Ronni that I would be back with a volunteer form for her to sign and also remove the children. Ronni did explain to this worker that it was also the regular day for [the mental retardation case manager] to have an appointment with her in the home.... [The case manager] did contact Ronni while I was in the home. [The case manager] stated to this worker that she would meet me back out at the...home...to remove the children. [The Agency's] case aide...did assist this worker in removing the children from the home. During that time, Ronni was very angry at her male live-in boyfriend, Raymond. She stated to this worker that she was going to leave Raymond because she did not want because he had been verbally and physically abusing her. This worker did explain to Ronni that we would do some contracting with them before they would be able to get the children back.

Approximately two weeks later, Ronni and Raymond signed a "Service Agreement" that committed them to the following "recommendations" of the Agency:

(1) Weekly visitation with children at agency.
(2) Get involved with Parents and Children's Education (Parenting Classes) along with children to help develop better parenting skills with a positive report.
(3) List of identified and reliable child care providers.
(4) Follow through with medical appointment for children.
(5) Parents become involved with counseling with positive report.
(7) [The Agency] will be responsible for providing this family with bus passes.
One week later, the Agency filed a "complaint" that the children were "dependent" and petitioned the Juvenile Court for "emergency temporary custody"\(^{26}\) of each of them. The "protective services worker" submitted the following "assessment" to support the Agency's request:

...The natural mother, Ronni, signed a thirty day Voluntary Agreement for [the Agency] to place her children under care. Our agency had been providing protective services for this family for over two years, on a high risk status.

The parents are common-law married and have had a long history of domestic problems. Also, both parents are functioning below average of intelligence. They are involved with [the county mental retardation case management agency and the sheltered workshop]. Their I.Q.'s are in 40's to 50's.

A staffing was held at the [sheltered workshop] for Raymond.... [The county mental retardation case manager and case manager from the sheltered workshop] feel that the children will be at risk if they are returned after the thirty days.

Our agency feels that the parents' domestic problems have not been resolved at this time. Both parents are in agreement for ongoing counseling to help them deal with their domestic problems.

At a hearing one week after "emergency temporary custody" of the children had been awarded to the Agency, "temporary custody" was "continued" by the Court and the children remained in foster care. Almost five months later, the Court returned the children to the "physical

\(^{26}\) See Note 14, supra.
In contrast, during the first interview with the researcher—while her children had been in foster care for approximately three months—Ronni offered her perception of the "intervention" by the Agency that ultimately resulted in the abrogation of her legal custody of her children:

I: So, you called them, thinking that they were going to be able to do something for you.

R: No, I called them because I thought that they were there to help me. Instead, they were there waitin' for me to mess up. They were there waitin', waitin' to see if I was going to call them to have 'em come and pick my children up. 'Cause when I first had my baby, they didn't think I was capable of havin', havin' a baby and takin' care of it, because I was a slow learner, 'cause I was a slow learner.

I: [The Agency]....(Interrupted).

R: ...Slow, slow, as in the world society, today, slow learnin' people are,...slow learnin' people, to high functionin' people, are not what you say,...in their, how do you call it?...In their..., ahh,...they're not up where they're at!

I: They're not as good as....

R: Right, they're not as good as...them. And...me, myself, I feel like I'm better than, I'm better than anybody, I feel like that, I feel like, I feel like, I feel like, I feel like, I lay down, I had my children, no one was there when I had 'em, but me and the man that I lay down with to have 'em,...and I feel like they had no right to step into our life, when it came to our children. They had no right.
...However, if I can't answer your questions, I can at least give you a piece of advice; think less about us and of what is going to happen to you, think more about yourself instead. And don't make such an outcry about your feeling innocent, it spoils the not unfavorable impression you make in other respects. Also you should be far more reticent, nearly everything you have just said could have been implied in your behavior with the help of a word here and there, and in any case does not redound particularly to your credit.

Franz Kafka
The Trial

Analysis and interpretation of the "text" of the transcripts revealed four interrelated, but conceptually distinct, themes or "categories of meaning" in the researcher's dialogue with each of the parents involved in the study: (1) perceptions of the authority and "power" of the Agency, (2) perceptions of the "meaning" of their experience with the Agency, (3) perceptions of personal freedom, and (4) "resistance" (Diagram II). In essence, the identification of these themes, or the construction of each "category," evolved from the researcher's discovery of a high degree of intersubjective "agreement" among the parents with
respect to these "dimensions" of their experience.
Consequently, the "findings" of the study are shaped by
this interpretive approach, as well as the nature of the
research questions, interview "guide," and the boundaries
of the theoretical sample.

The following is a summary of specific parental
"perceptions" that "crystallized" during the researcher's
interpretation of the data, each of which comprises, or
serves to "shape," one of the four themes, or "categories
of meaning." Both the themes and the "perceptions" are
supported throughout the chapter by extensive excerpts
from the transcripts of the interviews with the parents.
Again, the former is the researcher's attempt to "get
round" what Clifford Geertz (1988) has warned is the "un-
get-roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions
are homemade, that they are the describer's descriptions,
not those of the described" (p. 144-5). The latter is
intended to preserve a portion of the researcher's
dialogue with each of the parents---to resurrect some of
its "living power"---for the reader to understand and to
evaluate, as much as possible, within the "world" of a
parent as he or she revealed it.
I. Perceptions of the Authority and "Power" of the Agency

Perceptions of Authority

1. Parents acknowledged that they did not know and understand the nature and extent of the legal authority that was vested in the Agency, nor their own legal rights.

Perceptions of "Power"

2. Parents perceived that the Agency had the "power" to "intervene" in their families at any time and to "take" their children away.

Perceptions of the Authority and "Power" of Caseworkers

3. Parents perceived that the nature and scope of the exercise of authority and "power" by the Agency varied, depending on their assigned caseworker.

4. Parents perceived that some caseworkers violated their rights.

II. The "Meaning" of the Experience

5. Parents perceived that being involved with, or having children in the custody of, the Agency resulted in some kind of loss for them and their family.

III. Perceptions of Personal Freedom

6. Parents perceived they were constrained by the "power" of the Agency "in their lives," but believed they were "free" to make choices and to take responsibility for "getting their children back" or for "getting the Agency out of their lives."
I. Perceptions of the Authority and "Power" of the Agency

As a result of a parent's experience---at the "front door" with police officers, in the "living room" with child welfare caseworkers, at the Agency during "administrative case reviews," or in front of the Juvenile Court Judge---consciousness of the institutional "power" of the "child protective services system" was "gradually constituted." As one parent confided,

I will tell you one thing. You live in a country that says we are equal. We are not equal. You are equal to what you have in your pocket. If I didn't have a little bit of money saved, to be able to hire a private lawyer, I would have been up, ahh,...against the wall.... You always hear about these things, but then you say, well,...but still, you know, it never hits you right. Just like they say, what they say, you have to...forget, just forget it, but once it hits you, you know, it's pretty hard to forget! I believe one thing. You are worthless unless you have money in your pocket.

While rudimentary, such "consciousness" gave meaning to a parent's "world" and received meaning from it: it was born of a parent's anguish, self-reflection, and daily struggle to (a) "make sense of" or to "control" what was happening to them and (b) to determine what they should--indeed, could---do in response to the actions and inactions of a public agency that, in most instances, had abruptly "taken" their children. As a result, it is important to understand the "perceptions" that "shaped,"
or served to "constitute," the "consciousness" of the parents who were forced to be involved with this public child welfare agency.

Prior to, and throughout, their experience with the Agency, parents admitted that they lacked any substantive knowledge or understanding of the statutory authority of the Agency and the legal process in which they had become entangled. For example, during an interview with a husband and wife in the cluttered "living room" of their home, the researcher learned something about the authority of the Agency, "rights," and the sense of "powerlessness" that is induced when innocence faces coercion:

I: Well, when you took that position, that they have "no right" to...then, inquire about, or take action, in regard to the other three [children], umm, how'd you know that? That they had "no right?"

J: Because I called VOCAL. And because I knew....

I: VOCAL is....

J: VOCAL is a group, here, in [the City], it's a, a parents organization against rights, or parents whose rights are being trampled on by [the Agency].

I: I didn't know that such a group existed.

J: Yes, I do, I did. I mean, I thought, the first time, I thought, I saw it on the [television news],...and it was like the first time, I said, wow!...This is what we need! And they kept pushing, and they kept pushing, I didn't take the phone number down, or anything, because, like I say, my troubles usually start
in June, and end in October. As so I, I think it started getting bad, last year. And I called, umm, I called the, the T.V. station. And I said, I'd like the number for the group. And I talked to this woman, and she was telling me, your rights are this.... But, see, they don't tell you that. They do not tell you, do I have to let them in. They don't tell you, they, that they have to send a letter setting up the specific time. That they are not allowed to roam around your house at free, at their own free will. They do not tell you any of these things! And, it's like, I don't want the police here. So, I'll do it, because I always just thought they could call the police, kick my door in, come in, and look through my house.

P: Yeah, if you don't know their rights, they'll walk all over you. I mean, it's kinda like, they'll kick you in the knees and say, get out of my way! We're comin' through!

I: Up until the time, then, that...[you] called VOCAL, and gained this information from them, neither of you were aware of those things called "rights."

P: Not really.

I: I mean, their [the Agency's] rights.

P: No...no. No, it was more like, ahh, it was kinda like they gave you the impression that, ahh, you just had to submit to 'em. That was that.

Most striking was the discovery that each parent perceived the Agency as having "limitless" or "unstoppable" "power" to act independently of, or through, the Juvenile Court, to (a) "intervene" in their family at any time, (b) make immediate, exclusive, or even final decisions regarding them, and their children,
and (c) command or "enforce" parental obedience with the Agency's standards and directives. For example, the following are accounts that were given to the researcher by some of the parents involved in the study, each of which are representative of such perceptions:

I: You paint a picture for me of this Agency as having...to use my words, lots of power. Lots of authority. You even paint a picture of them as though they are unstoppable. There's nothing you can do.

R: There's not! There's not. There's not. I really don't see how you can stop the Agency from taking your kids. If they want your kids, they're going to take your kids!

***

I: How much power do you think this Agency has?

B: Oh,...God! (Sighs). They got a lotta power! A lotta power. More, I'd say, they're bigger than the cops of [the city]! They're just like the police force here in [the city].

I: ...When you say that, though, what do you mean, when you say they're bigger than the cops in [the city]?

B: Well, they got more control, they have, if a kid goes out here, a live-in boyfriend, for instance, lives in a home and...the girlfriend and boyfriend are fightin', well, they're gonna jerk the kid out, right there. Forget the parents, they're gonna jerk the kid out! Because the kid don't need to go through that torture.

***
I: ...I think we're talking about the Agency's authority and their power. How much power do you think they have?

T: (Smiles). All the power. They're the Courts. It's just like asking yourself, how much power does the Courts got! They got all the power.

I: And there's really no way that you perceive that you can contend with them other than just....

T: ...Do what they say.

***

I: ...You would see this Agency as very powerful.

K: Oh, yeah! They are. I think they are.

I: Almost unstoppable....

K: Right. That's the way I feel. My ex-husband doesn't even have the power they do, and they are his kids! You know, blood-wise. And, I know, he has no right comin' in here right now, if he came in here, right now, and took the kids, I could press charges against him. But, [the Agency] can come in, without any warning at all, and take the kids. And, it's..., you know, all legal. So, they are,...they're really powerful....I'm glad, in a way, I'm glad it's almost over. I don't, I do doubt right now that I will agree with them about temporary, you know, custody, temporary custody. I just want to get the kids back, and get on with it.

***

I: The way you describe it, their power is limitless,...then.

J: It is limitless!

I: You say, they have more than a Court of Law?

J: For...the middle class people. Remember that, when I tell you.
I: Middle class people.

J: Middle class people. You talk somebody that makes two, three hundred thousand dollars a year, they will not dare touch!

I: How about a poor person?

J: Poor person...has no chance. ...At least, at least, I got a chance to say my peace! Poor people have no chance whatsoever! Whatever they tell 'em, they do!

***

I: ...First of all,...how much power do think this Agency has?

E: (Matter-of-factly). There's...nothing above them. They are top, as far as power...and, also, if a family...has, ahh, is on public assistance, they seem to have greater power...even, umm, this family is currently on public assistance.

I: ...What's makes them so powerful in your life?

E: Because, now they have...the other point I was saying,...they, then, have restricted my husband from our home. They have...ahh,...torn our marriage apart. We...cannot live in the same home, together. They have denied him to live at home...to live with his wife, and children, ahh,...we cannot as eighteen-and-a-half years of relationship, fifteen years of marriage,...I, you know, my husband is not permitted to sleep in the bed that we have shared for sixteen years. Umm,....

Indeed, much of a parent's thinking was dominated---and, in some instances, "consumed"---by their preoccupation with, and struggle to understand, the Agency's "power":

..
I: So, again, when I asked you about the power of the Agency, you feel they have a lot of power, then.

R: In order to take somebody's child away from them, I feel like they have a lot of power. If they take away somebody's kid, ... without, take away, take away, take away, take away somebody's baby, ... and not flinch, not flinch one time when they see a mother cry, cry, from heartbreak, from havin' her child torn from her, ... then I don't, I don't I feel like, I feel like, I feel like they can, can take a child away from a mother in one day, and tell her, you're not gettin' back your child ever again, and she can never find her child, can never, never, never, never, to ever to track her child down, ... yeah, I feel like they got power! I feel like they got power to remove somethin', remove the biggest part of a thing in a woman's life away from her, the biggest part of her life, and that's, that's something she laid down and birthed into this world, ... I feel like, I feel like, takin' a child away from you, and givin' it to another parent... to raise, you might as well walk into a store and pick up a pack of meat and give it away to somebody and never see that pack of meat again! And the way I feel, is like, ... the way I feel, the way I feel is, it's, it's, it's, it's just... a way a mother feels about her child! Any mother! When a child is, when a child is torn from her mother, ... it makes, makes the mother feel that her child's being gave away as property! Property that to somebody else that doesn't, that doesn't, that doesn't, that doesn't have anything to do with your child. Somebody that's not a family to your child.

***

M: ... They make us, when they take our kids, me and a bunch of other people I've talked to have agreed on this, they take the kids and then we have to pay out of our ass to get 'em back. They don't have to pay out of their ass to take 'em from us. (Pause).
Not surprisingly, in view of (a) a parent's "certainty" of the Agency's "power" to "take" their children as a result of any allegation, or "report," of child abuse or neglect---regardless of its validity---and (b) their own, relative "powerlessness" to prevent, or contend with, such action, all of the parents struggled to cope with, and some were emotionally overwhelmed by, feelings of fear. Indeed, many of the parents reported this fear as being most pronounced at the time of the Agency's initial "intervention" in their family:

I: Why don't we talk about that first time that they came, then.

J: It was like total surprise. I mean, it was like...you know, at the time, I did not know that I had rights. They'd knocked on the door and I'd always heard, O.K., if they come to your house, you have to let them in.

I: Where did you hear that?

J: I, it was,...I don't know, it was just something I'd always heard. If [the Agency] shows up at your house, you let them in, or they'll go back, get the police, and come in. So, it was like, I let them in,...rather than have the police come. And I mean, the first lady that came..., I mean she was very nice, very cordial, but it was like, she would ask questions and it's like, it catches you off guard, and,...you didn't know what to say or what not to say. You know, 'cause I was afraid if I open my mouth and I say too much, I'm going to be in more trouble myself.

I: Did [the caseworker] come as a surprise?

J: Yes.
I: In other words, she didn't call ahead, or send you a letter, or anything?

J: Most of the time they come, . . . oh, most of the time, they just show-up. O.K., I mean, you know, it's like . . . a surprise, there's not a letter saying, we're going to be here on this day, and at this time, . . . it was like, knock, knock, knock, that's it.

I: What do you think of that?

J: I think it's unfair. Because . . .

I: What do you mean?

J: Umm, . . . it's, it's intimidating. It's scary. I mean, it is absolutely frightening, you think, they're going to take my children away. 'Cause I mean I was mainly having the problem with [my son], and . . . this is . . . I . . . I'm married for the second time, and I have . . . other children . . . .

Second, most parents feared that the Agency's "investigation" of the condition, or circumstances, of one child made any other children in the family subject to "official" scrutiny, and accessible to "intervention," thus "opening the door" to the possibility that all of the family's minor children might be "taken" for the same, or similar, reasons. Indeed, this perception was compellingly expressed by a married couple who had signed a "Temporary Custody Agreement" with the Agency---on a "voluntary" basis---with respect to their oldest son, whose behavior, and psychological problems, had become completely unmanageable:
I: So, if we want to look at the word, "consequences," for a second, I guess we're talking about legal consequences, in terms of issues of rights [that are contained in "Temporary Custody Agreements"] But, we're also talking about practical consequences in terms of things that the Agency could then do with him, and in relation to him, in their judgment.

P: Yeah. They make it sound like, ahh, custody was forced out of you.

J: Right! That they forcibly took [my son] out of this house.

P: Yeah, and not only that, on top of that, it more or less kicked another door open, to access to the other three kids.

J: Right, that's it! I mean, you know, like I say, I hadn't thought about it, but that's the way it is, it's like, we've looked into this family, and we see this. Well, [your son's] got some problems here, and we're going to have to take [your son] out of the house. And, so, now, we have to look at [the other children], too!

I: ...The other question I asked you was about time, the passage of time, and how long it takes the Agency to be involved with you, or how long it takes them to act in processing things, etc. You said to me, "It is a one-year chunk of time, that's the time frame, and that's if you have a lawyer."

J: Right.

I: ...Who controls time?

J: [The Agency] controls the time. O.K., they get you, they go in, saying, they have a list, like I say, we want A, B, and C done. O.K., you go back, you've completed A, B, and C, and then they'll say, no, no, but we've got D, E, and F now, too. And you're standing there going, you only told me about A, B, and C! Now how can you bring up the other three things you've got before me, now? And, it's like, well, if you want us out of your life,
this is the way you've got to do it. I mean, I was...I was told I had to go into therapy. You know, they told me I needed to get,...at the time I did, I was going to go, myself, anyway, it wasn't really...totally being forced by them, but it was written on paper. You have to get therapy. And, if you don't, then you've got real problems here! See, they've never been able to touch the other three [children], but there was an implied, you know,...threat there, that if you don't do what we want you to do, maybe we can come in and check on the other three children now, too.

Third, the same parents maintained that the inducement of fear was part of the Agency's modus operandi: a strategic attempt to "intimidate" parents in order to achieve their compliance with the Agency's expectations, wishes, or directives.

J: O.K., I'll tell you about a case I know personally about. My girlfriend was painting, ah, she was working for this company, she was painting garages out in [the western part of the City]. And,...one of the women that was working in the building was a social worker. And,...she came up to Glenda and Glenda was painting! Mind you, this girl was at work! She did not know this girl from Adam. She didn't know her at all! And she came up to Glenda, Glenda had sunglasses on, because the sun was shining, she was painting the garages. And a lady was talking to her about something. The next day, Glenda got a call from [the Agency]...that they wanted to come out and check her child, because they were, she was abusing her child. Well, she goes, what makes you think that? And she said, because the social worker said from the way you talked, and the way you carried yourself, and the way you stood, she knew you were a potential child abuser....This is, I swear to God, the truth!
I: What did that mean to you when you heard that?

J: It was like,...this is Russia. This is Russia! You know,...this goes beyond your rights. Nobody has that right, because Glenda is so good, she has one little girl, she's as old as [my youngest son]. And, I mean, Glenda dedicates her life to that child, I've never seen her hit that child, I've never seen her do anything, but give to that child, and try to do the best she could for it. And, it's like,...they can just turn you in because they don't like the way you stand or the way you talk. Now,...this is Russia.

I: And what is it like to be on the other end of that?

J: Scary. Really scary. To think that someone can just come in, and just swoop up your children, and take them out the door. That is frightening!

P: And before we came into the...aahh, dealings with [the Agency], it was, something like that just never really crossed your mind. And, aahh, it's like, ahh, you know, maybe once in awhile you'd hear about [the Agency] this, or [the Agency] that, but, ahh, unless, you happen to hit the iceberg, which is, that's exactly what it seemed to be, an iceberg, that, ahh, when you hit the iceberg, you knew you was gettin' the full force of it. And....

I: And did the possibility of your ever, let's say, digging-in and not letting them "push you around," did that ever occur?

J: I was too scared. I always talked, I always talked a good game, let's put it that way. But, it was like, I'm afraid if I push it too far, they will take my kids from me.

P: Yeah, they, ahh, they use that intimidation with the kids, of taking them away from you, of, umm,...to their advantage.

J: I mean, they know, especially a woman, a mother, all they have to say is, I'm going to take your kids. And, it's like,...my kids are mine, and you can't have 'em...that's like
kidnapping to me!

P: It's kinda like slapping you upside the head to get your attention.

J: Right.... No, it's even worse than that, I'd say, it's like taking a 2-by-4 (board) and hittin' you upside the head. I mean, your brain, your brain just goes splat, all over the place.

Many of the parents perceived that the use of "power" by the Agency was selective: they perceived that the Agency "picked-on" them because they were more accessible than other families in the community or simply because they had the misfortune of being "reported" to the Agency, for whatever reason. In specific, some of the parents claimed to have knowledge of other families that were not involved with the Agency, despite conditions wherein children were neglected or maltreated. Some parents believed that the Agency "feared" more aggressive or potentially violent families, especially those involved in illegal drug usage or trafficking, and consequently chose not to "intervene" in such situations. Finally, several of the parents seemed to be aware of relatively recent "cases" of child abuse or neglect in the community, especially one that resulted in the death of a child in spite of the Agency's longstanding involvement with the family; indeed, at the time of the study, the Agency was facing a multi-million dollar
lawsuit because of the incident. The following are prominent examples of some of the parents' perceptions:

I: Again, correct me if I'm wrong, are you saying you feel as though you have been singled out?

S: What do you mean?

I: I mean that...because your landlord initially....

S: I think they're just...picking on me!

I: Well, that's what I mean by "singled out," that you feel as though they are "picking on" you.

S: Yeah.

I: Do you know what their motivation is, or what their reasons would be that they would be "picking on" you?

S: I don't know, I guess they think I'm a snob! (Laughs superficially).

I: Well, what do you mean, a "snob?"

S: I don't know, uhh,...I can't take care of my kids, I can't take care of myself. I don't feed my kids. I keep a dirty house all the time.

I: But you say you know other people whose homes are not very clean, and there are children are present, and [the Agency] doesn't seem to....

S: They don't give a shit! I know this one woman, right now, a couple women, and these one kids eat the shit from the dog poop. And they (reference to Agency) don't do nothin'. They didn't even come out.

I: So, that's what I'm saying,...you know of situations where things like that are occurring, and you know of your own situation, but you end up involved with the Agency and the other situations....
S: ...The others don't.

I: ...People don't.

S: That's right. I think it's stupid. I think that mothers that ain't goin' to take care of their kids, they should have 'em taken away for awhile, till they straighten their act up.

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I: What is it, when you think back to, then, the early part of these, the early part of these eight or ten months, I guess,...you would say that there was "harassment,"...what is it about the way they go about doing things that makes it seem that way...for people, like yourself, who are on the "receiving end" of it?

K: Oh, well, they [the Agency] already know how I feel about it. I just feel it's more harassment, on my behalf, that they are more or less harassing me. Because...everything, all the referrals they got is so outrageous that, no mother could do those to their kids and nobody know about it! And to let it go on for as long as they say it was goin' on, even a few months, and have no one realize it's going on. You know, so.... They drag it on, and I'm not getting no help.

I: ...So, specifically, when you think about what it is or isn't that you did, or what you didn't do, that would warrant their involvement, what are you saying to me, that you're not sure what you've done wrong?

K: Right!

I: You're saying you don't think you've done anything wrong.

K: No, really, I haven't. You know, there's people out there that beat their children and leave bruises, and they got custody of their children! For me, I don't see where I did anything wrong, and my kids are in custody. You know, they took the kids from me, you
know, that's what I consider harassment. Then when they should be helpin' other people, they're not doin' it.

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I: You say that you believe that [the caseworker] is more interested in herself and in her job.

B: Right.

I: What does that mean? Just in doing her job...?

B: No, she wants to take people's kids from her! She don't mess with the people's on cocaine, and prostitutes, she messes with people like me! I try to make a life for my kids! I try to do things for my kids! And she just, she messes with me and she don't mess with these other people, because she knows these other people will kill her! That's the way I see [the caseworker]!

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I: When you sit back, now, and look at your whole experience with this Agency, from "day one", all the way to where you "sit" now, how much power do you say this Agency has in terms of becoming involved in people's lives?

D: They have a lot, but...they, it seems to me they go after the wrong people. I lived in a house the landlord wasn't taking care of. People in the paper [newspaper], ceilings are falling down. They live in houses that are very, have a lot of windows broken out, and everything else.

I: Let me see if I understand you correctly. You are saying there are people who are in circumstances that are really beyond their control, because they are poor, or because they are living in inadequate housing....

D: Uh-huh....
I: That are owned by landlords that don't make certain that the houses are in good repair. They don't have enough money for food, and other basic....

D: ...Right....

I: ...Necessities, and you are saying that there are people in circumstances like that, then, that this Agency gets involved with?

D: They should get involved.

I: They "should" get involved?

D: Right. They should get involved and help these people.

I: Oh, "help" them.

D: ...By either...helping them find different houses, or they have say-so, they can get 'em into low-income housing, these projects, stuff like that.

I: But the Agency does get involved with these kinds of families, but you're saying they don't help them?

D: Right, they don't. They take their kids, like they did mine,...and then you have to play the waiting game...for 'em to give them back....You have to fight with them to get 'em back....

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J: O.K., I don't know if you know about the Bobby Smith case down here in [the City].

I: No, I don't.

J: This mother was a prostitute, she was livin' with this guy, and the guy beat the little boy to death. [The Agency] forever, as long as this kid was alive, was always involved, the mother, like I say, was a prostitute, she was...always getting in trouble. But,
it seems like, those people, the ones where it ends up really in a tragedy, they kinda back off on! (Said with incredulity). And, it seems like, the ones that aren't so bad, I mean, like I say, I'm not a good housekeeper, and I try to be the best Mom I can be, it seems like those are the ones they hone in on. It's like, they can tell who's the victim and who's the one they can't mess with. Because I can totally see this Smith woman standing there, going,...I'm not lettin' you in my house! Write me a letter! And, here I am, I open the door and let 'em in.

P: It's kinda like they know who they can push around and, ahh, who they're going to have to stay away from,....

J: ...Right!....

P: ...Or, handle with gloves.

J: Right!

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E: ...And, umm, see, and I understood, I understand the fact with these [Agency] workers that they have to take action, first, then investigate...to determine, because of cases that have been, notifications that have been and they didn't feel it was serious, and they did not do that, and children, some children...have died..., because, that they did not take action, because they did not feel that it was a serious matter. And, the children were then, later, killed, abused, to the point that they died. And, ahh,...and just before this first case, with us, [the Agency], ahh,...a few months before that that things really cracked-down on the [Agency]....That they have to take action first, then find out what's really going on, you know,...with their attitude, the way they feel they have to do it.

I: But, that reminds me of the old Western thing, or maybe the detective show, and that is, to "shoot first and ask questions later!"
E: Right! Exactly! That's it, that exactly the way it is, and that, ahh, ahh, maybe in general, [the Agency] has mellowed-out a bit, with that, because at that time, it was just a current thing that had, ahh, a couple cases that had come back on them with that happening. And, ahh, in order to prevent something like that, 'cause they don't know how, they don't always know how serious it is, 'cause maybe at the time, it doesn't look like a major, serious crisis. You know? Or, that it's a repeated situation, that's getting, that's a growing, worsening situation. And, ahh,...anyway, ahh,...so, I can...I can understand their fear and concern,...you know, but...those...cases, like that, though, are the more rarer cases. But, then, like...but then they don't always know which ones...are the ones...that potentially are happening!

Furthermore, many of the parents perceived that much of the Agency's involvement with their family was not "helpful," but complicated their lives with yet "another problem," as intractable as the rest, which included low income, unemployment, inadequate housing, or, in several instances, the social and spatial inadequacies of their neighborhoods. For example, one morning the researcher sat with a mother at a kitchen table in her clean, but outworn, apartment on the second-floor of a small, dilapidated building adjacent to an abandoned industrial site. There, she shared her problems and her hopes for her children, perhaps as a mother had done before her in the same room, at a different time, in a different era:
S: Well, I told [the caseworker] a long time ago I'd like to move,...move out of [the City].

I: How soon after getting custody do you think it would be...when you'd move?

S: I don't know. That'll be up [to my boyfriend]. He'd like to go to North Carolina, 'cause I think his brothers-in-law work there, and they have a lot of jobs down there. We might move down there. But in [the City], we got no place, there's no place to raise the kids, I can't stand it. There ain't no playgrounds for kids. The place right here is ready to fall apart. The toilet is leaking like mad.

I: So, in light of those circumstances, how do you think living in [the City], with no playgrounds, and living here, has affected the way you've related to your children...in any way, in what you've been able to provide?

S: I want my kids to have a yard, and a place to ride their bikes. There ain't no place to ride their bikes around here. When you ride your bike at times, some idiot goes down the road real fast and ends up on the sidewalk. That's what happened to him once. A guy ran over on the sidewalk, 'cause some people don't know how to drive. They like to drag race.

I: So, if you were to think about just being a parent, being a mother of these children, in this situation,...how would you describe that to me,...let's say, in a couple of sentences?

S: I want them to have a better life than this! They, there ain't nothin' for them to do here. There's a lot of kids, but there ain't no place, there ain't no place for them to play. No yard for them to play in. No place to ride their bikes...when they get bored.

I: Has [the Agency] helped you reach some of those goals?

S: What do you mean?
I: Have they helped you,...? It sounds like you're saying you'd like to better your life and the circumstances for your children. Has the Agency or the caseworkers along the way helped you get to those goals?

S: Huh-uh.

I: What are they helping you to do, then,...if anything?

S: Well, they don't help me with nothin', they just come and go, to see my counselor every week. And see how the kids is doing. I don't tell the caseworkers about my life, about my childhood, 'cause that was a long time ago. I just want a better life for my kids.

Perceptions of the Authority and "Power" of Caseworkers

All of the parents perceived that caseworkers, acting on behalf of the Agency and with the sanction of a law enforcement officer or the Juvenile Court Judge, had the authority and "power" to influence, affect, or "determine" their lives and their relationships with their children. As one young mother expressed it,

I have no choice, they've got my kid. She's the one who says if my kid comes home or not! She is the one that says, is the one that has my life!

In practical terms, each of the subjects was convinced of two things: (1) parents involved with the Agency were "at the mercy" of a caseworker's perceptions, judgments, and decision-making regarding them and their children and
(2) as a result, some caseworkers "misused" or "abused" their authority and "power" in interaction with those parents. The parents emphasized that such variables as the nature of a caseworker's personality; whether or not a caseworker "had children" of his or her "own"; whether or not a caseworker "cared about" the parent; the nature of the caseworker's biases with regard to "appropriate" standards of child care and discipline, including the use of corporal punishment; the caseworker's "beliefs about their job"; and a caseworker's "qualifications," including the nature and extent of his or her "education" and "training"; were "predictors" of a caseworker's use or "handling" of "power."

