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# Authentic Behavior and Job Satisfaction among Child Welfare Caseworkers

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This study was designed to investigate the relationship between authentic behavior and job satisfaction among child welfare caseworkers in Pennsylvania. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the domains of the Authentic Behavior Scale (balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality) and Job Satisfaction Scale, and the results provided consistent support for the factorial structure of the scales across child welfare caseworkers. The findings of this study revealed a positive correlation between authentic behavior and job satisfaction. To further explore this relationship, a path model was developed that included the elements of authentic behavior, job satisfaction, and demographic variables. The results indicated an association between the type of agency and internalized morality, impacting job satisfaction. Private workers showed a higher level of authentic behavior compared with public workers, with authentic behavior associated with greater job satisfaction. The findings suggest that authentic behavior can play a crucial role in social work practice and warrants considerable attention.

KEY WORDS: *authentic behavior; child welfare caseworkers; confirmatory factor analysis; job satisfaction*

Almost a decade ago, a former Penn State football coach's conviction of child sexual abuse spurred substantial changes to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). The public and political fallout from the scandal created the Task Force on Child Protection to conduct a comprehensive review of the state laws and procedures governing child protection and the reporting of child abuse ([Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, n.d.](#)). The resulting legislative changes reclarified and expanded the definitions of child abuse, perpetrators, and mandated reporters, which increased referrals and workload. In 2015, state officials estimated that 40 percent of callers gave up while waiting on hold with Childline before reaching a caseworker ([PA Family Support Alliance, 2021](#)). In Northampton County, referrals surged by 78 percent in 2015 and nearly 140 percent in 2017 ([Assad, 2017](#)).

The Child Welfare League of America and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children recommend a child welfare caseworker hold a caseload of no more than 12 to 15 children at one time ([Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2021](#)). In 2009, public child welfare workers in Pennsylvania were assigned to work on 24 or more cases on average per month ([Yamatani et al., 2009](#)), and this caseload increased up to 50 to 75

cases per caseworker after the major legislative changes to the CPSL went into effect in 2015 ([Moyer, 2017](#)). Other significant changes to the public child welfare workload are additional computer work, including assessment forms and documents that caseworkers are required to complete attendant to the newly enacted laws. A child welfare expert stated, "We didn't have enough people or funding to keep up with the enormous increases in workload for a staff that was already overworked and stressed out. And children suffered because of it" ([Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2021](#), p. 2). County agencies did not have a sufficient complement of caseworkers to meet the required workload, and many overwhelmed workers left their jobs, which led to staffing shortages throughout Pennsylvania's county agencies that remain to this day. National data reported that child welfare agencies annually face a workforce turnover rate ranging from 14 percent to 20 percent ([Edwards & Wildeman, 2018](#); [National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2021](#)). The [Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services \(2022\)](#) reported that Pennsylvania child welfare agencies estimated an average turnover rate of approximately 45 percent, significantly surpassing the national average.

Prior to the Sandusky scandal, public child welfare agencies operated with staff levels that were either at

or close to their allocated complements, even though caseloads remained high due to outdated regulations dating back to 1980, remaining unchanged despite shifts in legislation. During that period, annual turnover typically hovered at around 15 percent to 20 percent. However, in the aftermath of the scandal and subsequent legislative changes, turnover rates escalated significantly, reaching an estimated average of 30 percent to 60 percent; in some counties, the loss of caseworkers even reached 90 percent (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2021). The advent of the pandemic further exacerbated the situation, resulting in a substantial and sustained increase in turnover, as reported by the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators Association (PCYA) and PCCYFS. At present, while vacancy rates have been gradually improving, they still fall considerably short of meeting the full staffing needs of most agencies.

The Pennsylvania legislative changes on child protection led to increasing referrals and high caseloads without promising solutions. The new laws created resource scarcity in child welfare agencies, and caseworkers faced pressure to deal with increased workloads, often leaving many cases unaddressed. In such a volatile work environment, caseworkers look for directions and support from their colleagues and administrators. Practicing authentic behavior is one way to enable workers to exercise empathetic and genuine communication at the workplace that helps reframe a crisis as an opportunity for problem solving and innovation (Leroy et al., 2015).

## AUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR

*Authentic behavior* is defined as actions that are guided by one's true self as reflected by one's values, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, as opposed to environmental contingencies or pressures from others (Gardner et al., 2005). The key elements of authentic behavior are self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality (Kernis, 2003; Leroy et al., 2015). *Self-awareness* involves being aware of different aspects of the self, including what motivates and why it is important through a worker's introspective self-reflection (Gardner et al., 2005). *Balanced processing* refers to analyzing all relevant data before deciding, and *relational transparency* refers to presenting one's true self through disclosures and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003). *Internalized*

*morality* entails demonstrating one's beliefs that are consistent with actions (Leroy et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2003).

