A chance to do some good in the world:
An enquiry into frontline children's welfare workers in the climate of change created by welfare reform

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Signature)   Ann Lazarsfeld Jensen, January 2009
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<tr>
<td>ACWA</td>
<td>Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>APAI</td>
<td>Australian Postgraduate Award Industry</td>
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<td>DoCS</td>
<td>Department of Community Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Higher Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Looking after Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>OOHC</td>
<td>Out of Home Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Sciences</td>
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Abstract

This thesis is about disenchantment with work through the loss of moral meaning.

I set out to explore the reasons women do low-paid and stressful work in non-profit organisations to better understand the relationship between welfare reform, work place ecology and staff retention. I found that women who wanted to make a difference among children and their families often experienced conflicts of values that were a source of distress and attrition. Familiar values had been lost in the rapidity and complexity of changed social attitudes through welfare reform.

Reform processes have reshaped the way Australians think about poverty, unemployment and welfare dependency. A media discourse has stigmatised welfare dependents, and in the public imagination it has also conflated poverty with the dark spectre of child abuse and parental failure. As a result there is a turbulent confluence where welfare policy constrains the services, and child protection failures lead to public calumny of workers. Frontline workers, often cast in the ambiguous role of family supporter and mandated reporter of suspected child abuse, experience powerlessness through resource poverty and blame.

Welfare reform devolved many children’s services from the government sector to the non-profit sector through policy processes that included vigilant auditing, constant evaluation, and a demand for inter-agency cooperation as well as competitive tendering between agencies for program funding. The frontline workers in non profit agencies are subject to the intense scrutiny of government, as well as the suspicion of media and the public, and the hostility of their clients.

My methodology was critical social theory (Habermas, 1984, 1985, [1967] 1988) and Gadamerian ([1960] 1989) hermeneutics informed by constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003). I was concerned with issues of justice in all aspects of my research. A fair report would include textured multiple perspectives or horizons. This meant giving full expression to the thoughts of the frontline workers as well as inviting the perspective of people working at other levels in the non-profit organisation, such as middle and senior managers. Methods were long in-depth interviews, a focus group, and the analysis of relevant literature. A total of 25 people were involved in the research: 10 frontline workers and five non-profit managers participated in long individual interviews, there was a focus group of eight middle-managers, and two email correspondents who were not interviewed personally.
provided feedback on the emerging themes, contributed their own ideas through material they had written, and validated developing concepts.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of how moral meanings operate motivationally at work. It demonstrates that in non-profit organisations there is an expectation that values will be central to practice, yet individual moral identity has become compromised by policy constraints on agency resources, tighter management and increased bureaucracy and social hostility to the child welfare clientele and workers. The significance of moral symbols is argued from the utilisation of moral symbols and language in the corporate and consumer worlds to enhance loyalty, commitment and worker sacrifice. The purpose of the argument is to show that moral community is an aspect of work place ecology in a non-profit organisation, and the central component is the integrity of its moral agenda which is a tool of recruitment and retention of value-driven workers.

Four aspects of moral motivation are the thematic discussion of this thesis. In my analysis workers were suffering from what I described as moral distress, a frustration of their capacity to enact their personal principles in their work, and an apparent conflict between their personal and agency values. Other workers had made what I described as an altruism audit, which was a more pragmatic approach to protect their own interests without abandoning their desire to do good work. I found there was an absence of moral community, through the loss of traditional value systems, and the corporatisation of non-profit organisations. There was also a need to retrieve a sense of moral proportion, which would signal to workers and agencies what was possible in the light of the policy demands for greater financial audit and practice accountability. Moral proportion is a new secular value that I suggest could be constructed in a moral community of practice, increasing the possibility of values agreement both within and between agencies.

This thesis is a sobering reminder that human beings cannot become efficient machines capable of solving complex human problems through protocols and formulas. Children’s welfare work is driven by compassionate dispositions attempting to engage the hearts of recalcitrant parents. In order to sustain an emotionally engaged frontline workforce, support structures must address the moral core of the worker and the work.
A Prelude to a Thesis

I did not reflect much on the oddities of my mother’s relatives: they were oceans away, and my father told me it had all been caused by syphilis. I must have missed a thousand clues – my own visual problems, my children’s central nervous system anomalies; deafness, epilepsy, learning difficulties – none of these things in my children seemed to be related to poor Great Grandmother Edith Harris, until the day the geneticists broke open the textbooks and showed me the cluster of symptoms that made up our syndrome. “Statistically you have a worse case scenario than your great grandmother,” the doctors warned “because only half her children were affected ... and 100 per cent of yours have this thing.”

From the day my children were diagnosed with Usher Syndrome in the late 1970s, in the wake of all of Whitlam’s social reforms, the state rallied to ensure that my children were educated, medicated, socialised, subsidised, acoustically aided, adequately nourished and habituated, vaccinated, and thrust into the mainstream of life. A taxi took them to distant special education units. Conferences of experts gathered often to re-assess and shepherd them into the mainstream of school. I had subsidised home help and respite care available to me for 15 years. Our entire family enjoyed holidays at the beach in a huge modern home owned by a charity. We were given our first computer by a charity. The children went to camps funded by service organisations. They grew up educable, employable, and marriageable. Despite the worst fears of the Royal Blind Society\(^1\) and National Acoustic Laboratories\(^2\), they were functional citizens.

In May 1999 at the age of 21 my daughter gave birth to her first child, a dwarf. This time the geneticists had no answers. Her second child, born two years later, was hearing impaired. The deconstructed welfare state had no resources: hearing aids seemed to be made available slowly and grudgingly, there were no speech pathologists, the child disability allowance was refused, specialist teachers were not available, and the hospital was two hours away on unreliable public transport. The school needed fee-paid professional assessments to get ramps. Respite seemed to be non existent. My daughter did not have a caseworker. The paediatrician, who had served us well, bailed out of the local hospital after a public row that

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\(^1\) Now known as Vision Australia
\(^2\) Now known as Australian Hearing
we did not have the energy to comprehend. The first I knew of DoCS’\textsuperscript{3} involvement was when a call centre worker contacted me on a Sunday afternoon and suggested that I should become responsible for this next generation, because they had no answers, no resources, no continuity of service, and no confidence that my daughter could cope. They did not enquire about my other care commitments.

Entrenched generational poverty and social problems emerge in families like ours. My great grandmother had only one brother, Blind Brewster of Bingham: the city of Nottingham, England, honoured him for independence, thrift and piety. My mother had only one blind brother, born between wars, but he was poorly educated, rarely employed, and spent time in prison. Accidents of birth are modified by social policy. My great grandmother Edith Harris had six blind sons whose capacity to live productively was shaped by the vigilant training of the Royal Midlands Institute for the Blind in Nottingham. They reached maturity at a moment in history when social policy was shaped by these ideas: “The affliction of blindness makes an irresistible appeal. The blind can count all men amongst their friends. Their claim upon everything that is chivalrous and selfless in human nature can never be denied” (Blanesburgh, 1932). My grandchildren were born during welfare reform in Australia. I wonder how this is shaping their future, and my concern for children like them is part of this thesis.

Although society now knows about clusters of genetic disease, it is hard to imagine the social impact of attempting to care for multiple generations impacted by degenerative disabilities. Unemployment is inevitable. Crime and suicide happen. Public housing is often essential. Women invariably try to hold things together.

For two hundred years or more, our family was its own social welfare system. For at least nine generations, they strategised to care for the infirm in odd configurations of dependence. The willows that grew so abundantly in the swamps near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire were the source of a trade that was pride and security for family members, whether blind or sighted: they were basket weavers, patronised by Queen Victoria.

Yet in every family that can strategise to care for itself, there is the haunting fear of a future in which the strong are no longer able to care for the previous and the subsequent generations. The fear of age or sickness or death stalks thousands of families whose children, with congenital and hereditary diseases, are now dependent adults. Who cares, and who will care?

\textsuperscript{3} Department of Community Services, in New South Wales a government organisation involved in family welfare and child protection
This is a picture of complex, entrenched, generational welfare need. We are the clients of frontline children’s welfare workers. No worker arriving on my daughter’s doorstep this week will fully comprehend the collision of chromosomes that brought this competent deaf woman to such a point of need. As she waits to get help and justice for her own disabled children, my daughter knows little of the conflicting demands that the worker faces. I have observed both careless judgmentalism and empathetic frustration in those who have come with nothing to offer. At times, I have observed professionals whose angst seemed to exceed their brief.

Women’s capacity for caring has always been both costly and rewarding. Caring can cost the lifetime of a carer, and give life back to the cared-for. Caring can diminish, dehumanise, shackle, crush and marginalise women, and it can also be a source of escalating skills, increasing professionalism and confidence, a source of income, community, recognition, and satisfaction. It is a presumed, innate, female characteristic or inclination, and the lack of an impulse to be a care giver can reap all kinds of denouncements from a disapproving world. Yet the truth is that women do not care uniformly or globally, but selectively, privately. For women who elect to work in industries where care is a commodity, the labour extracted for the wages paid is remarkably inequitable. This may reflect on the old idea that care is simply women’s work. This thesis is about women who are paid to care about other people’s children and their families, and so it partly concerns itself with equity.

Caring has shaped my entire adult life, and enriched it. Through the genetic curiosity of producing deaf children in a blind family, I developed the interests and skills that became an accidental career. Beginning as a foster parent and later as an adoptive parent, I developed rewarding relationships with case workers whose support for our family was generous. They remained our friends. Through contact with various welfare agencies I was invited in as a speaker and educator. Through friendship with other parents I helped establish early intervention and advocacy organisations, and I began to write and speak on behalf of disability groups. There was a decade of activism that helped improve our community’s education, intervention, therapy and recreation for disabled children. There was a decade of professional development, when a non-profit organisation invited me to do work for which I was not trained, and I gradually gained education, working my way through the roles of case manager and counsellor, leading finally to an executive role in denominational work. For most of this time my life had a great sense of meaning and purpose, and I felt I was making a difference. Yet this was not work that I had deliberately chosen. In time, particularly as my children grew up, I did not feel suited to a professional role that demanded empathy and
engagement with people at their point of need. Yet I knew that there were workers who were passionate about their involvement with people. They had a gift and capacity for relationship that was admirable, and necessary. I knew many tireless people whose unique concern for other human beings shamed me. Through my own reluctance and inability to remain in people-helping work, I recognised the extraordinary gift of care that workers had brought to our doorstep. How much more difficult would my own young life have been without the resources, services and support systems, that they were able to introduce us to?

This thesis represents an attempt to think through what it takes to be involved in the welfare of other people’s children on a daily basis, in a professional role, and most particularly, in a society which does not genuinely recognise and reward this kind of work. It also asks about what can be done to help workers remain in their jobs. It places workers in the context of welfare reform, taking a critical social perspective on the economic policies that have made family welfare a marginal concern. It is a thesis that is overwhelmingly concerned with values: the values of the frontline welfare workers and their colleagues and agencies, the values that work against welfare concerns, and the values of the society that endorses the shifting values from people to things, and blames with equanimity those who stand against the tide of anomie.
Chapter One - An introduction to a thesis haunted by ghostly ideas from times past
1.1 Introduction

… the idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.

(Weber, [1904] 1930, p. 182)

This thesis is concerned with women in frontline children’s welfare work in non-profit organisations. It is stressful, low paid work, where attrition is high and mobility endemic. Yet the challenging work of child protection and family support also attracts committed women who stay for the long haul. I wanted to understand why women did this work, particularly in the light of welfare reform that was creating change and making new demands on non-profit organisations and their workforce. I was interested in their values, and how those values intersected with welfare reform and its repercussions in Australian society.

My project began its journey within the constraints of an industry partnership based on prior research, where a question was conceptualised to serve that framework. As a result, the thesis contains the ghosts of its origins, which I will expose in this introduction. The thesis also concerns itself with other ghosts, particularly the kind that Weber ([1904] 1930) imagined in the citation above. I wondered if the hegemonic power of religion might intersect with women and care-work given the denominational roots of so many non-profit organisations. I wanted to know if women doing low-paid and stressful work, serving other people’s families, were motivated by a sense of calling; or whether they were responding to charismatic leaders, or a compelling sense of mission. A Weberian looking-glass suggested itself as a framework, where the concerns of religion, bureaucracy, calling and charisma, and the convergence of conflicting cultures, could be considered (Weber, 1918; Weber, [1919] 2004).

Although Weber himself is a ghostly old theorist, his anvil was located at the same confluence of factors pertinent to my inquiry. Weber suggested that Western disenchantment with religion opened the way to rationalised economies: denuded of moral content, but shaped by forgotten religious virtues such as hard work, thrift, and restraint (Weber, [1904] 1930; Weber & Parsons, 1965). Weber described traditional vocations of medicine and academia as imbued with enchanted values, such as morality, dedication, a sense of calling in doing what God had prepared. Weber analysed charismatic leadership empowering the building of institutions by inspired sacrificial workers (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Yet Weber also suggested that charisma was short-lived, and that organisations became rationalised and rule-bound as new leaders tried to stabilise and control the dynamics of fast growing entities.
Workers, deprived of other meaning, then began to struggle for material benefits that had previously had little significance. Would this happen in Australian non-profit organisations?

It seemed possible that Third Sector\(^4\) organisations in the new socio-economic climate were transitioning into more rationalised entities. If the Third Sector lost its foundational concerns, would it continue to find a cheap workforce of women committed to work in conditions of poor and uncertain resources? Frontline children’s welfare work had to be interrogated against the backdrop of welfare reform, because policy change over more than a decade (1995-2005) had altered the status of clients and agencies, and introduced less secure funding arrangements. Part of my purpose was to bring the emerging conditions into focus, and ultimately look at what enabled women to continue in this significant work.

1.1.1 The ghost of paucity management and the virtue of thrift

Attrition and rapid staff turnover were exposed as features of children’s welfare organisations in a pilot study of factors impacting job satisfaction (Wagner, Spence, Scott, & van Reyk, 1999) as part of a series of studies underpinning the concept of paucity management. The most troubling ghost of this thesis is its original commission to expound paucity management (Wagner & Spence, 2003a, 2003b; Wagner, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001), which was described as a set of ethical strategies for doing more with less in resource poor organisations. The term emerged from extensive research at the University of Western Sydney between 1998 and 2002, to isolate practices that had been effective in the face of resource poverty. As the status quo of Third Sector organisations had never been well described, and in order to redress the problem of what has been described as the Third Sector’s management “black box” (McDonald, 1999a), four studies of 170 paid staff in 157 non-profit organisations in New South Wales were undertaken in the paucity management program, focusing on job satisfaction and staff morale. Narrative research tools such as day journals, critical incident reports and relationship maps were trialled in the research projects and there were workshops to support the use of the tools to accumulate textured qualitative data. Lewin’s force field analysis (1999; Wagner et al., 2001) was used with two data sets to identify driving and restraining forces. In addition, a 92-item questionnaire was used for a partially quantitative analysis of management and leadership tasks, using SPSS on the closed questions and expert moderation on the balance of the data. A service delivery-focus by frontline workers was identified as one of the five “domains” of paucity management. It was also clear from the research (Wagner et al., 2001), that workers were attracted to small non-profit agencies by the opportunity for participation, small teams, flattened leadership structures, and agency values,

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\(^4\) I use the term Third Sector interchangeably with non-profits or Sector. These terms are commonly used throughout non-profit organisations.
albeit undefined, that meshed with personal values. The impact of religion and ideology were not canvassed in the paucity management studies, although the cohesiveness of one agency that had a prayer meeting was noted. The potential impact of values interested me because non-profits were known to be the site of unique motivations.

Yet through welfare reform, workplace ecology was changing, and it seemed that some positive attributes of small non-profits might disappear into more efficient consortiums. Non-profits were re-inventing themselves along corporate management lines in response to changing funding policies and the demand for greater efficiency and accountability. There had been some indications in the pilot study (Wagner et al., 1999) that there were “heavier and darker” (p. 22) dimensions to children’s welfare work.

... low staff moral, organisational dysfunction and poor staff retention rates have been some of the defining characteristics of the child and family welfare system in NSW in recent years. (Wagner et al., 1999, Executive Summary).

Paucity management was not, ultimately, a comfortable concept for me, simply because I questioned whether it was intrinsically constructive to enshrine principles of doing more with less in the field of human welfare. I had been awarded an industry scholarship to develop the concepts through PhD research, and despite the difficulties of changing course, I felt that I could make a greater contribution to the Sector by researching from the standpoint of the workers rather than management. As my research unfolded, I was concerned with the deteriorating provision of children’s services in the climate of welfare reform such as: escalation of child protection reports, scarcity of out of home care, and the inadequacy of family support services. My focus had shifted from concern with management issues to frontline children’s welfare workers, situated in Third Sector organisations who were experiencing the impact of reform processes that required greater efficiency and promised less secure funding. Would women workers be required to make bricks from straw? The thrift that paucity management implied seemed to be like the central virtue in Weber’s Protestant work ethic (Weber, [1904]1930), which had been empowered by religious rhetoric.

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5 I use the word ecology in its derivative sense, of household economy, and in its implicative sense, of the science of systemic influences, in this instance, on the workplace

6 In order to reduce the administrative pressure of funding applications from many small agencies, Government policy requires consortiums to be formed and collaborative applications to be made. Large agencies take the role of lead agency

7 The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) was the industry partner with the University of Western Sydney’s Centre for Learning and Social Transformations (CLAST) in providing two PhD scholarships to develop the paucity management concepts (Wagner & Spence, 2003a).
An enduring feature of non-profits in welfare work is that people give more for less, or in voluntary roles, all for nothing. If the Sector was still enchanted by religion, the motivations would be beyond the realm of management. But if the Sector was moving into the disenchanted world of rationalisation, would a cheap and committed workforce be found? Motivations and ambitions might no longer square with resource poverty as the status quo. I wanted to explore the unknown dimensions of ideology and religion and see if they had a role in the commitment and longevity of some workers.

Paucity management (Wagner & Spence, 2003a) was an uncomfortable, ghostly presence that followed me through my research process, seeking attention that I was unwilling to give it. Instead I gave my attention to Weber. I framed my question with the Weberian concept of subjective meanings in mind. This allowed individuals to describe their situation and its meaning: “Weber insisted that social scientists respect the social actor’s inalienable right to define what his or her social action means for himself or herself” (Cohen, 1996, p. 112).

Moreover, I worked from a critical social perspective (Gadamer, [1960] 1989; Habermas, 1984; Heidegger, [1955] 1996; Weber, [1904] 1930), which enabled my concerns about social justice and equity in the lives of women and children to be explored in a transparent way. In rewriting the first draft of my thesis in 2008, I exorcised paucity management as the driving agenda, but paid my respects to its role in exercising my ethical imagination.

1.2 The structure of the thesis

The three distinct parts of the literature review in Chapter Two consider the confluent issues that are the heart of my thesis: the challenging work of child protection in resource poor organisations, the challenge of remaining in or retaining a workforce that is chronically stressed, and the unique characteristics of the Third Sector and its motivations. The literature revealed the complexity of the conflict between a rationalising economy and the policies that transferred welfare service provision from government to organisations with less authority and resources. Social shaming of welfare recipients influenced the values base of Third Sector organisations as cultural change compromised both mission and accountability. The gendered and religious discourses of care and benevolence were considered, along with some of the literature relating to the Weberian framework.

1.2.1 Critical social theory

subject’s way of seeing. Gadamer allowed me to explore the often emotional and turbulent world of frontline welfare provision, without analysing my subjects at a pathological level. From a social justice perspective, individual pathologising is related to rationalised enterprise economies and it is evident in attitudes towards welfare service provision in Australia (Saunders, 2002).

1.2.2 Thematic development in the hermeneutic circle

It is in Chapter Four that another ghostly apparition returns to remind me that this thesis took some wrong turns before it emerged in its present format. For example, in organising my data within a computer-based program – Nvivo – and using its tools and charts, I found that I strangled the voices of participants by distilling, theorising, and analysing to abstraction. In this chapter I describe the multiple layers of data collection in partnership with ACWA: using media technologies to overcome the problems of time and distance in obtaining the participation of children’s welfare workers at diverse sites throughout NSW.

In all, 25 persons participated in the research phase of this project. Between June and August 2005 I conducted telephone interviews (40-90 minutes) with 10 frontline children’s welfare workers; in September 2005 data were collected from eight middle managers in a 90-minute focus group that was digitally recorded and supported by shorthand notes; from September to November 2005 I conducted long purposive telephone interviews with five senior managers of children’s welfare agencies. Repeat interviews to explore specific emerging themes were held with some frontline workers: one person was interviewed three times, and three others were interviewed twice. Two additional frontline workers participated by email with notes and ideas, but were not interviewed personally: one also provided written reflections which had been published in-house by her agency, and another responded by email to talk about the theme of moral distress in response to web page publicity of this emerging theme.

My intention was to liberate the voices of frontline workers, in keeping with critical social approaches. I used the slogan Making a difference? in recruitment of participants, in an attempt to find women who identified with doing low-paid and stressful frontline welfare work, for a good reason. The clarity and resonance of the themes was ultimately retrieved by a more open-ended analysis, comparing layers of data from diverse informants with the extensive literature, within an hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, [1960] 1989; Habermas, 1984), and returning to the field with my themes to test resonance. In this way, four themes were developed – moral distress, altruism audit, the absence of moral community, the search for moral proportion – that informed the relationship between longevity in frontline children’s welfare and values.
Values were named as a significant motivator by participants at all levels of my research, but participants did not share a cohesive perspective. I defined values as shared social symbols that direct action (Wright Mills, [1959] 2000), acknowledging Weber’s critical social perspective that values are legitimations of authority. Religion is praised and blamed in the literature for many characteristics of the Sector (Lyons, 1998a), and it seemed important to me to know whether religious values exercised contemporary hegemony. The unexpected outcome of my research was that values survived apart from religion, and moral concerns were at the heart of much stress.

The theme of moral distress is an emotive concept, recognising the essentially moral nature of the stresses described by workers. The ambiguity of the role as both advocate for clients and punitive authority figure, in instances where families were subject to interventions, was painfully conflicting for workers. The theme altruism audit demonstrated the way in which some workers rationalised their self-sacrifice and weighed their stress against the desire for influence, income and more positive workplace ecology. Both these themes contribute to an understanding of stress and attrition and Sectoral mobility of workers. These themes also inform the suggestion I make as a way forward at the end of the thesis: for a moral community of practice that enables frontline workers to make a semiotic exploration of their own values in the light of the rhetoric of welfare and its disempowering language.

Two other themes that I named and later developed conceptually were the absence of moral community, and the search for moral proportion, which I refer to as moral community and moral proportion. The former theme arose from the absence of religious ideation among workers who had religious affiliations, and it was developed through engagement with the literature that demonstrates the role of moral community in workplace ecology (Allahyari, 2000; du Gay, 1996; Voyce, 2006b; Wuthnow, 1996). It was an important theme in demonstrating profound values shifts in the Sector, because religious values were thought to permeate even the non-religious non-profits (Lyons, 1998a). The loss of traditional beliefs at a time of shifting social values in welfare, contributed to values confusion, and ultimately to moral distress. This search for moral proportion names the kind of value system that is evident by its absence, and explores the workers’ need for a tool to validate their practice. These two themes are central to the discussion chapters, Seven and Eight.

### 1.2.3 Moral distress

Chapter Five specifically deals with the theme of moral distress. Workers recruited for their disposition and commitment demonstrated an intense sense of responsibility for client outcomes. Failure to meet needs could lead to a paralysing emotional response, often
described as a values conflict, which I labelled moral distress, borrowing the term from nursing literature (Jameton, 1993). The theme emerged from data drawn from frontline workers’ stories of anxiety, as they confronted the obdurate nature of entrenched generational poverty. It was developed through engagement with the literature (see 2.2) of stress and burn-out in the Sector, none of which named the essentially moral nature of some stress. There was evidence that workers felt alienated from management, and poorly supported in their work. Moreover, frontline workers seemed to have absorbed the blame-and-shame aspects of media reporting of child protection failures, and were unable to protect themselves by recognising structural failure and their own limited resources in problem solving. In Chapter Five, the workers’ voices are set against the contextual backdrop of policy and organisational changes through welfare reform.

1.2.4 Altruism audit
Chapter Six deals with the theme altruism audit, which describes an active response of evaluating personal needs and preferences in order to remain in the children’s welfare Sector, although not necessarily in a specific agency. Altruism audit was a theme strengthened in the focus group discussions with middle managers, who were transitioning off the frontline through retraining. As they developed a management focus, they made decisions about client relationships, work and family balance, and their own education. They retained their ambition to do meaningful work, and did not feel client relationships were the only way to achieve that end. Workers’ relational loyalties were less compromised as their client relationships diminished, and there was an increasing sense of inclusion and influence in the agency as they left frontline responsibilities. Workers who wanted to remain on the frontline tried to achieve a better balance by moving between agencies, although interviewees who were committed to frontline work seemed less able to make an audit of their altruism.

1.2.5 Moral community
Chapter Seven is a discussion chapter, in which I explore the conceptualisation of values in frontline welfare work. Values, although lauded and embraced by workers and managers, seemed empty of meaning through the lack of shared value symbols, perhaps eroded or under siege through the discourse of welfare reform that stigmatises dependency (Saunders, 2005). The absence of religion or spirituality in explanations of values – even among those affiliated with religion – seemed to indicate that the traditional religious sources were also diluted, or vanishing under secularising pressures. The social work values of social justice were also muted. Within a Weberian framework, I reflect on the implications of lost religion, considering the new secular religions in corporate moral communities that offer symbols of
loyalty and commitment to anchor a workforce. I considered the issues of identity, particularly the moral self (Allahyari, 2000) that seeks expression and support through the kind of moral community that I could not locate in frontline welfare work.

1.2.6 Moral proportion
In Chapter Eight I use the concept of professionalism to explore workers’ understanding of their role. Professionalism can be considered a contemporary refinement of the Weberian concept of calling and vocation (to profess), and it contains recognisable symbols of responsibility and privilege within which I could consider the frontline workers’ position. The frontline welfare workforce includes women with diverse kinds of training, and the concerns of litigation and prosecution around child protection are so intense, that it is often a line-managed occupation. Issues of professional supervision, support, direction and communication that were developed through the research are discussed.

Using the framework of professionalism, I identify the lost value symbols that result in lost status for frontline welfare workers. I suggest that a new kind of deliberate moral community of practice is needed, in which workers affirm shared values beyond the boundaries of their individual agencies. I suggest that the work of developing the personal integrity of moral self be more seriously considered as an aspect of self-care and protection for frontline work.

1.2.7 Looking for enchantment in a lost world
In the concluding chapter, I revisit the disenchanted world in which the welfare of children has been commodified, subjected to media-driven moral panic, economic scrutiny, and a kind of public moral anomie that both despises the existence and avoids responsibility for the ugly reality of child neglect and abuse. I suggest the creation of moral communities of practice for frontline children’s welfare workers as a way forward, an arena for resistance and empowerment. Borrowing Wenger’s (1998) model of communities of practice and its extension by Barton and Tusting (2005) into semiotic explorations of power and inequality, I suggest the way out of moral distress is to find moral proportion, in moral community; a task that will be meaningful, as it fills the now empty or confused place of value symbols. As well as revisiting the ideas that were developed through preceding chapters, in Chapter Nine I address the limitations of this thesis.
1.3 Conclusion

In my research I worked with a small sample of frontline welfare workers whose motivation for engagement with the project cannot be fully known. There was always the concern that the most articulate would also be the most discontent. However, I attempted to short-circuit that possibility by the use of the slogan Making a difference? to draw those who might identify with it, and the workers I interviewed used the phrase freely to identify their motivation. Given the intensity of some of the conversations, I wondered whether having the desire to do some good in the world made feelings of failure and disappointment more painful. However, I tried to remain focused on the way welfare reform changed the meaning of things like welfare, poverty, child protection, dependency and social responsibility, which evidenced the uncertainty of the Sector. In its bid to reduce individual welfare dependency, welfare reform has drawn non-profits into a dependency relationship with government. The need to ensure future funding has compromised the capacity for advocacy (Mendes, 1997).

Caught between resource poor organisations and children in need, frontline workers continue to act sacrificially. Burn-out, attrition and retention are important issues, but they do not address structural social causes or social policy. This thesis addresses the issues of a marginalised workforce that serves an emergent underclass, within the constraints of the escalating demands on organisations that must do more with less.
Chapter Two – Welfare reform and its impact on non-profit organisations and children welfare
2.1 Introduction

Children’s welfare workers are often employed by resource poor non-profit organisations, which comprise what is also known as the Third Sector (Wagner & Spence, 2003b). The focus of my thesis was the women on the frontline of children’s welfare, who worked in the maelstrom of welfare policy change, economic and organisational restructures, and new approaches to welfare and social work practice associated with the marketisation of human services (Lyons, 1998b; Wearing, 1998). This overwhelmingly female workforce deals with some of society’s most vulnerable children, in complex and disrupted families experiencing extreme stress (Hodgkin, 2002). Although attrition is high in children’s welfare work, some women enjoy long careers. My interest was in knowing why and how some women embraced this difficult work. My research looked below the level of workers’ actions in resource poverty, and their service delivery-focus (Wagner et al., 2001). I explored those values that anchored them in poorly paid and stressful work, to discover more about the relationship between the values of the workers and their willingness to stay in the non-profit Sector where wages were consistently lower than for comparable work elsewhere (Lyons, 2003).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the characteristics of the children’s welfare workforce, and the child protection emphasis of their work. I then contextualise the workers by examining the impact of economic and political change in the unique milieu of welfare service provision. The central part of the literature review (2.2) is a discussion of the key issues of stress, burn-out, attrition and retention that impact both workers and their employers. Finally (2.3), I discuss the values-driven nature of the Third Sector from gendered (2.3.2), religious (2.3.4) and Weberian (2.3.6) perspectives. Weber’s concepts of vocation (2.2.4), charisma and institution (2.2.6) link the individual’s profession to the causes that inspire the building of institutions (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). The historical, gendered and hegemonic aspects of children’s welfare work are intrinsic to the discussion, along with an exploration of the meaning of values and identity in welfare work, and the relationships between values, identity, stress and attrition.

2.1.1 Characteristics of children’s welfare workers

Gender defines children’s welfare workers more than any other factor (Harlow, 2004). While the workers are predominantly female, it is not possible to define frontline workers in terms of training, because of the lack of consistency across occupational descriptors. For example, the category community worker includes social workers as well as workers with a range of other

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8 The known practice of acting on behalf of client needs as a priority above other professional activities. (2.1.5)
tertiary qualifications, and the variation in the occupational descriptions is slight in the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (Healy, 2004). Welfare worker is the fastest growing category, but a large number of these workers have no formal qualifications (McDonald, 1999a). In my research, all workers in children’s welfare who have direct client contact, regardless of qualification, will be referred to as frontline workers, and my research subjects are all female. At the same time, I recognise that the strongest professional voices on the frontline are social workers, whose discourses are distinctive, cohesive, and published, and whose concerns impinge on those of other frontline worker categories. Of necessity I refer to literature that is primarily identified with the profession of social work, although this thesis does not specifically intend to address that profession. In the US literature, the category named public child care caseworkers (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1990) easily correlates to the broad spectrum of work performed by children’s welfare workers in Australia, although training and licensing are often differentiated in the US by specific roles (e.g. adoption, foster care). The presence of this category of worker in the US results in specific and useful literature to which I refer.

Formal training is not regarded as the sole qualification for children’s welfare work. Healy and Meagher (2003) argue that effective service delivery is dependent on the disposition of workers, so that the type of labour force being mobilised in the new economic climate is germane. The relational nature of the work with vulnerable child clients calls for stability and continuity, which points to the need to recruit those who will stay (Howe, 1997). Despite these concerns, there is little evidence of research into the characteristics of those who apply to train in fields that lead to child welfare work (Moriarty & Murray, 2007). There is however, some evidence that workers often feel they were poorly prepared for child welfare work (Bednar, 2003).

2.1.2 The centrality of child protection issues

Frontline children’s welfare workers deal with vulnerable children and their carers to provide support, resources and training. They work with families to avoid the need for statutory interventions where decisions may be based on what Mason (1993) described as: “stereotypic constructions of what good mothers are like” (p. 16). Workers may be involved in developing and staffing parenting programs, resourcing programs for children with disabilities, training and supporting foster families, but a large part of the work is generated by child protection policy, and those families and children identified as ‘at risk’. Child protection issues in Australia are volatile, and subject to public scrutiny and concern, which impacts workers and agencies in diverse ways (Hodgkin, 2002). According to the Australian
Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), initial notifications of child protection concerns logged to call centres nationally increased from 46,154 in 2004-05, to 55,921 in 2005-06 (AIHW, 2006). In 2006-7, 37,094 calls were logged in NSW and 58,563 nationally (Peatling, 2007). The increased numbers of substantiated reports led to statutory interventions in families, among which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were over-represented (AIHW, 2006). Similar burgeoning of child protection work was reported in the US (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998) and the UK, where minority groups were over represented, and there was a 247% increase in convictions for child cruelty and neglect between 1998 and 2005 (Williams, 2007).

In Australia, each state governs its own child welfare systems, and legislation is not consistent (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005). There was a lack of comparable child protection data across states due to differences in definitions (Tilbury, 2002). In NSW, mandatory reporting was extended in 1998, to require all people who delivered health care, education, welfare, children’s services, residential or law enforcement services to children, to report instances of potential harm to a child less than 16 years of age. Substantial fines could be imposed for failure to report, which Cashmore (2002b) suggested might “lower the threshold” (p. 11) of reporting for some workers, a phenomenon that Ainsworth (2002) called “defensive reporting,” that “dilutes” (p. 7) responsiveness. Cashmore said that the Act was intended to identify families in need of support, yet paradoxically, children’s welfare workers were mandated to report clients who were already receiving support services (Mulroney, 2004).

Despite the many-layered protocols surrounding the passage of a report, some research (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005) indicated that the system had brought “consistency of practice to the initial assessment of risk of harm ... and has allowed the Department to more accurately measure demand for its services,” (p. 14).

Ainsworth (2002) was one of the few researchers in Australia to oppose mandatory reporting. He questioned its capacity to reduce child abuse, because of low investigation rates and even lower substantiation of the very high number of reports in NSW, compared to the high responsiveness to fewer reports in Western Australia where there were no mandated reporters at that time. Since then, under the Children and Community Services Act 2004, the reporting of children with sexually transmitted diseases in WA has become mandatory, and legislation is scheduled in 2008 to make members of key professions mandatory reporters (Higgins, Bromfield, & Richardson, 2007).

In NSW, reports to the Department of Community Services (DoCS) call centres increased by seventy per cent between 2000 and 2001 (Ainsworth), yet a third of all calls were made by
people who were not mandated reporters (Cashmore, 2002b). In a study of the experiences of mandatory reporting among 39 children’s welfare workers (Mulroney, 2004), ACWA found tensions between the mandated reporter role and the need for workers to continue working with the families that had been the subject of a report, as well as inconsistent communication from DoCS on the action and outcomes of reports. Regardless, workers strongly supported the practice of mandatory reporting, and some saw the opportunity to cooperate with DoCS, and receive child protection training, as positive. However, the presence of a statutory child protection agency (DoCS) in tandem with the frontline workers of non-profits creates dual decision-making in the life of child clients, and creates another layer of bureaucratic accountability in organisations already enmeshed in audit relationships with government. Increasing bureaucracy was a stressor for the workers, due to slow decision-making in the high risk arena of child protection, along with a purported erosion of professional integrity (Harlow, 2004; Healy, 2004).

2.1.3 New bureaucratic practices in child protection
The pressure for better protection for children coincided with increasing bureaucratic vigilance and a push for efficiency, which led to the development of new practices in child welfare. Guided practice involves the use of child protection tools for working in substitute care, aimed at redressing the failures of the past. One of the tools increasingly used in Australia is the Looking After Children (LAC) package (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004; Tregeagle & Treleaven, 2006). Workers in substitute care are guided in planning the care of a child, and accountability is maintained through the administrative tools, so that all relevant information on a child’s care remains with the child throughout her life in care. There was an argument that LAC imposed the values of the academics who devised it (Garrett, 2003), and deprived children of genuine participation in decision-making about their own future (Munro, 2001). However, Tregeagle and Treleaven (2006) emphasised that the system was brought to Australia from the UK by practitioners, not bureaucrats, and without adequate planning children were lost in the welfare system. Children in foster care being lost, drifting, and falling through the cracks because of the numbers of individuals involved in their lives, is well documented over decades in Australia (Cashmore, 2002a; Cashmore & Paxman, 1996; Gilbertson & Barber, 2003, 2004; Wise, 1999).

LAC\(^9\) was developed in Britain in the early 1990s, in direct response to egregious reports of inefficiency and neglect in the child care system resulting in health and educational problems.

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\(^9\) Looking after Children (LAC) is a case management package used in the UK and increasingly in Australia to ensure that children are seen consistently, and the documentation for each child follows her throughout time in care.
for children, poor relationships between all parties, the loss of child identity, communication problems and dubious outcomes (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). In places where support systems were distributed between multitudes of unconnected authorities, the relevance of a centralised system to care for vulnerable children who were often mobile, moving between various carers and authorities, was obvious. In the UK, the government had become the “administrative parent” for children needing care, and research (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004) judged that parent to be “inadequate, ineffectual and neglectful” (p. 235). The South Australian “Review of reviews” of foster care (Gilbertson & Barber, 2004) echoed many British claims that young people were receiving substandard care, and notably, that children’s welfare workers had low compliance with policy such as case-planning, as revealed in an audit of case files. Children were not receiving the consistency of follow-up, or opportunities for participation in planning their own future. Caseloads and staff shortages were invariably named as a problem.

A key principle of mandated interventions in families, whereby a child may be removed from parental care, is that the child be not only protected from “significant harm” (Fernandez, 1993; 1996) but placed in a situation where “wellbeing will be preserved and enhanced” (Wise, 1999, p. 6). In Australia, children at the end of their time in care have notoriously poor outcomes:

*Cashmore and Paxman’s (1996) important Longitudinal Study of Wards Leaving Care* indicates that 23.4% of NSW wards finished school below year 10, with only 6.4% completing the NSW HSC. Thirty-five per cent had attempted suicide and 57.7% had thought about it, 44% were unemployed a year after discharge; and nearly 33% of young female wards had been pregnant or had a baby soon after leaving care. Wise (1999:5-6) notes the over-representation of children from care backgrounds in juvenile justice statistics and in those for homelessness, mental health problems, and drug and alcohol use (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004, p. 236).

Substitute care is an angst-ridden arena, and child protection so potentially dangerous that tools such as LAC have been subjected to trials, evaluation, research and critique too vast to consider here (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). The need for some reform of accountability that encroached on professional autonomy was defended by Munro (2004), who in referring to the English system, stated:
The state of social work practice in the 1970s must be close to an auditor’s nightmare: operating predominantly in the humanist tradition, it was autonomous, private, and idiosyncratic. Social services were administered as a professional bureaucracy that, respecting professional expertise, allowed social workers a high degree of discretion (p. 1081).

The broad historic freedom of the profession was incompatible with the increasing need for standardised records for legal and medical purposes (Munro, 2004). There was evidence that frontline workers continued to exercise autonomy, but in the interests of survival rather than for idealistic reasons. Despite the high profile of the LAC program, particularly in the UK, in a study of nine residential homes in Scotland where activities should have been based on measurable and assessable outcomes, and distinctive items based on individual plans, none of the 28 frontline welfare workers or unit managers discussed quality care in terms of “belonging to a wider professional or organisational discourse or debate” (Watson, 2003, p. 74). Workers described themselves as reactive in practice, and there was conflict between their intuitive understanding of quality of care and the need to simply get through a shift.

The combination of inflammatory and intractable social circumstances involving children seems to guarantee that the welfare of the worker herself is a more marginal concern. McDonald (1999a) cautioned that there was no guarantee that the social justice values of welfare frontliners were shared by the main stakeholders in the new welfare market, and there was no certainty about the kinds of occupational roles that would predominate. McDonald described the future of tertiary educated social workers and similar professionals as ambiguous, uncertain, and turbulent. In terms of frontline children’s welfare work, the identity of social work was already somewhat submerged.

2.1.4 Competitive funding and bureaucratic efficiency
The new welfare market to which McDonald (1999a) and Wearing (1998) referred, is described in many different ways, and the appropriateness of each of the terms in welfare provision is contested (Brown, Kenny, Turner, & Prince, 2000). Micro-economic reform in many Western nations was the three-tiered project of deregulation, corporatisation and privatisation, commonly called economic rationalism. Reform introduced the tools of managerialism into both the public and the non-profit Third Sector (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004; Lyons, 1998b). Wearing (1998) usefully defined managerialism as: “…the major political-administrative means to privatisation, decentralisation, commercialism and the contracting out of services … .by means of the four E’s: efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity” (p. 6).
Saunders (2002) argued that neo-liberal reforms were philosophically removed from the ideals of social responsibility embodied in welfare provision. Tsui and Cheung (2004) disputed the view that managerialism was the answer for “...shrinking budgets and increased competition”. They argued that social problems could not be adequately addressed by scientific methods, and welfare work should be an expression of civil society as opposed to the market. Their view of managerialism was a series of juxtapositions of previous roles:

... the client is a customer not a service consumer; the manager not the frontline staff, is the key; the staff are employees not professionals; management knowledge, not common sense or professional knowledge, are the dominant model of knowledge; the market, not society or community is the environment; efficiency, not effectiveness is the yardstick; cash and contracts, not care and concern, are the foundations of relationships; quality is equated with standardisation and documentation (pp. 237-38).

This argument seemed to depend on the perceived virtue of certain sets of activities, as though cash and contracts necessarily worked against care and concern. There is a more subtle argument, that contracts and competition are a further disincentive to work that is already marginalised. The introduction of competitive tendering for funds to run the kinds of welfare programs the government wants, was one strategy of economic reform driven by expectations of increased efficiency (Spall & Zetlin, 2004). Third Sector organisations were invited to compete for the privilege of delivering government-funded services to a clientele increasingly stigmatised by the language government policy attached to people with welfare needs (Swan, 2005; Wearing, 1998).

Welfare reform brought a complex system of accountability. Competitive tendering replaced the grants system for agency-initiated programs, which was discredited for a variety of reasons, but most notably by the rush at the end of the financial cycle to spend funds in order to prove continued need for funding (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004). In the past decade in Australia, competitive economic policy pressures have percolated down to the frontline of children’s welfare work to shape job descriptions and performance indicators, the availability of funds and programs, recreating relationships to a market-style clientele as government shrinks its own direct involvement in welfare service provision. Australian research linked the impact of policy and practice in the new managerial climate to worker stress (Healy, 2004; Tilbury, 2002). One contested area was performance measurement in child protection services (Tilbury, 2002) where: “what is measured potentially influences resource allocation
... less tangible client outcomes may not be counted” (p. 136). Although agencies and workers participated in defining their intended outcomes, indicators were reflective of government priorities in child protection, and practice was skewed by poor choices in what Tilbury (2002) described as a process that is “not value free” (p. 41), using models based on “an understanding that we can demonstrate what we do produces a result for clients” (p. 137). This process involved workers in continuous data collection and concomitant administrative work. Planning outcomes was more predictive of need than their spontaneous work in the past, which was responsive to demand.

2.1.5 The impact of resource poverty on wages and workloads
There is little doubt that resource poverty lives alongside the demand for efficiency in the new contractual relationships between the non-profits and government (Tilbury, 2002). Financial accountability is tied to performance measurement, which in turn is supposed to improve service quality and efficiency, “defining and quantifying inputs, outputs, processes and outcomes to monitor costs, quality and achievements” (p. 136). The prescription of outcomes for child protection disregarded more subtle qualitative aspects of human service, while influencing future resource availability. Tilbury suspected the concern with efficiency “diverts attention from resource deficits” (p. 136) in a way that was counterproductive to service quality. In this climate, retaining a trained children’s welfare workforce that will work with both demanding parameters of accountability and resource poverty, is a significant challenge.

