Article

Recognising the embedded child: children's participation, child protection inequities and cultural capital in child protection

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Abstract: Children's right to participation in child protection decision-making is supported by moral imperatives and international conventions. The fragmented implementation of this right reflects an already-conflicted discursive terrain that attempts to incorporate both children's agency and their need for protection. This article uses two key theoretical lenses to further examine this terrain: child welfare inequalities and cultural capital. These theories draw attention to how social inequities and cultural capital relating to culture and class affect how participation plays out. An unintended consequence of constructing children within a traditional liberal account of rights, within neoliberal and 'child focussed' policy paradigms, is the reduction of an acknowledgment of the culturally contested nature of an individualistic construction of children, excising children from their social backgrounds and promoting the notion of a 'universal child'. With a particular focus on class, culture and professional paradigms, I argue that the ways children's views are elicited, the content of those views and how they are interpreted, become subject to a set of professional assumptions that tend to take little cognisance of the social backround of children, including norms relating to class, ethinicity and the oppressive structural relations relating to those two factors. This process is shored up with concepts such as attachment theory, the 'adultification' of children of colour, the diminishing of Indigenous concepts of children and childhood, and the pre-eminence of the 'concerted cultivation' middle class parenting style. The child's cultural worldview and manner of expressing it may clash with professional cultures that emphasise an ability for verbal expression, independence, and entitlement when negotiating preferences with representatives of powerful social institutions such as child protection systems. Many children may not comply with this expectation due to both cultural and class socialisation processes, and the histories of the oppressive functions of child protection systems. The unspoken power of child protection organisations that must engage in constant translation of children's cultural capital to ensure participation, may instead better serve children's participation aims by devolving authority to affected communities. Communities reflecting children's own, may be better able to offer recognition to children and enable their participation more effectively.

Keywords: Child protection, social work, participation, child abuse, inequalities, cultural capital

Introduction

A growing awareness of social inequities is re-shaping research, policy and practice in child protection systems in many countries. Policies and histories based on racism, capitalism, colonialism, sexism and ableism are under a new wave of scrutiny and challenge. Connecting these challenges with the way child protection systems operate is imperative, opening up new ways to examine how state interactions with children and their families might promote socially equitable outcomes (Featherstone et al., 2018). How children's rights to participation might intersect with a growing awareness of social inequities has had little scholarly attention so far. This article draws on an intersectional inequalities perspective, and the concept of cultural capital, to consider how children's rights to participation in child protection systems are affected by these inequities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child…The child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child". (Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

In this well known injunction, age is implied as the only aspect of context that might affect a child's capacity to form and express their views. What might shape the content of their views, the manner in which they are expressed, how they are effectively elicited, influence their interpretation and shape their translation in the process of 'being heard' is considered self evident. I draw on a range of literature and theoretical lenses to trouble this self-evidence. I argue that particularly a child's culture, ethnicity and class intersect with pre-existing impressions of children that affect children's participation. These pre-existing discourses include the tendency to protectionism, notions of vulnerability and the perception of what is acceptable within the professional culture of child protection systems (Vis et al., 2012). I argue that more attention is needed to often unarticulated norms governing children's participation efforts, which tend to prioritise white, middle-class, professional concepts and processes that are then mediated through documents and various professionals that together can diminish children's already-tenuous agency, and the agency of key stakeholders in promoting children's views and interests, namely their parents, wider families and communities. Processes disempowering families at the structural level also disempower children at the interpersonal level. Drawing on the notion of cultural capital, I trace the interpersonal mediation of children's expressed views, and the institutional context of child protection systems to highlight the barriers and enablers of participation for children from backgrounds shaped by social inequities – the majority of children in child protection system contact.

Social inequities, the child protection system context and protectionism

Child protection systems reflect systemic inequalities in society. These inequalities, defined by Bywaters et al (2015; 2016) can be defined as aspects of advantage or disadvangatage that affect children's chances of coming into system contact, their experiences once in the system, and the outcomes of it (Bywaters, 2015). Many studies have found that children living in areas of poverty or high deprivation, and children from specific racialised and Indigenous groups face intersecting overrepresentation in most child protection systems (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Bywaters et al., 2016; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2019; Pelton, 2015; Author et al., 2019). The child protection system itself is a formalised, bureaucratic, legal regulator of family's rights to care for children. In many jurisdictions, such systems are based on a 'notify-investigate' set of institutional arrangements that rely on a central legally established organisation, to whom other professionals and members of the public are expected to report to (Author, 2021). Depending on the broad policy orientation of the nation state, the central body may be mediated by the presence of community organisations that offer

preventive services, and a greater or lesser provision of broad social protections such as income support, access to housing, support for parents and parental leave and daycare (Gilbert et al., 2011). This broad institutional context establishes a set of power relationships that parents often experience as surveillant and judgmental, while providing for the ability of the state to act to protect children if needed. This care and control dichotomy has been well described, and historical and current accounts note the conflation of state power in child protection with white, middle class values as one reason for the continuing intersecting overrepresentation of Indigenous and racialised minorities living in poverty in most countries (Dudgeon et al., 2015).

The nature of organisational norms and routines within organisations are structured around bureaucratic processes, technologies, and new public management ideals of efficiency, standardisation and accountability, while the variety of key professionals such as social workers, lawyers and others work within it (Webster & McNabb, 2016). These professionals draw on key concepts, values and knowledge bases within their work. Together these conditions create the habitus of child protection settings, that is, "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence …predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 8). Within child protection organisations, this habitus constructs institutional social capital and with it, a range of powerful norms that shape the representation of children and the processes and structures governing participation (Hamilton et al., 2021). One study, for example, found that issues such as team specialisation, that required children to change key relationships constantly, impeded participation, as did the physical space of offices that were seldom desgined to facilitate personal conversations (Seim & Slettebø, 2017). Others note that the often pressured context of child protection and the conflicting demands to both protect children and encourage their active participation can lead to confusion in practice and tick-box approaches to participation (Dillon, 2021; Cossar et al., 2016; Toros, 2021). Similarly, the involuntary nature of child protection can lead to the resistance of both parents and children to participatory practices (Dillon, 2021).

Children's views may be diminished not only because they may be viewed as incompetent due to their developmental stage and dependence, but because within the child protection system, children are constructed as hyper-vulnerable due having often suffered abuse and neglect or other harm (Author, 2018). One barrier to participation related to this hyper vulnerability is sourced in the difficult position of child protection workers to attend to children's right to participate, and the need to protect children on two fronts: from exposure to distressing information that might be shared in group decision-making fora, and from the burden of responsiblity for difficult decisions that participation might imply (Vis et al., 2010; Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2019).