Existing studies on turbulent workplaces reported that authentic behavior among workers can minimize negative outcomes through mutual trust and positive psychological capital (Leroy et al., 2015; Walumbwa et al., 2011). The concept of authentic behavior was initially developed for leaders and highlighted as authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Subsequent research has revealed that the same components of authentic leadership are evident and pertinent to the authentic behavior of staff members who do not hold leadership positions (Leroy et al., 2015).

Authentic behavior and leadership have garnered substantial attention and have found applications in various fields, including organizational psychology, business, and healthcare. These applications highlight the positive outcomes associated with authentic behavior, such as improved staff performance, the development of trustful relationships, and the facilitation of open communication within organizations, even in challenging and demanding circumstances (Alilyyani, 2022; Avolio, Gardner, et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Existing research showed that authentic behavior was positively associated with performance outcomes, especially in an unstable work environment (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hannah et al., 2011; Hmiseleski et al., 2012; Leroy et al., 2015). Several studies reported that authentic leadership facilitates employees' work engagement, leading to improved job satisfaction (Avolio, Bringham, et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

The existing evidence indicates the potentially important role of authentic behavior in understanding Pennsylvania's child welfare system, which was marred by the child abuse scandal. This event prompted numerous changes to county-operated, state-supervised child protective services agencies. In such a situation, caseworkers want to discuss their concerns and hear their administrator's vision for how to respond to the crisis, which helps them understand the situation from the employer's point of view. Authentic behavior can help caseworkers connect and engage with their colleagues and administrators whom they can genuinely trust. Such behavior reflects the primary aspect of authentic behavior, which can increase a worker's job satisfaction. While limited research exists on

the direct relationship between authentic behavior and job satisfaction among social workers, the potential benefits in terms of a positive organizational culture and job satisfaction in other fields suggest that authentic behavior is a valuable trait to cultivate within the field of social work. Given the challenging nature of the Pennsylvania child welfare field, this study attempted to explore the potential influence of authentic behavior on child welfare caseworkers.

## CURRENT STUDY

Following the implementation of changes to CPSL, Pennsylvania's child welfare system found itself unprepared for the ensuing crisis. The state's caseworkers faced difficulty in their work with the new laws on child protection, and the changes may have affected their morale and job satisfaction by increasing stress and requiring high levels of reactivity. Authentic workers tend to share diverse viewpoints based on the networks of collaborative relationships with colleagues, and such authentic behavior can lead to a positive change and shape a positive organizational culture during the crisis (Avolio, Gardner, et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic workers can have a potential leverage to build a high level of credibility and trust from colleagues because they tend to convey their actions in accordance with their thoughts and feelings and in a respectful manner to others. As a result, authentic workers stay motivated and satisfied with their work. This study intended to empirically measure the components of the Authentic Behavior Scale and examine how authentic behavior contributes to caseworkers' overall job satisfaction. Based on the existing literature, we expected a positive effect of authentic behavior on job satisfaction among child welfare caseworkers.

## METHOD

### Data Collection and Participants

A cross-sectional design and nonprobability sampling strategy were used to collect information from public and private child welfare caseworkers in Pennsylvania (IRB10092018). The PCYA (for public agencies) and PCCYFS (for private agencies) collaborated to recruit participating counties and confirmed that 33 out of the 67 counties agreed to participate in the survey. Out of the 33 participating counties, 21 were classified as rural counties according to the [Center for Rural Pennsylvania's \(2020\)](#)

criteria. Two online surveys, one for public agencies and the other for private agencies, were distributed to agency directors in 33 participating counties in January and February 2018. The agency directors, in turn, distributed the online survey to frontline caseworkers. The survey did not collect information about specific job positions because it was exclusively completed by nonsupervisory, frontline caseworkers.

The survey included a question about agency location and name, with the option to skip it to prioritize respondent privacy and comfort. As a result, most respondents chose not to provide this information, making it unclear how many caseworkers from each agency or county participated. The initial responses yielded a sample of 688 caseworkers from public and private agencies (511 public workers and 177 private workers). Demographic data (presented in [Table 1](#)) were collected from participants as follows: gender (0 = others, 1 = female, 2 = male); age (open-ended question); education attainment (1 = high school or GED, 2 = college, 3 = some graduate school, 4 = completed graduate school); having an MSW degree (0 = no, 1 = yes); race/ethnicity (0 = multiple ethnicity, 1 = American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2 = Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 = Black/African American, 4 = Hispanic, 5 = White/Caucasian); and type of agency (1 = public, 2 = private). A question for years of work experience was also included in the demographic questionnaire.

