



# Unsettling White Settler Child and Youth Care Pedagogy and Practice: Discourses on Working in Colonial Violence and Racism

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Article abstract

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## **UNSETTLING WHITE SETTLER CHILD AND YOUTH CARE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE: DISCOURSES ON WORKING IN COLONIAL VIOLENCE AND RACISM**

**Kaz MacKenzie**

**Abstract:** In 2018, using in-depth, semi-structured, collaborative dialogues, I asked 11 child and youth care practitioners working in various Canadian provinces, including British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, “How do you understand, name, reproduce, contest, and struggle with White settler privilege?” The intent was to name and challenge the dominant Whiteman norms in child and youth care. This project was inspired by the significant work of Indigenous and racialized activist-scholars to address the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous families across colonial systems in which child and youth care practitioners work, such as the child welfare and justice systems, and the underrepresentation in others, such as educational systems. Participants named colonial violence and systemic racism as entrenched in child and youth care practice while recognizing the difficulty of challenging dominant White norms and conventions in the classroom and field. I explore how this key finding unsettles child and youth care pedagogy and practice. In closing, I propose two practical ethical pathways towards unsettling White settler privilege in child and youth care.

**Keywords:** child and youth care, youth work, settler colonialism, racism, critical Whiteness, critical praxis

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***Acknowledgement: Let Me Begin in a Good Way***

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional territories and Nations that my ancestors occupied with invasion and violence, bringing disease, genocide, and terror: Wampanoag, Mohegan, Mohican, Cherokee, Chippewa, Seneca, Shawnee, Wyandotte, Potawatomi, Illini, Iowa, Delaware, Sac and Fox, Abenaki, Listuguj, Mi'kmaq, and Kahnawake Mohawk. My White occupier ancestral lineage connects me to Ireland, Scotland, and England; my occupier roots have been on Turtle Island for three to seven generations, depending on the ancestral line. I am a White, settler, cisgender woman (she/her/hers) who has spent the last three decades working in the field of child and youth care while living on the stolen territories of the Lekwungen, WSÁNEĆ, T'Souke, and Pacheedaht peoples. In the explicit naming of my own lineages, along with locating myself within systems of Whiteness and White supremacy, I heed the plea of critical, politicized child and youth care scholar-activists: "If we do not name it, how will we work collectively to change it?" (de Finney et al., 2011, p. 377).

The Child and Youth Care Association of British Columbia (n.d) defined child and youth care as a field of human service that works with children, youth, families, and communities with complex needs, and stated:

At the core of all effective child and youth care practice is a focus on the therapeutic relationship; the application of theory and research about human growth and development to promote the optimal physical, psychosocial, spiritual, cognitive, and emotional development of young people towards a healthy and productive adulthood; and a focus on strengths and assets rather than pathology. (Section 5)

Child and youth care practitioners work across the field of human and social development in applied contexts, such as early childhood education; child protection; residential care; youth justice, health, and education; and in human service community-based settings.

Child and youth care has had a legacy of inviting critical perspectives to unsettle established norms and approaches (Pence & White, 2011, p. xii); however, even with this critical invitation, the field is never innocent or removed from our colonial history (Little & Walker, 2012; Loiselle et al., 2012; Skott-Myhre, 2006; White, 2015). Attending to an "ethic responsibility-based truth telling" (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p.4) and ethical commitments of justice-doing (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014, p. 152), I engaged in research on critical, politicized praxis and White settler privilege in child and youth care. In taking up critical, politicized praxis, I looked to Loiselle and colleague's (2012) definition of doing child and youth care as an ethical commitment to "politicized, critical, and radical social change work alongside children, youth, families, and communities" (p. 180).

## Introduction

Drawing from critical child and youth care practitioners' narratives, the purpose of this study is to disrupt, unsettle, and reframe White settler child and youth care practice, and to illustrate ethical pathways to teaching and working in child and youth care that lead to challenging colonial violence, racism, and White settler fragility. Understanding child and youth care practitioners' engagement with White settler privilege may assist in shifting the narrative in child and youth care education towards examining the White settler problem (MacKenzie, 2019).

The key finding explored in this article is that participants named colonial violence and systemic racism as endemic to child and youth care practice while recognizing the difficulty of challenging dominant White norms and conventions in the classroom and field. The purpose of this exploration is to unsettle Whiteness in child and youth care, and engage politicized praxis in how we teach and practise child and youth care to further justice-doing (Reynolds, 2012). I highlight the wisdom, transgressions, learning, and disruptions of Whiteness that practitioners discussed. I frame the exploration of working in colonial violence and racism and White fragility within an “unsettling pedagogy” based on the premise that White settlers cannot just theorize about liberation and decolonization but must embody it, starting with ourselves (Regan, 2010, p. 19).

### *Context: Unsettling Whiteness and White Settler Privilege in Child and Youth Care*

In this section I will define the theories of Whiteness, White supremacy, settler colonialism, and Eurocentrism used in this study and analysis. I also define White settler privilege, and provide a contextual framework for the theoretical concepts mobilized in the analysis of the practitioners' narratives.

Whiteness can be defined “as a positionality of privilege systemically promoted by a racially organized world” (Steyn, 2015, p. 3). The concept of Whiteness, rooted in racial superiority, is entrenched in the foundational structures and values in Canadian society (Saraceno, 2012, p. 253). Whiteness masks racism in the settler state of Canada by espousing ideas of “niceness” and “multiculturalism”. Further, Whiteness is a product of White supremacy. Child and youth care scholar Hans Skott-Myhre (2017) raised the critical issue of naming the power structure of White supremacy in which child and youth care is embedded, and asserted the need for the use of this language within the field.