Many studies report limitations for children's participation relating to these discourses – including that workers have an over-reliance on expert and deficit based assessments, that children are not always included in assessment processes, that children expressed the wish to be heard more in decison-making, and the organisation of spaces and processes are not set up to accommodate children's participation (Arbeiter & Toros, 2017; Sanders & Mace, 2006). Others report that children are viewed as information providers, and as recipients of decision outcomes, but that protectionist ideas about children's vulnerability keep them from actively participating, or being supported to participate, in decision-making processes such as meetings (van Bijleveld et al., 2015; 2020; Vis et al., 2012). Others note how the 'best interests' principle as the apex principle in most legislation prioritises adult views of children's interests over their own perspectives (Archard et al., 2009). Via these constructed images and social positions,

children can be viewed through a prism of 'difference', and be 'done to' rather than engaged in meaningful participation, despite this right being spelled out in both the UNCROC and many statutes governing child protection systems (Besssell, 2011). Because of this social-organisational-professional-theoretical context, despite best intentions, when children come into contact with the system, their ability to participate can be reduced, and is highly mediated by adults, and the organisational, professional and cultural norms those adults operate within (Diaz et al., 2020; Revell).Yet this extant literature seldoms considers how children's experiences of inequity and the organisational context shape their ability to participate. As Wells (2017) notes, childhood studies tends to focus on generational inequality, though many children also experience racial and socioeconomic inequality, among others, that intersect. Examining these protectionist beliefs from the perspective of social inequities and cultural capital leads in several directions. If children are already considered too vulnerable to be exposed to certain types of knowledge, in what ways do aspects of social disadvantage increase or decrease perceptions of vulnerability, and how does this affect children's participation?

Participation, individualism and cultural capital

The birth of the children's rights movement was borne out of an eagerness to promote a construction of children as individuals capable of autonomy, agency and worthy of equal recognition to adults. This was important in the context of developing and adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a break from both Victorian notions of 'child as chattel' as well as assumptions about children's incompetence relating to age (Woodhead, 2009). Proposing the child as an individual agentic rights-holder was a key plank in constructing the state's responsibility to respond to childen in need of protection directly, and flowing from this, legitimacy for intervention in the private sphere of the family. This created a direct relationship between the state and child to enable protective action (Cashmore, 2009; Bessell, 2011). However, this construction reflects liberal, individualistic rights ideals that while contributing to children's protection, also reduced alternative paradigms based on, for example, Indigenous worldviews about the nature of children and childhood (see Williams et al., 2019). They also align neatly with neoliberal ideals of individual rights and responsibilites. McCafferty points out that the traditional liberal theory of rights creates problems for all children who fall foul of its assumptions of "independent, rational individuals capable of making choices" (McCafferty, 2021, p.2135), and this dissonance underpins some of the difficulties social workers have with encouraging participation, even if that is their intention (Bessell, 2011, McCafferty, 2021).

Within protectionist or child-focussed policy orientations, and within neoliberal political contexts, a tendency towards hyper-individualism is heightened. Constructions of children in neoliberal policy environments downplay the social contexts children live within, and limit holistic or ecological understandings of the effect of family social conditions and cultures on children (as well as parents) (Winter et al., 2022; Author, 2018). This excising of the child from their social background limits an acknowledgement of the ways the child has been affected by material economic conditions, and socialised within a specific cultural context. It also reinforces the notion of a 'universal child' – a singular way in which people in the category of 'children' experience the world and interact within it (James & James, 2012). As James & James (2012) point out, this is a misnomer, as children's lives, experiences and cultures are diverse. Individualised rights concepts are asserted by states founded on colonisation, racism and neoliberalism, imposing, or attempting to impose, both economic and cultural hegemony. This hegemony, particularly regarding accepted conceptualisations of the child, can diminish the perspectives of many cultural and Indigenous groups, whose worldviews often encompass

the child as indivisible from their family, extended family, and tribal group (Choate & Lindstrom, 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2020).

Neoliberal ideals position children as future human capital, their potential imagined in ways that aspire to self-expression, autonomy and employability (Author, 2018; Sims & Tiko, 2019). Hennum & Aamodt (2021) for example, note that where the language of being child centric or child focussed in used, that this legitimates the quite authoritarian intervention in the lives of families within the Norwegian and similar child protecion systems. A key plank of this is the notion of the 'entitled child' that is, one of the child with its own set of individualised rights. These and similar positions written into law appear to "transform the relation between the Norwegian state and families by directing the state's loyalty from the parents to the child." (p. 206). Because the premise of the child protection system is to respond to children suffering abuse and harm, these political constructions are exacerbated, as the child's family is often demonised as the source of harm and not worthy of support (Winter et al., 2022). This increases the tendency to view the child as a disembodied citizen, freed from their family to converse directly with the state through exercising their 'voice', with little consideration of their social location either before entering care or once in it, or the deep interconnections between their families rights and their own.

An unintended consequence of this individualistic rights frameworks is that it implies that children arrive in the child protection system as blank slates, cut away from their social environments and free of social influence. Yet children's ability to participate in decision-making in the child protection context, the forms that participation might take, and how that particiption is interpreted are intimately connected with children's social context (neighborhood, income, housing); their family and community's social and historical positioning (colonisation, migration patterns, racism, economic situation); access to social goods (education, space, healthcare) and the cultural norms of their family and community (relating to class, culture, ethnicity and religion). These factors shape children's access to cultural capital and with it, the means by which to participate in ways that the dominant cultural paradigm of the child protection system can hear. For instance, social context influences how children prefer to participate or express their views, the content of their participation efforts, how their views are interpreted using particular knowledge bases, paradigms and worldviews, who has control of that representation, how those interpretations are represented in decision-making fora, documented and shared with other professionals, and how all of that informs decision-making about their care (Vaghri & De Souza, 2021).