Most caseworkers were female (84 percent), and five respondents refused to disclose their gender. The average age of participated caseworkers was 38 ( $SD = 11.40$ ), and they had, on average, 6.36 years of experience ( $SD = 9.77$ ) working in child welfare agencies. Most of the sample self-identified as White/Caucasian (90.5 percent), followed by Black or African American (5.2 percent) and Hispanic (1.9 percent). While we had the intention to explore potential differences in job satisfaction among caseworkers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds as evidenced by the inclusion of six race/ethnicity categories in the survey, the considerable skewness in our sampling, with a predominant representation of White caseworkers, renders statistical analysis insufficient for such comparisons. Later, the race/ethnicity responses were converted into two categories (White versus non-White).

Approximately 55 percent graduated from college, and about 26 percent completed graduate school. Among college graduates or higher, 123

**Table 1: Demographic Information for Child Welfare Caseworkers (N = 688)**

Characteristic	M (SD)	n (%)
Gender		
Male		99 (16.0)
Female		520 (84.0)
Age (years)	38.38 (11.40)	
Race		
Multiple races/ethnicities		11 (1.8)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		2 (0.3)
Asian/Pacific Islander		1 (0.2)
Black/African American		32 (5.2)
Hispanic		13 (1.9)
White/Caucasian		559 (90.5)
Education		
Completed high school or GED		13 (2.1)
Graduated from college		379 (55.1)
Some graduate school		71 (11.3)
Completed graduate school		116 (26.4)
Earned or working on MSW degree		
Yes		123 (17.9)
No		565 (82.1)
Agency type		
Public		511 (74.3)
Private		177 (25.7)
CWEB and CWEL graduate		
Yes		79 (12.6)
No		548 (87.4)
Work experience (years)	6.36 (9.77)	

Notes: Valid percentages reported. CWEB = Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates; CWEL = Child Welfare Education for Leadership.

caseworkers (17.9 percent) either earned or were working on an MSW degree. The category of “graduated from college” included both associate and bachelor’s degrees. Some public agencies utilize the Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission (SCSC) as their federally compliant merit-based personnel system, which is a requirement for recipients of federal funds. According to SCSC regulations, an employee in the next lowest position (human service aide) is eligible for promotion to caseworker if they have completed a minimum of 12 credits in human services from an accredited college and have accrued at least two years of experience in the lower-level classification. Consequently, this policy has led to the inclusion of caseworkers with associate degrees or high school diploma in the workforce, alongside the majority of caseworkers who hold bachelor’s degrees.

## Measurements

**Authentic Behavior Scale.** Instead of the original four domains, the survey assessed the three domains of authentic behavior: (1) balanced processing, (2) relational transparency, and (3) internalized morality (Bamford et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2014). After reviewing the four domains of the Authentic Behavior Scale, we noted a significant overlap between the underlying concepts of the self-awareness items and those of internalized morality. For instance, statements like “I am aware of why I do the things I do” and “I am aware of what I truly find important” imply self-reflection on values and beliefs. Such concepts of values and beliefs are inherently present in internalized morality items, such as “I stay true to my personal values” and “I act in accordance with what I believe in.” Self-

awareness involves being aware of different aspects of the self, including feeling, thoughts, and behaviors, and one may or may not act in accordance with one's personal values and beliefs. A previous study explained that the self-awareness domain focused on understanding the self, which affected the last three components of authentic behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2008). It means that self-awareness is a psychological state that can drive behavior and action, while the other three aspects of authentic behavior (i.e., balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality) are the explicit behaviors/actions that are observable to others in a workplace, which influences an organizational environment and work performance. Consequently, we opted to concentrate on the latter three components of authentic behavior, removing self-awareness as a psychological facet separate from the behavioral domains and inherently embedded within the internalized morality items.

A four-point Likert-type format (1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = completely agree) was used to measure 12 indicators of authentic behavior (four items each for the domains of balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality). Example items of balanced processing were "I'd rather not be confronted with my personal limitations and shortcomings"; "I'd rather not have my personal weakness exposed." Example items of relational transparency were "I often pretend to like something when I really do not"; "I often pretend to be someone I am not." Example items of internalized morality were "I stay true to my personal values"; "I act in accordance with what I believe in." Higher scores represent higher levels of balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality. The internal consistency of the 12-item Authentic Behavior Scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = .71$ ), with five reverse-coded items.

**Job Satisfaction Scale.** To assess caseworkers' job satisfaction, survey questions were adapted from the Texas Child Protective Services study (Madden et al., 2014). Items included workload, salary/benefits, and court work. Four items assessed caseworkers' acceptance of their workloads, including (1) "I am satisfied with my client caseload"; (2) "I am satisfied with the paperwork load"; (3) "I am satisfied with the computer workload"; and (4) "I am satisfied with flexible working hours." Two

indicators represented caseworkers' satisfaction in salary and benefits: (1) "I am satisfied with salary" and (2) "I am satisfied with the benefits offered by my organization." Finally, two indicators were used to assess caseworkers' satisfaction with court work and court staff. These eight indicators of job satisfaction were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = completely agree). The internal consistency of the Job Satisfaction Scale was good ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

## Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 25) was used to analyze demographic information and to account for missing data. Mplus 8, a program designed for the analyses of latent variables (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017), was used to perform a series of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models and explore the hypothesized factorial structures of the Authentic Behavior Scale and the Job Satisfaction Scale. Before estimating CFA models, missing data analysis was performed to identify the possible pattern of its missingness. The analysis of missing data patterns revealed that approximately no more than 5 percent of values were missing from each variable of interest. Little's missing completely at random test showed that variables were missing completely at random:  $\chi^2(379, N = 688) = 1,195.16; p = .06$  (Little & Rubin, 1989). Estimates reported for the CFAs were generated using full information maximum likelihood estimation on missing data (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). All models were estimated using delta parameterization and weighted least square mean variance estimation because the hypothesized constructs were measured binarily and ordinally. Unstandardized and standardized coefficients (*StdYX*) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for each estimate were reported.

## RESULTS

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for Authentic Behavior and Job Satisfaction

A three-factor model for authentic behavior included balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality (see Table 2). Only items with standardized factor loading greater than .30 were retained in the final models. Result of the CFA model with 36 parameters (11 items) revealed an excellent fit:  $\chi^2(60, N = 683) = 110.91, p < .01$ ;

root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .03, RMSEA 90% CI [0.02, 0.04]; comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .96; standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) = .03 (see Figure 1). Three of the four items in the balanced processing domain were retained in the final model. The three items of hypothesized balanced processing included (1) “not confronting my limitations and shortcomings,” (2) “trying not to vest too much attention to criticism,” and (3) “blocking out unpleasant feelings about myself.” All four items of relational transparency and all four items of internalized morality met factor loading criteria and included in the final model.

A three-factor model for job satisfaction (see Table 3) was assessed. Result of the CFA model with 27 parameters (eight items) revealed a good fit:  $\chi^2(52, N = 688) = 238.90, p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .02, RMSEA 90% CI [0.05, 0.08]; CFI = .97, TLI = .95; SRMR = .04.

### Path Analysis

The domains of authentic behavior and job satisfaction were measured while adjusting common covariates such as age, gender, education, race,

type of agency, and years of work experience. Overall, the path model fits data well:  $\chi^2(332, N = 555) = 601.29, p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .04, RMSEA 90% CI [0.04, 0.05]; CFI = .90, TLI = .90; SRMR = .07. The type of agency was significantly associated with internalized morality, which in turn was related to job satisfaction (see Figure 2). Private caseworkers showed higher levels of internalized morality ( $StdYX = 0.12$ ; 95% CI [0.04, 0.20],  $p < .05$ ) than public caseworkers, which was associated with greater job satisfaction. Caseworkers who reported a high level of internalized morality were more likely to accept workloads ( $StdYX = 0.10$ ; 95% CI [0.003, 0.20],  $p < .05$ ) and report greater satisfaction toward their salary/benefits ( $StdYX = 0.17$ ; 95% CI [0.04, 0.30],  $p < .05$ ) and court work ( $StdYX = 0.13$ ; 95% CI [0.01, 0.24],  $p < .05$ ). Non-White workers demonstrated a greater degree of balanced processing, ( $StdYX = 0.12$ ; 95% CI [0.01, 0.23],  $p < .05$ ), yet this balanced processing did not predict job satisfaction. Other demographic variables did not contribute to the caseworkers’ authentic behavior (see Table 4).

While there was no association between relational transparency and demographic variables,