I: Obviously, you don't believe [the caseworker] cares about you or your children.

B: Me, my kids, or nobody,...anybody. Only person that she cares about is her damn job, takin' people's kids away from them!

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M: It pisses me off, though. Knowin' that this woman who don't have kids, don't know the love of kids, I mean, for her own children,..O.K., she may know a love for children, I can't say that, but for her own children, children that she beared, that she brought into the world, her and her husband, you know....She can't possibly dream of the hurt she puts people through. And she doesn't care! Or, she'd work harder and, try to realize what people, what they're goin' through. At least try to understand. She
says she understands, and I tell her, no, you don't understand....The only I like that I have had (reference to caseworkers) was Bonnie, because she knew what I was goin' through! She had kids. She knows that love. And me and her would sit there and talk.

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I: What do you know then about their authority?

J: They abuse it. They overuse it. They overstep their bounds. Some of, I'm not saying that all social workers are bad, like I say, [the current caseworker]...I had no gripe with, I really didn't, she has been really extremely good, she's really good to [my son] .... But, [the previous caseworkers], they're gonna, they will impose their ideas on you at all costs! No matter what you think, they're right! They are the best parent!

I: So, if I were to say to you, specifically, though, what...authority does this Agency have, or these caseworkers have,...in other words, what, in fact, can they do or are they permitted to do..., what you say?

J: Screw up your life. Tear your life apart.

I: You feel as though they have that much freedom, that much latitude to....

J: Hey, it got to the point I didn't want to open my front door.

P: They make things miserable for you.

J: I mean, I didn't want to answer my phone. I didn't want to open the door, because, I knew they'd be on the other side! I just knew it!

P: Well, there was a couple of times we just had to leave the house, just to avoid contact with them.

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I: And, again, "going as far as they can," means what?

J: O.K., like walking into your house, going through, you know, like, the police can't even do! They just...come in and do as the please....

I: Again, you said that...it really depends on the caseworker, and some caseworkers would not "go as far as they can," other caseworkers "would." It really is inconsistent.

J: Right. They are inconsistent. It doesn't seem like they have any guidelines for...social workers. It seems like, go out and do your job. And, some of 'em are more, umm,...willing to overstep the boundary line than others are. Because I think some of 'em think, well,...maybe some of these people do have a brain! You know, where the other people, you know, some of the other social workers say, well, I've got a college education and this person doesn't, that makes me smarter! And, also,...they like to force you into their mold. You know, they figure, well, this is the way I run my house, this is the way everybody's supposed to do it! And that's not so. Not everybody is the same.

I: So, it's your sense that individual caseworkers set their own boundaries....

J: Mm-hmm....

I: ...They have their own perceptions of their jobs....

J: Right.

I: ...And their authority, and they act accordingly.

J: Right.

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E: ...[the caseworker] did not have to give us that option. [The caseworker] could have just took the action against us and took the children. See, that's what, there are different kinds of [Agency] workers, and like, I asked [the caseworker] why, the difference, you know, why, did [the caseworker], [the worker] expressed to me that some workers, and [the caseworker] told me a lot of workers would have just done that, would have went and got a Court order! And just took the children to the [Agency group home]! And [the caseworker] said, it was because that [the worker] went to a different school than what they went to. [The caseworker] didn't say where she went to school or where anybody else went to school, but had this type of training, in working with people in these types of situations.

I: There may be different caseworkers who act differently, but you are convinced that the power or the authority of the Agency is there.

E: Right! Right, they can do whatever they want to do. You know. And you don't have no say, or choice about it. Although, depending on the caseworker, they may give you opportunities...to, like, in this, what I was just mentioning, about [the currently assigned caseworker], about taking the children or not taking the children. [That caseworker] give us opportunities to prevent that. So, to a point, [the caseworker'd] give us a choice. You know? And, that would be a lot rougher and harder for us as a family, than in the way that it's being done.

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P: My, ahh, contact with them's been kinda...real, it's been extremely light, they've been mostly dealing with her.

J: He, he was on the Court, because he was usually working when they'd come.

P: Kinda like [one of the caseworkers], I only saw the one side of him, Mr. Nice Guy. Ahh,...
J: ...Yeah, his job.... 'Cause like I say, like I told you that day when we took [my son] to [a substance abuse rehabilitation hospital], it was, when he's not in this environment, he was really nice and pleasant to talk to. But, it was like, once he got into the house, he was Mr. Social Worker. And, ahh, I mean, he just would not back down, he was...you know, all over.

P: Kinda pushy.

J: Yes! Pushy.

I: The "hide-and-seek" part, then, implies what, when you say, the "hide-and-seek" aspect of what he was doing?

P: Well, I guess, ahh....

I: You don't mean, literally, he was hiding outside and....

P: No, no, no, nothing like that, no, just, umm,...oh, when you had, ahh, a secondary contact with him, like, ahh, over the phone, or, ahh, or I guess something on that order? (Gestures to wife).

J: Ohhh,...I don't understand what you're trying to say, here.

I: I think that when you say, in other words, when you call him and talk to him over the phone about something that wasn't directly related to the situation at all---and you certainly throw a brick at me if I'm off on the wrong track---but if you're having a conversation with him over the phone that you think is informal, or off-the-record, it's not off-the-record? Is that what you mean?
P: Oh,...that could be part of it. Ahh, but,...oh, mainly just kinda... ohh, I'm not sure what I want to say here. Umm,...just kinda, umm,...dealing with, ahh, a Doctor Jekyll-Mr. Hyde-type situation.

I: He would change.

P: Yeah.

I: He'd change his attitude or his....

P: Yeah! Ahh, I guess, you know in one instance, ahh, we had some words there, at one time, ahh, ahh, remember when we wasn't, ahh, was just kinda, ahh, ahh, having arguments with him over the phone, and that sort,...(turns to wife), and, ahh, met him face-to-face, it was, ahh, you know, he was Mr. Smiley, real nice....

J: Oh, yeah, his demeanor down at the Detention Home was always different. I mean, when we would go for Court, it was always a different demeanor. He was, Hi,...blah, blah, blah, blah (said musically), you know? Yeah, I mean, my lawyer's standing there, going, I know better than that. You know, like I say, my lawyer was a good guy. He goes,...I mean, I don't trust him. Because he was just too good to be true at Court. And when he came over here, it was a different story, it was like, you do what I say or else, else, else! I mean,...I couldn't....

P: He wasn't, he wasn't quite as aggressive with me as with her.

J: Yeah. Yeah. That is true. He, he, ahh, I don't think I could ever remember him gettin' on [my husband]. It was like, he waited till I was alone, and then, pounce! You know, I don't know if it was because I'm a woman, or..., I don't know.

P: It was like, I, in a 'round-about way, I more-or-less told him off, I guess, and, ahh,...it was like, ahh, since that moment, we hadn't had any problems...between the two of us. [The caseworker] and I, ahh, from that point on. (Smiles).
I: If I were to ask you to explain or to give your best understanding of why anyone would be a "Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde," or would change, that way, what would you,...how do you understand the reason for...that "flip-flopping" that he did, in your view?

J: Maybe bad days, maybe...maybe sometimes he takes his job a little too serious? And he thinks he wields a little bit more power, or he does wield power! He does. No doubt about it. He can call the police, he can go to Court. He wields power, he knows he does and he can throw it around! You don't do what I say, I can throw it around. I mean, he never implied that, the threat was never made, but it was like, you always knew that that was there. You don't do what I say, I'll make trouble for you.

P: Yeah, you can kinda sense it, that, ahh, umm,...ahh, you do what I say or, I can make things miserable for you, it may not, ahh, do any direct damage, but indirectly, things can get really miserable for you.

I: So, he communicated that...somehow.

J: Somehow. It was like....

P: It wasn't really...outright....

J: It wasn't implied, it wasn't implied, it was...just...you knew it was there. You just knew it was there.

P: Kinda like, ahh, when they, ahh, sit you down and explain, well, this, this, and this can happen, if this, this, and this isn't done.

J: Uh-huh! Uh-huh,...that's what it is.

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I: ...This is my other question, and that is, how much freedom, how much latitude, discretion, do you think these caseworkers have in making decisions,...all on their own, not accountable to anyone, in people's situations?
J: ...It goes back to the individual. It does go back to the individual. Ahh,...some caseworkers are afraid, period, to make a decision, because they are not qualified to make a decision! Which there are ninety percent of them! Ahh, I'll ask this in another way. If you are a shoe shiner, you should do your best to do a good job! Whatever, whatever you do! Some of these don't do a good job because they don't know how! Ahh, they have to always go back to somebody else to get answers. You follow what I am saying, because they aren't qualified to do a job! If you are not qualified, what are you doing there, anyhow?! I told [the caseworker]. He said, what do you think of me? I said, I like you. As a person, I like you. But, shit or get off the pot! You either make a decision or get off the case! You follow what I am saying? So, you tell me about the decisions. I don't think they can make a decision, they can't make a decision! Not because they can't, but because they don't know how! They're not qualified to make a decision.

I: So, you're saying then, even if a caseworker believes what they are doing is right, they don't have the freedom, they don't have the latitude, to make the decision. In other words, you don't...I'm really asking about the authority of the caseworkers.

J: No, I think they have, they have the authority to make a decision. But, you see, what I'm trying to tell you is, when you are unqualified, you cannot make a decision. You are in between this and that, you do not know how to make a decision. So, how can you make a decision if you do not know how? Do you know what I am trying to tell you?

I: Do you think the caseworkers have too much authority or too little?

J: I believe they abuse their authority. I think they abuse their authority. Take for example the original caseworker.... She had, ahh, the authority to make a decision, and she made it.
She would never back out of it. Anybody can make their own decision. But, you are a bigger man when you realize you made a mistake. Do you follow what I am saying? She made a decision. She made the wrong decision, and... stuck by it!

As a result of such "variability" between and among caseworkers, each of the parents soon learned that their only "control" of a caseworker's use of "power" in relation to them hinged on "how the caseworker perceived them," i.e. what the caseworker "saw," "knew," or believed about them and, as will be described later, whether or not the parent was perceived as "cooperative."

For example, in spite of her mental retardation, a young mother of two children, not only displayed extraordinary sensitivity to, and perceptiveness of, the behavior of her assigned caseworker, but "strategically" attempted to "control" her own reactions to the caseworker---even when allegedly "baited."

I: Do you trust [the caseworker]? Honestly. Between you and me....

R: Yeah. (Said tentatively).

I: That's the truth? Again, when we talk,...it's between you and me, and [the caseworker] will never hear this tape [recording], nor will [the worker] ever see anything that I have asked you. And that's all there is to it. So, I'd want you to be honest with me, and not, let's say, "play my game," and tell me what you think I want to hear. I want to know, honestly, if you trust [the caseworker].
R: (Smiles) No. No, I don't, I don't really trust [the caseworker].

I: Is there something that [the caseworker] has done that made you not trust her? Or, what is it that keeps you from trusting her?

R: It's just her ways. Her ways. One minute she's, one minute she's, one minute she, one minute she likes you, the next minute, she don't. The next minute she, the next minute she willing to help you, and the next minute she's willin' not to help you. And I just don't understand her, I really don't, I mean, she's got a like a, mind change! One minute she's good with you, the next minute she's bad with you, the next minute she's got a good day with you, the next minute she's got a bad day with you.

I: When [the caseworker's] "good," what does she actually do? When you say she's "good?"

R: Well, when she's good with you, when she's good with you, she tries to help you. Like...there's been times when I came in there, to take back my kids (to the Agency after a visitation), there's been times when...she sits there and asks me, like, how are you and [your boyfriend] gettin' along, and.... You know, asks me all these questions about me and [my boyfriend], and stuff. And then she'll say somethin' the other way, you know. Out of the way, and.... And try to see how, see what my reaction is, and see if she's goin' to get me and snip off! And, you know? And then when she's, you know, then when, then when she sees that she can't get me to, when she sees that she can't get me, she, you know, she can't get me in one of my snippy moods, then she'll...get me in one of my little snippy moods and blame it on something else, and say, well, she came in with a bad mood again, today! And, I don't know, I don't know if we're goin', I don't know if...I don't know if...[this parent] is goin' to be, I don't know if [this parent's] goin' to be able to handle the kids, and you know, all this....
I: She says these "out of the way" things....

R: Right. And, she knows that sometimes,...yeah....

I: ...To try to catch you.

R: ...Yeah, to try to catch me. And, sometimes, you know, it's like, sometimes she'll, she'll try, sometimes, sometimes, it'll be like, it'd be like, you know, like, sometimes I believe she, sometimes I wonder if she's really there to help me, or she's really there to do, to see if I'm goin' to have a downfall.

In spite of variations in their individual circumstances, each of the parents believed that caseworkers either ignored or completely disregarded their "rights" during "investigations" and the process of "taking" custody of their children. Indeed, they expressed related, but significantly different, perspectives in support of this major criticism of caseworkers' actions in relation to them and their children. In specific, (1) the parents claimed that "investigating" caseworkers failed to conduct accurate, thorough assessments of the actual circumstances of a family, or the real "problems" between parents and their children---especially during "investigations" involving adolescents---before "taking" custody and "removing" children from their homes. In addition, (2) parents criticized the swiftness and secrecy of the Agency's
decision-making and the subsequent practical and legal action that was initiated by the "investigating" caseworker, either in conjunction with a law enforcement officer or with the sanction of the Juvenile Court. In the latter respect, parents who experienced such "interventions" consistently acknowledged their lack of understanding of, but disagreement with, the assertion of Rule 6, of the Ohio Rules of Juvenile Procedure, by law enforcement officers or the issuance of "emergency orders of custody" by the Juvenile Court, each of which facilitated the immediate and abrupt abrogation of parental custody. In essence, inasmuch as such actions resulted in one or more children being "taken" from their homes, parents described such unrestrained "power" by caseworkers as "devastating" or "destructive" to their families. For example, the following accounts represent the experiences of three parents, each of whom faced different caseworkers during formal "investigations" by the Agency. It is noteworthy that problems involving adolescents were the reason for the Agency's "intervention," and abrogation of parental custody, in two of the situations.

I: When they took emergency custody of the children, I assume they came, one day....

K: Oh, the same day. [My daughter] was hospitalized for five days,...and immediately
that same day they came here to the house and they took [my son].

I: I assume you were called that day that they came to take [your son].

K: Oh, I was at the Hospital. And, ahh, my Dad informed me that [the Agency] was comin' out here to take [my son]. And, at first, I wasn't told that it was ordered, you know, that they had ordered temporary, emergency temporary custody. That was the reason why they were comin' out to get him. So, I had..., I was automatically out here, you know? I'm not going to let them take my kid!... (Said emphatically).... one of my children, and then not tell me why. You know, but they didn't tell me why, at first, they took, ahh, temporary custody of the kids. So, I was automatically out here, and then [the caseworker] talked to me and she told me, you know, what was going on. That they took emergency custody of the kids, and they were comin' to, ... you know, to take [my son] with them.

I: But, basically, you were told that an "order" had been made by whom?

K: By [the casework supervisor]. By the Court.

I: By the Court.... Did you ever see any papers that would....

K: No! I seen no papers....

I: ...So, you trusted, or decided to cooperate with what you were being told by your caseworker and....

K: ...Right....

I: ...And her supervisor.

K: Right. See, when [my caseworker] first showed-up, I told her, I said, you're not taking my son. I says, I see no papers, no nothin' saying that you have the right to come in here and take my son. And she says..., it'd be easier on you if you just let me take the kids, let me take [your son] now.
If not, I'll just go back to the...you know, back to [the Agency], and back to the Court, and then I'll bring out papers saying that. You know, I have the right to take [your son]. Sayin' that I have the right to take [your son]. She said it would just make it look worse...in Court...if you give me any harassment about it. So, you know, what could I do? I willingly,...well, she had me scared into it, I willingly let her take [my son].

I: But that's when you were quite afraid.

K: Oh, yeah! You know, I didn't know what was going on! She didn't explain nothin' what was going on or anything! They just said that, umm,...they were taking emergency, ahh, custody of [my son]. You know. I didn't know if they took [my daughter], too,...or whatever,...under this. And like three days later, they finally told me that [my daughter] could not leave the Hospital with me. She was leavin' with [the Agency]..., with [the caseworker].

Ahh, to me, it seems like,...what referrals they do get, automatically, is, for some reason, the kids are taken away. You know, because of the referrals.... That the parents that have custody of them are automatically a bad person. They don't give that person a chance to prove that, you know, accidents happen,...or they are not as bad as they automatically right-off-the-bat think they are. And automatically think they are a monster, because this happened to their child. You know, they don't give you a chance to prove you're not, they don't even consider, at first they don't even consider that you might not be the monster that they think you are! You know, then, later on, when they get to know you, the more of...helping...instead of this harassment.

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J: ...You are not talkin' about welfare case, which my kids live on welfare. You are not talkin' about...a drug addict, that take drugs.... Or a drunk who gets drunk and comes in and beats his children, you know. I don't drink, I don't take drugs, I smoke. So, the whole thing is, where do you draw a line between discipline and abuse? Where? Ahh, I see, I will say that I see the American children, the way they are. I will see the next generation, I see how the next generation is going, from bad to worse, to worse, and worse. I see people with a stack of earrings on one ear. I see "Mohawk" haircut and shaggy clothes. I don't want my children to be that way. I want them the way, I don't believe I was abused, I was hit when I was a little kid. I don't believe I was abused. But, the whole thing is, the day it happened, they said they took emergency custody on Wednesday. In other words, they couldn't inform us to be in Court, because it was emergency custody. Fine, I agree with you. That's what the law stated. But, why would you send the kids home on Wednesday?! If you feel it is emergency custody, and you already got the custody on Wednesday, why would you send them back home? Do you know why they sent them back home? Because we had a birthday party for my daughter! I had the birthday party,...on Thursday they took them!

I: Now, they took custody of all of the children?

J: All five of them! Two separate schools!

E: And that the, the girl that took custody of them, called the police officer to go to Elm (School), and the police officer didn't want to do it! He knew us! He knew my husband.

J: The police officer, his name is, ahh, Mike Jones, he's a sergeant. He came with [the investigating caseworker], which I told you, she's the feminist bitch".... ...So, ahh, the officer said, Ma'am, he looked at her, he said, Ma'am, you have no case! He said, I know the family, you got no case! Now, I'm talkin' about the police officer, the sergeant! He told me that, after I met him,
He called me, and I met him, and he told me. He said, I told the lady, she has no case! She still insist. He said I just had no time to call you, I know, according to the law, I'm supposed to call you, anyhow! You're supposed to be informed. He said he didn't have time to, and they took them....

See, the whole thing, what I'm trying to say is, [the Agency], any organization, you have to have a good motive to have an organization. I cannot come up and say, hey, I'm going to have an organization for children, not one will like me, am I right? You have to get a good principle behind it. [The Agency's] principles are fine! The people that operate [the Agency] are idiots. They are idiots. You do your job, I don't care if you are a shoe shiner, you do it properly. If [the Agency] would have studied my case, for one hour, prior to this incident, nothing would have happened.

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I: How did you perceive that caseworker, what were your perceptions of [the caseworker]?

E: [The caseworker], well, [the caseworker] is the only [Agency] worker, so far, that I have felt these feeling for, but that was the first interaction, and she just abruptly tore my child from me! Umm, the current [Agency] workers...did not handle things in that way. Umm, and, also, too, the reason they were taking her at that time was not actions I took on my daughter, but what her father did. Umm, but they were still taking her from me. And the charge, the alleged (sic) charges were on him, not me. They would not, and then, going to the hospital, she said we could go down there and be with her, but when we got there, they would not even let me see my daughter. But,...I thought [the caseworker] was horrid, I thought [the caseworker] was, felt she was inhuman! How could anybody do something like this? You know?

I: How could she as a person or "as a caseworker" do this...?
E: Right! Right!

I: What about her made you conclude that she was "horrid" or "inhuman"?

E: Just the fact that she was ripping...my...my child from me.

I: "Ripping" your child from you means what?

E: She has no values or morals.

I: ...But, was there something else, about her, as an individual, that....

E: O.K., one other thing, it was in the way that she had no sentiment or compassion for the people, the family, she was dealing with. She was very harsh in the way she communicated. Very, very distinctively (sic) sharp,...and horrid in that way. Not that, she did not use foul language, ahh,...her voice, she was kind-of loud, but I wouldn't say that, you know, she was hollering...loud...but loud as far as hard....And, did not care, she just had no concern about...what...this was doing, mentally and emotionally to my daughter, to myself. You know? And, ahh,...at a later point, well, during this case, and, umm,...you know, there's a police officer, different police officers on different departments that...which I sometimes are acquainted with, on a personal level. And, umm, anyway, there was one, then, who...was my husband's employer...at that time. And, ahh,...he owned a private business, but he was also a police officer with the department. He, in particular, him, expressed to me, he...knew this particular caseworker, [the Agency] caseworker, and...he told me that she had no children...and, also, she's older than me! I'm thirty-three. She wasn't an old person, but she was...a number of years older than me. She had no children, which...is, that people that..., I know they're trying, you know, they're helping, trying have a career, trying to follow their job, but they cannot relate to the emotions, and the parental bon-, ahh, bonding...that are, these natural things...that most parents have. And, ahh,...also, he told me...that...she, him,
being a police officer, had a lot of interaction, and they grow to know [the Agency] and how they operate and the workers within the system. And, that she is the worst! Hardest! Toughest! Person, at [the Agency]...that they have.

I: Would you say, then, that...that the caseworker misused or abused the [caseworker's] authority, in that situation?

E: Right. Right, no, the authority that was given to her, she was allowed to, if there was any form of suspicion, or evidence, you know? She was given that. But, I feel that...it should be taken and used for...a milder measure, unless there is serious evidence, right up front. You know? Umm, I feel there, like in this case, now, the workers that we've had, they have taken it more in that direction. They did not want to separate, tear-up the family. They want to take it more on an assisting than investigating measures,...which I feel the worker...[that originally investigated] at that time, should have done, you know? Umm, and been a support to the family, more a support and helping, if there was a problem that needed redirected, you know? And,...if she could help, if she knew a way, because of her education, and her professional experience, to help direct the family and parents towards...a measure of discipline that...does work and help, beyond what has been used,...you know, that would be good and fine, even though as parents, most parents...probably all, any parent would feel, ahh,...resentful...towards the worker, but...I felt that if the worker with a lot of parents, if the worker shows...that she wants to help give them the support to deal with and work the problem out, that they would get a lot more people more willing to cooperate with them.

(3) Parents perceived that some caseworkers disregarded their individual "right" of privacy:
I: The day that [the caseworker] came out, that first day, how did she explain or define your circumstances, or the reasons that she was even there?

J: She had a list that she read. You know, that had been called in. She said, this is why I'm here. And I said, I just looked at her, and a lot of it was just stupid! You know, like I say, mainly about...the...what I'm feeding the kids. You know, that kind-of stuff. And, I'm like, you know, I could see if you were here, lady, and you, there were bruises all over my children, or you'd come here and found them without any, you know, parental guidance or anything. But, it was like, most of it was just stupid! I mean, the part about [my husband] was not, I, you know, at the time, I knew it was bad, [my husband] did, too. He knew he was out of control. But, he went and got help for it. But, it was like, it was really none of their business! I mean [my husband] had already started getting help, it was not...her business or anybody else's, but [my husband's] and mine.

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I: Did [the caseworker] ever say that she didn't like you?

S: No, but I could tell by how she acts.

I: Can you recall how she acted?

S: Snobby!

I: O.K., now....

S: How she talked.... She said it real snobby-like. So, I said it snobby back! She asked, who was my boyfriend, how old am I, and all that. So far as I'm concerned, it's none of your damned business!

I: You told her that?

S: Yeah.
I: How did she react to that?

S: She said, I have the right to know. I said, no you don't. And her Dad (reference to one child) is in prison, and she asked what he did, and I said it was none of your business. She got snobby with me, so I got snobby right back!

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T: Yup! I feel, you know, they tried to treat me like that one, ahh,...did you hear about that kid gettin' beat to death by a live-in boyfriend? That's how they treated me, you know! They didn't try to give me a chance. And now they found out different,...about me, but,...you know, they treat you, like,...you're the same guy...that...beat the other kid, you know? They didn't give me no chance, you know, they treated me like...that one, well,...like that person that beat the kids, you know?

I: When you say they "treated you like that person," basically,...what does that mean in terms of the way the caseworkers related to you when they came out?

T: Well, in my opinion, they didn't like me, you know (smiles). I don't know....

I: Did they throw snowballs at you, or.... You say they "didn't like you," how did they show that? How did they express that?

T: Well, it's just the feeling I got, you know. They never expressed it all, really, it's just the feeling I got. The first time I went into Court, the Judge... (Laughs)...They got down on me, they didn't allow no long hair, ear rings, nothin' like that, you know. You shouldn't judge a person by their appearance. And, that's the way they judged me by, my appearance. And, ahh, they make me take drug tests, alcohol evaluation tests, you know. They don't know if I do that! They didn't know, you know. I, I, I...really surprised them!
It comes out clean! Really surprised 'em...!

I: Where did they come up with the idea that they would make you do all of these things?

T: In Court!

S: He had a back record, see....

T: Well, I had a back record. You know.

I: They checked that record and decided that it was still something that they wanted to do. But you decided to do all of the things that they....

T: Oh, yeah. Why shouldn't I? I have to! Either that, or I would have had to leave. You know? So?! That's how they treated me!

I: So, needless to say, this is what I think [we] talked about before, you...I get the impression you did not feel then, and maybe don't feel now, that you had a whole lot of control over even significant parts of your life after they became involved.

T: Right, you know! (Smiles with incredulity). I feel half the questions they asked me was...personal. You know? They, they shouldn't be able to bring up my back record, from when I was minor. You know, they brought up my juvenile record up in Court.

I: And you're how old now?

T: Twenty-four.

I: So,...I thought that that record was supposed to be.

T: Yeah, so did I!

I: ...Expunged, is the word. They somehow got to that?

T: They got it! ...Uh-huh.

I: Have you ever tried to do anything to take control over the situation,...if you feel you have not had control?
T: How do you take control over the Courts?
(Laughs sarcastically) That's pretty rough. If I knew how, I'd do it.

According to the parents, (4) some caseworkers failed to provide "fair warning" (a) that an "intervention," and abrogation of parental custody of one or more children, by the Agency was possible or imminent, (b) that information "gathered" by the caseworker during "interviews" with the parent, or information acquired from any other sources, could or would be, "used" against the parent in subsequent legal action by the Agency, or (c) that a parent's "voluntary" commitment to a "Temporary Custody Agreement" could be later used---as evidence---to support the Agency's "request" for "temporary custody" of their children at a hearing in the Juvenile Court.

S: I didn't know nothing till [the caseworker] had the Court order.

I: On that day that [the caseworker] came with the police officers?

S: Yeah.

I: And, again, on that day---and this may seem a bit silly, or stupid---did you see any other options in your situation, other than to cooperate with them on that day?

S: I'd cooperate, but I couldn't, just, I couldn't hand [my daughter] over to 'em. I had someone else do it. I just couldn't do it. I don't think any other mother could do it,..either. It was hard.
I: It seems as though when the Agency assumed custody then, of [your son], you obviously surrendered something....

J: Right....

I: ...To the Agency.

J: Myself, it wasn't just [my son], it was like,...myself, too. I was open to them coming when they wanted to come. Most of the time, like I say, they showed-up...umm, [my current caseworker] isn't that way, I mean, she will call and make an appointment, or if she's here, she'll say, O.K., I'll make another appointment for two weeks from now, is that alright with you? I'll say, sure, I mean, most of it, what...the other people I dealt with, mainly before, it was like, they came when they came, or they would call ten minutes before they were to come here. And, I'm like (sighs), you know, that doesn't seem quite fair...

I: You say that [the caseworker] came here, and she did not have an appointment, that her visit wasn't announced ahead of time. When she, do you recall, at all, what she said, or what she did, how she behaved when she came out...?

J: Yeah, ahh,...O.K., umm, at the time, my husband and I were having some problems. Alcohol...abuse, and some drug abuse. And, I mean, the charges were leveled against [my husband] about that.... And, it was like, she came here, and she, she pulled out a sheet of paper,...you know, and it was like, sign this, we want you to admit that you have an alcohol and drug abuse problem. And, it was like, [my husband] looked at her, and he goes, but,...can't people go and, you know, see this, he goes, because, you know, I admit that I have a problem, but I've been getting help, he started going to a "Head"....
I: You read...a piece of paper that said that?

J: Yeah, right,...well, it was like, yes,...there was a piece of paper, I cannot remember exactly what it said, but it was like admitting, O.K., I've got a problem. You know, and it was like, you have to be nuts, because in two minutes time, she could go down to Court and come back here and take the kids! And it was like, I, he said, I can't do this, you know, I won't sign this. He goes, for one, an employer can see this, and for two, you can go to Court and use it against me. And so, for a long time after that, was like, they were on my back, and on [my husband's] back...about going to a "Head," seeing a psychologist, you know, and they wanted to prove, they wanted to be able to go read the records and the files that [my husband] had at those places..., which is like going to a Doctor, I felt, and you're saying, O.K., well, I've got a problem, and a Doctor's not supposed to tell. But, yet, they wanted written permission to go in and see those files.

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P: ...Oh, yeah, like when we signed, signed over custody. It was like, ahh, what, when they came out on paper, when the custody was signed over for [my stepson] to [the Agency], it was like, ahh,...we were at fault, because of this.

J: Right, that we did not volunteer, we voluntarily gave up custody of [my oldest son]. We were not forced into Court. We weren't forced into signing the paper. We did it because [my son] was running, [my son] was a habitual runaway. And, I had no other, I didn't know what else to do. It, well,...the first time I was like, they're saying, O.K., do this, the first time, yes, I was rather naive. And, it was like, do this and we will help [your son]. So, I did it. I didn't know what the consequences were. Because they don't tell you at the time.
I: You didn't know the consequences of signing the [Temporary Custody] Agreement?

J: No. No. It was like, I knew they would take [my son] over there. That's all I thought it was. That they would pick [my son] up off the street, instead of going to the Detention Home, I thought this was the alternative to the Detention Home. Because I didn't want him in the Detention Home, so I thought, he'll be over, over there! But, I didn't know that it was also, I gave up my rights to him, you know, my parental rights!

As one young mother put it, such actions created a "wall" in her relationship with her assigned caseworker:

I: So, [the caseworker] has no idea, then, how important [your child] is to you.

B: Huh-uh. No.

I: So, you never really, clearly, told [the caseworker] that.

B: No! I'm afraid of her!

I: You're afraid that if you tell [the caseworker], listen, [my child] is everything to me, [my child] is very, very important to me, you're afraid that [the caseworker] might use that against you?

