Smile, we can't see you: the voices of workers of colour navigating Whiteness in the Australian child protection system

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Abstract

Cultural competency is presented as the balm against culturally insensitive practice for Australian statutory child protection agencies, yet fails to capture the complexity of people of colour's lived experience of racism. Using Whiteness theory and literature on second-generation migrants, this paper argues that the inclusion of voices of social workers of colour is crucial for shedding insight into the complex intersection of white privilege and racial Otherness. Drawing on my reflections as a child protection worker of colour and conversations with other caseworkers of colour, I conclude that the inclusion of our voices is an essential part of the effective rethinking of the concept of cultural competency. The discussions in this paper issue a challenge to include insight from those who acutely experience whiteness, contributing to the larger goal of redressing oppression and adhering to the requirements of the Australian Association of Social Workers to ensure culturally competent practice.

Introduction

"I don't see colour", a white, child protection colleague said to me once, beckoning an end to a discussion on racism in Australia. It left me feeling as empty as the statement itself. I should be impressed that he has never been able to see colour, because it has been an ever-present companion in my life; both in the personal and professional realm. As one of the few non-white children in my area and school, I learned to occupy a space that was not mine. I learned which stereotypes to manipulate or avoid and learned to perform my race in a way that lessened my visibility. I was quenched by the rare moments of representation in film and stories, and the duality of Othello's plight resonated strongly. I learned to suppress my emotions about any jokes or remarks pertaining to my colour and was representative of all types of brown people; from Indigenous, to gangster rapper, to asylum seeker. My experiences were shaped by societal issues which brought brownness into public discussion, from immigration, terrorism and local tensions. And as a statutory, child protection caseworker invested into the departmental heritage of racially oppressive practice, I recognise a compelling

need to "see colour". So, when my white colleague tells me he doesn't see colour, all I can think is "how utterly superficial", and wonder how much praise he'll receive for the self-reflection. Certainly, it is a commonplace expression for accepting the differences of the Other; however it still has the impact of silencing my view. Ironically, this silencing is reminiscent of cultural competency training, which ignores the nuances of second-generation immigrant experience and instead focuses on blatant (perceived) differences between white and non-white cultures.

There is an unspoken weight behind my colleague's words, which privileges his opinions on racism over mine despite the disparity in our lived experience. A weight that downplays racism as 'common sense' and serves to ultimately deny its existence (Lentin, 2018). I assert that this effect is akin to cultural competency practice, which creates the binary goal of developing the capacity of white caseworkers to work with the assumed Other. The inevitable power imbalance establishes white caseworkers as the dominant culture, with non-white Others as subjects to be examined and understood (Beagan, 2008). It is the dominant group's knowledge and growth which is valued, and the Other's overt differences to be learned; differences, but not lived experiences. As a caseworker of colour, this feels like exclusion.

The field of Whiteness studies aims to rethink cultural competency as a concept, primarily through the call for reflexivity of Whiteness (Walter, Taylor and Habibis, 2011). Shifting the focus to white privilege is a crucial step in deconstructing how we view race and culture within social work practice. In its reconstruction however, we must ensure not to perpetuate the impact of Whiteness through the exclusion of non-white voices in the emerging discourse.

This paper insists that an equal and separate call for reflexivity is placed for caseworkers of colour. This recognises the reality that these caseworkers occupy a unique position in the discourse on racial Otherness, one that is not limited to a focus on the relationship between White privilege and the Indigenous or new migrant community. I strongly posit that the sector requires a third voice in the discourse.

This third voice belongs to the social workers of colour who are second-generation immigrant Australians and therefore maintain a unique understanding of racism and balancing culture. This holds an important distinction to cultural competency training, given its dominant focus on the needs of new immigrants such as language barriers, prior trauma, cultural parenting practices and lack of resources. In contrast, the literature indicates a separate and nuanced set of experiences shared by second-generation immigrants. This paper therefore aims

to explore how the exclusion of these voices reveals a substantial deficiency in cultural competency discourse.