In my scholarship I look to Charles Mills' (1997) definition of White supremacy as “the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over non-white people” (pp. 1–2). White supremacy is a power structure, both informal and formal, full of socioeconomic privilege, and enforcing standards for the distribution of material wealth and opportunities (p. 3). It is also the unacknowledged and invisible political configuration that formed the modern world (p. 1).

Further, this study was conducted in a settler colonial state. In settler states, settler colonizers come to stay and move to eradicate the Indigenous peoples; as such, “settler invasion is a structure, not an event” (Wolfe, 1999, p. 163). Settler colonialism is defined in this study as a “persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there” (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 12).

Eurocentrism is predominant in Western ontology, and is the foundation of Canadian structures and institutions, including those in child and youth care and the human services. The theoretical framing of Eurocentric ideas is based in liberal ideologies (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The dogmas of universalism and individualism are foundational in liberalism, and they sustain the theoretical base of White supremacy (DiAngelo, 2018; Mills, 1997). The “normative values inscribed in the practices of professionalized helping” are Eurocentric; the “hegemonic foundations and power base” are Eurocentric as well (Saraceno, 2012, p. 251). Child and youth care education and practice is rooted in the ideologies of neoliberalism — the legacy of liberalism — which centre the experiences and knowledge of White, Eurocentric, wealthy, heterosexual, male knowledge holders (Gharabaghi, 2017; Skott-Myhre, 2017). With these theoretical foundations supporting current-day practices in child and youth care, White settler child and youth care practitioners “cannot assume our roles as inherently benevolent and unproblematic” (MacKenzie, 2019, p. 114).

Targeted, paternalistic, state-sanctioned residential internment of Indigenous children has lasted decades, including residential schools, Indian hospitals, day schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the present-day Millennium Scoop (de Finney, 2014), which refers to the current mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities by the child welfare system (Turner, 2016). While Indigenous children and youth make up just 7% of the child population of Canada, they represent 48% of the children in government custody across Canada (Turner, 2016). These numbers reveal that there are currently more Indigenous children who have been removed into government care than there were at the height of the residential school era (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (2015) executive summary, Justice Murray Sinclair articulated that all Canadians need to interrogate the Indian residential schools’ legacy as a Canadian problem and not merely an Indigenous one. What is needed, Sinclair emphasized, is a collective act of reflexivity on the part of the settler population. White settlers can somehow ignore, deny, and avoid the systemic problems of settler colonialism and White supremacy that created and continue to disseminate violence towards Indigenous and racialized<sup>1</sup> children, youth, families, and communities (Skott-Myhre, 2017). With this in mind, is it not crucial

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<sup>1</sup> The term racialized is applied to people of colour who live with imposed, socially constructed, negative racial markers (Daniel, 2018). White people who live within White supremacy do not tend to recognize themselves, or other Whites, as members of a racial category nor self-identify with the descriptor White (Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 46).

that child and youth care practitioners consider how White settlers are educated and implicated in the continued violence to Indigenous and racialized children, youth, families, and communities? What role do White settlers play in perpetuating these violent systems? As posited by Epp (2003) and Regan (2010), it is important to interrogate the White settler problem and thus White settler privilege within child and youth care education and practice. How does White settler privilege operate within child and youth care education and practice?

White settler privilege is defined as conjoining White privilege and settler privilege by naming the established system, which was created by White people for White people, and which privileges White people who concurrently receive unequal citizenship benefits while profiting from living and working on stolen Indigenous lands (Gilio-Whitaker, 2018; Jafri, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in an ethical and theoretical commitment to unsettling settler colonialism through what Loiselle and colleagues (2012) defined as a transtheoretical approach to child and youth care (p. 180). In this transtheoretical approach, I engage critical race, intersectional feminist, antiracist, and activist methodologies to expose power dynamics, White hegemony, and hierarchies, with an emphasis on the relationships between the personal and the political (Lorde, 1984).

A pedagogy of unsettling must occur alongside connecting our logic and feeling — head and heart — as a fundamental part of the decolonizing process (Regan, 2010, p. 12). African American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/2015) coined the term “double consciousness” (p. 5) to describe the internal conflict that Black people experience while navigating life within the confines of Whiteness; originally, Du Bois referenced double consciousness in regard to the epistemic conflict that exists for many people of African descent living in North America (Moore, 2005, p. 751). Du Bois’ research is grounded in a theoretical framework to analyse White settler privilege within a field centred in Whiteness. Linked to double consciousness is Ahmed’s (2004) “double turn” (para. 59), which requires White people to stay implicated when critiquing Whiteness and to continue to take responsibility for the legacies of colonialism and racism “as histories of the present” (para. 59). As such, the analysis of the narratives of the participants in this study is guided by the double turn.

An analysis including the double turn cannot be separated from White fragility. Because of White fragility, according to Robin DiAngelo (2018), the smallest racial stress in White people generates “emotions including anger, fear and guilt and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stressful situation” (p. 2). DiAngelo further defined White fragility as “white racial control” (p. 2) and the defence generated by emotional discomfort and anxiety grounded in the conceptualization of Whiteness as superior and entitled. Erinn Gilson’s (2011, 2014) scholarship states that “White fragility is not a weakness but rather an active performance of invulnerability” (cited in Applebaum, 2017, p. 862). Both bell hooks (1990) and Audre Lorde

(1984) suggested that feeling bad about racism or White privilege can cause a White person to respond with self-centredness, certain that their place is at the centre of any discourse that involves them (p. 7). hooks argued that White guilt is performative and contributes nothing to actually undoing Whiteness (as cited in Ahmed, 2004, p. 7).