B: [The caseworker's] just that type of person, I've known [the caseworker] for four years. Two years on me and two years on [my child], I know [the caseworker] real well. Anything I say, [the caseworker will] take and switch it around, like this Court summary,...I don't got, the world knows what [the caseworker's] got in that! [The caseworker] might've got my past history in that, in that Court summary, who knows!
I: How is it that I can sit here and listen, as I am, to all the things you are saying, and I think I understand all the things you are saying, yet, you are telling me that this caseworker, or this Agency, doesn't understand at all what you are trying to say, or what you feel for your son, or what you've tried to do? How is it that there could be, how could they miss it?! Miss your feelings or miss what you're trying to communicate?

B: It's like a wall between me and my caseworker. I'd rather talk to a wall, rather than talk to [my caseworker], because she don't understand how I feel.

I: Well, who put up that wall?

B: She did! Because I sit here and tell her, I went to the office plenty of times, and sat there and told her, yes, I love my son! Yes, I want my son in my home! Yes, I do care about him! I do need my son. But, I don't, I don't want him now, I don't want him twenty years from now. And [the caseworker] says, yes,...I understand that. But, when I go to Court, she changes. She actually changes. Whatever she writes in that summary, I think, I'm supposed to know! I think I have the right to know what she writes, not when we go to Court!

(5) Parents perceived that some caseworkers conducted unauthorized "searches" of parents' homes for "physical evidence" of "neglect" or inadequate child care. Again, tempered by their lack of knowledge or understanding of the Agency's legal authority, as well as their legal rights, and consumed by a lingering fear of the Agency's "power," most parents complied with such behavior by caseworkers and thus chose to suppress their dissent:
J: Umm, she said, well, I'm not your caseworker. She was like a temporary...investigator. O.K. She goes, umm, your caseworker, I think it was a woman.... And with her came another man.... And, I mean these two were like trample-on-your-rights kind of caseworkers!

I: What do you mean?

J: Umm,...I'd say, O.K., I left them in without, like I said, every time they showed up, I let them in the door. (Said defensively). No appointments set up, no nothing. Just show up and come in. Umm,...we were in the front room, and [two of my children] were in the bedroom, it was nap time. They got up and followed me...into the bedroom, they wanted to see [my two children]. And, I said, O.K...., so I thought I'd go get them and bring them in. So, instead of just waiting until I got the [children] in, they both got up and followed me back to the bedroom. And I'm turning around going, I don't remember, you know I didn't say this to them out loud, but it's like, I didn't ask you to come with me, I said I'd bring them with me when I came back. And I thought, this isn't exactly right. And [the woman] wasn't quite as bad, like I say, [the man], I felt like the S.S. had landed here. He was the one who would go into my kitchen, open my cupboards to see what food was there, open the refrigerator to see what was there. (Said dramatically) Walk back into the bedrooms the other times that he came, it was like, I was on the phone one time, I had a phone in the kitchen, and I was talking to someone, and he, I was trying to get off the phone at the same time he got here. I mean, I'm on the phone, and while I'm talking, he just took off past me. It was like, I didn't have, you know, I didn't have time say, no, stop, whatever. He just, walked right back to [the children] and went right back to the bedroom, and was like taking a tour of the house.

I: He didn't ask you to....

J: He did not ask me.

I: ...To walk through your home....
J: No.

I: ...Or look in your cupboards.

J: No! (Emphatic) It was just like he went over there, oh, he...like I said about the Doctor,...O.K., [my son] had some foot problems when he was born, it's like his feet went in. You know, [my son] walked on his tip-toes, that's one of [my two children that I have already mentioned]. I had taken him to the Doctor, and the Doctor said, mainly, it's a sign of immaturity, he will grow out of it, there's no...an orthopedic guy, not a regular doctor, I took him to an orthopedic surgeon, that I see for my back. And I told [the man from the Agency], I said, I took [my son] to the Doctor and, the Doctor said, he didn't feel there was anything wrong at the time, that it was just immaturity. [The man from the Agency] left here and he called that Doctor's office and they gave him information that did not authorize any release for. And, I mean, that was just totally, (sighs in clear frustration) that was it! I was just really enraged, I thought, how, what right does he have to do this?!

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I: ...Is there anything else you want to say? With that microphone in front of you..., this won't be broadcast over the radio waves,...but is there any last statement, or anything at all that occurs to you?

J: Well, I think that there needs to be a shake-up at [the Agency]. I think...that there should be guidelines set down for all social workers. I feel like, when a cop arrest you, you are read your Miranda rights. I feel like, when [the Agency] comes to your door, they have the same thing, that they have a card they read off, you have the right not to admit me to your house. I will write you a letter stating when and where we can set up a date, umm, I do not have the right to search your house. I do not have the right to, you know, just come in and do as I please, when I enter that door. Because it is, it's like,
the police are here, but they're without a badge and without a gun, and you have not committed a crime! But, in [the Agency's] eyes, the minute they come to that door, the minute they get the call, you're guilty until proven innocent. It isn't the other way around.

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M: Well, you know that, ahh, there's been a few times that [the caseworker's] really discouraged me. Once, the first time [the worker] really did, was, umm,...I had been raped before, O.K.?....The thing is, is that after that happened, [the caseworker] came out to my house to check it. He made me stand on the porch, while he went through my house..., so [the worker] wouldn't be accused of trying anything with me. (Brief pause). And that hurt me very bad.... Because I'm not going to say somebody tried something, if they didn't, O.K.?

I: What did that mean to you, that [the caseworker] had you do that?

M: I'm not, I'm not sure what you're talking about.

I: What kind of conclusion did you draw?

M: I felt like [the caseworker] thought I was just sayin' that, that, ahh, [the worker] didn't believe that it happened....

I: Well, I'll use a word, you tell me whether this word makes sense..., [the caseworker] didn't "trust" you.

M: Right. [The worker] had no trust, whatsoever....And...[the worker]...put me down. [The caseworker] literally put me down bad. And, you know, there was nothing I could do, that I know of.

I: In that situation, in other words, when [the caseworker] told you to wait out on the porch, there was nothing you could do....
M: Well, I had to respect [the caseworker] because I was trying to get my kids back. There was nothing in the house that was going to hurt me. You know, I was not worried about it. But, I was told to keep out of my home so this [caseworker] could go through it. O.K.? Which, I don't mind [the worker] going through it, I just didn't see why, I mean, I, I, I.... [The caseworker] dogged me...by making me stand on the porch.

I: "Dogged you"?

M: Well,...yeah. I felt dogged.

I: What were you feeling?

M: I felt distrusted, I felt,...maybe an inch high. You know, I felt really shot down.

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I: ...I was asking you about [the previous caseworker] and what she did, or she responded to you. Let's see if we can pick up right there....Do you recall how that was or how she behaved? Or, how she related to you?

S: Snobby.

I: And, you were telling me that "snobby" meant....

S: Nosy.

I: "Nosy" means what?

S: Look in my refrigerator, in my cabinets, without even askin'! I don't think she should be able to do it.

I: She just came in here and,...she would just knock on your door, come in,....

S: ...And start lookin' around.

I: And you would let her in, of course.

S: Yeah.
I: Did the thought ever occur to you not to let her in?

S: Yeah! Plenty of times! I didn't like her, my kids didn't like her.

I: And this may seem rather silly, or even a stupid question, but I assume there are reasons that you let her in! And that you didn't just....

S: Yeah.... So I wouldn't get in trouble, for one thing,...and so my kids wouldn't be taken away. That's the trouble, they got tookin' away, because of her (the previous caseworker) and the landlord. 'Cause my kids were supposed to be runnin' the streets. And she (reference to daughter in arms)...was supposed to be neglected. She wasn't gaining the weight she was supposed to because she was allergic to the milk, the formula, but she was...drinking, and the doctor didn't check it.

(6) One parent perceived that a caseworker restricted parental contact with a child who had become involved in a formal "investigation" by the Agency as a result of alleged physical and sexual abuse by her father and some parents believed that all caseworkers expected---indeed, presumed---to have unrestrained access to any other minor children in the home, for the purpose of questioning or "interrogating" them regarding parental discipline or care, especially in suspected "cases" of physical or sexual child abuse:

I: How do you think the caseworker perceived you, the one that came [at the time of initial intervention]?
E: Well, my behavior, at the time,...was very intense, and in desperation, and horror, and everything, but I was trying to stay in control. And, [the caseworker] did not allow me...to be present when they were interviewing and questioning [my child].

I: What did you think of that?

E: That, I felt, that, I didn't feel they had the right to do that, and meet, mainly because, not because of, ahh, what they might pump her into saying, I wasn't majorly (sic) concerned about that, but, that, they would not allow me to be aware of what they were telling her or, or, what they were asking her. I felt I had the right to be aware, you know.... Because, she is my child, they could be doing her wrong, and if they did, I felt, I had the right to know, and what kind of actions they were wanting to take...with my daughter! I felt it was my right to know that!

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J: ...Well, I,...like one example with [two of the caseworkers], the day they were here, they kept,...they asked [my youngest son], does your mother beat you? Not once, but five times! And it was like, [my son] kept saying, no, no, no. But they had to keep it up, keep it up, and keep it up! Where [the current caseworker] has never come into the house and done anything like that. I mean, she's asked them questions, she asks like once, if they gave an answer, that was it. Not, I'm going to keep asking you until I get the answer I want!

(7) Parents perceived that their "right" to participate in the Agency's ongoing decision-making regarding them and their children was ignored by caseworkers who "told," or "announced" to, them what they needed and what they had to do in order to regain custody
of their children or to be "free" of continued involvement with the Agency:

I: Do you perceive that you have any rights, at all, in the decision-making?

J: No. ...No, I believe I live in Germany or Russia. I am under Gestapo rule. That's the way it is. And the only way to get rid of the Gestapo is to revolt on them. That's all.

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I: In other words, let me make sure you understand what I mean, umm, before they decided what they wanted you to do, did they talk with you about that, in terms of..., sitting with you and looking at what you need, or....

M: No, they, they looked at me and told me what I needed.

I: So, it wasn't as though you participated in the decision-making....

M: Right.

I: ...You were just told after the decision had already been made.

M: Right. They sat me down, said this is what you need to do, this what you need to do, you need to do this and you need to do that. O.K.? I went for psychological testings. I'm not goin' again. I've already got two psychological testings. And I've not changed. Except that I've been getting madder, you know.

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I: You feel powerless.

E: Right. Right. Umm, if I objected, or put up a fuss, I don't think it would make any difference.
I: What makes you conclude that so certainly?

E: I guess it's the way they presented it to me. And, that, ahh,...

I: So, how do they present it?

E: Well,...it's basically, like I've just tried to describe, the way she, ahh, [the Agency] workers....

I: They just announce the decisions to you.

E: Right, that what they're going to do.

I: You have not participated in those decisions.

E: No.

I: By participation, I mean, your point of view is not considered,...other points of view that you might have are not, umm, even partly....

E: Uh-huh....

I: ...Been considered and implemented in the situation at all.

E: Yeah, I'm, like,...I'm fear-, like I think that if I did that that they would ignore it or they would take power against me, that's what I'm fearful of, that they would take power against me. They'll go ahead, then, take the kids! You know, or take custody, and everything!

I: So, you have your point of view. [The caseworker] has her point of view, in representing the Agency.... What happens now, then? The Agency's view is the one that, is the one that's considered? The one that rules, here, then, in other words...? It will be business as usual?

E: Umm,...yeah, you know, they're,...they're the ones that, that has the, umm,...the rule and the decision, umm.

I: You feel that powerless to influence any of that.
E: Right. I think they may be, umm,...it all varies, probably, depending upon the worker...that's handling, that's working with the family.... Handling the case. But, I think that, umm,...to a point, depending on the individual worker, has some consideration. But, it's like, the only thing is, though, you don't have, you don't have full governing of your own life! Or, your own family....You know. They just...they just keep this black cloud over you all the time, that, umm,...and it feels like that it's never gonna be different, it's never gonna be better. We're never going to be a united family again. It's just hopeless..., like, there's no future. It's so scary....

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J: I mean the counseling is always the first thing on the list. You know, it's always the first thing. And, and that is like, they expect you to get all the counseling you need,...in a couple weeks. And, that's not fair. That is not fair.

I: Well, who makes the judgment that you need counseling.

J: They do. They do.

P: Yeah, they just, they decide whether, and how much counseling you need, also. Next time you come, I've got a piece of paper, I will show you. It's, I, I think I've got all the Court papers. They all say counseling on them.

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I: Well, in the face of all of that, you say, for the most part, you...just...attempted to meet their standards?

J: Oh, yes! Yes. When they came, you know, whenever they said...O.K., in order to get custody back of [my oldest son], they always have like, A,B,C, you have to do these things...in order for [my son] to come back home. Well, I would do them. You
know, but, it was like, it was being forced..., you know, to do it. It wasn't something that was really needed, or that I wanted....

I: What do you mean, "forced?"

J: O.K., if they said, you have to go to counseling, you have to go to counseling. Or there is, you know, that's it! And, I mean, I, ahh, did go to counseling for about six months.

I: Did they discuss these kinds of things with you ahead of time?

J: Yeah. Yeah.

I: ...And say, what do you think you need?

J: It wasn't really "what you think you need," this was what you need.

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I: O.K., so...the "way they (the caseworkers) made you feel" about being a parent, or about being a mother, in short, was....

J: Inadequate. Inadequate, uncapable,...and, just totally...umm...I..I should go to classes. You know, that there should, I should learn the correct way to be a mother. And I mean, I just didn't feel that that was...you know, their right to do that. That they had no right to force that on me. You know, their views, their standards, their way of raising a family.

I: So, am I correct in assuming that each time they came out, for routine visits, routine conferences with you, that that kind of...thing happened?

J: O.K., with [a previous caseworker], there were times when it was, we did not even, O.K., [my oldest son] was put into [a local substance abuse rehabilitation hospital] for drug addiction treatment. O.K., we, I rode up there with him, both back and forth, and, I mean,...I don't I'm the stupidest person in
the world, and we're like, in the car, sitting, and I'm very political...about the way I feel about, politics, the world in general. I mean, I was talking to him the whole way up and the whole way back, mainly about that, and it was like, I think this is the first time the man ever thought I had a brain in my head! And, I mean, that was kind of insulting. Because I think they perceive everybody as being...not as smart as them. You know, can't keep up. They don't know what's going on in the world. And, that's kind of insulting. Because, as I say, I'm not the best, world's best housekeeper, I try to do the best that I can as a mother, but I'm not stupid! I do know what's going on, I do, I'm aware of everything going on around me. And, I mean, that has to do with my kids, I try to do the best I can with them. And, it's like, they just want you to go that little bit more that meets their standards.

In the following example, a mother held "tightly" to her opportunities for "visitation" with a daughter who had been in the legal custody and care of the Agency for over a year, because she feared that the Agency might "move" to request permanent custody of the child at any time, without her knowledge, and regardless of her wishes:

I: O.K. This may be an unusual question, but why do you comply with the visitation, if you're given certain numbers of days, certain times...?

M: I get to see her every Tuesday. The reason I comply is that they got custody. I don't. They got the right to take my daughter away any time they get good damn ready!...How do you say, damn good ready.

I: Do you think you would have some kind "voice" in what happens to your daughter? Or, you don't feel as though you have....
M: I'm losing that real slowly.

(8) Parents perceived that once their children were in the custody and care of the Agency, parents lost "control" over the nature and amount of contact with their children because their "right" of visitation with their children was arbitrarily—and harmfully—"limited" or "restricted." In one instance, a mother perceived the consequences of this routine imposition of "restrictions" as a forfeiture of what she considered to be important—indeed, meaningful—residual rights of parental decision-making with regard to her children:

I: ...So what rights...do you have?

D: (Briefly disregards question). So, if.... The only rights we have, right now, is just visiting rights. We don't have any rights, at all. We can take 'em things. But we don't have the right or say-so as to takin' 'em to a doctor, or anything else. That's up to [the foster parent] and [the caseworker]. We have no say-so, in what doctor or anything. And if they ever need surgery, we don't have any say-so. It's up to [the caseworker] and [the foster parent], just like them puttin' [my child] back in first grade, we didn't have no say-so...of no, we don't want him put back in first grade. It was up to [the caseworker] and [the foster parent]...to tell 'em, go ahead,...put him back in first grade. So, in a way, that makes me feel, you know, left out. Like I'm just a visitor, when actually I'm his mother. It just...doesn't make me feel right, them having the say-so of what doctor does this and what dentist does this, when they've always went to [the city hospital], since they were newborns. They went to the [city
hospital clinic]. They go to...their dentist, out here on West Clayton Street. He's a regular child's dentist, that's where [one of my children] had all of his teeth taken out, in the front. And he got silver caps. Which I took him, when he needed to go, which he has...one more time to go. And, I don't know if [the foster parent] would call to get him in to the dentist, or if I should just wait till I get him back here.... And then, I'll take him to the dentist.

In another situation, a father argued that relatively brief "visitations" with his two, rebellious teenage daughters would not be sufficient to "restore" their "closeness," re-establish his parental authority, or counter the perceived "influence" that the foster parents enjoyed with his children, once they returned to their foster home. Indeed, in light of the extreme conflict that he encountered in relation to his daughters and the amount of time and effort that would be necessary to "repair" their relationships, he perceived such limited contact as a "joke":

I: ...There are times, now, that you refuse to cooperate, and the purpose of not cooperating is to try to get them, to try and influence them....

J: Try to get them to see it my way. If the by-laws say the family is, that they are here to put the family together, well, I'm not going to go their way, now, they're going to have to come my way! I need them to come along! One question, or some thing, get 'em out of the [foster home]. 'Cause, Bill, let me put it, that way. If I come in and I build this house, piece by piece, and every day, I hang this door, and go home, to sleep,...you come
in, in the daytime, and you break it! I come in next day, I put that day, you come in, next day, and you break it! It takes me three hours to build it, it takes you five minutes to break it! So, I'm gonna meet with my kids, here, and build up love with them, and I love you, come back home, and they're gonna go to the [foster parents], and in three minutes (snaps fingers),...it's gone, destroyed! What is it for?! Are we jokin' on each other, laughin', are we mature people?! Are we playin' games? I'm not going to play games! I'm not going to play games with anybody's life! I'm not going to sit down here and try to put it back together, and put the family together, and they go, in the end, to the [foster parents] and have it destroyed in five minutes! No way in hell. I will not do it! And if I am wrong, you tell me!

II. The "Meaning" of the Experience

As Donald Polkinghorne (1988) has noted, "The question, 'What does that mean?', asks how something is related or connected to something else.

To ask what a word means is to ask what it stands for. To ask about the meaning or significance of an event is to ask how it contributed to the conclusion of the episode. It is the connections or relationships among events that is their meaning....(p. 6).

Accordingly, the researcher attempted to "uncover" the personal "meaning" or "significance" of being involved with, or having children in the custody of, the Agency: how it "connected" or "related" to other perceptions or experiences of a parent, or other facets or events in a
parent's life. Not surprisingly, while such "meanings" were clearly difficult, if not impossible to anticipate, all of them tended to center on one, consistent theme: in some way, each parent perceived that being subject to "interventions," or having children in the custody, of the Agency resulted in some kind of important loss for themselves and their family.

(1) Parents reported that being involved in a seemingly endless struggle with the Agency resulted in financial loss, due to (a) the cost of private legal representation or (b) their inability to work, as a result of depression and its impairment of their job functioning:

I: You told me your attorney was very expensive.

J: They are, all my attorneys are expensive! My case, now, is gonna cost me two, three thousand dollars! Now. Very expensive! What I'm trying to say is,...it's easy for...a rich man to grab the phone, call his lawyer right now! Anybody tells me it isn't in the book, or in the law, somethin' to say, you could file a Court order that day! Or, now! And get the children out of the [foster home], now! I'd call him a liar.... The law is there. It takes a good lawyer to find it and pick it out. To file the right papers. I just was unlucky, I couldn't find a good lawyer! All the lawyers that you get is, ahh, maybe worried, they don't want to make waves with, ahh, the Court system or things like that. I couldn't hire F. Lee Bailey, if I had the money, I would!
...How do you think all of this has affected you?

Affected me?! It's affected me money-wise, monetary. It's affected me, ahh, emotionally.

What do you mean, emotionally?

Emotionally, I, ahh, for six months I ignored my business. It took me eighteen years to build my business, I destroyed it in six months.

I don't want to get too personal, but....

No, I will tell you!

When you say you destroyed it in six months, do you mean the business is completely gone?

I'll tell you why, I'll tell you why. Some people, if that incident (Agency intervention) hit you, you might become a workaholic. You go, you work your guts out, you work your butt out, just to forget these things. Some people don't. Me, I said, the hell with it! I don't have to do a damn thing, let everything go! People called me, I ignored them! It doesn't take much to destroy a business!

...So, what I'm tryin' to say is, why did it affect me? It affected me because I gave my life to my kids. I left the bar (tavern) business, because I was making money sittin' on my butt! To give them a good name.... I was in the construction business, I bust my rear-end...to give them a good name! People came to me...ten years ago, when I was really havin' a hard time, file bankruptcy..., I said, no way! It's not getting on my name!....Do you follow what I am saying? When you give your life to your children, and some outside element comes in, and without any study of the case, I wouldn't begrudge them if they take my children, if you study the case and find that I am abuser! Take 'em! I bring one thing up, in any abuse case you find, you prove me wrong, in any abuse case, then I'll give anything you want.
In any abuse case, it's gotta be stepmother or stepfather, one. If they are not stepmother or stepfather, alcohol, or drugs. A father could give his daughter a new Cadillac, a new house, and still abuse her. Because he's an alcoholic! If he is not, if he is the real father, and he is not an alcoholic, and he is not drunk, and he is not on drugs, there's no way anybody going to prove to me, there's nobody goin' to prove to me that...he would abuse them! A dog does not bite his brother or his kids!

You know, I don't live on ADC! I don't live on welfare! I don't need it and I would never live it, you'd never see me standin' in line! But, it's hard when you're used to making two, three, four thousand dollars a month, in your pocket, you know, you don't, you save and you...spend money, and things like that. When it comes down to the point you can't even make seven, eight hundred, a thousand dollars a month, if you can! It becomes pretty hard, yes, it is! It's pretty hard! And, it's a shame that we, we are in the twentieth century! We live in the United States, and these things, they allow these things to happen! You say, there's a saying...that say, you make your bed, you lay in it! But, they made a mistake, I paid for it! But,...whose fault is that?! That's the way I feel, you know, it's, it's...you want the truth?! I've lost my faith in government. I've lost my faith in the, ahh,...United States. I really, I have no respect for the United States anymore. None. Before, I used to defend it, anywhere I go! Now,...never! You used to give the policeman the benefit of the doubt,...for example,...now, I don't! Now if I see anything, policeman...is wrong! I fear them now! (Said incredulously).

I: ...You really feel lost, in many ways. I guess you think about things financially, or occupationally, it's really, in my many ways, redirecting yourself. Maybe even, starting over.
J: I have to! Don't get me wrong, I'm not lost that I'm gonna, ahh, stumble and fall over, no.

I: No, I don't mean that.

J: I'm lost at the time, yes, because, well, it's hard for you when...your son used to come to you and tell you, hey, Dad, I want to buy a new jean ("blue jeans"), and you say, O.K., let's go! And, now, he comes to you, I want to buy a new jean, and you have to give him some kind of excuse why you can't, you're not now.... Well, I have no money, I don't want to, I wasn't brought up this way and I will never,...you just have to give him some kind of push away.... It's hard!

I: That's painful.

J: It is painful! Like I told you, I'll put this jean on for a week! It don't bother me. I'll put these shoes on for a week, this doesn't bother me. But, it bothers me when I see my kids goin' hungry....

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I: ...How has all of this affected you?

E: Well,...it's made, I work in a Bank, I have to have my mind, I have no mind to work. My memory, I find, has been affected. It's affected me socially, to an extent, but I feel like I can lift my head high, and fight it, the depression because of the finances going down. And, because of them, taking away the bonding...between mother and child, I had a certain way to raise my children, that have affected them in such a... negative degree, that, ahh,...I don't know if it can even be...ahh, repaired. Let alone, it'll take time to be repaired. I don't know if it can be repaired.
The same parents, and others, believed that being subject to an "intervention" by the Agency, and having "lost" custody of their children, (2) "destroyed" their "family"--the "bonds," "closeness," sense of cohesiveness, or continuity of "parental authority" or "discipline" in relation to their children, especially adolescents:

I: ...You mentioned fear, living in a kind of fear, or,...the kids feel fear. Fear of what?

E: Well, they don't want to be taken by anyone anymore. You know what I mean? And, then, ahh, I had to live in the fear, my kids don't listen to me. And, now, my husband spoils them, ahh, not the way he usually would have done. He just kind of lets them go wilder than usual. So, I live in fear, I'm living with tyrants and I, I just wouldn't raise kids like that! If you ask me. That's one fear. The other fear, for my little ones. Complete, total fear. But, I am a very faithful person, and I feel that God is at my shoulders, so, basically, I am fearless. Basically, I am free.

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J: See,...the only thing that I tell you is, it is easier to destroy than to build. All the time. In my business, construction business, you can demolish the whole house in two days. It takes three months to build it. It took me fifteen years to discipline my kids..., and bring them up to my standards. The way I wanted them to be. If I would turn out bad, then, they turn out bad. They destroyed them in seven months. How long is it going to take me, now, to put them back together? How long? Maybe yes, maybe no. [My oldest child] is sixteen
years-old, almost, two more years, she gonna be gone. Am I gonna be able to do in two years what I tried to do in fifteen years? You can't.... I'll do my best, but I can't.

I: ...Do you feel, or believe, that possibly there has possibly been some kind of a permanent change or even damage, to use that word, to this family, to your life...

J: Yes....

I: ...Meaning that it can't be repaired.

J: ...Yes,...it can't be repaired. It can't be repaired, it can't be replaced. Bill, if I take you away from your father for six months, against his will, and then I give you back to him. Now, whether he succeeds in bringing you back to the way you were doesn't make any difference. How can I repair these seven, eight months? See, like I said, I break your car, I could repair it. I could buy you a new car. I could make you happy. If I take, if I am, if you are now...people tell you, hey, Bill, you have twenty years to live, exactly to this date! And, I come up to you and I tell you, I'm gonna take seven months out of your life! How can I repay that? You can't!

(3) Parents also believed that involvement with the Agency resulted in a loss of their "sense" of family "security," as reflected in the reported adjustment problems of children who were "returned" to their homes from foster care, such as fears of "being taken," nightmares, aggressive behavior, and increased defiance of parental authority:
J: My little son, now, won't go to bathroom by himself. If we sittin' in the basement, watchin' T.V., and he wants to go to the bathroom, somebody has to go with him.

E: He doesn't want us to leave him anywhere...at all! In anybody's home, he will not let us.

J: He is afraid that somebody gonna take him.

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E: Number one, it has devastated our life. My children were one way, now, they're definitely changed. It has, ahh,...taken, caused me a lot of agony with my little ones. When my children came home, my sons changed, my older son, completely. And, the little ones live in fear, and, you know, it's hard to let that, it's ruined my life, my husband is very apathetic...toward everything. It'll probably end-up breaking our whole life, our marriage, we probably will not end-up married together. And, I feel like, it hasn't been the only thing, but it's a major factor...in disrupting...our life! That's how I feel. And, I think it's sad for people that are not, ahh,...ahh, I was not financially able, ahh, I didn't, we did not have that great of a salary. My husband says forty or fifty thousand (in response to an item in the researcher's questionnaire), I refute that. So, I mean, he can say what he wants, still, you're worth what you make, but it doesn't make you any less if you didn't make that much. And, ahh, I just feel that, no matter what you make, you're a human being. We are all deserving of dignity. And, you know, this was a very undignified process. And, especially when it is not checked-out, and when it is a respectable person that is dealt with,...it's sad! Very sad.
In the aftermath of two, prominent instances of the Agency's "interventions" in the situations of "rebellious" adolescents, the parents were convinced that, in an emotional—and legal—sense, they had become "hostages" to almost daily threats by their daughters that they would immediately "report" their parents to the Agency if they attempted to "aggressively" impose restrictions on their daughters' activity:

E: ...[My younger children] don't want to be taken by anyone anymore. You know what I mean? And then,...I had to live in the fear my kids don't listen to me. And now, my husband spoils them,...not the way he usually would have done. He just kind of lets them go wilder than usual. So, I live in fear, I'm living with tyrants and I...just wouldn't raise kids like that! If you ask me,...that's one fear. The other fear, for my little ones. Complete, total fear. But, I am a very faithful person, and I feel that God is at my shoulders. So, basically, I am fearless. Basically, I am free.

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I: What's the most overwhelming aspect of this whole situation, all these decisions [by the Agency] that you've told me about? What's the most overwhelming?

E: I guess not having any power, and the family being separated..., to the point, ahh, that they have. We're a family of five, there's only three in the house. There's two that they are limiting from being allowed to be in the home. You know, the marriage relationship, and the effect that it's had on it, and, umm, and the, attitude of my [daughter], umm,...that she doesn't feel
that she has to comply with or respect, umm, my... mere existence, let alone anything that I would have to say to her, or expected of her. Like, just yesterday, I was over at my mother's home, and I asked her a question, she just said, Mom, shut up! You know, this is the attitude that she has. And, I didn't scold her, or raise my voice at all, I just asked her a question... about attending school yesterday. 'Cause she called yesterday morning and told me she was sick and she wanted to stay home. But, I said, no! She had previously called and told me she was sick, and I told her she wasn't going to get in the habit of doing that. She was to finish getting her clothes on and that to be at that bus stop, and she better be at school. So, yesterday evening, that, the school bus had called me, at ten-thirty, and she wasn't in school. So,...I kept trying to call over to my mother's, and,...to check on her, and there wasn't ever any answer, 'cause she wasn't there. And, she, in the evening, she claimed, she went to school, she walked to school. And, umm, but she never signed in, or anything. So, I don't believe her!

I: Where does her attitude come from? Where does this attitude, that she can do what she wants to do, that she doesn't have to respond, come from?

E: There's probably a number of things involved, but that... ahh,... a lot because this is the second time that [the Agency] has intercepted her, and, she, builds this, this attitude builds with her. That I feel, that since they withdraw her, she feels she has this power that she does not have to comply with her parents, that she does not have to listen, she does not have to even talk with her parents! And, she even says so, she goes, I don't live there, you're not my mother! You're, you know, I don't have to listen to you! I don't have to talk with you, I don't want to talk to you! These things she says to me, at different occasions, you know. Because, and even though at either time, I wasn't the parent that was accused of abusing her! And, ahh,
and she **still** has this attitude, that she, that she is her own boss! And, ahh,...and if she doesn't have to be at home, or if she doesn't want to comply with anything, she doesn't **have** to, all she has to do is call [the Agency].

As reflected in several of the previous accounts, (4) parents claimed that as a result of their "involvement" with the Agency, there were serious disruptions of marital and non-marital relationships, due to increased "tension" and conflict in response to the "pressure" of their circumstances:

E: We're just hanging, all of this, you know, the family's torn, split-up! And, they just left us hanging there!

I: Have you seen your husband?