Unpacking cultural competency in the child protection sector

The child protection sector has experienced growth in awareness of racism, promoted as 'cultural competency'. Cultural competence is embedded in social work education. The Australian Association of Social Work's code of ethics (AASW, 2010), stipulates the need for critical reflection of cultural values and its impact on judgement, the importance of cultural consultation and the need to provide a culturally safe service for clients. Sawrikar and Katz (2014a) refer to an audit of the NSW Department of Family and Community Services which states that 15% of children are from ethnic minority families. In a review of the Queensland child protection system however, Kaur (2012) notes that the child protection industry is significantly de-professionalised due to demand, resulting in many child protection workers not having the cultural awareness and sensitivity of a social work or related background. Furthermore, Mendes (2005) notes that despite the AASW apologising for past practice with Indigenous communities, there is limited recorded evidence of a shift in casework practice.

This theme is continued by Monani (2018), who asserts that the social work industry, a predominantly white profession, lacks the capacity to respond to multiculturalism. The work of statutory child protection is characterised by legislative power and marked by a heritage of oppressive practice. It is persuasive therefore, to regard cultural competency as a shield, ensuring that caseworkers adopt a broader view of the unique differences in the families they work with. However, Sawikar and Katz (2014) note that risk assessment for child safety, adhering to the normative practices of the dominant culture, may mislabel cultural practices as abusive or neglectful. One example provided by the author is the difference of how affection is expressed, such as verbally or with food, and how this may be wrongly perceived as emotional abuse. In my own practice, I discovered through a 'cultural consultation' that the large, coin-shaped marks on a child's back were likely to be the result of the Asian medical practice of Coining. Consequently, my assessment and decision-making process was less intrusive for the child and family. Had I achieved cultural competence? Or was I simply adhering to my supposed professional responsibility to remain objective and curious? Unpacking this question may shed light on the potential fallacy that competency could actually be attained.

In the literature, cultural competency practice has been critiqued for its individualistic, apolitical stance which aims to enhance the capacity of individual caseworkers, instead of addressing wider societal factors such as racism (Azzopardi and McNeill, 2016; Beagan, 2018; Pon, 2009; Montalto, 2014; Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011). This approach has been observed to result in the Othering of non-dominant cultures and is premised on the notion that cultural competency is a fixed set of skills (Beagan, 2018).

To illustrate why this may be problematic, it is worth drawing a relation to the way culture is seen in the lives of professionals. Beagan (2018) notes that cultural competency frameworks assume that the dominant, default culture is white, enhancing the invisibility of non-white professionals. The assumption that professionals occupy the dominant space has meant that their capacity can be improved by attaining fixed knowledge on culture and race (Azzopardi and McNeill, 2016). The superficiality of this perceived knowledge leaves cultural competency training redundant for caseworkers of colour with a greater depth of cultural awareness and the lived experience of cultural Otherness. I have had this sentiment reflected back to me offhand by Peter*, an Australian colleague of Samoan heritage, who expressed:

> While I'm glad the training exists, helping white caseworkers approach cultural families with an open mind and different perspective, I don't think it's helpful for me. It's what I would have done anyway.

This is a nuance which cultural competency training may fail to capture. Indeed, the literature on cultural competency indicates that the voices of the Other are absent. As Beagan (2018) states, literature on cultural competency often portray a "group of well-intended, caring, white, Anglo, upper middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian-Heritage, able bodied citizens, gathered together in a heartfelt, impassioned conversation about doing better work with those people," (Beagan, 2018, p. 126). Where do caseworkers of colour fall in this conversation?

The case for including voices of colour: a unique experience of the racial Other

> I had an Aboriginal caller who was very angry at the department and took it out on me. Later on, I thought about the 200 years of dispossession which led to her anger. She probably thought I'm a white caseworker. If she saw

> that I was someone with 200 years of colonisation behind me, would it have been different?
>
> (Daniel*, Child protection caseworker from the reporting line, Indian-Singaporean heritage)

In her critique of cultural competency, Beagan (2018) notes the 3D approach (citing Srivastava, 2007), which prioritises differences in dance, dress and dining as important to diversity, while ignoring factors of structural inequality. In contrast, Daniel's statement reflects an avenue for connection that exists beyond these shared, overt cultural practices and customs: a shared experience of how historical oppression has shaped our cultural identity. It is crucial to recognise the complexity of how cultural identity is constructed. For example, Ravulo (2019), writes that an individual's experience of cultural identity is shaped by societal perception; subject to influences such as nationalism. Our cultural identities therefore forge connections and meaning far outside the limited scope of cultural competency training.