The concept of cultural capital embedded in habitus or social worlds provides one way of theorising these intersecting domains. Cultural capital is a term extensively developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). Cultural capital refers to the different habitual practices and preferences of social classes primarily, and how these operate to reinforce power relationships between those holding attributes deemed desirable and those deemed undesirable. These are reinforced through social institutions such as schools, child protection systems and locations, reproducing social class. Studies of cultural capital in education settings noted that teachers respond differently to students based on class, often making assumptions about their intelligence or diligence based on their clothing and behaviour (Carter, 2003; Redford et al., 2009). Capital, to Bourdieu, equates to the kinds of resources needed to operate in different cultural contexts and achieve recognition within them. Without recognition of children and all they carry in terms of their webs of relationships, the deeper forms of recognition needed to enable participation may be absent (Smith et al., 2017; McCafferty, 2021). While Bourdieu has been critiqued within child protection discourse as

being too deterministic and not focused enough on agency, nevertheless it provides a helpful way to consider how conflicting social norms and power affect every level of children's participation – their expressed views, how they are elicited and how they are interpreted (Houston, 2009). Ogle comments on this, noting that "The participation of children in the child protection process is intrinsically linked with power relations that are mediated through political, sociolegal and cultural processes" (Ogle et al., 2021, np).

This context of inequities and cultural capital intersects with the existing issues with children's participation, expressed in the literature in multiple jurisdictions, described more fully above. Generally, research shows that a focus on protection, children's vulnerability, children's perceived lack of competence and the pre-eminence of the 'best interest' principle can weaken their participation, reducing their access to this right and leading to tokenistic attempts at participation (Heimer et al., 2018; Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2020; McCafferty, 2021; Toros, 2021). Reflecting on all this leads to proposing a re-construction of the child as an embedded person, rather than a brute individual, one whose rights to participation in child protection contexts are intensely shaped by the political, social, and cultural contexts they come from and are exposed to within CPSS. This leads to several key questions:

How are children's rights to participation shaped by their own social context and the embedded inequities within it?
How do the ways their views are elicited, interpreted and operationalized in child protection decision-making reflect, reinforce or ameliorate social inequalities, and how is this process affected by cultural capital?
What is the impact of this on children and their families in the child protection systems?

This article now turns to consider these questions, and discuss the influences of culture, class, and interpretation on children's participation. As I begin to examine these issues, it is important to recognize that within any racial, cultural, class-based, or professional group there are important internal diversities relating to people's experiences of gender, nationality, place of birth, religion, beliefs, values, individual preferences and many others. People's lives are affected by multiple intersecting and complex influences that makes identifying consistent patterns within single groups problematic (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020). Drawing on examples relating to class and culture necessarily essentialises differences to some extent, and risks reproducing stereotypical tropes that inadvertently shore up racist and classist assumptions. However, to not directly grapple with diverse realities ultimately reinforces universalist assumptions that make invisible their alignment with dominant economic and cultural hegemonies. In what follows, I have made my examples tentative and partial to reflect these complex realities while making a case for a meaningful grappling with some aspects of those inequities.

Children's cultures and professional cultures

Children's participation ideals seldom attend to the cultural context of the child, that shapes children's attitudes, values, practices and preferences. How children's views are elicited and how they interact with child protection social workers, and what they choose to say reflects culturally preferred ways of interacting, as well as content that reflects the child's cultural worldview. The position of children as inherently connected to their specific families and tribal groups is constant in many Indigenous cultures (Miniserial Advisory Committee, 1988; Fitzmaurice, 2020). Calls to decolonise child protection must accept that to do so leads to different ways of eliciting and recognising children's expressed views, and differences in the weighing up of children's best interests in relation to the rights and interests of other family

and wider community members. These views rest on an assumption of the importance of maintaining family, extended family, the rights of other family members, and tribal belonging (Moyo, 2012; Williams et al., 2019). As Fitzmaurice points out in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the notion of whānau (extended family) is rooted in the principles of whakapapa (geneology) and whanaungatanga (family and tribal relationships). This results in an assumption for many Māori that "Children belonged not to their parents but to their whānau, with the whānau as a whole carrying responsibility for them .. The responsibility for keeping children safe was upheld by multiple people … Whānau were also crucial in establishing and securing a person's sense of identity and belonging (Metge, 1995)" (Fitzmaurice, 2020, p. 167). The right to assert this view of children is embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People, which states that "Indigenous people have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group" (UNDRIP (Article 7 (2)). It is also guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi, with a recent tribunal ruling finding that child removals had breached the right to have sovereignty over 'kāinga', explained further below. These rights are held collectively, not individually, challenging a child-centric discourse that separates children from their family group (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021). Choate (2019) extends this analysis in the Canadian setting, noting that families are often assessed using Western theories such as attachment and family systems theory that do not reflect Canadian Indigenous ways of knowing or understandings of children, families, responsibilities, and the use particularly of attachment theory to justify the long-term placement of indigenous children into nonindigenous families "were seen as combining to diminish the possibility of Indigenous communities caring for their own children" (Choate, 2019, p.1085).

What does this mean for children's participation? Cultural paradigm differences within unequal power relationships have implications for the participation of children themselves at the interpersonal level, as well as institutional questions about who is in control of the concepts on which participation is based on and interpreted. At the interpersonal level, if we accept children as agentic members of their cultural group, then this affects their self-perception, their family relationships and their perception of any harm or abuse they may have suffered. It will also be refracted through the historical interactions between their cultural group and the child protection system. These will all influence their style of participation, their preferred process for participation and the content of their expressed preferences. For example, in traditional forms of Samoan culture there is a belief in that "in the same way that adults need to be *mata'u* (respectful, in awe, obedient and fearful towards God), children also need to be *mata'u*—respectful, obedient and to some degree fearful of their parents and teachers… respect, self-restraint and obedience are held in such understandings to be the foundation of learning and wisdom." (Pereira, 2010, p. 101). This foundational belief sometimes results in parenting practices that do not align with Western middle class norms of negotiation and reasoning about children's behaviour in contexts of migration outside of Samoa (children are expected to be obedient, not negotiate) (Pereira, 2010). In turn, this may lead to negative constructions of Samoan parents and children in Western child protection systems, and dissonance between participation ideals as constructed by white, middle class child protection discourse and cultural norms. For example, if asked questions directly in child protection participation settings, some Samoan children may be silent out of respect for the authority figure of the social worker, as well as respect for their family. Within this and other hierarchically organised cultures, the construction of children as needing to defer to adults is often promoted. Some Samoan children may be perceived by non-Samoan social workers when they respond to participatory efforts with silence or deference, as traumatised, withdrawn, untruthful or having a disability, though they may be none of these things (as well as any of

them). Different ways of eliciting and understanding children's views are needed to both encourage children's participation, untangle the relative effects of different influences on children's behaviour, and avoid imposing white, western norms in an oppressive and racist manner within a relationship of significant power imbalance.