E: (With some surprise and caution)...Sometimes. Not, (laughs quietly), often, you know. And, he continues under more and more pressure, and seems to be becoming more...alienated to the family, more distant. They've not changed anything, you know, and, umm,...the longer it goes on, the more depreciating it is, on the family, family, you know, the physical unit,...you know, and, ahh, mentally, umm, overwhelming, and depreciating, you know.

I: So, how is it affecting you?

E: Well, that, that's exactly what it's doin', to me, and that, umm, just feeling so overwhelmed, and lack of control of anything. And, ahh,...more isolated,...you know, and withdrawing. And, ahh, I, yesterday, I finally went to the, you know, I mean, non-functioning, not functioning,...anyway, I went to the doctor
yesterday, to try to get some medication, which I did. And, ahh, anti-depressants, trying to elevate and motivate me...more, because...my personal and, responsibilities and functioning, and, for the family, for the children, the baby, you know, umm, and you try to get more done, and, of course, the baby, the baby demands, and you have to do things, in preparation for and attention with the baby, but then, that's just about all that I achieve, 'cause, that's somethin' that forces me to do, you know, it forces me to do. Otherwise, you know, I'm not functioning, you know, emotionally, mentally, ahh, worn down.... And, loss of hope...for anything.

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R: ...What I think, I'm going to tell you this, and this is the honest-to-God's truth, [the Agency] is breakin' up my family. [The Agency] is causin' my boyfriend to leave me, because...because...because...because of what they...because...because...because of the situation I'm in. My boyfriend wants to leave, wants to leave, because he's fed-up with [the Agency's] problems, fed-up with them...to his neck. He's wantin' to leave [the City], to go to live where his sister's at. And he wants me to follow him. But, I'm not gonna follow him. I'm gonna stay down here, and I'm gonna stand my ground and fight for my kids. I'm not goin' to go chasin' after no man! I love him, but I'm not goin' to go chasin' after him. My children are here in [the City], and that's where I'm goin' to stay, I'm goin' to stay right in [the City], and I'm goin' to stand my ground and fight for my children. And I don't care...I don't care how long it takes me or how long...how long it takes me to get my kids, I'm gonna fight for 'em. And, that's my job, as a mother, to stand and fight for my children and for what I believe in.

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J: If somebody takes six months out of your life, how can they re-pay you back for six months?!

E: More than six months....

J: I'm just giving an example....

E: Because what they did with the girls is more than six months.

J: There's no way you can get re-paid for that!

E: It's ruined my relationship with my husband! My husband has not been able to work...at all. He's been in a state of depression, I'm sorry, he's diabetic. It has affected him greatly, it has affected my marriage, it's affected everything, my sons, my son has nightmares!

Finally, (5) parents believed that being subject to "interventions" resulted in the loss of some parental "autonomy." Parents expressed greater "self-consciousness" of their relationships and responsibilities to their children as a consequence of their experiences with the Agency for two, discernible reasons. First, some parents developed a fear of the scrutiny of others and what they described as the enduring "threat" of being "reported" to the Agency at any time by neighbors or others who might observe instances of "questionable" parental behavior in relation to children, including the use of physical punishment. Other parents "learned" from their "involvement" and made
a conscious "commitment"---born of the emotional suffering associated with abrogation of parental custody and long-term separation from their children---to avoid any "mistakes" or general behavior that might contribute to the "loss," or surrender, of their children, again.

I: ...To be in a situation in which someone is really, I guess, affecting your life, in a way, by primarily controlling time, in the sense of setting Court dates, and your having to conform to that,...only certain things move in your life, as it would relate to [your son in the custody of the Agency], according to the time frames that [the Agency] will set, or that will set with the Court. Has that changed the way you view your life? And how you can go about life?

J: Yes, it has, I, I, [the Agency] entered my life three years ago. I'm not the same person I was then. I am paranoid, I mean, I, I've gotten to the point where actually, if we're in the car, and you know how kids act-up, if they're in the back seat, slapping each other, or, you know, Mom! Dad! You know, you turn around and you go, O.K.! That's enough! I, and [my husband] has a booming voice, you know. And I've been with him at times, where he turns around and he'll say it to the kids, and it's like, I look around at the other cars. Because, like I say, I've had, I know of a situation where a girl was in a restaurant with her kids, the kids was acting-up, she took her foot and kicked the kid in the knee, not hard! But, enough to know, you know, enough to get the child's attention,...she was followed out of that restaurant, her car license plate number was taken down, and she was turned in to [the Agency]. And, so, now, it's like, I look around, I'm afraid to yell at my children, I'm afraid to discipline them in public, at all. In the house..., is the only place.
I: If you don't control the time frames, after being involved with [the Agency], do you feel as though you have the power to control your own life?

J: Oh, I, still, there are times, yes, that, you know, most of the time you feel you're in control of your own life. But, there's still always in the back of your mind, you know,...what if somebody hears me? What if somebody sees me? You are, it affects you ...for the rest of, you know, the time you raise your children. Even after they are out of the picture with [my oldest son], I know there's going to be times when I discipline the kids or I hear [my husband] yell at them outside in the yard,...where you're gonna go..(gestures with frantic facial expression).... I even said to [my husband], you know, you better cool what you're doing, 'cause you don't know who's watching or listening.

I: So, the sheer amount of time that they have been a part of your life, however large or small....

J: It changes it....

I: ...It changes it....

J: ...Forever.

I: ...Forever, and you say it's left you "paranoid." O.K., with the idea that, if I'm correct now with what I'm saying, as you go forward in life,...one of the goals, seemingly very conscious goals that you have, is to avoid ever having them come in and occupy you life in that way, and to control that part of time and its passage....

J: Right, because they watch, O.K., when they are in your life, they watch everything that is done. They watch the children. They watch the house. They watch how you interact with the children. And, I mean, that...it's not fair....

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I: Are... you afraid that someone might come, again,...that [the Agency] might come again?

E: I am....I hate to leave them, anywhere, including school or anything, 'cause I always wonder, I have a funny feeling when I go back to get 'em. I have a, a, feeling...are they going to be there or not be there, do you know what I mean? I, what I mean about school, I thought about leaving them home, having a tutor. Yeah,...that bothers me, a lot.

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I: Do you feel as a result of this experience with the Agency that you have changed in any way?

R: I feel like I've changed a lot, I've learned..., I've learned a lot, I've learned from my mistakes. I've learned from my mistakes. I've learned to go on.

I: The mistakes being what?

R: The mistakes of me giving up, giving my children over to [the Agency]...for thirty days. If I would have never done that, if I would have never had signed them papers, my children wouldn't be where they're at right now! If I would have only just said, no! If somebody had just been there in my corner, and would have told me, no! Wait! Don't sign those papers, wait until your boyfriend comes home. But, you see, sir, I have nobody in my corner. [The Agency's] not in my corner! I don't think they're in my corner.

I: So, you felt very alone at that time.

R: Very alone.

I: Do you feel alone right now...in dealing with the Agency?

R: No. I don't feel alone, now. Because...by me learning from my mistakes, by me learning from my mistakes, I've picked-up self-confidence...in the long run. Having confidence in myself, knowin' that I can, that
I can defeat them, knowing that I
can do, do everything that I can to have my
children and will get back my children.... And
I feel like once I get back my children,
there's nothin' that can stop me. Nothin' can
stop me from carryin' on my life with my kids!

I: What do you think that the whole effect has
been---if there has been one---of being
involved with this Agency? Has there been any
effect on you...when you stop and think about
it?

R: What'd you mean, like....

I: Has it changed you in any way?

R: It just taught me to be cautious.

I: Cautious. What does "cautious" mean?

R: It taught me to...think before, to think
before I do, you know, just, just, be...just
to be, be more, be more, be more...just to be
more gracious, just to be more, just to be
more, just to be...mind more of my "p's" and
"q's" than I did before! More of my "p's" and
"q's" than I did before!

I: Does that mean watching yourself?

R: That's right, watching myself....

I: Watch what you say and do. Is that what that
means?

R: (Nods affirmatively).

I: And it, also, means watch what other people
are seeing.

R: Right.

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I: If you had a...complete, free choice as to
whether not this Agency would be involved in
your life, what would you choose?
K: ...As far as myself, I think I've matured more...since they first became involved. When they first became involved, I agree, yeah, I wasn't watchin' the kids as good as, as well as, I should have. And, I was more or less trying to act like a, you know, teenager without kids. And then I realized, I guess it really hit me while they were gone. And I think it has brought me and the kids closer. You know, more...mother and child relationship, than a child-to-child relationship that we had in the beginning. But,...they, they've helped-out a lot! As far as being more closer to the kids....

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I: ...How do you think this whole experience, particularly these last, three years or more, for you..., how do you think the whole experience of being involved with this Agency has affected you? How do you think it's affected you?

T: It put age on you, (laughs) it makes you old!

S: (Laughs).

I: Has it changed your way of thinking at all?

S: What, about [the Agency]?

I: About life, about the world, about anything. In other words, as a result of being involved with them, and having the whole experience, has it changed your outlook on your own life, changed your thinking in any way about anything?

S: I thought I was doin' good until some, my landlord started his shit. And everybody else, mind their own business. I think...people should be with [the Agency] when they neglect their kids, when they beat their kids. I never beat my kids and I never neglect my kids.

I: How's the experience affected you? (Reference to "boyfriend").

T: Made me stay to myself, more. You know?
I: Staying to yourself, more, means what? I think I have an idea, but I want to be sure.

T: Just...don't associate with the neighbors. You have to almost be a loner. You have to worry if they're going to get mad and call, call someone, and, ahh, you know....

I: So, in other words, if I had to use a word, and you tell me whether this fits or not, you isolated yourself.

T: Yeah! Put myself in a...a..room, it's like a room, you know. Build a wall around.

I: And, you keep your distance from people.

T: Yup!

I: And, you make sure that people don't see a lot that's going on. Not that anything is happening, but you just basically try to avoid people..., just stay to yourselves,...that's what I mean.

S: Stay to ourselves.

T: Yup! People will talk!

S: Oh, yeah!

T: People will talk.

III. Perceptions of Personal Freedom

Once subject to an "intervention" by child welfare caseworkers, parents perceived that their personal "freedom" was constrained, or immediately "bound," by the authority of the Agency. Needless to say, as long as they were "involved" with the "protective services system," each of the them was fully convinced that
custody of their children was always at stake. Yet, in spite of their circumstances, all of the parents believed that they remained "free" to make choices and to assume responsibility for their plight, i.e. to "do what they had to do" in order "get their children back" or to be "free" of the Agency's "involvement" in their lives. In essence, for most of these parents, "freedom" could only be achieved by their commitment to this "cause": "freedom" was "commitment" to "getting their children back" and such a "commitment," in turn, gave them "freedom."

In contrast, two parents who attempted to "restore" their "freedom" by "withdrawal" from contact, or involvement, with the caseworker clearly failed to realize their hopes; indeed, at the end of the field work, due to sporadic periods of such "withdrawal," and other factors, the children of these young mothers became the target of separate legal actions by the Agency to "terminate" parental rights. In short, in order to be "successful," most of the parents sooner or later learned that they had to face the "brute facts" of their situations: they would have to "fight" to "get their children back" and, thereafter, "fight" to truly get "free."
In any event, all of the parents believed that their lives were encumbered, or "constrained," in four, substantial ways as a direct result of, and as associated with, their "involvement" with the Agency. As expected, (1) parents perceived they were not "free" because the Agency had legal custody and exclusive control of their children:

I:  Winston Village is....

M:  That's an institution for, ahh, delinquent juveniles.

I:  How long were you there [when you were fifteen years-old]?

M:  Six months. In the process, while I was there, I tried killin' myself once. Umm, they made a mistake and let me have a pair of scissors, I snuck them into my room, and I cut my wrist. Umm,...(slight pause) I wanted to die. Because I was trapped there. The doors were locked at all times. We had to stand in single lines. You was a prisoner, there. When we went to dinner, we had to stand in a single line, and walk across. Umm, I'm not one person to be trapped. Like right now, I feel trapped with my kids.

I:  What do you mean?

M:  I have no right to my daughter (reference to child in Agency custody and foster home placement).

I:  Tell me.

M:  (Pause, tearful,...becomes distressed)....You have kids. My daughter's my first baby. She's in custody. I used to pray when I was in lock-up for a baby girl. So I could hold her,...something I never got from my Mom.
(Pause) (Distressed) It doesn't hurt me with my son (surrendered for adoption),...sometimes..., but my son's in a good home. I love the people that adopted him. And I gave them something they couldn't have. They got tested, they couldn't have children. They always wanted a baby. Since they had my son, I watched them, well, I didn't watch them.... And, ahh, I'm happy about my son. It hurts, but I'm happy. I did the right thing. Not because I hate him, but because I love him....My daughter, I'm trapped with her, I have to have visitation rights to see my baby.

I: What's that like, to be told that you have "visiting rights" to see your own baby girl?

M: It's fucked-up. And it hurts very bad, at least to me, in my heart....

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I: In this situation,...right now, do you feel free?

M: What do you mean?

I: Free to choose, free to do....what you want to do.

M: No, I'm not....

M: No.... Because if it was up to me, I'd take [my daughter], take the baby in my tummy, and I'd move back to [my home state], or Texas, California, where I have family. Family that's going to stand beside me.... As it looks now, I can't leave [the city]. And when I came here, I didn't plan on stayin'. I came here for a visit. I got pregnant and I ended up stayin' until after the baby was born. That's all it was goin' to be, until after the baby was born. If it was up to me, I'd pick up my daughter and I'd take this baby, and I'd go somewhere. I don't like [the Agency]. I don't like their ways. Some of them's good. For some of their ways, some mothers do deserve to have their kids taken. My kids was never
hurt,...or they always had me. They're my babies and I have no right to 'em. (Pause).

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I: Do you feel free right now...in life?

R: Do I feel free? No, I don't. I don't feel free. I feel free in my heart, but not free in life.

I: What do you mean?

R: Well,...when you have [the Agency] over you, [the Agency] doesn't, when you have [the Agency] over you, you don't, I don't feel like I'm free. With [the Agency] over me, I don't feel like I'm free. Because...in my own way, in my way, when I was comin' up, [the Agency] wasn't around.

I: When you were a child?

R: When I was a child. [The Agency] never came into my family, and never watched me and my brothers while we were growin' up. So, why should they watch over me and my children, while my children are growing up?

I: When you have legal custody of your children again, will you be free then?

R: Uh-huh. I feel much free. I feel very much free. I feel like I'm just as normal as anybody else out here in these streets, and I can raise my children better than anybody, anybody, or anyone around. I've raised my children, and I come from a family of five children, I raised every child in my family! And, I feel like with my own that I have no problem raisin' my own children. I came from a, I came from a good school, I come from a good family. I don't have, I can't say that I have no bad background,...I have bad backgrounds, but those I try to leave, to leave bad memories behind. And try to carry my life on, and try to go on.
I: What is life like for you as a young woman, and a mother, ..a person (to have the Agency involved with you)?

K: It's hard. Believe me, it's hard. It's hard enough to be young, and raisin' kids. It's hard enough tryin' to adjust to that. And then you got this agency standing over you, like I said, .. now you know you can't do this, and no, you can't ..., you know, I feel like going to Florida, you know, taking my kids and going to Florida for a vacation, I can't do it ... because of the fact that [the Agency] has custody of them. And, you know, they can tell me where I can take the kids, and where I can't. And, you know, I don't like that, I figure they're my kids. If I want to pick-up and go, I feel I should be able to pick-up and go.

I: So, at this moment, do you feel free?

K: No.

I: You're not free at this moment?

K: No, I'm not, really, I'm not. As far as like disciplining, things like that, yeah, ... I can do all that, they don't say nothin' about it. But, I still got them, you know, standing over me, telling me I can't do certain things with my kids. And everything else. You know, if they come in and they happen to... oh, ...(sighs), he came in and there was a welt mark on [my daughter], and I just smacked her, and there was a welt mark on her, ... and he told me, oh, he's going to call [the Agency], ... and he did! And then they came out and they investigated. You know, where ... you know, you discipline the kids, you don't want to leave a mark, but, you know, there's times, sometimes you might leave a hand mark on them, or something like that, and you know how it is... with your kids! (Laughs in reference to knowledge of the researcher's three children.) And, ahh, you know, I don't mind just the idea of someone comin' in and telling me..., you know, as long as I'm not beating them. You
know, they've never accused me of that, never accused me of anything like that. They know from when they finally took custody of her, you know, there was no beatings being inflicted..., there never was no beatings.... Umm, ... the feeling of not, I guess, not having them, of not actually having them, they're not really mine,... you know, they are mine, but it's just the feeling I have. Yeah, I have two kids, but they're not completely mine until, like, they went to Court.

I: When they're back in your full legal and physical custody, will you be "free" then?

K: Well,... yeah. But, I know I won't be completely free, because I know there's times that they're going to be watching me. I know that, because [the case aide] told me that, she'll probably keep coming out even after I get custody back. More or less, they are still going to be tied-in, you know, in my life, in some ways, in my life, but... I won't no longer to bonded to 'em... as I am now.

I: Bonded....

K: Ahh,....

I: I think I know what that means, bonded..., you can't usually break a bond....

K: Right. I can't! You know, I can't break a bond. I can't say, you know, I don't want you to come out here anymore. 'Cause they're gonna do it, whether I like it or not. You know, where after I get custody and have the kids back, if they want to come out, I can say, no! I don't want you out here!

I: So, your choices will increase when you have custody back.

K: Right. Right. I would rather ask, I don't know, if I'm gonna be involved with them, I'd rather it be by my choice..., not having to, you know, being I have to be. It'd be my choice.
I: Do you think you will say, no, if you don't want somebody visiting you?

K: Oh, no! No, I don't think I will.... You know, as far as [the case aide], you know, she can come out at any time...I told that, even after..., you know, but...she can see if I have any problems after, because she'll be there. And, she says, yeah...not legally, she just don't have to be there.... I'd rather someone be willing to be there, than having to be there. To me,...I'd more...freedom..., you know, I have more choices.

(2) Parents perceived they were not "free" because caseworkers, and other "professionals," had "intruded" in their lives: they "told" parents what they "had to do" and what they "could and could not do" within the process of "treatment" or "case management," by establishing expectations for "change" in a parent's conduct, issuing directives, and imposing sanctions for proscribed behavior.

I: If we stay with that question about control, again, you've said quite clearly that if your children were home, if [your daughter] were here, and certainly if this baby were to be born and with...then, you would be 'in control'?

M: Yeah, 'cause I'd have my family, I'd have my life. I'd be in here, I'd be here for my kids. I'd be able to do what I wanted with my kids,...be able to go where I want with them. Have whoever I want here....

I: But even after [your daughter's] back, and this baby's born, and with you, let's say, some time passes, umm, and you say you would be 'in control,' then, will you still be 'free', would you feel free, you do think, then?
M: When I see that [the Agency's] off me.

I: And "off you" means what?

M: Out of my life.

I: That means not contacting you anymore.

M: Now, I don't mind if they come and see what I'm up to and see how the kids are doin'. I'd expect that. But until they quit tellin' me who I can have in my house, where I can go, who the kids can be around, 'cause I think I'm smart enough to realize I'm not going to let my kids get hurt....

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I: You said...that you did not feel as though you had control over anything.

E: No, because...they, ahh,... you know, like, they tell you what is, like, they don't give you choices. They might like give you, like, an ultimatum. But, when it comes down, to it, though, you really don't have a choice, because if you don't, they're gonna, they take action against you.... Like, they had, between the counselors, psychologists that are working with the family, and, ahh, the probation officer at Juvenile Hall, with the teenagers, and, umm, [the Agency], they had a conference, together, since they are all working with the family, involved with the family,...to decide...what to do about the children,...you know, and what, you know, what they're gonna do,...and, of course, they, they feel there, that, umm, [the Agency] and the, umm, police in Court,...are the only ones restricting the family from being together. And, umm,... anyways, but...so that's still on hold. You know, they're still holding onto that. And, they decided that the infant, umm, my grandchild, will stay with me, and they'll try to convince, they want to try to convince [my oldest daughter] to sign custody over to me. And, my [youngest daughter], they want to stay in the home with me. The [oldest daughter], whether or not the father
ever returns home, ... they do not want her ever to return home. They told me, ahh, ... they thought, between the conference, the, ahh, professionals, had together, that, they felt that she should be in an institution for treatment, not a mental institution, but like, ahh, a group home, not a foster home, but a group home. Umm, like ... ahh, [specialized group home for adolescents], or a similar facility. For her benefit, and that they do not plan, or desire, to take custody away from me and her Dad. Or, my involvement with her, as her mother, except that they felt she needs some constant, consistent, real strong structured, environment, discipline, counseling, on a continuous level.

I: What do you think about all that?

E: (Laughs) Well, it's really ... it's really tearing, ahh, I, I feel I need the support of my husband's companionship. Umm, and as far as my [oldest daughter]..., it's tearing in addition, even though they're not legally going to take her away from me. Like, they laid this out in front of me! But, like they're saying, this what they're gonna do! It's like, I don't have an option! You know, the professionals have decided together, and I don't have an option. You know. Umm, but like they, ahh, said to me, that my [oldest daughter], that, ahh, if she thinks the two teenage daughters, they don't want them in the home together. Because, they team-up against ... their mother. When there's any dispute or differences, and everything, and the other one, and then they team-up against me, and that, that's part of the reason, too, they're wanting to do that, because they said I could deal with one of them. But, when they're together, they do this, and so then, I'm out of control. You know. I don't have the control to reverse this, that way, and, ahh, when they do that. And, ahh, and they ... take the control... away from me. So, they told me that I am overwhelmed. Umm, for anybody, they told me, to be trying to deal with two teenagers, ... and then, having an infant, to take care-of, which is demanding of your time and effort, you don't have much time for other things.
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I: Who is Moorehouse, is that a caseworker?

R: It's a caseworker [from a mental retardation case management agency]. See, they have social workers come out and, ahh, do stuff with you, help you, help you, you know,...they just mettle into your affairs! Everything that has to do with you havin' any kind of...free life in your home, or any kind of personal...things in your life, when you're at home, you can't have without them buttin' in, into your affairs all the time. And, it just seems like me and my boyfriend, we can't be left, me and my boyfriend, we just can't have the kind of, can't have the kind of peace and quiet we want, without them always comin' into our home. Wantin', wantin' to, ahh,...tell us how to raise our kids, and tellin' us how, how, how to, you know, how to budget out money. It just seems like they're, it seems like they're, it seems like, it seems like...we got parents instead of...of use being our own adults.

I: Now, you have, obviously, custody of both of the children that are with you. Do you have legal custody of them, too?

R: Yes. See, me and my boyfriend, we wanted, me and my boyfriend, we wanted to get rid of all these people bein' in our lives. It just seems like, it just seems like,...we were trapped in this thing, down here,...in order for, in order for them to keep on havin' something to do with us. 'Cause they knew we was goin' to up and leave out of [the City], they knew they would no longer have anything to do with us. And the thing is, is now, now that we're down here, they all visitin' in our business, wantin' to know everything we do, what we do, how we do it, and everything.... It just seems like...it just seems like, everything we do,...we just can't have no free time! I mean, no, you know, no, no say-so over what we do, no say-so over we want, or nothin'! It's all, it's all, all of our decisions are practically, what you say, made for us. I mean, we voice out our opinion, what we want,
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and what we, you know, we put our foot down, and say what we need and what we want, ... we're overruled, we can't, you know, it's like, it's like, they go against whatever we want! And what I'm tryin' to say is, is I'm tired of these people bein' ... always in our business, always stickin' their nose in my business!

I: And that's the reason, then, you want to talk with me, because of ....

R: Well, see, everybody that I've tried to talk to, everybody that I have tried to talk to, it seems like, it seems like, it just seems like, these people, Moorehouse, these same people, they say how much they're willin' to try to help us and how much, they in, you know, how much they say they'd like to help us out, call us if you need somebody to talk to, or if you have any problems, call one of us and talk to us. But, the minute we call one of them to try and talk to one of them about, call, you know, it's like we call them, ... they're the first ones that are willin' ... to stab us in the back!

I: And "stab you in the back" means what? What would they do?

R: Like if we had problems, and nobody knew about it, our problems, they go on between me and my boyfriend, ... I'm just sayin' if we had any problems, like if me and [my boyfriend], we can't, it's like ... every husband and wife argue, alright? I mean, ... what husband and wife argue about is between a husband and a wife. But with organizations comin' in, comin' in, ... and wantin' to know what you're arguin' about, what's this, what's that! Then runnin' back, runnin' back to [the Agency], and tellin' [the Agency] that these two is arguin', they can't get along! When it's really not their business.... I mean, they're acting like I'm here gettin' beat up and then, then, uncontrollable! I mean, they act like me and [my boyfriend] are slow learnin' people, we can't get along with each other, and [my boyfriend] can't control himself! (sic). And they feel like somebody needs to be there twenty-four hours a day to watch over us to make sure that we, to make that we are,
to make sure that we don't harm each other.... What I'm sayin' is, we don't, we don't need 'em!

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I: Now, the Agency still holds custody, legal custody, of them, but they live with you.

S: Right.

I: So, between now and July, what is supposed to happen or what is supposed to occur that would have the Court make that decision, then [regarding the restoration of legal custody]?

S: Well, there's like, see, when I go and see [my counselor], he makes a report out. And, it can be bad or it can be good. And the school nurse is supposed to come and check how the kids is doin'. And she makes a report out. And it could be good or bad, like I say, again. And [the mental health center] will have to make a report out about [my boyfriend]. It can be, you know,....it just depends. Then I can get full custody of [my daughter and son], or they cannot give me back full custody.

I: Lots of people are makin' out lots of reports.

S: Right.

I: What do you think of that?

S: It sucks! (Laughs self-consciously). 'Cause it seems like it's takin' longer for me to get custody, full custody of the kids. Custody, I've got temporary custody...of 'em, and they've got temporary custody of 'em. It just seems like it's takin' em a very long time for me to get 'em. I got the kids now, but I just want full custody, 'cause I want to move out of [the City]. I want to get a big, I want a house, and a yard, 'cause there ain't no yard for the kids to play here. And, you gotta tell 'em what you do and where you can move, and that. I hate that.

I: But you do it anyway.
S: Yup.

I: You tell them.

S: It's like, if the kids get hurt real bad, I tell 'em [the Agency] about it.

I: And, again, there is a reason that you choose to tell them...all the time...in a way. What's the reason?

S: So the kids won't be taken away....

Furthermore, the weight of the Agency's expectations and "demands" upon the parents was always made heavier by the authority of the Juvenile Court. Indeed, the judgment as to whether or not a parent had actually---or finally---met the "demands" of the Agency rested, in most instances, with the Judge. As a result, for many parents, the process of achieving such a decree tended to induce an even deeper "sense" of "powerlessness" as they struggled to "prove themselves" throughout what "seemed like" endless extensions of time that were granted by the Judge for periodic "Court reviews" of their "progress":

I: And you mentioned, also, a lawyer having been in the picture, here.

J: Yes, yeah,...there was, ahh,...if we hadn't had a lawyer when we went down to the Court with them,...we always got our custody back right away with [my son]. I mean, but there's cases, you know, you go back to Court, I think, every three months, they can make it three or six months. But with [my son], it's usually every three months. And it's like, if you don't have
a lawyer,...go once at three months, and three months later they still have your child, three months after that they still have your child, three months after that they still have your child, until they think that you're ready! But whereas if you go to a lawyer, the lawyer goes in, he talks to [the Court Referee] down here that we see, and he says, this is what [the parents] have done, and, umm,...we feel at this time, [their son] is able to come back into the home environment, he'll adjust. And so, [the Referee] says,...O.K.! And that's it. But, see, if it were just [my husband] and I sitting there with [the supervisor], is the [caseworker's] supervisor, and [the caseworker] there,...he would, he would look exactly at them, and say, they would tell him, we still want [their son] in our custody, he'd say, we don't think [your son's] made any progress, and we just feel it would be in his best interest that he stay with [the Agency]. And he [the Referee] would say, it's O.K.

I: ...What's the difference between having a lawyer there and not having a lawyer, in relation to what happens,...at least at Court?

J: It impresses the Court, I feel. It makes the Court think you're a little bit, you've got a little bit more class. You're a little bit smarter than the average bear. You know, you don't go in there unprepared.

P: Yeah, you're not going to go in there and, ahh, just ahh, take your chances by yourself,...to go in with a prepared, ahh,...well-armed soldier.

(3) Parents perceived that they were not "free" because of their belief that the Agency would "retaliate," or "take power," against them in two ways, for any reason, but especially in response to any appreciable oppositional behavior. The Agency might "retaliate" (a) directly, by withholding "privileges" or
imposing "restrictions" throughout the conduct of "case management, or by initiating criminal sanctions in response to illegal behavior, and (b) indirectly, by extending the Agency's custody and control of children who were already in foster care or---ominously---by "intervening" and "taking custody" of other minor children in the home. Indeed, these perceptions, in most instances, reflected a parent's "consciousness" of his or her own vulnerability, as inextricably linked to the "hard fact" that they could not "protect" their children from any exercise of "power" by the Agency---such as an "unannounced" "intervention" by a caseworker with an "emergency order" of "custody" for one, or all, of their children that was authorized by telephone by the Juvenile Court Judge.

I: What other choices, what other alternatives, what can you do in your situation right now?

M: I could go kidnap [my daughter], she lives at 816 Ravenwood! But what's that going to get me?!

I: What do you think it would get you?

M: Nothing. Worse shape than I am now.

I: That would be what?

M: Never seein' my kids again. Or seein' this one (reference to unborn child). I have no options. (Said matter-of-factly). I have to live day-by-day and do what the fuck they want me to do! If they want me to start kissin' ass, I'll pull down their pants and
start kissin' ass! 'Cause that's one thing
I refuse to do, is start kissin' ass. But
I'm tired of not havin' my babies...or my
daughter. And I'll be damned if they're
taking this [child]....

***

J: I can't fight the system! Like I said, I'm
not a millionaire! You can't fight the
system. You want 'em?! I, I am, I am,
myself, personally, not her [reference to
wife], me, keep 'em! I don't want 'em
no more. I can't fight a winless battle. I
can fight a winless battle. The only way,
the only way I could fight this battle is to
go, physically, knock the people out, bring
the kids home, show 'em what I'll do now....

I: But, you choose not to do that.

J: I choose not to do that.

I: And, there are reasons you choose not do
that.

J: Sure, there are reasons, I got three other
children, here!

I: Which means what?

J: Which means I gotta take care of my other
children! If I do something irrational, if I
go blow their brains out, where's that going
to put me?! What is that going to do to my
children, my other ones?!

***

I: What recourse do you have? What do you do,
now?