Critical race theory scholars describe “racial microaggressions” as “subtle forms of racism that exist in daily life, which may be hard to pinpoint as racism, but cause harm, nonetheless” (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 446). Microaggressions can be seen in behaviours that are linked to White fragility, such as “crying, physically leaving, emotionally withdrawing, arguing, denying, focusing on intentions, seeking absolution and avoiding” when discussions regarding race and racism occur (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 119).

Further, the theory of spiritual pain is used throughout the analysis of the participants’ narratives. Vikki Reynolds (2012) defined spiritual pain of practitioners as the stress experienced “when we are not able to enact our ethics” in our work (p. 21). This occurs when there is “a discrepancy between what feels respectful, humane, generative” and the feelings engendered by working in circumstances that demand we defy the very beliefs and ethics that brought us to the work (p. 21).

## **Methodology**

The aforementioned theoretical approaches provide important guidelines for anticolonial research methodologies (Carlson, 2016, p. 4). Anticolonial research seeks to correct colonial oppression; settlers engaging in anticolonial research need to guarantee that their actions do not emphasize colonial dominance (Hart et al., 2017, p. 334), and to respond to the call of many Indigenous researchers for allied settler research to be rooted and engaged in critical, emancipatory, and holistic methods (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2010; Smith, L., 2012). The methodology used in this study is steeped in process-driven research that centres the complexities of multiple truths, power, ethics, and relationships. My research question was: “How do practitioners understand, name, reproduce, contest, and struggle with White settler privilege?”

### ***Recruitment and Participants***

With practitioners directly impacting the daily lives of children, youth, families, and communities, their practice presented a salient site of inquiry for exploring White settler privilege within child and youth care. I purposely recruited child and youth care practitioners who identified as advanced (i.e., having experience and having practised in the field), critical, and politicized. I extended invitations through emails (using the graduate student listserv for the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria) and through social media. The practitioners who responded were interested in engaging in conversations on White settler privilege and were open to troubling White settler privilege in the field. In total, I had collaborative dialogues with 11 practitioners: seven self-identifying White settler practitioners (although in the interview one of those reported having mixed-race ancestry), three self-identified Indigenous practitioners, and one

self-identified non-White practitioner. Four of the seven self-identifying White settler practitioners identified as male. The participating practitioners worked across a wide spectrum of applied child and youth care contexts, including early childhood development, education, health, child protection, and nonprofit community services.

### ***Data Collection***

In order to address my methodological commitments to a critical, collective, unsettling research processes, I opted for an approach to data collection that was collaborative and rooted in the experiences of advanced frontline practitioners. Thus, I engaged in collaborative, semi-structured, in-depth dialogues. I provided participants with some questions and themes and invited them to consider these ideas prior to engaging in our conversation. Among the questions were: “How can you challenge your White settler privilege and how can you resist White settler privilege?”; and “Can you share with me what you struggle with as a White settler practitioner or working within a White settler colonial context?” I indicated to the practitioners that these questions could help guide our collaborative dialogue, but that my most important aim was to have a collaborative discussion guided by their insights, reflections, and queries.

### ***Data Analysis***

In order to absorb and synthesize the content in the collaborative dialogues, I used a manual critical thematic analysis approach, which I applied through the transtheoretical lens described in the previous section. Clarke and Braun (2017) described thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (p. 297). Within the procedures for thematic analysis, I paid particular attention to the dynamics and themes in the participants’ narratives, including those of power, silences, the difficulty in challenging dominant White norms and conventions, and systemic and historical issues. Following a preliminary analysis of the data, to ensure alignment with a collaborative and relational research approach, I contacted the practitioners once again to invite feedback and comments, and adjust the interpretation of the data if needed.

### ***Reflexivity***

From my position of being a White settler researcher and practitioner, it is necessary to explicitly state the White centring required to contest White settler privilege (DiAngelo, 2018) in child and youth care research. Further, it is essential to acknowledge that examination of the impacts of White settler privilege and of Whiteness is not new. For generations, Black and Indigenous people and people of colour have theorized, spoken about, advocated for, written on, taken action against, and given up their freedom and lives to contest the violent injustices of White supremacy (Ahmed, 2004, 2007, 2012; Blackstock, 2008; Bundy, 2019; Creese, 2019; Daniel, 2016; de Finney, 2015; hooks, 1994; Hunt, 2014; James, 2019; Lorde, 1984; Palmater, 2015; Razack, 1998, 2015; Smith, 2012; Vowel, 2016). For centuries, Indigenous and racialized people have asked White people to turn and look at themselves (Coulthard, 2014; Du Bois, 1903/2015; Freire, 1970; Manuel & Derrickson, 2015, 2017; Mills, 1997; Razack, 2002; Simpson, 2017).



Concurrently, I acknowledge that I can complete this work without facing the kind of systemic discrediting, denial, backlash, pain, and violence that Indigenous and Black scholars and scholars of colour face every day for speaking about these same topics. This work, then, is deeply indebted to the historic and current active resistance and resurgence of Indigenous and Black activist–scholars and activist–scholars of colour.

### **Findings: Working Under Colonial Violence and Racism**

In this section, I share practitioners’ experiences and insights as they navigate working under colonial violence and racism. I begin with the subtheme of the ongoing colonial violence and racism in child and youth care that presented itself repeatedly in the collaborative discussions I had with practitioners.

