

**Marginalization of Social Work Practice with Ethno-racial Minorities  
in Mainstream Human Service Organizations in a Canadian Setting:  
A Critical Exploratory Study of Systemic Issues**

**by**

**Eugene Yiu-Chung Ip**

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**Promoter:**

**Professor Willem van Delft**

**Joint Promoter:**

**Dr. Pieter V. Steyn**

**School of Social Work**

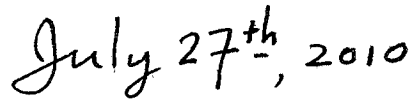
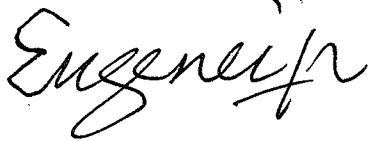
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## Declaration

I declare that *Marginalization of Social Work Practice with Ethno-racial Minorities in Mainstream Human Service Organizations in a Canadian Setting: A Critical Exploratory Study of Systemic Issues* is my own work and that all the sources I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Eugene Y.C. Ip  
Student #: 34395202

Date:

## **Acknowledgements**

In the child welfare circle, a favorite, wonderful piece of wisdom social workers often invoke is that it takes a village to raise a child. For me, the proverbial saying readily comes to mind as a resonating metaphor. Over the past six or so years, many individuals have helped me in my thesis work. Like the child-nurturing villagers, they have knowingly or not come into my thesis life in a wide variety of helpful, meaningful ways – some in single moments, some in short periods of contributive engagement, others staying with me through the entire journey. Together, they are the “village” in my academic growth as a social worker.

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## **Abstract**

The thesis is a qualitative study from critical theory perspectives to enhance understanding of how systemically mainstream organizations marginalize social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. It also explores strategic implications for systemic change based on field research findings. Ten social workers from Edmonton – the provincial capital city of Alberta, Canada - participated in investigative dialogues for the thesis field research. These research participants' workplace stories lend themselves to explore three questions: what does marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities look like in mainstream organizational settings; what is there to understand about it as a systemic issue and what the research findings imply for change strategies.

A critical analysis of dialogic data thematically identifies everyday work issues that describe how practice with ethno-racial minorities is kept at the operational and service-delivery fringe of individual workplaces. These thematic findings point to broader issues of the mainstream human service organization sector. These broader issues further highlight how the practice marginalization of concern in this thesis is a systemically constructed issue. These broader issues are mainstream benevolence, social work as an employment regime, multicultural service delivery as a thrill and clientization of ethno-racial minorities.

In consideration of these sector-wide issues, implied change strategies reveal three thematic directions for systemic transformational change: (i) continued dialoguing involving concerned social workers and ethno-racial minority community leaders, (ii) community social work to build and foster coalitionary activist work and organizations, and (iii) participatory research involving a community sharing concern of the practice marginalization issue so as to build a strong knowledge-base to support and empower a broad-base activist endeavour to effect change about mainstream human service organizations.

**Key terms:** multicultural social work, mainstream human service organizations, social work as an organizational practice, organizational change.

## Chapter One

### From Organizational Practice Experience to Research Inquiry: An Introduction to the Thesis

#### Introduction

As a subject within the profession's practice discourse, social work as an organizational practice is largely didactic in both intent and content (Kahle 1972, Daft 1983, Lauffer 1984, Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr. 1999, Heinonen & Spearman 2001, Heinonen & Spearman 2010). It concerns itself with how social workers can gain practice opportunities in human service organizations and function as employees for their organizational employers. In this instructional spirit, Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr. (1999: xx), for example, incorporate "chapters on constructing resumes and finding jobs" as well as "stress and time management" in their text on generalist practice with organizations and communities. In this light, social workers are considered as operational extensions of their employing organizations whose integrity as practice facilitators and enablers is assumed. The tone for this social-workers-as-organizational-persons perspective, again, comes through loud and clear in a preamble by Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr. (1999:454):

"This chapter will discuss creating and maintaining various agency resources. These resources include the agency's reputation, which is important because both agencies and services require good public relations to keep the support of taxpayers and contributors...we will look carefully at the topic of working with the media to help ensure that your agency receives the most fair and positive treatment possible from the news media..."