J: You got me, there. You got me, there. The
only recourse I have now is if I want to
blemish my name and, ahh, go after them and
maybe kick some asses, but that's going to put
me in jeopardy, I wouldn't do it. The other
recourse is, if I win the lottery, I'd hire F. Lee Bailey after their asses, and call 20-20 (television program), and get the media after them, that might be, the other recourse is, me...suing [the foster parents] and [the Agency]! And, then, goin' from one Court case to another. That's the only recourse.... People, you know, even the Court system, they have to understand, when you dealin' with things like that, you are not dealing with a bill owed, you are not dealing with a transaction of an automobile, that you could take your time with it. You dealing, you dealing with the life of a person. Whether he's black, white, purple,...it doesn't make a difference. You are dealing with an individual. They say, we, the people, under the Constitution. We, the people! But, bullshit! You the people that sittin' in the offices, not we!

***

I: Well, how free do you feel?

E: Knowing, you know, knowing that, that's so, I don't, I know I don't have a choice, it's like a blackmail...situation! I know I don't have a choice about not signing this paper [case plan]. I did sign it. (Reference to papers in hand). If I, if I refuse to, if anything [the Agency] does or requires, if I refuse to cooperate, they take action against you, and separating your family, or whatever.

***

I: At that time, in that situation [when the Agency had been granted emergency temporary custody of your children and were placing them in substitute care], did you see that you had any other options, any other choices that you could have made?

K: No. I had no, I had no other choices. That's what [the caseworker] told me. She said, you have no choice. [The caseworker said], I could leave now, and let you have, you know, have [your son]. You can take him anywhere
you want to...and hide him, do whatever you want to with him so I can't get to him, but, she says, I'll just go get a warrant for him and I will get him, no matter where you go. So, I seen no real option with the Court, I had no choice legally. If I didn't want to be in trouble with, you know, more or less, [the Agency] legally, for, you know, holding me for hidin' the child, or whatever, from 'em. And I figured I didn't do anything wrong, either...either way, I didn't do anything wrong, so what do I have to hide?

***

I: You don't feel free because of [what your life has been]...and that's the way things turned out in your marriage and family, or you don't feel free because [the Agency] is involved with you?

E: Well, now that you mentioned it, both, really, but I feel greater...bonded, and, ahh,...lack of freedom because of [the Agency].

I: How in....

E: Because they have the power to do anything that they decide that they want to do to this family. You know, they, they can take a child from me, they, now have restricted my husband from me, you know? And, like, in my teen years, because of something to hold onto, you know, I was very involved with the Church, and, ahh, and everything. Because that's all I had at the time, until,...then my husband come in the picture, and so, then, I had that, too, somebody to love me and care about me, you know, and to share that love together. Umm, but...anyways, ahh,...[the Agency]...you know, they, they, they, they could you know, they could destroy a marriage, destroy a family, destroy a home, ahh, above, even, ahh, God's law. You know? They can, like I commented to [the caseworker], yesterday,...umm,... In God's Book, God says, let no man, in regard to marriage, what He joined together, let no man put asunder. No one, no man can do that, no human can do
that. But, [the Agency] has done that. Even though it had, the marriage had its trials and stresses,...but the love and unitedness was, was there. You know? And, they have denied us the right...to be together. Not, it's one thing if the people in the marriage decide that,...or, you know, umm,...if there is, you know, umm, a real serious crisis, and maybe it's necessary, you know, but, for other people to say, you can't, more or less, you can't be married! You can't be together! You don't have the right to be together! Your own husband or wife, you cannot sleep with them! It's not like you're being out against morals or laws, sleeping with people you don't have the right to be with! Or around, whatever, this is your husband! Or your wife! And, they're not permitting two people to sleep together! You know, I mean, even regardless, for any circumstances, that you cannot be together, you cannot share your life in your home together.

I: You do not feel free, then, because you fear their power.

E: Right. Their right and their destruction.

Perhaps most poignant was a mother's account of her anguish and struggle to stay in "control" during an "intervention" by the Agency in which her teenage daughter was isolated from her by caseworkers and medical personnel for purposes of examination and "interrogation" at a local hospital:

E: ...I wanted to...just...open the door, and to go in, anyways, and to demand that I was going to be there. And, when, also,...ahh, if they were going to take her, you know, the instinctual feeling that I was having...was to fight, if it took, you know, if it come to the point, that in order to stop it, because
I didn't know yet what they were gonna do..., you know, like I was commenting on before, I would, I would kill [the caseworker]... in order to keep [the caseworker] from taking my child from me.... But,... moral, you know, morally, value-wise, I mean, I could not ever... do that, well,... in that circumstances, at least, because [the Agency] was not taking physical harm upon my child. You know? If someone was taking physical harm upon my child, if it... did... have to go to that point, in order to protect my child, yes, I would. But, [the caseworker] wasn't doing that, so,... I could not take... somebody's life, I could not, ahh, take serious physical damage on somebody, umm, but... that was what I felt like... doing, but I knew that would only hurt me and my child, at that time,... under those circumstances if I did.

I: You would kill whom?

E: The [Agency] worker. But,... moral, you know, morally, value-wise, I mean, I could not ever... do that. well,... in that circumstances, at least, because [the Agency] was not taking physical harm upon my child. You know? If someone was taking physical harm upon my child, if it... did... have to go to that point, in order to protect my child, yes, I would. But, [the caseworker] wasn't doing that, so,... I could not, I could not take... somebody's life, I could not, ahh, take serious physical damage on somebody, umm, but... that was what I felt like... doing, but I knew that would only hurt me and my child, at that time,... under those circumstances if I did.

Finally, (4) parents perceived that their "freedom" depended on the nature of the assigned caseworker's interaction with them, especially the caseworker's use, or "handling," of the "power" at his or her disposal. In this regard, such factors as whether or not the parent
(a) "liked" the caseworker, (b) found the caseworker to be "judgmental," or accusatory, or (c) had to endure frequent "home visits" by the caseworker, appeared to be significantly correlated with the extent to which the parents in the study felt constrained, or encumbered, in their daily lives.

I: Do you feel free?

S: Do I feel free? I do now. 'Cause I get along with my caseworker and she gets along with me. And my kids like [the caseworker], they didn't like [the previous caseworker].

I: So, when [the other person] was your caseworker, you did not feel free.

S: No, it was like I was a prisoner. Now, I feel free, 'cause of [my current caseworker]. She's a nice person. I'd like to have had her when I had [the previous caseworker]. But now I have [my current caseworker], and she respects me, and I respect her.

***

I: In view of all of this, do you feel free...?

S: What, from [the Agency] or....

I: Start there, do you feel free of them?

S: Yeah, like I said, they're not here every day. They don't bother me.

I: If they came every day, or if they came very often..., then you would not be....

S: I'd feel like I was in prison.

I: You'd feel like you'd be in prison....

S: Yeah....
I: ...Because they'd be coming to see you so often.

S: Every day. But, [the caseworker] don't come every day, and she stays, maybe, about 15, 20 minutes. That's, that's all.

I: Beyond, let's say, just talking about the relationship with the Agency, do you feel generally free in life...to do what you want to do?

S: I do..., honestly. You know, like if I go anywhere, I let [the caseworker] know why I go, too. I'd say...I want to go up...to, umm, if it was real far, I'd let 'er know, but if I'm going up to Breckenridge, or...somewheres else, 'cause it's not that far, I won't, I don't let her know. Because I'm always back. (Smiles).

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I: Here's a real general, but kind of heavy question.... Throughout all this time, since [the Agency] has been involved with you, or a part of your situation, or your life, have felt free?

J: With [the current caseworker], yes. I don't feel like I've got Big Brother looking over my shoulder. You know, I really..., with the other people [caseworkers] it was like...everything that happened, it was like, I'm afraid...that someone will call [the Agency]. But, with [the current caseworker], it was more, she would pick up the phone and call me,...instead of just dropping by, I mean, the only thing that really ticked me off was, I had some problems with the principal...up at the school. [One of my sons] is hyperactive and...he needed on medication, I tried to take him to my pediatrician before school started, and he says, it's, I don't think it's appropriate, he goes, he's too young, for one, and I don't believe in giving medication to kids that young. And, so I was having a lot of problems with her, well, the principal called one day and turned me in for yelling at my child. And, it was like, [my current caseworker] came
out here, she was really nice about it, I said, but,...so far, I'm not allowed to spank my child, now I'm not allowed to yell at my child. Tell me how I'm supposed to discipline my child. Because, I mean, [my other son] had done something and I yelled at him, and he was going to run out the back door, and I said, don't you dare do that! You know, and I was back there yelling, and he went up, and he told somebody, and they took him up to the principal's office. And I called up to the principal's office, and I said, why did you call [the Agency] in the first place, and she goes, I wanted to make sure you weren't brow-beating your child. I said, as far as I know, I am allowed to yell at my child. I said, it's not against the law, I said, I wasn't cussing him out, I wasn't..., you know, physically doing anything to him, it was just like, I was trying to stop him from doing something he was doing. But, I mean, that's how paranoid it was getting.

I: You say that with [your current caseworker] you do feel free?

J: Right. She would call me and discuss it, rather than just come to the door and, like...make an accusation....And, I mean, it was like, she was trying to avoid a big scene. Where's the other people would come out, and it was like, I want every aspect and avenue of your life opened up to me and I want to know it all now! Or, with [the current caseworker], she comes in, she sits down, and she will talk to you. It, she, she doesn't intimidate you, she doesn't make you feel like you're stupid, she doesn't think, well, I raised my kids this way, this is how you should raise your kids.

I: ...And, if you were to then, maybe in a few sentences, or so, summarize what this whole experience has meant, to be involved with this Agency, what would you say it all means in terms of your life, as a person,...just as an individual..., what has it meant to you?
J: O.K., up till this last year,...it was like, I'm being watched. I have to very careful about what I do, what I say, where I go, how I do it, but this year, it's been a, it's been more freedom, I don't have to worry...about if someone's looking over my shoulder if I'm doing the right thing. Because, she's [the caseworker] not so judgmental.

IV. Resistance

In spite of the "power" of the caseworker---and the authority of the "child protective services system,"---and regardless of the constraints, or "brute facts," of their lives, each of the parents gradually developed a "sense," or consciousness, of their own capacity, or "power," however limited, to resist. Indeed, there were three interrelated, but conceptually distinct, meanings of resistance that emerged, or "crystallized," during the researcher's analysis of the data, especially the interpretation of each of the parents' accounts of their reactions to the "power" of the caseworker and the Agency: (a) to cooperate or to strive and "work against" the caseworker, (b) to withdraw or to withstand and "successfully endure" the experience with the Agency, and (c) to engage or to "oppose" the caseworker and Agency with "force," (Diagram III). Consequently, it is important to consider the data that support each of these different forms of "resistance."
DIAGRAM III: THE STRUCTURE OF RESISTANCE

To Strive or "Work Against"

To Withstand or "Successfully Endure"  To Oppose with Force
Constrained by their circumstances, much of a parent's behavior in relation to the caseworker reflected a striving (a) to assert their individual rights, (b) to defend their rights of freedom, privacy, and autonomy in relation to their children, and (c) to escape the caseworker's intrusion in their lives. Indeed, in light of such findings, exhortations by some authors (Cingolani, 1984) that "involuntary clients" must become aware that they are engaged in a "political exchange" with caseworkers is unnecessary: these parents immediately "knew," or soon became aware, that they were engaged in a "power" struggle that "objectively" they could not win. As a result, they adapted to their situations in order to solve their problems, protect their interests, and achieve their ends: they chose to "cooperate" in order to recover their children from the Agency's custody and control, to eliminate the Agency from their lives, or to prevent the Agency from "taking" their children or intruding in their family, again.

In essence, "cooperation" by these parents appeared to be a form of adaptive behavior: it occurred in transaction with, and in relation to, caseworkers whom parents perceived had (a) "misused" or "abused" the authority of the Agency, (b) violated the parent's "rights," and (c) continued to "intrude" in, or affect,
their lives in ways the parent perceived as "unstoppable" or otherwise inescapable. As Howard Goldstein (1981) has observed,

Adaptive behavior has a relational as well as a self-serving function. Although it serves the need for personal coping it is also enacted to induce others in the person's social field to behave or respond in desired ways...Whether it is expressed in words, posture, affect, or silence, it intends to convey something of importance to those in relation. These messages may be expressed specifically or ambiguously. The person may be informing others about how he sees himself, what he needs, how he feels, what has happened, or other 'facts' about his circumstances. His behavioral messages may also attempt to persuade others what ought to happen or what others should do. (p. 196-7).

In one respect, "cooperation" reflected a parent's conscious, rational attempt to cope with relentless intrusions in their lives, frequent transgressions by caseworkers, and the constant fear that they might "lose" their children. "Cooperation" was, thus, purposeful: it served to conceal a parent's anguish and dissent by "surrendering" to the expectations, demands, or directives of the child welfare caseworker. In another respect, and perhaps more important, "cooperation" was intentional: it was "designed" to influence, "sway", or persuade the caseworker to act in accord with the parent's wishes and interests, to "return" children to parental custody, or to get the Agency to "close its case."
As a result, "cooperation" appeared to have little, if anything, to do with whether or not a parent had internalized the "need," or developed the "motivation," to make changes in their personal behavior or family situation in response to "casework" or "treatment." In other words, "cooperation" was less explicable as a "psychological" outcome of "casework," i.e. as a positive response to a caseworker's efforts to instill behavioral change or to "facilitate personal growth," than a complex behavior---including emotion---that was "designed" to achieve transactional purposes and intended to serve political ends in the parent's intimate "power struggle" with their assigned caseworker. In specific, situated in the "mutuality" and "interdependence" of the "casework relationship," each of the parents appeared to struggle to gain "power" and some measure of "control": indeed, "cooperation" had more to do with what the parent was striving to "induce" in the perceptions, judgments, and behavior of their assigned caseworker, than vice versa (Goldstein, 1981, p. 197).

Overall, there appeared to be three interrelated, but otherwise distinguishable, elements, or "processes," that as a whole, or in part, "comprised" a parent's "cooperation" with their assigned caseworker. First, and most important, (1) parents acted to suppress or conceal
their disagreement or discontent in order to avoid "saying" or "doing something" that could be "used" by the caseworker to strengthen the Agency's "grounds" for maintaining custody of their children, to "justify" a delay in the return of their children to their custody, or to rationalize the family's "need" for continued "protective services."

E: Right. Umm,...I've known in other cases, where...they...took some very harsh action, which I didn't feel, I felt was...way out of line. Families that I knew was on public assistance, prior to me, with us, in this case, they seemed to be...taking things, following things...pretty... umm,...I'm trying to think of the right word to describe it,...mellow. I think, currently. Umm,...and, working with the family, probably a lot of that is because I'm willing to work with them. In fact, here's this contract that she brought me yesterday, to sign. Umm,...I don't agree with it! In all, that is. But, I know...if I don't sign it,...see, you don't have a choice! This is a case plan document, is what it is. If you don't agree to it, and you don't sign it,...[the Agency], then, will take action against you! And, deprive you of your children.

I: ...What if you disagree with them about what the problem is, what if....

E: I would say, you're in trouble! Because they don't give you choices! You know, in a way, they do, they'll say, well, then they don't usually threaten you, up front, saying, either you do this, or we're gonna do this! But, if you, like, share with them feelings that you feel, how wrong it is, or you disagree, or you don't feel that that's right, then they will explain to you...that point, so that's, so, they put it in a way, not in threatening
but in a way...that if you don't---just like [the currently assigned caseworker], after the [police] detective decided...to go for an investigation on the...allegations [toward my husband], [the caseworker] came to our home and let us know that she had the authority to go get a Court order from [the] Judge..., or, I don't know if it has to be the Judge, or one of the Referees, or what, but from the Juvenile Court, to come here, and probably escorted by police, and take these children in their custody, from their home, and from their family and their parents. But, she didn't do that. Now, [the original investigating caseworker] did that! [The currently assigned caseworker] didn't do that! She came here to talk to us about it, the authority, in case there was some reason or need, wanted my husband separated from the children, until this case was resolved, whether he was guilty or innocent...to prevent any further happenings. So, she came here, in concern for us, she expressed to me, that she felt that this family...had gone through enough crises...and, that, she didn't want to put additional crisis and emotional trauma on us. So, she asked if [my husband] would be willing to not stay at the home, until this [case] is resolved. Voluntarily. You know, if we did not, though, that's what she would end-up having to be forced to do.

I: ...I'll ask you one, last question. That has to do with that material that you had in hand the last time, you said that [the caseworker] had brought to you. I think it was the Case Plan that you were presented,...that big, thick thing?

E: Yeah.

I: You had told me that there were parts of that, or you told me that you didn't agree with...a lot of that Plan. Am I correct in concluding that....

E: Right.
I: ...That that Plan was something that was put together and presented to you, and you were expected to agree with?

E: Right.

I: You didn't participate in that Plan, either, or you don't feel as though you did.

E: No, they, they drew it up, and they showed it to me, and wanted me to sign it.

I: Did you sign it?

E: Yes, I signed it.

I: Did you agree with all of it?

E: No....There was a couple things that I didn't agree with, like, they said that I would not permit, ahh, the children's father to be in the home and that I would continue to protect the daughter that is staying in the home, with me. And, not, allowing him to be here. And, ahh, which I didn't agree with, but, I didn't...have...concern that there was risk for her...physical safety and welfare.

I: But, you signed that document, anyway.

E: Right.

I: What made you sign that, then? Despite the fact that you disagreed with part of it....

E: 'Cause I believe that,...ummm,...if I didn't sign it, and agree to it, that, then, they would take...the children, they would take, get a Court order, and take the children from the home. And, it also said that [my oldest daughter], that they were going to put her in permanent placement, elsewhere. Which, I don't agree with, either.

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I: You don't easily, then, say what you truly think, what you truly feel, you don't easily stand-up for your own rights and interests, you don't easily communicate all that....
B: I don't communicate with her (the caseworker). I communicate to everybody else, but her.

I: Is it a fear?

B: Yeah, because she can throw [my child] in my face and say, well, you may as well forget it, you ain't gonna have him no more!

I: So,...you hold back.

B: ...I try to hold back, and not say too much to her,...I try, put it this way, kiss ass!

I: There's fear.

B: Uh-huh.

I: So, even if you were to go to, let's say, that interview, or that administrative meeting, that I referred to, you probably would sit there and you'd be afraid....

B: I'd just tell them, yes, sir, and no, sir, and yes, ma'am, and no, ma'am.

I: Because you're that afraid....

B: (Interrupting)...Mm-hmm....

I: ...You might say something wrong.

B: Yup!

I: O.K. Now, let me ask you this. If...if [the caseworker] did not have the authority or the power, and if you were not afraid...as to what would happen, if you were to really dig in and tell it to [the caseworker], like it is..., what exactly would you tell her?

B: I'd tell [the caseworker] to go straight to hell!

I: And that would be it, in a nutshell, that's all you want [the worker] to know,...to go straight to hell.
B: Yup. [The caseworker's] a nobody, [the caseworker] don't mean nothin' to me. And, I'd tell [the caseworker], hit the door, or I'd kick [the caseworker] out on [the worker's] ass!

I: What would you tell [the caseworker] about your relationship to [your child] and what you want?

B: He's my son, I had him, not you. And I want him here. He's not yours, you don't have authority to sit here and tell me how to raise my kid!

I: O.K., but it would just suggest, then,...that what is very hard for you to do, then, is to say that clearly and directly to her, on a day-to-day basis...because you're so afraid! That's it?!

B: Yup.

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I: Have you ever had any outright conflict or disagreement with them?

R: No.

I: But, you disagree a great deal, it sounds, with some of the things they've done....

R: I have disagreed with some of the things, but I felt like I wasn't being treated fairly.

I: And you told these things to your caseworker?

R: No.

I: There are, I assume, some reasons why you did not tell your caseworker...that you felt....

R: Right....

I: What reasons? What kept you from telling [the caseworker]?
R: Well, for one,...it's a matter of attitude, attitudes can stop you from getting your children.

I: ...What do you mean, "attitudes?"

R: Attitudes means...[the Agency], if you go around [the Agency] with the wrong attitudes, you're showin' them, you're showin' them, you're showing them,...the bad side, you should be showing them the good side. If they see the bad side of you, they're going to think, well, why should we give this woman back her children?! When she's coming around us with this bad attitude.

I: So, you don't conflict with them, don't confront them....

R: ...Right!

I: ...Don't disagree.

R: The best thing for me to do is to follow along with them people, and do like I'm supposed to do. I might disagree with them, and I might not like the things that they do, but...whatever I don't, whatever I disagree with them on, it's best that I keep confidential to myself. And it's best that, it's best that I just go ahead and work with these people, try to get my children, so that, so that when I do get back my children, that we can carry on our life together. And, hopefully [the Agency] will see that I am picking up my life with my kids, and will leave me and my children alone.

I: Do you see any other option other than what you just described, in dealing with the situation?

R: To me, there's no other way. There's no other way I can do it.

I: How much power do you think these caseworkers have?

R: Well, right now, right now, it's like, it's like this, it's like, you know, it's like, it's like these social workers, like, we're
the kids and they're the parents, it's like, you do like we say to do, and you'll, you're little advantage, and you'll get to do this and you'll get to do that! (Said sarcastically). But, if you don't do this right, you won't get your advantage! But it's like this, it's like me, in so many ways, it's like me, I like, I like, it's like me, I won't just voice myself out and tell 'em, I don't want you to have anything to do with me. I'll show my, show in actions that I don't want 'em havin' anything to do with me....There are times when I show, there are times when I'll show 'em that I don't want to be bothered with you, that, that I'll just go somewhere else! And there's times when I don't want to be bothered with them and have to be bothered with them. And there's times when I feel like I just, there's times when I feel like, I ask myself, why did I ever get myself into this mess?! Why are these people always in my life?! Why do these people always want to know what...[we] are doing?! Why do they always want to know that?!!

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D: Just keep it inside. Not say anything. 'Cause, I'm afraid if I say anything, it's going to jeopardize getting my kids back. So I just..., don't say anything. I just...keep it...inside. I had told [my husband], but there was no sense tellin' [the caseworker], 'cause [the caseworker] would come up with something else...to try and take the kids away...well, she doesn't want to do this, so...we'll just make it so she can't have her kids back. I felt like just, do it, and keep my mouth shut. Just go ahead and do it, and get it over with.

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I: My last question is this.... And, maybe you've already answered it. Maybe not! What's the best way to deal with [the Agency]?
J: I hate,...this is a bad way to put it, but you just play their game. I mean, you know, [my son] did the same thing. And, he used to always say, well, you just play their game, and they, you pacify them. If they, while they're there, in front of your face, you say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, but if you don't agree with it, you have to wait until you're out of their sight, out of their clutches, before you can disagree. You cannot disagree with them, or you're the one that's in trouble!

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I: Do you agree with the Agency, at this moment, holding legal custody of your children?

K: Oh, yeah! I, I agreed to the custody, because I was supposed to get custody back in [three months ago]. And, ahh, then we...sat down and talked, [the caseworker]...and...the prosecutor, we sat down and talked that if I agreed to extend the custody, they'd help me out more..., as far as furniture, security deposit [for an apartment], so that I could get back on my feet....

I: ...So you don't object at this moment with the Agency being involved in your life?

K: No.

I: And you don't object right now to the fact that they're holding legal custody of your children.

K: No.

I: There was a time, though, that you did object....

K: Oh, yeah,...in the beginning, in the beginning I did!...They weren't working, they weren't...they weren't givin' me the chance...to prove...that I wasn't the person they thought I was. They were, more or less they were all against me, than working with me. But now that, you know, it's so many months later, we are more or less working
together, or trying to work together. So now, I don't object as much as at first. And plus the anger and the hurt when the kids were first taken, you know,...when they were taken it hurt me, it made me mad. And I just thought they were against me. And at first, they were. And then I really didn't cooperate with them at all.

I: But now you would say you are cooperating.

K: Oh, yeah!

I: ...So, you have been in situations here of real conflict, even confrontations, with this Agency.

K: Oh, yeah.

I: But, it seems as though...you, in reaction to those confrontations or those conflicts, you decided to do maybe what other parents have told me---and you tell me if this is true or not---and that is to basically "go along" and do what they tell you to do.

K: Right. More or less that's what you have to do, you have to go along...and agree with 'em. Not actually agree with 'em, but you have to go along,...whether you agree to it or not. Because they are holdin', you know, the one thing that means more---if you are a parent---you know, there holding the one thing that means the most to you, you know, in your world,...your kids, they have your kids. You actually have no real choice but to cooperate with them. And, you know, that's the one thing that I don't like. Knowin' that they, more or less, are holding your kids over your head...If you don't cooperate with me here, you know, we can do...that....

(2) Parents perceived that the only way to effectively cope with the caseworker, and the authority and "power" of the Agency, was to "do what they were told to do" or to "learn to play the game."
I: How do you avoid, then, giving [the Agency] a chance to take your children away?

R: By not doing what you're supposed to be doing. The only thing I can say...is...do you your (sic) supposed to do, do your job right, stay at home, be a good mother. Raise your children, stay off the streets! And do like you're supposed to do. Keep [the Agency] out of your business, because [the Agency], as far as I see, [the Agency] is nothin' to play with. [The Agency] can and will take your children and there's nothin' that you can do. That's the bottom line.

I: ...Obviously, you didn't leave the area, here, when you became involved with the Agency. You must have dealt with [the Agency] in another way.

R: I stood my ground. I hung my neck out there for my kids and I stood there. And I, I, I, I waited for, waited for my chance to get back my kids! Like any mother would do....I played [the Agency] game, and got my kids back. And now I'm just saying, now I'm, now I'm, now I, you know,...now that I got my kids back, I just hope that they never go, I just....I'm not goin' to say I hope, because I'm not goin' to never say I hope,...I'm just goin' to say that...that they, I just, that they'll never go back to [the Agency] again.

I: "Playin' the [Agency] game" means what? What do you actually do when you play their game?

R: [The Agency] game means, when you play [the Agency] games means that you do everything that [the Agency] asks of you to do, in order to get back your kids....It means keepin' standard appointments, keepin' all your, keepin', doin' everything a mother's supposed to do....That she's messed-up on, you know, what she messed-up on when her kids was here, at the time when her kids got taken away from her, at the time, at the time, to straighten up in order to get back your kids. Because when you messed-up, the kids get taken by [the Agency], automatically you
must have done somethin' wrong. In order to get back your kids, you have to go back, you have to reverse yourself and go back, backwards,...and look at the things you messed-up on. And, and straighten up the things you messed-up on. And do right, in order to get back your kids from [the Agency].

I: In "playing this game" with [the Agency], are you open with them, do yo tell them the truth about what is happening in your life or in your situation, or do you not do that?

R: I don't do that, because...with [the Agency] I don't feel like, [the Agency] I don't feel like (obstructed by child screaming in background) [the Agency] is...there for yo to help you, but [the Agency] is also there, [the Agency] is also there when it comes time, when they feel like, when they feel like, when they feel like you're not ready to have, when they feel like you're not ready to, when you're not gettin' along and not bein' able to take care of your kids, is when they feel like they're ready to come back and take your kids again.

I: So, what are you saying, you can't be open with them? Because of that?

R: It's not that I can't be open with them, it's just that I, it's just, it's just, it's just, it's just that...people, it's just, it's just, well, people, like that, it's just, I just don't like, I just like to spill, I don't like to go spillin' my, I just don't like to go spillin' my problems to other people. I'm the kind of person, I like to keep my, I'm the kind of person, I like to keep my personal life to myself. I don't like to spill my personal life to other people.

I: What do you think about the things that you've been told to do? Or, that you must do?

R: I feel like, they're all right. I should, they, they have a right to ask me those, but.... No, I feel like I've busted my hind-end, and I did what they asked me. But, I still don't understand why I'm not gettin' back my kids, it's not like my kids
was being treated wrong.

I: So, you chose to do all of those things, then, when they said you must do this, you must go to Family Life [education classes], you must go to counseling, keep all your appointments. You decided to do all those things.

R: Yeah.

I: Is there a reason you decided to do them?

R: I don't know, I guess.... (Brief pause). The bottom-line is just, is just..., if you want, and this is the bottom-line, and this goes for any mother, if you want your children, you'll do anything it takes to get 'em back. All I can say is I'm goin' to do whatever it takes to get my children back. And, I'm going to fight to get 'em back. And all I can say is that I will never make the mistake again to ever sign my children over to [the Agency] again.

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I: Another question is..., a lot of time has gone by since you've been involved with this Agency. How long has that been, now?

S: About three or four years.

I: Does time go by quickly, or does it go by slowly, from your point of view of wanting to get them out of your life?

T: Slowly.

I: Well, who seems to control that time, in other words, time has gone by, and I suspect by what you told me before, you would like to see time go more quickly, and get this thing over. But, if it goes very slowly, who controls that?

T: [The Agency], lawyers, Judge,...all of 'em!

I: But not you.
T: Right, not me.

I: You don't have any control at all over... the movement of all of this, in terms of the Agency?

T: Nope! You just gotta wait and do what they tell ya.

S: (Said quietly) Yup. (Smiles shyly) Be patient....

I: And be patient.... What's that like, waiting?

T: It's hard. Sure ain't no pleasure, waitin'. But,...you gotta do what you gotta do, sometimes. You know? If you don't do it, then they come and take the kids, you know?

I: ...What would happen if another day came when police officers were at the door, or caseworkers were at the door with a Court order,...what do you think you would do?

S: I don't know, I would freak out! But I know that thing won't happen.

I: O.K., it doesn't sound like it....

S: It better not happen, at least! (Laughs nervously).

I: But when you say it'll never happen, again,....

S: You never know, it could happen tomorrow, the next day, whatever. But, I been doing what they asked me. [My boyfriend] did what they asked, he had to go this [mental health center], 'cause he had a back record, so he went there. So, we did what they wanted us to do.

I: A back record means....

S: He had a back record of police, see, before me and him got together (interruption by end of tape recording)....
I: So, you were saying that even with [your boyfriend], because he's in a relationship with you, they have asked him to do certain things.

S: Yeah.

I: And they asked him to go to [the mental health center]?

S: Yeah.

I: For what reason?

S: Drinking...and drugs.

I: And did he agree to do that?

S: Yeah! 'Cause he said, when we last went to Court, the Judge said that, umm, the kids would be taken away or he had to move out. So, he went to [the mental health center].

I: ...So, if someone were to ask me how [you] cope with [the Agency], in other words, how does she deal with them, what would I say to that person?

S: I'm very patient...with them. (Smiles).

I: You're very patient with them. And being patient with them means, I assume, you thought that's the best way to deal with them.

S: Yeah, that is. This other woman, these other mothers don't want to be patient with the caseworkers. I'm patient with the Judge, I'm patient with my caseworker.

I: And that seems to work? That seems to be best? What does that seem to get you, to be "patient?"

S: All my kids back.

I: That's what happens.

S: Yeah, that's why I got 'em all.

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D: I figured it would be better, on my part, just to go along with what [the Agency] wanted us to do. So, in that way, they would see, yeah, they want their kids back. Because like [the caseworker] asked me, one day, do you want your kids back? I said, yeah! I said, if I didn't, would I be so concerned and wanting to go to [the mental health center] and get the [psychological] testing over-with? Would I come and visit my kids every week? Or show up on the court dates? I said, if I didn't, would I do all this?! [The caseworker] goes, well, if you didn't want 'em, then you wouldn't. I go, well, then I want my kids back....And, I don't see no other alternative but to do what I'm told to do...by [the caseworker], I'll just get it over-with. So that way, my kids will come back home.