#### ***Ongoing Colonial Violence in Child and Youth Care***

According to Jules<sup>2</sup>, an Indigenous practitioner with extensive experience in child and youth care and an outspoken survivor of Indian day schools<sup>3</sup>, “there has never been an end [to colonial violence] — from residential schools, to day schools, the Sixties Scoop, child welfare, health care, to current-day policies, programs, and removal of our children, it goes on and on.” They went on to say that the colonial structures continually show up in their work, from paperwork to the policies for programs they run serving children in their community. Jules’ narrative reflects what critical social services literature has shown: colonial and racial violence have not ended, and their impacts on Indigenous and Black practitioners, practitioners of colour, and the children, youth, and families of these communities, are incessant (Bundy, 2019; Creese, 2019; Daniel, 2018; de Finney et al., 2018; Edwards, 2018; Yoon, 2012).

In fact, Indigenous practitioner Gale, working in an educational setting, spoke about the Canadian myth of being a peaceful country while denying and forgetting the systemic racialized violence experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized people. They asserted:

Everyone wants to be “Canada, yeah, yeah! We are the greatest place on earth!”  
But we aren’t. And when you question this “Rah, Rah, Canada!” spirit, and you say, “I need you to realize what Canada has done to people of colour in general”,  
you are met with denial, and power.

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<sup>2</sup> Practitioners have all been given gender-neutral pseudonyms and I use gender-fluid pronouns (they/them/their) in this article.

<sup>3</sup> Starting in 1920, the settler colonial state of Canada established 700 Indian day schools. It is estimated that 200,000 Indigenous children attended these federally operated schools, and many who attended have reported experiencing extensive trauma inflicted by those entrusted with their care (Government of Canada, 2019, para. 1).

Further, all White settler practitioners in the study spoke of systemic racial violence within the field of child and youth care. A White settler practitioner, Dane, with experience in both the nonprofit sector and government, contextualized this systemic racial violence:

And when you think about who primarily goes to school to become teachers, it is primarily White people, at [Child and Family Services] in policy and research everyone is White. That is where all the programs for child and youth mental health are coming from. If you think about the people that are producing the knowledge and producing the policy, they are all coming from a White perspective and lots of the time probably haven't done any sort of work or had to confront their own White privilege ... those programs [were] assuming that everybody spoke the same way, that everybody spoke the same language, that everybody was the same culture, that everyone had a parent at home with them to do work with them.

The exclusivity of Whiteness in designing programs, compounded with the denial of racism and the ongoing demands of delivering programs from the state in Indigenous communities, echo several scholars' claims that colonial and racial violence have not ended (Gharabaghi, 2017; James, 2019; Kouri, 2018; McCaffrey, 2010; Skott-Myhre, 2017; White et al., 2017).

### ***Eurocentrism in Action***

The White settler practitioners in this study identified the accepted Eurocentric, Western norms in which we are educated, and which underlie the frameworks and assessments we use to evaluate children, youth, families, and communities. These accepted norms flow from the White supremacist and Christian ideologies of residential schools that were meant to destroy any connection to family and culture while indoctrinating Indigenous children into White settler ideologies (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The White settler practitioners shared stories about the Eurocentric and neoliberal constraints of practice. Tanner, a White settler practitioner who has worked in both education and residential care, articulated that knowledge is privilege and Eurocentric norms are entrenched in child and youth care practice. Tanner shared that “the way I see it happening here now is [Eurocentric] knowledge is [valued] over other knowledge ... Norms are very Eurocentric, Western norms.” Tanner went on to discuss the some of the impacts of these norms in practice:

If you are a youth in care, you are already classified as other, in that you need specialized care. It's a norm that you are not making it. So just to be concise, basically everyone who needs help is falling short of the expectations of our society. So they are evaluated and judged as less than ... those developmental milestones, those professional and social milestones ... the neoliberal mindset of individual responsibility, self-sufficiency, we are told we only need ourselves to be successful.

From the basis of these norms, Dane, a white settler practitioner, spoke of the restrictions on participants in programs, and how client needs are simplified, screening out those with more difficult or complex needs rather than meeting youth and parents where they are at. Dane recalled witnessing Indigenous folks accessing services but not asking for help:

First there are lots of different types of people accessing the service. Some people are really active in coming for help and some people are not. But there is this really, really messed up thing that happens: if a person is not actively coming and seeking help then they aren't participating in the program and therefore they [don't get a service]. Because if they aren't participating in the program ... we should ask them to leave. And so who are the people who primarily don't ask for help? The Indigenous folks who are accessing our services and why aren't they asking for help? Because they are so fucking afraid of, like, okay I shouldn't put words in peoples' mouths. But there is something going on there.

Dane was forthright that all the people that worked at the service were White, and that Dane, also White, did not speak up about this problem. They expressed how they saw racism and witnessed Indigenous people and people of colour trying to fit into the Eurocentric mould.

To further exemplify Eurocentrism in practice, White settler practitioners spoke of the general lack of knowledge and understanding among White settlers of the lives of Indigenous people and the historic truths and continued atrocities of colonialism. Quinn, a White settler practitioner who had recently worked in child welfare, referred to foster parents being uneducated about Canada's history of genocide. Quinn observed:

I still had foster parents that didn't know anything about residential schools. They just don't know. Let alone the fallout of them and the Sixties Scoop or anything like that. They would literally say, "I have never heard of this matter of residential schools."