**Table 2: Authenticity of Caseworkers Confirmatory Factor Analytic Model<sup>a</sup>**

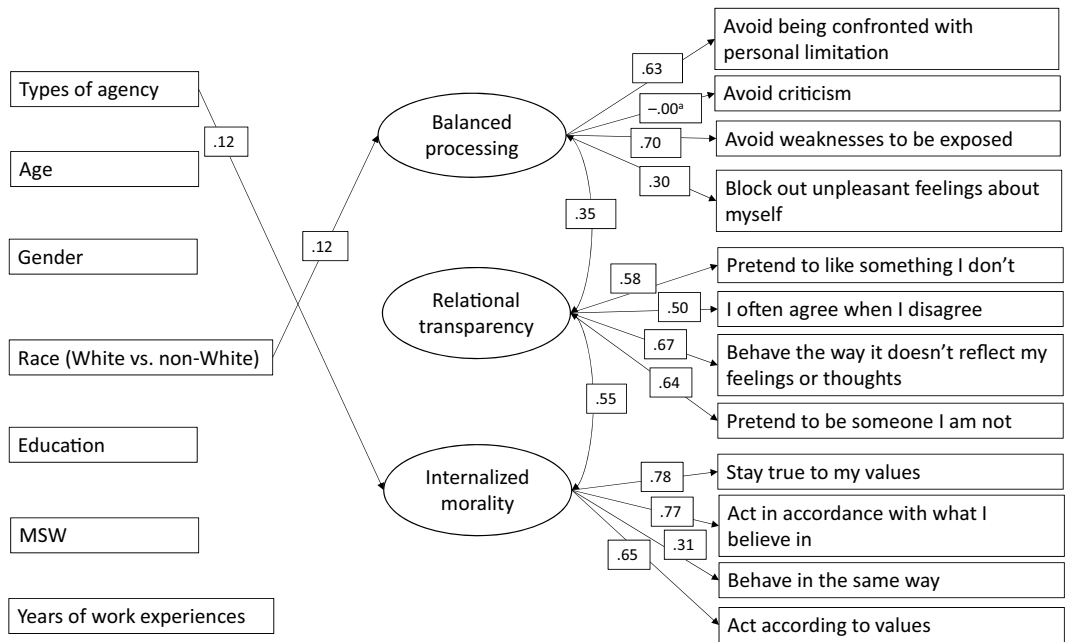
Domain of Authentic Behavior	Estimates <sup>b</sup>	95% CI	StdYX <sup>a</sup>	StdYX 95% CI
Balance process <sup>c</sup>				
Avoid being confronted with personal limitations	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.67	[0.56, 0.73]
Avoid criticism	0.01	[-0.13, 0.15]	0.00	[-0.08, 0.10]
Avoid weakness to be exposed	1.05	[0.67, 1.43]	0.67	[0.54, 0.78]
Block out unpleasant feelings about myself	0.48	[0.31, 0.66]	0.30	[0.22, 0.39]
Relational transparency <sup>c</sup>				
Pretend to like something I don't	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.58	[0.52, 0.65]
I often agree when I disagree	0.82	[0.66, 0.97]	0.50	[0.43, 0.57]
Behave the way it doesn't reflect my feelings or thoughts	1.17	[0.96, 1.37]	0.66	[0.60, 0.72]
Pretend to be someone I am not	0.98	[0.81, 1.15]	0.64	[0.58, 0.70]
Internalized morality				
Stay true to my values	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.77	[0.72, 0.82]
Act in accordance with what I believe in	1.05	[0.93, 1.18]	0.77	[0.72, 0.82]
Behave in the same way over various situations	0.05	[0.37, 0.62]	0.32	[0.24, 0.39]
Act according to values, even when criticized	1.05	[0.92, 1.17]	0.66	[0.61, 0.71]

<sup>a</sup>Refined model excludes indicators with standardized factor loadings  $\leq .03$ .

<sup>b</sup>All coefficients significant at  $p < .01$ .

<sup>c</sup>Reverse coded.

**Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model for Authentic Behavior**



<sup>a</sup>This item was removed with standardized factor loading smaller than .30.

relational transparency notably predicted job satisfaction. Caseworkers who identified being transparent were more likely to satisfy with workloads ( $StdYX = 0.12$ ; 95% CI [0.01, 0.23],  $p < .05$ ), salary and benefits ( $StdYX = 0.23$ ; 95% CI [0.09, 0.37],  $p < .05$ ), and court work ( $StdYX = 0.13$ ; 95% CI [0.01, 0.26],  $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The current study examined the psychometric properties of the authentic behavior and job satisfaction measurements and assessed the relationships between sociodemographic factors and the three domains of authentic behavior and job satisfaction in a sample of child welfare caseworkers. In line with existing literature, the psychometric analysis of the present study found that the Authentic Behavior Scale and the Job Satisfaction Scale exhibited adequate internal consistency. The results of CFA were consistent with previous literature on authentic behavior (Madden et al., 2014) and job satisfaction (Bamford et al., 2013). In the final model of authentic behavior, one item of balanced

processing (i.e., “When someone criticizes me, I try not to pay too much attention to it”) was excluded. All other authentic behavior and job satisfaction items yielded high factor loadings on hypothesized constructs.

