

THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER: WORKERS' STANDPOINTS ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF MISSOURI'S CHILD WELFARE POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an institutional ethnography of changes in Missouri's child welfare system after House Bill 1453. I demonstrate how child welfare policy is gendered, raced, and classed by examining practices, texts, and discourses in child welfare offices. By focusing on everyday practices and the way they are mediated by texts, I create a map to reveal how social inequality is produced and reproduced by subjecting families to intense regulation and disruption. I contextualize my analysis by pointing to the significant retrenchment of social programs. I discuss three key groups: social workers, mandated reporters, and juvenile officers. By discussing each group's structural position and their understandings of the system, I show the tensions that develop among the groups. Although HB 1453 was intended to bring about sweeping changes in most aspects of the child welfare system, the intentions of legislators were transformed at various points. This enables me to discuss the discourse of liability that encouraged social workers to recommend that children be taken into protective custody while it encouraged juvenile officers to do the opposite.