In colonised countries there is often a long history of the child protection system as an imposer of the coloniser's norms and values, and child removal used as a method to impose this (Kaiwai et al., 2020). There are also the economic impacts of colonisation creating conditions of poverty (Kaiwai et al., 2020; Dudgeon etal., 2015). In these contexts, the intense lack of trust and loss of legitimacy of the child protection system also affects the willingness of older children to participate in child protection settings. As Author (2019) notes, in some Indigenous groups the common knowledge passed down through generations is an expectation of over-surveillance and judgement, leading to a hyper-awareness of parenting scrutiny from child protection systems. For children raised in these environments, lack of trust is a barrier to participation. As the formation of the relationship with social workers is a key to enabling participation, these historic patterns still resonate and affect those relationships today, reducing children's willingness to participate in decision-making (Cossar et al., 2016). This reality invokes wider questions about system reform not able to be covered here, but nevertheless draws attention to the possibility that state systems may not be best placed to respond to historically oppressed communities. Such low legitimacy and cultural barriers to participation may signal the need for more radical transformation (Hyslop, 2021).

This issue draws attention to the control of the culturally derived worldviews on which participation is premised. It speaks to the position of embedded cultural norms within unequal societies founded on colonial ideals, what Tupaea (2020) calls 'invisibilised colonial norms'. Within colonised countries, the values of white middle class cultures are normalised, and the adults and communities of the child's family are positioned within structures that reflect colonisation, institutionalised racism, class and gender inequities, and child protection system stigma (CPSS)(Dudgeon et al., 2015). This can reduce recognition of claims regarding their own child's views, preferences, and best interests, compared to the claims of the professionals involved. Who is even considered to hold normative authority over 'best interests' definitions within families reflects culturally specific worldviews about the relative roles of parents, aunties and uncles, grandparents and cousins within family groups. Within Westminster-based legal systems, this usually gives preference to the views of parents, the only holders of guardianship, while in many Indigenous cultures the roles of elders and grandparents, and aunts/uncles, also hold decision making and care authority for children (Williams et al, 2019). The imposition of the child protection system can therefore result in reinforcing pre-existing hierarchies of knowledge related to colonisation, class and professional status that act to devalue the voice of both children and the valid representations of adults who have insights into their children's rights, needs and preferences.

For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are persistent intersecting inequities in the child protection system related to socioeconomic position and ethnicity. Around 60% of children in care are Māori, though Māori are 25% of the child pop (Author et al., 2018). Māori make up about 1/3 of children living in most deprived decile, and have nine times the chance of entering care than children in the least deprived decile (Author, 2019). There is a history of state over-intervention and cultural assimilationist policies premised on a 'fundamental misunderstanding' of the position of the Māori child in Māori society (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988). These ongoing disparities and resulting public outcries led to an inquiry brought to the Waitangi Tribunal arguing that the disparities faced by Māori were a breach of

the Treaty guarantees, particularly that of tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) over kāinga (the Treaty of Waitangi, a founding document setting out obligations for the two parties)(Waitangi Tribunal, 2021). This quote from their report, while substantial, points out the completely different cultural assumptions and the struggle for power over the definitions of children that flow from it:

"We note that article 2 of the Māori text guarantees to Māori tino rangatiratanga over both physical possessions and kāinga. The word 'kāinga' captures a range of meanings including home, residence, village, or homeland. This is a guarantee of the right to continue to organise and live as Māori. Fundamental to that is the right to care for and raise the next generation. The disparity we examine has arisen and persists in part due to the effects of alienation and dispossession, but also because of a failure by the Crown to honour the guarantee to Māori of the right of cultural continuity embodied in the guarantee of tino rangatiratanga over their kāinga. It is more than just a failure to honour or uphold, it is also a breach born of hostility to the promise itself. Since the 1850s, Crown policy has been dominated by efforts to assimilate Māori to the Pākehā way. This is perhaps the most fundamental and pervasive breach of te Tiriti/the Treaty and its principles. It has also proved to be the most difficult to correct, in part due to assumptions by the Crown about its power and authority, and in part because the disparities and dependencies arising from the breach are rationalised as a basis for ongoing Crown control. To our minds, the disparities are a consequence of the Crown's intrusion into the rangatiratanga of Māori over kāinga" (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021, p. x111).

Who should have the power to guarantee children's rights? Who should define and speak for them within a state of 'hostility to the premise itself'? How does this affect children's rights to participate? As Webb notes, the assumption that professionals are the only ones that should be guarantors of children's rights reflects an arrogance firmly based in state power and often colonial and oppressive attitudes (Webb, 2021). A preeminent Māori scholar comments on the power of state definitions: "The coloniser's need to impose their laws and institutions on people who already had their own allowed no room for an honourable relationship with iwi and hapū. Instead colonisation fomented injustice: a systemic privileging of the Crown and a relationship in which it assumed it would be the sole and supreme authority" (Jackson, 2021, n.p.). This 'assumption of authority' shapes the cultural capital valued within the child protection system, as well as views of children's place in society, both shaping how their participation is elicited and interpreted. It is interesting to note that since this report, the state child protection agency (Oranga Tamariki) has moved to incorporate a set of Māori values and principles into decision-making, while also forming partnerships with iwi and sharing some forms of decision-making and the 'co-design of services' directly with iwi and hapū (tribal groups) (Oranga Tamariki, 2021). Whether this will assist with improving participation inequities remains to be seen.

Class based parenting cultures and their impact on children's participation outcomes

Children's attitude to participation, expressing their perspectives and the content of those perspectives are also shaped by their class background. Many children coming into contact with the care system are coming from contexts of poverty and material disadvantage (Bywaters et al., 2015; Author et al., 2019). Children's expressed views are related to the type of childhood they have been able to access and the nature of parenting practices they have been exposed to. One influence on parenting is shaped by class-based cultural differences (though these interact with ethnicity and location)(Lareau, 2003). As discussed above, categories such as 'class' can be totalizing in their assumed homogeneity, but a precis of Lareau's work does highlight, however tentatively, how class can influence normative values to some extent. Lareau's extensive US study of differences in parenting styles showed that middle class parents often

invest large amounts of time to teach children specific skills, ensure children are able to access many activities, encouraged children's ability to advocate for themselves with adults, promoted verbal reasoning and expression, and "provided opportunities for competition and public displays of skill" (Zilberstein, 2016, p. 225). They engaged children in negotiation and reasoning to guide children's behaviour and this resulted in high level verbal and negotiation skills and a comfort in debating with adults. Lareau terms this form of parenting 'concerted cultivation' and points out it involves "precisely the skills that help children achieve in American social institutions, schools and occupations" (p. 225), providing middle class children with the cultural capital valued in educational and other institutional contexts (Redford et al., 2009). Those subjected to 'concerted cultivation' have been taught the skills most valued by competitive individualism rooted in neoliberal values, and have a high sense of self efficacy and an expectation that those in authority and in public institutions, will respond to their concerns and act to address them.