The Canadian settler state currently has unprecedented numbers of Indigenous children and youth in care, more than at the height of the residential school era (de Finney et al., 2018; Kouri, 2018; Vowel, 2016), and the state primarily places Indigenous children and youth in White settler homes and White settler facilities (Gharabaghi, 2017; Skott-Myhre, 2017). White settler practitioners — foster parents and beyond — are undereducated in colonialism and racism (Edwards, 2018).

### ***White Settler Compliance and Powerlessness***

Beyond the layers of institutional and academic knowledge steeped in Eurocentric views, White settler practitioners identified their own compliance and expressed their lack of power to make real, substantive, systemic change. Tanner stated that they "use [their] power in ways that [they are] comfortable using it. That doesn't make [them] overly uncomfortable," and added that they are "more comfortable not being in conflict with people". White settler practitioners

repeatedly commented on being dedicated to this work, but still finding it difficult to enact antiracism and anticolonialism within organizations and institutions. In fact, White settler practitioners shared that if they spoke up about racism or the impacts of colonialism on children, youth, and families they were perceived as the problem in their organizations and work places.

The White settler practitioners in this study implicated themselves within the structures of Whiteness. Tanner linked their desire to disrupt colonialism and their compliancy by saying, “We try to create people that are the right kind of citizen to ultimately perpetuate the system, contribute to the capital gains of the state. But we are super complicit in that.” When asked what it is like not to challenge the system, Tanner responded,

Disheartening. Unavoidable. So, in terms of challenging that or responding to it, it can feel really challenging ... It seems like to me, in a really novice place, that there [are] certain non-negotiables that I don't have the power to change. [I am] forced to value certain knowledge types over others.

Dane, discussing times when they have challenged colonial violence and racism with their White settler colleagues, expressed that they also struggled with a lack of power in their position. Dane ashamedly shared their inner dialogue when working under paternalistic colonial state pressures:

I don't know where this feeling is coming from, maybe it is my White privilege, but just “Be nice, [Dane], just go sit in that nice little chair and do your job and collect your pension and be nice like everyone else.” It is not nice. You know.

While White settler practitioners in this study critiqued Whiteness, they also indicated their own sense of powerlessness to change daily acts of colonial violence and racism in the field. Dane highlighted an ethical dilemma that involved an Indigenous parent, their White settler supervisor, and their workplace team. During one supervisory team meeting at the community agency where Dane was employed as an outreach support worker, Dane spoke about a new family that had been referred to them. The practitioner told the team that they had achieved a strong initial relationship with this new family, which was headed by a fierce Indigenous parent. Dane further described the Indigenous parent as engaged and committed. The White settler supervisor recognized the family name from a previous position, and proceeded to disclose historic, confidential information. When Dane challenged the supervisor on their boundaries, the supervisor characterized Dane as a bleeding heart. Dane stated, “We are supposed to be on the side of the [parent]”, but the program Dane worked in did not integrate, or even acknowledge, how the “basic intersection of domestic violence, mental health, and addictions, let alone colonial violence, impact children, youth, and families' lives”. Dane indicated that they repeatedly witnessed the impacts of pathologization and hypervigilance on Indigenous, non-White, homeless, and economically disenfranchised program participants. Even when attempting to challenge the supervisor's violation of professional ethics, the White settler practitioner's advocacy and support was seen by their White settler supervisor as

too aligned with the Indigenous parent. Dane shared, “And now, [the White settler supervisor] just refers to me as the bleeding heart. And so now I feel super silenced about it. I guess it doesn’t matter if I speak up or not.” Dane and the Indigenous participant were made the problem by the supervisor and team; there were no consequences for the supervisor.

This frontline practice example exposes systemic power imbalances that limit the ability of White settler practitioners to challenge White settler systems and privilege in their work. As these examples continued to be raised in the collaborative dialogues, I became curious about how the “racial veil” (Du Bois, 1903/2015, p. xiii), which prevents White people from seeing Black and other racialized people as fully human (Holloway, 2015), is perpetuated, consciously or unconsciously, by White settler practitioners, supervisors, and the system in the field of child and youth care.

### *Disembodied Locations of White Settler Practitioners*

Bailey, who self-identified as an educated, White, male, settler practitioner, framed working in colonial violence and racism and their understanding of White settler privilege as an “ethical piece. As an educated White male, I understand that in a very intellectual way.” Harper, a White settler practitioner who worked in community, acknowledged and questioned their own privilege:

I am incredibly privileged. One definition of privilege is around unearned rights and benefits and in many respects that exists for me. And what I think about my privilege ... comes [with] an ethic — what [do] I do with my privilege?

In relation to colonialism, Harper went on to express that they “had some trepidation and some nervousness, and [I] thought there’s a level of discourse around Indigenous issues which does not exist in the world [I] travelled in.” Dane articulated that, as a “White [person] not wanting to be a part of that [colonial] violence ... sometimes [I am] — just by the nature of wearing [White] skin.”

Lou, a White settler practitioner whose child and youth care work has taken them across the field in various practice locations, articulated their own “double turn” — a requirement for White people to stay implicated when critiquing Whiteness and continue to take responsibility for the legacies of colonialism and racism “as histories of the present” (Ahmed, 2004, para. 59) — and exemplified it through acknowledging the limits to examining White settler privilege, Whiteness, and their own racism. When talking about their own awareness of their White settler privilege, Lou stated, “I feel really aware that I skip in and out of understanding or levels of understanding ... [and the] ability to integrate or shift my own perceptions, my own racism, my own patterns of thinking. It comes and goes.”