Resource poverty refers to the inadequacy of time, money and people in the context of the work required, and it is a recognised status of non-profits (Lyons, 2003; Silverman, 2002; Wagner & Spence, 2003b). Resource poverty impacts the workforce and service delivery in many subtle ways. Lyons (2003) suggested that people who worked for non-profits often had an unusual values base that sometimes ignored money matters, opening them to exploitation because non-profits were “laggards” in pay matters, with low union membership and poor working conditions, the result of an inherent volunteer mindset (p. 151). Healy (2004) asserted that government funding agencies might be exploiting the willingness of the non-government Sector to tolerate poor wages and conditions.

Paucity management (Wagner & Spence, 2003a), which is a theoretical framework that initially informed this study, asserted that non-profits were different in that they had the ability to perform well in resource poverty. Wagner was primarily concerned with the positive working climate of non-profit organisations, and the need to identify how non-profit managers coped historically with lack of time, staff, equipment and funding. She suggested
that one key dimension, or one of five “domains” of paucity management (Wagner & Mlcek, 2005; Wagner & Spence, 2003a; Wagner et al., 1999; 2001) was the characteristic service delivery-focus of the children’s welfare workforce: a determination to meet clients’ needs regardless of limitations. The concept of a unique non-profit environment as described in the paucity management paradigm is important at a time when non-profits are involved in contractual obligations to secure government-preferred programs.

2.1.6 The unique characteristics of the Third Sector

One of the themes of Third Sector literature is that non-profits are unique, different to both private enterprise and government, and within that distinctiveness is the explanation for both effectiveness (Goodin, 2003) and inefficiencies (Anderson, 2004; McDonald, 1999b). The Third Sector comprises a privileged entity with tax shelters and fringe benefit provisions, that can be passed on to employees who work for a smaller cash component in their wages (Anheier, 2004; Drucker, 1990; Earles, 1998; Healy & Meagher, 2003; Lyons, 1998b). In Australia the Third Sector is described in various ways: faith-based, not-for-profit, charitable, and the volunteer sector. Welfare work is undertaken not only by non-profits, but the public and for-profit or corporate sector, so the Third Sector is not defined by the kind of work undertaken. Arrow (1998) describes the Third Sector as enterprise not directed by the priority of profits, and also an arena where there are no legal claimants to the income. The absence of pressure for profits does not diminish the need for strong cash-flow, and in a competitive environment there is the temptation to commercialise to create new streams of income using tax-free privileges (Weisbrod, 1998).

Paucity management suggested that the Third Sector was unique in its capacity to do more for less (Wagner & Spence, 2003b). McDonald (1999b) listed the qualities of the Sector as commonly purported: flexibility, responsiveness, innovation, participation and cost effectiveness. Lyons (2001) suggested that shared values set many non-profits apart from other kinds of human endeavour. The specific values embraced by a non-profit may be religious, environmental, or neighbourhood concerns (Lyons, 2001), but they are “rarely characterised by pragmatics self interest alone” (p. 22).

In a less positive assessment, unpredictable funding arrangements, the fragmentation of some services, and the potential to be swallowed up by government are among the concerns mentioned by Anderson (2004) in a literature survey that finds little empirical evidence of these sectors’ claimed virtues. The motivational roots of non-profits were regarded as both the reason for the Sector’s existence, and the source of weak management, as well as resistance to improving accountability, and thus management (McDonald, 1999b). However,
Lyons (2003) cited Onyx’s assertion that while corporate managers focused on personal advancement, non-profit managers were looking for opportunities to engineer social change, and willing to work for less in exchange for the chance to “make a difference” (p. 153). Paucity management saw this difference-making emanating from objectives, and therefore the strategies of non-profit organisations (Wagner & Spence, 2003b).

Although Lyons (2003) saw the distinctiveness of the Sector entirely bound up in values perspectives, these values were often a destabilising influence or a source of conflict, and represented a challenge, along with five other unique factors named by Lyons: the complexity of revenue generation, reliance on volunteers, difficulty in performance assessment, accountability issues and conflict with voluntary boards. McDonald’s (1999b) study of 230 non-profits in Queensland found similar evidence of compromised accountability, which challenged the “rhetoric and myth” (p. 12) emanating from discussions of non-profits values and implied virtues. Board members, for example, had been recruited for commitment to specific values. The result was: “problem solving abilities are illusory … because the characteristics which gave them the symbolic edge are those which undermine their capacity to perform efficiently…” (Seibel quoted in McDonald, 1999b, p. 13). Goodin (2003) suggested the unique structure of non-profits enabled “community minded altruists”(p. 359) to more reliably provide services than the state. McDonald (1999b) insisted that presumptions about non-profit effectiveness and “distinctive and desirable” (p. 11) attributes, have been made without a genuine understanding of the organisational workings.

Paucity management concepts (Wagner & Mlcek, 2005; Wagner & Spence, 2003a; Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2001) suggested that non-profits were unaware of their own organisational skills, and needed to define how they had worked well in the past rather than borrowing current managerial concepts. Wagner and colleagues suggested that non-profits were no more resource poor than prior to micro-economic change, although there were attitudinal shifts that saw volunteer boards transferring work to paid employees. Managers were under pressure to recognise their skill shortages in areas such as human resources planning and evaluation, and Wagner and colleagues posited that non-profit managers needed competencies over a more diverse range of activities. Although Wagner and her colleagues’ work recognised the presence of values and faith practices such as prayer in staff meetings in some non-profits, she did not explore the role of values in her conception of paucity management.

Values are implicit in every aspect of frontline children’s welfare work. It is work that begins with an assumption that workers have an ability to make value judgements in family
relationships (Mason, 1993). It is also work that is largely undertaken by non-profit organisations that are said to be values-driven (Lyons, 1998a; 2001). Yet the discussion of the values that drive the workers and their organisations is generally embedded in other research around ethics, motivation, identity and job satisfaction, stress and attrition, and the wider issues of management and policy. Little has been written from the perspective of the values-driven worker in their non-profit agency. It was widely implied that values-driven individuals and organisations were more likely to persevere in difficult circumstances, and certainly historically non-profits have volunteered for the unpopular tasks of caring for society’s poor and sick and particularly the work of children’s welfare where there are too few happy endings.

2.2 The challenge of retention of frontline workers

The recruitment and retention of frontline children’s welfare workers is a critical issue for employers and researchers. Attrition represents a serious loss of experienced labour (Harlow, 2004). Longevity builds the credibility of agencies, preserves important organisational cultural knowledge and relational contact with the client group, helps control costs associated with recruitment and professional development, and helped workers to build a career with skills that are not easily transferable to other endeavours (Bednar, 2003; Silver, Poulin, & Manning, 1997).

In Australia, Gibbs (2001) described the problems of attracting and retaining children’s welfare workers as “chronic, complex and multi-faceted.” (p. 324). In a study involving managers and supervisors in rural Victoria, Hodgkin (2002) found no cohesive solution because of the number of perspectives on the problem, including the attributes and inclinations of the worker, the quality and shortcomings of the workplace, and the nature of the work itself.

The imperative to find strategies to reduce attrition was particularly strong in the literature from the US, where social welfare reform and child protection policy were regarded as critical in worker burn-out and intention to leave, and annual attrition was as high as 30 per cent (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006; Winchester, 2001). Other nations experienced the same problem to various degrees, as indicated in literature from Europe (Harlow, 2004) Israel (Freund, 2005) and Scandinavia (Tham, 2007).
In the UK, applications to train in social work had fallen by 55 per cent by 1999, and in 2001 vacancy rates for social workers in local government areas were at 10 per cent (Moriarty & Murray, 2007). Harlow (2004) linked high levels of attrition in social work in the UK directly to welfare reform, specifically the managerial direction that replaced traditional relational priorities, and newly defined roles that required expertise in administration and budgets, so that there was an “evacuation of the emotional content from practice that means social work ... has lost its way” (p. 171). It is problematic to generalise specific problems of social work recruitment to frontline children’s welfare work because of training differences. However, there was evidence that working in child protection was more stressful and led to higher attrition than in other areas of social work (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Hodgkin, 2002).

Similarly, evidence that attrition among Australian social workers in children’s welfare was a decades-long problem (Markiewicz, 1996; Mor Barak et al., 2006).

### 2.2.1 The intensity of stress in client engagement on the frontline

Reasons given for the high attrition rates were both diverse and inconclusive. There was evidence to support the view that stress and burn-out led to attrition (Gibbs, 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2006), although the relationship between stress and various personal and organisational factors was more subtle (Bednar, 2003; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Stress\(^\text{10}\) in children’s welfare work was regarded as more sustained and intense than in any other human services industry, due to ambiguity, role conflict (Jones, 1993) and value conflicts associated with working with vulnerable families, in situations where there were often no winners (Drake & Yadama, 1996).

The nature of the work – such as reporting on child sexual abuse, physical and psychological abuse and neglect, visiting children in volatile home situations, apprehending children, placing children in out-of-home care, preparing children for court, and accompanying children to court – was associated with the high levels of unrelieved stress that are the precursor to burn-out (Omar, 2003; Perry, 2003). Lemaire (1995) reported endemic stress among 50 NSW district officers whose primary work was with abusive families, antagonistic and aggressive clients, and injured and abused children. In Australia, public confidence declined following innumerable allegations of institutional abuse of children in church homes, as well as abuse in Indigenous communities, all of which have been cited as stressful for workers (Healy, 2004; Hodgkin, 2002; Jones, 2000).

\(^\text{10}\) The literature makes little distinction between stress—or the experience of strain—and stressors—the factors that contribute to personal stress—and tends to use the word stress in a popular and self-reported sense.
2.2.2 Self-protection strategies in stress and burn-out

In the literature, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burn-out were recurring themes that related to the stress of people in caring professions (Nelson-Gardell & Harris, 2003; Omar, 2003; Perry, 2003). Vicarious trauma was linked to observing or participating in the traumatic suffering of another. This was interchangeably described as compassion fatigue (Nelson-Gardell & Harris, 2003). Commentators differentiated between vicarious trauma, the result of a single event, and burn-out, resulting from prolonged and cumulative stress (Omar, 2003; Perry, 2003).

Empathy between client and practitioner was a key determinant in vicarious trauma, yet social work and children’s welfare students were taught to use empathy as a tool, and self-protection strategies such as disengagement from clients were regarded as negative (Omar, 2003). Disengagement was seen as counter-productive because it depersonalised clients. It was also an indicator of burn-out in some assessment inventories (Anderson, 2000). The need for sustained relationships with clients intensified stress for children’s welfare workers in ways not experienced in other human services work such as emergency services (Perry, 2003). Children’s welfare work was regarded as emotional labour, where workers sustained paradoxical attitudes, such as optimism, compassion, patience and tolerance, regardless of personal feelings (Hothschild cited in Erickson, 2004). In her case study of Victorian supervisory and managerial staff in child protection, Hodgkin (2002) found workers were “implicitly required to have an appearance of coping and not seeming stressed” (p. 196).

However, the connection between burn-out and attrition was weak in some studies. In their quantitative study of Missouri child welfare workers and job exit data over 15 months statewide, Drake and Yadama (1996) used the Maslach Burn-out Inventory with 177 workers with bachelor degrees. The three conceptual parts of the inventory measured emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment. They found that emotional exhaustion, the psychological dimension of burn-out, was more commonly associated with job exit than the depersonalisation that was regarded as unproductive behaviour in human service work. Despite arguments that emotional exhaustion led to depersonalisation, Drake and Yadama demonstrated there was no correlation and both aspects could be reduced through a sense of personal accomplishment that led to greater job satisfaction. The difficulty was in retaining staff long enough to deal with the endemic stress, as demonstrated by Hodgkin’s (2002) study in the Victorian Department of Human Services, that showed 55 per cent of workers had less than two years experience, and the retention of those with social work qualifications in child protection areas was lower than for social work staff in other areas.
The tenuous connection between role conflict and stress, and attrition, was evident in Jones’ (1993) qualitative study of role conflict among long-term workers in mandated service provision in the US. Mandated services contained the role ambiguity of care and control, because clients were obligated to accept help. Following her two year study of administrators of public welfare agencies, Jones argued that the public image of a stressed-out workforce did not concur with observations, which found workers became more flexible through strategies to redefine their work. Only weak links between the decision to stay or go were found in those with emotional exhaustion in the Missouri study (Drake & Yadama, 1996).

Anderson (2000) found some workers were motivated or energised by stress. Although burn-out was regarded as the inevitable result of long term stress (Omar, 2003), Anderson found that workers utilised coping strategies to avoid the depersonalisation and disengagement with clients that is typical of burn-out. Anderson’s research involved 151 veteran US frontline child protection workers, some of whom scored high for emotional exhaustion, a precursor to burn-out, on the 22-item Maslach Burn-out Inventory. Additionally, Anderson asserted that a commitment to the work of child protection anchored many workers: “Although their pay is low and they are dissatisfied with the work environment, two-thirds indicated their intention to continue this work indefinitely” (p. 846). Whether this is commendable is debatable, because critical functions are impaired by emotional exhaustion (Drake & Yadama, 1996). The need for emotionally engaged workers was supported by Higgins’ (2006) work, which asserted only those who could audit their own emotions and demonstrate respect for families who may have harmed a child, were regarded as competent to avoid errors of judgement.

2.2.3 Stress and policy, public perception and bureaucratic process
The diversity and incongruity of child protection policy legislation and practice across Australia, and what Hodgkin (2002) called the “coercive nature” (p. 198) of the work, were good reasons to not oversimplify attrition. Policy failures often made workers the subject of media scrutiny. Hodgkin’s (2002) study of recruitment and retention in rural Victoria, found child protection policy expansion and mandatory reporting were sources of stress, and transience and instability had been named in an auditor general’s report as major problems, particularly in rural areas. These problems echoed earlier findings among Victorian social workers in the then State Welfare Department (Markiewicz, 1996).

Hodgkin (2002) said that the political and social pressure to find solutions for children-at-risk was always in danger of public damnation. The impact of the low public image of the child
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A protection program in Australia was foreshadowed in a year-long US study into the impact of media scrutiny on a child protection agency, which documented lost morale and coping difficulties among workers who felt blamed (Cooper, 2005). Child welfare was a high risk area for practitioners, where errors of judgements had serious consequences, and harmful outcomes were often inevitable (Higgins, Richardson, & Bromfield, 2006).

Bureaucratic processes were thought to contribute to the emotional climate of the workplace (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Omar, 2003; Perry, 2003), creating conflict, pressures for resources and office space, and resulting in “... apathy, negativism, hostility towards client/agency, emotional distancing, and lack of attentiveness and cynicism” (Omar, 2003, p. 39). Unfair, non inclusive and unsupportive workplaces were seen as a cause of low job satisfaction (Mor Barak et al., 2006). Evidence from Australian studies (Gibbs, 2001) and the US (Smith, 2005) showed that supportive supervision was important in retaining workers by building resilience and recognising the emotional impact of the work. Hodgkin (2002) however, said there was a lack of good supervision simply because the Sector was losing experienced people.

Bednar (2003) showed a link between institutional abuse of children in the US by workers due to poor supervision and stress. She suggested supervisory conflict and an inflexible role contributed to job dissatisfaction, but she rightly refused to make simple cause-effect links to stress and attrition, because there was sufficient evidence that more supportive environments could be created. Systemic failure was identified in a comprehensive South Australian study (Gilbertson & Barber, 2004) of a series of reviews of the child welfare system, which “called into question the capacity of the system to respond to the needs of children and young people under state protection” (p. 31). Large caseloads were a simple factor in workers’ ability to comply with policy, as well as government failure to “redress the disadvantage of children and young people in care” (p. 44).

2.2.4 The loss of social work ethics and idealism in welfare reform

The compromise of the inherent values of social work professional practice was seen as a significant issue in retention and attrition (Healy, 2004). Work that involves the care of human beings has long been recognised as the site of ethical, moral, or values-driven decision-making, with each of these words – ethical, moral and value-driven – used as overarching descriptors with little to distinguish between each, except in the literature devoted to ethics (Banks, 1995; Horne, 1987; Hugman & Smith, 1995). Ethics can be defined as sets of professional codes that reflect a social expectation of behavioural standards appropriate to
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A particular kind of work, such as the police, clergy, or welfare workers. In this way, ethics are shared in vocational groups, to ensure consistency of practice that may extend to recognition of the rights of clients. This understanding of professional ethics is particularly strong among social workers, and the use of a code of ethics makes up part of the claim that social work may be defined as a profession (Banks, 1995). Throughout the world, social workers have ethical codes that include broad social justice concepts, often based on the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1998; Banks, 1995).

Healy (2004) analysed five years of Australian census data to compare social worker employment trends, using Fraser’s (cited in Healy, 2004) concept of recognition to identify threats to the profession. She identified welfare reform as a source of stress, because the themes of economic rationalism were in opposition to many human services values.

Lost idealism was named as a factor in the decline in the number of people training as social workers in the UK (Harlow, 2004). Dominelli (1996) pointed to the loss of early social justice principles in social work, as well as the “... demise of the autonomous reflective practitioner, creating, a fragmented, deprofessionalised service that is poorly placed to meet the requirements of anti-oppressive practice” (p. 153).

One welfare reform practice that violated personal values and professional ethical codes, and muddied boundaries between service providers, was competition between agencies for government funds to provide services that agencies saw as essential (McDonald, 1999a). Healy (2004) spoke of “good enough care”, and of the “chronic under funding” and “financial constraint” (p. 105) of services as evidence of a wider social disconnection from the urgent problems of child protection. While Healy’s analysis contextualised those problems to policy change, she simultaneously introduced the issues of values and worker identity, and suggested that both were compromised by such things as the loss of frontline decision-making autonomy and the conflict of basic social work ethics (such as client self-determination). This compromise was due to the requirements of accountability to government, user-pay policies, and the drive for “lean and cost effective” services (p. 104). Jones (2000) similarly conflated values and identity: “Social values comprise a crucial element in the way staff construe their identities ... being there to make a difference for the better one way or another”(p. 366). Banks (1995) took this a step further, and discussed the “blurring of the distinction between personal and professional life, values and responsibilities,”(p. 130) as definitive of what many referred to as vocation.
2.2.5 Lost autonomy and professional identity in an audit economy

Another key social work value that was tied to identity, and lost to welfare reform, was the expectation of exercising personal integrity in frontline decision-making (Harlow, 2004; Healy, 2004; McDonald, 1999a; Munro, 2004). Integrity was defined usefully by Jones (2000) as “striving for convergence of practices and espoused values,” and that an “authentic sense of self” could barely be maintained in the new frontline welfare environment of the quasi market because “integrity coheres around a sense of doing the work properly in a context where values-talk is prevalent” (p. 366). Both Jones and Hodgkin (2002) asserted that this loss was compounded by the compromise of values expressed in ethical codes and professional training (see 2.2.4), so that even new graduates felt the pressure of a management style that conflicted with their expectations (Hodgkin, 2002). Both Ewalt (1991) and Wagner et al (2001) argued that limiting professional judgement was fatal to job satisfaction and staff retention.

The corporate style of management that emerged with welfare reform required a level of accountability for time and resources that did not sit easily with workers who once saw themselves as advocates in a values-driven profession, rather than a line-managed worker (Abramovitz, 2005; Tilbury, 2002). Yet whether autonomy can be regarded as an intrinsic value of social work was challenged by some practitioners, who said that all values should be worked out in the concrete reality of accountability to clients and agencies and the community (Banks, 1995; Horne, 1987).

Autonomy was named by Lipsky (1980) as “street-level bureaucracy” – a phrase that gained common usage – which he conceptualised as de-facto policy of government enacted by frontline workers in various human services. Lipsky saw street-level decision-making as imperative, given the dynamics of human issues, and he suspected increasing accountability demands were an attempt to achieve convergence of workers’ performance with agency policies. By 2000, there could be little question that workers in Australia were required to represent agency policy, and this was a source of stress for them (Abramovitz, 2005). Evans and Harris (2004) suggested the claim to autonomy was exaggerated, and that the discussion was dichotomous, based on the presumption that autonomy is wholly positive, whereas autonomy was neutral, and depended on usage. Autonomy opened the door to abuse of power, but its exercise occurred at street-level, where it could not be wholly controlled even under new regimes. Howe (cited in Evans and Harris 2004) argued that autonomy was mythical, and that there was a false presumption of successful “managerial control and worker compliance” (p. 873) in the curtailment of autonomy.
It can be argued that the loss of autonomy is not only a result of structural reforms in funding and agency management, but closely aligned to child protection policy intensification. Critical public scrutiny has also increased particularly for the church-related charities whose reputations have been besmirched by historic child abuse cases (Cooper, 2005).

2.2.6 The role of mission in job satisfaction and retention

One small strand of research suggested that there was a defining characteristic of workers who stayed in their jobs regardless of circumstances, and this was a sense of mission. Mission was named as both a source of identity, and of empowerment in times of stress (Bednar, 2003; Brown & Yoshika, 2003; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). The understanding of what mission might mean stretched from a simple mission statement (Brown & Yoshika, 2003), to the more esoteric interpretations of Reagh (1994), who extended the idea to commitment resulting from what she called epiphanies, or defining moments from which workers drew strength to continue in their work. Mission was a significant factor in the characteristics of both the individuals who stayed in the work, and the organisations that succeeded in keeping them.

The concept of mission was central to Weber’s (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968) theory of charisma and institution building, which used the religious concept of charisma to describe the kind of leadership that enabled individuals to labour with unusual commitment to a cause. Although Weber might be presumed to belong to a past era in which the gendered hegemony of religion assigned roles and labour, Voyce (2006a) suggested “vocation, character and virtue” (p. 77) were the contemporary concerns of the secular workplace (see 2.2.7). The meaning and power of mission has not been explored in depth among frontline child welfare workers in resource poor non-profit organisations.

Many of the non-profits that are now embedded in fiscal relationships with government came into existence through the inspiration and energy of benefactors driven by a cause, such as Australia’s oldest charity, the secular Benevolent Society established in 1813. Others were established by the mission or charity impetus of religious organisations, such as the 100 year old Wesley Mission, Anglicare, Uniting Care’s large agency Burnside in Sydney, and the Catholic Family Welfare Services (Hughes, 2002; Hughes, 2004; Lyons, 2001). It could be suggested that the disjunction of the historic values and imperatives of non-profits, impacted its workforce in ways not fully understood, because complex political and economic pressures and resultant changes to practice and process in children’s welfare work do not present a coherent link between stress and attrition (Freund, 2005).
Freund’s (2005) quantitative study of turnover intentions in an Israeli welfare service used a closed questionnaire with 202 high level workers, and focused on items such as job satisfaction, intention to leave and affective commitment. She found commitment to organisational vision assuaged role-conflict created by the bureaucratic demands of welfare reform. She linked job satisfaction to better performance, so that the recruitment of staff committed to child protection work was suggested as a strategy for ensuring quality services. She also argued that satisfied staff could be presumed to be doing their jobs well. There were limitations in Freund’s interpretation of data, in that it could be argued that anyone contemplating leaving their work had by definition lost commitment to it. However, she regarded mobility within the Sector as a positive strategy for solving job dissatisfaction, and saw it as evidence of commitment to the work of child protection. By comparison to quantitative studies, qualitative research penetrated less predictable aspects and provided a fresh understanding of commitment, as I will now show in reviewing three studies that attempted to describe commitment through the concept of mission.

Rycraft (1994), Bednar (2003) and Reagh (1994) focused on the role of commitment in retention. They suggested that the word mission described the high level of personal commitment which enabled workers to deal with work related stress. In a review of job satisfaction literature, Bednar (2003) found commitment was most relevant to individual training and specific work settings, there was little evidence that job satisfaction principles were utilised by employers, and ultimately: “a sense of personal and professional mission” (p. 8), aligned to good job-fit and supervision, were key to those most likely to stay in their jobs regardless of burn-out.

Rycraft (1994) similarly named mission as the first of four key indicators for retention of workers in her depth study of 18 child welfare caseworkers. The other factors were job-fit, supervision and investment. Reagh’s study focused on a sample of child welfare workers in Maine, US, where individuals had been in their agencies for at least five years, and most had worked in the Sector for seven to nine years. Reagh (1994) identified epiphanies as turning-points in the lives of the stayers, using a theoretical turning-point model developed by Denzin (1989a). Turning points were generally interpreted retrospectively, but the respondents felt “led into the field” (p. 73) by events such as death, disability or victimisation. Reagh’s research could be critiqued as dated, but there were no similar contemporary studies of child welfare worker characteristics (Zell, 2006). The work could also be critiqued for perpetuating sentimental or feminine dimensions of children’s welfare work. She described her subjects as “quiet contributors” who “wanted to make a difference”, and she saw these workers as having
“incorporated the field of public child welfare into their identities,” (Reagh, p. 73) so that leaving the field could become an identity crisis. My own research drew some of its focus from this study, which demonstrated that the lived experiences of frontline stayers could provide insights.

Reagh (1994) described a sense of calling as being sometimes associated with religious convictions, and also as a pay-back for life’s benefits and a stable childhood. In using the Maslach Burn-out Inventory, she found subjects showed a high level of satisfaction with their work, and a sense of fulfillment which outweighed emotional exhaustion. Reagh’s subjects were not indiscriminate in their commitment. They depended on recovery time, and complained when organisational demands encroached on private time.

The tension between personal commitment and a culture of workplace demand on time was evident in Krueger’s (1986) training manual for youth workers, which suggested new employees should commit to stay in a position for a minimum of two years, rather than looking around for work when funding was in jeopardy. A similar presumption of extraordinary dedication was found in Freund’s (2005) suggestion that employers search for committed workers because one result of high commitment was a willingness to use personal resources to promote the organisation and its goal. Drucker (1990) argued that the idealism of religion that led to high commitment was a source of burn-out. However, the concepts of mission and vocation in the literature, although poorly defined, suggested that some workers would develop a capacity to stay and resolve issues whilst retaining a sense of autonomy, integrity or identity (Bednar, 2003; Jones, 1993).

2.2.7 The role of moral identity and belonging in job satisfaction
The possibility that a sense of mission was empowering was present in literature beyond that of children’s welfare. In du Gay’s (1996) interpretation of new managerialism, he asserted that workers searched for meaning and quality of life within work cultures. du Gay argued that the Marxist perception of work as alienating was replaced by work cultures of belonging, and personal entrepreneurialism through perceived participation or ownership of the enterprise. He suggested that values affirmation in the workplace was an answer to lost autonomy associated with managerialism. This could imply cynical manipulation of workers, yet work is rightfully recognised not only as an important source of identity but: “Within the discourse of excellence, work is characterised not as a painful obligation imposed upon individuals ... [but as] a means for self-fulfilment” (p. 63). It has been increasingly suggested that work itself has replaced the hegemonic power of religion, imparting meaning and
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purpose, and that enterprise culture has brought with it an enterprise theology. Voyce (2006a) argued that an enterprise theology had emerged so that “vocation, character and virtue” (p. 77) were elements of a new kind of religion enacted around work.

For welfare workers, workplace identity had a dimension of morality that was described by Allahyari (2000) as moral selving. Allahyari studied workers in two Christian emergency food provision programs with different philosophies of charity. A Roman Catholic community kitchen offered unconditional hospitality to those in need, and expected its workers to be non-judgemental in “… transcending selfishness and materialism to give to others” (p. 93). A Salvation Army feeding program offered its workers strict behavioural guidelines that included avoiding alcohol. Many workers who began as court mandated labour, strived to better themselves with industriousness and deference to leaders, to achieve the Salvation Army’s approved masculine role of the good provider to rise above the “sinking” client class (p. 155). Allahyari suggested that her subjects committed to a moral community in which they shaped their own moral self by conforming to the agency’s specific vision of charity. Allahyari’s work demonstrated the way in which issues of personal integrity were developed and expressed through the worker’s role. The submersion of self into the mission was also suggested by Reagh (1994), whereby the workers sense of mission was so strong that they could not leave their work without losing a sense of self.

In some respects, the Third Sector is already regarded as imbued with values that offer workers a unique identity (Lyons, 2003), yet it is important to define and clarify Third Sector culture and those aspects now subjected to the pressures of the market.

2.3 Values and virtues in Third Sector culture

Some of the perceptions of a uniquely value-driven or virtuous Third Sector may be traced to historic religious associations. Wearing (1998) suggested a myth of charity associated with Christianity permeated the entire Sector, regardless of the origins of the agencies, obscuring the intractable nature of aspects of poverty and social ills. He suggested there was a charity culture that had been institutionalised, implying worthiness despite the increasingly secular nature of service provision, although in Australia some Third Sector agencies were regarded as insufficiently secular. Maddox (1999) made the cynical suggestion that the Howard government (1996-2007), which supported Christian non-profits, was hijacking right-wing Christian causes for party political reasons. This was increasingly the case in the US, where the Bush government made direct invitations to faith-based organisations to increased and privileged participation in welfare provision (Tangenberg, 2005). However, the situation in
the US was not wholly comparable to Australia because firstly, American culture had a higher
tolerance of religious symbols and language which Bush supported at policy level, and
secondly, there was an urgent need to find a safety net for thousands of single parents who
were deleted from welfare rolls by legislation (Besharov & Germanis, 2001).

While the Third Sector was regarded as trustworthy because it “invoke(s) images of
community, voluntarism, civic dependability and neighbour helping neighbour” (Lipsky &
Smith, 1990, p. 625), McDonald (1999b) said there was concern that the virtuous profile of
the Sector caused people to ignore the “black box” (p. 12) of its management issues. In
catholic-founded organisations, the black box often included boards appointed for
denominational loyalty rather than expertise, and problems with accountability because the
legal incorporation of the charitable work was not separated from the church (Lyons, 2001).
McDonald (1999b) found employees and committees recruited for their ability to “act out
value commitments” (p. 16) lacked the skills to develop monitoring processes. Moreover,
professionals appointed to voluntary boards appeared to apply different standards in the
performance of their unpaid duties (McDonald, 1999b). When voluntary board members
were not welfare professionals, rarely at the agency office in daylight hours, there was no
leadership culture. McDonald suggested that chaos in service delivery-focused agencies that
constantly responded to apparent client crises, limited management options. However,
Lyons’ study of 2000 non-profits in 1994 (Lyons, 1998a), found only six per cent needed
board support for administration. Drucker (1990) took the perspective that the lack of a fi-
scal bottom line in non-profits made performance more important, but also more difficult to
assess, demanding new definitions and strategies. Speaking specifically to the Australian
context, Goodin (2003) suggested the process of competitive tendering by non-profits to win
the funding to run government–endorsed programs would undermine the potentially
distinctive accountability of the non-profit Sector.

Institutionalisation, commonly associated with stagnant or rule-bound organisations, tended
to be a negative distinctive feature of non-profits related to structure (Lyons, 2003;
McDonald, 1999b). In Australia, nine of the largest multi-service organisations were church-
sponsored agencies more than 100 years old. Lyons spoke of “...non-profit organisations
that keep hanging on to old ways and principles when circumstances have changed,” and
noted that despite the longevity of many Third Sector organisations where for-profits had
failed, “...an ability to survive does not mean an organisation is well managed” (p. 133).
Wearing (1998) took a similar view of the relationship between religion and service
provision.
Not all commentators attributed the growth of the Sector to its distinctive values or virtues. Weisbrod (1997) attributed Third Sector growth to the non-homogeneous nature of many Western societies with myriad needs, that were more flexibly met by a multitude of smaller organisations, rather than a distant centralised government. He suggested that in more homogeneous societies such as Scandinavia, governments could efficiently meet more cohesive needs. This also explained the recent rapid growth of the Third Sector in the US, which is akin to Australia in its multiculturalism. The Third Sector globally provided many of the services that were traditionally associated with welfare states: 67 per cent of all hospital care in the US, 22 per cent of education in the UK, 35 per cent of child care in France, Germany and Japan (Weisbrod, 1997). Lyons (2001) refuted Weisbrod’s demand theory that used government failure to explain the presence of the Third Sector, and used Hansmann’s (cited in Krashinsky, 1997) theory of contract failure: when clients could not ensure that the service they had paid for would be delivered, and of a reasonable quality, such as health care, they turned to more trustworthy agencies, such as non-profits. Krashinsky suggested that contract failure theory focused on service users to the exclusion of suppliers. Yet those who purchased “trust goods” (p. 154) such as care for a child or elderly person, which would be provided in their absence, could not afford to ignore the motivations of non-profit service providers and entrepreneurs, which were often religious.

2.3.1 Motivation, accountability and transparency of mission
The trustworthiness of the Third Sector was seen as relative to its motivation and accountability, and difficult to assess in a competitive market-driven climate (Goodin, 2003). Democratic accountability, which Goodin defines as a control mechanism between principals and agents in charities receiving public funds, was difficult to achieve because non-profits straddled blurred boundaries in their operations in ways that Weisbrod (1998) argued sometimes “cross the line” and “stretch the envelope” (pp. 292-295) in profiteering, personal ambition, and allowing mission to be marginalised by negative trends that verged on the illicit.

Goodin (2003) spoke of moral obligation, and saw the future of the Sector as dependent on its financial transparency as opposed to the “grudging” (p. 263) accountability to shareholders in public companies. Goodin cited the loss of control by principals, such as funders and donors, over their agents such as managers, as a threat to the non-profit Sector. He cited as an example a publicised failure of the Red Cross to use funds for the specific humanitarian crisis it had nominated, at the time of fund-raising. McDonald (1999b) characterised controls in non-profit organisations as “crude or non existent” (p. 12), and linked that failure to the role of values in the conception of these organisations. Many non-profits prioritised religious,
political and moral values over efficiency, and McDonald asserted that the diversity of interpretations of non-profits’ mission priorities among workers, boards and contributors, resulted in poor internal controls and accountability. Goodin (2003) said: “Because they are motivationally and organisationally distinct, Third Sector organisations are capable of doing many things that neither the state nor the market sectors can do reliably or well,” although, enquiring into the motivation of the Third Sector is “more central to holding them to account than such enquiries would be in either of the other two sectors” (p. 2). He suggested that purity of purpose was one of several valid forms of assessment, and imagined that Third Sector agencies could be embedded in networks of contemporaries “praising, shaming and shunning” as a form of accountability (p. 13). Goodin’s idealism was not shared by Weisbrod (1998), who regarded the lack of clarity of mission as a factor in the commercialisation of the Third Sector, so that financial constraints caused managers to move their goals while apparently maintaining the same mission. With useful clarity, Drucker (1990) argued there was genuine confusion between moral and economic causes: non-profits were tempted to pursue moral goals regardless of results, but accountability for more specific goals made better use of funds.

The continuing problem of accountability is that the Third Sector delivers services that are not easily measured, because of the human and relational nature of those services where value or effectiveness is subjective (Krashinsky, 1997; Wuthnow, Hackett, & Hsu, 2004). Another difficulty with accountability is that clients generally have complex issues, requiring multi-disciplinary approaches, so that a number of different agencies may be involved with a single client, resulting in confused outcome statistics (Wuthnow et al., 2004). The difficulty in quantifying subtle kinds of service provision is complicated by non-profits’ capacity to utilise tax benefits, in enterprises that may not be strictly related to their mission (Weisbrod, 1998).

The loss of organisational autonomy associated with new levels of accountability was seen as a negative erosion of community participation, by those interested in measuring social capital (Brown et al., 2000). Managerialism had created “… change and instability” and “… produced a countervailing set of social forces which seek to measure, regulate and control…” (p. 7). The writers saw the new controls of once autonomous Third Sector organisations as the “McDonaldisation” of welfare systems (Ritzer, 2000). Ritzer suggested that non-profits pushed the McDonaldisation button because of the need for efficiency and economic survival. Brown (2000) extended the autonomy and authority argument surrounding civil society, to discuss Weberian “plebiscitary democracy” (p. 43), an analysis of German politics advocating strong centralised government. The concept arises from Weber’s “pessimistic conclusion that a grass-roots democracy is not a viable solution for a modern state” (Brown
et al., 2000, p. 10). Traditional moral and religious views of human frailty were used to explain the need for a vigilant government in a passive public domain. The discussion emphasised the curious paternalistic struggle for power, between sectors, which seek to empower those who are seen to be disempowered, and the ways in which the vigorous, autonomous character of the Third Sector does not easily yield to a managerial agenda. In American studies, the grass roots nature of many faith-based organisations, and their capacity to mobilise local resources and win community support, as well as form spontaneous alliances across denominational boundaries, demonstrated the power of social capital vested within civil society (Ebaugh, Chafetz, & Pipes, 2005). Lyons (2001) contended that the social capital debate shifted emphasis for the Third Sector, from service-provision per se, to the creation of another kind of qualitative product, which was difficult to value. This shift challenged the criteria for judging Third Sector effectiveness and relevance.

2.3.2 Gender, religion and institution
Frontline children’s welfare work is an occupation regarded as feminised, which implies small reward and little power as well as female predominance (Dominelli, 1998; Hasenfeld, 1974). Gender discourse, therefore, is important in any discussion of the industry and its workers. There are also subtle links between religion and welfare, as shown in the previous discussion, which I want to extend to religion, welfare and women. The intersection of women, care, and values is a minefield of suggested gendered virtues, inclinations and abilities, touching on the question of a woman’s innate capacity to make moral judgements (Noddings, 1984; 1989). However, it is precisely at this intersection of women, care and values that my own thesis evolved, and so it becomes imperative to revisit these questions.

Welfare organisations are often thought of as inherently and intrinsically genderised (Allahyari, 2000), and the site of a different kind of morality and impetus (Brabeck & Bebeau, 1989; Gilligan, 1982). There is evidence to suggest that welfare agencies have a different motivation and moral perspective because of the predominance of women. Gilligan’s 1982 book In a Different Voice sparked the influential gender-based ethic of care debate. This work asserted that women emphasised relationship and care-giving in making moral judgements, as opposed to a masculine justice-based approach, and that this ethic of care needed to be given a weight of value that was lacking in societies that had made the male experience normative.

2.3.3 Women’s moral perspectives and oppression in care work
Gilligan (1982) said that women defined moral conflicts and choices in ways that were outside the recognised bounds of both the psychology of moral reasoning, and moral theory,
representing a different voice whose credibility was in doubt only because of the male bias of research in ethics and moral theory. Gilligan’s view represented second wave feminism, celebrating gender difference and looking for endorsement of uniquely female contributions. Moral philosopher Noddings (1984; 1989) had a similar perspective, and she suggested that the female attributes of compassion and responsiveness had been demonised as weakness, leading to different standpoints on moral education and goodness. In her scheme, to integrate female understandings into both morality and education would lead to a moral integrity that is not possible in a world defined by male experience alone. Tronto (1994) advocated for a construction of a formal ethic of care that had a general, rather than gendered, application. Tronto rejected any sentimentalising of care work through its association with disposition or emotion, insisting it was a practice. She saw Gilligan’s work as limited because instinctual acts could not be regarded as elective morality – a somewhat specious argument, as many moral acts, such as not murdering one’s neighbour, have become deeply embedded in most humans.

Gilligan made care work more visible, but she was criticised for perpetuating stereotypes (Houston, 1989). Women have been traditionally assigned a greater number of care roles than men, over a greater part of their lives, with fewer opportunities to exercise moral judgements in other arenas (Houston, 1989; Seigfried, 1989). Nevertheless, Houston (1989) suggested caring or relational perspectives belonged in any moral formulation. Gilligan’s implied intrinsic gender attributes were beyond the constructionist theory of a socially assigned and learned gender role, yet perceived differences between male and female, particularly in caring roles, were in the fabric of popular thinking to such a degree that it was still presumed that women made decisions on the basis of emotion while men had an overt rational, justice approach (Noddings, 1984). It was suggested that care work is essentially emotional work, and that care organisations became feminised because of the nature of the work (Allahyari, 2000). Care work was closely associated with culturally shaped expectations of women as moral guardians, which restricted wider participation in competitive and remunerative work (Brubaker, 1994).

Many of the themes relating to care and women find their roots in religion. We can assume the survival of religiously inspired values in the religious heritage of the Third Sector, and the values embodied in the workers, simply because institutions carry their heritage in their culture (Earles, 1998; Hasenfeld, 1974; McDonald, 1996; Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Religions generally have a perspective on women that does not sit comfortably in the 21st Century. Brubaker (1994), a feminist liberation theologian, asserted that throughout the world women still had low worth: restrained, disempowered and impoverished by the
religiously inspired social limitations applied to motherhood that deprived women of economic liberty and opportunity. She saw as destructive the church’s role in making family relationships sacred, and speaking of “womanly virtues” that should more rightfully be regarded as basic human attributes (p. 249). Although Brubaker rightly demonstrated the moral domination of the modern church, in perpetuating women’s oppression through the rhetoric of righteous motherhood, her primary concern was the domination of gender roles in Third World poverty and labour division.

### 2.3.4 Benevolence as suitable work for religious women

Historically, women were expected to take responsibility for the young, the old, the infirm and the disabled, based on a household headed by a male breadwinner who kept a female hearth-keeper whose work did not require remuneration (Brook & Davis, 1985; Cage, 1992; Hasenfeld, 1974; Marchant & Waring, 1986; Walton, 1975). Not only was women’s care work in the domestic setting unrewarded, unseen and unappreciated, but when the work moved into the public arena, it remained a marginalised activity for which women might receive the minimal wages associated with “women’s sphere” work (Hughes, 2002, p. 69).

The difficulty of finding a marriageable man in the mid 1860s forced many women to begin looking for work (Walton, 1975). Walton reports that The English Woman’s Journal launched an employment agency because dozens of women had turned up at their offices looking for work: “… all of them more or less educated – all of them with some claim to the title of a lady” (p. 15). The financial need that drove women to look for work was often ignored by the commentators of the time. Those clamouring for work included widows supporting small children, and older females who now found teaching too gruelling. Mary Carpenter, writing in the Woman’s Journal in 1858, (cited in Brook & Davis, 1985) invoked God’s name to urge women to “bestow their maternal love” in the service of others (p. 7). Role-models of working women of the time – Florence Nightingale, Mary Carpenter and Elizabeth Blackwell – were do-gooders with private means. Work associated with the Poor Laws was considered suitable for women (Hollis cited in Brook & Davis, 1985) because “it is only domestic economy on a larger scale” (p. 8). In Australia, ladies benevolent societies worked hard for little gratitude (Cage, 1992), winning social approval for doing difficult work (Swain, 2001). Welfare work was birthed out of the Christian virtues of nurturance, empathy, kindness, and a lack of economic motivation. Pauline theology, as interpreted by the Roman Catholic church, continued to assign women primary caring responsibilities (Brubaker, 1994).

Three scriptural injunctions are universally taught in Christian churches up to the present day, limiting women’s sphere to care-giving, and emphasising the redemptive power of child-
bearing. The best known injunction is attributed to the Apostle Paul who, in the first century of the Christian church insisted women should be silent in church meetings, and in a separate passage, keeping their heads covered. This followed on from Judaic tradition, where women were kept separate from men in the temple. Women were not permitted to express opinions, nor assume leadership:

1Co 14:34 the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge
1Co 14:35 If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in a church meeting. (Good News Bible).

These scriptures are used to exclude women from the priesthood of the Roman Catholic church universally, and the priesthood of the Sydney Anglican church, from the ministry in the Presbyterian church in Australia, and from all forms of leadership in Brethren, Orthodox and Mormon churches globally. All of these organisations have charitable arms that have concentrations of women working within them, both paid and unpaid. Charitable work was considered a suitable sphere for women in the early churches, as demonstrated by another of the Apostle Paul’s injunctions – that only widows performing good deeds could receive the support of the church for their own needs. This concept of the deserving poor that continued down through history (Blanesburgh, 1932) was drawn from the following biblical passage:

1Ti 5:9 do not add any widow to the list of widows unless she is over sixty years of age. In addition, she must have been married only once
1Ti 5:10 and have a reputation for good deeds: a woman who brought up her children well, received strangers in her home, performed humble duties for other Christians, helped people in trouble, and devoted herself to doing good.
1Ti 5:11 But do not include younger widows in the list; because when their desires make them want to marry, they turn away from Christ.

Child-bearing was regarded as virtuous, as well as a way for a woman to be saved from her sins:

1Ti 2:15 But a woman will be saved through having children, if she perseveres in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (Good News Bible).