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I: So, you've just basically done what you've told me before, what you've done...is you've followed everything that they've said and you've tried to do what they've told you to do.

B: Went to counseling, parenting classes, I've went to, ahh,...I've went to every court hearing, everything,...every review, everything. Signed up for Section 8,...it ain't much more that I can do. I've tried, and I tried for the past two and a half years.

I: You tell me if I'm wrong, then. You've tried to make things go faster [in your situation in relation to the Agency] by doing what....

B: ...Told me to do.

I: ...Told you to do....

B: Right.

I: But, you're saying that you feel you've done what they've told you to do.

B: I've done everything they possible told me to do. If they told me to do parenting classes over, I'll do it over, again. This'll be my
third time doin' this stuff over, again. I mean, I know how I'm will (sic) take and I know how to take care of a kid, that's no problem. As long as they've got food on their back, I mean clothes on their back, and food, and shelter on their heads, what else can they ask for?

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E: Well,...I've grown more comfortable in working with [the Agency]..., umm,...because,...I know it's only to my benefit if I do, if I put-up a big fuss, and fight, it's only going to make things rougher for me...and my family. And, it's going to look as though we...are...trying to hide...things, that I am trying to protect [my spouse] from the law.

I: If you engage in conflict with them, you're concerned that they will perceive that as...guilt? On your part?

E: Very possibly, and that if I'm willing to work with them, they are more willing to work with me! They are more willing to have consideration for me, and my family.

I: If you cooperate.

E: Right. They are more willing to cooperate for my, they are more willing to cooperate with me, too, and to have consideration for my, our personal..., ahh, our personal crisis and emotions. You know, I can get more from them, too....

I: ...If you were to give advice to other families, other parents, about the best way to cope with...this Agency, what would you tell them?

E: Well, I would tell them what I am now trying to do, because...if they,...like if they give you a case plan to follow, or if they...put out certain requirements of you, whatever it has to do with, if you don't do it, then they will take power against you, over top of you, legally. You know? If you're unwilling to cooperate, that shows them either that there is guilt somewhere, umm,...or there's,
there's, a little bit more to it, than that, umm,...If you're willing to cooperate, also, that you are willing to work on the problem, to improve it, that is a point, too, that is very important to them. That you want, whatever the problem is, if you do care, and you are willing to work...on the improvement,...as long as you are willing to work on whatever they feel that the problem is, as long as you are willing to work on it, then they won't press so heavy,...you know?

...If I objected, or put up a fuss, I don't think it would make any difference...I'm like,...I'm fear-, like I think that if I did that that they would ignore it or they would take power against me, that's what what I'm fearful of, that they would take power against me. They'll go ahead, then take the kids! You know, or take custody, and everything!

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P: They give you kind of a little...ahh....

J: List.

P: ...List of, umm, items, ahh, that...they want done, and if they aren't done, then,...certain things can happen out of this list, through this other, ahh,...umm, reprisals..., whatever.

I: Did you get an opportunity to participate in the making of that list, in other words, did they consult with you around the things you were supposed to do, or the things that needed to be done?

P: Not...really, yeah,...it's...they come, they come down with a basic list...of....

J: Demands.
P: ...Demands, yeah, and, ahh,...they'll say, this is our basic, ahh, demand list, this is it, we don't deviate from it, other, unless we sit down and, ahh, ahh, come into agreement, with things.

J: If you want to accomplish...if you want to make this...end, that's what it is, if you want to make this end, you have to do what we say, or it'll be never ending. So,...you do what you do. (Said matter-of-factly).

I: What do you mean, "you do what you do?"

P: You kinda play their game.

J: That's it, exactly, you have to play their game.

P: You gotta play ball, and, ahh, just...some things you just kinda choke down along with all this, that, umm,...you know that if you don't, that, ahh, the game is going to go into extra innings.

J: Uh-huh. But the thing is, the ball were my three other children. And that I didn't like being played fast and loose with! Because it was like, yeah,...I really hate to do this, but I could take your other three kids, too.

(3) Parents acknowledged that they attempted to create, or sustain, a specific "image" of themselves in the mind of the child welfare caseworker---that the parents "really loved" their children and "wanted them back," were willing to "work on their problems," or were competent enough to manage and provide care for their children---in order to (a) regain custody of their children, (b) get the Agency "out of their life," (c) reduce the amount of "pressure" applied by the caseworker
during ongoing "case management," (d) "protect" themselves against future "reports" to the Agency, and subsequent "investigations," of alleged child abuse or neglect, and (e) to avoid, prevent, or deny the Agency the "right" to seek "permanent custody" of any of their children who might continue to be in "temporary custody" and care.

I: What will she do if she "catches you"?

R: Well, let's put it this way, I'm not going to let, let's put it this way, when I get back my kids, I made up my, I made up my, I made the choice between stickin' on the good line and bad line. And my choice was to stay on the good line.

I: What's the "good line," I don't understand?

R: My 'good line' is, my good line is, is, in order to play it cool with [the caseworker], I have to, in order to play with [the caseworker], that's an order to march a straight line to keep from havin' [the caseworker] come back, to keep [the caseworker] from comin' back on me. As long as I know as I'm doin' good, and she knows that I'm doin' good, there will be no reason for her comin' back on me, to say, hey, you're messin' up, you're not doin' right. You know? I finally figured out the way to do [the caseworker]? I finally figured a way to hop to [the caseworker's] tune. See, I can pick, see, it's, it's, it's, it took me a while to figure out [the caseworker]? But, ...she's like a...combination lock, like,...in order to...[the caseworker], in order to do right with her, and to keep her happy with you, you do right, you do the things that you're supposed to be doin', you do the things that people ask you to do, what [the Agency] asks you, and you're all right! But, if you mess up one time, [the
caseworker's] right back on your tail, again, like...Pow!  Pow!  Pow!  Pow!  [The caseworker's] ready to pounce on your tail!...If I turn around and play my game right, and do the things I'm supposed to do, I'll get [the caseworker] off my tail, she's be back on the good side of me, again.

I:  But,...that gives me the impression, and correct me if I'm wrong, that you do lots of things just to get her "off your tail."

R:  Well, I do that, but I also do, I also do things to get her off my tail, but I'm doin', I'm doin', thing, I'm doin' things...to improve myself. Because I know, I know that, I, I know that, when my kids were taken, that those were the things that I messed-up on. And I know that, some of the things that I messed-up on, I know that, yeah, I needed a little bit of proddin' and little bit of tail-kickin'!  But, I, I, I knew that, if I, I knew that, knew that I had to do it. And I, you know, with havin' [the caseworker] there it was, just like, havin', it was just like havin' another problem added on to another problem!  It was just like, I mean it was just like, she was askin' me like, are you gettin' these back to [the Agency]?  Are you keepin' up your appointments?  Are you doin' this? And I didn't need her to tell me, I didn't need to, you know, to tell me these things, didn't need her to come behind me and say, are you keepin' your appointments, are you doin' these things?  'Cause I was doin' 'em!

I:  Again, on the basis of what you said to me a little bit earlier, I also have the impression that you consciously, in other words, you very aware that you will let her see certain things, you'll reveal certain things....

R:  ...I'll reveal certain, but other things, not other things.

I:  And is it true, too, sometimes that you will actually create an impression for [the caseworker], in other words, let her see what she wants to see?
R: Well, I let her see, I let her see, I let her see, I let her see the good side of me, but I don't let her see the, I let her see the good side of me, but, then again, I don't spill my whole life story out to her, either.

I: And that's how you deal with her, as a caseworker?

R: Right.

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I: So, there were times, then,...let's see if I can conclude this, there were times when you would even change your behavior in response to them....

J: Right!

I: ...In order to have them....

J: Back off.

I: Back off, but to create an impression for them, which would hopefully get them to back off.

P: Yeah, kinda patronize them.

J: Yeah.

I: You would patronize them.

J: Yes! You're right! I'd say, oh, you're right! I never looked at it that way! (Said sarcastically).

P: Yeah, that was the easiest way to get rid of them, was, ahh, or, to get 'em to back off somewhat, to, ahh, patronize them, let 'em hear what they wanted, what they come to hear. Ahh,...in that sort of a general manner.

I: And that, from your view, was more effective in "dealing with them," than it is to, let's say, dig a trench and dig in, and put sand bags around it, in outright conflict.
P: Yeah, it took awhile to catch on as to what was, ahh,...how to deal with the people, but, umm, oh, eventually, ahh,...being involved with them for so long, you learn this, that, and the next thing, umm....

I: So, the point where you are now, compared to where you were in those early days, if I were to ask you now, who's in control...of the situation, now....

J: We are.

P: Yeah, we are.

I: But, if [the current caseworker] were to come out and all of a sudden be the way, and act the way some of these other caseworkers acted, would you say you would be in control then?

J: No,...the wall would go right back up. See, with her, I kinda let my wall down. With her,...I let my defenses down. Because, she's not picking at me, you know, she's not going, do this, and do this, and picking, and picking, and picking at me, she, she lets me alone. Whereas they, the other ones (caseworkers) seemed to find the weakest point, and they just keep hittin' you there, until you think, I can't take anymore of this. So, you go, I give in, you win. I'll do what you want. I'll play your little game. And that's the way it is.

I: But, what you said before is that "playing the little game" is a way of dealing with them, it's a way of coping with them.

J: It is. It is. It's the only way we can cope with them.

I: And, the goal, ultimately, is what,...in "playing the game" that way?

J: Getting them out of the picture....Totally and exclusively out! No, nothing! No contact at all! Because, I mean, if you even give them this much (motions with hands to communicate proportions), they're gonna take this much.
P: As long as you have that door cracked open a little bit, they feel they have access to the rest of the room.

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I: How do you think [the caseworker] perceives you, or she sees you—if I were to ask her to tell me how she sees you, your situation?

K: Oh, now...it's a lot different. You know, before she would talk to me, and when she did talk to me, she was forced to talk to me because of the referrals and I was forced to talk to her, you know? But, I..., you know, all the referrals that they got in...was...three. You know, most of them, but, ahh, prostituting [my daughter]....

I: But, you're saying that that image of you is not correct, is not accurate.

K: No.

I: So, how did you deal with that?

K: I tried to convince her otherwise. You know....

I: How did you try to "convince her?" What do you mean, you "convinced her?"

K: Well,...see, ahh,...as far as [my daughter] goes, he [ex-husband] had convinced her that he was really concerned about the kids and that I wasn't. Well, at the time, as time went on, he wasn't interested in the kids at all. In fact, they haven't seen their Dad [for over six months]. But, in the beginning, he was, you know, the faithful person. He'd come there [to the Agency], he'd call about them about four or five times a week, and stuff like that, where, in the beginning, like I said, I didn't know how to contact anybody...about the kids, or how to see 'em, or anything. Matter-of-fact, [the caseworker], she never called me,...I see them, you know on a weekly basis, you know, now,... And, ahh,...next she started comin' out to the house and counseling me every once in awhile, and she'd
see...how...you know, I was handling them, and stuff,...and she seen that I wasn't a bad person like the way they all thought I was. You know, she'd come out at eight, nine o'clock in the morning, I wasn't drunk, yo know, if I was drunk, I wouldn't be up at eight, nine o'clock in the morning. I'd still be in bed, drunk, hung-over, or whatever. Once I found out how to see the kids, I was in there, you know, once a week. I could see them, you know.... And they realized that everything that [ex-husband] was telling them were lies.... I wasn't a bad person. And then I started gettin' more cooperation from them. And they was working with me, then against me.

Without exception, each of the parents had to withstand or "successfully endure" the anguish of their experience with the Agency, including the abrupt "removal," temporary loss, and prolonged restriction of their children, or the ultimate threat that the caseworker might petition the Juvenile Court to "terminate" their parental rights. As a result, in many instances, withdrawal was the only way a parent could resist the "power" of the Agency. This type of resistance occurred in two forms. First, parents tended to emotionally withdraw---into depression---in order to reduce the psychic strain of the ordeal or to blunt the profound feelings of "emptiness" and "loneliness" that were induced as a result of the loss of their children. Second, parents tended to socially withdraw---into isolation---in order to protect themselves from further
"reports" to the Agency and the "investigations" that always seemed to follow (Diagram III).

In general, a parent's "withdrawal" at different times throughout protracted "involvement" with the Agency represented what might be viewed, in Goffman's (1961) terms, as a "psychic collapse" into an overwhelmingly---and endlessly---threatening situation. Clearly, for all of the parents, commitment to the "cause" of "getting their children back"---a typically self-absorbed, often desperate, struggle---exacted a price: fear, depression, thoughts of suicide, "relapse" into substance abuse, and, in most instances, increased social isolation of the family in order to contend with the onslaught of often false "reports" to the Agency by neighbors, friends, and relatives---even the grandparents of their children. As a result, in such situations, "withdrawal" was clearly necessary for "survival." Indeed, several parents confided that the experience of having their children in the custody of the Agency and "not being able to see them" or "to get them back"---in spite of their efforts---was like being "trapped" or like "burnin' in hell." In short, most parents felt "powerless," like a "prisoner" of circumstances and fate:

Nothing happens and nothing lasts. Birth is the mirror of death and between the two, there is only scorched earth. Everything has been consumed by the curse of bad luck. (Sartre, 1965, p. 5).
I: What's your experience been like, then, in these two or three years, since that first report was made to the Agency? What's it been like to be involved?

S: Hell....(Laughs self-consciously).

I: I have my own definition of "hell," what do you mean by "hell?"

S: People tellin' lies, that I didn't like my kids. And they just take 'em away and they seem like they don't give a shit about...other parents that beat their kids and don't want to feed 'em, and stuff like that. It's been pure hell because I was livin' off my sister and she has three kids and it wasn't easy on me..., until I got my kids back.

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I: So, how did you react that night that they took custody of them?

D: Well, Edward and my Ma,...I called my Ma, and she went by and picked up my Grandmother. And, between Edward, my Mom, and my Grandmother, they had to literally drag me out of [the city hospital], because I wouldn't leave. That's how bad it hurt me...their takin' them from me (tearful).

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D: When they first were taken away, it made me feel like, well, I'll never get 'em back. And, I'm a bad parent....

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B: When the holidays come up, it just breaks my heart. I see his stuff around and I, I don't know, some people can, I'm different, I can hear his voice,...Mommy, where are you? Like you're sleeping, you're dreaming. Well, I could be sittin' here and I could hear his voice! But, nobody else knows what I'm
feelin', only I do.

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I: So what does that mean to you, the fact that you are talking to a man who has three of them (children)?

D: 'Cause you would more or less understand where I'm coming from, because you have children. And where [the caseworker] doesn't understand, because [the caseworker] doesn't have any. [The caseworker] doesn't know how it's hurt me to come here [to the Agency for visitation] instead of having my kids home with me...where they should be. (Tearful).

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D: Well,...sometimes I feel depressed, 'cause they're not around. If [my spouse] is not there, and I go upstairs, to an empty apartment, you know? I miss the kids talking, playing, and doing different things. We used to sit around and watch TV. We used to sit around the living room, around the TV. I miss it...you know? There's times that I'm depressed. There's times I can't eat, can't sleep. There's one night I was up all night, 'cause I couldn't sleep. So, I just got up....

***

D: It's, you know,...the kids aren't here, we've got threats comin' if we don't do this and we don't do that..., then our kids are going to be completely taken from us. And it really hurts..., a lot. And only getting to see 'em, once a week for an hour, is even harder. [The caseworker] keeps saying, well, we're going to up it to where you can see 'em for maybe two hours. Well, so far, [the caseworker] hasn't done that.

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I: When you think about yourself, and your life, up to this point, in your life, what has this whole experience meant to you---when you stop and think about that...

D: Well, being without the kids, it's lonely, especially when [my spouse] is not here during the day. And, but it's not so bad, now, now that I take care of four of them (through babysitting), while she's (a neighbor) at work, and at school,...I help take of her four. Which puts my mind at ease, while I'm takin' care of these four, I'm thinkin' of my [own children]. Because her little girl is the same age as [one of my children], her boys is the same age as [my other children]. So, while I'm taking care of them, I think about my [children] all the time. In a way, it's like havin' 'em here, with me, but they're not really here. I'm just thinking of them, while taking care of four more....

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I: So, I guess, the fact that I'm sitting here, and I'm asking you very specific questions, and you are giving me very specific answers, that come out in the form of views, criticisms, or complaints, or whatever, about what's happening,...umm, that seems to be what's happening now, as you and I sit here and talk. I wonder,...I wonder if I weren't here, and asking these kinds of questions, if it would ever come out. What do you think?

D: No, it would never come out, it would just stay inside, it would never come out. I'd just keep 'em to myself. And not say anything. Most of the time, I just, don't say anything. I keep what I'm thinking to myself. And not say nothing. There's times [my husband] doesn't even know...anything.

***
M: Have you ever went on a vacation (said tearfully),..., and, ahh,... like on a cruise or somethin' and had no way to call, to check up on your kids...to see how they're doin'? You're on this cruise and there's no phone to reach back to shore to call, to check-up on your kids. And you're tryin' to have a nice time. But, you can't. 'Cause you're wonderin' how your kids are doin', if they're hurt, which you know if they was, anyways, it would be known, it would get to you, you know, but,.... You got all these, like, I go to sleep and I pray that if I can't have my daughter with me, that God will be with her. (Silence). (Tearful, crying). You have the house ready for 'em. I'm talkin' about when I wanted my son back this time. I had it set up real pretty, you know. Made it seem like home. (Crying) I go to Court every three months.... But, that's all.... I come in once a week, for this appointment, because that's the only time I get to see my kids. (Sobs) It doesn't hurt as bad with [my son] as it does with [my daughter]. I'm happy for [my son]. [My daughter].... Every time I see her, she's ask me, 'Mommy, when am I comin' home?' And I gotta tell her, 'I don't know....' You know how bad that hurts? And when she was sick and [the foster parent] called, where I was stayin', I could talk to her, 'cause I couldn't visit her, [my daughter] said, 'Mommy, me sick. I wish I was with you.' Do you know how bad that hurts? (Sobs) To hear your kid say how bad she wants to be with you and you know damn well you want it as bad, if not worse. And then they talk about takin' this baby from the hospital (reference to unborn child). Do you know what it's like to have a baby in your stomach and having somebody already start talking about taking it away? (Said incredulously).

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I: I can't imagine what that would be like. I could only try to understand what you've told me, which is what I'm doing here....(Pause). What does the world seem like, what does life seem like when things like that happen?
M: You have nothing left (Tearful). Like some Agency that has no right to your kids comes in, with no right to your life, that way, ... comes in, takes your kids, and leaves you sitting there with empty, somebody comes in and cuts out your heart in one piece, ... and ripped it up in front of you. That's what it feels like. (Silence).

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J: ... To me, to tell you the truth, ... you want the truth? My case is closed. I don't give a damn what they say! It doesn't matter what they say. ... You gotta remember, once you lose respect, if I lose respect for you, Bill, I don't give a damn what you tell me, that's it! It don't mean nothing to me anymore! You can say what you want! They could come in now and say I'm gonna take 'em! Now I say, go ahead. I tell my kids, ... if you want to stay here, nobody will take you. But, if you want to go with them, God bless you. I'm not going to fight anymore for you. I... did it! I proved the point. But, I'm not going to prove that point over and over. You can't! You are under a losing, ah, ... if a policeman give you a ticket the first day, you fight and you win it. The second day, you fight and you win it. The third day, don't you ever get tired? At the end, don't you go there and say, O.K., you say, guilty. O.K.? ... You cannot beat the, the system doesn't work that way. It says, we the people. But, it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way, whether you are guilty or not, they want you, you're guilty. And they only wanted me, [the caseworker] told me, ... because they never had a case that the person would fight them like I did. They never did! During the history of [the Agency] in [the city]. I fought them the hardest. [The caseworker] said, ... they expect you to roll over. Which is true! Once the policeman give you a ticket, he doesn't want you to fight him! He expects you to just, O.K., you are right, let's get it over with! It's just not right! It just isn't right! Why should I roll over?! Whether I am guilty or not, I fight for what I believe in. I believe I am right, prove me wrong! But, don't grind me to prove me wrong. Prove me wrong, the way you
know how, the way this country was built on. You don't prove me wrong by beating me until I can't fight you no more! That's what I believe. As I told you, I have no respect...anymore for the system, I have no respect for the people that run that system. Because I don't believe, especially in this area, that they have any qualified persons down there, any! Have any.

***

J: ...Anybody can make a mistake. We are not perfect. But you don't drag it on! At who, at whose cost? At somebody else, at another human being's cost! You don't do that! What will they do if I wake up, one morning, and I'm fed up with everything, and I take my gun and I go blow their brains out?! What will that make me, then? What will that make me? A murderer. Do they justify what they did?!

I: Have they, or did they....?

J: Would they? Would they justify what they did, if I killed these people?

I: Oh,...O.K. I understand....

J: They can't! They'd say, oh, this guy's a killer! Hang him! But, they don't care why they made him a killer! They send you to war, to fight a war. Kill your enemy! You go kill your enemy!

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M: ...When you get down, when get bottom, I mean, the flat bottom, like I did, and [the Agency] took my kids and they took my life, O.K. Yeah, it took me longer than anybody else to get back on my feet, anybody else woulda got out there and worked there ass off to get up again, you know. But, I really didn't feel like I had anything left. Can you understand that?

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I: So, since the [psychologists'] reports weren't there [at the court hearing], they made the decision to keep your child in the custody and in the care of the Agency.

D: Yeah,...mm-hmm, mm-hmm....

I: What do you think of that?

D: I thought it wasn't right, I mean, like, when I got home from Court [on that day], I actually wasn't going to come home. I felt like I didn't have nothin' to come home for. 'Cause [the caseworker] had got my hopes, sayin' that [my child] was comin' home. And then we get in Court, it was a downfall. [The referee] said, no, [my child] wasn't comin' home.

I: When you say you thought about not coming home, what does that mean?

D: I was going to jump off the bridge. But, I decided to come home, and I talked to Jean...[a neighbor]. She was pretty upset, and she got me calmed down, and...another woman, that had her kids taken, one time, from [the Agency], give me a number of an attorney. I was waitin' for the Court-appointed one. And if I wouldn't have gotten a Court-appointed one...soon, then I would 'ave called this attorney she had. And she got the kids back the next time she went to Court. The kids went back home that day. Like when we go to Court, this time, the Judge says, send the kids home, they'll be home the day we go to Court.

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I: Does [the caseworker] know that you're this afraid of [the worker]?

B: Mm-hmm.

I: [The caseworker] knows?

B: Mm-hmm.
I: How does [the caseworker] know that?

B: Reaction....[The caseworker will] say,...why are you so nervous? And, I'll say, I don't know.

I: But, you're certain that [the caseworker] looks at you and sees you trembling and concludes you're afraid of [the worker's] power, [the worker's] authority?

B: Yeah.

I: ...Simply because [the worker's] got the authority....

B: ...[The caseworker's] the authority.

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I: O.K. Here's what I'm concerned about, too,...here's what really, among other things, brings me back here. And that is, emotionally, how all of this is affecting you. And what might happen on the [day of the next Court hearing], and what that might mean, when you try and deal with that.... How are you coping with all of this?

B: I'm not coping with it at all. I don't like [the Agency], 'cause, only thing they're doing is pushin' me in a hole, they pushin' me in a dungeon. Feels like I'm in jail, I'm not free, I can't do what I want to do. I try, and I try to go everytime to see [my child]. I mean, what else do they want me to do, I've signed-up for Section 8, I went to counseling, I go to school....

***

I: You believe, clearly, that [the caseworker] expects too much...from you.

B: Yes,...[the caseworker] does. And it's gone on for two years. And when my son comes here, he don't want to leave. He wants to stay here. And what can I say, no, honey, you can't stay here?! What are my reactions to that? I don't know what to say to him, well, I have to take you back? I ust tell him, we're
for a ride..., I don't know what to say to him....And the reactions on his face, it's like, God, I just want to get up, and..., I don't know..., I just want to get up, and disappear! You know? But, I can't do that! It's not that easy.

I: The reaction, meaning.... You said the reaction on his face, that causes you to want to get up....

B: His cry, it's like, Mommy, come here,...Mommy don't leave me!

I: Oh....

B: That's the reaction on his face. You know, when he's left now, he does now his mother, he knows his Grandmother, like when [the caseworker] pulls-up, 'I met Grandma and Grandpa at Mommy's house.' You know? He jumps right out of that car and starts runnin' towards me! He's like, he holds on to me like he don't want to let go! It's like, when I take him back, and I walk him up, and he looks back through the car, and he starts cryin'.... He don't want to go. He's like, and this is the expression on his face, why do I have to go through this torture? Why me, of all the other kids, why me? You know? I don't know what to say to him! I mean, it hurts me. Don't get me wrong, it hurts me really bad, for him to come here and play with his toys, and then, all of a sudden, he's got to go.

I: But, everything you've done, so far, has not been successful in getting him....

B: No, it's not,...it don't satisfy 'em. It's not good enough. (Said bitterly). What they're sayin' to me, I'm a nobody, I'm not doin' what, I'm not doin' enough effort!

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I: Let me ask you this, "point blank." When we talked the first time, you had said that there were times you had thoughts of suicide as a result of this whole experience. Have you had those thoughts lately?
B: Yeah. No, not recently.

I: Not in the last week.

B: No. Huh-uh.

I: O.K., but you've had those thoughts since we talked last?

B: No, I've had it when [my child] was taken away from me.

I: Originally.

B: (Nods affirmatively).

I: What do you think is going to happen if, again, you go [to the next Court hearing] and it is unfavorable to you, and they do give permanent custody of [your child] to the Agency?

B: I'll go in the hospital. My blood pressure will drop. I've passed out...several times.

I: It'll mean that much, emotionally.

B: Yeah. See, I'm anemic, on top of it. And when you push, push me so far, my blood pressure falls down, and then I'll pass out. ...'Cause when I had [my child], my heart beat stopped. They had to put oxygen on me to keep me alive. And then...[I was] rushed to the hospital. It might even happen in the Court hearing, I don't know. I don't know when it's going to happen, it'll just happen.

I: If you had to say what kind of emotion, if you had to label, or use a word to describe the emotion you're feeling, when you think about that hearing coming up... , what would be the label, what would be the emotion?

B: I scream and I panic, and...um,...I wouldn't fight, or anything, I'd just fly off-the-handle...if the Judge says, no,...you cannot have [your child]. Then I'd go off and, by the time I walked out of the Courtroom, I'd probably pass out. 'Cause, I can't stand pressure....Sometimes I fall asleep and I have nightmares. And I scream in
my sleep...and then it takes me until maybe
nine, ten o'clock to go back to sleep the next
morning. But it's a good, long eight hours.
Because when I was in labor, nobody knows what
labor's like. They don't know the feeling in
side of having a baby, especially [the
caseworker]. And, you can feel that, I can
still feel it, the sensation of having a kid,
and then...it felt like I was just going
through labor all over again,...having [my
child]. Then, all of a sudden, [my
child] dies, [my child] dies, and all of a
sudden, [my child's] gone. But, [my child's]
tooken away, he's not dead.

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I: ...Can you describe that a little bit more,
when you say that...it hurts that much that you
just can't go on....

B: It hurts that much that I can't go on. If I
had him, I could do more things. Like, get us
a house. I'd scrounge around and try and get us
a house,...I already got the furniture, that's
no problem. But, as long as I had him, I'd be
set for life. I'd feel more secure,...and he
would, too. Where's he's at, now, he don't
feel secure. He don't have nobody to
love him or...take care of him, I'm not saying
that [the foster mother] don't or [the foster
mother] does, I'm just saying that he don't
have the touch of his mother. He don't have
the feel of me. And I don't have the feel of
him, so I feel like I'm lonely. I...my Mom and
Dad's around, but it's not the same as
havin' your own kid around.

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B: I've went through torture hell! It's just like
if I was down in hell, it would be just like me
burnin'! I can't even go out here and get a
job! Because I have some much...ah,
disconfusion (sic), I mean, discomfort on my
mind about my kids.

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I: ...You're very concerned about how they perceive you..., now, more than ever. And, you're worried that they are not perceiving you....

E: Right! Right! Umm, because I feel like I keep crumbling. You know? And, umm, and it's take, you know, it's taking so long for them to try to get anything resolved. And, everything. And, ahh,...it's you know, it's just overwhelming, I just feel like, you know, I'm just depreciating to nothing. And, ahh,...ment-, mentally and emotionally, you know, I'm not, the pressure is, you know, I'm not functioning! I have no direction. No personal direction. Or, hopes for myself, 'cause everything, my family was...the biggest, most important thing there is, and to most people, it is. And,...I don't have my family anymore. I have, I have part of it with me, but because of the separation, so, I mean, I feel like it causes me to neglect the family that is with me. Because of the...the hurt, and worry, the loss of the family that is not with me. And, my mind, is always is just rolling, and rolling, and..., and seeming to go nowhere. I can't concentrate on one particular thing at a time. And, ahh,...it's, you know, they make, they make you feel like there's no hope! You know, and you have...(sighs), it's, it's just hard to describe, really....

I: Let me ask you this, now,...sometimes when people---what you have described very well as your feelings---sometimes when people feel that there is no hope, people think of suicide.

E: (Smiles) Mm-hmm....

I: Have you had any thoughts of suicide as a result of all of this?

E: No! (Sighs, smiles). Umm, I used, not because of this, but there was phases earlier in my life, umm, I wanted to, for the purpose of escape, or relief of pain. But, umm,...I over-, made up my mind, one time, you know, to overcome that. What it does, instead, is that, it seems like it just destroys the mind,...to deal with it day-by-day,...but, yeah, I would...say...it could do that to
people, and ahh....

I: The reason I ask that question...is that other people, in precisely your same circumstances, have told me that they have thoughts of suicide. And, precisely....

E: Uh-huh. I could see where that could very well happen, or, at least, they're feeling that way. And, umm, like with me, I just, you know, it just seems so, so destroying of my mind, that, you know, ahh, that I feel like I've gone bananas,....you know. That, ahh,...I wor-, you know, I worry about, ahh, how [the Agency] then perceives me, as far as my mental condition, because of all this pressure, although, they may not see it that way. The reasoning for it....

I: They may not see what as the reasoning? They're own...actions....

E: Yeah, their involvement,...yeah. Their involvement, and interceptions with the family.

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I: I think I mentioned when I was here before that I have three children of my own, so I know, certainly, what it is like to have children....

R: But, you never know, do you know what it's like to have your children taken away from you?

I: No. That's exactly the question I was going to ask you. What is it like?

R: (Pause) It's a hurtin' feeling. A big hurtin' feeling. All I can say is once the hurt's there, it never goes away. If you have something taken away from you, and you knew you could never have it, you can never cover up the hurt, no matter what you do. All I can say,...to the mothers that never dealt with [the Agency], don't do it! If you have to deal with them, don't make the mistake I made. Don't ever give [the Agency] the chance to take your children away.