To illustrate: my own cultural identity is formed through my experiences not only as a male of colour in Australia, but as a male of colour born in late 80's who grew up in a largely homogeneous area of Sydney that fostered potent symptoms of racial politics, such as xenophobia and nationalism. My family story is of double migration, with my parents leaving their separate home countries (in which they were already part of the Tamil diaspora) to study in the U.K – notably living in an area with fewer Asians. In Australia, their connection to other migrant families was severed by both location and differences such as religion. It would be too simplistic then to class my cultural background as just Indian heritage, and even today I cannot really identify as anything but as a Brown Australian, or Australian-Other.

Does cultural competency training capture this balancing act or its accompanying sense of fatigue? Zevallos (2005) describes this as living within the shadow of the debate around the ongoing "tension between 'traditional Australian' and multicultural ideas of national identity" (p. 1). Within this space, we are called to assimilate by rejecting our family heritage (Law, Kõlves and De Leo, 2014) and often develop a complex and insecure cultural identity (Asghari-Fard and Hossain, 2017). This experience is amplified for non-white groups who do not have the privilege of appearing mainstream until they self-identify as ethnic through overt practices (Anderson, 2016).

Second-generation, child protection caseworkers of colour have the potential to contribute their insights and experience to assessment, potentially identifying

important dynamics in ongoing casework and assisting in developing the organisational efficacy in working across difference.

What does cultural competency mean for caseworkers of colour?

> We have inbuilt competency. We've had to navigate difference our whole lives. Putting ourselves in another's perspective is easier, more automatic. (Colleen*, Child Protection Caseworker, child reporting line, Nigerian and Anglo-Australian heritage).

As the child of a Nigerian migrant and a white Australian mother, Colleen has an acute understanding of the nuances of cultural competency in Australia. Regrettably, her experience of cultural competency training in the sector has been marginalising, ignoring her deeper insights. For example, she recounted being asked about her cultural competency in an interview. "What did it mean?" she wondered. "My qualifications? I do this every day. How do I prove cultural competency?"

In her critique, Beagan (2018) notes that many cultural competence assessment tools place a heavy emphasis on contact with members of minority groups. This inherently places non-whites on the margins, and Colleen's statement reflects the redundancy of this training for whom understanding 'culture' is a lived experience. Collen also spoke of 'switching performances', akin to the notion of Double Consciousness as coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (Gikandi, 2012).

These nuances are relevant to understanding the experiences of non-white youth in the child protection system. For example, Sawrikar and Katz (2014b) note that the trauma of separation from families may also be potentially heightened for children in collectivist cultures, given the tendency of individualistic cultures to prepare children for self-sufficiency. Furthermore, youth in State Care (Alternative Care) are reported to feel acute apprehension as they approach 18 years of age (Tillack, Raineri, Cahill and McDowall, 2018). Their experiences of Otherness may require consideration. As Colleen states, "we have a lived perspective that is not being brought into the conversation. We're being lumped into having the same experience". There is a need to ensure that the re-shaping of cultural competency draws upon the insights of those who have experienced Otherness acutely.

The call for white reflexivity

To reposition the focus of culture from the 'other', Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) urged a focus on reflexive practice about whiteness, with a consideration on the pervasive impact of white privilege in social work. This call for reflexivity asks white caseworkers to approach culture by interrogating their own position in society, instead of focusing on non-dominant cultures as a problem to solve through the development of professional capacity. This level of reflexivity requires moral courage, as white caseworkers consider their complicity in racist and oppressive structures (Walter, Taylor and Habibis, 2011).

This approach has considerable merit in challenging the invisibility of whiteness in cultural competency training. As an alternative, the literature suggests a preference for cultural humility, with critical reflexivity as a key component of cultural humility, taking responsibility for individual practice (Azzopardi and McNeill, 2016; Beagan, 2018). Cultural humility is infused with respect and openness and essential for the core development of social practices (Azzopardi and McNeill, 2016). Montalto (2014) has also included the concept of cultural safety as an avenue for exploring power and colonisation in cultural competency, indicating a demand in the literature for repositioning how white caseworkers 'improve' their cultural competency practice.

The call for reflexivity from non-whites

> If we're reshaping cultural competency, let's make sure it's not only catered to helping White caseworkers challenge themselves. (Colleen).

The flipside to the argued coin of inclusion is an equally compelling reason to include caseworkers of colour in the discourse of reflexivity: to promote the development of their own professional practice. Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) write a specific focus on how "we, as social workers, operating within the domain of Whiteness, are formed by its assumptions" (Walter, Taylor and Habibis, 2011, page 16).