Working class US parents on the other hand, (with many undoubted exceptions) tend to engage more in 'natural growth' parenting, where children are expected to follow broad rules, not negotiate about boundaries, and have more free time to engage in their own self-directed activities (Lareau, 2003). This was particularly because parents in the working class families in Lareau's study tended to spend more time accessing the basics of life needed to feed, clothe and educate children, while the 'concerted cultivation' style required a high level of resources, time and money to implement (Zilberstein, 2016). The focus of this type of parenting is on becoming a positive member of the collective, and belonging and responsibility to the collective is emphasized more than competition and individualism (Zilberstein, 2016). This type of parenting, in this context, "leads to more connections to family, greater independence, higher self-restraint, and less entitlement. Despite the value of natural growth parenting in some settings, it appears to place children at a disadvantage in industrialized societies that require (reward) more assertiveness and self-promotion" (p. 225, brackets mine).

In particular, differences in attitudes towards public institutions, and culturally preferred ways of interacting with adults may affect some children's participation in child protection settings. "Lower-SES families also displayed different attitudes towards institutions, which they approached with caution and suspicion, making them less likely to assert their ideas or intervene in institutional matters" (Zilberstein, 2016, p.225). Other research similarly suggests poorer children are socialized to focus more on family, thinking of others and the collective rather than themselves, in order to create a social system of interdependence and homogeneity when the group depends on one another for survival (Zilberstein, 2016; Keller, 2012). Consequently, some children from working class backgrounds may not have skills of self-advocacy, argumentation or have an expectation of entitlement when they interact with public institutions. They may be taught instead, not to have trust or faith in the institutions of government at all.

Parenting cultures and children's participation

These class differences in parenting cultures, while not monolithic and with national, cultural and local differences, nevertheless bear consideration when we consider children's participation when they come into contact with the child protection system. It is reasonable to consider that children from working class backgrounds (or from any oppressed cultural group) may have less trust in the formal institution of the child protection system, and less sense of entitlement that their expressed views will be considered, and may have less experience negotiating their preferences with adults. Their interaction style may not prioritise verbal

negotiation, or self-advocacy, and children may have reduced expectations that they have agency or efficacy when invited to participate in institutional decision-making fora or to provide information. Within a pressured work environment already challenged to accommodate the time needed to ensure and support children's participation, this group of children may be further marginalized. These class-based differences in style may also be misinterpreted as evidence of 'trauma', rather than as an expression of class difference, leading to inappropriate assumptions of intervention and care needs.

Class differences in participatory expressions of children, or rather, social worker's elicitation and interpretation of them, may explain Latsh & Quehenberger's (2021) findings. In a Swiss case file study of children's views in case reports, they found that while the child's voice was included in 55% of cases, that case workers were "much less likely to take children's views into account when the family was on social assistance (OR=0.21, p<0.01), even when controlling for plausible confounders in a multilevel model…the evidence points to something peculiar about families receiving social assistance that distracts social workers' attention away from the perspective of the child and/or that makes the inclusion of this perspective seem less advisable" (Lätsch & Quehenberger, 2021, n.p.). It may be that children who have little experience of formal verbal interactions with adults are perceived as harder to engage in participation, or as resistant to it. In another study of if social workers would consult with a five -year old girl, confidence in their capacity to consult with her was increased because she had *already expressed her view and desire* to stay in the hospital she was currently in , "although young, she had already shown her capacity to communicate what she wanted, and so their confidence to speak with her was increased" (Woodman et al., 2018). When viewed through the lens of Lareau's parenting cultures, this intersection of age, verbal expression and perception of capacity may mean that children from more middle class backgrounds who have more experience at expressing their views in formalised settings, have more opportunities to easily participate. Once known as a child 'who can express their wishes', their views may be more likely to be sought for subsequent decisions, because they are viewed as 'having capacity'.

Pathologising class and cultural difference
The class and cultural aims of family socialisation may affect children's self-concept, how children respond in formal decision-making contexts, and the nature of their expressed preferences. Where children are socialised to be more focussed on the family and collective than themselves as an individual, they may be more likely to focus on family loyalties and seek family connection when asked for their views. They may also prioritise the wishes and views of others. Children exist in a relational web that affects the content of their views and preferences in complex ways. The relational web they exist within affects their self-perception, which may be not related to themselves as an individual only, but as part of a wider group. While these relativities of independence and dependence from a cultural perspective are considered to be normative and exist on a continuum between groups, within child protection contexts, these cultural and class differences may be pathologized (Keller, 2013). Children who do not prioritise their own wishes as an individual, do not express them in a direct manner, or whose preferences reflect group or parental wishes may be perceived as an unable to participate due to poor parenting, fear of adult reactions or a distortion of their own needs to protect abusive adults. These subtle negative judgements may entrench inequities in participation, by embedding moral judgements about cultural and class differences in expression style and content that are dissonant with the professional body of knowledge embedded in child protection systems. For example, these two quotes from a study of children's views show how

children's views may be more focussed on protecting their family from negative perceptions, and how their views of family members might differ from professional views:

 Dominic, aged 10, said, '*They just put it in the report and they don't even tell our family what they're going to write, so that's what I don't like about the social*'.

Nicola, aged 13, said '*I'd rather go with someone from my family and my parents usually can't go. But they got angry and didn't like who I brought. I could tell they didn't want him there because of the way they looked at him. They wanted me to bring the headmaster instead but I wanted someone from my family*'. (Cossar et al., 2016, p. 105).

Finally, another implication of class-based differences in parenting style is the fact that participation is often equated with a child's ability to articulate verbally their views and wishes. As noted by Bijleveld et al., (2021), even without considering class-based differences in interactions with adults, children are generally viewed as verbally less competent, and despite this, "no attention [is] paid to nonverbal signs and the possible need for children to rely on nonverbal ways of expressing emotions, wishes, or concerns. On the contrary, they stated that in order to involve children, children have to be able to indicate what they want" (p. 281). While disadvantaging all children's ability to participate in child protection processes, an emphasis on verbal expression may be especially disadvantageous for children who have been raised within cultures that do not promote extensive verbal negotiation and discussions with adults, or who emphasise other methods of communication more generally.