In the expanding social work literature, organizations as locations of social workers' employment are however increasingly questioned as to these systemic entities' impact on practice and analyzed from a critical perspective (Galper 1975, Moreau 1979, Galper 1980, Lipsky 1980, Sherman & Wenocur 1983, Withorn 1984, Ng 1988, Moreau & Leonard 1989, Leonard 1990, Muller, Walker & Ng 1990, Ng, Walker & Muller 1990, Mullaly 1993, Campbell & Manicom 1995, Carniol 1995, Browne 1996, Burman 1996, Gutierrez, GlenMaye & Delois 1996, Thompson 1997, Thompson 1998, Green 1999, Mullaly 2002, Razack 2002, Baines 2007, Mullaly 2007). That is, an evaluative

perspective that lends itself to unpacking everyday social work practice as a function of organizational realities and to understanding those realities as critical factors in determining whether social workers can actually be responsive to and effective in addressing human and social needs and issues in the community .

In the academic front, this thesis represents an effort contributory to the knowledge base of human service organizations as systemic ruling of social work practice and therefore, always potentially, target systems for intervention and change (Pincus & Minahan 1973). This academic agenda clearly implies a practicality in that this thesis seeks to add to voicing and advancing social work with ethno-racial minorities as an integrated core driver of mainstream human service organizations.

The thesis is based on a qualitative study informed by a critical theory perspective (Baines 2007, Mullaly 1993, Mullaly 2002, Mullaly 2007), which involved a small group of social worker employees of diverse mainstream human service organizations in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in dialogues about their work experiences in their employment settings. They gave focus to problematic work scenarios experienced as defining their practice with ethno-racial minorities. Their dialogues lend an inside look at systemic challenges to practice – i.e. those of operational, managerial, organizational nature. At the same time, these conversational exchanges also build a critical discourse for analysis to better understand how marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities – **the central thesis problem** - continues to be a systemic reality.

This chapter introduces this thesis through the following main sections:

- **Section 1.1** Genesis of the Thesis Issue
- **Section 1.2** Thesis Goals, Objectives and Research Questions

### **1.1 Genesis of the Thesis Issue**

Informed by a critical theory perspective (Baines 2007, Mullaly 1993, Mullaly 2002, Mullaly 2007), this thesis investigates a front-line practice issue in an increasingly ethno-racially diverse Canadian community: that social work practice with ethno-racial

minorities in mainstream human service organizations remains systemically marginalized.

As a natural progression of education and learning from a critical theory perspective, social workers become more and more aware of their ethical responsibility for responding to the needs and issues of ethno-racial minorities in western societies like Canada. In particular, urban Canada has experienced a continuing rapid rate of ethno-racial diversification of its population. This demographic phenomenon is a direct result of post WW II immigration promoted as a national economics-driven population policy, as well as influx of refugees from the developing world. The latter kind of immigration is an outcome of Canada's policy response to unending global currents of humanity escaping from wars, genocidal campaigns, racialized state persecutions and like atrocities. Sensitized to life and social issues of multicultural immigrant/refugee people and families in their communities, social work practitioners look to and rely on their employing organizations to commit resources in support of social workers to engage and be engaged by this minority sector of the public. Organizational development advocates argue that resources in this regard need to go beyond the tangible kinds such as funds and staff. Vitally necessary resources include such foundational elements as policies for organizational operations and service-delivery to ensure serving these minority communities is a systemically integrated, core business (Thomas 1987, Rynes & Roser 1994, Babins-Wagner, Hoffart & Hoffart 1999, Pina & Canty-Swapp 1999).

This emerging new consciousness for social work practice has given rise to a particular expectation for mainstream human service organizations – i.e. those commonly regarded as serving the general public in western culture-dominant society like Canada – to be more inclusive of and integrative of the increasingly diverse public – including ethno-racial minorities. The idea of this thesis takes inspiration from a common collective experience of a group of social workers in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada that their practice with ethno-racial minorities in their respective mainstream organizations remains a marginalized operational consideration and concern. Captured in these

practitioners' dialogues about work in a socializing context over time, this "common collective experience" forms the basis of conceptually framing the thesis problem.