Do caseworkers of colour actually have a legitimate place in the discourse of Whiteness and challenging cultural competency training? An argument could certainly be made that given the historical heritage of the department, and the dominant representation of white caseworkers in the industry, that there actually is not an urgent space for workers of colour to justify a call for reflexivity on Whiteness. I would caution against this, however. Side-lined from the discussion, caseworkers of colour may feel disconnected from important discourse around

our relationship to Indigenous groups and our complicity in whiteness. Azzopardi and McNeill (2016), in writing about the need for social workers to be critically self-aware of their power, note the dangers of the "race for innocence" (p. 294), that is, minimising our role as oppressor by claiming victimhood status. Interestingly, while this appears to be written for white caseworkers, and is indeed often evident in reactionary responses whenever discriminatory practice is challenged, it is worth considering whether caseworkers of colour also rely on this defensive mechanism. In doing so, these caseworkers may restrict their growth as they fail to consider the impact of their own bias and complicity in working with Indigenous families. And therein lies the danger. These caseworkers occupy the same role and heritage of the organisation and in turn may perpetuate the same harm. The general culpability of non-white Australians has been recently highlighted in an opinion piece by Monica Tan (2019), who challenged all non-Indigenous persons to consider their complicity in benefiting from colonisation and dispossession of Indigenous people. She notes the duality of minority groups - being an oppressor whilst oppressed - but posits that there is no equivalence for the oppression of Indigenous people. Interestingly, this lies in stark contrast with a comment by Colleen, who stated:

> I don't have white guilt, do you have white guilt? I don't see what guilt I should have, because we're oftentimes the victims. We know how it's like to be victimised.

Colleen's sentiment is relatable and quite likely to be the result of the unique position occupied by caseworkers of colour within the current discourse of cultural competency.

Beagan (2018) highlights the danger in the notion of achieving 'full competence' and understanding of another group, positing that feeling 'comfortable' in one's cultural competency is actually indicative of arrogance and a lack of insight in white caseworkers. There is a subtle risk here too for caseworkers of colour. If they accept the validity of cultural competency training and merely position themselves as competent by default, they may fail to challenge it and suppress their own voice.

In rethinking cultural competency, it should be noted that the impact of Whiteness and White privilege is not intrinsically tied to the behaviours and experience of individual white people. Although challenging racism is the responsibility of the dominant group, it is important for caseworkers of colour to examine their own position in the Whiteness of the social work industry. This may help address yet another nuanced issue which cultural competency training does not address: internalised racism. Within non-white groups, there is a shorthand acceptance of

problematic language and assumptions; for example, non-white persons using the term "Australian" to solely mean white Australian (Zevallos, 2005). Additionally, Bond (2015) writes about the use of the loaded term Coconut (black on the outside, white on the inside) as weaponised language inflicted to punish and control in-group behaviour. Although she writes from an Indigenous perspective, drawing comparison to the colonial practice of classifying Indigenous identity (Bond, 2015), I have personally made constant use of the term to situate my bicultural experience. Within the child protection and Out of Home Care sector, racially insensitive language may create an environment that perpetuates the Othering and exclusion of youth and ought to be challenged.

Barriers for future research and inclusion

When considering how to encourage this reflexivity, it is important to consider the existing structural and individual barriers. This was suitably exemplified in a conversation I had with a non-government organisation, Out Of Home Care case manager named Nahesh* who has a Sri Lankan heritage.

On my initial question, Nahesh defined Cultural Competency as "having awareness and understanding and knowledge. The way to act around other cultures". When probed further, he intriguingly spoke in relation to Whiteness and how it differs from other cultures. I asked if it was relevant for a non-white worker. "I guess that's okay", he said, "I would say my point of view is definitely white. You and me are pretty anglicised growing up this country."

I asked Nahesh to reflect on any feelings of difference. Slowly, he recollected micro-aggressions. Feeling his opinions overlooked on cultural matters. Packing a sandwich for work solely to avoid scrutiny for bringing a curry. Racially loaded banter, such as a joke made when he walked into a dark room: *Smile, we can't see you.* Nahesh played along. (I pre-empted the joke, many would). Nahesh was once asked about Australia Day, and suppressed his strong opinions in fear, deflecting it with a joke.