Interpreting children's participation: documenting pathology, adultification and attachment theory

What children say must be interpreted in the child protection system context and this interpretation is shaped by theories, norms and processes as it is mediated by professionals and systems. As Revell (2022) notes, the social worker must "decode the child's narrative, questioning what children choose to share, within the context in which it is conveyed"(np).This decoding also affects how the child's views are represented to others, as "…adults present the content of the child's statements, which can be affected by their own perception of the child and their personal interpretation of the child's words" (Kratky & Schröder-Abé, 2020, p.171). When children's views are sought, how they are interpreted is refracted through a lens laden with assumptions that affect how those views are weighted and incorporated within a range of competing principles (Hennum, 2014; Moyo, 2012). The social worker tends to be from a middle class, professional background that has embedded within it forms of knowledge that prioritise certain views of children and what they say (Hennum, 2011).

They are also embedded within an organisation with its own cultural norms and processes that may contain heuristics that govern how children's expressed views might be responded to and packaged in the formal documents shaping decision outcomes (Enosh et al., 2021). Some expressed views are more acceptable than others, especially if they do not align with perceptions of vulnerability or are minimal. For example, as Hennum discusses, the background knowledge of middle class Norwegian parenting norms such as "talking and reasoning with children, of teaching them to solve problems through negotiation (similar to Lareau's conclusions), of being involved in children's school activities and homework and…sports", and developmental psychology form the uncontested background 'doxa' that are taken for granted as desirable norms in assessment and document writing. This doxa functions in document writing about children as an "unacknowledged presence in the descriptions of the

children's and their families' home" (p. 339). She shows how document writing about children's and parent's expressed views were mediated by the writer to construct social position and confirm the existing social order, particularly by reconstructing children living in conditions of poverty as 'maladjusted' and their families as 'pathogenic, reproducing deviance'. She also notes that report writers are those afforded most weight in decision-making fora, and how rare families writing their own reports or case notes is (Hennum, 2011, see also Plush, 2021). As she notes, the power of the written word is one exclusively preserved for professionals, yet it is these written documents that become powerful perveyors of the truth, including the truth about children's views and preferences (Hennum, 2011).

From a children's participation perspective, this study highlights how children are excluded from authoring reports and documents, and the mediation of their views by professionals, governed by forms of knowledge and the professional status of the report writers. This works to devalue their views when they may not align with the cultural and class-based norms, values and forms of knowledge that go unquestioned in those reports. This may disadvantage children particularly if their families are denigrated, if they are from cultures who place more importance on the relative importance of family connection, or different views on the aims and nature of a 'good childhood', whether because of class or ethnicity. The cultural capital valued in the mediating process of report writing may not be the one the child holds or expresses, subtly contributing to institutionalised exclusion and racism.

Adultification and vulnerability
Processes relating to adultification and vulnerability may also shape the interpretation of children's participation in the child protection system. For many children of colour, and particularly Black children in some parts of the world, processes of adultification may shape their access to participation by reducing their perception of vulnerability, leading to unrealistic expectations of participation or denial of participation rights. As Dancy (2014, p.225) notes, the image of Black boys in the US context as potential criminals "work to deny Black boys any access to childhood humanity", especially in public child welfare and criminal justice settings. While there are of course national and local differences, broadly speaking where Black children are viewed as older than they are, they can be seen as less vulnerable, more 'angry' and more culpable for negative behaviour than White children (Dancy, 2014, Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021, Toliver, 2018). For some refugee and migrant children, their perception as older may even exclude them from access to the care system altogether, removing any ability to participate (Clayton & Gupta, 2019).

The interpretation of what children say and do in participation contexts is not a neutral process, but instead reflects political and social hierarchies (Ogle et al., 2021). Bjekveld et al (2018) note that even in efforts to enable children's participation more generally speaking, that the intention to operationalise participation "is quickly overruled by often subconscious thoughts and beliefs, stemming from the complex interplay of child image, protection, and participation" (p. 1280). The child's class, gender, ethnicity and whether they are considered disabled all affect these unconscious thoughts and beliefs, interacting with pre-existing discourses around childhood, protection and participation as noted. These intersecting inequities undoubtedly affect how children's expressions or resistance to participation are perceived. The possibility of 'adultification' of Black children, or increased assumptions of the vulnerability of girls due to gendered ideals of female fragility, to assumptions about disabled children's ability and competence may all affect participation attempts, or reduce the weight given to what children say, or influence the interpretation of their view.

Interpretation of participation using attachment theory

As professionals interpret the content of children's expressed views, another lens shaping their interpretation is a common theory used in the professional setting: attachment theory. As this theory is culturally located within the gamut of white middle class Western theories, its use may dismiss or devalue the child's cultural norms and values by interpreting their behaviour in negative ways (Choate & Lindstrom, 2017). Attachment theory, originally a theory of adaptation of children to their social environments, has taken on a dogmatic prescriptive approach, particularly the notions embedded within it of child autonomy and independence as the key aims of parenting (LeVine, 2014; Hammarlund, 2022; Keller, 2012). Alongside this, monotropy, maternal sensitivity and availability, and maternal mindmindedness are viewed as key to producing the healthy child (Keller, 2013). However, these aims of parenting are culturally malleable, and reinforce the similarly culturally specific ideals relating to intensive parenting (Keller, 2013; Manning, 2019). As Keller (2013) points out, the ability of most parents in most situations globally to meet those conditions of intensive parenting applies to a small percentage of the world's population, a point made as long ago as Margaret Mead in 1962 and recently explicated by Garrett (2022). Mead criticised the notions of constant maternal availability noting that it reflected, even then, an insular view of family life based on what was 'only possible' in 'urban conditions' that combined 'production of food outside the home and the practice of contraception'. She contrasted this with situations elsewhere requiring a "break in the continuity of mother–child care", and this tended to "involve: (a) the need of the other children for care and (b) the demands on the mother for food gathering, materials gathering, horticultural and other contributions to the food supply of the family group'" (Garrett, 2022, p. 10.). Mead labelled such assumptions ethnocentric.