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I: Have your children been close to being permanently taken away from you...

R: Not that I've ever known, but I have seen other people, I've seen other people, and I've seen it happen to other people.

I: So you think about that....

R: I think, I think, I think, I think, I think about how lucky I am, and think, and think, and think what might happen, I think about what might happen to me, or think about what might have happened to me, or what, what, what might have happened. And I thank my lucky stars, that nothin' ever happened to my babies, I'm so thankful that I can..., I'm so thankful that I can sit, that I could have my babies back! Because of, because..., now that, you know what I mean..., to really experience what another mother goes through, and the hurt, and the anger, and feel the stress that another mother goes through...it makes, it, it, it makes, I doesn't, it, it not only makes, it not only stops and makes you realize, but it stops and makes you, stops and makes you think how thankful, how thankful you should be at times and how grateful it is to have, to have something that the other mothers don't have.

I: You've been afraid?

R: I've been afraid, I've been very afraid that I was going to lose my kids.

I: Are you still afraid?

R: Yes. I'm still afraid that I'm going to lose, I'm still afraid, I'm not afraid that I'm going to lose my babies, I'm just afraid...that someday...one day, one day, I just hope that it will never happen to me! Havin' to go through somethin', somethin' that somebody else is goin' through, somethin' that another mother, mother's goin' through, somethin' else that another mother is having to go through. I was so afraid when I went into Court...I was goin' to lose my babies! I was so afraid they was goin' to come and...and I was just havin' visions of my babies being taken away from me.
I was just havin' visions of, I just had...thoughts was goin' through my head, through my head, wonderin' if my babies was goin' to be with me.... Am I going to go into Court, am I gonna be, am I goin' to walk into Court and be happy and smilin', sit down and have [the Agency] tell their side of the story, sit down and Moorehouse [mental retardation case management agency] tell their side of the story,...and have me sitting there, have me sitting there havin' the Judge lookin' at me, wonderin': Hmmm, is this the mother that we should be givin' custody to of this baby...of these kids? Hmmm, is Moorehouse, what is Moorehouse tryin' to tell us...about these people? Hmmm! Wonderin' what, what is [the Agency] sayin'? You know, he's lookin' and wonderin', lookin' at [the Agency] and lookin' at Moorehouse, and lookin' at us! Wonderin' if these, are these parents, are these parents good enough to take care of these kids? Are these parents right for these kids?

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I: Along the same lines of thinking, do you feel as though the things that are happening in your life right now are within your control or do you think that some things are out of your control?

R: Nah,...I feel like everything's, I feel like..., I feel like this. Things are only, things...I'm not goin' to say that things are goin' to get better, things are goin' to get, things are goin' to get better, if I make 'em, make 'em better. And, the only way I can make things happen is if I make 'em happen. I got myself into this, I can get myself out of it!

I: You believe that.

R: I believe that. I believe that now wherever my children are at, I believe by me being strong for my children, being strong for myself, and my boyfriend, things are going to get better.

***
I: When they took custody of [your daughter], where did that happen? How did that happen?

S: Here, downstairs. I lived in Apartment 1. And,...she's, she was six weeks old, and they took her.

I: O.K. When you say, "they took her," what does that mean...?

S: They had the cops, they, they brought three cruisers down, and her.

I: And...the caseworker.

S: (Nods affirmatively).

I: They knocked on your door with three police officers, and [the caseworker]. Did you know they were coming?

S: No!

I: I assume you can remember that day.

S: Oh, yeah!

I: Can you tell me what that was like?

S: It tore me apart. I...couldn't, I couldn't,...she (the caseworker) wanted me to get her dressed, put different clothes on her, put her in her seat, so that they could take her.... I couldn't do it. (Pause). Someone else did it for me. (Tearful). And I was havin' troubles with my one leg, I had to have surgery done, but I didn't get it done till after my, till everything got back home with her. And, it tore me apart. And I was takin' pain pills,...but my neighbor threw all my pain pills away, 'cause she thought I was going to kill myself. But that was after all the kids was taken away. She thought I was going to kill myself.

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I: ...If we think about things in terms of emotions, we have different labels for different emotions, and one is fear. O.K.? Since you've been involved with the Agency,
or even right now, do you, or have you ever felt fear?

S: Yeah, at times I, it comes up fear that my kids is going to be taken away. That somebody is going to tell a lie, and they're [the Agency] going to believe them and not me. And they're going to take them away from me. I fear that a lot, at times.

I: And with that kind of emotion, how does that---if it does at all---how does that affect the kinds of decisions you make about your life, where you go, what you do?

S: I do hardly anything, I just ...mope around. When the kids are taken away, I don't want to be around no other kids because it reminds me of my kids. 'Cause when the kids was taken away from me the first time, I couldn't handle it, 'cause I stayed with my sister, and she has two kids. I couldn't handle that.

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I: For nine years there has been one caseworker, or another, involved with you. What do you think of that? For nine years....

S: That sucks.

I: I think I know what "that sucks" means, but, what do you mean by that?

S: I don't know, I get tired of it. I think our family gets along good, and we don't fight, I don't neglect them, like people say I do. They don't run the streets at three, four o'clock in the morning, like they say I, they did. We're one, big happy family. I just wish, at times, they'd just leave us alone.

***

J: ...And I thought, they will take my kids away. And I'm going, I, you know, I don't understand why, but they never have taken the other three [children] away. It's always been mainly [my oldest son]. Because,...I'm not the world's
greatest Mom, but, I mean, I do the best I can. I mean, I...I have never physically abused my kids. I have never neglected them. Umm, I have always done what I thought was best. And, I mean, especially with [my oldest son]. I've knocked myself out since he was in the fifth grade, takin' him to [a local mental health center], takin' him to doctors, you know, up to school, everything, you know, every time something happened. I was there. And so, I thought, O.K., I'll knock myself a little bit more with [the Agency] and I signed a paper, because [my son] was running. And there was no way I could stop him. And, I mean, he just, evidently he was into drugs and I didn't know this, too. And, I mean, he just, he was just totally out of control. And, there was nothing I could do and I was devoting all my time to [my oldest son]! The other three [children] were getting nothing from me, because emotionally...at the time...it got to the point where I was suicidal, then. I was like, I can't take any more of this, there was [my son],...this was my Aunt's house before I, you know, before my husband and I bought it. And, she was tryin' to take the house back, because she decided she had made a mistake. And my husband and I were having some problems then, too, and it was like, I can't take anymore. And [my son] just would not quit! And, I mean, he was like, relentless that summer. It would start every year, it would at the end of May, end of May, to the beginning of school and maybe to October, for three years, it was like...you can tell summer's here! I mean, [my son] would start running, the problems started, and [the Agency] was at the door. Because, mainly,...after awhile, there were calls about the other three kids. I mean, things like, I wasn't feeding them, which wasn't true....

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I: Now, you seem to be very much aware and thoughtful of the...[Agency's legal] process now, but when that was actually unfolding, we're thinking back three years now, did you react the same way? Did you give them what they wanted and....
J: At the time, I was so distraught. I don't, they knew,...[my husband] didn't even know. I mean, I was like teetering on the edge.... It was like the day they called to tell me [my son] committed suicide, tried to commit suicide. I heard it from a relative who had been harassing me, and it was like, five o'clock in the morning..., well guess what your son tried to do? And I was like, what? And he goes, he tried to hang himself! I mean, I felt like someone had kicked me in the stomach, I mean, I was like, you know,...the straw that broke the camel's back! It was like, they hadn't called to tell me any of this. And it was her telling me, like, ha! ha! ha! You know, and I was like,...I can't deal with this anymore. I didn't know what to do. I had to put my feelings on the back-burner and go down to [the City Hospital] and be strong for [my son]. 'Cause I was there, this isn't the way to solve your problems, but in the mean time, I was feeling the exact same way. But, I guess, because I'm older, I thought, I've got to handle this, I will handle this, that's all there was to it.

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J: You get to the point where you think, well, I can stand up to 'em, and you start, and then you back down, because you know you're taking a big gamble here.

P: You know, they were doing a mental beating on her...all..., ever since they been into the picture.

J: I mean, I was very close to suicide. Because it was like, I could not, that first summer, they seemed like they were here every other day! I know it wasn't that often, but it seemed to me like they were here every other day.

P: It's kinda like they kept after her because they knew they were, that they could, ahh, push her around to a certain point, ahh, where with me, I think I kinda, more gave, gave them
more the impression that, ahh,...that they, you know....

J: No, I don't think that was it. I think it was they knew I was emotionally vulnerable at the time. I think that they knew they could, you know,...they could say what they wanted and...I was, I was in such pieces, that I would go, O.K., you're right! You're right! I, I'll submit to whatever you think.

Not surprisingly, at other times, some of the parents chose to "oppose," or "engage," the Agency "with force," primarily through assertiveness or aggressiveness in interaction with the assigned caseworker (Diagram III). Only in one instance did a parent engage in direct personal action to protect their children or to recover them from the Agency's physical custody. In reality, because most of a parent's energy and resources were summoned to "work against" the caseworker and to "endure" the experience, this form of resistance, like withdrawal, appeared to be more of a "psychic collapse"---in this respect, a "surrender" to the impulses of frustration and despair---than a premeditated, strategic attempt to engage in "realistic" conflict, i.e. an attempt to gain proportionate political power in order to address the "objective" conditions of their circumstances or to overtly challenge the institutional legitimacy of the "child protective services system," itself.
In essence, engagement appeared to be necessary for these parents for two, important reasons. First, increased "assertiveness," or even "aggressiveness," in relation to the caseworker seemed to be associated with the parent's belief that this was the "only way" to achieve greater attention or responsiveness to their "case" by the assigned caseworker, the Agency, or the Juvenile Court, especially when combined with more vigorous representation by an attorney. Empirically, from the researcher's vantage, this may have been true. Second, "engagement" seemed to be essential to a parent's psychological "endurance," or "survival," of their struggle in relation to the overwhelming "power" of the Agency. In the comparatively few instances of its clearest manifestation, such behavior seemed to represent a parent's attempt to "escape" a "world" of fear and "powerlessness"---indeed, an act of Sartian "bad faith" (Fontana and Van de Water, 1977, p. 109)---in the face of (a) the actual, or possible, loss of their children, (b) the lack of responsiveness of the assigned caseworker or what a parent perceived as interminable delays in decision-making by the Agency or the Juvenile Court, or (c) both. Consequently, such behavior could only be "made intelligible" in the context of a parent's "commitment" to the "cause" of recovering, or regaining
custody of, their children or their struggle to get "free" of the Agency. In short, whenever parents believed they had to, and without appreciable regard for the consequences, they did what they could to expedite the achievement of these ends:

I: Do you—and I want you to be honest with me, as you have been, and I want you to be particularly honest about this—do you truly understand what this process is all about, or do you feel somewhat as though the process has its own momentum, it goes on and you do your best to make sense out of it? Do you feel you really understand what that process is about that you have been involved in with the Agency for a year?

D: No,...(slight embarrassment) I don't know, I don't understand it, I just...go on, just do what they tell me to do, like I been doin'. And when I see it's not gettin' me anywhere, that's when I step in,...go haywire.

I: But, your "stepping in" and "going haywire," that...mostly is just an emotional reaction, because you can't take it anymore?

D: Yeah, it's just,...you can only take so much. And then somethin' has to be done.

I: And when you get at that point, you're not really concerned what the consequences are of your actions, let's say, in terms of getting into conflict with them. All you know is this is the way you feel and you have some things you want them to know.

D: Mm-hmm. And I have the right...to say it!

I: Where does that right come from?

D: From me! (Smiles). From the Constitution!

I: It's obvious that you have a lot of frustration, a lot of unhappiness....
D: Yup....

I: And, it's fair to say, a lot of pain, inside, emotionally, about all of this....

D: Yeah,...mm-hmm....

I: A lot of unhappiness about the way the situation has been handled by the Agency, by the caseworker, by the supervisor,...what have you done with all of this unhappiness, this discontent with the way things have been handled here?

D: Well, I took a lot of it out on [the caseworker], every time somethin' came up that I felt wasn't right. I would call and jump all over [the caseworker].

I: So, you would get into direct conflict with [the caseworker]?

D: Uh-huh.

I: You didn't hesitate in getting into direct conflict with [the caseworker].

D: No, I went...face-to-face with [the caseworker] quite a few times. I told [the worker] just the way I felt.

I: Was that successful, or was that effective in getting [the caseworker]....

D: It's been pretty effective, and with my attorneys, it's been more effective. Because now the ball is rolling, where it should be, and the kids will be home, hopefully, when we go to Court, either [next month] or sometime this month, when my attorney gets a new Court date.

I: You don't agree with the fact that every ninety days...it takes ninety days to go back into Court....

D: They have it, to where it could be every thirty, sixty, or ninety. [The caseworker] always says, every ninety (said sarcastically). Which, I got on [the worker's] case, I called
my attorney because one Friday when we went to
pick up the kids, [the caseworker] gave me
this medical form, to fill out for [one of my
children], for Head Start. So I called my
attorney and he goes, do you know where this
school's at?...I said, yeah, it's over off
Baker Street, in Wallins Park. He goes, do
you think that's dangerous? I said, yeah! I
said, that shooting took place there. I said,
there's nothing but drug addicts and
everything over there. I said, that is a bad
neighborhood. He goes, you tell [the
caseworker] that you want [your child] pulled
from that school, and then [the caseworker] is
to call me! But, everytime I try to get a
hold-of [the caseworker], [the worker's] never
in [the] office, [the worker's] always out!
So, one Tuesday, me and my Mom's been
working through [a local business college],
handin' out their surveys...., and one Tuesday,
we took time out to go over there to [the
Agency], 'cause we weren't that far from
there. And [the caseworker] was just goin'
down the hall, as me and my Mom come in the
door and I told [the caseworker], I said, just
the person I been callin' and lookin' for!
[The caseworker] goes, what's up? I said, my
attorney told me to tell you to pull [my
child] from that school! And if she is not
pulled, he will get a Court order! And have
her pulled! Well, [the caseworker] goes,
well, I don't have time to talk to you, right
now. You can talk to my supervisor. [The
worker's] supervisor...just come in the back
door. I said, I didn't come to talk to [your
supervisor]! I said, I come to talk to you!
[The supervisor] goes, what's up? And I
said, I want [my child] pulled from over there
at Wallins Park Head Start. I said, that's
where..., he goes, why? I said, because
that's where a bunch of dope addicts and
everything else hang out! And his mouth
dropped, as if he didn't know there was a
bunch of dopers and everything else over
there! And [the caseworker] goes, well, I'm
not pullin' [your child] from that Head Start.
And you tell your attorney to call our
attorney! I called my attorney and told 'im.
He goes, that's it! I'm goin' to Court, I'm
getting a Court date sooner that March. He
goes, [the caseworker] is being a smart-Alec,
and I'm goin' to make it so as [the worker] loses [the worker's] job at [the Agency]. Everything's that said, [the caseworker] gets smart about it! And like I told [my spouse], I said, one of these times [the caseworker's] gonna get smart with me, I may go to jail, but I'm gonna pop [the worker] in the jaw! 'Cause every time I call, well, [the caseworker's] not here! Even though [the caseworker] is there! And sometimes [the worker will be in the building, and I'll have [the worker] paged. [The caseworker] doesn't answer his page. There's been times I had to get-ahold-of [the supervisor] and [the supervisor] says, well, I'll get-aholda [the caseworker]. I said, I've called five times! And [the caseworker's] never in [the worker's] office, [the worker's] always gone somewhere. [The supervisor] goes, well, I don't know where [the worker] could be all the time. [The supervisor] goes, well, I'll check into it.

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I: Now, having been told my [the caseworker] that they might take custody of this child....

M: It's like I told [the caseworker], try it and [the worker] will have a big, fuckin' fight on [the worker's] hands! I want to raise this [child] if I can.

I: And what would a "big, fuckin' fight" be?

M: I'd probably end up goin' to their [foster] homes and takin' the kids and just leave. (Pause). Because I'm tired of the bullshit. And what I'm saying about the bullshit is, they said a few times, it won't be long before you get your kids back, but 90% of the things I do, they dislike. Like I never understand, there's a lot of things they do I don't dislike, I mean, I dislike. You know, there's so much, they act like they are so much better than us, the people they got their kids. [The caseworker] sits here with no kids. [The caseworker] doesn't know what it's like, and [the worker] says, well, if I did have kids, this wouldn't happen to me. So, I asked [the worker], how do you know
this wouldn't happen to you? You aren't that special. It could happen to you (reference to interviewer), it could happen to anybody that's workin' here [at the Agency].

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I: You never have gotten to the point where you have outright conflict with [the caseworker], ... I mean, outright dispute with her, as you are talking to her.

B: I told her how I feel. I told her to go to hell! I told her, I told her, this is my [child], it didn't come out of you, it came out of me. I told her, what does she think she is, somebody special? And, she says, well, I know I'm somebody, I don't know what you are.... So, I told her to go straight to hell.

I: Let me ask you a general question, and this may be a bit vague, too, but,...you answered me very well, let me say. I really appreciate your taking the time. Umm,...in this situation, do you feel free?

B: No. I feel like I'm in a prison, locked-up in a cell...without my kids.

I: O.K., could you say some more to describe what you mean?

B: It feels like I don't have nothin' to live for. My kids are not around. Now, I do go into depression times and I do cry over my kids, 'cause I truly love 'em. I'd do anything in the world for my kids. But I can't do 'em without them being around. And it's hard, it's hard for me, to ahhh, to sit here and explain how I feel, because, like [what was previously said, I left the area],...because I was going to have a nervous breakdown. I had to get out-of [the city],.... Yes, I flew off-the-handle a couple of times with [the caseworker]. I won't lie about that, I have.... Because when I..., O.K., I went down and I told [the caseworker], these are exactly the words I said, 'Bitch, where's my kid?! Where's [my child]!?' Well, [your child's] not here. [The caseworker] says,
you to leave. So, I left.

As previously indicated, in only one instance did a parent engage in direct personal action to recover his children from the Agency's custody and to protect them from "being taken." As a result, he was arrested and subsequently charged with "criminal damaging," "assault," and "domestic violence." Nevertheless, the following excerpt presents a compelling account of this father's anguish, his struggle to "stay within the law," and his "only" recourse in the face of the "power" of the Agency and the loss of his children, particularly his youngest son. Indeed, his account is fitting testimony to the experience of the parents, the power of the "protective services system," and the nature of resistance when nothing else can be done.

I: ...Now, I'm Lebanese, I'm not going to take it. I don't know if you, an Italian, will take it. In our heritage, I cannot take it! ...I got up Friday. They send me a man from [the Agency].

E: Michael.

J: Michael.

E: Very nice.

J: He walked in, the first thing he said to me was, I don't know nothin' about this case, I just took it over. I said, what the hell you doin' here! I looked at him, here I am, forty years-old, I'm sittin', my God! Don't get me wrong,...I'm not knockin' him, but I'm sittin' down, having a twenty year-old interview me!
you're learnin' now, I've already forgot! You send, you send a mature person, you send...qualified people. I don't, I don't care to be doctor, I can't be doctor! Ahh, you don't send somebody that doesn't know, ahh,...excuse my English, ahh, his ass from a hole in the ground, you know! You send a qualified person! To interview and know the situation. I said, are you married? He said, no. What the hell you know about children?! He said, well, I want, ahh...to talk to you for a minute. I said, I'll talk to you, but I want to tell you one thing: if my children are not home tonight, I'll go and pick them up myself! I am going to pick them up! I said, don't think it's a threat. No threat! You better do whatever you can, study your case fast, and bring my children back home! But, I'm going to go get 'em. Come six, he said, well, O.K., give me until five o'clock. Five o'clock came, nothing. All this time, my lawyer present, you know. Now you're talking about two days the lawyer conferencing with me! Six, seven o'clock,...no answer. The caseworker is not here, [the investigating caseworker] is not down there. You know, in other words, they take the kids, they take vacations, they don't give a shit what happens to you! You wait! So, ahh,...I got up, I put my jacket on, I got up to leave. I was going up to get the children! To pick up the children! My cousin walked in, he wouldn't let me. We started talkin', he wouldn't let me. I said, fine. ...He said, don't do that, you know, take it through the legal procedures. I said, fine, you know, I went back to sleep. I couldn't sleep. I woke up Saturday morning, I couldn't sleep. I put myself in the car, I said I would be back, and I left. I went to their house [acquaintances of the family who were serving as foster parents]. The way I look at it is, if I have your children and you are a friend of mine, and I see you coming, welcome, come on in. Now, you know me. I know you. I want my rights. I go and knock on the door and see who is there, to see who wants to come with me, come on! I'm not going to just snatch them and put five children in the car! I go to knock on the door, I saw, they had a big window there, which of
the children inside, and puttin' deadbolt lock on! And my little one [boy] is calling me from the inside....I said, ahh, open the door. [The foster mother] wouldn't open it. I kicked the door in.... I walked in, she went to the phone, she want to call the police. I broke the phone, I said, I cut the wire off. I said, you don't be afraid of me, I did not break in to steal. You call after I leave. I called my son, he came to me. I put him in the car....So, ahh, I go back to get my other children,...I lost the keys. And all this time, the keys are in the car and the car is running. I just,...you know, lost it. I put my first son in the car, I go back in to get him out..., it was chilly outside. I said, well, I have to walk with him. So, I went back, took my children out of the car, started walkin' on the street, called a cab, I came home. Five minutes later, Jack Taylor,...he's a Juvenile Detective, called me. And I've know Jack Taylor for twenty years. He said,...I have your daughters and the [foster parents], here. I want to talk to you. He said, I want to talk to you. I said, if you want to talk to me, you're welcome. If you are coming to take my son,...forget it. You are not taking my little one out. I believe in one thing, possession is three-quarters ownership. And, if you cannot believe that, you cannot take him, take me back to Court. Let me have my day in Court. He said, no,...I don't see any abuse signs on your daughter whatsoever. But, I don't,...abuse, I mean, you can tell an abuser. If I get up, now, and you are my son, and I slap you, is that abuse? If you said something to me or said, is that abuse or do you call that abuse? So, ahh, he said they want to press charges, and I wouldn't let them, I said, go to the prosecutor, he wouldn't let them, because he knows me. He said, O.K., I'll go see the prosecutor Monday. I took my son to see my sister, to stay with my sister, and they went to sign the warrant on Monday on me. I went downtown, I signed....

E: He [the Juvenile Detective] told us to take my son to...his sister's....
J: ....I signed my name, and I left. Now, trying to get the other children back.... They want to meet with me, I refused to meet with [the investigating caseworker]! I will not meet with [the investigating caseworker]! I met with her once, and I will never meet with her again. To me, like I say, she's a feminist, and I don't like feminists! They might appeal to you, [the investigating caseworker] might love you because you say yes, ma'am, no ma'am! Not me! I kept insisting on, just, fine! I abused my daughter. You call it abuse, I abused her.

...You can put it in the record, if the Agency gets involved anymore, the first guy that gets involved will be dead. Will be actually dead, because I cannot fight them financially anymore, now, anymore. Before, I had the resources to fight them financially. To go within the law, and the law says, don't take the law into your own hands, take it to Court. Right? I took them to Court. It cost me every dollar I had, and I beat 'em. Now, they don't want to get involved, again, because now I don't have the finances to take them to Court, again. Now, I take them to my Court. Stay away from me. That's the way I believe in it, now. But, to tell you I am afraid, now,...if they get involved, the Agency will not be involved with me, anymore. As a matter of fact, it's [the caseworker]! I don't like [the caseworker]! I guarantee you, I will not allow [the caseworker] to have input here, now. I'll tell [the caseworker] to get the hell out of here, go tell your boss I said that! But, I like [the caseworker]. [The caseworker] was always nice.

I: But you have to do "what you have to do."

J: That what we do, I have to do what I have to do. And, they will never get involved in my life, anymore. You know, you put a cat against the wall, and, ahh, she wants to jump on you. You throw her a piece of meat. She shut-up! But, then she keep jumping on you, and you don't have any more meat. What do you do, let
her jump on you?! No! You do anything to defend yourself. That's exactly the way I feel now.

If you asking me, I am not afraid. 'Cause I know they will not, this time. Because, like I said, I'm sorry to say it, you live within the law, you expect others to live within the law. You live within the law, you expect others to live within the law! If somebody would touch my kids, anymore, he's dead! I'm not going to take it to the law, anymore, he's a dead man! That's one thing you cannot...play with! It's not a bit if you owe me, you pay me tomorrow, or I'll take you to Court, so you sue me! My gut feeling, now, they better not try it! Because they gonna have a rage on their hands!

I: ...The slightest indication that someone would take them, if the Agency would take them, again, you would respond with....

J: I would respond...wildly!....

I: You say you would behave 'wildly,' now.

J: Yes, I will.

I: 'Wildly' means what?

J: It means, whatever it takes.

I: You would resist with violence?

J: Whatever it takes! I, you know, you might say, you put in your book, whatever it takes! You don't play with somebody's life, somebody's family....
CHAPTER 5

Symptoms of Injustice

'...And now I advise you,' he went on, 'to go to your room, stay quietly there, and wait for what may be decided about you. Our advice to you is not to let yourself be distracted by vain thoughts, but to collect yourself, for great demands will be made upon you. You haven't treated us as our kind advances to you deserved, you have forgotten that we, no matter who we may be, are at least free men compared to you; that is no small advantage. All the same, we are prepared, if you have any money, to bring you a little breakfast from the coffeehouse across the street...'

Franz Kafka
The Trial

Ann Hartman (1990) recently reminded social workers that "the boundaries" of the field of social work are "wide and deep."

We are concerned about the nature of our society, about social policy, social justice, and social programs. We are concerned about human associations, about communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and families. We are concerned about the life stories and the inner experiences of the people we serve and about the meaning to them of their experiences. No one way of knowing can explore this vast and varied territory (p. 4).

The qualitative research reported here joins that "exploration" in several ways. First, and most important, as an example of "interpretive social science," the study responds to the need for an increased knowledge, and "understanding," of the perceptions and
experiences of "involuntary," or "mandated," clients in at least one field of social work practice. Second, based upon the researcher's interpretation of the findings, the study offers a limited, but important, opportunity for an analysis of child welfare "practice" as a selective "social policy" in the United States. In essence, while each of these conclusions will be elaborated in this chapter, the conditions and problems of practice in public child welfare will be addressed first. It seems necessary at the outset to identify the factors and circumstances that affect, or "constrain," this field of social work practice and that may predict ---if not determine---the experiences, and behavior, of at least some of the parents who become entangled in the "system."

I. **Social Work Practice in Public Child Welfare**

Inasmuch as three decades of social change have resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number and complexity of responsibilities, or "demands," that have been imposed upon public child welfare agencies by local communities, it is not surprising to discover that social work practitioners remain impaled by several critical---and seemingly intractable---problems that affect many
things, including the outcome of protective service delivery with parents who are "reported" for alleged child abuse and neglect. Nevertheless, in order to fully "grasp" the experiences of these parents, as "shaped" by involvement in the "protective services system," it is necessary to know something about the setting, itself, its problems, and its effect upon those who "intervene" in families and provide "protection" for children.

First, the field of public child welfare has the unfortunate distinction of being a service delivery system in which the lack of public and professional consensus regarding a definition of "child maltreatment" continues to encumber agencies who, nevertheless, tend to be held exclusively responsible for its "detection" and "treatment." "The definitional dilemma currently poses both ethical and technological problems for practitioners," observes Elizabeth Hutchinson (1990).

Child welfare workers cannot ethically engage in coercive interventions into family life without a clear sense that they represent social standards rather than individual practitioner, professional, institutional, or administrative agendas. Further, practice ethics as well as practice technology require child welfare workers to inform involuntary clients of the thresholds at which coercive action will be initiated. The ambiguity in existing definitions provides insufficient guidance to child welfare workers for such case management activities. (p. 63).
In addition, even less agreement abounds with regard to several, other concepts of immense importance to the field---such as what constitutes "the best interests of a child," what represents the essentials of "child well-being," or what characterizes the "healthy family"---leaving child welfare caseworkers, among others in the "protective services system," with few, consistent "guidelines" for assessment, decision-making, or "intervention" in the situations of families, including the specification of a clear set of "grounds" for the "removal" of a child from his or her family (Seaberg, 1990, p. 297).

Second, as previously suggested, despite unequivocal public and professional expectations that mandated organizations should, at all times, "protect" and provide "care" for "abused, neglected, and dependent children," there remains an additional lack of consensus regarding the nature and scope of those responsibilities as embodied in statutory law, and as specified within what are typically perceived as the "muddy" regulations of federal and state agencies that monitor the delivery of such services. Consequently, several important ethical and legal issues have not been resolved. For example, how "strictly" should a public child welfare agency's legal "mandate" be construed? If such agencies
are primarily responsible for the "protection" of "abused, neglected, and dependent" children, to what extent can, or should, these agencies be held accountable for, alleged "violations" of the "rights" and "interests" of parents? Furthermore, if it is decided that the legal "mandate" of public child welfare agencies should, indeed, be "strictly construed," who, or what agency, should represent or serve the needs, "rights," and interests of the parents embroiled in the process?

Third, and inextricably linked to the aforementioned difficulties, are problems related to the accuracy, adequacy, or effectiveness of the decision-making by public child welfare caseworkers, at all phases of the process of service delivery. While examples abound, no better reflection of such substantive difficulties can be cited than those associated with, and directly resultant, from the federal requirement that child welfare agencies "assure"---in all instances---that "reasonable efforts will be made (a) prior to the placement of a child in foster, to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from his home, and (b) to make it possible for the child to return to his home" ("Public Law 96-272," United States Statutes At Large, 1980: 94 STAT.503). "It seems clear that the objective of the legislation and the administrative rules,"
observed James Seaberg (1986), "was to provide...a structured procedure that featured external and presumably more objective monitoring by the courts to ensure that children were no longer allowed to drift in the foster care system and that parents' rights to parent their own children were protected."

It should be noted that the level of accountability presumed here is mid-level, 'reasonable.' One might think of 'reasonable effort' as the mid-point on a continuum from 'no or little effort' to 'extremely diligent effort.'...The question, then, is what are the cutting points between these levels of effort, especially between 'no or little effort' and 'reasonable effort?' How do we qualify and quantify this concept? These questions are still being asked by judges, state agency administrators, and local service providers. (p. 471).

In other words, the problem is this: how can agency administrators---indeed, the practitioners, themselves!--be certain that the decision-making, and actions, of caseworkers in specific "cases" reflect "reasonable efforts" when---once again---the practical translation of the principle underpinning such a requirement remains vague, inconsistent, and controversial?