Nahesh realised that he always felt uneasy, but never acknowledged it until our discussion. "That's the worst thing", he said, "when you get that feeling but you can't prove it. I'm now starting to get it, white privilege".

This was a surprise, Nahesh used to scoff at the term. Now he volunteered it.

I asked Nahesh if he would like to reflect on the relevance of cultural competency for children he worked with. "Well, I don't agree with matching cultures for the sake of it", he said, "the most important thing is them being placed with loving, genuine carers". He reflected further however on tokenistic attempts of cultural

competent practice, such as placing a Samoan child with a Tongan family, an insensitive decision which caused tension. More poignantly, he was once reallocated to work with a child of Fijian Indian background instead of continuing his substantial work with a sibling group of white children. Nahesh wondered if this decision was made on superficial assumptions.

Unpacking the conversation

My conversation with Nahesh illustrates a challenge in our reflexivity, the need to peel back layers of structural silencing, lack of insight and internalised racism. His reflection came through the process of curious questioning, which is unlikely to occur in standard cultural competency training.

This is a barrier for creating the third space. Even with opportunity, workers may be unable or unwilling to reverse a lived experience of assimilation. It is a harmful assumption that workers are fully cognisant of the impact of Whiteness in their lives and professions. Colleen, the child protection worker of biracial heritage, captured this reality when explaining why she feels incompatible with Cultural Competency training:

> … my mind is being decolonised off a white perspective. I'm looking at things from a white perspective, learning about racism, but I've already experienced it innately.

Colleen demonstrates deeper insight into her positioning as an Australian child protection worker of colour and sets a valuable standard. Regardless, the responsibility for change does not rest on individuals like herself, and as a qualified social worker her awareness is unlikely to be consistent across the de-professionalised sector. Change comes from reframing cultural competency, and it is crucial to recognise that even if the floor is opened, caseworkers of colour may require support to stand up.

This is exemplified through Nahesh's voicelessness. Insightful workers may be apprehensive about sharing due to the expectation of hostility or exclusion. This subtle experience is difficult to challenge; nor is it a passive barrier. Ravulo (2019) writes that dominant ethnic groups may strengthen their identity as a defensive reaction, and Azzopardi and McNeill (2016) note that the Other is either viewed as safe or a potential threat. For minority caseworkers, these dynamics can be acutely marginalising, especially in the polarised climate around political correctness and diversity. We may share a profession but as Ravulo (2019) notes, societal forces may inevitably force caseworkers of colour to be in stark contrast with white workers when it comes to racial discourse. Lentin (2018) writes how White defensiveness has materialised in outright denials of racism as common

sense, emerging as a new form of racism. How can caseworkers of colour feel comfortable to discuss racism when outright denial is a commonplace response? How could we challenge problematic views of dominant caseworkers when they are fundamentally shielded under the umbrella term of cultural competence? This highlights an ongoing tension which needs to be dismantled if the floor is opened.

Opening the floor, embracing our potential

> We have a privileged perspective, because we can be the voices for them, to share their experience of what marginalisation looks like. Experiences as the people of colour have in their daily lives. How do we experience the system? (Colleen).

The barriers caused by systematic oppression are substantial. Cultural competency training is restrained by its individual focus and being positioned on the outskirts of its framework is marginalising. Ravulo (2019), however, offers a refreshing alternative, a hopeful position. He suggests we embrace the opportunity which marginalisation brings, positing that it creates a corner which fosters resistances and a counter discourse. He cites bell hooks (1989) in asserting that instead of abandoning marginality, it should be acknowledged as a life source for resistance. This perspective is a contrast to the idea of "not seeing colour"; rather it celebrates the difference. Our marginalisation does not strip away the potential of workers to contribute to the discourse. Indeed, their insights should be nourished by ally-ship and organisational change. By creating a third space where our contributions are included not as a token afterthought, but an officially recognised gap in the literature.

I stress, this isn't just *embracing diversity*, that maintains Whiteness as the default and invites superficial Othered contributions. Rather, it's about inviting Australian caseworkers of a marginalised background to join the table and share their insights. This in turn requires the worker to acknowledge their own nuanced experience of White privilege in Australia.

Who builds the bridge we cross?

> We can help colleagues, we're close to them. I think people want to know but might be embarrassed. I can see the white guilt dripping off them. But if there's a gap that needs jumping. We're the bridge. That can help further cultural competency and also help us identify our own blind spots. (Colleen).