To this disembodied connection to White settler’s privilege, Harper linked the intersections of gender and settler. Harper described the “awareness of my own violence and how and what the legacy of settlery means from a male perspective ... and owning that part, as well, which perhaps feels more concrete for me, [those] other forms of colonialism, because I am confronted

by my maleness, misogyny, and violence in a different way.” While all of the White settler practitioners acknowledged working in violent systems, the impacts of that violence were differently described by — and housed very differently in the bodies of — Indigenous and non-White practitioners.

### ***Embodied Impacts on Indigenous and Racialized Practitioners***

The Indigenous and racialized participants all stated that the colonial systems they worked within continually overrode Indigenous and non-White ways of knowing, doing, and being. In addition, they shared lived experiences of being impacted by racism and colonial violence daily themselves, and seeing the same impact upon Indigenous and non-White children, youth, families, and communities with whom they worked. In my conversations with Indigenous and non-White practitioners, all described the ceaseless denial of racial and colonial violence by their White settler practitioner colleagues.

It was clear from the dialogues that working within settler colonial institutions and systems embedded in White supremacy impacts Indigenous, Black, and non-White children, youth, families, and communities in very real and violent ways. For instance, Sam, an Indigenous child and youth care practitioner working in a community-based agency, spoke of the intersection of settler colonialism, racism, and White supremacy. They expressed how White settler practitioners’ own pain can reassert this violence:

Settler colonialism, to me, is you are participating in the ongoing colonialization of not just Indigenous people but all non-White people that have come in because of your White supremacy. But you just keep reenacting it because you’ve been taught to, and you don’t want to see anything outside of yourself because it would be too painful.

This reflection is supported by literature that identifies settler colonialism’s encouragement of White settlers to ignore the impacts of systemic violence while “colonial power is imprinted on Indigenous bodies in a myriad of everyday ways” (Razack, 2015, p. 201).

Indigenous and racialized participants expressed the harrowing discomfort they felt, bodily and spiritually, when colonial violence and systemic racism impeded their work. Parker, a racialized practitioner who had worked in various child and youth care settings, spoke about being the only Indigenous person or person of colour in a workspace:

It is unnerving but it’s what, I think, [is] maybe [at] the heart of my impostor syndrome. Because I always feel out of place ... I think, particularly for myself as a racialized practitioner ... it is the ongoing reminder that you don’t belong, and it was created without you in mind. It has always been created by and for White people and to support Whiteness and to support settler colonialism, to support the settler dream.

What drove Parker was the welfare of the Indigenous and racialized children and youth with whom they worked. Naming the anger that working in White supremacy had created, Parker asserted that the youth were:

my motivation [for] pushing myself to be in systems like this. Can it be de-humanizing? 100%! But what about the kids that walk through the door? What is it like to be seen by a face you can see yourself in?

Further, Indigenous and racialized practitioners explicitly described experiencing racism enacted by their colleagues; they also witnessed the Indigenous and non-White children, youth, families, and communities they worked alongside experiencing racism. Sam declared:

What is it like to work in colonial systems? It is not like there is ever any change. I work with a lot of systems. A lot with child welfare. A lot with mental health. Several systems as well — government and health, and then justice ... It's the hardest part of my work. So, I work with a lot of trauma and a lot of dark things sometimes, and that's a lot of weight to carry ... the difficulty [is] practising in systems that are so broken and inconsistent, and incongruent with what my values are and my worldview. Dissident. And so disembodied.

Throughout my conversations, Indigenous and racialized practitioners reiterated the scope and impact of the embodied stress they experienced in relation to dominant Whiteness, which was similar to experiencing double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903/2015). Sam emphasized this by saying, “I feel like I experience [colonial violence and racism] alongside my clients. It is an exhausting uphill battle.”

### ***Microaggressions***

Most of the White settler practitioners spoke of experiences in which they witnessed a racial microaggression, acted out a microaggression unconsciously, or intervened in an act of microaggression. Practitioners highlighted the background of microaggressions in the field, allowing White settler practitioners not to challenge our privilege or each other, and to sidestep the messy task of analyzing systemic violence. For example, Bailey discussed microaggressions that occur when educating White settlers in anticolonialism and antiracism work in child and youth care:

So much of that education of White settlers falls on Indigenous [and racialized] people and then the backlash of that when people raise consciousness. I am not innocent of that, I definitely, you know, behaved in those ways.

Each participant detailed microaggressions that occurred both in one-on-one interactions and in collective environments, such as meetings or training sessions. Gale, an Indigenous practitioner, articulated the impacts on themselves of sitting in circle when their White settler colleagues were processing the emotional impacts of learning about settler colonialism and all its violence:

It is not my job to make you feel better for what your people did to my people. Like why am I sitting here with a bunch of White people crying about how bad their people were to my people? ... Well, don't just cry there. Do something. Read some stuff. Grab some knowledge. If you have some questions in the middle of that, I am so happy to talk with you. But you have to make the first step.

### *Spiritual Pain*

The constant confrontation of racism and colonial violence never escaped the Indigenous and non-White practitioners in the study. Parker said:

I remember reading something [by a White settler] about experiencing racism and then not allowing yourself to be traumatized by your clients' experiences of racism. How do you separate those two things? Because what ends up happening, it wears us down. It wears down our spirits.

Parker named this as an example of spiritual pain (Reynolds, 2012), which takes place when practitioners are unable to enact what they believe they are ethically bound to do.