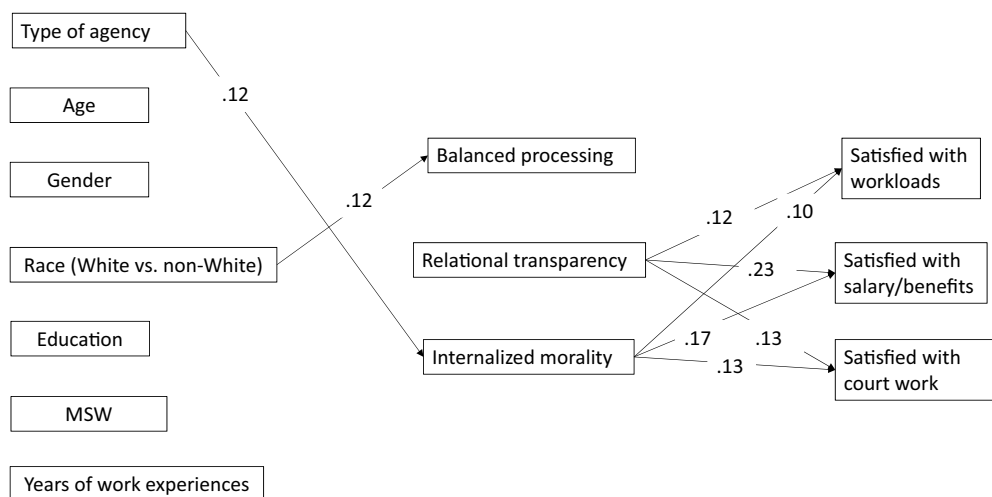
Of the three domains of authentic behavior (balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized morality), only two showed statistically significant correlations to job satisfaction. Balanced processing, akin to critical thinking, was not significantly associated with job satisfaction, while relational transparency and internalized morality seemed to be operative factors that increased caseworkers’ job satisfaction. This result is consistent with the proposition that caseworkers who display authentic behavior (specifically, relational transparency and internalized morality) view their job in a positive perspective, which can lead to positive impact on job performance and retention.

Another noteworthy result was that relational transparency and internalized morality were found to be associated with the type of agency. Private workers showed a higher level of authentic behavior

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analytic Model for Job Satisfaction**

Domain of Job Satisfaction	Estimates <sup>a</sup>	95% CI	StdYX	StdYX 95% CI
Satisfied with workloads				
I am satisfied with my client caseload	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.72	[0.69, 0.75]
I am satisfied with the paperwork load	1.28	[1.19, 1.37]	0.93	[0.91, 0.94]
I am satisfied with the computer workload	1.32	[1.22, 1.41]	0.94	[0.92, 0.95]
I am satisfied with flexible working hours	0.48	[0.40, 0.57]	0.37	[0.31, 0.40]
Satisfied with salary/benefits				
I am satisfied with the salary	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.59	[0.53, 0.65]
I am satisfied with the benefits offered by my organization	0.81	[0.67, 0.95]	0.51	[0.44, 0.57]
Satisfied with court work				
I am satisfied with the respect I am accorded in judicial proceedings	1.00	[1.00, 1.00]	0.78	[0.73, 0.82]
I have confidence in the decisions made by the juvenile courts with respect to the case I work with	0.96	[0.86, 1.05]	0.79	[0.76, 0.83]

<sup>a</sup>Refined model excludes indicators with standardized factor loadings  $\leq .03$ .

**Figure 2: Path Analysis Model**

compared with public workers, with authentic behavior associated with greater job satisfaction. In most cases, private workers deliver direct, face-to-face remedial services to client families as directed by county agencies through purchase of service agreements. It is not uncommon for multiple private agencies to be involved when families have diverse issues requiring attention. This dynamic creates a buyer/seller relationship between public and private staff. Public agencies are mandated by

law, and families are entitled to their services, while private agencies operate voluntarily and can refuse referrals. Certain private agencies, such as Catholic Social Services and Jewish Family Services, are rooted in faith-based principles and align their mission closely with their respective faith traditions. This alignment with faith-based values and mission may potentially have an influence on the internalized morality of the workers associated with these agencies. Research indicates that many faith-based



**Table 4: Authentic Behavior Regressed on Demographic Variables**

Variable	Estimate	95% CI	StdYX	StdYX 95% CI
Balanced processing <sup>a</sup> ON				
Type of agency	-0.01	[-0.12, 0.08]	-0.01	[-0.10, 0.07]
Age	0.00	[-0.00, 0.00]	0.04	[-0.05, 0.14]
Gender	-0.00	[-0.12, 0.11]	-0.00	[-0.09, 0.08]
Race (White/non-White)	0.21**	[0.04, 0.37]	0.12**	[0.03, 0.20]
Education	0.02	[-0.02, 0.07]	0.04	[-0.05, 0.16]
MSW	0.00	[-0.09, 0.10]	0.00	[-0.09, 0.09]
Years of work experience	0.00	[-0.00, 0.00]	0.05	[-0.05, 0.15]
Relational transparency ON				
Type of agency	0.05	[-0.04, 0.14]	0.04	[-0.03, 0.13]
Age	0.00	[-0.00, 0.00]	0.08	[-0.01, 0.17]
Gender	-0.09	[-0.19, 0.02]	-0.06	[-0.15, 0.01]
Race (White/non-White)	0.05	[-0.08, 0.19]	0.03	[-0.05, 0.11]
Education	0.04	[0.00, 0.09]	0.09	[0.00, 0.18]
MSW	0.04	[-0.04, 0.13]	0.04	[-0.04, 0.13]
Years of work experience	0.00	[-0.00, 0.00]	0.04	[-0.04, 0.14]
Internalized morality <sup>a</sup> ON				
Type of agency	0.13**	[0.05, 0.23]	0.12**	[0.04, 0.20]
Age	0.00	[0.00, 0.00]	0.10	[0.01, 0.19]
Gender	-0.01	[-0.12, 0.08]	-0.01	[-0.09, 0.06]
Race (White/non-White)	0.02	[-0.11, 0.16]	0.01	[-0.06, 0.09]
Education	-0.00	[-0.05, -0.04]	-0.01	[-0.09, 0.07]
MSW	-0.00	[-0.09, 0.08]	-0.00	[-0.08, 0.07]
Years of work experience	0.00	[-0.08, 0.08]	0.03	[-0.05, 0.12]