Bowlby's psychoanalytic training led him to define independence from others as a "requisite of healthy human development", and this assumption led to the promotion of personal autonomy as an "ideological foundation of attachment theory with notable consequences for the definition of parenting quality, childrearing goals, and with respect to an understanding of desirable endpoints of development" (Keller, 2013, p.181). Viceo (2013) notes that in general, there was not enough evidence to justify Bowlby's claims and his tendency to dismiss contradictory evidence. As Keller points out, his assumptions about independence lead to moral ideals and the pursuit of "culturally valued qualities, such as self-confidence, curiosity, and psychological independence" (Keller, 2013, p.181). Maternal sensitivity is held as key to child development, and infants are held to be an equal partner, but "Infants are attributed an independent agency, a free will with preferences, needs, and desires and emotions that are elaborated in mentalistic dialogues. This conception of an infant can only be adaptive *in contexts where material and social resources are plentiful so that families can afford the caregiver-child exclusivity without neglecting other tasks*. It is obvious that this cannot apply to all humans" (Keller, 2013, p.180). Others take issue with these propositions on other grounds. For example, Fleming notes that while Western attachment theory tends to focus on the interpersonal attachments between people, "indigenous Māori attachment perspectives have always included connections and relationships to aspects outside of the interpersonal domain. ..these.. include connection to whānau/hapū/iwi (extended family and community groups), whenua (land and the natural world), and wairua (interconnection and spirituality)" (Fleming, 2018, p.23).

How do these assumptions affect the participatory expressions of children? Children who deviate from the assumed traits of a securely attached child may similarly be pathologised in participatory environments. Where children's views are held to express attachment problems, or do not align with its independence ideals, it is easier to discount or misinterpret their wishes.

As has been recently noted, a large proportion of children deemed to have a 'disorganised' attachment style have not been abused, but can be attributed to social factors (Granqvist et al., 2017; Hammarlund et al., 2022) For example, while a working class child from a historically oppressed group may be perceived as 'difficult to engage', this may be attributed to their attachment style, that is, as disorganised attachment from a child who has had dismissive and disengaged parenting, rather than a child from an oppressed group who knows already how they are likely to be treated and interpreted. This may pathologise and dismiss children's views, by suggesting they stem from psychological pathology rather than social position or their own preferences, especially in contexts where professionals use attachment theory in simplistic or overly deterministic ways (Hammarlund et al., 2022).

Very young children, participation and representation's of children's voice and best interests

While many discussions of children's participation barely mention developmental differences, perhaps out of a reluctance to imply less capabilities for young children, research shows that age and maturity is a key factor for social workers when attempting to enable participation (Kriz & Skivenes, 2015; Bjekeveld et al., 2022). For babies and very young children, their preferences, voice and best interests are the most interpreted, represented and mediated by adults (Marsh & Leamon, 2019; Masson & Dickens, 2015). The representation of very young children's voice highlights the power differential, borne of various inequities, between the adults involved in a young child's life who might desire to claim representational dominance. The differing social locations of the adults involved – of class, ethnicity, culture, family role and access to state power (that is, the social worker holds the power of the state) – affects their power to make representational claims. With increasing intervention in the pre-birth and newborn period, the intervention of child protection services is based entirely on adult perceptions of the child's best interests, and notions of participation or the child's perspective are completely reduced to the representational claims-making abilities of parents, other family members and the child protection service to invoke children's best interests most convincingly (Broadhurst et al., 2018).

In this context of assymetrical power, where there are competing claims to representational authority, there are several ways in which some people gain access to 'higher order' claims about babies than others. Within colonised national contexts, and others structured by class or racialised differences, for example, how these inequities play out in claimsmaking is of interest. For example, the state's duty to protect inevitably slides into an assumption that their definition of risks is the most accurate and compelling, yet these also contain classed and racialised assumptions about what is considered a good childhood, and professional, Western theories such as attachment theory as discussed above. This is the institutional dominance that child protecion systems hold (Braithwaite, 2021). For example, as noted above, Indigenous views of the need for children to remain connected with wider family even if they must be removed from their parents, or differing views on living conditions acceptable for a baby, can affect professional risk assessments, paricularly if the assessor is from a middle class background (Author, 2016). These implicit concepts are difficult to dispute for family members, and if there is a lack of procedural justice within the system, this ability is further subverted, especially if the basis of that claim includes concepts related to cultural worldview that are not prioritised within a specific child protection system (Moyo, 2012; Masson & Dickens, 2015).

Parents from Indigenous backgrounds in a number of countries consistently report a lack of respect for their views and perspectives, and dismissive responses for their concerns (Children's Commissioner, 2020a; Boulton et al., 2018). It may be that this also reduces the

ability for a different weighing up of potential harms and benefits that include Indigenous worldviews and preferences in the broader paradigm of assumptions about young children's best interests (Moyo, 2012). In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, a recent high profile case reported in the media showed an attempt to remove a newborn Māori baby from their mother. Known as the 'Hawkes Bay case', it provoked a national outcry and numerous public inquiries by both Māori and non-Maori bodies. The office of the children's commissioner's report on the matter reiterated the findings of an inquiry some 30 years earlier, that Māori babies were inherently connected to their whānau and this needed to be prioritised in decision-making (Children's Commissioner, 2020b).

One of the key causes of concern was the report from the Ombudsman who examined several hundred similar cases where orders had been made without notice. The majority were Māori babies. The report showed how little family members themselves were able to represent the baby's interests and affect the narrative of risk generated by the child protection agency (Boshier, 2020). Few had access to a family meeting or family group conference before the baby was removed, and no orders had been made on notice, removing the opportunity for family members to put forward their perspectives in court. This lack of access to procedural justice, within the context of colonisation, leads to the dominance of western and state controlled discourses of risk attaining dominance in decision-making fora. Where there are cultural and class-based differences relating to how babies needs and interests are constructed by key stakeholders, and little access to procedural justice for families and their communities, the rights of babies to have their interests defined at least partly in accordance with the cultural paradigm or their family and community becomes unbalanced. Battles over the right to represent best interests are of course, contested in an environment where parents and other family members may be abusive or unaware of the possible negative effects of their behaviour or situation on a baby or young child. However, where there are culturally contestable understandings of babies best interests, these conflicts cannot be simply dismissed as evidence of risk. The implication of these processes in the historic and ongoing processes of assimilation were connected by the ensuing Waitangi Tribunal inquiry outlined above (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021). Research captures this issue with representation and the interrelationship with Māori worldviews most eloquently:

 "the children haven't got the voice to actually say please, can you get it right this time, ok ...our children and our whānau, they come from such lustrous people and ancestry, they come from mana and we're forgetting ...or Oranga Tamariki can be dismissive of that under .. the 'safety of a child'. So rights of child would be the voice of a child and I've always challenged how young is a voice of a child because we're always saying that in the pregnancy, the 'voice of the child' is from a mainstream organisation such as Oranga Tamariki ...and I think there is something wrong with that (Author et al, 2021, p.22.)