Yet, despite the dehumanizing impact of working in these systems, the Indigenous and racialized participants remained because they felt that the young people for whom they deeply cared had a desperate need for contact with Indigenous and racialized practitioners. Parker asserted that “it is so crucial to have Indigenous and racialized people in the field”:

There is nothing wrong with White people supporting children and youth of different cultures, but I think there needs to be an effort to have people who have that experience of racialization and have the experience of othering, because that changes the way you connect with someone.

Current literature echoes the need for representation of Indigenous practitioners, Black practitioners, and practitioners of colour in the field, and asserts the need to dismantle the colonial violence and racial logics under which we all work (Edwards, 2018).

Spiritual pain was expressed by White settler practitioners. Dane, a White settler practitioner working in a community agency, whose mandate and values did not align in their practice, illuminated the Eurocentric, neoliberal, and White supremacist ideologies deeply rooted in the organization. Dane had repeatedly witnessed racism and the screening out of people from programs. They struggled with the fact that the organization presented a façade of White feminism when really, “There was a lot of push to help people who are just really easy to help: they show up; they had a decent enough income; they can engage in programs; and, you know, we help them learn skills, they are really keen to learn.” The practitioner experienced spiritual pain when they were unable to support Indigenous, racialized, and street-entrenched people to access programs because of the incongruency of the agency's mandate and values. Dane's critical, politicized lens was ineffective in initiating change in the agency, and they ultimately left because of these issues.



As a measure of protection from spiritual pain, Parker stated, “Critical practitioners need each other, need community. And they need people with differing amounts of privilege. Like actually start to balance things, and leverage their privilege, and leverage their reputation.” Creating connections with critical politicized practitioners and leveraging privilege were discussed as pathways to address and dismantle systemic injustices.

### ***Unontologizing***

Throughout the study, participants offered concrete examples of how to unsettle White settler practice. Sam, an Indigenous practitioner working in community settings, articulated that “people have been brainwashed by White supremacy and patriarchy”, and named the process of counteracting that brainwashing “unontologizing”. Sam stated that the formation of the White settler identity is something that:

is engrained, that is an active process to work against. Unlearning is the most difficult thing. You are unlearning. You are unontologizing. You are taking away that ontology of who you are as a being. That’s difficult, it’s difficult work. But you aren’t going to make it by making up excuses.

Unontologizing is the process of unlearning what has been framed as normal. It is the struggle to overcome neoliberal ideologies that claimed non-White as nonhuman and colonial property; the struggle against “whiteness over all else and the struggle to overcome the racism inscribed in [our] bones” (Skott-Myhre, 2019, p. 13). Sam suggested that because White settler child and youth care practitioners are implicated in and benefit from others’ pain, they must learn “not [to] turn away from pain, from struggle, and other people’s struggle”. Together we discussed how to unsettle practice and make White settlers aware of the need to sit and be still with discomfort. Sam highlighted White fragility and microaggression, which often emerge as White settler practitioners unontologize:

[White settler practitioners] can’t see themselves in a way they see as negative.... And [White settlers] aren’t going to [unontologize] by finding ways to say, “I can’t hear this feedback. I can’t think of doing something that is racist.” No one said it is with intention. It’s not intentional. It’s unintentional knowing and ways of being.

Sam underscored that intent does not equal impact, and that it is important for White settler practitioners to get uncomfortable and expand our learning outside of dominant Eurocentric, White supremacist frameworks.

### **Discussion: Ethical Pathways**

As I processed the collaborative dialogues with advanced, critical, and politicized child and youth care practitioners, I considered the call of scholar-activists de Finney et al. (2018), who stated that “we urgently need other ethical frameworks by which to understand our practice and

professional ethics” (p. 34). Weaving together suggestions by practitioners and current literature, I here offer for consideration two ethical pathways towards unsettling White settler privilege in practice.

### *Strategic Use of White Settler Discomfort*

The first pathway is the strategic use of White settler discomfort. As White settler practitioners, we are born into White supremacy and have internalized that thinking (Harvey, 2007). White gender studies scholar Elizabeth Grosz (1993) asserted, “Bodies are essential accounts of power and critiques of knowledge” (p. 196), and practitioners’ accounts of embodied and disembodied knowledge generated a palpable tension across their accounts of practice. There was a marked contrast between the visceral, embodied impacts of colonial violence and racism described by the Indigenous and non-White practitioners, which showed up repeatedly as frustration and exhaustion, and the “embodiment of racial innocence and white guilt” (Daniel, 2018, p. 24) of White settler privilege by White settler practitioners, myself alongside them. This contrast highlighted one of the pivotal and crucially important differences in how interfacing with systemic colonial violence is divergent for differently racialized practitioners and is a tension held throughout this work.

Practitioners are in a unique position to influence child and youth care practice, policy, and research in ways that could have direct, tangible impacts on all children, youth, families, and communities (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). As critical praxis evolves in child and youth care, it is imperative that we White settler practitioners are self-aware and locate ourselves as politicized, accountable, and ethical. Although we may situate ourselves as antiracist and anticolonial White settler practitioners, when we identify with disempowered and marginalized people but do not acknowledge our differences (e.g., being colour blind, or not addressing our own White settler privilege and the benefits White people have been afforded through Indigenous genocide) we nevertheless reinforce foundational frameworks in which harmful, albeit well-intentioned, actions occur (Fee & Russell, 2007, p. 188).