For the past 20 some years, social work colleagues and I have regularly visited as a group to share stories of serving ethno-racial minority communities in Edmonton – our increasingly socially diverse home city. We have never called us that; but over time, it has become obvious that when we get together, we turn the occasion into a peer support group – one with a changeable membership. Empty seats because of those gone from the group would – given time - invariably be replenished with new enthusiasts arriving and staying on their own terms. On those occasions of sharing practice stories, one common experience for unfailingly passionate discussion is that mainstream human service organizations offer little meaningful support for advancing best practices with ethno-racial minority communities. Many of us have recounted workplace situations indicative of organizational environments that limit our ability to work responsively and therefore, responsibly with ethno-racial minority individuals, families and communities. When these clients look to us as professional allies to help them address pressing private troubles as well as related public issues, all of us have felt falling short for our ethno-racial minority clients. There is a shared recognition that our practice limitations are significantly attributable to mainstream human service organizations – our employers - continuing to treat ethno-racial minorities as a non-primary community sector and at best, a fringe consideration in operations and service-delivery. This thesis was born of this commonly lived experience of practice marginalization, asking as systemic entities, how these organizations rule and construct social work practice with ethno-racial minorities.

The rise of a critical consciousness among Canadian social workers – like the researcher himself and his peers described in the last paragraph – who are concerned about ethno-racial minorities as a marginalized clientele for mainstream organizations, has a sociological grounding. This foundational aspect is a broader context of the thesis's genesis. As below, sub-section 1.1.1 introduces this Canadian sociological context to give the thesis issue a fuller explication.



### **1.1.1 Canadian Multiculturalism: A State-Sponsored Discourse of Intercultural Integration and Its Impact on Human Services**

During the process of this present doctoral thesis, recurring questions concerning the thesis issue were raised by some who gave feedback to this thesis issue. These questions basically come down to this challenge: can/should one expect mainstream human service organizations in Canada to respond with necessary multi-lingual and multi-cultural capacities in order to serve individuals, families and communities from an open-ended range of cultural backgrounds? The challenge is fair in that one can appreciate how the question naturally appeals to one's instinct for reasonableness and practicality. The question clearly comes from the view that social work practice based out of Canadian mainstream human service organizations should cater to the general public's needs and issues rather than those of many communities of diverse, individual cultures, ethnicities and along with these, multiple languages. Behind this view of mainstream social work practice, there is an assumption of a common denominator of needs and issues of a Canadian public that social work practice can and should be resourced and deployed to respond to primarily.

When it comes to Canada, a societal dimension to understanding social workers' consciousness of mainstream organizations' duty to extend their practice to ethno-racial minorities is essential. This dimension speaks to a Canadian state discourse of its ethno-racially diversifying population and how this discourse influences social work thinking of service delivery. The narrative of such a discourse needs to begin with a brief revisit of Canadian immigration and its impact on the changing face of the Canadian public.

An established reality of Canada is that it is an immigrant society (Isajiw 1999) – that is, a social order that has continued and will continue to sustain and to develop for its nationhood in a large part by relying heavily on immigration. The history of Canadian immigration since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century has seen a radical change in the kinds of immigrants settling the country. The early historical phenomenon of British and French settlements in pre-confederation Canada, and to follow from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a steady immigrant influx from more diverse places of continental Europe and the United

States, has been replaced by the modern post-WW II reality that the overwhelming numbers and proportions of today's immigrants to Canada represent people and families from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries (Statistics Canada 2006 Census). Such significant demographic shift traces its origin to the liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s, which opened Canada's door that had been shut tight on non-white immigrants. Understandably, a societal result of the modern emergent Canadian immigration trend is that Canada's population has become and will continue to be more ethno-culturally diverse.

This is particularly an urban phenomenon. Based on the latest official releases of demographic data, Friesen (2010 March 10: 1) reports - under the heading "The changing face of Canada: As minority population booms, a visible majority emerges" – that

“...by 2031, one in three Canadians will belong to a visible minority. One in four will be foreign-born, the highest proportion since the end of the last wave of mass immigration that began around 1910...Visible minority groups, which have higher birth rates and younger populations, are expected to grow at roughly eight times the rate of the rest of the Canadian population over the next two decades. The ranks will grow from 5.3 million today to between 11.4 million and 14.4 million by 2031.”

In response to Canadian population's foreseeable cultural diversification, the federal government (i.e. Government of Canada) established the policy of multiculturalism in 1971. By and large, this policy has since framed the Canadian state's values and approaches for what race relations should be in Canada. For our interest here, what is promoted to Canadians and their public institutions based on this policy has over time generated a clearly value-based discourse that has imported itself into ethical codes of the human service field, including the profession of social work, and has influenced the thinking within as to helping professionals' ethical responsibilities with respect to ethno-racial minorities and their needs and issues.