Discussion: children's participation in context

Children's particpation is often discussed in ways that assume children have universal and obvious ways in which they might engage in efforts to increase their participation in child protection decision-making, and that the only conceptual barrier to this is assumptions about their competence due to age, maturity and the protectionist ideals of the child protection system. How their social backgrounds shape the ways they might engage with participatory practices, and the often invisible or unstated class and cultural basis of child protection organisations has been less explored. This article contends that children's age and comptency assumptions are affected by the social contexts they live in. In particular, the cultural habitus they come from, shot through with particular cultural and class-based norms, affects how they

express their views and wishes, interacts with discourses governing conceptualisations of children and childhood, and affects how their expressions are interpreted and documented by social workers and other professionals working within the child protection system. This has implications at both the interpersonal and institutional level. To respect and recognise children as agentic, their culturally imbued ways of interacting must be accounted for in order to fully engage children of all backgrounds in participatory efforts. To embed full recognition of children at the insitutional level, heuristics that assume particular preferred ways of expressing views, or judge the acceptability of the content of those views, need to be critically refelcted upon, as well as negative, deficit-based assumptions relating to children's complex social positions. At the macro level, this discussion questions the control of child protection agencies and the underpinning habitus of practice environments that reflect dominant hegemonies relating to class, culture, race (because many class and cutural differences are also racialised) and professional cultures. In Indigenous contexts, ensuring communities have governance over child protection organisations as part of recognising UNDRIP and other rights-conferring instruments, is needed to reduce the tendencies for racist and classist assumptions to further exclude children from Indigenous backgrounds from participating in the decisions made about their lives.

Children's ability to participate in child protection contexts is intrinsically linked to their social backgrounds and the cultural capital held by them and their families as they enter the child protection system, which maintains in every national context, its own institutionalised cultural capital. This unequal power context shapes how children's views are obtained, weighted and interpreted. The acknowledgement of social inequities on participation is reduced when children are constructed via a traditional liberal rights discourse as brute individuals, neatly excised from their social background. Without recognising how children's social background affects their participation, important opportunities for inclusion and true recognition may be overlooked, including not accounting for cultural and class-based differences that are not indicators of risk or resistance, but part of normal cultural difference. Oppressive processes such as the adultification of some Black and migrant children, or a lack of recognition of cultural paradigms that consider children as connected to family, tribe and community, may also influence the image of vulnerability or culpability that can affect children's rights to participation.

Further, problems relating to participation may be shaped by the significant power difference between children and the system they find themselves in. Professionals may interpret children's expressions in ways understandable to the professional cultures of child protection systems, including through the lenses of popular theories and discourses embedded in the language of practice theories and report writing. This may result in a mismatch of understanding, where the problem frame, not adequately recognised, leads to ineffective supports and interventions. Heimer et al., (2018) point out that: "when children are not given voice or opportunity to influence the framing of what "the problem" is, the design of protection and care tends to be poorly matched to the actual problems documented in the child investigation and vice versa; when children can influence framing, this is associated with well-matched protection and care". Overlaying this with an inequalities perspective reminds us that culture, class and other axes of oppression point to the importance of understanding how culture and class differences might shape children's 'framing' differences.

For children from poor and working class backgrounds, Indigenous or racialised groups, what they say and how this is interpreted is influenced by social factors, and for very young children especially, the representation of their best interests (how participation is enacted for them) must

respond meaningfully to the differing cultural paradigms that may be at play. Calls to decolonise social work cannot be operationalised without an acknowledgment of the validity of differences in parenting that stem from fundamentally different assumptions about what is best for children, and the connection with this dispute with colonial processes of oppression (Choate, 2019). In efforts to decolonise, abolish or transform child protection systems, it remains important to be cognisant of the harm done to children through violence of many kinds, usually by their family members. However, recognising the embedded cultural norms within child protection systems that emanate from states undergirded by colonisation, economic inequity and racism, must shape new ways of ensuring children's participation. We must respect children's right to both participation and protection, support diverse ways of participating, and interpret children's expressions in ways that do not conflate classed and cultured social norms with pathological assumptions.

Recognising the embedded child leads to different responses at policy and practice levels. One way to consider institutional change is to pursue the devolution of power and resources to affected communities, ensuring an anti-oppressive practice approach to ensuring children's cultural capital is more easily recognized, and reducing the distance between the lifeworld of the child and those charged with responding to them (Detlaff, 2021). Restoring authority over the child protection process via partnerships and Treaty recognition in Aotearoa New Zealand to iwi (tribes), for example, is already underway though how much power is truly restored remains unclear. Broadly, community control of services would help ensure the defining power holder understands the context of the child and supports the child's cultural paradigm, and can disaggregate cultural norms from the effects of trauma. At the interpersonal level, trusting relationships are key to participation (Cossar, 2014). Matched workers from similar class and cultural backgrounds may be more able to form relationships of trust key to the process of participation, yet this dynamic is seldom mentioned in participation narratives. This might assist with a depth of participation: "Participation starts with seeing, hearing, and understanding each other, only after which "higher levels" of participation can be facilitated." (Bijeveld et al., 2021, np).

There are numerous limitations to this rather long-winded discussion. Many nuances particular to specific contexts have been brushed over in an effort to map out the broad issues at play. The role of gender and disability have been barely mentioned though undoubtedly shape inequities in participation. The methods by which more effective responses to class and cultural differences, and institutionalised racism, in the face of the path dependency of many child protection systems and their relative imperviousness to transformative change has not been covered. Both class and culture have been represented in somewhat essentialist ways, with little discussion of the multiple, fluid identities held by many people including children in our modern world, and the risk of this is essentialising 'difference' and ignoring the complex identities of both children and their families.

Nevertheless, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing articulation of how child protection systems might respond meaningfully to the increasing focus on inequities in child protection policy and practice in many nations (Featherstone et al., 2018). While discussions of children's rights and perspectives sometimes imagine children exist separately from their social environments, many issues leading to contact with child protection services are related to wider struggles for justice: Indigenous justice, racial justice, economic justice, reproductive and gender justice, disabled people's justice. Connecting these key debates to concepts relating to children's right to participation remains an important task within wider calls to transform child protection systems to protect children while avoid reproducing social and individual harms.

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