Fourth, despite the proliferation of "demonstration projects" promoting the concept of "family-centered, home-based services," or some version of "intensive casework" approaches to preventing the foster placement of children from "high-risk" families (Stehno, 1986; Barth and Berry, 1987; Frankel, 1988), the field of
public child welfare, by all accounts, continues to rely on a service delivery, or "case management," model that tends to (a) focus on parental "failure," "weakness," or "pathology" (Weick, et.al., 1989) as the justification for "interventions" in such families, especially those in which parents may not otherwise be willing to seek "help," (b) depend on the use of coercion and "punishment," both civil and criminal, through the adversarial processes of the juvenile and criminal courts (Hutchinson, 1990) and (c) remain "paternalistic," to the extent that the "control" and "direction" of the interaction and decision-making with the "client"---including the crucial determination of what parental "rights" and "liberties," if any, shall be recognized and respected---rests with the public child welfare caseworker, with little, or no, "invitation" to the "client" to "join" the worker in a mutual examination and resolution of the family's difficulties (Heger and Hunzeker, 1988; Hogan and Siu, 1988). Certainly, there are complex, historical reasons for this inertia. Certainly, there are child welfare caseworkers whose "practice" departs from these norms. Nevertheless, it is disappointing to discover that the potential contributions of more progressive models of service delivery have avoided, or ignored, for various reasons,
the pervasive needs of "abusive" or "neglectful" families. As Harvey Frankel (1988) has concluded, "Given their comprehensive and intensive approach, home-based services would appear to be especially well suited for cases of child abuse and neglect. Yet many programs are simply not intended to serve this population, and others exclude them indirectly through their selection criteria" (p. 143).

Current procedures for verifying and intervening in reported cases of child abuse and neglect provide some clues about the reasons for the relatively low frequency of maltreating families served by home-based programs. The emphasis on ensuring the child's immediate physical safety and the limited family intervention skills of child welfare workers create a bias toward out-of-home care. Situations that are not serious enough to warrant immediate intervention are often closed at investigation, or referred to family service or mental health agencies. In addition, social workers are not likely to view seriously abusive families as candidates for home-based services, although they may view neglectful families as likely to benefit from such programs. Overall, this limits the population of protective service families available for referral to family-centered, home-based services, a model that is designed to prevent imminent placement. (Frankel, 1988, p. 143-4).

Finally, and perhaps most sobering, it is important to recognize what many in the field of social work have referred to as the "staffing crisis" in public child welfare, a symptom of injustice to many of those who earnestly labor there, and a reflection of more serious and pervasive administrative problems facing local
agencies across the country. 27 "Understaffing," inadequate education and training, low salaries and high caseloads, along with increasingly complex, and overwhelming, family problems----including rampant alcohol and drug addiction among parents and children---continue to pose substantial obstacles to the improvement of what Alvin Schorr (1974) once described as a "poor system for poor children." Moreover, local agencies that somehow "survive" the "threats" from within must then escape an increasing "threat" from without: charges of organizational and professional "negligence" in the protection of children or "malpractice" in the delivery of specific services to families, including an increasing number of lawsuits associated with the placement of "special needs" children with adoptive families. Consequently, it is reasonable to question the extent to which perceived "liability"---or, the practice of "defensive social work"---affects the "screening" of

"reports" that are received by an agency (Wells, et. al., 1989), as well as specific decisions by caseworkers—in the face of indeterminacy—to conduct rigorous "investigations" and to abruptly "remove" children from "marginal" homes in order to avoid the possibility of "error" and the administrative or legal sanctions that might follow. Indeed, as one supervisor of a "protective services unit" succinctly put it, "No caseworker is going to get into trouble for doing extreme investigations or even unfairly removing a child from a home, as long as there is some concern about a child's safety.

It's just like they used to tell us when I was in business school: You can't get into trouble for buying IBM. Caseworkers who operate that way are probably what an agency needs in order to protect the organization from liability.

Overall, it is obvious that social work practice in public child welfare is constrained by numerous practical, "technical," legal, and organizational problems. Consequently, in the face of such irrepressible conditions—too frequently intensified by the realities of "practice" in the living rooms of decaying houses or "on the streets" of isolated, frightening neighborhoods held "hostage" by poverty and crime—the question remains: how adequate, effective, or "fair" can social work practice be with parents who do not request, nor want, any "help?"
II. "Resistance" as Political Dissent

"Client resistance is...the primary barrier to successful engagement of the mandated client and presents the greatest challenge for social work technology" (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 591). In essence, the current research has embraced that "challenge." The study contributes to an increased "understanding" of (a) parental perceptions of the use of authority, or "power," by public child welfare caseworkers, (b) what it "means" to some families to be subject to "interventions" or to have their children "removed" from their custody and care and (c) the nature and "meaning" of "resistance" as it may be displayed by some "involuntary clients" in response to their experience in the "protective services system." In one respect, the findings tend to "support" one of Elizabeth Hutchinson's (1987) arguments, namely, since a "mandated client did not seek service, the opposition to the client role is a conscious refusal to participate.

This opposition may be manifested in several different ways: reluctance, hesitance, evasion, withdrawal, hostility, sarcasm, submission, or passive resistance. Furthermore, the opposition may represent fear, distrust, hopelessness, injured self-esteem, or a different view of the client's situation. (p. 593).
In another respect, in light of the parents' sharp criticisms of the "misuse," or "abuse," of "power" by caseworkers during "investigations" and throughout protracted "case management," the findings cast doubt on Hutchinson's (1987) neat prescription for such "resistance": citing Siporin's (1975) description of "social work practice" with "involuntary applicants," Hutchinson maintains that "the beginning problem-to-be-worked is to help him undertake the role of client...." (p. 594-5).

Limited by what she later admits is the need for more "empirical" knowledge of "how mandated clients perceive their involuntary status" (p.596), Hutchinson's recommendation is, nevertheless, far from palatable. In essence, her perspective derives from and, in turn, reinforces a basic "clinical" assumption associated with the conventional notion of "resistance" and the function of "treatment" or "casework" in "breaking through" or "reducing" this "barrier" to "client engagement": inasmuch as a parent's "involuntary" status is believed to substantially contribute to "resistance," persuading a parent to willingly---or "voluntarily"---accept, or "cooperate" with, services is perceived by practitioners as the "first step" toward a reduction or elimination of "resistance." Needless to say, as confirmed by the
research findings, such an assumption—or judgment—by caseworkers in relation to some parents "accused" of child abuse, or neglect, is not only faulty, but potentially hazardous, especially when incorporated in subsequent "casework" decisions to "leave" children in their own homes or to "return" them to the custody and care of previously "abusive" or "neglectful" parents. In specific, the current research makes several, important contributions to a clearer "understanding" of "resistance."

First, it appears that parents involved with public child welfare agencies on a "voluntary" or "involuntary" basis—despite the latter being "reported" against their wishes—may not always represent mutually exclusive groups. Indeed, while such "labels" reflect neat "professional categories," parents are not so easily—or accurately—differentiated, especially after they become "immersed" in service delivery. For example, many of the parents who participated in the study, and who were considered "involuntary clients," had "voluntarily" sought help at some point during their involvement with the Agency, including instances in which they "reported" themselves to the Agency because of situational problems or "crises" involving the care of their children. Not surprisingly, this finding seems to "confirm" a recent
judgment by Wells, et. al. (1989), that "families who are not alleged to be abusive or neglectful but who need services and who are willing to accept them should not have to bear the burden and stigma of an investigation to receive help.

The protective service mission should be balanced by providing community- and state-supported services on a voluntary basis to those in need. (p. 48).

Consequently, in light of the research findings, it is clear that an explanation, and solution, for "client" behavior as complex as "resistance" cannot be fully achieved by simply attempting to "connect" it to "changes" in a construct as imprecise---in reality---as the nature of the "client's" status in relation to the service delivery system, especially in the field of public child welfare.

Second, as the study strongly suggests, parental behavior that is perceived, and defined, by child welfare caseworkers as "cooperation" may actually be a form of resistance: a conscious, rational---and, in the extreme, pernicious---form of adaptive behavior---that is intended to (a) achieve some measure of "power" in relation to the caseworker, agency, and Juvenile Court, (b) to affect, influence, or "shape" the perceptions of the child welfare caseworker, and (c) to purposefully advance
parental interests and to achieve specific ends, i.e. to "get their children back" or to "free themselves from involvement with the Agency. Consequently, in the extreme, the sudden "appearance" of "cooperative" behavior by a parent may not only be "seductive," but as ominous, insidious and potentially lethal as "spontaneous remission" in a chronically depressed, markedly suicidal person. Indeed, such "resistance"---as a "toxic" adaptive behavior---may contribute to the occurrence, or reoccurrence, of severe physical or sexual abuse of children by some parents who are otherwise described as "cooperative" with "treatment" by caseworkers, mental health practitioners, and others involved with the family. As a result, for public child welfare agencies to be successful in "breaking through" or "reaching" "involuntary clients," "resistance," as a form of adaptive behavior, must be recognized, understood, and addressed.

Change must occur at two levels. First, as previously indicated, client-based evaluations of the "outcomes" of protective service delivery have been neglected or avoided in the field of public child welfare, especially with regard to practice with "involuntary clients." Nevertheless, the current findings strongly suggest that the alienation, discontent
and dissent expressed by some parents during, and throughout, the process of service delivery may be symptoms of injustice—-not necessarily indications of "immaturity," "low intelligence," "drug addiction," or "emotional disturbance." Clearly, some form of administrative "mechanism" must be developed to consistently and impartially "hear" the criticisms of parents, to seriously mediate complaints, and to provide an appropriate remedy in instances in which an identifiable wrong has been committed by a caseworker or other practitioner involved with a family. Indeed, truly protecting children in their own homes does appear to depend upon many things, including an organization's willingness to consider all of the reasons that parents are, or become, "hard-to-reach," and why some caseworkers, in particular, "fail" to "engage" them. In short, public child welfare agencies must develop the capacity to honestly and legitimately evaluate parental discontent or dissent—-including the ability to distinguish it from parental "reactions" that are unrelated to perceptions of authority, and "power"—if the "protective services system" is ever to be effective and, at the same time, fair in its "treatment" of families.
Second, the research findings suggest that in daily practice, (1) it is imperative that caseworkers understand the extent to which (a) any "misuse," or "abuse," of the agency's authority, or "power," at any time in interaction with a parent or throughout the process of "case management," or (b) disrespect of parental "rights"---as codified in statutory law or as personally "constructed," and endowed with "meaning," by the parents, themselves---may contribute to, or exacerbate, a parent's fear and sense of "powerlessness" in relation to the agency and the development of "resistance," as previously described. In addition, (2) it appears essential that caseworkers understand and "control" the professional or personal biases that lead them to undervalue, or fully disregard, the discontent, disagreement---and criticisms---that may be expressed by parents as a result of their experiences in the "protective service system." Clearly, caseworkers cannot ignore such complaints, or quickly rationalize them as "evidence" of "denial," without the risk of immediate, and potentially enduring, "damage" to a parent's sense of "trust" in the caseworker as "someone who understands," "cares," and "who is really there to help them." Narrowly defining "resistance," in purely "clinical" terms---or choosing to completely avoid, or ignore, such
issues, if "outside" of the caseworker's immediate responsibilities or concerns---will fail to recognize parental "adaptations" for what they might be---a suppression of legitimate political dissent---that will (a) confound and distort the "helping relationship," (b) subvert the "casework" process and, at worst, (c) when combined with a parent's pre-existing psychological disturbance, drug addiction, or both, place vulnerable children at even greater "risk" of harm.

III. Future Directions

The findings of the study, along with a "secondary" analysis of data gleaned from the interviews and the Agency's "case records," provide a useful foundation for a wider discussion of (a) several dimensions of social work practice, especially with those who have been "reported" for child "abuse" or "neglect" and who are "involuntarily" involved with public child welfare agencies, and (b) the nature of the legal process underpinning current public child welfare policy in the United States. The importance of further research---both qualitative and quantitative---that is required to build upon the findings is also described.
Implications for Social Work Practice

A. Assessment

"Social work assessment is the cornerstone of the social work relationship with any client," observes Mary Rodwell (1987).

It is essential to problem definition and the development of the helping relationship in any social work environment. Given its importance, it is striking that this significant piece of social work process often seems to fail to capture a truly relevant understanding of the subject being studied. (p. 231).

What is striking upon examination of the situations of the parents involved in the study---specifically, upon analysis of their accounts, as reflected in the transcripts, and the accounts of caseworkers, and others, as embodied in the Agency's "case records"---is the absence of any real "understanding" of the thoughts, feelings, and overall circumstances of the parents that was documented by those who maintained such power over the parents' lives. It is important to note, however, that such a judgment rests solely upon the researcher's review of the formal "reports" and "case summaries" that were contained in "structured case recording" regarding each of the subjects; indeed, as Edwards and Reid (1989) recently suggested, the child welfare caseworkers involved with these parents may perceive, and "manage,"
"structured case records" in the same way as their counterparts in 57 local Departments of Social Services in New York:

The data suggest that workers object to spending time on paperwork tasks they perceive as repetitious, lacking in relevance, and taking time away from direct service activities. ....Workers may cope with incompatible service-control features of the record (in this instance, meeting time limits) by recording distorted or unsubstantiated information. (Edwards and Reid, 1989, p. 50).

The majority of the "case summaries" that were included in the study appeared to reflect workers' "consciousness" of possible administrative scrutiny of their "casework," presenting a literary style, and "tone," that seemed more "defensive" and self-acquitting than intimate or "involved" with their "clients." Notwithstanding such limitations, it was evident that significant differences, or "distance," existed between the "worlds" of the parents and their assigned caseworkers, reflecting not only "cognitive discrepancies" in the encounter, or "collision," as Howard Goldstein (1986a) has emphasized, but a preoccupation with their respective interests, goals, and requirements for "survival."

Such a "gap" between caseworkers and parents---if, indeed, as pervasive as these findings reveal---would support Rodwell's (1987) judgment of the "failure" of prevailing social work "models" of "assessment":
Models of assessment have directed practitioners to limit sets of variables, reduce uncertainty, and provide clients with tidy explanations for problems. But commitment to such social work values as the self-worth, dignity, and uniqueness of the individual as well as client self-determination has meant that the assessment process must also maintain attention to the uniqueness of the individual or the setting and must consider the client's view of the circumstance. The tension created by these contrasting expectations suggests a reason why each apparently new model of assessment is rejected, modified, or replaced because of its failure to perform fully and completely as desired. (p. 236).

Consequently, there is good reason to embrace the study's hermeneutic approach to "understanding" as a useful, and effective, "model" for "assessment." It is derived from, and contributes to, an alternative "paradigm" of social work practice that has been conceptualized by others during the past decade as "cognitive-humanism" (Goldstein, 1981, 1982, 1986a, 1986b), "naturalistic assessment" (Rodwell, 1987), or "meaning construction" (Scott, 1989). For example, as Dorothy Scott recently concluded, "meaning construction is central to the way social workers practice. Through a naturalistic and interpretive mode of inquiry, the practitioner seeks to decipher what events mean to the client and significant others, both at the intrasubjective and intersubjective levels of analysis" (1989, p. 49). Indeed, the development and expansion of hermeneutically-informed research provides the clearest demonstration of the
utility, effectiveness, and "common sense" of this "new" practice "paradigm."

B. Empowerment

The findings of the study suggest that the conceptual framework represented in Figure 1, "Treatment as Political Process," may underestimate the extent to which parents preserve or develop (a) a "political consciousness" of their situations and (b) the "capacity" to act on their "knowledge" of the Agency's "power," and their beliefs about their own interests, needs, and "rights," as a result of their struggle---in interaction with their assigned caseworker, and others in the "protective service system"---to "make sense of" and to cope with their circumstances in relation to the Agency. In essence, the "determinism" of the "formal" theory, namely, that "treatment," "casework," or "case management," serves to (1) obstruct the "visibility" of actual sociopolitical conditions underpinning family vulnerability, (2) to suppress, deter, or disperse parental dissatisfaction and dissent, and (3) to reduce the potential for "realistic conflict," i.e. parental "knowledge" and "capacity" for direct political action in response to those conditions, appears to be misplaced:
while each of these parents may have been constrained by the "hard facts" of their situations, and overall life circumstances, they appeared (1) to discern their socioeconomic and political "vulnerabilities, especially in relation to the Agency, (b) to sustain and rationally re-direct their dissatisfaction and dissent in response to the perceived "power" of the assigned caseworker, and (c) to develop---not "lose"---the "knowledge" and "capacity" to "realistically" undertake a form of political action in response to the practical conditions of their situations. Such was the "power" of otherwise "powerless" parents. As a result, there is an important implication for the development of "strategies" to "empower" parents involved with public child welfare agencies.

It appears that "involuntary clients" may need less help with "redefining what they expect of themselves as parents and as people" (Heger and Hunzeker, 1988, p. 501) and more of what Stephen Rose and Bruce Black (1985) refer to as the development of the kind of "critical reflection" and "evaluation of action" that are essential to a "social action strategy" that can adequately "respond to the concrete issues in people's lives" (p. 128). For example, Rose and Black have described eight "common principles" of advocacy, and "empowerment,"
with former "mental patients" who have "returned" to the local community, each of which exemplifies the kind of support that may be needed by, and with, "involuntary clients" who become involved with public child welfare agencies:

1. The prerequisite of understanding how to redefine clients' problems as a conscious component of practice. This social-being orientation allows us to see clients not just as mental patients incapable of any action on their own, but as oppressed people who endure both objectively grounded domination, poverty and powerlessness and subjective invalidation as well. These constitute what we have called the 'compelling themes' of daily life.

2. The struggle to generate dialogue with each person, thus posing a challenge to the person's mental patient identity. This process is done by listening critically to the complaints and problems presented, by introducing into the communication a real interest in having the person elaborate perceptions and feelings, and by seeking to reconnect or 'recontextualize' feelings/perceptions to objective and understandable circumstances.

3. After supporting sequential elaboration, and seeking to connect people to one another, seeking to help people move beyond the descriptions of reality to an understanding of its causes.

4. The struggle to gain causal understanding of clients' descriptive material by creating interim themes out of the descriptive material based on our critical understanding of the reality shared by our clients. We use this critical understanding to represent material back to people that they have shared with us, filtered through our critical perspective as embodied in the interim themes we choose.
5. After elaborating the themes, we again seek the opportunity to synthesize discussion, identify thematic patterns and attempt to reformulate problems. This process is referred to as problematization, the arriving at new problem definitions through thematic dialogue.

6. Having come to new understandings of problem situations, new action strategies become possible. These strategies are carefully discussed with clients, extending dialogue into action. Each strategy is sketched out by its creator, analyzed carefully by all to see if it does define the problem in accordance with the problematization, and then projected into an action format to determine if the people can assess potential risks and benefits.

7. Joining with clients in any action that advances their control over their own lives and that appears to be merited by the situation.

8. Learning to examine critically any actions as process and outcomes. (p. 127-8).

Needless to say, it is questionable---and, probably, inappropriate---to expect that a public agency charged with the legal responsibility to "control" or "regulate" relationships within families, to assure "adequate parental care" of dependent children, and to "protect" them from "abuse" or "neglect," can---or should---engage in the kind of advocacy and "empowerment" that appears to be needed by parents entangled in the "protective services system." There is good reason. Such a "social action strategy" with "involuntary clients" requires an absolute commitment to the
principles of "client" freedom and autonomy, and a degree of political mobilization of relatively isolated parents that would fundamentally challenge the current "model" of "case management"—as previously described—that tends to obviate, rather than enhance, parental "control" of their lives and their relationships to their children. It is possible that the latter ends can only be achieved through parents' participation in "mutual support groups" or through advocacy by social work practitioners who are employed outside of public child welfare agencies. Nevertheless, as Julian Rappaport (1985) has emphasized, "If empowerment is our aim, we will find ourselves questioning both our public policy and our role relationship to dependent people.

We will not settle for a public policy of programs designed, operated, or packaged for social agencies to use on people, because we will require that the form and the unspoken implications, as well as the content, be consistent with empowerment. It will cause us to confront the paradox that even people most incompetent, in need, and apparently unable to function require more, rather than less, control over their own lives; and that fostering more control does not necessarily mean ignoring them. Empowerment presses a different set of metaphors upon us than the traditional helping model. (p. 18).
C. "Negative" or "Critical" Social Networks

Upon secondary analysis of the "case records" of the parents involved in the study, it was apparent that each of them were, or became, more "visible" in the community, for various reasons, and were more "vulnerable" to identification and multiple "reporting" to the Agency for alleged child abuse or neglect. For the most part, the majority of such "reports" emanated from maternal and paternal grandparents, siblings of one or both parents, or persons otherwise specified as "friends" of the family. Furthermore, while there appeared to be a lack of predictability and consistency in the Agency's decision-making regarding those "reports," i.e. when and when not, to "intervene" in a family's circumstances, in most instances, the Agency directly "investigated" any allegation and only rarely dismissed a "complaint" as frivolous. The implications of these findings, if widespread among families who become involved with public child welfare agencies, are important in several respects.

First, "false accusations" of child abuse or neglect may, indeed, be widespread and precipitate unnecessary "investigations" of families for any reason,
not simply because of a "report" of alleged sexual abuse of a child (Dillon, 1987). Second, whether or not a family is "reported" to a public child welfare agency may have more to do with the presence of a "negative" or "critical member" in their "social network" than the extent to which such families are disproportionately "known" or "visible" to public agencies. Clearly, the latter would explain a family's increased "vulnerability" to mandated "reporting" by certain "professionals," but not the multiple—and frequently false—"reports" that tend to emerge from a parent's "social network."

For example, Elizabeth Tracey (1990) examined the "social support resources" of 45 families "at risk" of "disruption" through "out-of-home placement" of minor children and reached the following conclusion, among others:

Results...suggest that the amount of conflict in a network may be an important assessment factor. The proportion of critical network members was negatively related to emotional support. The majority of respondents had one or more people in their network, primarily household members and relatives, who were almost always critical of them. There was also some evidence that single parents' networks contained a higher proportion of problematic people. Overall, the findings suggest that interventions to decrease aversive interactions may be needed in addition to those designed to increase socially supportive behaviors. (p. 255).

Indeed, it is evident that quantitative research is
needed to determine whether or not "negative" or "critical" members of a parent's social network may tend to misuse, or manipulate, child welfare "reporting" laws, especially their guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as what may be a lack of criminal enforcement of penalties for deliberately "false" or "malicious complaints" that are made regarding a family. If such conditions actually prevail in local communities, reducing the social isolation of, and "stress" within, "high-risk" families will require a "short circuiting" of this pernicious social process.

D. Occupational "Subcultures" and the Use of "Power"

An important implication of the current study, and a fertile area for further qualitative research, centers on the question as to how public child welfare caseworkers "justify" the use of authority, or "power," in "interventions," or practice, with families "reported" for child abuse or neglect. William Waegel's (1984) study of how police officers "justified" the "use of lethal force against citizens" may hint at what might be a similar occupational process underpinning decisions by child welfare caseworkers to invoke the authority of a police officer, or the Juvenile Court, to abrogate parental custody and to "remove" a child from a home:
...The occupational subculture of the police involves a set of understandings, beliefs, practices, and a language for talking about all problematic aspects of their work, including the shooting and killing of citizens. This perspective includes both prospective beliefs that influence the decisions of officers to use their weapons, and retrospective interpretations of events that have already occurred. The prospective beliefs might be called 'techniques of neutralization' because they permit officers to violate both the general cultural prohibition against taking life and sometimes also the specific regulations of the police department and the law about the circumstances under which the police may use their weapons. The retrospective elements may be called 'vocabularies of motives' or 'accounts'; they reveal the specific ways people either excuse or justify their actions when required to do so. (Naegel, 1984, p. 145).

Exercising the latitude and flexibility accorded them by the civil process of state child protection laws—and exploiting the freedom that is afforded, and shaped, by their "direct service" positions—it is possible that caseworkers develop the equivalent of such "cop's rules" in order to resolve the ambiguities—and "threats"—of daily practice that abound in the field of public child welfare. If this is true, changing the way caseworkers use—or "misuse"—their authority and "power" may have less to do with the reform of statutes or policy, than the nature and extent of the organizational "subcultures," or ideologies, that may actually
influence, or determine, the judgments and decision-making of a caseworker "at the front door."

Implications for Social Policy

*Family Law and State Power: A Final Analysis*

While it is certainly not possible to examine the philosophy and development of family law in the United States as others, such as Laurence Houlgate (1988), have done, the findings of the study---supported by a "secondary" analysis of data gathered from the "case records" of each parent---suggest the importance of a final commentary on the legal, and political, processes underpinning the practice of "child protection" and their relevance for current policy regarding the use of "power" by local public child welfare agencies. Twenty-five years ago, Jacobus tenBroek (1964, 1965) offered a thorough treatise on the origins and history of family law in California that provides, among other things, three insights that serve to frame the following conclusions. First, tenBroek argued that a "separate" and "unequal" "family law of the poor" emerged in the United States from several sources, but principally, Elizabethan Poor Law.
The Elizabethan poor law system proved an historical repository and a fertile source of special legal provisions about the poor. These governed their subjection to public control, their condition of idleness and labor, their freedom of choice of living arrangements, their right to travel and settle where they pleased, their personal and civil rights, and their family relationships. Regulation of those family relationships included the denial or subordination of parental rights to custody, control, and determination of training or education, the imposition of a support obligation upon relatives, descending and ascending in a direct line and eventually laterally as well, implementation of public concern about the paternity of bastards and the liability of both parents for their support, and the establishment of the criminality of parental desertion. The poor law was thus not only a law about the poor but a law of the poor. It dealt with a condition, and it governed a class. The special legal provisions were designed not to solved the causes and problems of destitution but to minimize the cost to the public. (tenBroek, 1964, p. 286).

Second, as the plight of the families in the current study clearly reveal, "the constitutional grant of power which has been invoked to deal with racial minorities and the poor of all races has been the police power, not the general welfare power.

When problems of poverty are handled under the police powers of the Constitution, poverty comes to be equated with disease, immorality, and disorder. Indeed, historically these were inseparable conditions. The police power has generally been utilized to protect one part of the community from another—the comfortable against the needy. (tenBroek, 1965, p. 680).
And finally, as recently reiterated by Mark Hardin (1988), and as confirmed by the experiences of most of parents in the study who became "involuntarily" involved in "protective service delivery," "the poor, generally stigmatized as indigents, paupers, or vagabonds, have not been the beneficiaries of constitutional guarantees to citizens and persons.

They have, however, been recognized in the Constitution as proper objects for exercise of the police powers of the states, to be controlled, regulated, and suppressed. In this respect, the poor and racial minorities, often two names for a single class, have stood upon the same constitutional footing. Discrimination against them in public welfare programs---and even worse, the perversion of welfare, constitutional, and statutory concepts and provisions to control and exclude them---has had great impact on welfare ideas and institutions. (tenBroek, 1955, p. 680).

As previously discussed, and documented in the "cases" of each of the parents, public child welfare agencies may intrude into family relationships and effect the "removal" of a child by means of four legal processes: (1) a parent's "voluntary" relinquishment of custody through written contract with the agency to provide "temporary care," sometimes referred to as an "entrustment agreement," (2) a law enforcement officer, exercising specific, statutory authority, to "protect" a child from immediate "harm," (3) an ex parte legal action, i.e. without a prior hearing on the assertion
that an "emergency" exists in relation to a child's condition or general well-being, as determined by a juvenile court judge, and (4) a petition and "hearing" before a judge who may order the abrogation and transfer of custody to a public or private agency. The current study produced several findings related to such practices that have clear policy implications.

First, the "vagueness" of child "abuse," "neglect," and "dependency" statutes, and the breadth of their interpretation by the Agency in daily practice, appeared to contribute to instances of unnecessary "intervention" in many of the families involved in the study and even a certain degree of "harm" to the children whose "best interests" had precipitated—and supposedly justified—the "intervention" by the Agency in the first place.

While the "vagueness" of state statutes, and the civil proceedings underpinning them, may be necessary to provide sufficient "latitude" and "flexibility" for local agencies, and caseworkers, to "protect" children at genuine "risk" of "abuse" or "neglect," the study tends to confirm the legal problems—and familial devastation—that such ambiguity can create in daily practice.

Nevertheless, while the "search" for more "realistic standards" regulating "coercive interventions" in, and the "removal" of children from, families is critical
(Wald, 1975), such reform does not appear to be of importance to, or have captured the attention of, legal scholars, state legislators, or even the most vocal in the field of public child welfare, including those who profess to "advocate" for the "rights" of children. Second, as supported by the accounts of several of the parents, even those who were ostensibly "willing" to participate in service delivery, the "voluntary" relinquishment of child custody may not be as free of coercion as implied by a caseworker's "record" of the "intervention" or as presented during the legal proceedings of the juvenile court. Indeed, as Robert Mnookin (1973) once observed, "A substantial degree of state coercion may be involved in many so-called voluntary placements, making the distinction between voluntary and coercive placement illusory....If one were to use the legal standards of voluntariness and informed consent applied in the criminal law to confessions and to the waiver of important legal rights, many of cases of relinquishment after state intervention might not be considered voluntary" (p. 601).

Finally, almost twenty years ago, Robert Burt (1971) offered a judgment that, unfortunately, still serves as the basis for most of the criticisms and complaints that were expressed by parents who became
"involuntarily" entangled with this public child welfare agency:

In proceedings in which parents may be deprived of child custody for neglect or abuse (as opposed to criminal prosecution for such conduct), parents are not guaranteed the presence of counsel, no 'presumption of parental innocence' effectively guarantees retention of custody by the parent prior to final adjudication of abuse or neglect, the burden of proof at trial is the civil 'preponderance of the evidence' rather than the criminal standard, courts may rely on confidential information to determine the existence of neglect or abuse without giving confrontation opportunities, and no 'self-incrimination right' or fourth amendment 'probable' cause requirement restrains courts from ordering pretrial physical or psychiatric examinations of parents or children to determine neglect or abuse. (p. 1269).

As a result, much as "periodic case reviews" of children "adrift" in public foster care served to justify federally-mandated "permanency planning"---and despite anticipated political opposition by local agencies and juvenile court judges---the development of a mechanism to scrutinize the decision-making, practices, and "case management" within the entire "child protective services system" appears to be necessary. Again, similar to the institution of procedures for "foster care case review," such oversight might begin with the political advocacy of a "community review board," as established and governed by citizens, especially representatives of racial and
minority groups whose members remain disproportionately vulnerable to "interventions" by public child welfare agencies. Without question, such "reviews" must serve at least three ends: (1) to assure that parental "rights," as currently guaranteed by federal and state statutes, are not violated during "coercive interventions" by child welfare caseworkers or throughout the civil proceedings of the juvenile court; (2) to articulate and codify other, important parental "rights" that are essential to the "re-unification" of children who have been separated from their families as a result of judicial abrogation of parental custody; and (3) to determine the extent to which other constitutionally-based procedural safeguards are necessary to protect any parental "rights" that are essential to the well-being---and survival---of families most frequently disrupted by the "interventions" of a public child welfare caseworker.

Clearly, the seemingly intractable problems of the "child protective services system," the deepening vulnerabilities and despair of poor families, and the continued suffering---and deaths---of children, demand that we do more than "treat" the symptoms of injustice. Indeed, it is time to acknowledge and to end the real American "holocaust": the state-sanctioned victimization
of the families of thousands of children, simply because their parents are poor or, in some way, have "failed."
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