The belief that women had a God-ordained nurturing role influenced women throughout the late 19th and early 20th Century, when poor women expressed their religious impulses through
sacrificial membership of religious orders (Hughes, 2002) and wealthy women through sacrificial benevolence. Fiorenza (1983) suggested that the religious coercion of women to assume a nurturing role, regardless of their life’s circumstances, had never diminished. Despite a feminist theological reconstructionist discourse, the church had closed its doors to women in leadership roles.

2.3.5 Gendered institutions and attitudes to welfare practice

Although the Roman Catholic church has a distinctive theology of welfare that is unlike the Protestant models (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005) there is some evidence that religious rhetoric was filtered through female perspectives to help shape welfare practice, as demonstrated in the development of Catholic social services in Sydney and Adelaide (Hughes, 2002). Four unenclosed orders of Irish Catholic nuns, that immigrated to Australia between 1838 and 1880, founded networks of welfare programs (Hughes, 2002). They embraced work not only as an expression of selfless piety, but as an escape from Irish poverty, famine and political oppression. The Irish sisterhoods saw poverty as a complex structural problem, in contrast to the English Protestant concept that linked poverty to moral failure (Hattersley, 1999). The nuns’ values, embedded in attitudes towards the poor, were distilled in practice. A similar phenomenon was observed in the US by Allahyari (2000), and explained by Hasenfeld (1974):

"...when we work on people who are themselves imbued with values, our own actions cannot be value neutral” (p. 5).

The power of moral language to influence attitudes and behaviour is well recognised (du Gay, 1996; Fine, 2004; Voyce, 2006a). Language associated with need can stigmatise, as evidenced by the recent use of the phrase welfare dependence (Saunders, 2005) in Australia, which carries with it the political rhetoric of government policies encouraging personal enterprise. Renaming social problems or associating them with marginal or even delinquent groups, often implied simple individual solutions (Saunders, 2005).

Australian attitudes towards poverty and welfare provision were sharpened by both its convict past, and the imported class divisions of English society. Langfield (2002) described how up until 1939, migrants sponsored by the Salvation Army were stigmatised as part of an underclass not wanted in Australia. Nevertheless, blaming the poor was not the perspective of movements founded by the Sisters of Charity in Australia, who had experienced personal poverty. They developed organisational structures staffed by laity, a theory and practice of social work that has endured, with religious women positioning themselves to retain the managerial direction (Hughes, 2004). Allahyari (2000) found the same refusal to hold the
poor to account in the Roman Catholic emergency food programs she studied in the US, compared to the Salvation Army’s expectations of reform.

Hasenfeld (1974) found feminised agencies focused on empowering clients, eschewed competition, and had little concern with justification through efficiency, but he did not see gender as significant in attitudinal or practice reform. Instead, he asserted that the gendered nature of many agencies disadvantaged the practice of welfare and upheld institutional values, because women in low status jobs worked mostly with poor women. Services were undervalued and under funded; resulting in poor outcomes, which further devalued the women workers:

... by making references to institutionalised moral systems ... they adopt and uphold moral systems that are supported by significant interest groups ...

... human service organisations are archetypical of institutionalised organisations ... their growth and survival depends less on the technical proficiency of their work and more on their conformity with dominant cultural symbols and belief systems (Hasenfeld, 1974, pp. 9-10).

Organisational theory from a feminist perspective tended to associate rationality with the masculine, dating the convergence of ideas on rational male leadership to Weber (Davies, 1995; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004). This was sometimes seen as an over-simplification, in the same way that Weber’s contribution to an understanding of bureaucracy was popularly reduced to a theory of managerial efficiency (Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004). While it is possible to read “Weber’s notion of rationality ... as a commentary on the construction of a particular kind of masculinity based on the exclusion of the personal, the sexual and the feminine from any definition of rationality” (p. 287), other factors at the time conspired to permit the integration of the concepts of masculine and rational. These factors included the dominance of males in management, the use of masculine language in organisational theory, and masculine practices, and the absence of a defined feminist discourse. Davies (1995) argued that Weber conceived of a masculinised rationality that has become embedded in a socially endorsed vision of male leadership, leaving no room for care.

However, in a lengthy analysis of the historical roots of this idea, Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) argued that Weberian rationality was not a single entity, but included rule-bound instrumental rationality, as well as value-directed substantive rationality, which tended to conflict. In this argument (Bologh cited in Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004), value-directed
rationality became subsumed “into instrumentally rational action which corresponds to the
cult of masculinity, a male chauvinism that values physical strength and bravado as an end in
*itself*” (p. 126). Although Weber saw scientific management (Taylorism) as a significant
trend in rationalised efficiency training, he also effectively saw the “*retreat from public life*”
(p. 287) of ultimate values, as bureaucracies became embroiled in the preservation of their
own structures.

### 2.3.6 Weberian worldview of work and the professions

Weberian thought provides a theoretical framework for this research project: it serves to
expose and test my expectations, and it seemed appropriate given the unique character of non-
profits providing welfare services, and my own particular interests. Weber’s thinking is at the
intersection of religious and secular influences on law, government, economics and human
social action, which is where my research is also located, given the historic religious
influences on welfare provision and non-profits. Weberian thought affects my worldview,
because my professional and academic life as a theologian was located by the linguistic
nuances of Weber. Weber had no interest in religion apart from its motivational power, most
commonly understood from his seminal work: The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of
Capitalism (Weber, 1930). Although Weberian terminology has become popularly heuristic
(bureaucracy, rationalisation disenchantment, charismatic, Protestant work ethic) the
underlying theories are complex, and were not systematically expounded in books in Weber’s
lifetime\(^\text{11}\). In reading Weber in translation, the choice of edition becomes significant. Many
translators who were also interpreters of Weber, such as Parsons, Roth, Schluchter and Wright
Mills, were subject to extensive critical scrutiny because of the disputed nuances of Weberian
words, such as the paradoxical use of rationalisation. Weber is regarded as ambiguous and
inconclusive, and those interpreters who claim clarity are themselves regarded as obscure
(Turner, 2000). Any search of an aspect of Weberian literature yields thousands of results,
with increasingly dense and obscure critiques of one another. For this reason, I engaged at
depth primarily with Weber’s work translated by a handful of the most respected scholars,
notably Schluchter (1985), Roth (1978), Eisenstadt (1968) and Parsons (1964). I was aware
of some of the commonest criticisms translators made of one another, such as Schluchter’s
(1985) perception of Parsons alleged pro-capitalistic stance. Weber’s vast, two-volume
Economy and Society (Weber et al., 1978) was edited by Roth and Wittich, from translations
by ten academics including Parsons, Wright Mills, and Gerth. Schluchter also wrote The Rise
of Western Rationalism (1985), translated by Roth, which is an interpretation and commentary

\(^{11}\) Marianne Weber, wife of Max Weber, was a feminist activist and author in her own right. After her husband’s
sudden death at 56, she compiled ten volumes of his work for publication and wrote his biography. She was
awarded an honorary doctorate for her sociological work.
on Weber’s developmental history to which I refer. The other Weberian works important to my theoretical framework were On Charisma and Institution Building (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968), translated and interpreted by Eisenstadt, and The Vocation Lectures (Weber, [1919] 2004), translated by Rodney Livingstone who also translated Adorno and Marx, and edited by Owen and Strong.

Rationalisation is often considered a key to Weber’s work, but it is a concept shared with Marx and Adorno, and in Weber’s usage the word is applied at macro and micro levels (Habermas, 1984; Weber et al., 1978). The critical social theorist Habermas, in an interpretation of Marcuse (cited in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992) equated rationalisation with domination, as industrialised nations necessarily rationalised all aspects of life, including transport and communications, institutionalising science and technology. In Marcuse’s scheme, humans lost awareness and legitimised this domination over time. Weber did discuss types of domination (Weber et al., 1978) and the concept of domination was central to his discussion of charismatic leadership in building institutions (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). In discussing domination, Weber’s work moved typically from the grand-scale historical and social movements, to the micro social actions of individuals. The conditions of economic change that are reshaping the culture of the Third Sector are by definition rationalisation, and my research intended to look at the micro levels in the light of the macro changes.

Although Habermas (1984) considered Weber’s work disjointed and redundant, and argued that rationalisation was a theme that had “… already discharged its mortgages from the philosophy of history and nineteenth-century evolutionism encumbered by it” (p. 145), it was Habermas who clearly defined Weber’s rationalisation project:

...Weber analyses the process of disenchantment in the history of religion, which is said to have fulfilled the necessary internal conditions for the appearance of Occidental rationalism; in doing so he employs a complex, but largely unclarified concept of rationality (p. 143).

For Weber, rationalisation included legal and moral practice, which had become independent of the value systems in which they were seeded, as well as the purposive, instrumental, practical rationalisation of actors mastering their environment. In Weber’s social theory, his interest in rationalisation came down to a focus on individual motivation, in particular, on those members of society whose values and motives were religiously inspired with a “… universalistic ethic of conviction which had taken hold of the strata that bore capitalism ... ethical rationalism penetrates from the level of culture to that of the personality system” (p. 164).
Weber’s grand-scale rationalisation was always contrasted with the ethical and values bases that previously directed humanity. Two concepts of rational social action that represent opposite poles are Weber’s understanding of zweckrational and zwertrational social action: the former being a methodical goal-orientation, and the latter a values-rational approach, which may not be rational in terms of means, but sustains intuitive subjective values (Weber & Miller, 1963; Weber et al., 1978). In a Weberian worldview, work and the pursuit of wealth was invested with ethical and moral meanings emanating from the Enlightenment project of humanity’s continuing moral progress, and particularly the Puritan theology that equated material success through hard work with God’s choice of an individual for salvation (Weber et al., 1978). The disenchantment of this worldview occurred when the principles of prosperity through hard work became entrenched socially, creating what Weber saw as the right environment for the emergence of capitalism (Weber, [1904]1930). Weber visualised bureaucracy ultimately denuding work of meaning, beyond the pursuit of the material (Owen & Strong, 2004; Weber, 1946; Weber & Andreski, 1983). Moreover, Weber saw the professions stripped of moral meaning, through the loss of the values, upon which the work was professed to be service to God and man (sic) (Weber, [1919] 2004). In Weber’s analysis, just as the Protestant work ethic had led to the acculturation of thrift and efficiency, devoid of religious purpose, professions continued to operate in conditions that might require dedication and offer poverty, but the original spiritual motivating force had vanished (Weber & Parsons, 1964, 1965). Enchantment referred to the retention of mystical, magic or spiritual elements applied to life’s most mundane tasks, such as work, and disenchantment led humankind to seek the material benefits of labour to restore enchantment (Ritzer, 2005).

The idea of a divine call to specific work was found in Weber’s use of the word vocation, by which he also intended to mean profession (German: beruf), although every vocation, including academic and political work, was seen as a site for a collision with bureaucratic forces ([Weber, 1919] in Owen & Strong, 2004). The use of the word vocation today is contested, particularly when applied to women and care work. Healy (2004) saw the use of the word disregarding workers’ needs for incomes and occupations, promoting the concept of women working for pocket money, and reinforcing sexist presuppositions about women’s labour which had existed in history. She also alluded to a cynical remark made in 1956 by social worker Elizabeth Younghusband that: “a good vocation would be killed by a decent salary” (cited in Healy, 2004, p. 110). The hegemony of rationalised and intellectualised constraints on the vocations of science (academic work) and politics (Weber, 1946), were equally problematic to Weber. Although religion might include a “sacrifice of the intellect” (Weber, [1919] 2004) its absence meant “the ultimate and most sublime values have
withdrawn from public life” (p. 31). Weber did not resolve the dilemma of the moral failure involved in the loss of intellectual integrity: “If we attempt to construct new religious movements without a new, authentic prophecy, this only gives rise to something equally monstrous in terms of inner experience ... academic prophecies can only ever produce fanatical sects” (p. 30).

Vocation, as a hegemonic tool in religious institutions, held people in its thrall through the domination of charismatic leadership (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Charismatic domination was mission-focused (Schluchter, 1985), operating within an economy based on “begging, gifts and endowments” (p. 122), and high ideals compelled self sacrifice. Charisma was a word taken from Sohm, a theologian, redefined by Weber for sociological purposes, retaining the understanding that while bureaucracies were external change agents, charisma had an intrinsic motivation (Woods, 2001). Weber (1918) discussed charisma in relation to his interests in domination and authority: “Here we are interested above all in the second of these types: domination by virtue of the devotion of those who obey the purely personal charisma of the leader”. Charismatic authority is validated by followers, often working for causes in loosely administrated organisations which operate in spontaneous and creative ways (Weber et al., 1978).

In studying frontline children’s welfare workers in non-profits, which are said to retain the values of their sometimes forgotten religious roots (Lyons, 2001) I expected to find evidence of Weber’s religious world, with phenomena such as charisma, calling, and values-intuitive rationalism at work. These phenomena, which I regard as evidence of dynamic religious ideation, are found in Weber’s concepts of charisma and institution, and his description of called followers of charismatic leaders working tirelessly for a cause (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Weber’s charismatic leaders had power to persuade followers to forget their own needs in pursuit of an inspiring cause. However, charisma was only powerful in the establishment phase of organisations, and it became “routinised” as workers sought security, positions and material benefits, or as new leaders depended on their office or role for authority. Weber’s description of “routinised” organisations had been applicable in my earlier studies of the loss of meaning in charismatic churches (Jensen, 1999), and it seemed probable that Third Sector organisations that had their historical roots in similar values and world-views, might suffer the same loss of momentum under the influence of bureaucracy. Rational authority is contrary and opposite to the charismatic (Weber et al., 1978). Despite diverse understandings of Weber, it is hard to misinterpret his fearful vision of bureaucratic rationalism as an “iron cage” that could imprison humanity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147).
Bloom (1987) stated that American thought was permeated with Weberian “mythmaking and value-positing interpretation of social and political experience” (p. 208). He argued that the use of Weberian language in the free market, even when reduced to the notion of work ethic, suggested “… they are admitting that their rational system needs moral supplement in order to work, and that this morality is itself not rational – or at least the choice of it is not rational, as they understand reason” (p. 209). Bloom’s argument was somewhat supported by the literature that discussed the power of moral language (Saunders, 2002), and the emerging motivational use of moral values in management (du Gay, 1996; LeGrand, 2003).

Thiselton (1995) argued that a human sense of duty was magnified by moral interpretations: “We interpret this sense of duty impinging upon us as divine, as some external command of God, when it is merely the inner conflict which paves the way for a free decision to act responsibly” (p. 83). Wearing (1998) argued that Christianity influenced the Sector regardless of its secularisation, which also implied that there were shared concepts and a moral language that shaped practice, without regard for its historic source. The existence of submerged, socially endorsed, acculturated and gender determined moral preferences in care work signals a complex collision of purposes with the market-driven age of accountability brought about by welfare reform.

If welfare workers and their agencies are motivated and sustained by the value-laden quasi-religious concept of mission, then the collision of mission with rationalised bureaucracy is an important site for research. If concepts of vocation still exist, then the bureaucratisation of agencies by processes know variously as marketisation, managerialism or economic rationalism, may signal a Weberian “routinisation” associated with the loss of institutional power and purpose (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Drucker (1990) asserted mission was the sole reason for the existence of non-profits, and without a clear understanding of mission and a singular commitment to it, non-profits had no distinctive identity or purpose. For Drucker, in an American context, mission implied religion. Lyons (2001) provided statistics to demonstrate that despite a decline in adherence to organised religion, religion was still “a powerful motive for public serving non-profit activity” (p. 35). In Australia, mission is not synonymous with religion, although the motivational power of its intrinsic values remain, and there is need for further study of the relationship between faith-based organisations and the state (McCarthy, 1998).

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12 Agencies with some church affiliation, no matter how tenuous, are now generally referred to as faith-based, although in the United States gradations of church affiliation were marked by the use of the phrase faith-related (Twombly, 2002)
One study concluded that many agencies were not so much linked to the churches in terms of resources, but in terms of authority and culture (Smith & Sosin, 2001). Faith-based organisations have long assumed responsibility for society’s most vulnerable people, and they interpret this work as an expression of their values (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005). Researchers questioned the capacity of religious communities to work in secular institutions organised around sectarian principles (Wood, 2002). Despite some evidence of the negative influence of religion, values distinctiveness was associated with the continued success of the Sector. Goodin (2003) argued that the loss of distinctive motivation would erode the Sector’s ability to provide services that neither the private sector nor government could effectively deliver. In particular, with the appointment of workers more aligned to bureaucratic or managerial values than mission values and motivation:

> Non-profits lose their motivational distinctiveness, as they are increasingly obliged to install executive officers selected for managerial prowess rather than commitment to the cause and as volunteers no longer see the point in doing for free what others are paid to do (p. 51).

The Weberian conflict between self-preservation and the public good as an outworking of bureaucratisation echoes in the Third Sector’s struggle for definition and vision.

### 2.4 Conclusion

In contextualising the stressful challenges of frontline children’s welfare work, I have demonstrated the continuing significance of values, in all their complexity, at personal and corporate levels in the welfare workplace. I have discussed the political and economic pressures on workers and their workplaces, and focused on the role of mission as a motivation, while recognising the secularisation of values in Australian society. I have argued that the point of convergence of historic values with new bureaucratic pressures is an important site for research. Resource poor organisations depend on a cheaper workforce, and the government which funds the non-profits presumes it has the capacity to recruit such a workforce, and continue to recruit this workforce regardless of the imposition of a new market culture on a unique sector of human endeavour. Attrition is such a significant problem that it is imperative to ask why some women do stay, and why in the 21st Century they continue to do this low-paid and stressful work, facing daily tensions in identifying with the society’s most marginalised families while working, de facto, for the powerful.
Chapter Three - A methodology to make the workers’ voices heard on the turbulent horizon
3.1 Introduction

This research project is concerned with women performing poorly rewarded child welfare work in resource-poor non-profit organisations. My intention was to give voice to women in a situation that seemed inherently inequitable, and which I suspected was still infected with historic inequities relating to women, children, welfare, and the kinds of religious organisations that often run non-profits. Yet it was important that the voices should be those of the workers, and not mine, or those who were stakeholders in the project. I also wanted to fully contextualise the workers in terms of the socio-economic climate, the social issues, and workplace culture and expectations. These concerns shaped my methodological choices. My qualitative methodology is critical social theory (Habermas, 1984, 1985, [1967] 1988) and Gadamerian ([1960] 1989) hermeneutics informed by constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003). In this chapter, I will attempt to show the integrity, appropriateness and coherence of the methodology for this particular project. In the first part of the chapter I describe the interface of Gadamer’s critical hermeneutics with my Weberian theoretical framework, leading to the place of constructionism as an ontology that informs my methods.

3.1.1 The purpose of a qualitative methodology

A question that concerns itself with complexity of the human condition, must use a methodology capable of representing the “fine grain details of daily life” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 294). Qualitative research methods that are not bound by a finite number of variables in specific configurations of enquiry answer this need. Pragmatist philosopher, G.W. Mead, saw society as central to the construction of meaning, and influenced sociologists to develop post-positivist methodologies that worked beyond the limits of natural science (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). The social context of my subjects is very specific: children’s welfare work is the site of conflicting interests of government, media, welfare policy, values, religion and human compassion, calling for qualitative methodologies able to address complex critical social concerns (Hammersley, 1990).

Qualitative methodologies are appropriate to any research with a critical intent because of the capacity to explore subjective values and subtleties of social action in context. Critical theorists Habermas (1984) and Gadamer ([1960] 1989) resisted the concept of positivist scientism as arbiter of knowledge, particularly in the sphere of values. Habermas ([1967] 1988) saw that: “the actual profusion of so-called values could be deciphered only in the real context of cultures in which the value-oriented action of historical subjects had been

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13 Mead did not produce any books and his lecture notes were a major source for those who explicated his work.
objectivated – even if the validity of those values was independent of those origins” (p. 5). In my interpretation of this statement, Habermas seems to echo Weber’s understanding that actions may be rooted in historic values that have become acculturated, or cut loose, from an original discourse. Communicative, interpretive qualitative research has the capacity to probe the social and cultural conditions and question the motivational sources of action. Habermas and Gadamer suggested positivism answered only “instrumental interests” (Thiselton, 1992, p. 382). Gadamer abandoned the natural science model, and saw all qualitative research as prejudice of one horizon fusing with the equally subjective horizon of another, contextualised by history, culture and language. Positivist approaches were denounced by Marxist critical theorists for objectifying and silencing human subjects, an argument emanating from the Marxist observation that social conditions shaped consciousness rather than the contrary (Thiselton, 1992). This argument, which concurs with Mead, appears to work against my Weberian theoretical framework, because some important Weberian concepts arise from the precedence or influence of consciousness impacting social conditions (Weber, [1904]1930; Weber, Gerth, & Mills, 1946). Habermas usefully regarded Weberian categorical approaches to values-rational subjectivity as too narrow. He advocated a move away from the philosophy of consciousness, that would also rescue critical theory from an irresolvable theoretical morass (1984; Habermas, [1967] 1988). Qualitative methods influenced by Habermas permit the nuanced human experience to emerge in an holistic way, that recognises the complex interactions of relationship, situation and interpretation.

There are specific research areas that have applications for positivist quantitative approaches that, for their purposes are regarded as bias-free (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My literature review has utilised research based on data collected and analysed using the methods of the natural sciences, providing statistical evidence of phenomena such as worker attrition in the children’s welfare industry. The positive scientism of quantitative methods is useful, in both natural sciences and human sciences, for elucidating objective facts, isolating phenomena and explicating demographics that inform aspects of research like mine, such as statistical trends in recruitment, retention and attrition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

However, my intention to give validity to the voices of frontline children’s welfare workers required an accommodating methodology, which was flexible enough to respond to emergent ideas, no matter how contradictory. From a critical standpoint, my research needed to penetrate below statistics to the human condition, and quantitative methodologies cannot orchestrate the multifarious voices of the subjects. A qualitative methodology uses the variations of voices as a form of internal validation, but this validation does not claim to mimic the criteria of positivist approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).
In an arena such as the one I am working in, validity may be defined as authenticity or trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 257), as a researcher attempts to faithfully construct the definitions or meanings shaping a particular world. This kind of validation has been described in Laurel Richardson’s conceptualisation as “crystalline,” which “…combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities and angles of approach” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 279).

Triangulation of data was envisaged by Denzin (1989b) as a way of authenticating qualitative research, which he conceptualised as taking bearings as do surveyors, using two or more points to find an intersection. Triangulation is “the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). This suggests the possibility of what in positive scientism might be regarded as competing truths, but in the lived experience of individuals is the liberating of equally valid subjectivities. The critical intent of this thesis required qualitative methodology and methods that respected, rather than objectified, its subjects.

3.1.2 Gadamerian critical hermeneutics in interpretation

Gadamerian critical hermeneutics may be described as both philosophy and science, leading to both understanding and interpretation (Gadamer, [1960] 1989; Geanellos, 1999). For Gadamer, hermeneutics was a philosophical enquiry into understanding that offered hermeneutical objectives that were not a prescriptive. Moving beyond traditional Romantic three-step methodologies associated with intuition, Gadamer ([1960] 1989) saw a converged event: “…understanding is interpretation” (p. 307). He envisaged understanding emerging between the shifting horizons of subjectivity and history, or in the merging of two horizons. Gadamer saw the search for understanding as a central human activity, rather than a marginal science, but he emphasised the role of language in mediating interpretation. His interest in language was not in the atomistic dissection of dead languages which had characterised classical biblical hermeneutics, but in the sense that cultural understanding, mediated by our proximity to its language, of our place in history. In this respect, our cultural knowledge and personal place in history is not baggage or lack of objectivity, but resources for interpretation. Gadamer followed his mentor Heidegger in understanding that a text becomes alive with fresh meaning in the light of the reader’s interactive encounter with it. As a theologian and ministry practitioner, who spent a large portion of my adult life in the management of religiously inspired Third Sector organisations, I regard my worldview and life experience as qualification for my research work, rather than cultural baggage. My concerns relate to Weber’s view of the loss of professions as callings or vocation (Owen & Strong, 2004; Weber, 1918), which is sometimes interpreted to mean: “all genuine values have gone from
public life” (Grunow, 1988, p. 319). Weber’s analysis could lead to a suggestion of impotence among those who attempt to promulgate ethical or values systems, such as ministers. I enter into the dialogue as a person with a strong desire to find fresh understanding of my research area.

Gadamer’s seminal work Truth and Method ([1960] 1989) was a development of Heidegger’s interpretive theory. However, Heidegger had an interest in being as opposed to Gadamer’s linguistic and historical perspectives. An understanding of the argument for linguistic and historical contextualisation, and the place of society, is important to me as a researcher because it influences my approach to human subjects. Gadamer not only moved hermeneutics away from its pre-occupation with texts and traditions, but also from a posture that we might call psychoanalytic which arose from Heidegger’s ontological approach, his interest in being. Habermas used the term critical hermeneutics (Thiselton, 1992). Gadamer’s critical, historical and linguistic perspectives allow me to consider the emotional states and responses of the subjects contextually, rather than moving to personalised pathologies that ignore social pressures such as inequity and exploitation, and to anticipate the acculturation of language at organisational levels. Gadamer sees that human science is historical hermeneutics situated in the tensions of change, which is precisely where my research subjects find themselves.

Another usefulness of Gadamer’s ([1960] 1989) philosophy of critical hermeneutics as a qualitative methodology is that it frees the researcher from the false expectation of achieving neutrality; it recognises a role for presuppositions, demonstrating that individuals are necessarily contextualised by their personal history, culture and education, and it does not anticipate the possibility of total identification between text and reader, or actor and observer. Gadamer did not see the prejudices of the individual as negative(Thiselton, 1980), but that they “constitute the historical reality of his being”(p. 305). This complete break with the hegemony of natural science and its demand for objectively verifiable data, allowed me as a researcher to approach the task with anticipatory ideas, and a willingness to have them overturned, aware that my life’s experiences and training contribute rather than detract from the hermeneutic process.

The Weberian concept verstehen (interpretive understanding) did not offer a method for my research. Weber envisaged verstehen as a tool for causal analysis, whereby motivation and cause could be conflated (Ringer, 1997; Weber, Shils, & Finch, 1949). Such an approach was designed to make causal links between individual motivation and world views and systems, but it does not give credence to the nuanced concerns of individuals, which is a more ethical
strategy in a crucial approach. The critical theorist Habermas, who was also an interpreter of Gadamer, extended the possibilities of Weberian sociology both in its methodological and its critical intent. He engaged with somewhat discredited theorists including Weber (Habermas, 1984) for the purpose of “redirection rather than abandonment of the project of enlightenment” (p. viii). Habermas’ depth analysis of Weber’s rationalisation categories demonstrated that without a discussion of interaction and lifeworld, narrow interpretations would result. While Weber imagined subjective meanings would contain more than the actor perceived, his theories and categories of rationalism would not adequately explicate other complex human elements (Habermas, 1984; Outhwaite, 1994; Turner, 2000). While some Weberian analysis of rationalism is relevant conceptually to this research, such as his approach to the rationalism of vocation which is characterised by an “ethical and methodical approach to life.” (Eisenstadt 1968, p. 390) the search for interpretive understanding is more usefully extended by other hermeneutical practices. For Heidegger, interpretive understanding is hermeneutics within the dynamics of human existence, as suggested by the title of his seminal work Being and Time (1962[II.6]), which closes by asking whether time manifests as the horizon of being (dasein). Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle is an analytical process in which the reader or interpreter is wholly contextualised ontologically, and interpretation proceeds as the reader moves between the parts and the whole, seeking out new questions and newer levels of understanding, which emerge often from the reader’s own re-interpreted pre-understandings (Crotty, 1998; Heidegger, 1962; Mulhall, 1996). Heideggerian hermeneutics have been described (Crotty, 1998) as “an attempt to return to the primordial content of consciousness … the objects that present themselves in our very experience of them prior to our making any sense of them at all” (p. 96). Heidegger was not concerned with exploring “culturally derived meaning” which he saw as power structures, rather, his primary concern focused on being: “the shadowy pre-understanding of Being that we all possess…Reaching that pre-understanding is already a phenomenology” (p. 97). The movement between the poles of understanding became clearer through Gadamer’s two horizons merging past and present, as a perspective for understanding, and a place of mediation of meaning (Habermas, [1967] 1988). However, while Heidegger offers a useful method, it has no critical intent, and could objectify subjects. The cooperative interpersonal interaction of Gadamerian hermeneutics reflects an important socio-critical value of respecting subjectivity (Thiselton, 1992).

3.1.3 Heidegger’s circle and Gadamer’s horizons
As Gadamer’s ([1960] 1989) horizons are theory rather than method, critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003) sees the hermeneutical circle as a place “to defamiliarise conventional defamiliarisations” (p. 446), using as an illustration the analysis of the Barbie
doll, which is so familiar conceptually that it shuts down new understandings. In other words
we are so familiar with some critiques of our own society that we need a nutcracker to get to
the fresh kernels. This is germane when research is conducted in an arena such as the one I
am involved in, which is loaded with themes that seem familiar or obvious: women, children,
and care. The hermeneutic circle is a space where: “hermeneutical scholars attempt to think
through and clarify the conditions under which interpretation and understanding take place”
(p. 445). This method heeds Gadamer’s view, but requires deliberate disruptive strategies to
expose forestructures, the personal paradigms from life, work and education that every
researcher brings to the research process. Without some awareness of presuppositions,
personal experiences, or unanalysed theories, the researcher may make a too-rapid closure
(Geanellos, 1999). The hermeneutic circle gives rise to new questions as interview and
analysis continue apace, generating new areas of enquiry and fresh analysis, informed by
other aspects of the research such as its context and social history. The hermeneutic circle
effectively begins with the interview and its conduct, although the hermeneutics of critical
theory does not envisage any final revelation of truth (Kin etch elo & McLaren, 2003). Gaining
insight into dynamic human conditions can only reach closure in the knowledge that the
embroidery is necessarily incomplete, and others will work on different aspects.

3.2 Social criticism as the purpose of understanding

In looking at the impact on workers of providing welfare services in the resource poor
environments of non-profit organisations, my research set out to find ways in which
workplace ecology could be improved. In this sense my thesis had a critical intent that could
“upset institutions” (Kin etch elo & McLaren, 2003, p. 433). My methodology drew on those
theorists whose purpose in deeply understanding the human condition was also critical
theory does not imply a theoretical approach (Kinch elo & McLaren, 2003) but rather
a cluster of concerns about justice, gender, religion or power, that shape the kinds of questions
asked, or causes canvassed.

My research, rising out of the personal circumstances described in the preface and my
concern for social justice contemporaneously, began with assumptions about the complex
difficulties of frontline children’s welfare work. I presupposed the possibility of inequity or
exploitation in a sphere of labour that had profound impact on the lives of children and their
families. Moreover, I wondered whether it was safe and ethical for organisations to look for a
cheap workforce to answer the government’s need for both cheaper and more efficient
welfare provision. These questions have a socio-critical perspective.
Critical theory has equity at the heart of its agenda, which might be rightly described as a moral concern. The values of critical theory are sometimes regarded as arbitrary and ungrounded (Antonio, 1989). Within a Weberian framework, moral values inform value-oriented social action (value oriented rationality) based on an intrinsic rationality (Weber & Parsons, 1965; Weber et al., 1978) whose logic is often beyond cognitive analysis (Schluchter, 1985). Although Weber’s categories of rationalisation were often considered obscure, Eisen (1978) defined one of six components of Weberian rational action as purpose. Value-oriented rationality is purposive although means and ends are secondary considerations. Value-oriented rationality may fall into Weber’s poorly defined over-arching category of substantive rationality (Eisen, 1978), where “… economic action are [sic] assessed according to an extrinsic standard of value-rationality …”; and “Substantive rationality represents the degree to which provisioning is shaped under some criterion of values” (p. 64). Substantive rationality stands in contrast to Weber’s second category, formal rationality, which is “… equated with the continued long-term functioning at maximum efficiency.” Weber imagined a number of values scales which may have included religion, but only one scale of formal rationality, which was efficiency (Eisen, 1978). Equity, as a concern of critical theory, may be regarded as a values-intuitive rationality which cannot be discussed without recourse to a value system. Values are a coalescence of concern for all of the theorists I have engaged with – Weber, Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas – and their literary dialogues with one another. Yet values have been a topic avoided by many contemporary researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The conflation of religion, spirituality and values systems may partly explain why axiology (the philosophies of ethics, values, or religion) has been excluded from scientific enquiry. However, Guba and Lincoln (2005) describe the critical theory issues of emancipation as “profoundly spiritual concerns” (p. 200). They see axiology as significant in selecting research methods. Not only does it mark a boundary between positivist and interpretivist paradigms, but the inclusion of values interests tends to create confluence of interpretive, critical and constructionist approaches. This confluence of methodologies is evident in the design of my research, which blurs boundaries in a bid to ask questions that could not be framed in a positivist or prescriptive methodology, and to address questions about values that are interpreted in deeply subjective ways outside of the rational framework of other methodologies.
3.2.1 Moral questions and Weber as a critical theorist

The questions I raised in this thesis were moral questions, and a moral perspective became important because of the values-driven nature of the non-profit organisations in which frontline children’s welfare work is performed. Values or moral perspectives impinge on the frontline workers, their work (children’s welfare) and their working context (Third Sector) in ways that distinguish the entire milieu from technical or skills-based labour. The moral questions involved in children’s welfare and the Third Sector are often voiced by media, politicians and religious organisations because of public concern about caring for children, doing welfare work, and the public funding of that work (2.1.4; 2.3.1). There are presumptions relating to the virtue of non-profits (2.1.6) that make it important to adopt a methodology with the capacity to deal with questions that are regarded as moral, and subject to a different kind of evaluation.

I characterise Weber as a proto-critical theorist whose emancipatory interests were implied rather than overt, a view shared by some critical theorists (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Habermas (cited in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992) found a shortfall in Weber’s critical intent: although he found some evidence that Weberian rationalisation could be equated with domination, he was sceptical of Weber’s view that public acceptance legitimised political institutions, and believed there was coercion in public validation of some social practices Weber pre-dated the Frankfurt Marxist discourse and the School’s attitude to Weber was regarded as ambiguous. Turner (1996) said: “The analyses of the Frankfurt School become more rather than less Weberian as their pessimism towards the possibility of revolution on the basis of an autonomous working-class struggle has increased” (p. 65). Habermas (1984), who ultimately found critical social theory stagnant, did see critical dimensions in Weber’s diagnosis and scepticism of modernity, and the loss of meaning and freedom. The ambiguity of Weber, for critical theorists, arose from various interpretations of the outworking of rationalisation. For example, Marx found emancipatory potential in scientific and technological progress, but this was reinterpreted by Horkheimer and Adorno, drawing on Weber’s theory, as “the core of a domination generalised to all forms of life” (McCarthy cited in Habermas, 1984, pxxi).

Weber is not generally regarded as critical because of both his pessimism, and a historicist concern with causality (McIntosh, 1983; Schluchter, 1985). Ringer (1997) suggested Weber was post-positivist, critical in relation to the historicist agenda, whose interest in causality extended to the social significance of conditions. The early critical theorists (Kincheloe &

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14 The preoccupation of critical theory with issues of oppression and exploitation emerged in the Marxist Frankfurt School around the time of the Third Reich.
McLaren, 2003) were responding to: “forms of dominations emerging from a post-Enlightenment culture nurtured by capitalism” (p. 435). I see Weber’s approach to history as critical because of his concern with the types and uses of power (Schluchter, 1985). Weber’s descriptions of charismatic forms of power do not endorse its practice so much as describe dysfunction, particularly in relation to the hegemony of religion (Weber, [1904]1930; Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). However, Weber saw the sublimation of traditional and charismatic forms of power (monarchic, religious) as the triumph of rational-legal (bureaucratic) authority that, despite its superior efficiency, imprisoned hearts and minds (Ritzer, 2005; Weber & Kalberg, 2002). Weber’s interest was not in retrieving lost belief systems, but in analysing the social impact of the changes.

The claim that Weber was critical is challenged by McIntosh (1983) and Ritzer (2005) because of his work in categorising bureaucratic processes that offered no hope of liberty. His “iron cage” was presented as inescapable (McIntosh, 1983). Ritzer (2005) made a negative comparison between Marx: “a radical hoping for a revolution” (p. 55), and Weber: the pessimist merely describing a world that had lost enchantment. Although Weber’s theories proved prophetic, the limitations to his critical understanding were proscribed by the age he lived in. Weber was interested in institutions and individuals whose disillusionment with religious traditions had changed the motivational content of their actions, without changing the actions per se, making room for rationalised or bureaucratic processes which Weber saw as a seedbed for capitalism (Weber, [1904]1930). While Weber named oppressive features of emerging capitalism, he could not visualise the extent to which modern society would adopt practices which are the very object of critical theory, such as technologies that dehumanise and marginalise people. Weber’s cynical attitude to the emergence of capitalism is found in familiar passages of his seminal work (Weber, [1904]1930): “The pursuit of wealth stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which actually give it the character of sport” (p. 182). Weber’s early recognition of the stultifying forces of capitalism did not include insight into the technologies and the wealth that would result. The critical intent of his work is embedded in his discussions of the power of moral motivations at both personal and organisational levels, and the global implications of financial enterprise, and professions, denuded of moral meaning (Weber, [1919] 2004). Weber finds in the etymological roots of the German word beruf (to call) the concept of a life’s work, profession, vocation or calling, imbued with moral purpose, and in the loss of the moral purpose, only formal rationality.

While Weber’s critical intersection with Gadamer, Habermas and Heidegger creates a

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15 Disillusionment with religion post-enlightenment saw the death of the hope of humanity’s continuous moral and material progress and mastery.
cohesive critical and interpretivist methodology, the unresolved issues of consciousness in their discussions points to the need to name an ontology that recognises the ambiguities of time (history) and being, and the interactive significance of being-in-the-world (Habermas, 1984; Heidegger, 1962). For this reason, I name constructionism as the ontological base that informs the critical and interpretive dimensions of my research (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

3.2.2 Constructionism as an ontology

Constructionism finds its ontological base in those philosophies which conceptualise reality as embodied in social interaction (Crotty, 1998), or more succinctly, “all meaningful reality ... is socially constructed” (p. 55). Constructionism is the co-creation of meanings (Kvale, 1996), a qualitative post-positivist approach. As there is no suggestion that objective absolute truth can be elucidated through constructions, this perspective frees me as an interpreter from the specious demands of objectivity reified through generations of scientific enquiry which left a shadow of suspicion on research focused on the nuances of the human social world (Burr, 2003). Interpretations occur “against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 305). Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasised the rapidly changing nature of socially constructed worlds, and the embodied nature of the definitions people use to name their realities. They argue: “To understand the state of the socially constructed universe at any given time, or its change over time, one must understand the social organisation that permits the definers to do their defining” (p. 134). Constructionism, influenced by Mead, engages with the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interaction, which undergirds the grounded theory approach which I adopted as a method to organise my data as I will show later.

In conceptualising my research I believed that frontline welfare workers would be engaged in renegotiating an understanding of themselves and their role, as they intersected with rapid change in their work culture through welfare reform. Part of my purpose was to understand how workers’ interpretations intersected with the Sector’s agenda for efficiency and accountability, given that this kind of work, which could be done in the better paid government sector, was known to be stressful. In other words, the context of non-profits was significant in shaping individuals’ meaning-making. Burke (2003b) demonstrated the contextualised nature of meaning with the simple example that the poor are not poor simply because they see themselves that way. The symbolic meaning and influence of some of the ways in which we are already named, such as parent or child, are both subjectively and socially constructed, carrying roles and resources that empower or marginalise (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burke, 2003b). In this way, constructionism informed my research design.
I was interested in the workers’ constructions/meanings and how these were both individually and contextually shaped.

Maines (2000) described constructs of values and beliefs held together by social conditions and structure. Meaning is not constructed on a blank slate, but both objective and subjective realities pre-exist in an undefined format, and take their definitions from human analysis, interaction, or naming (Crotty, 1998). In other words, without the intervention of human consciousness, what does exist would remain meaningless. Naming and describing the distillation of human experiences, no matter how obscure, which emerge through research projects such as mine, enriches human understanding. Named phenomena provide conceptual language that becomes heuristic to address the critical intent of my project.

In my interpretation, Weberian thought has a form of constructionism as its ontological base. Weber’s analysis of capitalism seeded in the social action of a single group of industrious religionists shaped by their interpretations of the meaning of work, wealth, and the will of God, evidence an underlying constructionist concept (Weber, [1904]1930; Weber et al., 1949). Weber contextualises meaning-making and emphasises the movement of subjective meanings through history (Schluchter, 1985). However, this is not the constructionism of Mead, who gave priority to society in shaping individual meaning-making, and usefully defined social action in its institutional context rather than all social interaction. This marriage of person and place justifies a shift within my Weberian framework, as it is central to this research project to ask what subjective meanings are attached to a specific role that is institutionally defined, within the context of various social influences. Anselm Strauss, one of the “discoverers” of grounded theory, also followed and exposited Mead, whose work was largely published and interpreted after his death by Herbert Blumer and Hans Joas (Athens, 2005). Weber and Mead converge in the sociological understanding of subjective meanings as a key to understanding social action, but the more complex, circular interaction of society and individual are found in one of the legacies of Mead’s thought, Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) as a product of constructionism, demonstrated that subjective meanings influence human action, that meanings are derived from interaction, and that meanings are modified through interpretive processes (interpretivism). Blumer mounted complex arguments against quantitative sociological methodologies. Unlike natural science there were no “universal laws... for social phenomena,” although Blumer was still drawn to satisfy the demands for a scientific sociology (Hammersley, 1989, p. 184). Blumer named the theory of symbolic interactionism, but his readings of Mead were contested, particularly in relation to the centrality of society as opposed to the meanings of self (Athens, 2005). Initially there was more interest in Mead’s concepts of the self. This conceptualisation of
self, as a social construct whose identity is rooted in roles and relationships, later emerged in an understanding of “multiple selves” shaped by social locations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 632). The implication that self-understanding may be shaped and renegotiated by roles such as work is important for this research project, which looks at women in their professional settings. This perspective frees the research subjects from interpretations that conflate an individual’s work role with personality or character, but place them in the socio-critical light of social change. The methodology’s critical intent is demonstrated in the way personal issues are contextualised by structural change.

Symbolic interactionism has been described as: “pragmatism in sociological attire” (Crotty, 1998, p. 62), because of its purposeful attention to social action. As a result of its pragmatic alliance with practice and lived experience, symbolic interactionism has also been described as: “…an American perspective on life, society and the world” (p. 72). Interpretivism sees the institutions of society as both constructs of human interaction, and the arena for social action, both the source of identity and biography. Weber’s interest is “to focus social inquiry on the meanings and values of acting persons” (p. 69).

Interactive interpretivism adds a new dimension to the Weberian subjective meanings. Weberian interpretivism, in my understanding, looks to human social action, arising from subjective meanings, in shaping institutions, events and history, while my use of symbolic interaction sees the reciprocal or communicative action of history, events and society in shaping subjectivities. In this way, my methods will evidence both the Heideggerian ([1955] 1996) hermeneutic circle at work, and Gadamer’s ([1960] 1989) fusing of horizons (see 3.1.2).

3.3 Conclusion

This methodology makes clear the social critical purpose of my research, and the desire to make the voices of participants authentically available to the reader. At the same time, it acknowledges the symbolic and socially constructed artifices of social action. Individual symbols are significant, and personal interaction with institutions is the stuff of life. It is foundational that we invest our brief existence with meaning and purpose, and the methodology I have described contributes to my research toolbox in entering the world of strangers.
Chapter Four – The fusing of horizons through mixed methods
4.1 Introduction

The methods for this research project express the methodological intent of critical social theory (Habermas, 1984, 1985, [1967] 1988), and Gadamerian ([1960] 1989) hermeneutics, informed by constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003). My intention was to look at women’s reasons for doing low-paid frontline children’s welfare work, and explore issues of attrition and retention in non-profit organisations. Individual voices were important, as was co-construction of meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2003) and contemporaneous participation in the themes that emerged through my analysis. For these reasons I employed mixed methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, purposive thematic interviews, a focus group, and the analysis of relevant literature. It was not a sequential method, but rather a layered one, with all processes overlapping.