Our polarised climate creates alienation, and individual interactions should be encouraged to break barriers. Yet this does not address the systemic factors which

underscore racism. The child protection sector itself has gathered a diverse cross-section of cultures with a shared middle-class status. Therefore, it is not mere proximity which will address racism. As mentioned previously, sub-groups may form based on shared views and experiences. Colleen offers an interesting perspective, noting that "people of colour may be talking about certain things but only amongst each other, and not sharing it with their white colleagues". I asked why. "Because of how it'll be received". She said, "Of how it'll make us look""

The reluctance of caseworkers of colour to share their knowledge is not the direct responsibility of White caseworkers, many of whom Colleen acknowledges may be willing to listen and learn. Crossing that bridge and sharing knowledge does indeed require from caseworkers of colour the spirit of resistance and moral courage. But theirs is not the responsibility to build the bridge. This rests with the dominant group, to push for systemic change and to commit to reflexivity. It is incumbent on the sector to dismantle structural barriers which may prevent this, such as by creating a climate of genuine curiosity about caseworkers of colour experiences.

Additional research can also provide this support by strengthening collective understanding of the experiences of caseworkers of colour. Without a solid research base, I can only speculate based on my own experiences. Research could identify whether these experiences are consistent, illuminate pathways to change and identify acts of resistance. In helping those within the margins to find a voice, it can help those on the outside to develop their understanding and challenge power structures (Ravulo, 2019).

The added bonus

A final benefit of including caseworkers of colour into the discussion is to allow for the positive aspects of inclusion. The organisational environment holds the potential to perpetuate or dismantle the lived experience of Otherness that the worker may already experience. This is poignantly reflected in another statement from my Samoan colleague, Peter*, who stated:

> I'm excited you are writing about this. I'd be very interested to hear actually what the white caseworkers think of me. I don't know how they view me.

This statement is not included to unduly insinuate racism within the workplace, but rather as a reflection of the potential experience of caseworkers of colour in the child protection industry. There are substantial benefits from empowering these caseworkers by including them in the overarching call for reflexivity. Empowering social workers of colour to reflect on their experience gives permission. It brings out of the shadows concepts and insights which otherwise

may be silenced; particularly by a framework which promotes white learning and sharing. Empowering workers to advocate against the subtle forms of white privilege will, in turn, create better advocates for clients. This may ideally prevent non-white children from being subjected to irrelevant cultural competency practices.

Conclusion

The process of writing this article has been an exercise in reflexivity, encouraging me to examine my position within white privilege, challenge my internalised racism and my acceptance of cultural competency training. The nature of this has changed from draft to draft. I realised that the lived experience of being a second-generation person of colour had instilled an innate understanding of cultures as a survival mechanism: the dominant culture, my own heritage and my place as Other. Is this not a level of knowledge impossible to capture in cultural competency training?

To this end, I would like to conclude with a personal, story about Otherness and Ally-ship.

For all the aforementioned racial Otherness I experienced in my school, my most poignant moment of ally-ship came from someone who was a stark contrast in age, race and historical context: my white, German-accented teacher named Frau Emelia*. She was set apart by her own cultural and physical Otherness.

One lunchtime, in grade seven, at my predominately white school, the group discussion turned to the usual, languished racial jokes (with the schoolyard blend of ignorance, malice and jest which I could never articulate at that age). I prepared myself to smile and deflect, when Frau Emelia walked over and asked the group if they checked that I was happy with the jokes. I played it down to keep the peace.

 "Good, good," she said, "as long as he's part of the joke."

Mocking laughter and the usual taunts fell upon her as she walked off. We continued the conversation.

That moment has always remained with me. Despite being separated by blatant differences, she was an Other who recognised the subtle nuance of my experience and had the moral conviction to intervene. She strengthened me. And made me visible. This is a far cry from the faux moral claim of colour blindness by my *culturally competent* child protection peer.

This is my appeal, therefore. As cultural competency training is reconsidered, the lived nuances of second-generation workers must hold a space in the discourse. Furthermore, caseworkers of colour must also recognise the potential within

themselves. Their reflexive journey into Whiteness is not token, but valued. Future research could explore the commonality of my own conclusions and uncover potential contributions. This is essential to improve child protection work given the powerful shoes these caseworkers fill. Social work should unsettle problematic structures, and everyone partaking in this field deserves the opportunity and support for reflexivity.

Acknowledgements

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