As Canada approaches the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country's multicultural policy, what has become firmly affixed into the world view of the Canadian state is the country's official stand for an aim for race relations: better integration of Canadian society by providing the diverse ethnic minority groups with a sense of belonging to Canada. To this broad societal outcome, the policy states four objectives (Ministry of State, Multiculturalism 1978):

“(1) assistance to cultural groups to support and promote cultural retention; (2) the overcoming of barriers to full participation in Canadian society for members of cultural groups; (3) enhancement of national unity through the promotion of cultural exchange and interaction among Canadian cultural groups; (4) assistance to members of cultural groups, particularly, immigrants, in learning at least one official language.”

Based on this vision and sense of purpose, a societal discourse has generated over time a Canadian approach to race relations. For the purpose here to further understand the sentiments of the social workers described in the previous section, perhaps, the most important feature in this discourse to point out is that this Canadian approach to race relations is clearly integrationist rather than assimilationist. In other words, the multiculturalism policy-based discourse as applied to human service field is that as a social institution, Canadian human services need to make themselves accessible to ethno-racial minorities. In fact, the above-cited policy objectives collectively and effectively affirm that minority culture individuals and families are an integral part of the Canadian public and therefore, are core constituents as well as clientele of public and community-driven institutions and organizations in the Canadian mainstream. For a vital message that calls for change in mainstream organizations/institutions, the implication is that the constituency and clientele will now be increasingly presenting as very different from the traditionally white, Euro-cultural public of the past – that these sectors will be highly diverse in terms of ethnicities and cultures and along with that, service needs and life issues arising from ethno-cultural situations and race relations in the community.

The challenging question noted in the beginning of this subsection speaks to a view that considers ethno-racial minorities in Canada as a sector other than some primary, main public majority as the constituency and the clientele of mainstream

humans service organizations. However, in the spirit and discourse of Canadian multicultural policy, ethno-racial minorities ARE a Canadian public. Given this perspective, whether mainstream resources can or should adjust to accommodate them for whatever reason becomes a problematic question. A compelling, challenging Canadian question should instead be how this organizational sector - as an institutional component of a inclusive Canada – changes to respond to needs and issues of a changing public along ethno-racial lines. It is in the spirit of the last question, that this thesis investigates the issue as raised in this chapter.

## 1.2 Thesis Goals, Objectives and Research Questions

This thesis is a scholarly contribution to advancing Canadian social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities. The thesis goals pertaining to this contribution are as follows:

- **Goal One:** to increase social work understanding of systemic realities that are directive and determinant of practice with the ethno-racial minority communities in mainstream organizations, and
- **Goal Two:** based on thesis research findings, to explore implications for social work practice to influence change within mainstream human service organizations as individual entities as well as an institutional network.

These goals in themselves contribute to helping build a representing voice of social workers who pursue continuous improvement in the systemic environment of practice with ethno-racial minority communities.

Toward these goals, two research objectives are addressed through the thesis investigative and analytical processes, as follows:

- **Objective One:** to explore systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities; and
- **Objective Two:** to understand how these experiences are organized into systemic ruling of practice.

The three sub-sections below will discuss these two objectives in greater details and will also articulate the research questions that drive the research practice toward the meeting of these objectives and **Goal Two** of this thesis: exploring practice implications based on research findings in this thesis.

### **1.2.1 Exploring the Front-Line Experience: Toward a Critical Discourse of Practice**

With respect to **Objective One**, it is a primary research focus for this thesis responding to the void of knowledge and information which can be readily shared, discussed and most meaningfully, contributory to heightening the profession's critical awareness of the practice issue expressed in the objective statement. In my experience of association with the profession over time, practice with ethno-racial minority communities at best receives polite attention, but, by and large, remains at the edges of mainstream social work. Boucher (1990) observes that while the profession is engaged in continuing education opportunities to gain awareness of issues faced by non-mainstream culture immigrants, it has great distances to catch up on in terms of putting these issues forefront in practice. From the United Kingdom, Humphries (2004) similarly notes that social work has only slowly come to accept that an involvement with ethno-racial minority people - who are mostly recent-era British immigrants - is within the profession's business.