Analysis was assisted by a listening strategy (see 4.3.2) and field notes, using the hermeneutic circle: constant questioning and comparison of data. The main tool for questioning and comparison was the concept of defamiliarisation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 446) described in 3.1.3. Through this process, familiar words and phrases, concepts and opinions that appeared regularly in the data were interrogated for further definition and meaning. Additional implications of these words, phrases and ideas were collected through subsequent interviews, and in the literature. This was important because within groups of practitioners, there are conventions in language use that can be mistaken for shared interpretations, but the use of similar language hides the difference in experience or intent. For example, stress and burn-out, values, supervision and judgementalism, were the kind of commonly used terms that appeared in both my data and the literature. Through analysis, these fragments of language yielded discursive themes that became important to my thesis. By comparing usage, the lack of shared or even conflicting meaning became more evident. The moral nature of some stress, the subjective nature of values, the pragmatism of attitudes regarded as judgemental, became evident.

Although there was a vast literature of stress and burn-out in welfare work, I had to search outside of the welfare literature to find an exploration of the moral content of some stress (Jameton, 1993). Moral distress was a concept borrowed then from nursing literature and tested for resonance in the new context of frontline children’s welfare work. The word supervision had been subsumed by frontline welfare workers, perhaps unwittingly, from social work practice. For some workers, it implied discipline-specific professional oversight, whereas some managers regarded line management as adequate supervision. The thematic ideas that developed from this kind of analysis were distilled and refined, through further
searches of literature, and further data collection and analysis, moving between the parts and the whole as they informed one another. Unfamiliar language use and concepts were similarly interrogated through further data collection and literature searches, to discover whether usage was idiosyncratic or discursive, such as the occasional use of the phrase “talking politics” (see 5.3.1) to describe budgetary discussions in team meetings. This proved an individual use, and ultimately served to illustrate the lack of insight of frontline workers into the policy realities of the Sector. The phrase also expressed the belief of a frontline worker that policy or financial concerns conflicted with client interests, a values-based notion that needed to be explored from a management perspective. Through this analytical process, the thematic content for future data collection on another horizon was suggested.

4.1.1 Inviting various perspectives: scanning the horizons
The essence of Gadamerian hermeneutics ([1960] 1989) is found in his understanding of the convergence of horizons: the point at which metaphoric light from various sources blends so that the colours are distilled, and the quality of light brings a fresh, intense focus. This is a fluid and creative approach, not unlike bringing an object into focus under a camera lens: it mobilises the sociological imagination in ways envisaged by Wright Mills ([1959] 2000), validating the researcher’s particular interests at a conjunction with values-orientations and social institutions. My research methods intended to try and capture the convergence of light from a variety of sources: frontline children’s welfare workers, their colleagues and managers; the discourses of the non-profit organisational Sector in which children’s welfare work is largely performed, and the discourse of welfare reform in its relationship to both non-profits and frontline welfare work. There were unreported voices in this research project, the voices of my students whose spontaneous anecdotes, insights and essays influenced my own reflection, and participants in a conference (Jensen, 2006) who provided feedback on the early development of themes. In this chapter I show how I brought together the various deliberate participants in this conversation, and how the themes – moral distress, altruism audit, moral community, and the search for moral proportion – that will be described in the four subsequent chapters, were developed within the Heideggerian (1962; Heidegger, [1955] 1996) hermeneutic circle (see 3.1.3), a method drawn out of Gadamer’s ([1960] 1989) theoretical intent.

In a Heideggerian analytical circle, there is a movement between the parts and the whole, which I interpret as correspondence to Gadamer’s requirement for both subjectivity and objectivity, the personal and the historical, the immediate and the contextual horizons. In this project, the parts are the voices of workers, whose unique experience of micro and macro
change – workplace ecology and welfare policy – are both derived from, and inform the whole. Yet the voices of others who share the same space – senior managers and middle managers – moderate the discussion, not authoritatively, but contextually on another horizon. From a critical social perspective (Habermas, 1984; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003), the voices of the most marginalised contributors should be weighted, which was my intent.

The liberation of human voices was compatible with both my critical intent and the justice perspective of Weber (Weber, Shils, & Finch, 1949) and Habermas (1984). However the methods also needed to ensure that the integrity of the subjects’ perspective was not sacrificed to serve my own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This could only be achieved by preserving their voices rather than reducing them to abstraction through analysis. I began my analysis using the computer program NVivo to store and organise data, and my themes began their life as labels for groups of comparative ideas in the processes the program offered: real understanding of the issues, and a more genuine representation of them, came through subsequent data collection in layers of interviews.

4.1.2 Interviews that invite a values perspective

Interviews are regarded as a method of empowering the little-sought opinions of marginalised groups (Kvale, 1996), despite the potential inequity of the researcher-subject relationship in the final presentation. The methods I used were intended to fully expose the data as a rich seam of human voices. I wanted to juxtapose the voices of frontline children’s welfare workers with their colleagues, middle and senior managers, to provide a deep illustrative vein of conversations. Long, inductive, individual interviews gave me access to many voices, from which I distilled the themes, while a focus group and a series of more structured thematic interviews elucidated and amplified the themes. In this way, data was densely layered and nuanced. The literature was searched throughout, and it provided the historical situatedness of the worker, the task, and the workplace of the research subjects, in the light of socio-economic realities in social welfare, and the political and social pressures on the welfare arena.

An idea or issue that may have seemed insistent in the voice of one informant, was intensified or diminished in the voices of subsequent informants, amplified or dismissed by the literature, until the themes were cohesive, like an arc of distinctive hues spanning the horizon. It was through this textured approach that I developed an essentially moral story, or what Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to as a seventh moment in social science methodologies,

“...concerned with moral discourse, and with the development of sacred textualities. The
seventh moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, *race, gender, class, nation, freedom and community*” (p. 612). The values-orientation of children’s welfare work, and the values-driven nature of the non-profit organisations that perform the work, evidenced in the literature, collided with my own interests in moral motivations and ethical issues, to produce this perspective. This first chapter explains the steps of the journey, a metaphor that Kvale (1996) associates with the original meaning of the word method. In the four subsequent chapters, the themes are the fusing horizons that are the destination of this journey.

### 4.2 Ethical perspectives

In September 2004, I submitted my research proposal to the University of Western Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (UWSHREC). The application was supported by the industry partner, the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) (see Appendix B), a peak body representing 150 different children’s welfare agencies throughout New South Wales. ACWA confirmed its willingness to give me access to partner agencies. The broad aim of the partnership, one of several with UWS around the same purpose, was to improve the working environment of community Sector workers.

The methods I described to UWSHREC included web-based resources for the dissemination of information, and email recruitment of participants using ACWA’s lists. Web technologies are central to ACWA’s communications network, and I wanted to utilise those resources.

I intended to interview women, because frontline children’s welfare work is highly gender specific as shown in the literature (see 2.1.1), and I was aiming to include low-paid women in the non-profit organisations. It was my intention to use email contact to invite frontline women workers to participate in the project. UWSHREC raised ethical concerns. The use of a website was seen as limiting access to low-paid workers who may not have the benefit of computer literacy, or compromising those who depended on work-based computers. However, my understanding about the level of computer literacy required by staff within human services organisations was that computer access was not a challenging issue. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2005) in 2004-2005, 67 per cent of Australian households had access to a home computer. In addition to this, Australians have access to computers and internet in their workplaces, as well as in libraries, schools, and TAFE, and highly accessible public places such as internet cafes. Low-waged women do not necessarily live in poor families without technological access, nor do they lack skills. If there were potential candidates who lacked confidence or access to e-technologies, they necessarily
fell outside my scope, and it is unlikely that initial communications about the research reached them. I was confident that by utilising the ACWA communication networks, I would have broad access to women in 150 different non-profit organisations, among whom I would find suitable candidates. Ethics permission (HREC 04/165, see Appendix A) was granted in November 2004. Research commenced early in 2005.

4.2.1 The peak body as the site of recruitment

My point of access to ACWA was through my relationship with Mr Nigel Spence, who was chief executive of that organisation, as well as co-supervisor for my project for a year of my candidacy. Mr Spence was also co-author of the paucity management papers (Wagner & Spence, 2003a, 2003b; Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner, Spence, & van Reyk, 2000), which had originally been intended to inform my research (see 1.1.1). After consulting Mr Spence on the web-based elements of the research design, an ACWA administrator who managed the web site, publications and email lists agreed to work with me to develop web pages, and to make email contact with members for the purpose of inviting women to participate by way of personal interview.

ACWA has a dynamic website\(^\text{16}\) that is updated weekly with welfare news, policy documents, agency statements on emerging government policy, discussion papers, and news on research projects, funding, training and job vacancies. It maintains archives of child protection statistics, monitors current legislation, and invites participation on working papers and responses to government plans. At a more personal level, it promotes social events and runs photographs of social gatherings, such as foster parents’ picnics. For workers in isolated areas, the website keeps them abreast of the fast moving policy arena. I immersed myself in that site throughout 2005-2006, and it provided a strong connection with the unfolding political perspectives on child protection and welfare issues.

The site’s manager assisted me throughout 2005 and 2006 at each level of the project, from the invitation of participants, to reports on progress, and solicitation of feedback on the emerging themes. I used the slogan Making a difference? to identify the project and the web pages of my site. I was not interested in those who worked for expediency only, and the slogan was my device to express, and question, the concept of participating in significant work. This slogan was taken from Lyons’ (2003) citation of Onyx, who found the desire “to make a difference” (p. 153) was an important motivator in welfare work. Its very familiarity

\(^{16}\) http://www.acwa.asn.au/
and the multitude of applications for this phrase, suggests that these few words perform a heuristic task in defining employment motivation for some people.

Reports on the progress of my research appeared in the ACWA annual report, and its news pages on the website. An independent email address linked to my personal account, makingadifference@ozemail.com.au, was set up to enable workers to contact me directly.

The Making a difference? web pages (see Appendix C) for this project were designed and launched under the auspices of ACWA, and promoted each week between May and August 2005 on the front news pages of the ACWA site. These pages were both promotional, and an informational resource and depository for downloadable informed consent forms needed by participants (see Appendix D). An email pointing to the website was sent to all 150 member agencies, and from the responses it was clear that it was forwarded freely within agencies.

There were initially 50 email responses to the promotion of the research, including men who felt disenfranchised by an all female study, agency researchers who wanted to offer their own insights and frontline workers who had written papers and newsletter contributions which they felt would assist. Only one organisation refused to distribute the email to staff, but offered its own extensive online research papers. For workers who wanted to participate in this study, there would be some sacrifice of time, and concerns about confidentiality. The time pressures faced by frontline workers soon became a common reason for the withdrawal of a number of candidates. The diverse and persistent difficulties in finding time, faced by willing candidates, left little doubt about the pressures of their schedules. Fifteen frontline women workers signed and returned informed consent forms, although only ten finally participated in personal interviews. Many women who made initial email contact did not follow through by returning consent forms.

The frontline children’s welfare worker participants (see Table 4.1) in this project were aged between 27 and 60, with five of the participants aged between 40 and 51. The significance of age as a demographic was indicated by workers and managers early in the research. Two workers felt their ages (40 to 50) prevented them from continuing in physically demanding roles, and this influenced training and job choices. Two social workers, who had started work in the Sector in their early 20s, felt they had gained necessary maturity for their roles by working firstly in direct care during their university training. Tenure in the Sector is described in terms of long and short term, using the workers’ own definitions. Workers seemed to regard anything above eight years as long term, and this became the measure.

There were five long term frontliners, two of whom had been in the Sector for more than 20
years. Of the short term frontliners, four had been in the Sector between two and eight years, and one had been in the Sector less than a year. Workers were asked about their time in the Sector, because it seemed that those with a longer history would more easily identify and describe cultural change. Longevity was also a useful indicator of their commitment to the Sector, and their past capacity to cope with stress and disappointment. This became more significant when some of the longest term workers expressed grievous disappointments that were motivating them to look for other roles within the Sector to relieve the stress.

Three women with Social Work degrees identified themselves as frontline workers. One was working as a foster care caseworker, the second in family support services with a focus on children with physical disabilities, and the third in a support program for vulnerable families in the early years of parenting. Despite the increasing administrative complexity of their work, which in one instance took up a full day per week, these social workers saw their role primarily as advocates for the child and support workers for the families. All of the social workers had permanency in their positions. Two of the social workers strongly identified with the concept of being low-paid workers by comparison to social workers in DoCS. All three were working in non-profits because of a preference for flexible work practices, such as refusing a client, that were not a part of DoCS policy.

Training and job titles were significant factors for workers, reflecting on presumed competence or expectations. Five participants had tertiary training in what could be regarded as related disciplines. Two of these frontline workers were formerly teachers and both of them were now working in out-of-home care (OOHC or fostering). The first former teacher was designated a caseworker, while the second felt her job title manager was deceptive because she was managed by volunteers who were also clients of the service. Both teachers felt their previous occupations had given them sufficient training and understanding for the issues relating to children in welfare work, but not for the political climate of their agencies.

Other tertiary trained workers were: a graduate welfare worker involved in providing intensive support to young people with high needs in OOHC; a worker with diploma level training in early childhood education who was coordinating programs in a disadvantaged community, where she was involved in breakfast, homework and vacation programs; and a university graduate who had majored in youth work, who was the coordinator of a residence for young people. The only trained worker who indicated that she felt her training had not prepared her for the work held a diploma in early childhood education. This worker was struggling with the increasing administrative load and accountability to DoCS.
Both of the untrained direct care workers worked in residential situations with children with high and complex needs. Both were enrolled in degree programs; one to train as a teacher and the other to train in social work. Both of the untrained workers reported that they had a sense of inadequacy in their work, related to the complex needs of children. The direct care work they did included transport to appointments, administration of medications, liaison with parents or other authorities, extensive administrative work and computer-based reporting. All of the women came from different, unconnected agencies as far apart as Penrith, Wollongong and Newcastle. All of the workers had self-identified with the word frontline, which indicates client contact. They described themselves as frontline workers regardless of their various job titles or qualifications. In the following table, I have assigned code names to the ten frontline workers interviewed, and indicated their training. There was little correlation between training, job titles, and the actual work performed, a trend indicated in the literature (Healy, 2004). In the table below, large agencies are generally multiple site and multiple program areas, while the small agencies are single site and single program.
Table 4.1 Demographics of frontline workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Agency Size</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Age Given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tilly</td>
<td>Co-ordinator Full time</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Children’s Services</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Caseworker Full time</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Caseworker Part time</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helene</td>
<td>Co-ordinator Full time</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Youth worker</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>Co-ordinator Full time</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Co-ordinator Full time</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giselle</td>
<td>Caseworker Full time</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>Co-ordinator Manager Casual</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Direct care Casual</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Untrained</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Direct care Casual</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Untrained</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The first horizon: Listening to a moral message

In Kvale’s (1996) metaphor of a methodological journey, the interview is conceptualised as conversation. Interviews invite living voices to personalise a phenomena within the constraints of a professional conversation. It is specious to imagine that such conversations are value-free or impersonal or without other underlying motivations. I anticipated that my availability as a researcher would lead to conversations with individuals who also saw it as a chance for debriefing, self-justifying or denouncing others (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004). My strategy to deal with this was to return to participants for second or even third purposive, thematic interviews. Interviews (Kvale, 1995) create evidence of a “perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice” (p. 19). In the construction of meaning through analysis and interpretation of interviews, and layers of subsequent interviews, “the dichotomy of facts and values is abandoned...ethics come to foreground”(p. 25). I was
interested in personal, lived, even emotive content, knowing an individual experience would gain or lose validity compared and contrasted against the whole (Gadamer, [1960] 1989).

The ten frontline workers who finally participated in this project were interviewed at length by telephone (60 to 90 minutes) individually, in semi-structured interviews. I used semi-structured interviews in the hope of achieving some equitable exchange, and it was also the style of interview that I had developed as a print media journalist. Interview schedules in journalism were seen as counter-productive, an obstacle to transparency because of the presuppositions they contained, and the potential to alienate subjects who could only assert power over the process by withholding information. However, the power of an unstructured interview to liberate the subject from the potential tyranny of the interviewer is also implied by Kvale (2006), who suggests that interviews are rarely equitable, that they are “instrumental, one-way, interviewer-driven dialogue” (p. 285), and that even in trying to create friendly conversations, the interviewer may be manipulative. Hiller and DiLuzio (2004), in analysing the reasons subjects agree to an interview, see another kind of manipulation in those who want to be heard. These conflicting interests may be counterbalanced if the exchange is not driven by a schedule. The initial semi-structured interviews were followed by subsequent, purposive thematic interviews. The theme of subsequent interviews was suggested in an email request to participants, and led to a productive focus.

I also believed that semi-structured interviews would assist the work of analysis. Gadamer ([1960] 1989) speaks of a hermeneutical process of asking meaningful questions of text, but in an interview, analysis can begin if there is the freedom to interrogate the living text with spontaneous questions. For all of these reasons my initial interviews with frontline welfare workers were semi-structured. These interviews generally opened (below) with the following questions used as prompts:

- Can you tell me about your work?
- Can you tell me why you enjoy it?
- What drives you?
- Can you give a specific example of (the issue raised)?
- How do you feel about (the issue raised)?
- What are your long term plans or goals?
- Are there specific beliefs or values tied up with this commitment?
- Can you describe the things that you find stressful?
- Can you explain how you cope?
During the early weeks of the research there were so many cancellations of face to face interview appointments, due to crises and work pressure, that I began to do telephone interviews using a digital recorder\textsuperscript{17} supported by detailed shorthand note-taking. This worked well, as some subjects liked to make themselves comfortable at home, and I would call them after 8.00pm.

With purposive, thematic interviews I went back to participants who had raised issues that had become significant in the light of other conflicting, contrasting or confirmative data.

- Joan\textsuperscript{18} was interviewed three times over nine months. I wanted to know how she was resolving stress and disillusionment through job changes, and I wanted to discuss her religious affiliations.
- Mary was interviewed twice because on the first occasion she had wanted to discuss her unfair treatment at length. I wanted to discuss her disillusionment with religious values that had motivated her to do the work.
- Jill was interviewed twice because she had been diagnosed with burn-out and she had changed jobs as a coping mechanism. I wanted to know how job changes were impacting her stress.
- Dana was interviewed for a second time as her client contact was declining, and her non-frontline workload increasing. I wanted to discuss her adjustments to different responsibilities.

4.3.1 The second horizon: Work-based post graduates drawn into a focus group

In a focus group, there is the possibility of equitable and participant initiated discussions where the “multivocality of the participants limits the control of the moderator” (Madriz, 2003, p. 371). The focus group for this project was both vocal and independent. It was made up entirely of new or transitioning frontline managers who were attending a training course. ACWA has a large training organisation under its umbrella, and part of the university partnership included the conduct of intensive postgraduate training at the site, among work-based students. I was not teaching in this program, although I was teaching both in a TAFE Certificate IV and undergraduate degrees at the University of Western Sydney, and my students worked casually or part-time in frontline or direct care roles. I was interested to talk to postgraduates who occupied management roles in the field, strangers to me, and whom I

\textsuperscript{17} Myvoice DMR-904S with a telephone jack.
\textsuperscript{18} Names changed to offer anonymity: see Table 4.1
imagined would be older than my own students, and able to bring insights from their longevity.

I decided to recruit a group of postgraduate students involved in work-based learning. I knew they would be familiar with one another through their shared attendance at ACWA’s training organisation, although they worked in diverse organisations, in different parts of Sydney and beyond. This group had the potential to be an effective focus group in that it enjoyed a level of safety and openness, had shared interests, and it was an homogeneous group in terms of work status and aspirations, qualifiers suggested in Merton’s original work on focused interviews (Merton & Kendall, 1946) and more recently systematised by Morgan (Morgan, 1997; 1996). My purpose, to use emerging themes from the frontline interviews to create non-directive, participatory discussion that was subjective and values-laden, also meshed with Merton’s suggested uses of the focused group interview. Focus groups are often used as a supplementary data source and I felt that transitioning workers could knowledgeably contribute to ideas that were emerging from the frontline: issues recent in their own experience. In this way, the focus group represented a second horizon. The focus group also served in the analysis of my themes, by defining their own strategies to deal with some of the stressors endemic among frontline workers.

The focus group of eight middle managers was held in the final session of an intensive training session at ACWA headquarters in Sydney. The session was digitally recorded. I had been told I could expect to find more men at management level, but they were all women. Some were in new roles and temporary roles, and some expressed an uncertainty about calling themselves middle-managers while still training.

Five women did most of the talking, although there was a lot of non-verbal affirmation, such as nods of the head, mmmns, and yes. Two women left before the end of the session due to travel concerns. Four of the five vocal middle-managers had worked in small community organisations for between 7 and 14 years, and they were all in their mid 40s. All of the women had been frontline workers for most of their working lives, and the postgraduate course was seen as ensuring security in management roles. The focus group spoke at both a personal and an organisational level, moving easily between issues of feelings and issues of policy. The voices are numbered in Chapter Six to demonstrate the cohesive and interactive nature of the group. My first question to the focus group, arising from the perceived powerlessness of frontline workers garnered in one-to-one interviews, was:

Can we discuss the ways in which a person in your position can influence service delivery?
My strategy was to ask them to amplify, explain and define the issues raised. Participants quickly reframed the questions and developed one particularly productive theme of their own with the question:

Do you think we shop around to find an organisation whose values match our own?

This significant question, raised spontaneously by the focus group, confirmed the values-driven base of children’s welfare work and acted as both an analytical moment, and the opportunity to derive a new dense thematic layer of data. Data was analysed in the same way as personal interviews: transcripts were highlighted, clustered and labelled in the computer program NVivo, and compared with data from other sources. The theme altruism audit was drawn from this analysis.

Altruism audit describes the way workers rationalised their future in child welfare, and it is primarily made evident by the voices of the focus group participants. Professionalising was their way off the frontline, although the benefits of the move were ultimately more important than avoiding stress. Altruism audit shows that workers find ways to continue their ambition to make a difference through their work without sacrificing all self interest.

4.3.2 The third horizon: Managers and their agencies

Senior managers represented a third horizon in data collection. Gadamer’s ([1960] 1989) horizons were both subjective and objective, the objective being contextual and historical in its relationship to more personal data. For me, the managers represented the policy-driven situated perspective. Denzin (1989b) suggested that diversity in data sources acts as a form of authentication, with the various perspectives becoming like points on a map to give true bearings. While it may not be possible or even desirable to authenticate interpretations that are subjective, there remains the need to explore structural and contextual conditions within which the subjects interpret reality and make meaning. The structural factors are part of the horizon (Gadamer, [1960] 1989), and in this project included the impact of welfare reform on the workplace beyond my primary concern with frontline workers. I needed to hear the voices of managers, whose experience of workplace ecology might be both similar and different. These interviews were a key to gaining a current account of workplace ecology issues in a time of rapid change.

The intention was that these senior officers would act as informants, to represent the work ecology situated in its contemporary policy, political and economic realities. I was provided
with a list of potential candidates by my industry partner, drawing on the agency membership of ACWA. I approached each manager individually by email, letter or telephone. The managers were not canvassed, nor did they respond at a personal or subjective level in the interviews, and for this reason they are given an impersonal code on the demographic table (Table 4.2). Five managers working in non-government organisations were interviewed at length individually by telephone (40 to 90 minutes) recorded digitally and transcribed fully.

Four of the five managers were in medium to large organisations with annual budgets above $8 million, placing them in the higher echelons of service provision in NSW. Organisational context shown below (Table 4.2) indicates the philosophical or religious affiliations of the agencies the managers represented. Although all of the agencies can be described as non-profit non-government organisations, one had a denominational church governing structure, two were agencies that had developed in specific communities to address particular needs, and three were described as secular benevolent organisations.

Four of the five managers had an exclusive children’s welfare focus for their own work role, although two of the organisations offered multiple or diversified services such as aged care packages. Two of the managers had the title of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), one was designated a Senior Executive, and two others were General Managers.

I did not find the preponderance of men at this level that I had been told to expect by frontliners and middle managers. Only one of the five managers I encountered was male. The qualifications of the managers, ages and personal histories were not canvassed, because the purpose of the interviews was to obtain reflections on emerging themes from frontliners that intersected with purpose and policies of agencies.

In the following chart, the operating budgets refer to NSW only unless otherwise stated, and to the children’s welfare services only in diversified agencies. The budget figures were obtained in 2005 and referred to the previous financial year.
All managers were interviewed by telephone and digitally recorded. The purpose of the interviews with managers was to discuss:

- Specific economic pressures in the current climate of welfare reform, and
- Recruitment, retention and attrition issues with frontline welfare workers.

The relationship between these issues and the themes raised in the frontline interviews was canvassed through prompts such as: “Frontline workers tell me that...”. This was done in order to maintain a conversational tone and not suggest criticism of a particular agency. The values-driven nature of non-profits, both secular and religious, suggested by the literature, was made clear when senior managers emphasised the need to recruit and retain workers whose values meshed with the organisation (see 7.2.1).

### 4.4 Rat handling as familiarisation with the data

In laboratory research, it is considered useful to become familiar with the rats. This thought has been applied to the process of familiarisation with qualitative data, aptly described as handling your own rat (Frost & Stablein, 1992). I handled my rat thoroughly and repeatedly. I took shorthand notes during the taping of the interview, and then re-recorded from a digital device used for telephone interview recording, onto long term storage media. One of the key issues in qualitative rat-handling is transcription, a contested and treacherous process (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003) in which correlation between text and speech cannot be presumed. The dangers of seeing transcription as merely a typing exercise, with no consideration for the way in which the complexity of speech is represented, are well articulated (Lincoln & Denzin,
2003). Kvale (1996) expresses almost abhorrence of transcriptions, as dying representations of a once lively interaction: “dried pale flowers ... replace the fresh colourful flowers of the field” (p. 168). Nevertheless, Kvale goes on to suggest that every researcher needs the experience of transcribing at least one of their own interviews, to increase awareness of mumbling, poor articulation, and the technical problems with auditory recording. This understanding led me through the problematic area of who should handle transcription: it should be me. Transcription can be described as “decontextualised conversations” (p. 165) which can become more meaningfully reconstructed by the retention of speech hesitations, including pauses, repetitions, laughter, sighs and groans. It is suggested that in speech: “... the nuances ... become the very pores of knowledge” (p. 168). I utilised these understandings in the transcription process, and retained hesitations, sighs and repetitions.

4.4.1 The moral language of the participants
Knowing from the literature and my own interaction with students and workers that values would be important to participants, I was alert to their moral language as a tool of both focused listening and analysis. Jack’s (1999) gender perspective is that women self-evaluate morally and in so doing reflect their perception of society’s role expectations. This understanding of the role of language in mediating interpretation is consistent with Gadamer ([1960] 1989) (see 3.1.2). Jack suggested that the language women used to tell their stories both constrained interpretations, and made coherent subjective emotional states. In feminist thinking this is particularly salient in all caring roles, where society expresses its harshest judgements on women: women who identify closely with social standards experience guilt (Jack, 1999; Voigt, 1986). Moral language contains imperatives, or oughts that could signify an individual’s underlying role expectations, as well as value judgements such as guilt and regret. The moral language of participants was salient in understanding motivating values and value conflicts, and I made field notes during and after interviews as initial analysis. In Table 4.3 is a sample of interview extracts of moral language where women expressed guilt or self-blame. The field notes served as an analytical tool as the interviews unfolded.
Table 4.3 Moral language and field notes sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I couldn’t get my head around how I could attempt to build a trusting</td>
<td>Field notes: this describes the role conflict of a frontline worker who is a mandated reporter for child protection issues. She saw this role tension as her personal problem rather than the ambiguity that comes with the role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship with a client and at the same time, you know, have to do...”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve got teenage kids who would prefer to live a lifestyle that we</td>
<td>Field notes: lifestyle conflicts created by poor wages. This worker blames herself for the economic tensions of a single-income household and the turbulent demands of adolescents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previously had, and that’s very difficult, and I feel guilty about that,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel guilty about a lot of things, um…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I could give more, if, um, I feel a bit hindered by the management there,</td>
<td>Field notes: organisational constraints. This worker blames herself because she feels the clients need more time than she is permitted to invest in them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there are certain cases that I feel I should visit more often…”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 The analysis of qualitative data and the development of themes

Through the use of focused listening, field notes and subsequent interviews, immersion in the transcripts and literature, I analysed data as it emerged and constructed themes, using the hermeneutical circle concept of moving between the parts and the whole (Gadamer, [1960] 1989). I organised data in a computer-based program NVivo, which enabled me to extract both whole topics that could be compared across the data and literature, and phrases and even single words that were important for their nuances of usage, as described in the introduction to this chapter.

Field notes stored in the program were linked to the data and became part of the ‘thinking aloud’ process of questioning, thematisizing and elaborating themes through further data collection.

Table 4.4 Four themes and analytical sub themes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub themes</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Moral distress</strong></td>
<td>A chance to make a difference in a worthwhile but stressful milieu.</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money and politics as paradoxical pressures</td>
<td>5.2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blame, shame and violence in the foster care crisis</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertain responsibilities</td>
<td>5.4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stressed of mandatory reporting</td>
<td>5.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Altruism Audit</strong></td>
<td>A different perspective on organisational power and loyalty</td>
<td>6.2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling at ease in the organisation</td>
<td>6.2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining a voice in the organisation</td>
<td>6.2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>7.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The secularised moral self</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Moral proportion</strong></td>
<td>The legitimation of values as symbols of power and status</td>
<td>8.1.1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values lost through the erosion of power and privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>8.2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status sacrificed for the sake of doing frontline children’s welfare work</td>
<td>8.2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion in practice</td>
<td>8.3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interpretive strategies were:
Highlighting allowed important ideas to be clustered, labelled and reduced to themes in the computer program NVivo. Transcript data as a whole remained intact, but its parts could be compared with the parts of other data sources. I collected key words such as burn-out, stress, values, comparing transcripts and literature usage as described earlier (4.1). I also highlighted topics across the data, such as self-sacrifice, blame, poor management, to see how they recurred. Many topics had no generalised resonance through other data, but insistent and recurring topics were explicated and refined.

Analysis in context looked at specific incidents used by interviewees to illustrate a situation. Data comparison allowed the central concerns of these incidents to be explored across other data sources out of context. For example, stories about blame and responsibility analysed by comparison, were subjective and relational (see Table 4.3). Workers blamed themselves and their managers for social conditions, and rarely cited policy or welfare reform.

(1) Moral Distress
Highlighting stress in the transcript data enabled me to question it contextually and comparatively and across literature, which was how I developed the theme of moral distress (see Chapter Five). Interviewees described their stress in terminology familiar to them, such as burn-out, emotional labour, compassion fatigue. The application of these phrases was tested for veracity in the literature. Contextual analysis revealed the essentially moral nature of the events described. Data comparison demonstrated the consistency of moral conflicts described in various familiar phrases by frontline welfare workers. In further searching literature for stress of a moral nature I found Jameton’s (1993) phrase moral distress, from her work in nursing, more appropriate than the language I had defamiliarised (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Moral distress is now a developing discourse and diagnostic category in nursing ethics (Zuzelo, 2007). It was evident that frontline children’s welfare workers sometimes felt a paralysis of indecision, or powerlessness, when stressed by dilemmas that they perceived as moral or values-based. I defined moral distress as: “the result of holding in tension a conflict between personal values and the realities of practice.” I further interrogated the emerging theme moral distress in the focus group by opening the discussion with an interest in the influence or power gained in the move away from the frontline.
(2) Altruism Audit
The second theme, altruism audit, was developed from the focus group discussions, where workers transitioning to middle management from the frontline discussed the pragmatic choices that gave them influence in their organisations. As this concept emerged, it was explored in further interviews with frontline workers. Deliberate choices to protect personal interests were analysed contextually and comparatively, and finally, analysed in the light of literature that explored role changes in welfare service provision, and the impact of managerial practice on workers’ sense of integrity (see 2.2.5). Individual words and phrases as well as topics were sorted in the NVivo program, so that the whole and parts were explored in a hermeneutic circle. Altruism audit is discussed in Chapter Six.

(3) Loss of Moral Community
In the development of the third theme, the loss of moral community, the literature interrogated the data. The literature suggested that a strong sense of values or mission ameliorated stress and attrition (see 2.2.6, 2.2.7). This was anomalous to my data, where stress was reported as endemic among values-driven workers. In comparing this hypothesis to the data, it became more evident that values were not adequately defined, but also that there was an absence of religious ideation or sense of mission among participants, even when a religious affiliation was claimed. Re-examined against the non-profit literature (see 2.3), it became evident that the absence of religious ideation was significant. The theme was introduced into two purposive thematic interviews with frontline workers and the senior manager of a non-profit, all of whom had religious affiliations. The policy-based responses of the manager were compared with the lived experience of workers who had religious affiliations. In this way I moved between the parts and the whole in a Gadamerian method ([1960] 1989). This theme is discussed in Chapter Seven.

(4) Moral Proportion
I named the final theme, moral proportion out of the need to create a cohesive understanding of the plethora of values reported in the data. Moral proportion describes only what workers seemed to be seeking, a proportional response within the boundaries of structural and social conditions. The phrase reflected on the inadequacy of religious and social justice values in situations workers described, and it was refined by contextual and comparative analysis. The theme now represents a goal for a new moral community, which is discussed in Chapter Eight.

Moral distress and moral proportion were tested for resonance in a paper presented to a conference in Adelaide (Jensen, 2006) and further introduced to research participants at every
level through email contacts (see 5.1) and through news items and a page-long report on the ACWA site (see Appendix C).

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the mixed methods of semi-structured interviews and the hermeneutical analysis from which I developed the four themes that are the subject of the four chapters that follow. This was a densely textured process of constant movement between the parts and the whole, which included literature, levels of interviews, and the responses of the wider community of practitioners through the ACWA website, and a conference paper (Jensen, 2006) in which I found resonance with the developing concepts. The merging of these horizons represents a perspective on frontline children’s welfare work. It is essentially a perspective that concerns itself with values, and it does not pretend to analyse the dozens of other complex issues that contribute to the current crises in child welfare in Australia.
Chapter Five - Moral distress: Anxiety on the frontline of children’s welfare work
5. 1 Introduction

I stumbled on your report tonight whilst looking for information for my TAFE class, and it certainly resonated. I have been away from the Coal Face of youth work (to bring up a child) after 14 years in many varied jobs. I left most of these with symptoms of moral distress ranging from being uncomfortable and unable to work in a way which a manager wanted to being downright horrified by the unethical and legally questionable boss. Each position I took was due to the apparent forward thinking and innovation of the service, only to find out later that this wasn’t always the case. In my last position in a family support I was lucky to have found an organisation that had a value system that reflected my own, as well as a Manager that was very value and morally driven, we had some wonderful discussions, but it was always respectful, unfortunately I then had to continually battle with co-workers and other agencies and their attitudes and values towards the people we worked with. I always say I left my positions because of the co-workers not the clients. – Spontaneous email response to the concept of moral distress.

In the next two chapters I will introduce the themes moral distress and altruism audit drawn from data, discussion and literature that informed the development of my ideas. These themes represent distinctive responses to the challenge of children’s welfare work in resource poverty and factors in retention and attrition that demonstrate how workers strategise or struggle to carve a future for themselves. The term moral distress was borrowed from a nursing discourse that recognised the essentially moral nature of the anxiety some nurses were experiencing (Jameton, 1993). Although I initially used the phrase only as a useful label, it remained the most appropriate phrase to explain the phenomenon, rather than create new terminology. Moral distress signified an emotional response to compromised values resulting in the loss of confidence in one’s ability to make a difference in the lives of clients. In this chapter, I use the workers’ stories to express the distress, and evidence its deeply moral or values-driven nature.
5.2 The chance to make a difference in the world

Ahh ... I have at different times, felt like, how can I possibly keep doing this. The bucket’s running dry if you like. It is really stressful work. - Tilly.

The emotional cost of caring for children was the strongest theme that developed in my interviews with frontline children’s welfare workers. The presence of strong emotions reaffirmed the complexity of the question of what motivates women to do children’s welfare work in non-profits, and the extended question of what factors influence retention and attrition. The high mobility of participants within the Sector during the course of the research, demonstrated why retention of staff is a major issue for employers (Gibbs, 2001). It was clear that workers did want to make a difference in the lives of families, and that they were willing to put up with low wages and stress to do so, but it was not an indefinite or unconditional commitment. They were frustrated by structures and policies that impaired their ability to serve their clients, resource poverty in their agencies, conflicted and unsupportive management, and bureaucratic constraints. While they could strategise to deal with many practical concerns, some emotional issues were the result of being thwarted in service delivery.

In this chapter I develop a clearer understanding of the boundaries workers create for themselves in deciding what they will tolerate, and when to stay or leave the Sector. I describe and explore emotional cost, which workers named as stress or sometimes burn-out. Few workers had a clinical diagnosis for their emotional issues. I begin by looking at the strength of commitment to the Sector, and the reasons given for it, and go on to look at how workers described their frustrations or stressors in the workplace, and how the various difficulties impacted commitment to the work.

I have densely contextualised the workers’ words by introducing policy, management and social background to the issues they raised. This reflects the shifting horizons of history and subjectivity of my Gadamerian hermeneutical methodology (see 3.1.2). My critical intent is found particularly where gendered discourses have previously silenced some emotive female perspectives of care work. The frontline participants in this chapter have been assigned names, but the managers, because of their impersonal role in the research process in responding to the themes raised by the workers, have been assigned a less personal number.

The participants in this research genuinely wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. For most of the women in this project the decision to work in children’s welfare had
been thought through, and it represented an opportunity in life to work for the wellbeing of others. Some began with this value, and others developed it while working with children in other arenas. In her study of long term and committed child protection workers in the US, Reagh (1994) identified epiphanies, or life-changing moments that provided an anchor for workers through stress. A number of her subjects came into child protection work through a religious calling. None of my participants gave spontaneous accounts of turning-points, religious callings or anything that could be loosely described as an epiphany, but most of them did describe influences on their decision-making. When prompted, some used the stronger language of a sense of destiny or purpose. Most of my participants identified with the less dramatic concept of making a difference, although their approaches were different as shown in the sample list below:

- Jill and Joan had been foster parents and felt they could do more to make a difference by working inside the system.
- Joan and Alex had been teachers and felt they wanted to do more for the welfare of needy children than was possible within the time constraints and given the sheer numbers of children in the classroom situation.
- Kate had surrendered a child for adoption and identified strongly with young people from dysfunctional homes.
- Nelly became passionate about working with children after taking a casual job.
- Dana and Giselle worked as volunteers in children’s organisations, and recognised needs they could fill. Dana developed a deep sense of gratitude for the prosperity and stability of her own children’s lives when she discovered the poverty and disadvantage of other families.

The only participant who did not specify a decision-making point was Mary, an untrained casual worker who drifted into the work out of convenience, and stayed because her background as a bible-college trained Christian worker opened doors into the Sector. She was seriously attacked and injured by an adolescent client, and left the Sector with clinically diagnosed post-traumatic stress. Although she felt unsuited to children’s welfare work, she planned to train as a teacher in the hope of finding work where she could express her Christianity.

For most of the women, children’s welfare work initially represented something more meaningful than their other options, including parenting and teaching. Both Joan and Alex, who left teaching, were interested in helping parents. Within a year Alex, who wanted to escape the stresses of teaching, felt she had made the wrong choice:
I thought I could make a difference, but I don’t actually think that any more, I actually think being a teacher you are a lot more influential in a child’s life. – Alex

Jill was untrained when recruited to DoCS on the basis of her experience in fostering, and worked her way through the system gaining training and seniority. She had a personal mandate to bring about change in foster care. She regarded her previous voluntary work as a foster parent as an “illusion” of care compared to the perseverance needed in the challenging milieu of fulltime work as a welfare professional:

Being a foster carer I couldn’t change the problems, the systemic problems, from outside. I could lobby. I could be part of a foster carer association, I could do whatever I liked, but I didn’t want to give the illusion, I wanted to get in there and change a system...if I could get in there and agitate, where lots of strategies needed to happen, and that was coming from a carer’s perspective... – Jill

Interestingly, Joan, who had been both a teacher and a foster parent, left a responsible frontline position during the course of the research to return to foster care because she felt she could make a greater impact on the life of children one at a time. She had become disillusioned trying to work with parents. In each instance of change of work, the women spoke of the desire to do more than simply earn a living.

Managers were actively seeking workers who viewed frontline welfare as a cause. Workers with a commitment to the issues of social justice, for children and youths with specific needs, were more readily recruited than those who expressed compassion or sympathy for clients. Managers did not like sentimentality in their workers.

That stuff [social justice values] is more important than most other qualities. Um, I’m looking for a fit with belief and commitment to the rights of people with disabilities, to equal opportunity, to achieving their [client] goals, so the thing I am usually looking out for is someone who is going to work with our clients and not at them...I’m nervous around “it’s beautiful work” and “it’s a very special thing to do.” That whole message gives me the creeps. We’re not doing our clients a favour, we don’t expect them to be grateful, I don’t want any of that side happening... – M3
5.2.1 Stress as a predictable factor of children’s welfare work

You can’t stay if you can’t manage that stress. – Nelly

The experience of conflicting emotions often named as stress was quickly evident in the initial analysis of data collected in interviews with frontline children’s welfare workers. Stress was a felt condition reported by all participants in this project regardless of their job title, training or the agency to which they were attached. However, stress was reported as both a positive and negative aspect of the work, and some reported stress as a neutral and predictable factor of children’s welfare work. One woman preferred to use the term “emotional intensity” to describe the status quo of children’s welfare work. Helene was a young (28) youth worker who was enthusiastic and energised by the work that she had been doing for almost four years. Although she could list systemic shortcomings and challenges of her work, she did not personalise the pressure, and found supportive colleagues were adequate to help her through difficult moments:

There is an emotional intensity. My job, I love it and hate it, but I never feel that I have just had a day in the office. My job does matter. – Helene

Management was not always willing to recognise stress levels but Hodgkin (2002) argued that frontline workers hid stress rather than endanger their careers by revealing the depth of their difficulties. This was played out in the research process in the story of Mary, who returned to work at the urging of a supervisor, immediately after she was attacked by a client, and it was not until later that the full extent of Mary’s physical and emotional injuries led to her resignation. One manager who had heard some of the comments of my research participants said:

I don’t mean to sound arrogant about these things but the stuff you were talking about I felt … was a bit different to our experience where we do have quite a strong management structure and a lot of quite clear accountability … I think people in our organisation feel supported by management and there is not that sense of being put upon – M4

I was not able to tell the manager at that stage that Mary had been employed on one of her agency’s sites, and was still receiving medical treatment for anxiety and post-traumatic stress.
The relentless emotional intensity of the work can be illustrated by the stories of two long term frontline workers, both older women. Neither woman contemplated leaving the Sector even when diagnosed with stress or unable to cope, but they moved within the Sector. Freund (2005) had regarded movement within the Sector as a positive strategy for dealing with stress, although it disadvantages individual agencies which invest in workers training and development. The two women reported stress related to time pressure, resource poverty, systemic failures\(^{19}\), and the urgent, confronting nature of the poor families they engaged with. The longest serving frontline worker that I interviewed, Jill, had spent 21 years in both the non-profits and DoCS. She had recently suffered physical symptoms of stress such as sleep disturbance, and was ultimately diagnosed with burn-out and given medication. Yet in two separate interviews she did not regard this as a personal matter, but a reflection on the unique challenges of her work. Jill was in a resource-poor agency which lost program funding, leading to the loss of her job. She regarded both stress and resource-poverty as predictable in non-profits, and she was willing to continually make adjustments to find new ways to work. Her solution to stress was to change pace by moving to a smaller non-profit organisation:

\[I\text{ had been working at that high level of adrenaline levels for so long that I couldn’t come down. Ah, so for a month of long service I was a mess } \ldots \text{ so I was basically head hunted, this position came up, so I thought, okay, middle 40s, it was a stable point in my life, so I thought it was at that moment where the money wasn’t an issue } \ldots \text{ – Jill}\]

Within a short time, Jill moved out of the small non-profit and back to a demanding, responsible and more highly paid position. When she was interviewed for the second time she spoke with excitement about the complex and challenging new situation she was in, that was physically and emotionally exhausting. Her work included travelling to distant Indigenous communities to work with issues of entrenched poverty, domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

\[I’m\text{ getting that way now, instructing and directing based on my knowledge base, my understanding of things. You know, I just did a case report for court, it’s been adjourned three times, and what I have actually written in my report this time about domestic violence } \ldots \text{ we know there is a period called the honeymoon period in which}\]

\(^{19}\text{The term systemic failure was used by participants to refer to bureaucratic failures to make timely or adequate provision for agencies or clients, or problems created by legal or medical complexities, or DoCS}\]
no violence will occur. This couple has only been back together for
two months. There is a real need to rely on your theoretical
knowledge as well, I know it sounds funny to say I am exhilarated
by it, but I am ...there is a possibility for huge, huge change ...– Jill.