A few steps to counter White settler privilege and ongoing colonial violence and racism include: engaging with Indigenous and Black scholars and activists, and scholar-activists of colour, in course materials; challenging dominant Whitemainstream norms; having White settlers engage in critical discussions about our own White settler privilege and the ways we are implicated in ongoing settler colonial violence and racism; and allowing for space in classes for Indigenous and Black students and students of colour to collaborate outside the White gaze (Razack, 1998, p. 15). Importantly, there are many possibilities for transformative networks among diasporic non-White people and Indigenous peoples that build connections of resistance and resurgence and do not centre Whiteness (Simpson, 2017).

**Unontologizing**

The second pathway is what a participant termed “unontologizing” — the process of unlearning what has been framed as normal by Eurocentric, neoliberal, and White supremacist norms. Unontologizing asserts the unsettling of White settler privilege, requiring White settlers to do the emotional and intellectual work needed to progress towards antiracism and anticolonialism. Ethical considerations for unontologizing include a requirement for discourse within education and practice on White fragility and “white supremacy consciousness” (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 74), which is a way of thinking that takes for granted the legitimacy of a society being dominated by White norms and values.

The findings illustrate elements of internalized “White supremacy consciousness” expressed by White settler practitioners in their experiences of powerlessness to change colonial violence and racism in practice, and their insights into their own compliance with these dominant systems. Within White supremacy consciousness, Kasl and Yorks (2002) explained, “White norms and values are normalized, thus making implicit their supremacy over other groups’ norms and values. It is this normalization that maintains the institutionalization of privilege based on race” (p. 74). The White settler practitioners in this study all challenged internalized White supremacy consciousness within themselves.

Figure 1. *Overt and Covert White Supremacy Consciousness*



Note: Adapted from Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (2005) and Turner (2018).

Figure 1 details components of White supremacy consciousness. It is important for White settler practitioners to pay attention to covert, socially acceptable aspects of White supremacy, such as Eurocentric curricula, practices, and policies; denial of racism and White privilege; expecting Indigenous people and people of colour to teach White people; and self-appointed White allies assuming that good intentions suffice. These are all embedded in unconscious White supremacy, resulting in the kind of socially acceptable enactments of White power and subordination of Indigenous and racialized people, as discussed throughout the findings.

White supremacy consciousness is an important concept in navigating the meaning-making of the collaborative dialogues on White settler privilege in child and youth care. The maintenance of White settler superiority and privilege is often unconscious. Therefore, a key question raised by this study is: “How do White settlers bring White superiority out of the cultural shadows (Bhabha, 2004), do the essential work of recognizing our own internalized supremacy, and ‘feel the shame contained therein’ (Turner, 2018, p. 10)?” While overt forms of supremacy lead to horrific acts of brutality, the Indigenous and non-White practitioners in this study made it clear that even the covert forms — which, according to Black intersectional psychotherapist Dwight Turner (2018), are more subtle and more culturally acceptable (p. 4) — have serious impacts on relationships with coworkers, on recruitment and retention of staff, and on practice. Further, White supremacy is evident in the overrepresentation and underserving of Indigenous and non-White children, youth, families, and communities that result from existing policies and funding structures. White supremacy also places the responsibility to address and fix systemic racism on Indigenous and non-White practitioners, creating grief, resentment, and burnout from contending with backlash, denial, and silencing.

There are various resources for White settlers to integrate this ethical pathway. One is the book *Me and White Supremacy: A 28-Day Challenge to Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* (Saad, 2020), which takes White settlers from simply intellectualizing about White supremacy to action. With this practical tool, White settler practitioners can begin to act to address their own Eurocentrism and the disembodied intellectualizing of White settler privilege, colonial violence, and racism. To mitigate microaggressions and racialized violence experienced by our colleagues and the children, youth, families, and communities we walk beside, White settler practitioners can engage in settler repair — going beyond simply responding to emotions to uncovering the connections between heart and mind in our White fragility — while we expose our own racial amnesia (Razack, 2002). And we can ask ourselves, as DiAngelo (2018) suggested: What “has allowed [us] to not know what to do about racism?” (p. 15).

## Conclusion

As White settler child and youth care explores and “experiment[s] with who we might become” (White et al., 2017, p. 59), this research invites us to unsettle dominant White norms to contest the everyday acts of colonial violence and racism perpetuated at the expense of Indigenous and non-

White children, youth, families, and communities, along with the colleagues with whom we practise. Hunt and Holmes (2015) suggested that we “raise questions and tensions, in order to center the dynamic, messy quality of relationships among individuals who are engaged in processes of unsettling dominant power dynamics and colonial ideologies” (p. 161). This article is a contribution to the ongoing work of integrating an unsettling pedagogy into child and youth care curricula, and engages critical, politicized ideas to point out ways to generate micro-level, everyday transformations and macro-level shifts in education and practice towards unsettling Whiteness in the field of child and youth care.

The recent National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) called for “an absolute paradigm shift” to “dismantle colonialism within Canadian society, and from all levels of government and public institutions” (p. 172). This will require rejecting past and present “ideologies and instruments of colonialism, discrimination, and misogyny” (p. 172). This is a further call for child and youth care pedagogy and practice to address colonial violence and racism, and to unsettle its White supremacist, Eurocentric foundations, and White settler privilege.

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### **Biography**

**Kaz MacKenzie** is a graduate of the University of Victoria MA program in Child and Youth Care. As a White, cis-gendered, settler woman (she/her/hers) living on unceded Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territory, Kaz is committed to her own unsettling and responsibilities to occupier repair. Her research and practice interests include: flipping the narrative and addressing the White settler problem; committing to pathways towards unsettling Whiteness; staying implicated in ongoing settler colonialism; and antiracist, anticolonial, and intersectional praxis in the human and social development field.