Thus, through this objective, I want to collect stories and narratives of helping work from social workers' personal standpoints, their subjective, experiential "takes" about systemic challenges to their social work practice in their employing organizations. Such a collection of "voices" will be an important enrichment of the current social work knowledge base.

Here "systemic challenges" is understood as social workers' everyday workplace experiences that have the effect that practice with ethno-racial minorities is devalued, deprioritized and contained. In other words, this area of practice is marginalized as an organizational service to the public. The descriptor "systemic" refers to the structural

relationships and the working of the social worker's employing organization as "a set of orderly and interrelated elements that form a functional whole" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr. 1999: 129) This definition of systems is meaningful for this thesis in that where systemic challenges are experienced, these problematic encounters in disfavor to practice with ethno-racial minorities should be understood as decisions and actions reflective of and supportive to the "functional whole" of the organization. What is therefore systemic of these decisions and actions – as structural social work theorists would recognize (Galper 1975, Withorn 1984, Mullaly 2007) – is that in the forms they present themselves, they have been formulated, vetted through and enforced to frame social work practice through a hierarchical "set of orderly and interrelated elements." This process renders social work practice – as stated in the outset of this chapter – as an organizational practice.

### **1.2.2 Analysis of a Critical Discourse of Experiential Voices from the Front-Line**

Constructing a discourse of systemically challenged practice with ethno-racial minorities from mainstream organization social workers' standpoint is building an entry into analyzing and then, reaching a new level of understanding. In pursuit of **Objective Two**, this new level of understanding speaks to becoming better aware of how challenging practice experiences of social workers involve or morph into systemic factors and forces behind the practice marginalization issue of interest here. A discourse of experiential voices - as pursued toward the first objective – lends fertile materials in addressing this question of the second objective.

The potential for everyday experience-based discourse to transform into meaningful knowledge is well supported by the qualitative research enterprise. Phenomenological research methods have long established the ontological value of experiential representation. Dilthey (1976:161) of a phenomenological school of thinking asserts that

“...all science and scholarship is empirical but all experience is originally connected, and given validity, by our consciousness...it is impossible to go beyond consciousness, to see, as it were, without eyes or to direct a cognitive gaze

behind the eye itself...From this point of view our picture of the whole of nature stands revealed as a shadow cast by a hidden reality; undistorted reality exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience.”

Research perspectives with a view toward planned change are promising in their capability to generate knowledge from everyday experience for social change agendas. For instance, institutional ethnography (Smith 1987) is grounded in the theoretical perspective that the study of cases of everyday world (for this thesis, the immigrants-helping practitioners interviewed in the field research) is a doorway to understanding the rich details of social meanings and implications. The validity of the mundane everyday “case” opening to a vista of social knowledge is put as follows (Smith 1987:157):

“The particular “case” is not particular in the aspects that are of concern to the inquirer. Indeed, it is not a “case” for it presents itself to us rather as a point of entry, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process.”

Two institutional ethnographers further explain as follows (Campbell & Manicom 1995: 7):

“In this kind of research, ‘experience’ has both conceptual and methodological centrality. Its methodological importance is that experience provides a standpoint, a place to begin an inquiry, and a place to return to, to demonstrate its usefulness...Beginning in experience helps the researcher identify ‘whose side she is on’ while constructing an account that can be trusted...The conceptual importance of experience lies in providing a real-life context against which, for instance, to reflect on administrative practices and their powerful effects on people’s lives.”

Thinking of research as knowledge creation for community building and action, Reason and Hawkins (1988) affirm the power of experiential data that “any form of inquiry that does not rest in experiential knowing is quite inadequate. This experience is held or contained firstly in sensory experience and memory, and then collected as data in record or account.” (Reason and Hawkins 1988: 83) Kirby & McKenna (1989:7) echo in their research “methods from the margins” as follows (Kirby & McKenna 1989:96):

“If you can increase the understanding of an issue...illuminate one experience, portray one person’s story in a new light, you will have helped others to understand the social world a little better. This is what research is all about.”

### 1.2.3 Research Questions: Researching from a Critical Theory Perspective

The thesis research questions are **first**, what does marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities look like in an organizational setting; **second**, what is there to understand about it as a systemic issue and **third**, but not least, what the research findings imply for change strategies? These three key questions are operationalized during the investigative dialogues with the social worker participants in the research.