Tilly was a 51-year-old woman who had been a social worker for 19 years in a large agency.
She had held a variety of responsible positions in the children’s welfare sector, but a program
change had required her to begin meeting clients in their homes. The confrontation with
poverty that she experienced through home visitation overwhelmed her emotionally. She was
equally overwhelmed by the resource poverty of her agency, which she felt left her powerless
to help clients:

Well now, I sort of...I nearly went insane before ... oohh I just
found for me emotionally I had just reached a point where I could
not do it any more, it was too (long pause, sighs) basically I think I
burned out, I just didn’t have anything left in me.

You know I tried lots of mental tricks on myself to say to myself
that what I was doing was making a difference, but most of the
time I arrived at the point where I erm, the system you are
working in just doesn’t make it any easier, and I thought I just
didn’t want to do that any more ...

It took me six months to realise I had been living in some kind of
fairy world because you actually see it, you see the poverty, you
see the struggle and experience it in a different way, um, and I
think that was the crowning thing for me and made me think, no
I’m over it, I don’t want to do it any more. You actually see it, you
see the poverty ... It was more the broader system stuff of
witnessing people not coping on the government pension or
allowance or benefits ... – Tilly

For both the women, the need to make a contribution to the welfare of others was a powerful
motivating force, yet both reported stress. At the time of the interview, Tilly was unable to
find the evidence of her contribution, and she chose to withdraw from direct client contact where she felt powerless.

The confrontational nature of poverty was confirmed by one of the managers (M4) who discussed the need for workers who had the right “values base” towards poor clients.

*We mean attitude to service users ...why people are in that difficulty, the issue of poverty for us is a really important one and people need to understand the impact, of you know, people’s socio-economic positions on their lives and the cycles of difficulty that some people get into ... all the people we see are very poor, some are very, very poor, very difficult situations.* – M4

It would be unfair to contrast the two frontline women workers on the basis of their capacity to cope. It is possible that if I had interviewed Jill in the midst of her burn-out, she might have expressed similar angst. However, the possibility that personality affected responses to stress was suggested by some workers who felt well suited to the pressures. Giselle, who at 27 was the youngest participant, took pride in her capacity to cope with stress:

*I’m a fairly easy-going person but there are times of crisis. You can’t stay in this work for eight years if you are not good at managing your own levels of stress.* – Giselle

It can be argued that younger workers have simply not had the pressures over time in the Sector. Jill and Tilly have two decades of coping with stress behind them. Omar (2003) found stress over time correlated significantly with burn-out, as indicated on diagnostic inventories. Jill and Tilly demonstrated that the most experienced workers do suffer high levels of emotional tension that can be described as stress, yet remain in the Sector.

Ubiquitous stress reported by workers concurred with the literature which demonstrated that stress relating to child protection, social and welfare work was endemic internationally. Some literature made a correlation between stress, burn-out and attrition (Hodgkin, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 2006), but the correlation between stress and attrition in the literature was generally inconclusive, and too little literature explored the motivations and strategies of those who stayed in the Sector long term regardless of stress (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). Some literature had indicated that many stressed workers were neither unhappy nor tempted to quit (Bednar, 2003), and this was an important point of interest for my research. The possibility that women had unique motivations for remaining in low-paid stressful work was the reason for using the concept of “making a difference” in recruitment of participants for my
research. This phrase does not contain any concepts that might relate to a specific religious or philosophical stance, but it did help distinguish people who wanted to use their work as more than a wage source.

5.2.2 Children and families as a worthy social and political cause

For most of the women in this project, their reason for doing frontline welfare work was related to the significance of children in the community. Some regarded their work as politicised advocacy or social justice work rather than care work.

*I am an advocate for the child...* – Helene

*The right to access services or to be involved with the right to communicate and participate in the community and be valued ... any sort of person with a disability or not...that's where my values lay.* – Nelly

This conceptualisation of their work as social action is important, given popular perceptions of care work. Care work is the focus of a gender discourse that ranges from women’s capacity and preference for care work, to women’s marginalisation and exploitation in care work, and care work as a female path to power (Brook & Davis, 1985; Brubaker, 1994; Fine, 2004; Rasmussen, 2004; Swain, 2001). Care work is closely associated with culturally shaped expectations of women as nurturers and moral guardians, which restricts their wider participation in competitive and remunerative work (Brubaker, 1994). It is also argued that the pervasiveness of women in roles of care and nurture, paid and unpaid, is directly related to the political, religious and economic hegemonies exercised over the physiological function of women as child-bearers (Brubaker, 1994; Calvert, 1985). From a critical perspective, feminisation is a phenomena in professions related to the continuing domination of males in the higher echelons of employment. Feminisation occurred in professions such as welfare, teaching and nursing, where women found easier access to the jobs, and wages were constrained as a result (Probert, 1997). The entrenched concept of women as nurturers makes it difficult to argue that care-giving calls for multiple skills that are neither instinctive nor universal to women. The function of motherhood is biologically a time-constrained role; it is not exercised by all women, and more women are choosing to bear fewer children. The issue of child welfare and care giving professionally is quite separate from the issues of procreation, although motherhood still defines a woman’s work, her capacity and preferences at work, her economic limitations, and thus her place socially (Brubaker, 1994; Wright, 2007). Calvert (1985) suggested that romantic notions of nurturing motherhood were only
formed in the 19th Century when women gained statutory recognition of rights in the life of a child. At that time, maintaining the dependence on male breadwinners, and protecting male jobs, was an important motivation in shaping women’s destinies as wives and mothers. Children’s welfare work, however, is not primarily a nurturing role, and not a socially approved role, but a skilled profession subject to political and media scrutiny (Cooper, 2005; Eberstadt, 2001). Welfare work is not practised as a form of nurture, and it is often regarded socially as an imposition of government policy on families.

Some workers in my research had chosen a politicised engagement with the issues of child protection instead of the relational work of foster care they had engaged in earlier. Those with social work training spoke of a desire for social change. The majority of frontline workers discussed caring for children in the broad context of social need. Jill, as a former foster parent, chose a low-paid position in a non-profit at a time when she could afford not to be concerned about money, because:

*Young people in care are one of the most marginalised, most at risk groups in the community* – Jill

Alex was completely child-focused in her occupational choices, both as a teacher and a welfare worker, and she talked about the value of a child and the need to be able to influence the course of their lives:

*... but I also think that in society it is so important to care for children. For the good of society and the whole ... it’s a personal belief, the value of love and of education ...* – Alex

Frontline children’s welfare work, from the workers’ perspective, was represented as a significant social cause worth the investment of time and stress and despite low wages, which meshes with the work of Anderson (2000) among American veteran child protection workers who saw the work itself as a cause worth pursuing.

### 5.2.3 Significant work more important than the wages

For the majority of the workers the cause of children and young people was more important than money, although low pay was grudgingly tolerated. The sacrifices for the cause included intrusions onto personal time, self-funding of programs and resources. Giselle sacrificed time and wages willingly:

*I wouldn’t be this poorly paid unless it was ... we’re about $10,000 a year under what we could get at a government agency, for*
instance, but it’s important for me to be connecting with kids and turning things around, giving hope, making a difference if you like

... it’s very difficult to spend time and energy on new programs and chasing dollars ... if I want to do that it means coming in on Saturday or staying um, until late at night, and not everyone wants to do that. But I do ... it’s about knowing that what we provide right now for kids, it’s doing something great in their lives. – Giselle

However, Dana explained that although her family was financially comfortable, she was looking for change within the Sector because she was not prepared to do low-paid work indefinitely:

One of the reasons I decided to take up management studies was because, um ... workers are grossly underpaid for the work they do and undervalued, and as I say, I knew it wasn’t something I could do in the longer term... – Dana

For some workers the low wages were a source of tension. Both Joan and her husband were involved in low-paid contractual frontline children’s welfare work, and they had re-mortgaged their home to solve personal cash-flow problems. Their unique situation was the result of blurred boundaries in the agency between voluntary and part-time work, which became evident later, but they did not think of leaving because of the tight money situation. Kate, as a single parent doing further study to improve her earning capacity in welfare work, was resentful of the financial sacrifices she was making and the conflicts with her own children due to lack of cash. She was not ready to leave welfare work just to earn more money. She cited multiple sources of stress, such as unfair demands on her own time, and compromises in providing services that she was not qualified to perform. Yet she still felt drawn to remain in care work:

Um, I’m looking at maybe working in a hospital or something like that, but its, er, um (sighs) I don’t know, I still swing towards young people and working with young people because I feel I get along with them better. It doesn’t matter if I trip over my words when I’m with, er ... a young person – Kate

Women in the focus group, who were transitioning from the frontline to management through a training program, admitted that money was an incentive, but the low wages in the past had
not been a source of stress. By going into management, the financial gain would be small compared to the demands of greater responsibilities.

In addition to tolerating low wages there was evidence that self-sacrifice was expected by managers. Joan worked part-time from a home office, but her family life was disrupted by out-of-hours demands from a voluntary board that wanted her work to fit around their availability. Most workers routinely allowed work to cut into their own time. One older worker, who had always taken her own resources into children’s programs, reminded herself that young workers who refused to spend their own money, were justified.

... any good child care worker worth their salt actually goes out and buys things. That was my experience of the services. When you consider how much they get paid that’s not really reasonable ...

– Dana

One further example of self-sacrifice was workers’ expressed willingness to undertake professional development on their own time and at their own expense. One team which felt it needed the help of a psychologist financed their own professional supervision. One manager (M3) confirmed the problems of funding training and support, particularly when the type of tender offered by government impacted the categories of staff that could be recruited. Her agency preferred, where possible, to employ more people as permanent part-timers, to overcome the instability created by casualisation.

We have a different workforce, a lot more casuals. It makes it harder for everyone to keep in the same groove ... harder to maintain training for casuals. The budget does not stretch to paying for training and support...that is coming out of people’s packages ... – M3

Despite the pragmatic discussion of sacrificial strategies, Dana Jack’s (1999) feminist proposal that women might feel socially obliged to persist in self-sacrificial labour, had some resonance. Jack suggested women self-evaluate morally based on social role expectations. That role expectation might be a maternal or nurturing one, but in this instance the social role expectation was the sectoral status of resource poverty which puts pressure on everyone employed by non-profits to work sacrificially. The evidence of the focus group was that workers who could (or would) not afford to stay on low wages or sacrifice time, would find a way out. For all workers, a greater source of frustration, resentment or distress was the resource poverty that directly impacted service delivery or client services.
The strongest objection to the wages paid by non-profits came from the only male participant in the research, a manager (M1) whose concern was that it restricted recruitment opportunities, particularly for smaller programs. Larger agencies were paying significantly higher wages to attract staff, and many workers at supervisory level had vehicles in their packages. When asked why workers would stay on wages $15,000 per annum lower than DoCS workers, he agreed the question was valid, but did not suggest any explanation:

Absolutely ... and that issue is on the table ... and people make choices on that issue. The dollars start to impact some people. DoCS is making it difficult for the rest of us by paying staff above the levels for which they fund agencies ... the only opportunity that we have ... is to package our remuneration for staff a little bit better ... and still we’re behind. – M1

5.3 Resource poverty in non-profits as a source of stress

All participants in this project were recruited from resource poor non-profit organisations. All non-profits can be regarded as resource poor, due to dependence on unpredictable and restricted sources of income such as gifts and government funding (Wagner & Spence, 2003a, 2003b). Non-profits are often charities that exist under taxation protection, which enables them to package wages to provide workers with benefits such as vehicles or laptops for private use. This compensates for the lower cash component of wages in non-profit organisations compared to wages paid for similar work in government agencies such as DoCS. Workers in non-profits usually know that they will have to tolerate understaffing, lack of professional support services for both workers and clients, and uncertainty resulting from welfare reform and rationalised economic practices which lead to demands for greater efficiency on smaller budgets. The lack of resources was evident among frontline workers, managers and the focus group.

...there’s not that many services out there, and we get calls and get, just get frustrated that there’s not that many services out there.... – Dana

There were so many things I don’t think the agency could provide.

– Jill
There are no caseworkers. – Helene

Lack of resources. Never enough resources, particularly tutoring, counselling... – Nelly

In my research the cause of the Sector’s resource poverty was not clearly understood by workers, sometimes was not a source of concern to workers, and they were often poorly informed about financial constraints and funding processes in the Sector. They were also concerned when money was not spent directly on service delivery:

There’s something not right going on with the money. I’m not privy to it, but they buy cars. – Kate

In addition to suspicions about how income was expended, there was also a misgiving about the appropriateness of non-profits confronting their budget problems, and welfare workers discussing money with clients. Many agencies were adopting new strategies to improve the cash flow, including user-pay policies for some services, such as respite care. Respite care was often regarded by social workers as essential for parents who were caring for a disabled child. In the past, social workers had been able to influence fee levels, but as their agencies developed new layers of management, new corporative practices were introduced:

...someone here ... was doing debt collecting, doing follow up and ringing clients following-up if they hadn’t paid for respite. We said, oh we’ll ring the family and find out what’s happening and try to work something out. But it was also a little bit awkward for us. We don’t like talking so much about money. – Nelly

5.3.1 Money, politics and bureaucracy as a distraction to the real work

Many workers seemed to feel that money matters tainted their real work. The reluctance to confront money matters was evident when Dana kept referring to the politics that were always discussed in team meetings, and it took a brief interchange to discover that she regarded budgetary discussions as politics. She felt there was a fundamental selfishness in discussing the agency’s financial challenges, or the workers’ needs, in the light of the clients’ more urgent circumstances.

... but I do feel myself that the primary focus should be the young people in our care, and um, that, that gets lost with the politics and discussions about the staff’s wellbeing. – Dana
Budgetary concerns were also conflated with ideas of bureaucracy or corporatisation which was seen as counter-productive to welfare work. Giselle believed she had been able to influence her own programs to remain “not very corporate” by comparison to her organisation that was becoming “the big beast,” which she described as more corporate than she liked:

*We are a welfare organisation and we don’t set out to make a profit from our services to people. And I think if you are business minded and profit minded it is impossible to provide the best quality care for someone.* – Giselle

Although resource poverty impacting service delivery was a significant issue for most participants, it was not an issue for Tilly, the worker whose burn-out was so severe that she was withdrawing from the frontline. Tilly’s agency paid well, provided good supervision, and it had brokerage funds available, a budget for urgent and special client needs. This statement reaffirmed Tilly’s own estimation that her burn-out was related to her own sense of powerlessness in seeing endemic poverty, inadequate pensions or allowances, and in regarding her own role as a band-aid.

*... We had the capacity to do extra things for people ... say, working with a family who can’t afford a pram, or purchase their counselling or something like that. So that kind of, that’s probably, it’s a bit more empowering than working in some other agency where you don’t have access to that.* – Tilly

### 5.4 Foster care crisis and the stress of no-win situations

*... from the time residential care was virtually de-funded ten years ago, foster care has been in crisis so the foster care system has been forced to pick up the children: high and complex needs, challenging behaviour, so there is a high level of foster carer burn out.* – Giselle

Out of home care (OOHC) was routinely described by research participants as being in crisis and a no-win situation. OOHC includes several categories of residential care provided to young people who can no longer be cared for by their own families. These include foster care, kinship care, family group homes, and institutional, hostel and to a lesser degree supported independent living and respite care. Around 78 per cent of children in OOHC are
on ‘care and protection’ orders, which indicate there has been a statutory intervention. OOHC is regarded as the last resort for any child, and policy in Australia emphasises stability and continuity of care for all children, or what is known as “permanency planning” (Bromfield et al., 2005). Australian literature searches confirm the increasing demands for places, the diminishing number of carers and their aging profile, the increasing complexity of needs that children present with, and the depth of human suffering children have endured before reaching the moment where care out of their own homes is deemed preferable by courts, social workers and/or DoCS (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004; Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; Fernandez, 1993, 1996; Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, & Aldana, 2005).

In a bid to reverse the abysmal statistics of placement failures, abuse and poor educational, psychological and health outcomes for children leaving care, Australia is developing a national plan for foster care, and critical issues are being addressed at government ministerial level in national conferences. National audits of research in relation to both OOHC, child abuse and neglect were funded and published by ACWA (Higgins et al., 2005). Higgins saw the issues of OOHC as the “hard end” of child protection which could not be discussed separately.

The entanglement of child protection policy with the OOHC crisis is not a specific focus of much research. The authors of an audit of OOHC research over a decade (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004) independently wrote papers that challenged some aspects of mandatory reporting, a policy which is a stressor to workers despite their fundamental support for it. Cashmore and Ainsworth identified policy evaluation as a gap in the Australian research. Little consideration was given to workers in the research. It was Cashmore who alerted government and professionals to research that revealed tragic outcomes for wards leaving care, and her name became known to frontline children’s welfare workers regardless of whether they had read the reports (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996).

OOHC was named as a singular source of stress by workers because the situations often represented emotional losses for the natural parents, the foster parents and the child and caseworker. Workers described themselves as grieving over court decisions, and being emotionally overwrought by the processes of placing children in care. Several specific aspects of OOHC were mentioned, such as foster-parent recruitment and support difficulties, the violence of child clients, the split decision-making policies, and poor outcomes for children involved in mandatory interventions, all of which I will deal with separately.
5.4.1 Blame and shame in foster placement breakdowns

Poor support for foster parents was named as a systemic form of abuse by several workers.

... the moment the placement breaks down there is almost a sense of blame, um, when in fact the system has not provided them with sufficient information or necessary training because the young people that are coming into care are the more difficult kids who ultimately have difficulty finding a home ... so that lack of support for foster carers who do a job which is highly effectual ... it is a form of system abuse ... – Jill

Workers reported it was difficult to recruit and train foster parents because of the harsh realities of working with children who are older, who had already been through multiple placements, who may be violent, disabled, have learning and behavioural disorders and who would probably disrupt the (foster) family in diverse ways. There was also a reluctance to expose foster parents to some situations.

It had become an almost impossible task. You could not recruit people who were prepared to have holes punched through their walls and be verbally abused. – Joan

Children coming into care were disturbed by the process as well as by the circumstances that had created the needs, which may have included relentless poverty, abandonment, abuse, or witnessing the abuse, addictions and violence of others.

A lot of the young people we’re working with have had quite a torrid time and there can be a lot of anger and violence ... where do you find a carer who is going to provide 24 hours day care where the kid is school-excluded, and you have to go and pick the kid up, have the kid at home? – Jill

While frontline workers recognised that foster parent burn-out was not unusual, and they felt that foster parents were not giving adequate support, their philosophical commitment to permanency planning for young people, and the understanding that children needed stability created a conflict of interests in which they tried to always give priority to the needs of the child. This was played out in Joan’s career during the research process, when she excluded two foster parents from a training and support event she was hosting, following the breakdown of a placement, because the children were at the event with their new carer.

...the children had been removed from her care and I decided it was emotionally abusive to the children if she stayed ... [others] felt
it was the foster parents who needed our support and her needs were important and the children irrelevant ... and I said absolutely not, we must put the children first... – Joan

Joan’s decision to exclude the foster parents led to a request for her resignation. Training foster parents was her area of expertise, and she said she would not have left the position voluntarily despite the inroads the job made on her finances, emotions and personal time.

The program has gone, and once again it is the carers who miss out ... and because of my passion [for supporting foster carers] in that, I really want to still be doing something that has that connection – Joan

Joan’s choice to exclude foster parents from an event may not have been supported from a theoretical perspective because in the out-of-home care literature, and most particularly in the themes of 67 Australian research papers into OOHC (Bromfield et al., 2005) the needs of the foster parents and their biological children were given equal priority to the needs of a foster child. Joan admitted her decision was based on “gut feeling”.

Social shaming exists in the complex relationships between foster parents, biological parents, children and workers, creating blame rather than shared disappointment over placement failures. Voigt (1986) said that women pressured one another to adopt nurturing roles. She described how the public myth of ‘super mum’ became a moral value in an innovative program that required foster mothers to develop supportive relations with biological mothers. Some foster mothers had so imbibed socially prescribed nurturing roles that they judged other women – the natural mothers – as moral failures.

While managers concurred with the workers’ evaluations that foster care was facing critical systemic problems, they also named poor welfare and social work practice and worker negligence in following-up clients. Throughout the interviews, blame was shifted from agencies to DoCS and from workers to managers, and back again.

... there is so much evidence about kids not being seen, kids falling through the net, all the Judy Cashmore stuff about wards leaving

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20 Joan’s contract was not renewed and it effectively ended what she saw as her life’s work, having moved as high as she could in an organisation where she began as a volunteer. Joan was a credible participant even when she seemed to be prone to conflict with many people in her agency. Eighteen months after the research was completed, long after Joan’s departure, there were newspaper reports that the agency was refused future Government funding for its OOHC programs due to ongoing conflict between the board, its members, and DoCS. It was significant that the failure of a voluntary board to act in a way that Government regarded as professional, resulted in all its funding being moved to a large corporate-style agency whose “brand” enjoys public esteem.
care and very few of these young people actually having a relationship with the worker... yes the evidence is of appalling standards of practice in Australia ... a program that takes very disturbed children into permanent care and they, you know, you’re getting kids with 20 placements before this one ... – M4

5.4.2 Violent behaviour of child clients as a source of stress

Violence and opposition was not restricted to foster care work and children who were state wards. Workers encountered aggressive behaviour from child clients in case management, counselling, before- and after-school programs, specific needs accommodations, and mediation. Most workers accepted angry and violent behaviour as an expression of client frustration with the system and their life’s circumstances, and some referred to the Judy Cashmore (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996) work on the poor support given to wards leaving care, which described the results of inconsistent care, multiple placements, and lack of skills for independence. Cashmore’s work is reviewed in the literature (2.1.3).

Jill, who had been one of the strongest advocates for high risk young wards who faced difficulty finding homes, was intolerant of giving excessive support, and linked aggressive behaviour to a sense of entitlement. The material support now given to wards leaving care, she suggested, was an attempt by agencies and DoCS to compensate for the systemic abuses suffered by young people during their time in care:

...in the care plan we have developed, to a degree we have developed a sense of dependency. They [wards] expect the Department (DoCS) to do this and the Department to do that...they expect the Department to set them up ...well, sorry, my kids when they left home they got the old bar fridge and they could take their bed with them, a bit of old crockery, but nowadays these kids expect a flat, they expect a television and a fridge and ...well that’s my own, I own that one ... but they should get out there and do some work as well ... I think that’s what we are finding. I see it across all aspects of OOH, where there are system abuses in many ways, where they are trying to make up for it other ways, they make sure they get their driving lessons and the licence, but where does it stop? – Jill
Aggressive child and adolescent behaviour caused many workers to feel incompetent, unprepared, inadequately trained or poorly supported. These complex emotional responses were generally described as stress. Mary, who was untrained, was physically assaulted by a child with a disability, and her physical injuries were not diagnosed immediately. Some time later she resigned because she was excessively anxious and felt ill-equipped emotionally, fearful of large children. She was then diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Dana, who was trained to managerial level, found the behaviour of school age clients in an after-school program excessively challenging:

... I have been used to pre-school children, and I find behaviour management was what I was trained to, at that level, and I did not find it particularly exasperating. But I do with this age group, because children this age are far more physical. Behaviour management, I would say that is up the top [of causes of stress]. – Dana

... I think this is a major problem with working with these young people who display incredibly poor behaviour and very challenging behaviour, a lot of them, in a shift you could be faced with knives and threats, really nasty, and it happens all the time...well, again, I have to be careful, it doesn’t happen in [place name] ... but it does happen at [place name]. – Kate

For workers who could look beyond their own sense of inadequacy with aggressive children, there was an equal sense of frustration and anger at the systemic problems that contributed to that powerlessness. Some workers (Kate, Mary) grasped the localised issues that impacted their frustrations, such as managers who seemed unsupportive, their own lack of training, and agency requirements that they found distracting such as writing reports and maintaining computer records. Others, however, named specific national and state-wide policies that were ambiguous or counter-productive, particularly split decision-making and some of the implications of mandatory reporting.

5.4.3 Only half in charge of a child’s care: Split decision-making
The blame-shifting that I encountered in talking to workers and managers was related to the tension of tangled professional relationships in children’s welfare work in New South Wales, and with the case management policy known as split decision making. DoCS hold ultimate
authority over the allocation of resources and the signoff on case plans for most children in
case management. Some large agencies are able to gain delegation of case work from DoCS,
but it is not easy to achieve, and there are financial disadvantages. Managers conceded that
frontline workers felt pulled in different directions by the need to answer to two different
authorities, but management was equally powerless to change the situation unless it could get
full delegation, and carry the costs involved.

A lot of the social workers working in out of home care would feel
somewhat constrained by the requirement put on them by DoCS in
terms of case management delegation and things like that, and it is
one of the frustrations of working with DoCS. – M1

Workers faced the continuing dilemma of building trust with clients that they could only
partially represent, leading to what they felt to be compromises or even betrayal of a client’s
interests. One example was given by Alex, a caseworker who was placing a child with a
foster family. Split decision-making led to a situation where significant information about the
child’s health was withheld because it was regarded as confidential. By not having the
information, the caseworker (Alex) compromised the safety of the foster family’s natural
child. For Alex, this was a source of distress:

Yes, I had a situation recently when I placed a baby in care with a
family that already had a baby. And they coped marvellously well,
and they were marvellous parents, but she recently took him to the
doctor … the doctor was alarmed that she had another child and
was caring for this one, given his medical record. And they hadn’t
divulged what that medical record was to the carer. And the carer
was very alarmed, oh gosh, they rang me up and I contacted DoCS
you know, what do you know about this child’s medical history that
I haven’t been told, and the caseworker at … had contacted the
doctor and it wasn’t passed on but the child had Hepatitis C … .I
just really felt for the family, the foster family.

Yes, they give so much, as carers, and then to get the blah blah
blah from DoCS to say confidentiality, blah blah blah, I know, I felt
very, I felt so, well I placed the child, to a degree, responsible,
certainly responsible in helping them get through. They haven’t
rejected [the foster child] that was very stressful. Um, well I … I
sort of carried it with me all weekend. – Alex
The problems of split decision making were not issues that agencies could easily resolve. Managers were also faced with communication difficulties and delays because of the multiple layers of responsibility and accountability:

... plus our crisis foster care program always driven berserk by how long it takes to get decisions through the systems through the courts, and all that sort of thing, and so we were aware of a lot of poor practice and systemic problems... – M4

5.4.4 The stress of mandatory responsibilities
Mandatory reporting obligations were experienced by individual workers as a constant source of tension and distress, particularly as they felt the legislative pressure was on the individual worker. Workers felt they were personally vulnerable to prosecution for negligence, particularly in an instance of a child’s death. Workers’ fears of prosecution were heightened by media exposure and public blame of workers in high profile cases of child abuse, neglect and death. Similar cases have exposed workers to public reprehension in most Western nations for more than two decades (Hodgkin, 2002; Mulroney, 2004).

The fear of prosecution among participants in this research intensified their vigilance in ways that they felt were counter-productive. It reinforced the tension of a client–worker relationship in which trust was both essential and impossible, because there was always the possibility that a worker’s report could lead to the removal of a child.

A lot of the time you are working with systems that are not supportive of people ... you know we try in our programs to build on people’s strengths and encourage them to be the best parents they can be, but at the same time you are having to work within a mandated role where, if you have a sense that their children may be at risk, then you have a responsibility to, er, (sighs) notify... I couldn’t get my head around how I could attempt to build a trusting relationship with a client and at the same time, you know, have to dob them in, so to speak. – Tilly

Child protection was regarded by frontline workers as a minefield of profound consequences for clients and workers, yet agency policies seemed ambivalent and some workers complained that their agency’s practices made them more vulnerable. One manager explained that pre-emptive reporting was
…a feeling that you should always cover your back and write a report, but then the issue we explored with them was that every report has huge implications for the families and for children and huge disruption, and it does have an impact on your relationship with the service user and you need to really think through why you are reporting … if it’s just to cover your back – M4

The concept of defensive reporting was raised by Cashmore (2002b) and Ainsworth (2002), who felt the child protection process was watered down by excessive specious reports produced by punitive legislation aimed at professionals. Ainsworth’s lone voice of strong opposition to mandatory reporting was based on statistical research that demonstrated better investigation and closure of cases in the only Australian state that did not have mandatory reporting: Western Australia.

Continuity in service provision for child clients was regarded as extremely important. Workers discussed the way that children in care did not know the name of their own case worker, or even understand that the worker was there for them. Many children had such disruption of placement that any continuity of relationship with a worker was secondary. The uncertainty of funding caused continuity problems. A manager, confirming the concerns of the frontliners, said:

…they’re thinking about some of our clients because they are there for the long haul … and young people need that… and funding might only be for one year or two years or three years. – M3

At every level, issues surrounding out of home care of children were a source of troubling emotions for frontline workers. The foster care crisis, the escalation of reporting of child protection issues, and the level of violence and mental illness among adolescent children in care, were seen as intractable, generational and irreconcilable problems. A sense of powerlessness and futility sometimes crept into the comments. For children entering care, even the most pragmatic workers expressed their concern at the difficulty for foster parents and workers in coping with young people’s behavioural difficulties. A necessary removal of a child from parental custody was fraught with conflicting emotions.

There is vicarious trauma. It’s very confronting working with people’s pain, sitting with them in court, knowing the child won’t be going home… – Helene
Some workers believed there was systemic failure that was a form of abuse by omission: the lack of resources. They spoke of the Sector strategising to cope with the demands that had been put on it through problems as diverse as audit and child protection legislation.

Errm. I think yes, the powerlessness, working in with families where there has been, er ... generational issues that had got them to where they were now, and um a lot of the child protection stuff used to upset me, it's so complex I don't know where to start. I think a lot of the time you are working with systems that aren't supportive of people. – Tilly

5.5 The evidence for moral distress

Moral distress describes a disabling emotion associated with ethical conflicts, compromises and confusion, including problems associated with changing roles and priorities. This theme was derived largely from the data presented in this chapter.

In talking to frontline children’s welfare workers I was struck by the intensity of emotions reported. Women seemed to be impacted by resource poverty when it led directly to an inability to deliver services to children. Circumstances in which workers could not make a difference to the lives of children and their families produced an acute emotional response, which they named as stress, burn-out or vicarious trauma. Although workers understood the irrevocable and complex nature of the foster care crisis, including increasing violence and difficulties in recruitment of carers, their own inability to make a difference was distressing. Managers confirmed the circumstances and echoed the sentiments at a more pragmatic level, describing the instability created by competitive tendering for future funding, partnerships and the need to be entrepreneurial in fundraising. Workers who had entered the Sector for philosophical reasons - to make a difference - as well as for pragmatic reasons such as the ease of getting a job, found themselves caught up in a maelstrom of emotions that surprised them. Workers with varying levels of professionalism felt they were unprepared for the harsh realities of child protection work.

In this chapter, the data demonstrates the intensity of emotion at the intersection of workers with children and their families. At times the voices shifted to reflect on their personal options to reduce stress, such as moving to other agencies, other roles, or into management. During the course of the research a number of participants made the changes they had been considering, but some significant long-term workers such as Jill and Joan, made surprising
moves to remain on the frontline. In the following chapter, the tone of the data changes as a focus group of trainee middle-managers reflects on their transition away from the frontline.

5.5.1 Defining moral distress, and its resonance
In defining the theme moral distress I used the word distress to indicate a serious and prolonged emotional event that impaired a worker’s functioning. I used the word moral in the empirical rather than a philosophical sense (Allahyari, 2000) to stress the dynamic nature of moral decision-making in frontline welfare work. I also borrowed the understanding of moral used in the framing of the term moral distress in nursing discourses, which was the avoidance of harm (Kopala & Burkhart, 2005). Moral distress for frontline workers was often related to the inability to avoid harm. This was significant in OOHC where the removal of a child into substitute care should not merely avoid harm, but positively enhance a child’s life (Fernandez, 1996), an essential yet significant challenge given the dearth of foster carers and support services.

Moral distress was a phenomenon of strong emotion associated with irreconcilable ethical dilemmas, role conflicts, compromises and confusion. Conflicts sometimes involved role divergence, such as the need to act in a child protection role, as in mandatory reporting, while simultaneously giving a family support. Compromises involved practices in the new managerial culture, such as billing clients. Moral distress described what in Weberian thought (see 2.3.6) could be regarded as a values-intuitive (Woods, 2001) response to stress and resource poverty: an attempt to make moral sense to find continuing motivation for the work, using tools of reflection devoid of bureaucratic or rationalised priorities. When frontline workers described their emotional response to values conflicts they often used terms that were more familiar to them such as burn-out, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma, none of which indicated the essentially moral sources of distress, or suggested a values conflict.

Distress of a moral nature was first described by social workers who felt inadequately supported, by line-management supervision rather than by a social-work trained person or a psychologist. Line-management was seen to represent the rationalised bureaucracy rather than the values-base of social work; interested in statistics, efficiency and accountability rather than responsiveness to human need (see 8.2.3). As social work practice per se was not central to the research, the generalisable factor was the emotional content of values conflicts. Moral distress was evident when the worker described her personal poverty and lack of job
security and the paradox of feeling powerless to help people who faced similar financial insecurity, due to the agency’s lack of resources (see Kate in 5.2.3).

In developing the concept of moral distress as defined above, I tested its resonance with participants and the ACWA community. The ideas were put into a press release that was circulated through the ACWA website. It was further tested in a paper in Adelaide (Jensen, 2006). Social work academics affirmed the essentially moral nature of the distress they had observed and experienced in children’s welfare work. Participants agreed with the idea of moral distress but complained they could not fully understand the concept. The TAFE teacher whose email was quoted at the beginning of this chapter was the strongest independent response. She particularly identified judgementalism among workers in their attitudes towards clients, as a source of distress. This same issue was raised by a senior manager (see 6.2.2) who saw judgementalism as evidence that graduates were ill-prepared to work with very poor clients. Accusations of intolerance towards clients were made against colleagues and managers throughout the research. The email extract opened up several troubling aspects of moral distress that demonstrated its significance in attrition and retention. Values are the core of moral action, but the writer described her values presuming that colleagues and agency management shared these values. This was a common view of participants, both on the frontline and in management. Although it seems incongruous to use the violation of values that have not been clearly defined, agreed upon or explored, as a reason to leave a job, this was undoubtedly happening. However, not all workers were morally distressed or disempowered by values compromise. In Chapter Six I introduce the altruism audit as a strategy used by more pragmatic workers, and with it, I introduce values that are less client focused, more focused on the agency agenda, professional and personal needs.

5.5.2 The altruism audit as a way beyond stress
The altruism audit can be understood in Weberian thought as rationalisation, although it is not based on the disenchantment that Weber visualised in a work world driven by bureaucratic methods (see 2.3.6). Workers making an altruism audit wanted to continue to make a contribution, but they rationalised the boundaries of their self-sacrifice in the light of their other needs and ambitions. Altruism audit is a strategy of evaluation used by workers to remain in the Sector regardless of stress, resource poverty or other difficult circumstances. I defined altruism audit as: a rationalisation of commitment to work where there is a conflict between demands and returns.
5.6 Conclusion

The themes moral distress and altruism audit represent two ways of responding to the pressures of frontline children’s welfare work. Moral distress may emanate from values confusion, or lack of clarity about an individual’s capacity in the climate of welfare reform. The perceived judgementalism of colleagues may not be a moral act, so much as a pragmatic response to policy and economic pressures. Unless values are defined, moral issues become a high ground that eclipses more practical problems, such as resource poverty. Without defined and shared values, some frontline workers may continue to be distressed by limitations in their work over which they have no control.

The presence of more pragmatic values is evidenced in the theme of altruism audit which I introduce in the next chapter. Altruism audit signals the possibility that workers within agencies respond in contrary ways to the personal, economic and policy pressures of welfare reform, while retaining the desire to do good and make a difference. Middle managers in the focus group, whose loyalty towards clients shifted as they moved up the organisational ladder, shared the conviction that values compromises at senior management level were good grounds for leaving an agency (see 6.2.4). Yet their understanding of values and their methods of responding to pressure were more strategic than distressed. The presence of committed workers, who make an audit of their contribution, and the potential for conflict between the moral high ground and pragmatism, demonstrates the need for shared values within and between agencies.
Chapter Six - Making a difference and making a living: Altruism audit reshapes priorities and expectations
6.1 Introduction

*So my advice would be, go to a frontline management course. Get some information: learn that language so you will say things in the right way, so they will hear your opinions because they are hearing it in a way that they want to hear it. You can be a gifted amateur but I don’t know if you will get heard until you sound right.* – Focus Group Voice 3.

The powerlessness expressed by frontline workers towards the end of the Chapter Five contrasted with the influence enjoyed by members of the focus group of trainee women middle-managers, most of whom had only recently left the frontline. In the extract above, a focus group participant equated speaking the language of the organisation with being heard and having influence. Rather than affirming or focusing on the issues raised by frontline workers, the focus group moved the discussion to the personal choices they had made and the strategies they had utilised, in order to achieve their own objectives in children’s welfare work. In the extract above, it was suggested that the best way out of frontline stress was up the organisational ladder. Focus group participants had measured the extent to which they would allow uncomfortable aspects of frontline work to eclipse personal concerns. They weighed up the rewards and costs, advantages and disadvantages of their work and chose moves that would help themselves. They did this without relinquishing their desire to do work that would make a difference and to retain the values that were important to them. In the descriptive phrase I used for this theme, some of the focus group members evidenced what could be regarded as an altruism audit. In this chapter the altruism audit will be identified and exemplified through the voices of the focus group, against the background of frontline and senior management concerns.

In introducing the nuances of the altruism audit in this chapter, I also show the qualitative difference between the resilience needed for frontline survival, and the pragmatism possible in policy-based management work at higher levels within the same non-profit Sector. If I describe the altruism audit in Weberian terminology, it is a rationalisation process. It is a reversal of the abandonment to self-sacrifice described in Weber’s institutions led by charismatics, who utilised causes or missions to rally support (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). The charismatic institution belonged to Weber’s enchanted world of religion and high moral purpose, whereas a rationalised strategy belonged to the disenchanted world of efficiency, production and consumerism (Ritzer, 2005). I have previously argued that many non-profits
arose out of religiously-inspired charitable organisations whose mission could once be identified with Weber’s notion of charisma at work in institution building. The self-sacrifice that Weber envisaged in charismatically institution building could be compared to the contemporary suggestion of a form of paucity management (Wagner & Spence, 2003a) at work in non-profits, which depends on lower-waged workers who are motivated by concerns other than wages. The concern with mission rather than wages was seen by Lyons (2003) as extending to management level in non-profits. However, in response to government policies that mandate increased efficiency in exchange for continued funding, many non-profits have increasingly rationalised themselves so that their internal workings more closely resemble private or corporate structures than the spontaneous kitchen table enterprises of non-profits in the past (Lyons, 2001). The presence of altruism audits among some frontline workers suggested a rationalised personal approach to welfare work, which mirrored organisational concerns with outcomes and a balance of inputs to outputs. The focus group demonstrated the rational steps taken in terms of changed attitudes, and changed alliances.

6.2 Difference and distance in middle management

All of the women in the focus group were moving away from direct contact with clients, transitioning into frontline management. The women in this group represented the level in organisational leadership that has the most direct management responsibility for the frontline workers. The focus group was distinctive for its sense of volition, inclusion, of being informed or in-the-loop, and having the right to speak, knowing the language, all of which frontline workers felt they lacked. While it could be argued that the focus group felt empowered by its further training and education, I observed rational choices that they had made that were a definitive move away from the priorities of the frontline: a break with their past priorities.

The importance of knowing theory about management and organisation was stressed by the focus group. In the following extract a focus group member describes how her further training gave her the ability to speak to management:

*It’s the language of the Sector. The theory underpins you ... little things like 'outcomes'. You can critically evaluate as you are going, because, I think, otherwise I was much more likely to have been going along with things because I did not know better...they had MBAs and things like that, and all I had ever done was the job, frontline worker.* – Focus Group Voice 3.
The trainee middle managers still saw themselves as client focused and concerned with the issues of the frontline. Their conversation, however, was dominated by both organisational concerns with policy, leadership and vision, and managerial language. They did not feel distant or removed from the frontline or client concerns, but rather, more effective in their emerging roles. Their perspective was that management of the organisation was pivotal to all its functions.

...leadership is needed in a manager to run the place or places go down. – Focus Group Voice 5.

This contrasted with the frontline workers who saw service delivery as the pivot. The importance of management and its functions mystified many frontline workers who believed frontline work was subtle, hidden, and could not be clearly represented in the reports and statistics required by management.

I spend a full day a week on paperwork. In this work sometimes less is more and how do you capture that with the semantics of statistics? – Helene.

We are always collecting stats which seem to go into a big black hole. I don’t know what they do with them. – Giselle.

Our management are restructuring, yeah, and it’s sort of hard. We’ve moved buildings ... a brand new building ... state of the art ... so I guess it’s the corporate element happening. And so they’re looking at ways of marketing and branding so we can get the dollars to expand, but at this point you feel it is expanding at the top, really ... do you need those people in marketing? It just seems weird. – Nelly.

The frontline workers’ sense of futility, confusion or the suspicion that their agency was misdirected was not shared by the focus group. Focus group members allied themselves to organisational objectives and felt they had found a place of conspicuous influence:
… since becoming a general manager … we [self and two other general managers] feel that we influence service delivery, we carry our culture, we have a heck of a lot of influence. I understand what being a support worker is, the culture of that, it gives you a much better understanding, so my attitude is very client focused and then coming through into management, that is passed on to the workers. – Focus Group Voice 1.

The middle managers felt that their frontline experiences extended their influence down to the frontline workers as well as up to senior management. They were confident that they were respected because they had come through the ranks:

*Having some knowledge, like, and some education, and having done the work yourself there is a certain level of credibility that goes with that, yeah, and believing in whatever the organisation is out there promoting.* – Focus Group Voice 4

It is perhaps predictable that the perspective of those managed was quite different to that of their managers. Some frontline workers did not see managers as credible, and felt that managerial processes, such as written reports, were used to discriminate against them. Frontline workers expressed a sense of distance from management.

*If the person who is the manager of the team decides they don’t like you or they don’t want you on the team for some reason, maybe they got out of the bed the wrong way that day, that will be, er...um...reflected by...er...reports. It’s mishandled because it’s not professional. Yes, you will have managers placed in managerial positions with no qualifications at all, but the fact that [the boss] wants to give them a go ...* – Kate

Two frontline workers angrily expressed feelings of being let-down by managers who had acted like friends, when in fact they felt inadequately trained, exposed to danger, unsupported, unable to avoid unpaid overtime, and in one case, unable to refuse to work with a client who later assaulted her. Mary21 felt her frontline manager had insisted that she return to work, with a boy that other workers had said was becoming dangerous:

21 Mary ultimately received a compensation payment.
All of these things neglected to be noted, neglected to be acted upon ... me, I wouldn’t take those kinds of er... um ... avenues. I would not be choosing to leave someone, in my opinion, in a pretty er um difficult situation. No one was interested in hearing it, no one wanted to know ... where it was warranted to increase staff levels, they have been decreased. – Mary.