<sup>a</sup>Reverse coded.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

workers feel a sense of duty to uphold strong moral values, including treating others with dignity, respect, and compassion, and remaining faithful to religious beliefs while delivering services (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Brillian & Young, 2008). These unique aspects of faith-based organizations may contribute to the high level of internalized morality and relational transparency exhibited by private caseworkers, which in turn are associated with greater satisfaction with their work. Regrettably, this study did not encompass data collection pertaining to specific agency categories, such as faith-based organizations, despite their significant presence in this field. Consequently, the reasons behind the higher levels of authentic behavior and job satisfaction among private workers in comparison with public workers remain unclear. There is currently limited understanding of potential variations in organizational cultures and their impact based on the specific types of private social work

agencies, including faith-based and non-faith-based organizations. Future research should seize a valuable opportunity to examine how organizational cultures and outcomes vary across a diverse range of agency settings, extending beyond the broad categorizations of public and private domains.

The nature of the relationship is a crucial factor in determining job satisfaction with court work, which involves judicial proceedings among child welfare caseworkers. The culture of the court system can vary from county to county, with differing attitudes toward child removal, reluctance to terminate parental rights, and varying levels of confidence in child welfare workers. Public agencies must collaborate closely with their respective courts, whereas private agencies have more autonomy. Private workers typically focus on specific aspects of a case where they can achieve greater job satisfaction, whereas public workers are responsible for complying with a broad range of legislative requirements, over which they

have limited influence. In this context, one plausible explanation for greater authentic behavior and job satisfaction among private workers can be attributed to their distinct roles in dependency proceedings in juvenile court. Public workers testify in court about case specifics, allegations of maltreatment, and conditions that constitute dependency under the law. They are the petitioner of record and have legal standing in these proceedings. Public workers are obligated to demonstrate that they have made reasonable efforts to address all issues before the court. On the other hand, private workers primarily serve as direct service providers with a narrower role in judicial proceedings. They testify about their work with families but do not have legal standing. They represent only part of the required reasonable efforts that the county agency, as the moving party, must demonstrate in court. This means private workers do not have the same rights as public workers, such as the ability to be represented by legal counsel, present evidence, or cross-examine witnesses.

This context implies that holding expert status and having limited responsibilities may lead to greater job satisfaction for private workers. Private workers are less likely to be affected by the external issues faced by public workers, and their testimony is often more candid. Consequently, they often come across as more credible witnesses and are more likely to have positive experiences with the court system, which can affect their overall job satisfaction. Existing studies reported that the organizational culture characterized by tension and fear in relation to court proceedings has been identified as a contributing factor to employee turnover in child welfare (Ellett et al., 2007; Han et al., 2008; Johnco et al., 2014). Private caseworkers are not subjected to the same level of scrutiny or additional inquiries that public workers must undergo. Private workers provide testimony related to their services and serve as key informants regarding family progress for judicial consideration. They are more likely to be perceived as expert witnesses, especially when they have established strong reputations with the courts. In contrast, public workers must address a broader range of issues, including due process failures and other procedural requirements. Private workers are more likely to align with their agency's mission, while public workers must adhere to legislated mandates, which may impact workers' authentic behavior. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of authentic behavior and job satisfaction, future research should

incorporate the specific job responsibilities of caseworkers. Addressing this gap can provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders interested in enhancing job satisfaction in the child welfare sector.

The finding of a limited presence of caseworkers with an MSW degree (17.9 percent) in this study's sample is also noteworthy. MSW staff are valued as the most productive and effective staff in child welfare in both public and private agencies, especially as incentivized through the Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL) program. CWEL is a federal and state program that collaborates with counties to cover tuition, book expenses, and travel costs for public employees pursuing an MSW degree. In return, participants commit to continued employment for a period of 21 months after successfully completing their MSW program. Historically, MSW staff stay in the field longer than staff with other degrees, but not in direct service in the Pennsylvania child welfare field. In a competitive employment market like Pennsylvania, caseworkers holding an MSW degree are more likely to explore alternative job opportunities. This factor may have contributed to the relatively small representation of caseworkers with an MSW degree in the sample.