While the difference in perspectives may not be surprising, it does emphasise poor communication of the structural realities that dominate each group. It also demonstrates the ability of transitioning workers to make a rationalised disconnection from conflicting concerns that became more evident as the focus group talked about power, values and relationships. It was difficult for frontline workers to think about the pressures on management that came from social and political change, and it was difficult for those transitioning into management to continue to engage with the same level of empathy with clients.

6.2.1 A middle-management perspective on organisational power

The focus group members demonstrated that they were willing to engage with the political structures of their organisations, rather than be overwhelmed by them. While some of the statements about senior management from the focus group were as angry and indignant as those from frontline workers, the focus group saw organisational conflict as the price to be paid for earning a living and getting ahead. Their sense of connection to the organisation was stronger than that expressed by frontline workers, and it seemed they would not be easily displaced by power struggles.

It’s a power thing; an abusive power thing. When we were talking about, when we said the politics of our organisation, it’s who you know, and who likes you and who doesn’t. If you stand your ground it could be suicide. That’s life. – Focus Group Voice 3

Mmmn. – Focus Group, various voices

... but it’s what we were saying this week, if you are permanent fulltime, you are spending your life at work. It’s a big chunk of
that, apart from being asleep, if you add up the hours. – Focus Group Voice 2

Yeah. - Focus Group, various voices

It’s like you don’t just work for the organisation, you live in the organisation. That’s it! – Focus Group Voice 4

Yeah. Mmmnn. - Focus Group, various voices

Reflective silence until someone abruptly changed the subject.

In this exchange the primacy of the focus group’s relationship with the agency, its policies, power structures and vision, were recognised as central to all they did. Moreover, although the focus group shared some of the frontline workers’ views on power play, they saw the need to engage with it regardless of the risk. In this respect, their attitude is pragmatic and they rationalise conflict in relation to their own agenda. They do not interpret conflict or power play as a moral issue in the way that Joan, Mary, Giselle, Kate and Tilly had done (see Chapter Five).

6.2.2 Relational loyalties shaping new attitudes

Many of the trainee middle-managers had a primary relational loyalty towards the agency as an entity, whereas frontline workers were aligned with their clients in a service delivery focus. When the members of the focus group were asked to describe how they could influence service delivery, they did not discuss any of the structural problems such as resource or staff issues, welfare needs and policy, but rather relationships between staff, clients and agencies and the impact of attitudes on service quality. Part of their impact was achieved by moving away from client relationships.

I think you certainly do become more task focused, and I think you become a bit legalistic in your thinking and start thinking in terms of...you must think more globally, and the less you have to do with the clients, the more that is going to happen, I think. – Focus Group Voice 1.
When asked to return to the question of influencing service delivery, the trainee middle managers felt they could shape loyalty in both directions through their own attitudes:

If you have the right attitude to clients it will go down the line to staff. [the right attitude] to the organisation and the clients. If you are making a change and the manager is very positive about that change, then you can put that back on the employee, and they can become very enthusiastic and happy….if you are negative, they can become negative…we do hold a lot of influence over attitude, attitude affects every part. – Focus Group Voice 2

Attitude to clients in service delivery had also been raised by a senior manager in discussing the entrenched nature of poverty. It was interesting that representatives of two management groups could use the same phrase in the same context, and mean something entirely different in terms of practice. I repeat the statement of M4 (from 4.2.1) because she was speaking of a relational attitude of compassion and tolerance among frontline workers who engaged with very poor clients.

We mean attitude to service users ... why people are in that difficulty, the issue of poverty for us is a really important one and people need to understand the impact, of you know, people's socio-economic positions on their lives and the cycles of difficulty that some people get into ... all the people we see are very poor, some are very, very poor, very difficult situations. – M4

In strong contrast to this senior manager’s expectation of profound relational engagement and resilience, the focus group diluted attitude in service delivery to enthusiasm, happiness and positive thinking, which come from the arsenal of popular management culture (Ziglar, 1994). The focus group’s belief that service delivery could be influenced by positive attitudinal shifts of this kind effectively moved the goal posts to allow a rationalised, impersonal approach to the work. It is not, however, an approach necessarily supported by senior managers. It may appear to be a perspective aligned to a rationalising organisation, but it is a paradox already understood by many in senior management as shown below where a senior manager ponders whether her agency is a service provider or a business, and contemplates the conceptual and cultural difficulties of that choice.
Ah yes, whether we are a service or a business ... we are still grappling with how we include moneymaking streams in our organisations and other opportunities like that, and the different sorts of language, thought and culture that go with that ... so we don’t end up looking like two different organisations ... we are still working that through. – M3.

Significantly another senior manager (M4) discussed the need for empathy in a way that would resonate with the relational practice of frontline workers of Chapter Five. It indicated that in the higher echelons of some agencies, there were managers strongly oriented to service delivery. It was also important to note that the manager represented a large agency with a strong public profile, less dependent on government. Nevertheless, it led me to believe that the focus group expressed the over-enthusiasm of novices for the managerial rhetoric offered in their studies, and over time, would return to a stronger service perspective.

Poor education of the heart, such as lack of empathy among young graduates, was named by managers as a problem. The manager quoted below drew attention to a gap between the knowledge and skills of some university graduates, and the values and relational base needed for the frontline. Practices such as her agency’s preference for adoption rather than long-term foster care, was an issue she said graduates did not fully understand, or inappropriately opposed. There was misunderstanding as well as resistance to what she called guidance and support (supervision) in frontline casework. In this statement she returns to the essentially relational and values-driven nature of frontline work, which may suggest that education alone is not the answer:

It’s about fundamental values, about doing good in the world, I don’t know, I don’t know but um, in terms of ah ... we don’t see ... we don’t feel the universities are producing people who are well enough up, well, there is that very generalist approach to social work ... so that when we get young people who are just young graduates, their knowledge of our (long sighs) ... Oh, the knowledge, they just don’t know the area well enough, and it’s hard, a lot of the people we have traditionally used have been older women ... and certainly people who have had experience of the parenting task and have the right kind of you, know, value base in terms of relationship with clients. – M4
Whether or not education was responsible, it was a significant problem when a service delivery-focused group felt it was supervised by people who did not share their priorities and values. Senior managers also wanted the frontline closely managed because of risk factors, and one was impatient with frontline workers who wanted more autonomy:

They might say they don’t have a lot of autonomy and they probably don’t in the sense of doing personal visits ... the casework is relatively closely scrutinised by their manager, so they might feel they don’t have a lot of autonomy ... I’ve worked in child protection, and that is the most risky work in Australia. I’ve worked in Redfern where babies are born to drug-addicted girls where ... horrendous ... that’s what’s on the front page of today’s paper ... and it doesn’t get much worse in Australia than that .... you would only do it knowing you had a level of support and scrutiny ... it wouldn’t feel like scrutiny, it would probably feel incredibly supportive but in the end ... we had one worker, really not a good fit for her...found it too, too scrutinised. – M5

Although senior managers wanted to blame education for frontline misfits, they struggled to define the formal qualifications that best prepared women for frontline work, but returned consistently to the need for excellence in relational skills.

It’s relationship, long term, and working with families, and it just doesn’t lend itself to having casual workers. It’s not that kind of work, and yeah, we deliver services here, yes, welfare trained people play a role, child care trained people ... supportive ... people who have a certificate and not at degree level ... some services will have family workers who might have a two year kind of training ... we will have people of that kind of background, a welcome part of the team. – M5

6.2.3 Breaking the rules to serve client relationships

The frontline workers interviewed for this project were primarily relational workers, and they conformed to the managers’ profile of workers with mixed undergraduate qualifications, life experience, and knowledge of parenting. They did not want to move away from a service
delivery focus, away from an alignment with clients, to align with organisational purposes. In a second interview to discuss the theme of relational shifts, Giselle, who was moving up in her organisation, knew she would need to let go of personal relationships with clients. The loss of the relationships was a cost she had to think about each time new opportunities presented themselves. In this extract she discusses two successive moves up, in which she reveals the importance of relationships to her as a frontline worker:

*I didn’t really think at the time what it would mean to move up the ladder. When I first stepped up, I had been a direct carer to most of the clients in the program and it was very hard to let go. I really struggled to let go of that stuff - like, really struggled. I sort of jumped in [to a new position] and I sort of worked myself to death doing that at the same time as not letting go of some of those relationships that were really important to me ... the new relationships ... are different because I am in a new role ...* – Giselle

Giselle’s statement serves to emphasise what was already evident in Chapter Five: that frontline workers are relational workers, and their client focus has priority. For the focus group the most important relationships were the vertical ones, particularly with senior management. The middle managers saw lack of support for senior management as a negative attitude, and did not approve of circumventing policies and protocols:

* [a negative attitude would be] not supporting the management or the decision set down even though you may feel that you are following guidelines ... putting it across in such a way that you can get around a lot of rules and regulations. – Focus Group Voice 3*

The desire to support rules was in strong contrast to the frontline workers who were often frustrated by rules and felt triumphant when they could find a way around them. Nelly told several stories of getting around the rules in order to provide a much-needed service for a client.

*There’s no way you can get funding for it ... so they went to a top donor and told the story and they donated ... it’s rare ... and you’re not really meant to do it, and I wonder how much longer we can do those one-off things now, the way we’re heading. For now there*
are enough people who believe in the services we provide. That’s why a lot of us are feeling a bit uneasy … – Nelly

Joan was a frontline worker who tended to see everything through the eyes of her clients, and she expected to be able to interpret rules. Joan ultimately lost her job for opposing an instruction that did not align with her own evaluation of the situation. 

She [co-worker] was very regimental in what she was saying, and when I came along, they [clients] didn’t want anything to do with her; – Joan

Rule breaking was not restricted to non-profit workers. Paucity management studies (Wagner et al., 1999) had found frontline workers in DoCS felt a need to “subvert statewide policy when necessary to achieve outcomes for clients” (p. 34). In that study workers felt a personal weight of responsibility because if anything went wrong, the team or agency would not share blame. Managers saw any desire for this level of autonomy as misguided, given the risks of litigation and prosecution.

6.2.4 Values and job fit concerns among middle managers

Having discussed the importance of representing an agency’s vision and policies, one of the focus group members asked the others whether they left jobs and moved on until they found good values fit. Most of them agreed that by job fit they meant convergence of values. They said the problem was that they could not predict a good job fit because of the gap between espoused and enacted values. The focus group demonstrated a pragmatic view of values conflict and did not describe it as an area of moral anxiety so much as personal adjustment to the various ways policy was enacted.

...and I had that experience, where ethically and morally I believed what the organisation was preaching and saying, and what they stood for … and another person came in who did not value those things and that was a reason for leaving. The organisation may still have believed, or its mission statement may have said what was valuable, but the new person did not believe in it. – Focus Group Voice 2.

The extract above also demonstrates differentiation between the agencies’ stated values and individual practice. There was a consensus that individual managers tended to represent their
own values and interpretations, and not the mission statement or espoused values of the agency, and if an individual worker could not tolerate the differences it was of no consequence.

You’re right, in the core executive group there’s five different ways that those policies are implemented ... we are a learning organisation and we strive for these things [shared values] and yet this manager does not manage in that way. So it happens ... – Focus Group Voice 1

Working for a senior person who didn’t believe that volunteers needed nurturing ... it was her personal values. It was her personal values ... after a period of time, which didn’t come out initially. – Focus Group Voice 3

Focus group participants were very tolerant of differences, but not in a self-sacrificial or indiscriminate way. The focus group said there would be occasions when conflicts of values were an appropriate reason for leaving. Yet they were discussing conflicts in relation to management and policy rather than clients and service delivery. Without strong client relationships, the vertical relationships were predictably more powerful for focus group members. I interpreted this approach to organisational conflict as a pragmatic altruism audit that had the potential to cause attrition at agency level.

You find the place that sits with you, how you think it should be interpreted and implemented. I found people moved around quite a bit and people don’t leave [the Sector] altogether but they may change agencies. – Focus Group Voice 2.

Finding a good fit enabled them to stay and respond to new promotional opportunities.

I stopped where I have been for 12 years. What has been important for me is having different opportunities within the same organisation. The fit felt very good when I arrived ... and what has kept me there has been that other opportunities have come up. – Focus Group Voice 1.
The importance of values fit for focus group members meshed with the perspective of the senior managers, who often looked at the values of frontline workers above formal qualifications.

_Primarily, it is the other things that are more important, and if they have a tertiary qualification, that will be great._ – M2.

The “other things” the senior manager listed were problem solving, common sense, high levels of communication skills, a commitment to social justice, and resilience. The manager linked resilience to the needs of the clients:

..._a lot of the young people we’re working with have had quite a torrid time, and there can be a lot of anger and violence._ – M2.

Resilience, in the face of intractable, unjust circumstances is imperative. A need for flexibility or coping capacity in dealing directly with clients made it difficult for frontline workers to take a pragmatic or rationalised approach to their practice. Pragmatism was evidently more possible among the focus group of middle managers, as they dealt increasingly with the theoretical and political. The need for both strong values and resilience to do the work of caring for children in the face of suffering is the paradox of frontline work in rationalising organisations. The focus group middle managers and senior managers dealt more with policy than people, and they did not experience the sense of urgency and need that direct contact produced in frontline workers.

Frontline workers who had discussed the dilemma of their agencies developing income streams, user-pay programs, marketing and other economically rationalised strategies to stay afloat despite knowing the uncertainty of government funding, expressed anxiety for their clients, concern about their own ability in service delivery, and ambivalence about the policies. For the frontline workers in Chapter Five, rationalised strategies were hard to reconcile with social justice. Frontline workers recruited for their emotional capacity found it difficult to empty out the emotional content of their relationships with clients to respond to rationalised practices.

**6.2.5 The right to speak for and with the organisation**

The importance of achieving autonomy over time schedules, and the right to speak and be heard were key motivators for the middle managers who were investing time and money in their career advancement. Their sense of inclusion, participation and the validity of their
opinions were highly motivating. By contrast, frontline workers had seemed time poor, crisis driven, and often ignored. The following exchange demonstrates the way the focus group members weighed up the advantages of their increasing autonomy:

_I was self-employed before I began to work here and I was surprised by the amount of say I had and have over my whole career and where I want to go._ – Focus Group Voice 3.

_... but isn’t that part of the advantage of doing what you do., I mean, unless you get promotion as a frontline worker and become a manager and all that...it’s about getting a bit of control over your day and your time and that._ – Focus Group Voice 4.

_And having your say and someone listening to what you say, – Focus Group Voice 5._

_Yes, because of that demarcation line, because until you hit that management level you are not allowed a voice_ – Focus Group Voice 3.

The focus group was quick to recognise the marginalisation of frontline workers, the difficulty of staying informed and feeling included in those positions, and the failure of many plans aimed at increasing participation.

_Like my last organisation tried to be a learning organisation ...they tried to have learning teams right across the organisation ... which was fantastic that people were talking to one another and when people in your team would ask what was going on you actually had a voice to feed back. While it was a novel idea, something changes along the line, and it slid back to well, frontline worker you’ve got your place, and while you’re doing your stuff, well, I do the budgets._ – Focus Group Voice 2.
Geography as well as internal communication were blamed for frontline workers being out of the loop and poorly informed.

We have frontline workers who are completely unqualified and then highly skilled and professionally trained frontline workers. And I think, again, those people would have different strategies ... about fitting into our system and our processes ... that would be really daunting. For our casual staff with no goals who are working a shift a roster, you know, I don’t think we do a fantastic job of saying, hey, if you ever have a fantastic idea while you are washing that bum, one night, you come and tell us. You know, I don’t think we do. – Focus Group Voice 1.

Interestingly, the focus group saw itself marginalised in terms of senior management opportunities, yet further advancement also represented choices that they did not want to make. Although the focus group members were investing in further education to progress their careers, their inclination to audit the best options was clear. Most of them wanted (at that moment in time) to be close to home, available to their children, participators in their own community, and money was still not the key concern. Few of them wanted to work in the city, and all of the women who had children indicated that those responsibilities circumscribed their other ambitions.

I think it’s personally easier to make the decision not to go into Sydney, but stay say in South West Sydney and look for a job, stay more local, what’s happening in my local area. – Focus Group Voice 5.

I don’t want to travel an hour each way each day and have to wait an hour to respond to something that has happened [to my children]. – Focus Group Voice 3.

If they break an arm I want to be there in half an hour, so the commitment to your family means you can’t be climbing up the ladder. – Focus Group Voice 2
I can’t sit here while my child has a broken arm. – Focus Group Voice 3.

I wouldn’t want it to be any other way. – Focus Group Voice 5.

You’re not going to become the CEO of some organisation if you sit in South West Sydney. – Focus Group Voice 1.

I could earn more as an admin at the university, but I don’t know it would be as much fun. – Focus Group Voice 2.

Not many jobs are transferable into the private sector, because it [welfare work] is more nurturing, there isn’t a lot of transferable skills. – Focus Group Voice 1.

In this exchange the focus group defined the boundaries of its altruism. Middle management represented a level of responsibility and reward that suited their lifestyles. The focus group, in some ways, represented the aspirations and expectations of many Australians who desire to make a difference through their work. The significance is that all of the participants were once frontline workers who may once have shared an intense emotional commitment to clients.

6.3 Altruism audits among frontline workers

Prior to naming the altruism audit by observing the focus group’s sense of autonomy and purpose, I had observed that some frontline workers found it very difficult to make decisions for their own welfare. Joan, Tilly, Giselle, Mary and Kate, who evidenced what I named moral distress, struggled with guilt when they attempted to put their own interests first. Altruism audit is a process for remaining on the frontline as well as leaving it. While moral distress seemed to lead to passivity, the activism of an altruism audit enabled some workers to reinvent themselves and survive, either on the frontline or in middle management. Yet for some workers still heavily engaged with clients, any audit was made slowly and reluctantly, and there was not the confident ‘me first’ thinking seen in the focus group.
Kate seemed to be making a reluctant altruism audit even when suffering moral distress (see 5.2.3). She was retraining and considering more lucrative welfare-related positions for the sake of her own children’s material needs.

Now I have failed my counselling portion having been doing it [counselling youth] for 20 years I failed the counselling portion … I’m trying to complete all the necessary electives that will clear the path. Well, it’s a little difficult, a little challenging … I’ve got teenage kids who would prefer to live a lifestyle that we had previously. – Kate.

Kate expressed guilt about her personal needs:

I’m a solo parent now, I’m doing it pretty tough, plenty of people have that story. Um but I guess I wasn’t willing to, oh, I don’t know, I guess, it’s very difficult, because I can see myself slipping into depression, I can see myself slipping into an area that I don’t want to pursue, I can see that would have a huge impact on my own children, so, there aren’t too many options. I can work fulltime in the same field, and again have no credibility and not be able to alter or change anything which I think is pretty major um, I tend be very strong in my beliefs. It takes a long time for me, to swing one way or another, but when I have done that, I am very, erm, very strong in those beliefs

... I know, my own choice, but it is a very difficult thing. That’s very difficult, and I feel guilty about that, I feel guilty about a lot of things, um, – Kate.

In using the words “plenty of people have that story”, Kate diminished her own needs and continued to feel powerless and depressed by her circumstances and her work. In the statement above, there is not a balance sheet of advantages and disadvantages of the kind demonstrated in the exchange between the focus group. Tilly also felt guilt for wanting to escape frontline work:
I feel bad about it, you know. Bad about saying I don’t want to do this. We all go into social work to make a difference because we believed we can, we’re committed to it, but when you get to a point in your life where, you know you’re going from being really zealous in the beginning, and then, then, as I’ve got older … someone else is going to have to do the hard bit. – Tilly.

In three interviews, Joan’s conversation was littered with references to clients, children, crisis and need, and she diminished her own problems in comparison. In these instances of moral distress the workers seemed unable to rationalise or audit their own situation effectively. Joan felt committed to caring for children in a specific way. She described the way she had been exploited and dismissed from a significant role in OOHC, and her financial difficulties, but she chose to return to providing direct foster care, which would seem to be more demanding and less financially rewarding, although she had teaching qualifications:

The thing is with teaching, the children are with you for four or five hours a day but you’re looking at 30, not one or two, and with this, the numbers are smaller, just one or two, but at least I can see the impact, I can see something on some sort of scale. I guess in some ways I like to be able to … make an impact. – Joan.

The power of a pragmatic reinvention based on an effective altruism audit was twice evidenced in the longest serving frontline worker, Jill. She had joined a small non-profit in Sydney at a low wage in order to give herself time to recover from debilitating symptoms of clinically diagnosed burn-out. However, she quickly moved on and doubled her salary when it became obvious that the agency could not financially sustain an effective program. Jill was the one who suggested to the agency that the program was unsustainable, even when she knew it would mean the end of her own contract. She demonstrated a loyalty to the work of child protection and a concern for using her own skills most effectively, rather than alignment with individual clients or a specific agency. Jill had confidence that she could make a difference in almost any situation:

... where someone is a very good advocate for a child they will often get the best services than someone who just accepts, well this is what they’re going to offer me, instead of getting out there and trying to force the situation. – Jill.
6.3.1 An audit of essential frontline characteristics
The focus group discussion evidenced women who felt sovereign over their own destinies, and confident they could make a difference in the lives of people without direct client contact. None of the women were particularly ambitious, but they were clear about the boundaries of their altruism. The independence of the focus group contrasted with the sad and disturbing stories of some low paid frontline workers that I interviewed, who felt obliged to remain in roles that had ceased to give satisfaction.

The transition to middle management had required specific priority changes, and essentially the focus group workers identified strongly with their agencies. The focus group identified values in relation to policies rather than people; relationships were with colleagues and bosses; relational loyalty was directed at the organisation; conflict was seen as inevitable, and power play as essential to business rather than a moral issue; influence was understood as the ability to speak the language of the organisation which gave the right to be heard. All of these new priorities were believed to influence service delivery and have an indirect impact on the lives of clients. All of these adjustments represented a move towards the new culture of rationalised agencies that have developed in place of the more democratic community-based and collaborative models of welfare organisations that were possible in the past.

For frontline workers, the idea of changing their focus and relationship represents a challenge to moral frameworks. A move towards management was not a real option for some of the frontline workers I interviewed, despite the difficulty of remaining on the frontline. Two of the most important elements of frontline children’s welfare work are client relationships, and the values of non-judgementalism, compassion and empathy that inform those relationships. Senior managers indicated that relational skills and an appropriate values-base that respected and supported clients, avoided judgement, and attempted to understand the structural causes of poverty and its outworking in the lives of individuals, were essential to good service delivery. Yet focus group discussions revealed that in a transition from the frontline into middle management, relationships with clients were necessarily and deliberately closed, values became both more fluid, and more structured within organisational goals. In fact, service delivery itself was seen as an expression of organisational policies and priorities, representing organisational interests. Although the focus group saw its own transition to middle management as an answer to frontline stress, their experience served to demonstrate that transitioning into management would not be an easy alternative for workers whose strongest skills are relational, and whose most significant contribution to their agency is an emotional investment in their work.
6.4 Conclusion

Altruism audit describes the phenomena of personal rationalisation, activism and autonomy, through which workers protect their own interests without diminishing their sense of contribution to the welfare of others. An altruism audit represents as much threat to worker mobility and attrition as moral distress, in that it is still a personal evaluation without reference to wider Sectoral influences such as welfare reform. While there is a desire to do some good in the world, there is also a desire for values fit in agencies, which suggests the vulnerability of any non-profit that cannot demonstrate the integrity of its moral agenda. The middle managers and the frontline workers were alike in that there was little indication that values were moderated by a depth understanding of welfare reform factors that impacted the agency’s exercise of its mission. The difference between the frontline workers and the middle managers was in their relationship and loyalty to clients and managers. The similarity was in their subjective values-driven perspectives. In a Weberian institution directed by a charismatic or a strong mission vision, belief systems would be a recruitment tool (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). Yet there was scant evidence that the workers had any particular allegiance to leaders, institutions or religion. Their approach tended to confirm the work of Anderson (2000) who found that American child protection workers had a loyalty to the work itself, that is, their clients. It is significant that client loyalty changed in an altruism audit, and that client relational issues were moot in moral distress: the stigmatisation of clients is central to the media discourse of welfare dependency and child abuse, and judgementalism towards clients is seen as moral failure by workers at all levels. In any ratification of values, the client relationship would be central.
Chapter Seven - The loss of moral community: The absence of a religious discourse
7.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I concluded by showing that the values integrity of an agency was important in recruitment and retention of frontline welfare workers. Values were key concerns in mobility and attrition for both frontline welfare workers, and middle managers. Moreover, managers wanted to recruit values-driven workers. It was important to try to locate the values sources for several reasons: firstly, to describe an issue as moral created an intractable situation because one perspective was canonised at the expense of any another. There was a danger that a vacuous concept of values would become enshrined, to act like an oracle in judging practice: an unreliable arbiter given the fluidity of values. Although values were described as important enough to influence mobility and attrition, and values were often the source of allegiance to agencies, the issues used to define values conflicts were labelled by other levels of management as problems of education, experience and communication of agency policy.

Shared values would characterise a Weberian charismatic organisation creating a sustainable and inspired workforce (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). But despite the emphasis on values at every level, there was no sense of a moral discourse, ratified, agreed and defined values, or a moral community of shared objectives, hopes and expectations. Values were spoken of largely as a field of conflict. There was no difference between humanitarian and religious non-profits in the confusion of values. Workers acknowledged the gaps between espoused and enacted values. They did not choose or avoid agencies because of a faith perspective. Among the frontline workers I interviewed, religion was not a significant concern. I considered religion as the first possible kind of moral community where values would converge.

Religious rhetoric throughout history has exercised its hegemony to persuade people to work for its causes. I was surprised to find workers whose values were not connected to religious allegiance, and those for whom religion only confused their work values further. Christian workers had weak denominational alliances. Yet the workers expected motivation and reward would be different in the non-profit Sector, because historically, its driving forces had not fit into a corporate, labour-hire paradigm. Weber ([1904]1930) described ghosts of dead religions as concepts that continued to influence societies, such as the values embodied in the Protestant work ethic that were embedded socially without church or theology. If the values of the frontline workers were disembodied, it was because familiar landmarks had been relocated by a variety of influences which I will identify in this chapter. In this chapter
workers’ perceptions of the relationship between religion and their personal values will be explored in a broader discussion of values, religion and identity.

7.1.1 The place of values in identity and community
Values are at the heart of moral distress and altruism audit. In a Sector where the work calls for value judgements relating to the welfare of human beings, the agency’s values integrity influences attrition, retention, and mobility. Moral distress is disempowering because workers cannot reconcile conflicting values in practice, and do not find adequate leadership in sorting out their own capacity, responsibility and guilt. In the altruism audit there is an empowering process of reconciling the desire to do good in the world, with personal needs, preferences and personal welfare, yet it remains dependent on agency integrity.

Values in children’s welfare work are not cohesive and well-defined, but rather, complex and contested. In some instances in the research presented here, participants thought policy inferred values, while managers thought the same issues could be understood in an educational framework, for example the preference for adoption in permanency planning (see 6.2.2). The relational values of frontline work were emphasised by all. However, there seemed to be evidence that the important relational quality of empathy itself was either poorly defined or inappropriately expressed: while some workers seemed to be the victims of their own empathy for clients, some managers felt new graduates were inadequately empathetic, and had a poor understanding of the issues that manifested in family dysfunction. Discussions of values among participants served only to emphasise the subjective, confused and non-negotiable nature of values.

The personal nature of values in welfare practice, and the willingness of workers to move jobs to protect their values, could indicate a connection to worker identity, in the sense that identity extends beyond performing a role, and it is intrinsic and permanent (Wuthnow, 1991). Increasingly, Westerners define themselves by the work they do, and many new occupations claim the moral attributes such as altruism that were associated with the old professions such as medicine (Casey, 2002). Enacting policy in certain specific ways was the point at which workers in this study could not always separate who they were from the work they did. Worker identity may be more fragile in frontline children’s welfare practice than elsewhere, given the relentless public scrutiny and suspicion attached to the work. Opprobrium of child protection workers, or rather, the moral panic over child abuse that has occupied the headlines of newspapers in many Western nations (see 2.2.3), as well as the tendentious reporting of children’s welfare practice (Eberstadt, 2001), could create fear or
insecurity among workers whose self-esteem in the workplace might be eroded by reports of incidents elsewhere. Workers may feel their strong personal values offer some protection in the legal minefields of child protection.

In the previous chapter I showed that middle managers interpreted values in their vertical relationship to organisational agendas, while frontliners were concerned with the horizontal relationships and service delivery to clients. Moreover, senior managers were aware of the incipient values conflict between care work, and the necessary transition to more corporate streams of income generation to make up for the loss of regular or predictable government funding. Values at agency level were more fluid in response to government welfare reform, and religious values did not seem to be immune to this trend. This complex picture indicates that the most valuable resource and tool of non-profit organisations – their values base – has become endangered.

7.2 The historical role of religion in non-profits

In 2001, church affiliated agencies were the major suppliers of government-funded welfare services in Australia (Lyons, 2001). Previously, religious ideation had been regarded as a negative influence, thought to saturate the non-profit Sector to the point of institutionalisation, so that agencies were seen as moribund, inefficient, almost paralysed by their religious affiliations (Wearing, 1998). Religious organisations, however, saw themselves as leading resistance to economic rationalism, particularly in the field of welfare, based on what was then thought to be dynamic and unified Christian social teachings (Mendes, 1997). In the decade 1997-2007, a cynical view of the funding relationship between churches and governments developed (Maddox, 2005), particularly as faith-based organisations appeared to be favoured, as they won valuable tender rounds and were assigned the lead-agency role among consortia of smaller agencies, which often did not share the faith perspective. There was public concern that Christianity, through its relationship with government, would find a platform to oppose what were regarded as issues of lifestyle choice such as homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia (Mendes, 2004). Christian apologists denied that church and faith should be constrained to a private sphere. They saw the church as a public organisation that addressed faith and social meaning, that should be responsive to public order. They saw de-humanising influences of global economic policies as central to their right to have a political voice because of the fundamental injustice of systems, particularly welfare reform, as it favoured the wealth of individuals and impacted on community and culture (Mendes, 1997). The church’s essential role as advocates for the poor was widely defended (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2004).
By 2007, although faith-based agencies were still successful service providers for government; there was little evidence in my research that denominational interests directed the values of workers. For most frontline workers, clients deserved empathy simply because they were needy human beings. Although this idea is eminently Christian, it was never used by workers to explain the values of their faith or spirituality. Those who espoused a religious faith did not articulate any theological position. The lack of religious expression was all the more surprising because children’s welfare work is a feminine domain, and the issues of religion, women and welfare have converged, historically.

In the literature (see 2.3.2) there is a broad discourse on the historic relationship between women, care, ethics and religion (Brabeck, 1989; Davies, 1995; Kittay & Meyers, 1987; Porter, 1991; Tronto, 1994; Voyce, 2006a; Wearing, 1998), which led me to think that expressions of mission as a religious motivation might have been found among frontline women workers in children’s welfare. Occasionally, the intensity of commitment to the work among research participants was reminiscent of religious fervour associated with call or vocation in Weberian thought (Weber & Eisenstadt, 1968). From a Weberian perspective the presence of hegemonic religious influence or charismatic domination through the use of the rhetoric of mission, would have been evident in institutional alliances: either strong allegiance to a denomination, or strong allegiance to a missional agency. Frontline workers that I interviewed did not express any such allegiances. Although some saw themselves as advocates for their clients, not one saw their church or denominational agency in the advocacy role.

Reflection on religious values was noticeably absent from most of the participants’ discussions of values. When religion was raised, it was in a definitive way, as though religious labels alone represented a cohesive set of values. Workers said they did not join an agency either because of its faith-based perspective, or the lack of one, although it could be a bonus.

*The values, too, are Christian, so it’s empowering for me, finding out how I fit my faith in with my practice. That contributes to the feeling of team ... it’s a bonus ... but not the reason I’m here .... in terms of our work with the clients, it is about living as Christian role models with Christian values and ethics .... it’s about being good role models.* – Dana
Frontline workers resisted religious labels, although some described themselves as active Christians or strong Catholics.

...well, (I'm) not religious, but spiritual, but at the time I went into social work those philosophies were not at the front of my mind, but over time, I think that is maturing ... you grow, you question... and I find now much more connected to what I think about humanity and what I believe about humanity. – Tilly.

Mostly they did not use religious rhetoric or express loyalty to denominations or religious ideas, and even those who described themselves as Christian expressed alienation from organised religion. When frontline workers did criticise the faith-based agencies for which they worked, it tended to be based on theoretical concerns about bigotry that they had not yet faced, such as knowing they could probably not place a child with a homosexual couple.

Apart from the occasional specific issue such as selection in adoption, workers who claimed their agency values meshed with their own values, whether faith-based or secular, also had difficulty expressing those values:

...er um, the ethics fit in with my own. So it’s about promoting...er... we're all just people and we have to help each other out. So I think the values fit in with my own value system. – Kate.

7.2.1 Managerial views of the role of religion

From a management perspective, values were at a point of convergence rather than divergence between secular and faith-based agencies. The problem for secular agencies was not faith, religion or Christianity per se, but denominational loyalty. In the following extract the manager hesitated, and then substituted the words church-based, to emphasise the difference between broadly Christian and denominational loyalty.

I think some people don’t like working for religious organisations, they want to work for an NGO, but they don’t want one which is attached to a particular, you know, erm Christian organisation... or they don’t want a church based organisation. Now I might overplay that because that’s my bent, but I think increasingly that is also the case...they might say, I don’t mind doing multi-cultural work but I don’t want to do that for a framework of a Christian organisation. – M5

The same manager emphasised that there was probably no difference in values between faith-based or secular agencies.
... our values ... are linked to theirs ... but ... we value that our values are not particularly linked to a particular Christian or other platform. – M5

A paradox of the perceived power of allegiance emerged when there was a discussion of values in retention of staff. Both faith-based and secular agency senior managers believed that workers chose to work for their agency because of their specific values. Yet workers in faith-based agencies saw the values as uncertain, dependent on the manager at the time. Each manager believed their agency’s perspective provided the best platform for practice and retention. The senior manager of a Christian organisation said this:

*We retain people quite well because, I guess [named organisation] is a little different in that it is an overtly Christian organisation, wanting to be able to exercise those values in the workplace. We separate ourselves a bit with those kinds of values.* – M1

Interestingly, Christian workers were attractive to both faith-based and secular agencies. Two managers of secular agencies lamented the loss of Christian social workers who tended to marry and become stay-home mothers. One manager confirmed that many active Christians were keen to work in the larger secular agencies. One manager described the trend of “zealous young Christian women” with the right training and values applying to join the agency, and their faith did not interfere with their work:

*I don't see too much of it [faith or religion] in their work performance, or they've just got smart about keeping it out ... but it's a definite proportion of people who are applying for the work, is what I'm trying to say.*

*We have people involved with the very big movements they're into the stage productions on the weekend and this stuff Monday to Friday .... They can keep it separate, whatever it is, but it's just an amazing trend.* – M3

The manager’s aside “*whatever it is*” indicated some behavioural evidence of faith was anticipated. She was pleased that Christian allegiance was not a predictable set of behaviours other than an anticipated level of compassion.
7.2.2 Committed Christian views of the role of religion and values

The manager’s mention of workers involved in weekend stage productions pointed to membership of the large neo-Pentecostal churches in Sydney. This made it easier to analyse both the presence of these workers in secular agencies, and the separation of their faith from their work. Religious identity among neo-Pentecostals is expressed by a stronger collectivity when compared to other Protestant denominations (Hughes, Black, Bellamy, & Kaldor, 2004). For neo-Pentecostals, faith is exercised by inviting others to participate in their meetings, seeking their conversion, and by making their own public expressions of faith. In Hughes et al (2004) a National Church Life Survey found 67 per cent of neo-Pentecostals (compared to 10 per cent of Anglicans) did not accept other versions of religion or philosophy as equally valid to their own. The priority of neo-Pentecostals is proselytisation which cannot be practised openly in secular or Christian agencies in Australia. In the large Sydney neo-Pentecostal congregations which use motivational teaching rather than bible stories, the concepts of kindness and care are encouraged as evidence of faith in the community, but there is no theological framework of social justice such as might be found in a conservative Protestant or Roman Catholic congregation (Daw, 2004; Jensen, 1999), and advocacy is almost non-existent. The largest neo-Pentecostal churches in Sydney are in the wealthier suburbs of Baulkham Hills and Sutherland Shire. The young people who belong to these churches are cool, well socialised by comparison to more conservative Christians whose visible rejection of youth culture would make them less attractive. They represent a distinctive and growing group of young professionals in Sydney (Jensen, 1999).

One frontliner (Mary) had identified herself as a neo-Pentecostal, and I returned to her for a further interview. She said that for her, doing children’s welfare work was a pragmatic choice based on the availability of care work. As a bible college student she found her Christianity was a passport to jobs in both secular and faith-based agencies. She began in direct care work and went on to more responsible if somewhat ambiguous frontline positions which included accompanying clients to appointments. She did not enjoy working with children with special needs. She said employers presumed that as a Christian she would be a caring person, but in fact she felt she had been painted into a corner, because care work was all she had done since the age of 19. She could not imagine how she could express her faith through her work,  

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22 Contemporary prosyletisation is achieved through youth-focused stage productions, concerts, music production and mass conferences. The music from these churches wins gold labels in popular lists.

23 The best known in Sydney are Hillsong in Baulkham Hills (10,000 people) and Shire in the Sutherland Shire (5,000 people). These churches have dozens of satellite churches through Sydney’s suburbs as well as international sites such as London, Kiev and New York. The Hillsong Conference in Sydney attracts up to 50,000 over two weeks in July.
when faith could not be discussed in the workplace. Moreover, the scale of the problems of the children she came into contact with, overwhelmed her, and she felt the training she received was inadequate:

I just felt out of my league with these people who had been knocked about by life, and with these hugely dysfunctional psychological backgrounds ... behaviours so challenging... – Mary

For Mary, an expression of her faith would have meant having religious conversations with clients, or inviting them to her church, both of which were not permitted in any agency she worked for. She had, in fact, engaged in one covert religious conversation with an adolescent young person, which filled her with ambivalence: guilt as a worker, and a sense of success as a Christian witness. Mary tended to confirm the understanding that neo-Pentecostal expressions of faith are strongly collectivist and aimed at the integration of strangers into their congregations.

Other Christians evidenced disengagement from the values of both their churches and their agencies. Joan felt her church was irrelevant to her work. When she was foster parenting, church members represented values that she could not recognise. In this statement, Joan’s overwhelming client focus is made clear, eclipsing her church relationships:

...we had children in our care ... after we made the commitment that they were going to stay with us long term ... my husband lost his job and we had friends [at church] who said: "Why don’t you send them back? They’re not your responsibility.”

...in our local church ... it certainly wasn’t promoted as something you do ... no [my work is not] locked into spiritual values. – Joan

Dana was cynical of the role of religion in the management of faith-based organisations:

I am actively Christian, but I have seen it in lots of Christian organisations, what I refer to as prayerful incompetence. You know, where, we’ll all just pray a lot ... I don’t subscribe to that sort of management. – Dana

In these extracts workers had difficulty making a connection between their faith and their work. This disengagement could be attributed to the teaching received in their churches, the secular nature of non-profits, and social constraints on Christian activity in any workplace. It
was clear, however, that Protestant and neo-Pentecostal Christian ideas were not a cohesive or clearly articulated values perspective for frontline workers.

### 7.2.3 A Catholic vision of compassion on the frontline

Cohesive social teachings expressed as concern for the poor and marginalised, are found in Roman Catholic communities (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005), which subsidise a raft of social justice, advocacy, welfare research, lobbying and education agencies. In Australia, they have been involved in high profile struggles over economic issues, such as opposition to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on food, for which they partnered with Protestant churches with a social justice agenda (Mendes, 1997). Roman Catholic values are perhaps the most difficult to apply in the atmosphere of welfare reform. Roman Catholics are taught to engage with the world’s people, particularly the poor, and avoid judgement (Daw, 2004). The Roman Catholic church’s social teachings are embedded in Canon Law and core values about the dignity of work and workers, and value of human beings, appear in all kinds of church and welfare service documents (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2004). However, the apologists are quick to note that even within the Catholic church opinions diverge, because welfare practitioners do not prioritise institutional interests (Mendes, 1997).

I presumed that some workers were familiar with the doctrine of Imago Dei, that humans have ultimate value as the bearer of God’s image, or the Vatican II imperative that saw all good work as a religious duty of unconditional love and hospitality regardless of outcomes (Daw, 2004). For frontline workers who said they had faith or spirituality (other than the one neo-Pentecostal), it was invariably a personal source of strength, rather than a public expression. In trying to discern the role of faith in motivation, this was a response of one who felt religion was personal:

...when it’s really hard to get out of bed sometimes those are the days that I call on, you know God, for me, like motivate me Lord, to get up here, but it is not the focus of my work. – Dana

In a longer discussion Kate offered her Roman Catholicism as an explanation for her values, but then remembered that she had been taught by a priest to not equate her work with her religion. It seemed she had understood that she needed to keep the two areas separate, rather than integrated as suggested by Vatican II, but she had not developed a clear understanding. The following is an example of attempting to draw Kate on her religious values.
Q: What values kind of drive you?
A: Ah..eerm, I'm a Catholic.
Q: Is that important to you?
A: It is.
Q: What sort of values do you bring from your Catholicism?
A: (Pause, sighs) Well, I have a bit of difficulty sort of verbalising that, so you might have to guide me through it a little bit..
Q: Well, for example, some people talk about vocation or call ... I know the Catholic vocation is about being a nun or a religious ... er
A: Possibly, yes, I guess it is something like, of a vocation.... although I am open to change and I am always open to change and I think studying at university this way makes a big impact on recognising that change is something we are all frightened of but happens all the time, but as for actual values ... I don't know, um ... I guess it's about character and integrity and the nature of you know, honesty, and stuff, as for actual values, vocation, er....mnm...
Q: In your work with children have you,er, related it to your faith at all?
A: Mmmn...probably, given that .... the organisation .... had to be very much not focused on any religion. I sort of took a similar stance in as much as I didn't equate it with Catholicism but more with humanitarianism, I guess, yes, caring for people, just caring for people, and all people are equal and all people have the right to have an equal chance in life. Mmmn (trails off).....

The question of what a worker believes is irrevocably tied to what she does and her identity as a frontline worker. Unless the worker can articulate values that converge with a worldview or workplace, she lacks a framework for decision-making and analysis, and becomes vulnerable to confusion and angst when dealing with some of the most morally challenging issues of life. It does not need to be a formal religious framework, but the inability of workers to articulate
the values of their faith indicates the morass of mixed metaphors that co-exist in frontline children’s welfare work.

7.3 The loss of identity in a field of mixed metaphors

There are significant obstacles to the development of a personal values framework in frontline children’s welfare practice. Welfare reform has redefined both the non-profit Sector and the nature of social problems, reshaping practice through its policies, and particularly through the language of reform. Roman Catholic apologists such as Winkworth and Camilleri (2004) are specific in naming the language of market and managerialism, customer choice and competition as inappropriate to the value of community that undergirds Catholic welfare services. Simons (1995) said the economic policies of reform contained scientific principles that posed as “laws of economic human nature” (p. 65) that were not morally neutral. Voyce (2006b) suggests that inter-dependency of human beings was once a norm, but it was now regarded as morally deviant. The perspective of welfare reform with its emphasis on personal responsibility aligns with evangelical thought, although I do not infer any contrivance. It is significant, however, because the policies of welfare reform in Australia are so far removed from the compassionate, unconditional, non-judgemental perspective of conservative Christians and Roman Catholic social teaching post Vatican II (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2004; Daw, 2004). This difference would represent a moral escarpment if Roman Catholics were trying to apply their religious framework to frontline welfare work.

Government policy contains emphases that may contribute to the value confusion on the frontline. These seismic shifts in the way welfare work is understood – redefining agencies by redefining clients, redefining need, and thus defining practice – may strike at a worker’s identity or what I will later refer to as the moral self (Allahyari, 2000). Agencies have been reshaped and redefined by welfare reform in ways that are well documented (see 2.1.4). Goodin (2003) warned that competitive tendering could undermine the non-profit’s capacity for doing its idiosyncratic work, because performance pressures associated with successful tendering impacted motivation and methods. For non-profits, motive was not previously associated with the financial bottom-line: social need defined direction or mission. Goodin (2003) believed the usefulness of the Third Sector depended on these motivational differences. Others saw the Sector’s moral base as the reason for public trust (Lipsky & Smith, 1990). The Sector now emerging is a new entity that bears little resemblance to the one my research participants joined between 12 and 20 years ago, the participatory and collaborative small agencies described in the paucity management discourse (Wagner et al., 2001).
Welfare reform has redefined the client group. The term poverty is highly contested, and the substitution of terms such as financial hardship, behavioural poverty, and welfare dependent population carry both a softening of harsher structural realities and a weight of judgement (Saunders, 2005). In relation to the language of poverty Saunders suggested: “…core ideas have been relabelled in ways that presume an understanding of its [poverty] causes and solutions” (p. 9). The media demonising of welfare recipients through new labels\textsuperscript{24} created a public impression that welfare dependence was an avoidable lifestyle choice\textsuperscript{25}.

The values communicated through welfare reform represent additional mixed metaphors that affect workers by identification with a stigmatised “underclass”\textsuperscript{26}. The rhetoric of welfare dependency tends to sideline discussions of structural poverty such as race, isolation, community resources and family size. Understanding poverty in family dysfunction is foundational in the education of frontline workers. A deep understanding of the causality of family poverty and marginalisation in the jobs market is also important to Roman Catholic teaching. This is particularly true in Sydney, where Irish nuns who had experienced political and social oppression, and extreme poverty, established the policies of social work in diverse and extensive organisations that still serve the community (Hughes, 2002). In short, these reclassified and redefined understandings could create a morass of mixed metaphors for frontline workers.

7.3.1 A new secular religion for the workplace

My observation that welfare reform has left muddied discourses that provide no framework for workers finds resonance in the work of Voyce (2006b), who described what he called enterprise theology in British welfare reform. He claimed the Blair government’s policies became a voice of pastoral authority, making moral announcements such as equating work with virtue. Government-led disapproval of welfare dependency was sermonic, like a chiding religious community creating conformity. He suggested the moral voice of the churches had been watered down through secularisation. Voyce (2006a) argued that government-led moralising was made possible through a decline in religious affiliation. Voyce’s ideas are more subtle than Maddox’s (2005) belief that in Australia, right wing religious ideas were hijacked to provide a moral cloak for rationalised economic policy. However, both Maddox and Voyce point towards welfare service-provision culture where the churches that once led it have been silenced by the moral voice of government. Voyce (2006a) suggested that in the

\textsuperscript{24} Terms such as dole bludger are familiar to newspaper readers.

\textsuperscript{25} A Google search of terms such as welfare cheats yields thousands of Australian newspaper headlines.

\textsuperscript{26} Popular newspapers increasingly use this term to describe the unemployed and poor.
move away from formal religion, “religion as a discourse permeates all aspects of our culture” (p. 79).

Diminishing religious influence, secularisation and the triumph of economic rationalism were the themes of many early social theorists of the 20th Century including Weber, but the contemporary evidence (Norris & Inglehart, 2004) is that “the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before ... and they constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population” (p. 5). These writers used the pooled 20-year international World Values Survey (1981-2001) that showed vital church-based religion flourished in nations where there was a high level of existential insecurity. Yet even in financially secure nations, although authoritative religion was marginalised, spirituality, values and meaning of life, were central concerns, and there was broad consensus on ethical standards. This contributed to an understanding of the personal, non-theological, and non-aligned spirituality expressed by frontline children’s welfare workers. Part of the evidence that secularisation was a discredited myth was the political entwining of religion and politics (Stark cited in Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The idea that religion and politics have become enmeshed is possible because the shared values of the UK, US and Australia tend towards competition and the free market, more associated with Protestantism. In Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) analysis of the statistics there is neither a pastoral government assuming the voice of religion, nor a government deceptively cloaked in religion for its own agenda, but a stream into which what people desire (material success in the West) flows with what the government is offering (endorsement of free enterprise). If the protesting voice of a religion is quieted, work and virtue can be more easily defined according to new, even cynical, standards.

This does not imply a continuation of Weber’s Protestant work ethic, on the contrary, Muslims were more likely to see work as a God-given calling with its own intrinsic rewards (Norris & Inglehart, 2004) while Western Protestants were more interested in leisured lifestyles. If Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) analysis of Western lifestyles is accepted, it provides an alternative understanding of why government might feel the need to invest work with new kinds of virtue, because those who cannot afford leisure may not be motivated in an economy that supports non-workers. Employers equally demonstrate the desire to be a moral voice, evidenced by new spiritualities and discussions of morality and values in many different kinds of workplaces (Casey, 2002; du Gay, 1996; Voyce, 2006b). Work is not only the new arena where identity is shaped and a sense of a moral self, an ethical social contributor, enhanced. There is a preference to have meaningful work in an organisation that is associated with moral integrity. The concepts of moral self and moral community, offered
in the work of Allahyari (2000) provide useful language to describe what seems to be lacking in frontline children’s welfare work.

### 7.3.2 Identifying the moral self in an organisational setting

Allahyari (2000) showed that some frontline welfare workers derived a moral identity from the specific philosophy of their workplace. She did longitudinal ethnographic research in the US, where two conflicting frameworks of service delivery in feeding programs provided the framework that workers used in constructing a moral self. In one agency, there was a self-improvement impetus where workers were expected to convert to new standards (salvation), while the other was non-judgemental and welcoming with no expectation of gratitude or change (hospitality). Allahyari’s work tended to demonstrate that workers in the programs she studied did not have fixed, independent values, but rather in applying the dominant ideals of the agency or moral community for which they worked, they achieved a sense of moral self.

Australian frontline participants entered their work with training and preconceived ideas of the meaning of welfare and practice, unlike Allahyari’s (2000) subjects who were volunteers, belonging to discrete social groups whose choice of moral selving around their agency’s philosophy, might have been explained in various ways. White, middle-class volunteers predominated in one program (hospitality), while unskilled males, most of whom had been long term welfare recipients, ran the other program (salvation). The male volunteers had often been mandated by courts to attend, and they represented the salvation values of their own changed lives. It should be stressed that in the American political climate, where religious expression has public approval, it is possible for faith-based agencies to enshrine values that would be offensive in Australia. In one welfare agency where volunteers included former addicts and alcoholics, moral selving included “salvaging respectability by distancing oneself from ... stigmatising characteristics” (Allahyari, 2000, p. 156). Allahyari’s subjects, both males and females, seemed to use the script of the agency they served to define and develop their care-giving persona. Allahyari’s findings contrast to Robert Wuthnow’s [Acts of Compassion](1991) based on extensive interviews, which described different kinds of discourses used by voluntary workers to define and explain their motivations. Allahyari (2000) pointed out that despite the scale of Wuthnow’s data collection, he: “overlooked the nuances of how volunteers learn and refine moral rhetorics, as well as questions of why

27 This probably referred to workers in a Salvationist program’s drinking, smoking, swearing, sexual behaviour and drug use.
volunteers find particular moral rhetorics appealing” (p. 3). There are other significant aspects to Wuthnow’s work to which I will return at the close of this section.

The appeal of a moral rhetoric in the workplace is a recognised phenomena, and issues of morality, identity and belonging are significant in motivation (du Gay, 1996; LeGrand, 2003; Voyce, 2006a). Work itself has been described as a theology that endows individuals with dignity, purpose and identity (Voyce, 2006a). These new work theologies give soft rewards of approval and inclusion, as opposed to cheap rewards of car parking and personal office space, or hard rewards of financial success and organisational advancement. Workplace spirituality is seen by some commentators as a soft form of social control of disaffected workers (Casey, 2002). This work ethic does resemble Weber’s Protestant work ethic, where hard work itself was God-ordained and the financial benefits were a peripheral outcome, yet it may be a cynical application of Weber’s theory. The moral rhetoric of the workplace more closely resembles an attempt to “enchant ... a disenchanted world” (Ritzer, 2005), by endowing mundane work with the virtues once found in professions that were believed to serve God and humankind out of self-sacrificial reverence for life. This discussion serves to emphasise the increasing confusion in the workplace for values-driven workers, whose work and organisations have lost credibility in the shift of social and religious values.

7.3.3 The self and the role-appropriate points of separation
I want to return here to Wuthnow’s (1991) observations of the exercise of voluntary compassion in America. He began his book with the story of the American benefactor Jane Addams meeting Tolstoy. The great Russian writer was soaked in sweat as he laboured in the fields with the serf-class, and she had soft hands and elegant finery with enough fabric in her voluminous sleeves to clothe a peasant woman. Tolstoy attacked Addams for her failure to identify fully with the poor. This was essentially unfair, because both Tolstoy and Addams were only able to serve the poor because they were not fully constrained by a lifestyle of poverty or ignorance and apathy. Within an American culture, Addams had made great sacrifices. Allahyari’s (2000) mandatory male volunteers were close to Tolstoy’s vision of charity in their total identification, because they were demonstrating to their clients that profound personal change was possible. However, the middle-class volunteers ran an equally useful feeding program without abandoning their privileged private lives: exercising unconditional acceptance and hospitality was an attitudinal sacrifice. In making these statements, I suggest a moral self can be a role, and the adoption of a role does not have to eclipse an identity, although for some individuals it has and does. In the following passage,
Wuthnow (1991) could be addressing the problem of moral distress, as an inability to limit compassion to the role in a way that leaves the essential identity away from work, intact:

> The most effective mechanism we use to limit our compassion is to create a distinction between our roles and our selves. A role is a cluster of distinct and related activities defined by a set of specialized norms and expectations. A self, in contrast, is a basic definition of who we are. It may consist of, and be exhausted by, all the roles we play. In many cases, it also appears to include something more fundamental. People often argue that even if all their roles were stripped away, something would be left: their selves consist not only of the things they do, but of the traits that define their beings, and perhaps some overarching sense of their biographies, characters, spirits, or souls. I can take a vacation from my roles; I cannot take a vacation from myself (p. 194).

Wuthnow’s understanding of the separation of roles and identity among American volunteers was modified by a gendered interpretation of women’s care roles. He suggested that women tended to conflate care roles with identity, while men more easily understood caring within organisational roles. My research involved only women, and all of the women were employees rather than volunteers. Most of my subjects, both the frontline workers and middle managers, said they would move agencies in order to retain a personal sense of integrity. This could demonstrate a low level of separation between role and identity, or a strong attachment to the values per se. It could also indicate the strength of their relational attachment to clients, which many described, and an unwillingness to distance themselves emotionally from their work.

In suggesting that frontline children’s welfare workers may need to construct a moral self within a moral community, I am suggesting role structures in the place of some that have vanished, through the complex processes of the political and moral community change I have identified in this chapter.

### 7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated that frontline welfare workers in my research could not define their values, and did not define them in relation to their religious or spiritual perspectives. Values were tenuous, yet played a significant role in workers’ decisions to stay or leave an agency. Values were subjective and unpredictable, and more aligned to strong commitment to the work of child protection rather than agencies, religion or social justice per se. I
suggested that the difficulty of articulating values contributed to the phenomena of moral distress and the associated attrition and mobility. Moreover, for those workers with a religious perspective their articulation of religious ideas was as weak as their personal engagement with institutional religion. The lack of religious ideation in workers in a Sector dominated by denominational agencies could be the result of dilution through secularisation or the feeble social justice agenda of Sydney’s large evangelical churches (Burke, 2003a). However, if values were related to identity, then doubts about their moral self or moral community in the secularised spirituality of the new workplace intensified the challenge for frontline children’s welfare workers to feel good about themselves and their work.

For frontline children’s welfare workers receiving mixed messages about the nature of their work, their clients and their own practice, the identification of their own values and those who share them is a significant issue in enhancing their resilience.
Chapter Eight - The absence of professional privileges and the search for moral proportion
8.1 Introduction

Work historically carried labels that implied moral purpose, particularly the concept of vocation which stands behind profession (Dawson, 2005). I am not using Weber’s ([1919] 2004) work on vocation in this chapter, because it was an element of religious hegemony whose specious authority was discarded in the previous chapter. Instead, I am considering the contemporary conceptions of professionalism. In this chapter I utilise the more familiar label of professionalism to discuss some of the practices that frontline children’s welfare workers feel compromised their values, such as line-management as supervision. Although dated, Wright Mills’ (1956) conceptualisation of old autonomous and new salaried professions is useful to me. He showed the role of wages and bureaucratic direction in the development of different kinds of professional hierarchies in the workplace, distinguished by privilege. Autonomous old order professionals were so independent in their work, its location, schedules and objectives, that it was barely distinguished from the whole of their life.

According to Banks (1995), professionals often fail to distinguish between who they are and what they do, which is essential to achieving the emotional distance of a role, spoken of by Wuthnow (1991). The frontline participants in my research did not easily distance themselves from their work, but work that is relational and dispositional makes unusual demands. There are several other good reasons for using the concept of professionalism. Professionals enjoy an exchange of privileges, commitment and responsibility in the workplace that are socially endorsed and prestigious. Professionalism tends to establish values that can be explored. My third reason for looking at these issues through the lens of professionalism is that there is a need to disempower values as a self-justifying device. I do this to reinforce the question of where frontline values come from, and what they mean.

8.1.1 The hegemony of legitimised values

Values of all kinds assume hegemony in the absence of endorsed religious absolutes, because they are symbols of social and political power. Subtle power is bound up in the social obligation suggested by good reputation and character. The social power of values is at the root of the idea of virtuous organisations and enterprise theology (du Gay, 1996; Voyce, 2006a) where ordinary work was endowed with extraordinary virtues (thrift, commitment, loyalty) to compel workers in motivational corporate communities. Values in Weberian thought can be interpreted as legitimations of entrenched authority (Weber & Andreski, 1983; Weber & Eldridge, 1980). The power of secular values was suggested by Weber’s key interpreter, Parsons. In explaining Parsons’ “grand theory” of values, Wright Mills ([1959]
2000) suggested that the concepts regarded as values orientations were in fact: “grand symbols of legitimation”. Wright Mills\(^{28}\) regarded values as socially irrelevant “unless they justify institutions and motivate persons to enact institutional roles” (p. 38).

In the non-profit Sector, values historically justified and explained the existence of the organisations and motivated workers. Through welfare reform, beacons and sign-posts shifted. In some respects, the moral distress of workers that I have described could be regarded as the loss of legitimation of their chosen career. The deep connection between work role and self was also suggested by Allahyari (2000), but the deposit of social values into self was expounded much earlier by Wright Mills ([1959] 2000) who wrote:

That these shared values are learned rather than inherited does not make them any less important in human motivation. On the contrary, they become part of the personality itself. As such, they bind a society together, for what is socially expected becomes individually needed (p. 31).

Using these interpretations of Weber, within a social critical framework, values arbitrate social behaviour, inclusion, community, belonging, legitimisation of a role or work, and act as a control mechanism, awarding membership and community to those who subscribe and support the values. Allahyari (2000) usefully described this in her US study as moral self, and moral community. My interpretation is that I found frontline welfare workers alienated from a moral community, through the loss of identifiable values that legitimised their work. They seemed to be in search of a moral self, as evidenced by the critical concern with values. They could not draw on a professional community that might have validated them. Many issues of frontline welfare practice are bounded by policy and economic constraints. Workers do not have strong legitimation for asserting autonomy, opposing or subverting policy on the grounds of values, because government itself represents a legitimate authority in democratic nations. In dealing with a vulnerable population and politically significant social policy, frontline children’s welfare workers both need, and receive, a level of supervision and management that is not consistent with a profession. Professionalism is a framework that can be identified, justified, and denied as a status to an occupational group.

8.1.2 Professionalism as a form of legitimation of values

In this discussion I am concerned with the way professional workers trade-off privilege and commitment for autonomy and authority, in pursuit of work rewards more subtle than wages.

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\(^{28}\)Wright Mills’ purpose was to move sociology from the speculative grand theories to application to the human situation.
Professionalism offers the possibility of moral community through associations, journals, shared education and networks. It also offers a moral self, because most professional work is seen as serving the community in significant ways. Identity and motivation are influenced by the subtleties of professionalism, and a set of values is often implied by the status of work, such as flexibility of time where work does not fall into neat timeframes.

The poor recognition of social work and the threats to its professional status have been observed (Healy, 2004). In my research, those without social work training did not have the educational and associational benefits, and will not gain them if the work continues to evolve as a closely supervised occupation with increasing accountability and audit.

8.2 The attraction of a role with professional privileges

Slightly less than a decade ago, the culture of non-profit children’s welfare organisations was sufficiently attractive to workers that they happily relinquished the chance to earn higher wages for the same work in the government sector. The characteristics enumerated in the paucity management pilot study (Wagner et al., 1999) were inclusiveness, participation, small teams, flattened leadership structures, informality. Moreover, the smaller non-profits were more flexible in their hiring pre requisites. Literature confirmed that inclusive aspects of work ecology were important to workers (see 2.2.3). Clearly, a government agency such as DoCS was a bureaucracy, while many non-profits appeared to offer workers the privileges associated with professionalism. By the time my research project was underway (2005-2008), workers were experiencing the erosion of these privilege as their agencies adopted corporate strategies to achieve alternative sources of income (see 5.3.1), and bureaucratic ideas of efficiency, accountability and audit were effected to align with government demands in the tender process.

The literature also showed that child welfare work was a murky category, poorly defined in terms of qualifications and role expectations (see 2.1.1). Despite the predominance of child protection work, those recruited for children’s welfare work came from variable educational backgrounds, including nursing, teaching and early childhood work. For social workers, the choice to work on the frontline, given the ambiguity of their colleagues’ qualifications, was a risk to their own professional status. Social work generally was a profession that was facing problems of recruitment and retention, loss of autonomy, and the erosion of social work ethics, and its status as a feminised industry was always uncertain. (see 2.2.4).
The loss of autonomy was not related only to welfare reform. OOHC care was facing so many complex problems that workers’ roles were impacted by the responses of agencies and government. There were challenges from the escalation in reports of child abuse and neglect, new protective policies with training demands, and declining numbers of potential foster families (see 5.4). Workers responses to greater control also influenced their sense of well-being. Workers who chose to identify with management policy and rules experienced a greater sense of inclusion, and voiced more satisfaction than those who remained client and service delivery-focused (see 6.2.2. and 6.2.3).

8.2.1 When an occupation is not a cohesive profession

Shulman (2005a), who was involved in a decade-long Carnegie Institute study of professions, said that in addition to professions having a recognisable combination of skills, practice and ethics, professions were defined by “conditions of inherent and unavoidable uncertainty” (p. 18). The unpredictable nature of professional work invests it necessarily with levels of autonomy and privilege, in exchange for an investment of time and energy that exceeds that of simple hire of labour. A profession, in both a Weberian and the popular sense, implies more than labour hire: it includes a dimension of service to humanity (Shulman, 2005b). Shulman (2005a) suggests that a genuine professional does not “merely practice: he or she performs with a sense of personal and social responsibility … they must be characterised by integrity, by a commitment to responsible, ethical service” (p. 19). Most professionals are autonomous decision-makers, although there is a sense in which peers exercise some moderation through professional registration and organisations. Lipsky’s (1980) “street-level bureaucrat” (see 2.2.5) in welfare work, was born out of the understanding that flexibility, spontaneity and unusual levels of engagement, characterised the work.

Despite the unpredictable nature of welfare work, it does not have the signature pedagogy of a profession (Shulman, 2005b), a single educational profile that would provide the foundations of shared ethics, and a single moderating association. Frontline welfare workers are a disparate group. Although social workers are found in large numbers on the frontline, their professional education, ethics and association are not the dominant discourse (see 2.2.4).

8.2.2 Supervision and the predictable losses of privilege

Many of the privileges that have vanished for frontline welfare workers, and the cost of those losses in terms of worker satisfaction, were predicted (see 2.2.5). There is less participation in agency processes and greater accountability for time, outcomes, increased expectation of justifying their practice to a larger audience, and the loss of autonomy (Harlow, 2004; Healy, 2004; McDonald, 1999a; Munro, 2004). The fact that limits to practice were predicted for the
Sector does not mean it was clearly communicated to long term workers. Frontline workers who misunderstood the changed status of their role might have imagined the veracity of their own work was being questioned. Workers who were unhappy with changed status and lost freedom might have seen it as limiting the way they preferred to practice. Often, the disparity between expectations and new realities were seen as values conflicts.

The changes in agencies that were made necessary by welfare reform have reduced the privileges, but many women still have a professional commitment and sense of responsibility to their work. Munro (2004) saw that social work training put a high value on empathy and intuition, and the relational emphasis did not easily lend itself to accountability and practice grounded in theory. A report prepared for the Burnside agency in New South Wales (Edwards & Wearing, 2003) emphasised that practice in cases of child abuse and neglect could not be rule-bound, and that workers needed to spontaneously utilise their own knowledge and experience. However, this level of integrity was also supported by professional supervision and an expectation that practice would be well informed and theoretically defensible.

In my research there was evidence of confusion about the purpose and type of supervision that was appropriate. This was complicated by the vast difference in workers’ roles, responsibilities and resources across the different types of programs and non-profits. It was at the intersection of issues of supervision and education for frontline work that claims of professional status for frontline workers could be called into question.

8.2.3 The purpose and preferences of professional supervision

Social workers wanted supervision, and they expected to get it from a psychologist, a clinical social worker or at least someone from their own discipline. Social workers saw supervision as an opportunity to get a fresh perspective on their work, support for their own emotional issues, and to consider different theoretical perspectives as part of their continuous learning. Supervision was a significant issue for most frontline workers, but the distinctions between the expectations of those with social work training, and those with other kinds of training, was clear.

_I see my line manager about once a month or so and that has really just become administrative. And then we have a clinical social worker, a different one, come to our team meeting ... those fresh eyes, that external person who is not caught up in the day to day issues, helps you take stock of the big picture_ – Giselle.
Managers were aware that social workers wanted to be supervised by someone from their own discipline, but some thought the preference was only an emphasis of tertiary education. All the same, agencies wanted to support workers adequately. The lack of distinction between discipline types in supervision was made clear when the manager of the agency with the largest budget spoke of supervision as follows:

*It’s not just social workers, it’s all staff have supervision, everyone gets supervision. There is a mixture of line management supervision which includes planned reviews and that sort of thing and ... but, we also provide clinical external supervision for the direct care staff, yes. Er, what we usually use is people with a knowledge and understanding of the agency’s target group ... yes, people who have got some, erm, qualifications in similar or clinical type work. We have the ability to get it ... for people if they are struggling ... if there is a critical incident, whatever.* – M2.

Another manager made it clear that her agency expected workers to explain and theoretically justify their practice. Supervision was as much quality control as worker support and professional development. In those agencies that could afford to create a high threshold for recruitment, there were also high expectations in providing quality supervision:

*Child protection and early intervention, there is an expectation that they would present their work in their consultancy, we have external consultants, they would present a family, weekly or three monthly, there was an expectation that they would be able to talk coherently in defence of their work. They all have fortnightly supervision with their managers. Uh, clinical supervision, there is a sense people need to discuss their work ... the work of the service, so it would be normal that everyone has a role to play in supporting families. Our service is quite holistic so they [family] might have a caseworker and they may attend [named program]. Hence the work we all do here is able to be scrutinised and assessed.* – M5.

Although the literature tended to point to poor supervision in burn-out and attrition, the stories of frontline workers in my study did not always support this. Tilly, who described herself as
totally burned-out, reported excellent professional supervision that aligned with her social work expectations:

_We had individual supervision monthly with the coordinator of our program but we also had access to external supervision because our supervisor was not social work trained. That was really good, and then in our weekly team, meetings they were structured and we talked about our successes and challenges. So those kinds of things were built in ... they do work hard to make sure people are de-briefed._ – Tilly.

Supervision was not a high priority for Jill, who had strategised her way through clinical burn-out. Jill believed that self-reflection on her work, and her education, made her overly cautious. She did not feel competent to describe her work theoretically, despite the degree studies she had completed. She had received line management from a sympathetic supervisor, and was not looking for either more clinical supervision or more education.

_I decided to go back to school when I was about 26. After that [doing a degree] I did training in challenging behaviours, disabilities, adoption work, foster care training. I found the training in some ways was, er, um, er, a bit debilitating, because they didn’t ... as practitioners we make professional judgements and sometimes that means taking risks, and now, once you get the training, you know about legalities, the training, particularly the legal training, you take more care of yourself, you think, I must watch my backside on this, so you’re a bit more cautious. From the years of working as a foster carer I was using eclectic practice, and when I got to university they wanted me to plot it all out and say I used this theory and this theory. I knew it but couldn’t put a name to it ... I knew where to focus but it was based on experience, where I’d think, well, that’s not working._ – Jill.

Some frontline workers were offered line-management, and sometimes felt intimated by it. Kate, who had tended to move between direct care and frontline work, had not received supervision for 17 years. While in a supervised position, before de-institutionalisation of
care, she had seen a psychologist weekly, and thought of it as a support mechanism for managing a group home. In regard to supervisory support in later roles, she said:

Well you know, staff meetings will be, um, theoretically in relation to a particular child, which we will all have input about, but ... it will be ignored or overlooked or not taken on board because of the cost. – Kate.

When Kate began studying for a degree, she was introduced to the concept of clinical supervision in counselling, a subject in which she failed despite long experience as an untrained youth counsellor. She still had an unclear concept of the role of supervision and she was not confident to speak about herself or her work.

I did feel confronted by the supervision aspect. – Kate.

Others without social work training also felt intimidated or confronted by supervision.

um, I feel a bit hindered by the management there ... I feel I should visit more often and my manager will say no, you shouldn’t be doing that, and what’s wrong with the situation, and I will say I think I need to visit them more often because the placement needs to be supported, the carer needs that amount of support, that’s how it is, but um, that’s not ... if you want to do anything that stretches the normal way of doing things, that’s not very well accepted. I don’t know what it’s about, really. I don’t know whether it’s because in my position I don’t have a social work degree. I sometimes think management thinks, oh well, she doesn’t really have, well, may not having trust in me yet to make those kinds of decisions – Alex.

In Alex’s case, supervision by line management did not explain, justify or guide her future practice, but merely limited the present and undermined her confidence. In these abstracts it is evident from the diversity of training that a one-size-fits-all approach to supervision is not possible. For those without formal training for the role, supervision becomes professional development. Frontline children’s welfare work is not unified in the way of professions. Shulman (2005b) identifies “nurseries” of professionals that are shaped for practice. The lack of shared understandings was made clear by Dana’s observation:

... a lot of staff we get are either welfare or early childhood trained and um, if you get a welfare person they are really great because
They have an understanding of family issues, domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues ... and if you get an early childhood person well they have ... child development and behaviour management, but they’re been trained to different age groups. That’s where a lot of the turnover is – Dana.

8.2.4 Privileges lost for the sake of child protection

Some of the privileges of autonomy have been reduced because of the alarming social failures in child protection, and appalling outcomes in OOHC. In Britain and in some areas of Australia, social work practices are almost protocol-driven, a trend which should not be interpreted as a judgement on workers integrity given the recent history of child abuse and neglect in developed nations29. Guided practice is an approach to social work particularly as it relates to substitute care, aimed at redressing the failures of the past (Tregeagle & Treleaven, 2006; Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). Using evidence-based guidelines, workers in OOHC care lead in planning the care of a child, and accountability is operationalised through a package of administrative tools that aim to ensure consistency of care for a child in care.

In describing the need to remake social work, Garrett (2003) gave an exhaustive description of the conditions in the UK which stood behind the current crisis in recruitment and retention of social workers. Garrett’s critique of one of the tools of guided practice, LAC, discussed the kinds of social attitudes that were embodied in its tools, although not explicitly stated: the expectation that young people would be adequately groomed for employment, and that “crimo-genic proclivities of the children of the unemployed and working poor are deleted, regulated and contained” (p. 36). In calling for a closer analysis of the underlying discourses of LAC, he argued that one of the tools of the package, known as AARs30 have a “normative and oppressive potential” to shape a child, according to the values and world-view of the package designers (p. 32). He also pointed to the social controls embedded in the program, the potential to track, screen and profile children for delinquency. Garrett saw increasing control as inevitable: social work with children was becoming “a heavily prescribed activity”29

29 The most notorious of these deaths occurred despite the involvement of five social service agencies, two hospitals, a general practice, the police, and schools, in the life of a child who lived in England for only 308 days (Laming, 2002). Victoria Climbie, an eight year old, was tortured, beaten, and cruelly neglected throughout the months leading up to her death, while authorities were investigating tip-offs concerning her abuse. No individual or agency was the prime advocate for the child. This led to a statutory enquiry, and the prosecution of one social worker throughout the high profile case. Similar child deaths have led to intense political involvement in child protection in Australia (Scott, Lindsay, & Jacksun, 1995).

30 Action and Assessment Records (AARs), are used by local authorities to focus on outcomes. The documents track the development of seven aspects of a child’s life: identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioral development, self-care skills.
and “increasingly dominated by centrally devised schedules,” although it should be resisted because it is often aimed at producing “docile social technicians and compliant users of services” (p. 140). While Garrett expected social workers to embrace change, and be “constructively engaged” with the change agenda, they should remain critical and never passive or sentimental. Many of these criticisms were echoed in the Australian debate (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004).

In Australia, there is the same danger that frontline children’s welfare workers will impose the expectations of a middle-class childhood on poor clients, or allow parental responses to intervention to influence assessments of the family and child safety (Fernandez, 1996). The role of adequate professional supervision in such vulnerable and volatile situations is clear. The public exposure of child welfare failures in modern societies have contributed to the ambiguous status of frontline welfare workers. However, the roles will remain ambiguous unless the training and supervision needs are also made cohesive.

### 8.3 Subtle losses and the service delivery focus

A service delivery focus was identified in the early paucity management (Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2001) studies as a known feature of frontline welfare work, and it was evident in my research. Effectively, workers gave a relational priority to the client and their immediate needs, sometimes simply because other parts of the work had become unstable, unpredictable, and less satisfying. Although some workers felt frustrated by the lack of holistic practice, they blamed their agencies and interpreted the failures as values based rather than policy driven. A service delivery focus can become the moral high ground that eclipses concerns with many other aspects of an agency’s operations, such as teams and budgets, as was evident in Chapter 5 (see 5.3.1). However, it may also be an outworking of welfare reform and the way it values quantifiable outputs. Despite the complexity of describing in quantitative terms the value of relational work, the need to do so propels workers and their managers to work with those people and in those situations that will effectively answer the demands of audit. In this way, frontline welfare work becomes more occupational than professional, as workers are further detached from other important agency processes.

#### 8.3.1 The loss of the advocacy role

Advocacy is a significant activity that has been compromised by welfare reform. The impact of reform on systemic social advocacy has been the topic of some large research projects and publications that explore the nuances of the funding relationship between government and
non-profits (Onyx, Dalton, Melville, Casey, & Banks, 2007). Most research is concerned with the systemic level of advocacy, between non-profit agencies and government (Maddison, Denniss, & Hamilton, 2004; Mendes, 2004). As it becomes increasingly difficult for service-providers to oppose the policies of their funding-source, the loss of the capacity for advocacy is equally an erosion point for frontline workers. For some workers, lost opportunities to advocate for their clients represented lost effectiveness and lost professionalism.

In my research, most workers would advocate for clients within their agencies, but not beyond (see 5.3). Advocacy on behalf of individual clients was both possible and necessary within larger organisations that were developing business enterprise income streams, where people working in the new layers of management lacked a welfare perspective. However, casualised workers were angered by injustices, but kept silent for the sake of their jobs. Workers with social work training regarded advocacy as part of their social justice agenda, and they expressed frustration at the decreasing opportunities to participate.

Advocacy that impinged on social policy was handled by management, which wanted to negotiate without compromising their role as partners of a government they might prefer to criticise. Advocacy by frontliners tended to parallel service delivery, dealing with the immediate, urgent and local, because threats to funding longevity discouraged concern with entrenched community issues or even internal policy discussions. Without an advocacy or social justice role, frontline work becomes more occupational in its status.

8.3.2 The effect of qualifications on participation

Participation in organisational processes and autonomy were more likely to be experienced at middle-management level or above, as demonstrated in the focus group discussions in Chapter Six. The main difference between middle managers and frontline workers was not qualifications but client-contact. The focus group participants had all been frontline workers but not all of them had furthered their education for new roles. The presence of some professional privilege at middle-management level, attached to roles rather than other factors, tends to strengthen my argument that the loss of frontline autonomy represents a necessary deprofessionalisation due to the nature of the work.

Opportunities for a more professional practice were also shaped by organisational size. Some organisations had defined role responsibilities around the education of those they recruited. Larger agencies recruited graduate social workers with sufficient skills to allow management of budgets and programs to be devolved as close as possible to the frontline, in order to both control the costs and increase the workers’ control over their own program areas. One
manager used the language of Lipsky (1980) to describe his staff as “typical street level bureaucrats”. Nonetheless, he had explained that these were graduates in middle management roles whose capacity to manage large budgets and complex structures was the reason for their appointment.

Some large agencies provided staff support through professional accountability, peer support and teamwork models. Smaller agencies had managers who were generalists, with skills that could spontaneously respond to the shifting needs of the clientele and staff. The autonomy of the smaller agencies was also at risk in consortiums, but the larger lead agencies also carried the administrative burden and risks of trying to unify divergent cultures.

It is shifting the risk away from government to the Sector itself. So instead of the government getting into problems about why it has funded half a dozen of these little agencies and not others, it is basically saying, you guys sort yourself out into a consortium group ... ah yes, so it is forcing a new level of administration – M1.

It was also risk that impacted agency-level autonomy in decision-making over child clients. This situation of split decision-making in which DoCS was final arbiter was a source of frustration to frontline workers that managers recognised (see 5.4).

The agency is left carrying any risk [financial] if things change ... and the risk is that the Department says, your case, your problem. We don’t have the financial resources that DoCS does. It might get a slap over the wrist for overrunning its budget by $20 million but they still get paid. That’s just one example of how, whilst at our agency we are able to give quite a lot of freedom to our professional staff, there are those structural constraints – M1.

One manager thought the expectations of participation and autonomy were exaggerated:

Um, ah I think some people come into our organisation thinking it’s going to be a lot more cooperative type of model, but it isn’t, it’s a management model. I think it always was so, and I think there is some rose coloured glasses stuff that goes on about the past. – M3.
8.3.3 A proportional relationship in practice
The impact of government policy on practice was sometimes underestimated by frontline workers. The influence of so many stakeholders made autonomous professionalism impossible, and perhaps not desirable. It was the point at which managers felt the loss of power, and frontliners wanted to bend the rules, because interpretations of need varied. Senior managers tended to blame government’s welfare reforms for the difficulty in conducting a proportional or appropriate relationship with a client that avoided dependency.

_There has been huge changes around the attitude of government to structural causes of poverty, in many ways putting pressure on us to manage people, in many ways there’s elements of case management that could be improved, make sure everyone is on the same wavelength, work to make it more structured. I think it’s a bit overstated … I worry about the people I believe who are still out there who are well intentioned but what they do is they create dependency. And they stay involved longer because it also meets their needs. I don’t disagree that with some clients you are there for a lifetime. They don’t have anyone, some of them. They were made wards at a young age._ – M2.

The complexities of the DoCS policy of split decision-making were also named by managers as a source of relational anxiety (see 5.4). Although a non-profit agency worker might be best acquainted with a family or child client, the final decision rested with DoCS, and this situation seemed biased by the financial relationship.

_In Australia [this is a] split between who’s got the child and who’s doing the decision-making … all the non-government agency is meant to do is make a placement … totally off the planet as far as we are concerned because unless you are involved with the child on a day to day basis and know the child really well, how can you make decisions about them?_ – M4

This tends to supports Gibbs’ (2001) assertion that there is a need for reflective supervision, that frontline supervision needs to be refocused in the light of adult learning theory that also recognises the emotional cost of the work. After seeking affirmation for some of my developing ideas, one manager emailed me in capital letters to insist that adequate, intense, vigilant and managerial supervision was the only answer to support workers and ameliorate
stress. At the same time, many of my students were describing recent performance evaluations, wanting an explanation for how these could be considered a support strategy for workers.

8.4 Conclusion

Government policy change has driven many aspects of the increasing controls and loss of professional integrity that were a source of distress for welfare workers in my research. Their agencies were compelled to become more diverse in fund-seeking activity, more accountable, more efficient, and more vigilant in response to social concern about child protection. The small, flexible, participatory, inclusive non-profit, is a vanishing entity. It was disturbing that workers had such a poor understanding of the impact of reform on their own work, because it personalised too many of the issues. “Yet men [sic] do not define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction” (Wright Mills, [1959] 2000, p. 3).

Alienation, by which I mean the loss of a sense of belonging and participation, was evident in the moral distress of some workers. Alienation is evidenced by worker mobility within the Sector, the focus on clients in service delivery rather than agency or team, and worker attitudes that are critical and cynical of agency standards. Workers expressed loyalty to the Sector or clients, or the work of child protection and welfare. The increasing distance of workers from the information and decision making processes, doubtless erodes their sense of influence and participation.

Cynical expressions of isolation, distrust and contempt expressed by workers were given verbatim in the previous chapters. Alienation has occurred at a number of levels in the Sector. There has been professional alienation through the blending of roles and status and the blurring of distinctive practice (McDonald, 1999a). The erosion of social work as a profession, its marginalisation and loss of autonomy following welfare reforms, and public criticism and contempt in relation to child protection failures has been well described (Dominelli, 1996; Gibbs, 2001; Healy, 2004). This points to a need for a more cohesive child welfare/child protection workforce that can validate the possibilities for good practice, articulate the limitations, and share an educational agenda that will ultimately enhance professional status through a shared discourse. Such cohesion might be achieved through communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), but in the final and concluding chapter I suggest that this community for non-profits should have a moral agenda at its heart. Values were

31 “Awful” “Yuk” “Embarrassing” – they are young enough to limit their vocabulary
regarded as the driving force of non-profits historically, yet without a moral community that can define its values and purpose in the new economic and welfare environment, a key to workplace ecology will be lost.
Chapter Nine - Judgement calls that dwarf us all: How workers might retrieve the enchanted world of work where there is the hope of making a difference
9.1 Introduction

It is late 2008, and as I write this chapter strident newspaper headlines (Karvela & Robinson, 2008; Rehn & Watts, 2008) demonstrate that the issues I have raised are still critical. Child protection crises dominate news commentary this week. There is still a public demand that complex human failures of a relational and emotional type be resolved in a simple cost efficient and protocol-driven manner. There is still an expectation that values driven workers capable of responding compassionately to human failure, can be recruited to perform relational work in a Weberian iron-cage of bureaucracy. This thesis shows that one human cost in welfare reform is moral confusion that hinders the work of those committed to children’s welfare. This thesis also suggests answers can be found by directly addressing the moral dimension that motivates frontline workers. Issues of values and morality are not too esoteric for consideration if they are resolved by those who are motivated by them.

In this chapter I will conclude by showing how the concept of moral community that I have developed can become a site for the construction of the response I have named as moral proportion to support frontline welfare workers. I suggest moral distress, which is the label I have used to describe the condition of stressed welfare workers, may be ameliorated if moral issues are directly addressed in a professional moral community. The strategy of making an altruism audit, which I described in this thesis, to persevere in frontline work while protecting personal interests, also suggests itself as part of the agenda for a professional moral community.

9.1.1 The significance of this thesis

In this thesis workers spoke about their driving values, which is significant because workers’ voices do not make headlines, but their actions are so severely publicly scrutinised. The critical social theory of my methodology (Habermas, 1984, 1985) encouraged the expression of values and emotions from frontline workers, and the Gadamerian ([1960] 1989) hermeneutical approach ensured that my methods included other textured perspectives, such as the middle and senior managers of the agencies, against the backdrop of the literature. This approach revealed the paradoxical environment in which children’s welfare work is performed. Through my engagement with Weber ([1904]1930) I retrieved and tested old sociological ideas about the role of bureaucracies and belief systems. Through contemporary literature I showed that non-profit organisations were traditionally motivated by moral values, and that moral motivation is still significant to individuals in the secularised corporate workplace. In describing the moral distress of some frontline workers, I also revealed the
strategy of altruism audit which enabled others to remain in the sector. I revealed the challenging moral volatility of child protection issues and the role of welfare reform in the diminishing moral distinctiveness of the non-profit children’s welfare agencies. I have shown the lack of a supportive moral community for frontline workers, and in this chapter I will show the need to recreate that community in a professional context where workers might develop their own responses of moral proportion to the critical issues of staying on the frontline in hostile times.

The relevance of this thesis was emphasised afresh as I wrote this conclusion because the most recent series of child deaths through the apparent abuse and neglect of parents, led to more blame and criticism of the frontline workers. These newspaper crusades fuel the moral distress of workers and illustrate the lack of a supportive moral community. While the media and the public subsume the values of child protection, they fail to affirm the frontline workers who actually attempt to represent those values in the most personally intense way. There is no public recognition that those on the frontline are struggling to persuade an entire sector of the community that little children are indeed a sacred trust (Wild & Anderson, 2007). The urgent need for frontline workers is canvassed in newspaper headlines, but little consideration is given to the stressful challenges of working with families who seem to be an affront to public sensitivities. No consideration is given to the poor resourcing, the vigilance, accountability and competition in the Sector that intensifies the difficulty of frontline work. Headlines cannot convey the images, smells and fears that frontline workers take away from dysfunctional family situations. Headlines also fail to define the gap between the values of the workers and their clients, as though good parenting can be simply policed without the education of parental hearts. Public blame when combined with the vigilance of agencies, robs workers of any sense of belonging to the moral mainstream: they are regarded as culpable. As I have shown, the values that enable women to go into extreme frontline situations are not validated. The newspaper headlines emphasise the isolation and vulnerability of workers who are expected to fix those families who finish up on the front page. This lack of moral proportion in public blaming also serves to demonstrate the importance of my research. In this chapter I will show how the search for moral proportion among frontline workers must be the agenda for a moral community to affirm and support workers through the moral distress of their work. The need for a moral community independent of the public arena is illustrated in the contemporary ugliness and confusion of values when there are child protection failures in Australia.
9.1.2 Child deaths in the headlines

This week seven children died and another six were taken into care as a result of dramatic, public tragedies, some only fifteen minutes from my quiet rural home. Television news and current affairs programs are repeatedly screening explicit images of decaying living conditions at two state housing sites. We are told that this should have signalled the incipient emotional disintegration of two mothers in two different states. Both women seemed to have an abundance of children, but poverty and disorganisation overwhelmed every other aspect of their lives. One woman had noticed that her twin babies were dead in their cot, but failed to act. Her partner, charged with murder, admitted he had forgotten to feed them. Another woman had not noticed that one of her half dozen children was collapsing into a coma through malnutrition. She has also been charged with culpability, the children removed, hospitalised, fostered.

On the nightly news cameras scan the mountains of stinking trash. While the public wonder why the government and its agents failed to act, the lack of enquiry, action or complaint by neighbours and friends is disturbing to the media. Did no one wonder what was happening to the tribes of children sleeping beyond the veranda groaning under broken beds and discarded blankets? Did no one look into the garden that grew rags and cardboard boxes, where trees bloomed with tin cans and old milk cartons, and mangy dogs licked at hungry children. There is an implication that dirt and disorganisation are reliable predictors of poor parenting. The truth is that in certain postcodes, certain kinds of housing, certain kinds of family, produce public disregard. The newspapers (Rehn & Watts, 2008) announced a new national strategy in response to the child deaths, to ensure improved communication and better leadership for child protection authorities.