Our sample's relatively small number of MSW caseworkers is in line with a recent study conducted in a southern state, which also reported a very low representation of child welfare workers with an MSW degree in a statewide sample (Leung et al., 2021). Leung et al. (2021) also found that child welfare workers with an MSW degree showed a notable inclination toward an intent to leave, mirroring the prevailing situation in Pennsylvania. While official data on the migration patterns of child welfare workers in Pennsylvania are not available, agencies have frequently conveyed that a significant number of child welfare workers have departed to assume positions as school social workers, in part because of the appeal of summer vacations associated with such positions. Numerous public agencies have experienced the departure of tenured MSW staff to school districts offering more competitive compensation packages and benefits compared with those available in child welfare agencies, often for 10-month positions as opposed to the year-round 12-month positions. This migration trend is exacerbated by the fact that many counties are slow to recognize the true costs of turnover, display reluctance to increase salaries, and often perceive a

unionized workforce as an adversarial presence. Staff turnover pattern in child welfare presents an intriguing avenue for future research, serving to underscore the continued relevance and significance of our research findings within the broader landscape of child welfare workforce dynamics.

### Limitations

The current study marks the first application of the Authentic Behavior Scale among child welfare caseworkers, but it does have several limitations. First, the sampling design presents challenges for making inferences, as data were only collected from one state and at a single point in time. This limited scope may increase sampling bias, as participants may share a common trait of being Pennsylvania caseworkers. We distributed the survey in collaboration with the PCYA and PCCYFS, relying on cooperation from both public and private agency directors who then disseminated the survey to their caseworkers. It is important to acknowledge that this approach may have introduced selection bias into the data collection process. Depending on organizational cultures, some agency workers may have been more encouraged or motivated to complete the survey compared with others. This potential bias may have resulted in a lower representation of private caseworkers in the sample, thereby not accurately reflecting the true proportions of public and private caseworker demographics. While there is not a definitive census available, and not all positions are consistently filled, maintained, or may even be eliminated due to vacancies, PCYA and PCCYFS estimate that there are around 2,500 potential respondents from the public agencies and approximately 3,200 respondents from the private agencies (Personal communication with Terry L. Clark, MPA, President & CEO of PCCYFS). Given these estimated figures for potential public and private workers, the sample does not align with the true proportions of public and private workers. To address potential sampling issues, future studies should utilize a stratified sampling method to ensure that the sample accurately represents the caseworker population and facilitate a better understanding of variations among subpopulations of child welfare caseworkers.

As a weak point, this study recruited both public and private caseworkers in child welfare, but it did not investigate the specific types of agencies, such as faith-based organizations, despite their prevalence in this field. In future research, it would be

valuable to explore how organizational cultures and outcomes differ among various agency settings beyond the broad categorizations of public and private settings. Furthermore, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it was not possible to assess the variability among caseworkers across various areas and agencies. Most respondents chose to skip the question about the location and name of their agency, making it impossible to estimate interclass variations between workers in different counties and agencies.

Another limitation is that the self-awareness domain was excluded from the Authentic Behavior Scale, which could impact the instrument's content validity. While this study conducted a CFA to establish validity, the findings should still be carefully interpreted and applied specifically to child welfare caseworkers in Pennsylvania. Further research is needed to include all four domains of authentic behavior to fully assess its impact on child welfare workers. By addressing these limitations, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of authentic behavior and its impact on organizational culture and worker well-being.

### Conclusion

Pennsylvania is on the brink of significant workplace changes and innovation cycles that demand a new approach from child welfare workers. This change presents a challenge for workers who must acclimate to evolving organizational cultures as their experiences and expectations adjust in response to the legislative changes and staff vacancies resulting from high turnover. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge base by examining the impact of authentic behavior on caseworkers in child welfare, particularly during crises, and its correlation with overall job satisfaction. Authentic behavior plays a crucial role in shaping organizational cultures and warrants considerable attention. When caseworkers practice relational transparency and adhere to their values in their actions, they are better equipped to remain focused and motivated at work. To foster authentic behavior in caseworkers, child welfare organizations must consider several critical factors. First and foremost, it is essential to create an environment where caseworkers can be their true selves. This means that caseworkers should be able to discuss their work environment with their peers and supervisors, including issues such as supervision, flexible work schedules, fair workload

assignments, benefits, and salary. Furthermore, it is crucial that caseworkers feel that their voices are heard by upper management. Fostering an organizational culture that encourages authentic behavior can ultimately enhance the well-being of caseworkers and the children and families they serve. **SW**

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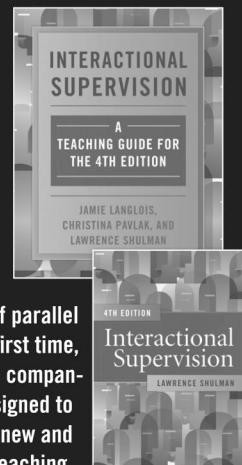
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