In the second week of public alarm over child protection, the murder of two small children in the far West of NSW was harder to categorise, because it occurred behind a picket fence. The age and health of the accused led newspapers to consider whether it was a mental health problem. It was a well hidden middle-class child care crisis where an elderly woman already caring for a husband with dementia was also responsible for the pre-school aged children of her single-parent daughter, who worked fulltime. Three children killed in a custody dispute murder-suicide was, however, a case in which some newspapers felt the intervention of DoCS could have helped. DoCS had not received any reports of domestic violence in relation to the household, although it seems that others knew. A half page was devoted to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining frontline children’s welfare workers, the current 15 per cent.

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32 Daily Telegraph July 1, 2008.
vacancy rate at DoCS, and the dearth of workers in the Western suburbs. The fact that the vacancy rate was also tied to a new recruitment campaign to increase the total workforce was mentioned late in the piece.

As alarm over child deaths continued, the Weekend Australian (Karvela & Robinson, 2008, p. 6) described government intervention in poor Indigenous communities, particularly the scheme to deprive families of welfare payments to coerce children into school. In the editorial (p. 18) welfare deprivation was described as income management. On the front page the scheme was described as a quarantine to guarantee money was spent on necessities. The need for what the editorialist called paternalism was tied to protecting children against binge drinking and domestic violence. The fact that the policies would be applied to non Indigenous families was given a fleeting mention.

In a single week the nation’s child protection concerns demonstrated the magnitude of the social problems that now confront those who must make good choices on behalf of poor or disorganised people. The newspapers exposed the Indigenous underclass whose existence is often denied or decried. The programs and policies were couched in the language of service to those who made poor choices for themselves. The distance between Canberra and the threshold of chaotic homes, is very great. It is on the thresholds that frontline children’s welfare workers make decisions on behalf of us all: not entirely isolated, because other community service providers intersect at these tragedies. Decision making in such confronting circumstances, has profound consequences.

In the five years that I have been working on this thesis, there have been many occasions when child protection crises have demanded headlines. Significant programs, reports and policy changes (Wild & Anderson, 2007) have chiselled away at many truly awful situations. Yet the deeper issues of complex generational, geographical and cultural patterns largely remain. The loss of social empathy and the failure to recognise, react, and report human tragedy appears to be an increasing social attitude. It is possible that the crass disengagement of the majority has intensified the passion of a few.

9.2 How we learned to ignore the needs of others

Frontline children’s welfare work is only one thread in the fabric of social change fashioned by welfare reform in Australia. The work is performed at the bottom end of a cleavage that opened up between welfare recipients and tax payers when Australia’s welfare system adjusted its focus to the lowest socio-economic groups (Saunders, 2002). Although welfare
reform was intended to create a more participatory and independent community, championing enterprise and personal responsibility, there were subtle ramifications for workers through shifting public opinion. Welfare reform as it was represented in the media led to the changing status of clients that co-incided with other changing signals and symbols. Workers were called to higher levels of efficiency in resource poor agencies, and felt blamed for broad social failure to protect children. The symbols and signals of what it meant to do good work in the world, changed. There were also traps of litigation, prosecution and risk, because children’s welfare work occurred in an arena of moral vigilance and alarm.

Responsibility for social ills was reduced by policy from structural concerns to individual pathology, and the result was increased judgementalism (Saunders, 2002, 2005). Judgementalism of workers towards clients was named by frontline workers and their managers, as the site of values conflict and moral distress (see Chapter Five). If welfare workers, some of whom were trained to social justice values, joined the social shaming stance it was a strong indicator that familiar moral markers had moved, creating uncertainty about the all-important values of the Sector. It was also evident that workers personalised responsibility. To efficiently provide children’s welfare services, non-profit agencies require a stable workforce recruited on the basis of disposition (Howe, 1997), that will work for a relatively low wage by comparison to similar workers in the government sector. In other words, a uniquely motivated workforce of low-paid women is imperative in an arena that is losing its unique motivations. The need for such workers is strengthened by the abdication of responsibility by the wider community as it follows the government’s lead.

9.2.1 How some women take too much responsibility

While I could imply that values uncertainty among frontline workers emanates from the reform process that has shaped attitudes through labelling (Mendes, 1997; Saunders, 2005; Swan, 2005) I do not have research evidence of earlier value systems that supported workers, apart from the anecdotal accounts of faith-based work. There is, however, evidence that the characteristics of non-profits was once supportive and attractive to workers who were willing to exchange cash benefits for good work ecology (Wagner, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001). There is also evidence of the loss of social work values and professionalism (2.2.4), poor communication of policy or change management, variable levels of professional supervision, as well as vast evidence of the importance of work ecology in supporting those on the stressful coalface of child protection work (2.2.1 – 2.2.7). In other words, work culture became less supportive through the rapid change pressures of welfare reform.
In developing the theme moral distress I had a theoretical and conceptual idea that found resonance with teachers, practitioners and academics. I felt I could use moral distress to describe a phenomenon of lost direction and lost meaning in frontline welfare work, and also as a tool to describe factors that might enhance workplace ecology. In this concluding chapter I suggest that a deliberate moral community of practice answers the need for validation, direction and support for frontline welfare work. Such a deliberate community for workers who trade on their emotions and character, would enable them to establish shared value symbols of what it means to do good in the world, within the limitations of legitimate social and political constraints.

More than 20 years ago there were calls for the development of an ethic of care, which despite its feminised perspective of care-giving (see 2.2.3) pointed to the need to consider emotional work in a different moral and ethical light (Gilligan, 1982). There is well researched work on emotional labour as an unusually stressful contribution of self to one’s work (Hochschild, 1983). My work borrows and builds on earlier concepts, contributing the concept of moral distress to frontline welfare work. I suggest that a moral community would signpost the ethical boundaries of self-giving, and that moral proportion represents the set of values that can be constructed within such a community. The concept of community recognises that not all agencies are able to adequately support workers in the moral decision-making dimension of their work through professional supervision, and not all workers are trained, or willing, to utilise supervision. Workers, who need to protect their jobs, also need to hide their distress. A community of practice (Wenger, 1998) also recognises the lack of educational cohesion among frontline workers, the absence of a single occupational descriptor, association or set of ethics.

The complexity of managing an emotional investment, the potential for manipulation of workers and clients when human need and human emotions collide, the social stigmatising of new under classes, social and political pressure on the arena of child protection, call for an integrated and intelligent community driven by the agenda of its own members. I am not confident that new training programs can fill this space. Tools of self-management, care and protection, are offered in most programs, but moral distress can occur later in careers and in those people who have previously seemed to cope well in their work (see 5.2). However, my research was limited in its approach to the issues of education. I did not canvass the suitability of qualifications for child protection, and I was constantly aware that there is no national accreditation of workers.
9.3 How the lack of moral symbols created confusion

The need for integrity in values motivation is an important contribution to understanding how workers are lost or retained, and how agencies need to be more effective in both the expression and enactment of their mission. Many issues raised by workers were located in the realm of values, although in more certain times, the same issues may have been seen as concerns of policy and practice. The themes moral distress and altruism audit, revealed the destabilising influence of welfare reform and culture change for frontline children’s welfare workers. Moral distress led to mobility within the Sector and attrition; the altruism audit created mobility within the Sector, and well as upward mobility away from the frontline. I linked these phenomena to the loss of moral community (Allahyari, 2000) through the erosion of values-based distinctiveness of the Sector itself. There were also issues of poor communication or poor change management, lost status, and erratic patterns of recruitment and supervision that made children’s welfare work an isolating occupation, which I characterised as alienation (see 8.4).

As children’s welfare work lacks the cohesion of a profession and does not share an educational base, workers depended on their agencies to explain how the larger social trends were impacting their work, and to provide supervision that would also be a form of de-briefing, emotional support and moral direction. Managers conceded that this was difficult to achieve (see 6.2.5). Without adequate support and information, workers personalised failures in service delivery, and developed a sense of personal responsibility for poor client outcomes. This was complicated by workers who wanted more autonomous work practice, not achievable in the current climate of justifiable public alarm in the field of child protection.

Moral distress and altruism audits were validating phenomena for workers trying to relocate the familiar landmarks named values. Values as culturally embedded and learned signals of what is good in the world have changed at every level, because people who were once an object of compassion needing support are now a target for the disincentives of the welfare system.

The loss of symbols of virtue tended to strike at some workers’ sense of self, but others made an audit of their altruism to achieve balance between their work roles and personal needs.

9.3.1 How altruism audits serve in evaluation

The elements of an altruism audit that I felt I observed in the transitioning workers (see Chapter Six) such as shifting loyalties away from clients, a pragmatic focus on family and
personal needs, an analysis of one’s need for influence, decision-making about levels of tolerance, could equally be subsumed by Wuthnow’s (1991) idea of the emotional distance achieved by distinguishing between a work role, and one’s core of identity or personality. The lack of distance was evident among those who wanted to remain on the frontline. Committed frontline workers did not want to rationalise on their own behalf, even when their programs were de-funded, they were burned out or sacked (see Jill and Joan in Chapter Five). I characterised their responses within a Weberian framework as values intuitive rationalism (see 2.3.6), driven by an internal logic focused on the values outcome rather than the gains of a rationalised society such as consumer goods or prestige. They did conflate role and identity, integrity was a key issue because action at work said something about who they were. There were people who suffered moral distress who would not make a balance sheet of their altruistic efforts and make a decision on behalf of self-protection or personal advancement, because they operated from a deeper sense of purpose.

Altruism audit represents a rational approach for workers willing and able to create emotional distance from their work. However, the desirability of creating emotional distance and the limits to such a strategy for frontline workers have been mentioned in research (Omar, 2003). Some elements, such as shifting relational loyalties, may ultimately disqualify workers or limit their capacity to form constructive client relationships (see 2.2.2). From this perspective, altruism audit is limited in its use for frontline workers who want to persevere in their current roles. However, many workers would probably benefit from the knowledge that altruism can be audited within the limits of an organisation and policy, and that the choice to perform altruistic work, should not imply unconditional self-sacrifice. Altruism audit has the potential to become an ethical tool to empower workers choices for their own future, to liberate them from a false sense of responsibility or loyalty to clients which tend to diminish the significance of other roles in the Sector.

Perhaps more importantly, I used the concept of an altruism audit in developing the idea moral proportion (see 9.3). Moral proportion was what workers were seeking as they made an audit of their altruism. I felt that by naming moral proportion, workers would have a key to evaluating their success or effectiveness within the limits of social policy and social attitudes. In other words, moral proportion itself would become a key value. The concept of moral proportion is a significant contribution to the development of a fresh values focus for non-profit organisations that will provide the content for meaningful communication of child welfare values within consortiums of agencies that come from various belief-systems.
9.3.2 Why women are committed to frontline work

The themes I developed showed the strength of commitment to the work, but that work commitment was not esoteric. Although I engaged with Reagh’s (1994) idea of epiphanies (see 2.2.6) there was little evidence of defining experiences in personal history that influenced the work choices of participants in my research. Moreover, the Weberian concepts of vocation were not evident: they were not looking for charismatic leadership or institutional charisma (see 2.3.6). What was overwhelmingly evident was that frontline children’s welfare workers in my project were committed to the work of child protection and care itself. This concurs with research among veteran child protection workers in the US (Anderson, 2000). I am not suggesting a commitment to children per se, or any kind of gender-specific attachment to children, but rather the kind of straightforward concern for other human beings that has become unusual, expressed in their desire to do good work in the world.

The mobility of my participants within the Sector demonstrated the diminishing influence of agency mission, vision or values. The absence of religious ideation demonstrated the diminishing influence of faith or denominations that were once significant in the Sector. Workers in this study did not raise the issues of welfare reform, and although they noted changes in their own agency, they did not speak of the loss of their work culture as part of a wider trend. Frontline women workers did not mention that social approval of their clients was diminishing, although they were aware of media scrutiny in child protection, and blame, and particularly intolerance towards youth. Workers knew that although not all child welfare problems occurred among welfare-recipient families, the social perception is that the issues of poverty, drugs, unemployment, single-parents, child abuse and neglect, coalesce. Frontline welfare work functions in that web of both social attitudinal change, and social policy change, yet workers were inclined to personalise responsibility and over estimate their own capacity to bring change. The welfare reform discourses that pathologise individuals and disregard structural pressures seem to have been internalised by the workers, who assume they can fix complex social problems, on a client by client basis. Their distress demonstrates the need for clarity of values in knowing who is responsible and what is possible within real limitations.

9.3.3 How other moral meanings disenchant the world of work

Moral meaning is integral to good workplace ecology. The concept of what it means to do good in the world has been redefined in all kinds of work ventures that are re creating themselves as moral communities invested with shared virtues (du Gay, 1996). If the sense of moral community and moral self can be used manipulatively in recruitment and corporate motivation, it can also reduce the worth of genuinely self-sacrificial work. High wages,
strong sales records and the capacity to own consumer status items, may tend to diminish work that does not provide social symbols of success. Using the words of Ritzer’s (2005) book title drawn from Weberian thought, to invest occupations of consumerism with special moral meaning would seem like a cynical attempt at “enchainting a disenchanted world.” Children’s welfare work has multiplied disenchantment, because childhood itself was thought to occupy a magical realm of safety, and there is social indignation when childhood is shown to be spoiled, and the public identification of workers with failures in child protection detracts from their moral intent.

The successful use of moral motivations signifies the importance of work identities, the moral self, and the desire to have meaning and a sense of contribution through work. Disenchantment occurs not only in altruistic work that once enjoyed social significance, but in all work where the artificial workplace community thrives due to a broader loss of geographic communities. A workplace cannot be all that is implied by the word community, because its power to care for people is constrained by its economic priorities. The correlation between community and care is a clue to both the depth of disenchantment among frontline welfare workers, and the answer to be found in a new kind of community.

In an argument focused on traditional American values, Wuthnow (1996) shows that community was once a place for meaning-making through care-giving. Wuthnow (1996, p. 332) suggests that work is essential for all individuals to give a “culturally legitimate account of themselves.” Traditional sources of values, family, church and community, are now “precarious” (Wuthnow, 1996, p. 244) and dimensions of service and sacrifice once expressed through those institutions, have given way to stressful lifestyles. Wuthnow’s main concern is with consumerism and ethics because he sees work and money as sources of disillusionment precisely due to the absence of social concern. He expresses longing for lost community because: “The moral logic of caring for others was ...deeply embedded in the realities of community life.”(1996, p. 266). It is the moral logic of caring that has been eroded in Australia by competing discourses that valorise independence, socially and economically, and stigmatise the needy (Saunders, 2002). Frontline workers will need to resist parts of the welfare reform discourse to avoid absorbing the powerful social stigmatisation it offers. Part of that resistance could include a clear articulation of their own values and moral logic in children’s welfare.

Wuthnow (1996) suggests work for its own sake gets credibility from the media, which commonly represents economic pursuits as a priority to be traded-off against other obligations, such as family. Caring responsibilities are represented as impoverishing, and
there is some truth in this media representation, due to the absence of community. In Australia care-giving does compromise enterprise: it is increasingly difficult for traditional care-givers such as older women, or retirement age grandparents, to choose a care role rather than prolonging their work life, and equally hard for young couples to find time for children. The absence of a community is the result of pursuing economic independence at the behest of government policies, a trend that cannot be ignored in considering families in crisis. The moral value of work is confirmed by media, government policy, and corporations, confirming status through consumption (Ritzer, 2005). Yet the lost moral logic of community care-giving is central to structural familial crises. Society depends on professionals to do what community can no longer do, while these professionals lack the cohesive, affirming, shared value base that gave traditional communities strength of purpose.

The concept of community as a regional space is contested, and more recently it has been seen as “aggregates of people who share common activities, and/or beliefs, and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern,” (Brint, 2001, p. 8). Although the concept of community is worn thin with conceptual and structural problems, political and sociological applications, definitions and discourses, and seasons of resurgence of interest in specific aspects such as social capital theory, Brint (2001, p. 1) also suggests that the concept of community “as a symbol and aspiration...continues to resonate in public discourse.” He points to Weber’s ([1922] 1978) concept of community as an interest in the “qualities of motivation in relationship,” (2001, f.n. 2). In the community I am suggesting, moral motivation would be at the heart of a community of practice, the theory of which is familiar in many professions (Wenger, 1998), although the concept of a moral centre is new. The subject of moral motivation, values and the emptied symbols, would find a place within a newer discourse of communities of practice concerned with “power, resistance and inequality,” and “other hybrid situations and theories of risk and stigma,” (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 6). A moral community of practice would exist to affirm its own existence because the traditional sources of values affirmation no longer function adequately.

While the evocative concept of retrieving spatial or traditional community is beyond my scope, it is precisely this loss of the moral logic of caring (Wuthnow, 1996) that must be retrieved on the frontline of children’s welfare work in Australia, through moral communities of practice. The communities of practice theorised by Wenger (1998) were organisational learning constructs, intended to contextualise practice historically and socially. More recently Wenger’s model has been stretched into the discussion of semiotics in relation to power (Tusting, 2005). Tusting sees the reification of key elements through naming as essential to
any practice, and envisions the negotiation of meaning as a tool for change as well as sustaining the communities. The possibility for a community of practice constructed to explore the moral language of frontline welfare work, and the power embedded in language to stigmatise and marginalise, would be a constructive response to deal with the empty value symbols of the welfare arena post-reform.

In the absence of a professional status, without an integrated set of educational pre requisites, or a cohesive description of the role of frontline welfare worker, it is difficult for workers committed to the cause of the work itself, to find a unifying and identifying focus. If artificial self-interested communities can be erected by corporations intent on anchoring their workforces, a construction of a moral community intended to bring greater protection to children has equal validity. Children’s welfare work could be re-enchanted with its meaningful status with a value system that acts as a roadmap to practitioners.

In the absence of traditional communities, the people who are paid to care need to possess a profound conviction about their work, adequate to work against the tide of public rhetoric. This can be achieved through the kinds of communities of practice that explore the value-laden language of their work, and explore discourses used in sustaining social relations of inequality (Tusting, 2005).

**9.3.4 Why community must be created in the public domain**

The possibility of becoming a deliberate moral community of practice with shared symbols to guide good work is imperative for frontline welfare workers because they are in danger of surrendering the moral logic of caring to the discourse of welfare reform. Surrender to the discourse of reform is evident in the lack of anger and resistance to its values, the self-blame and sense of failure evident in moral distress. Frontline welfare workers may be tempted to either identify with the powerful in disciplining the recalcitrant, or identifying with an underclass in its pathologised public failure to conform to the economic demands of an entrepreneurial consumer society.

There is no blueprint for the creation of a deliberate moral community, because in the past we have depended on the signposting of social institutions with values thought to be absolute and eternal. Moral community as a deliberate construction has the opportunity to embrace values that are pragmatic and transitional in response to the changing social climate, utilising new understandings of the role of validation and community in work ecology, longevity and satisfaction. Moral community has not so far been provided for frontline children’s welfare
workers through education, because of the diverse and disparate nature of training, and because of the weak connection between espoused and enacted values by non-profits.

A sense of community and the approbation it offers now seems fundamental to good work ecology, although sadly neglected by women. Throughout history men have formed many different kinds of communities based on shared work or interests. Women may have been slower to carve out similar spaces, and the possibility of significant work taking a major role in the life of women still creates some discomfort (Wuthnow, 1991). Work subsumed so much of life for my research participants that even family intervention was open to discussion (see 6.2.1). In some instances, they saw work as life. Wuthnow (1991) named the conflation of work role and identity as a female tendency, implying a failure to create emotional distance although this argument seems specious given the anecdotal evidence of Luddites and Frameworkers (male) who died rather than lose their trades to technology. Self-sacrifice, so frequently found in frontline work, has also been named as a female failing and enemy of emancipation (Gilligan, 1982). There is an implication that women want to put in or take out of their work something that men do not. However, it is probably the apparent emotional content of relational and sacrificial work, rather than the strength of commitment to work, that discomforts some writers.

More recently self-sacrifice has been re-defined to represent a quality of service that many workers want to bring to the occupation that fills such a large part of the human lifespan. In self-sacrifice, diligent or meaningful performance of work is irrevocably bound to the identity (du Gay, 1996) or what Allahyari (2000) calls the moral self. Le Grand (2003, p. 166) suggested that excellence in the delivery of human services is tied to altruism although it is not “morally preferable” to markets that are thought to “rely upon the pursuit of knavish self-interest.” Le Grand’s argument used the romantic allegories of knights and knaves, and saw the potential for moral service-delivery and altruistic motivations in a variety of contexts that are not usually associated with selfless good deeds. A romantic view of work is not misplaced when work offers income, community and the opportunity to make a contribution in the world for such a large portion of one’s life. The world of women and care work has rarely occupied an enchanted space.

**9.3.5 Why women and care work still lack lustre**

A moral community of practice offers women the hope of moral proportion in their practice and their lives. The suspicion that women invest too much emotion in their work has been particularly tied to caring work. Unmitigated self-sacrifice is a shard of the old religious
culture, where it was a virtue to which many women aspired (O’Brien, 2005). Gilligan saw women’s altruism as “always at risk” (1982, p. 67) because it was based on pleasing others in the absence of choice. In drawing attention to women’s ways of caring, Gilligan suggested that female identity is constructed relationally, but that when stripped of its need for approval, “...the ethic of responsibility can become a self-chosen anchor of personal integrity and strength,” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 171). Gilligan’s rejection of the need for approval ignores the social construction of identity, which is linked to social approval and acceptance. However, it was 1982 when Gilligan spoke of a broad social approval for sacrificial care-giving, and she probably referred to women anchored into care-taking roles in their families. In the presence of work choices for women, and the decline in compulsion in care roles, there is a place for independently altruistic concerns in the construction of a personal identity, a place in the world, and a sense of meaning and purpose, although moral philosophers would endorse self-care and self-interest as essential to genuine benevolence (Rogers, 1997).

In an argument focused on finding a theory of women’s moral identities, Elisabeth Porter (1991) saw choice as only one dimension, and she wanted to include both rational and passionate aspects rather than seeing moral choice as divorced from feeling and living. Porter does not endorse Gilligan’s (1982) emphasis on responsibility. She does not find a tension between altruism and selfishness, and argues that responsibilities and rights need to be considered in tandem: “A person who sees moral dilemmas solely in terms of responsibility to others remains blinded in an ideal of selflessness,” (Porter, 1991, p. 160). While Porter’s words have some weight, for frontline children’s welfare workers moral dilemmas arise through the lack of opportunity to reassess their moral responsibility in the light of a new welfare culture.

Using Porter’s perspective, the presence of an altruism audit indicated that women on the frontline were able to shape a moral identity free of the old models. This represented a response of moral proportion, in which duties to oneself carry equal weight with other responsibilities.

9.4 What moral proportion can achieve for moral community

I want to suggest that the task of a moral community of practice would be to find the values of moral proportion that could guide their practice. Moral proportion implies a quality of a response appropriate to a moment in time. It could be used to modify moral distress, and I suggest it describes the objective of an altruism audit, to give significance to self regardless of the intense demands of work. I developed the idea of moral proportion to describe what I felt
workers were missing in their practice, in the culture of their agency, and in the development of their own sense of identity and purpose. The phrase moral proportion was borrowed directly from Scott Turow’s Ultimate Punishment (2003) which discussed the lack of proportion in the use of capital punishment in America. The same call for proportional responses was heard in news commentaries at the beginning of the American incursion into Iraq in 2003, and Israel’s strikes against Lebanon in 2006. In all of these instances it was implied there are commonly understood responses that can be described as proportional, acceptable, appropriate for the specific moment and circumstance. The contexts in which proportion was advocated also implied doing the least harm in the worst of circumstances. I have not found any use of the phrase moral proportion in my search of academic literature. The concept of proportion reflects on the unique human elements of any situation, and proposes that a single mandated approach, even when based on perceptions of justice, contain the seeds of injustice for another unique human situation. The concept is relative and situational. The importance of the concept is that it supplies workers with a definition of their objective and a name for a fundamental value: to act with moral proportion.

The search for an ethical base in welfare practice is not new and some dimensions of the concept of moral proportion arise from the discourse surrounding the proposed ethic of care (Brabeck, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Kittay & Meyers, 1987; Tronto, 1994) as well as Allahyari’s (2000) more recent extension of that discourse. Moral proportion is not intended to represent a new philosophy of morality, but it has developed in the shadow of philosophical discourses, such as Schneewind’s (1990) retrieval of the concept of virtue-based morality where action emanates from disposition or character that is sensitive to the public good. Such a view presumes that those who engage in moral actions have an intrinsic motivation. Moral proportion utilises the propositions that people seek work that has moral significance for them (Allahyari, 2000) or invest their work with meaning as discussed by LeGrand (2003) and du Gay (1996). Moral proportion borrows the understanding of Aristotle’s virtuous action represented by the words of Urmson (cited in Schneewind, 1990, p. 43): “the intellectual excellence of practical wisdom”. Schneewind, expounds an Aristotelian view of virtue in discussion with Grotius’ 1625 Prolegomena to Law of War and Peace, which refutes the concept of a mean morality:

“The theory of the mean is a crucial point of difference between virtue-centred and act-centred views of morality, because it is one way of articulating the virtue

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33 Turow, who began as an advocate of capital punishment, soon felt that it needed to be a proportional response to crime rather than a mandatory sentence for certain categories of murder in selected States.
In rejecting Aristotle’s concepts of virtue, Grotius wanted to discuss rights or justice in a way that excluded personal decision making. Schneewind saw the preference for rule-bound morality as Grotius’ answer to the kinds of disputes that arise between religious and commercial interests. In fact Grotius pointed to the problem that is fundamental to the human condition, the unpredictable character of any decision maker and the influence of personal interests that could conflict with the greater good. Schneewind points out that Aristotle did not offer any useful definitions or processes to effectively utilise a virtue-based morality.

The problem of conflict between rule-bound and virtue based moralities echoes the ethic of care debate (Brabec, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1994) in which women were accredited with an almost instinctive relational moral bias that they brought to their caring, which stood in opposition to a masculine justice perspective. While relational concerns may balance the rights-justice perspective, proportion withdraws from either extreme. However, in my discussion, virtue itself is under siege because the objects of care are now seen as less deserving. If workers cannot wrestle with the moving social symbols of virtue, they can at least examine the proportion of their own responses in the midst of changed social attitudes.

9.4.1 What religion cannot achieve
The proposals I make are limited by other and past suggestions of a similar kind. Civil society may come close with its inclusive and participatory concerns with community development which have been suggested as an adequate secular religion (Brown, Kenny, Turner, & Prince, 2000). Weber emphasised the capacity of religion to create community that answered the hunger for belonging (Eisenstadt, 1968) but he also warned that new religions constructed intellectually become cultic rather than creating enduring communities. Moreover, while religion in its institutional sense may create some community, it also creates exclusion through conflicting interpretations (Daw, 2004). Religion currently creates artificial boundaries in the non-profit Sector where many values are shared regardless of denominational alliances (see 7.2.1). It is the impotence and organisational self-interest of religion that makes it unattractive as a source of community, moral or social. A moral community devoid of religious content would create a broader community of shared concerns.

9.4.2 What is really needed: Further limitations
For discontented workers in my research, rather than becoming a hired-hand denuded of driving passion, there was a continuing search for a values-fit. While I interpreted many value
concerns as a reflection on the lack of Sectoral stability and the loss of a familiar culture, the need for community was emphasised by the alienated state of frontline welfare workers in the enterprise welfare economy. In brief, a moral community of frontline welfare workers would need to develop values that represented moral proportion to the challenges of the Sector, given its various constraints. This morality does not claim universal or absolute status, but a flexible responsiveness to defining the best outcomes in an imperfect and emerging situation. A deliberate moral community of practice for frontline children’s welfare workers would draw its agenda from its own service delivery focus, to discover what is achievable within the constraints of economy, policy and agency. It would establish its ethical framework within the boundaries of its mixed loyalties to clients, to agency, and to its funder’s policies. In this enchanted, theoretical world that I envisage, workers would supply one another with affirmation and evaluation, and work on the deeper issues of the cost of emotional labour, and the content of an ethic of care.

My research, however, has probably named more problems and raised more questions than it has answered. To be of any use, moral distress needs to be defined and developed. In the discipline of nursing ethical distress has been discussed as a possible NANDA\(^\text{34}\) diagnosis (Kopala & Burkhart, 2005). In nursing the ethical issues are similar concerns to those found on the frontline of children’s welfare, but the differences are significant enough to warrant a separate study. The applicability of moral distress to frontline children’s welfare workers and its distinction from more familiar terminology such as burn-out and emotional labour, needs to be made clear. Any further work on moral distress could also focus on distinguishing the source and nature of the specific dilemmas that workers regarded as moral. In many instances the sense of a moral gridlock might have been alleviated in a variety of ways, yet invariably my research participants had not discussed the intensity of their feelings in the workplace. The dilemmas of some workers do point to the inadequacy of both training and support, and the poor communication of new political, social and cultural realities.

My research did not engage at depth with the difficult issues of training for the frontline. It would be easy to suggest the need for national accreditation, but such systems tend to bureaucratic processes that ignore the nuances of training needs. It seems appropriate that workers dealing with the complexity of family support and child protection should have various kinds of training to provide options for multi-disciplinary teams. Yet there are obviously shortcomings in the systems that are inequitable for social workers whose professional status is compromised. It is equally unfair for untrained casual workers to be

\(^{34}\text{North American Nursing Diagnosis Association}\)
thrust into demanding responsibilities without access to training and development except at their own cost. Minimal standards even for casual workers would help raise the status of the work as well as provide safeguards for employers and workers.

### 9.5 Conclusion

In some respects my thesis has been monosyllabic in its engagement with the values of workers in the Third Sector. This is justified by the workers’ own preoccupation with values, the values-driven nature of the Sector, and the broad academic discourse of the Sector which names values as the source of its unique motivation. The significance of my discussion was that values were shifting social symbols on the white waters of welfare reform, and it was probably change itself that drew workers attention to the uncertain values of the Sector. I began by wanting to know why women did this low paid and stressful work, and how their motivation related to retention and attrition. In the analytical process I developed the themes moral distress and altruism audit, which I have applied to developing the concepts of moral community and moral proportion to provide approbation for practice that is not dependent on agencies or professional status or educational institutions.

I chose a communicative, interpretive qualitative research methodology in order to look into social and cultural conditions and analyse sources of action. I succeeded in producing the grainy, complex, many voices of the human situation, developing more questions along the way. Guided by Gadamer ([1960] 1989) I did not envisage the development of objective truth, but rather, a prejudiced landscape of merging horizons, which is what I have.

I used a Weberian framework working from his proposal that ideas of the past, such as the Protestant Work Ethic, found momentum and expression in the present, producing actions that reflected the original values. Yet rather than discovering workers acting out ancient religious values, I found workers alienated from the founding values of much of the non-profit Sector. They faced increasing difficulty in finding value symbols that validated their own actions. In Habermas’(1984) analysis of Weber, there was an ethic of conviction at work where values moved from the culture into the personality, sustained there by action. The conviction at the level of personalities which I found in frontline workers, had become decoupled from culture, and represented values at odds with the social climate.

The use of Weberian language and thought with its ghosts of religions was dismissed as irrelevant to modern America by Bloom, who suspected rationalised industrial nations were merely using it to find moral support for their enterprise, an idea developed by others (du Gay, 1996). If the observations of Allahyari (2000), Wuthnow (1991) and Wright
Mills([1959] 2000) are significant, it is not corporations that are searching for validation, but workers who seek a moral self, a reason for being in the world. It would be interesting to know whether individuals have always sought moral meaning for their work. Calvinists who saw their work as blessed by God had a powerful social endorsement, but did it emanate from their need? I can’t help wondering whether the rationalised societies of efficiency, audit and accountability or the burgeoning new bureaucracies, just have a peculiar capacity to denude work of its meaning, and so it must be retrieved in some artificial way.

My intention throughout this thesis was to make the voices of the workers heard, and I believe I have achieved that. I will close with the words of an informant who was not interviewed for my research but understood its content:

My husband is a brick layer. When he knocks off at 4pm, as he drives away he 
admires his finished work, and it’s all neat and done. I go to work to let the worms 
out of their cans. It’s work that is never finished, never neat and tidy. When I go 
home at 6 o’clock I wonder what is going on behind the brick walls that will finish 
up on my desk in the morning covered in blood and tears.

Hard tasks that are rarely resolved, never finished, poorly rewarded, may be regarded as 
pitiful and futile to the uninitiated, although the greatest triumphs of the human spirit are only 
witnessed when the odds are impossible. Working with children offers these extremes of 
possibility.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: ACWA Supporting documents

Appendix B: Ethics (HREC) permission

Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages

Appendix D: Participant information and consent form
10 September 2004

To whom it may concern,

Attention: University of Western Sydney Research Ethics Committee

This letter is to confirm the willingness of the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) to permit and assist Ph D Candidate (Rev) Ann Jensen, to access potential research participants through our networks of member agencies.

The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) which incorporates the Centre for Community Welfare Training (CCWT), is a partner organisation with the University of Western Sydney’s Centre for Learning and Social Transformations (CLAST). In addition I am a supervisor for the applicant.

The aim of the research is to improve the working environment of community sector workers and managers. The findings from the project will be extremely valuable to ACWA, its member agencies and the broad sector of community service organisations. The research will be undertaken with our full support.

Yours sincerely,

Angel Spence
Chief Executive Officer
Appendix B: Ethics (HREC) permission

29 November 2004

Ann Jensen
"Mansefield"
Granger Place
Hartley Vale 2790

Dear Ann

Re: HREC 04/165 Carrying the Can - Understanding why women do low paid children's services work, and what it means to the industry

The Committee reviewed your responses to the issues previously raised and agreed to approve the research project.

You are advised that the Committee should be notified of any further change/s to the research methodology should there be any in the future. You will be required to provide a report on the ethical aspects of your project at the completion of this project. The form is located on the Research Services Web Page.

The Protocol Number HREC 04/165 should be quoted in all future correspondence about this project. Your approval will expire 30 October 2005. Please contact the Human Ethics Officer, Kay Buckley on tel: 02 4570 1136 if you require any further information.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Chairperson
UWS Human Research Ethics Committee
Cc Dr Regine Wagner
Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages

Making a Difference?

- If the idea of making a difference is important to you, perhaps you would like to become a participant in this new research project.
- Women frontline workers and managers are needed to participate.
- Women in mid-life and those who have worked for a long time on the frontline in children's welfare agencies, are invited to make email contact with The Researcher, Ann Jensen makingadifference@ozemail.com.au (2005)

People like the idea that their work can make a difference

“Making a difference” is one of the commonest slogans in health, education and welfare

Whether it’s a job vacancy, a disaster appeal, or a call to volunteer, the opportunity to make a difference is offered as an encouragement to get involved. The simple over-application of this slogan suggests the importance of the idea. It represents a high priority for many, and a good reason for doing a tough job.

But once you’re doing a job, does the buzz of being a difference-maker satisfy even if the stress is high and pay is low? Is making a difference a motivator, a reason for being, or is it a dying hope?

At a time when outcomes are directed by funding relationships, and the culture of institutions is changing under the pressure of audits, re-structures, casualisation and de-professionalisation, can anyone afford to look beyond their own survival and try to make a difference through their work?

When other people are “looking out for Number One”, some people are looking out for others. So what is it about making a difference that causes people to set aside personal priorities and needs?

Become involved! (June 2006)

This website has been set up to explore these questions as part of a doctoral research project which is being conducted in partnership with the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies (ACWA)
Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages

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People like the idea that their work can make a difference

“Making a difference” is one of the commonest slogans in health, education and welfare

Whether it’s a job vacancy, a disaster appeal, or a call to volunteer, the opportunity to make a difference is offered as an encouragement to get involved.

Making a difference

Your stories are important

The project is focussed on women who work on the frontline in children’s welfare agencies, but it will move on to issues of management. The research will look at their expectations and frustrations using the concept of making a difference to explore underpinning values and priorities.

As organisational culture changes, it is important to understand how to help women stay in the job. The loss of experienced workers to either burnout or another industry, is a loss for children’s welfare agencies.

This is a triphased research project. New questions will unfold as participants respond by email, one question at a time, with the researcher. Some people will also be invited to personal interviews to be conducted at the University of Western Sydney, Penrith. Towards the end of the data collection there will be a focus group with managers to explore some of the collected insights.

We need your help.

Frontline female children’s welfare workers are needed to participate in the project.
If you feel you would like to make a contribution to an understanding of these issues, please contact the researcher Ann Jensen by email.

The Questions.

Questions will focus on those occasions when frontline workers felt their actions led to a positive outcome which made a difference.

Participants will be asked to reflect on when and how making a difference became important to them.

Ultimately, participants will be asked to consider whether it is becoming more difficult to make a difference, and what factors impact their ability to achieve desirable outcomes for clients.
Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages
Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages

What about the kids?

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People has published a report - What about the kids?

How we nurture our babies and young children is universally regarded as fundamental to our humanity. But the ways in which we choose to care for our infants and toddlers are infinitely diverse. Each era, every culture and all families endeavour to create the best possible start in life for their young, but they face many and varied challenges.

It is concern about the ways in which Australia is meeting the test of caring for our infants and young children today that has prompted the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, and the National Investment for the Early Years organisation (NIFTeY) to look closely at the current situation.


NIFTeY is the National Investment for the Early Years, which emerged out of a meeting of academics, practitioners and government officials in 1999 - see. http://www.niftey.eyh.com/

Moral Distress and Moral Proportion

'Moral distress' is the result of holding in tension a conflict between personal values and the realities of practice. It is often experienced by frontline children's welfare workers, according to the findings of UWS PhD researcher Ann Jensen, whose project “Making a Difference”, was promoted through ACWA a year ago.

She also found that regardless of the specific values workers held - whether religious or social justice based - they were looking for a sense of “moral proportion” in their agency’s responses to the unique situation of each client. The discussion of the moral proportion of an agency’s response, and its

What about the kids? builds upon the earlier work A Head Start for Australia’s Children that provided a blueprint for what Australia needed to do to give our children a good start in life. What about the kids? puts forward concrete suggestions for policy improvements to support the care and education of all babies and young children.

ACWA News July 2006
Appendix C: (Versions of) ACWA sponsored web pages

Consistency with espoused values, was considered important to frontline workers.

In 2005 Ann Jensen talked to more than 20 frontline workers, middle and senior managers, in a mixture of personal interviews, email and written contributions, a focus group and feedback on participant observations.

The researcher now wants feedback on some of the theory generated by her findings, particularly the concepts of moral distress, and moral proportion.

At a time when children's welfare work is becoming increasingly bureaucratised as a result of tender and accountability relationships, many frontliners feel compromised by policies that impact their service-delivery focus. The policies may relate to issues as diverse as privacy or fund-raising, but the end result is that many feel compromised in their relationship with clients.

Jensen found that moral distress caused frontline workers to re-evaluate their willingness to work in low-paid or stressful situations. Frontline workers tend to be value-driven, and they hope their work will make a difference through a values-based agency. She found that while some workers quit, others retreated to casual direct care work to avoid moral distress, while others began to look for management roles to have a greater voice.

She also found that workers were looking for opportunities to talk through the moral dilemmas with their agency, and line-management or external social-work supervision, did not provide the right kind of forum.

It was important to workers that their agencies enacted their espoused values. She found that regardless of whether the organisation was faith-based or secular, frontline workers were concerned with consistency of practice. Workers were willing to modify their values if they had an opportunity to discuss the changed priorities, but this was not happening.

In order to understand whether this concept is useful and applicable, the researcher is now asking workers at any level to respond by email to her findings.

Does the idea of moral distress resonate with you? Does moral proportion describe the kind of values briefing you might need in dealing with complex issues?

If you would like to make a comment after reading this article, you can email Ann Jensen at: a.jensen@uws.edu.au. All responses will be handled in a totally confidential way.

See the Making a Difference website at http://www.acwa.asn.au/makingadifference/ Index.html

The Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has released the latest Australia's Health report (see http://aihw.gov.au)

Australia's Health 2006 reveals that:

• 70% of Indigenous people die before the age of 65 years compared with 20% of non-Indigenous Australians.

• Indigenous children aged 1-14 have a mortality rate which is 2.5 times higher than non-indigenous children.

• Mortality is 50% higher for the unemployed than those who are employed (unemployment is associated with other risk factors such as mental illness and cardiovascular disease).

• Nearly 40% of the population did not see a dentist last year. 1/3rd of lower and middle income adults are unable to access proper dental care.

Commenting on the report the ACSSS President Lin Hatfield Dodds said that the health of people living

ACWA News July 2006
Appendix D: Participant Information and Consent Forms

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

Why do women do low-paid and stressful work in
the children’s welfare sector?

A research project under the auspices of the University of Western Sydney,
The Association for Children’s Welfare Agencies, and conducted by
PhD Candidate, Ann Jensen.

Good Morning,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Western Sydney, conducting research into the
reasons women work in children’s welfare agencies, given the low-paid and stressful nature
of the work. Part of my study will include aspects of practice and management, and the
outcomes will hopefully help the sector develop policies and training to improve recruitment
and retention.

Children’s welfare services workers are needed for voluntary participation in this research
project. This is an invitation to participate in an interview, which would utilise your
experience in the children’s welfare sector. Primary contact will be by email, which could
progress to personal interviews. This stage of research requires women in any of the
following categories:

- Those who have been employed in the sector for less than two years
- Those who have been employed in the sector for more than five years
- Women who are 38 years of age or younger
- Women who are 48 years of age or older
- Frontline workers
- Managers

You may be asked to participate in up to three telephone interviews at a time suitable to you.

It is hoped that the results of this research will provide more information about motivation,
retention and training of people who work on the frontline in this sector.

Those who participate in the project may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their work,
discuss views with other people, and review their reasons for working in this sector.

WARNING
The process of interview concerning issues that are important to you, may result in some discomfort or inconvenience to you. Although we do not intend to be intrusive, argumentative or judgemental in any way, and we want to respect your time and expertise, it is important that you inform the researcher if you feel offended by any of the processes of the research. You are welcome to withdraw from this project at any time.

You are entitled to have access to transcripts of your participation in the interview or forum. The coding of all participants’ information will safeguard your anonymity. This coded data will be available only to the research student and her direct supervisors (see below). It will be kept in a locked storage cupboard in a private office, and shredded after five years.

A consent form is attached to this information sheet, for you to sign and return to indicate your informed consent to participate in this research project. If you require further information or assistance of any kind, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher (details at top) or her supervisor whose name and contact details appear below.

Yours Sincerely,

Ann Jensen BA, BTh (Hons) MACA

The supervisor of this project is Dr Regine Wagner, Director of the Centre for Learning and Social Transformation at the University of Western Sydney, Kingswood Campus.

http://www.uws.edu.au/clast Building AE, Werrington North Campus (Penrith) Locked Bag 1797, Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia
+ 61 2 9678 7612
+ 61 2 9678 7120 (fax)

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee or Panel. The Approval Number is HIREC 04/165. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 45 70 1136 or 02 4570 1688). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Making a Difference?
Why do women do low-paid and stressful work in the children’s services sector?

Children’s services research project under the auspices of the University of Western Sydney, The Association for Children’s Welfare Agencies, and conducted by Ph.D Candidate, Ann Jensen.

Once your have read the information sheet, please indicate by ticking the boxes below the categories which best describe yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frontline worker employed in the sector for less than two years</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frontline worker employed in the sector for more than five years</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frontline worker 38 years of age or younger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frontline worker 48 years of age or older</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager who previously worked on the frontline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime permanent employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time and or casual employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please sign the consent form below and return both these sheets to the researcher in the attached envelope, to indicate your informed consent to participate in this research project.

CONSENT FORM

| Your Name______________________________________________ |  |
| Address_________________________Phone___________________ |  |
| City_________________________Postcode________Mobile________ |  |
| Email___________________________ |  |

Please tick boxes below before signing:

I have read the participants’ information sheet [ ]
I understand I can withdraw at any time without explanation [ ]
I am willing to participate in a focus group [ ] a telephone interview [ ]
I give permission for the recording of a telephone interview [ ]
If you require further information or assistance of any kind, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher (details at top of page) or her supervisor whose name and contact details appear below.

The supervisor of this project is Dr Regine Wagner, Director of the Centre for Learning and Social Transformation at the University of Western Sydney, Kingswood Campus. 
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