In relation to the goals and objectives, the **first** research question answers to **Objective One** to seek a descriptive look at problematic practice experiences located in mainstream organizations. The **second** question will address **Objective Two** seeking a critical understanding of these experiences as systemic issues for practice with ethno-racial minorities.

The impetus to study social work practice as organizational and systemic experiences calls for a perspective supportive of building an understanding of systemic forces behind social work as well as the profession's change mandate to influence systemically in support of best practices. How the first and second research questions are posted calls for an investigative and analytical approach from a critical theory perspective (Mullaly 2007: 214). Leonard (1990:3) provides a succinct statement to describe this perspective as follows:

“A critical theory...is defined as a theory having practical intent. As its name suggests, it is critical of existing social and political institutions and practices, but the criticisms it levels are not intended simply to show how present society is unjust, only to leave everything as it is. A critical theory of society is understood by its advocates as playing a crucial role in changing society.”

This theoretical perspective will be adequately explored and explained further into the thesis – particularly in Chapter Five in which a theoretical framework will be drawn out for the thesis research methodology. However, for here, three reasons are discerned to explain why a theory perspective with a focus on exposing, understanding and addressing the inherent injustices of the societal system supports a study of systemic



marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities within mainstream human service organizations – the thesis’s topical interest. These three reasons are as follows:

First, a critical theory perspective is congruent with the mood and tone in the expressions of the practice marginalization issue by social workers who have inspired this thesis project. These subjective qualities have lent the scholastic spirit and mission for this thesis project. When my social work peers and I got together many times over the years in Edmonton where this issue came up about how mainstream human service organizations marginalize social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, we commonly spoke with a heavy sense of frustration. The mood and tone of raising and sharing stories about the issue were clearly one of activism, implying that the status quo was not acceptable and that there was a need to effect change to the status quo. However, an ironic part of the mood, which was always kept unacknowledged in words, was also a fatalistic mindset. We collectively also realized change would be an immeasurably tall order for an after-work peer group. This downside of the mood would come out in an audible tone represented by the oft-heard line not uncommonly accompanying with a shoulder shrug: “Well, what can we do though, right?” That rhetorical question – as I recall – would be the code for the group to move onto another topic for our collective mental health.

To study the practice marginalization issue these Edmonton social workers have raised, a critical theory perspective offers a theoretical standpoint for understanding and addressing how society – however it is manifested institutionally – engenders and reproduces social dominations and subordinations, and in human terms, experiences of injustices and oppression (Friere 1970, Friere 1973, Leonard 1990, Mullaly 2002, Baines 2007). Such an agenda for social inquiry speaks to what has been implicitly but clearly demanded for the issue lived and experienced by those in my social work peer group who have raised it.

Second, as a school of social thoughts, critical theory is constructed with intellectual and conceptual building blocks that speak to the level of analysis and strategizing for change demanded for addressing the practice marginalization issue. What has become clear through practice discussions among my social work peers and me is that when mainstream human service organizations subordinate social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, it is not idiosyncratic, sporadic actions of certain individuals or particular agencies or institutions causing the issue. Given our resonating, shared stories of how efforts to work with ethno-racial minorities were restricted and stifled in mainstream human service organizations, the social work peer group also understood that this organization sector in Edmonton behaved in this regard as a collective system. A critical theory perspective is taken up as it brings theoretical traditions such as theories of a Marxist lineage (Leonard 1990, Thompson 1997, Mullaly 2007), feminist and anti-racist sociology (Smith 1987, Smith 1990, Smith 1992, Dominelli 1997), liberal psychology (Moane 1999), structural and anti-oppressive social work (Friere 1970, Friere 1973, Baines 2007, Mullaly 2007) – to name some key “building blocks”, that provide the necessary explanatory and analytical perspectives to shed light on the systemic practices and forces contributing to the practice marginalization central to this thesis’s interest.

Last but certainly not least, based on what is said about the second reason above, a critical theory perspective lends itself to understanding social problems in a way that engages strategic considerations for change at the structural and systemic level. An example would be referencing Friere’s perspective on how social subordination is internalized by the oppressed to help understand how social workers feel a paralysis to effect systemic change in response to the practice marginalization issue (Friere 1970). Further from there, Friere’s anti-oppressive, liberation thoughts on conscientization or consciousness-raising (Friere 1970, Friere 1973) will lend ideas for change strategies proposed as an output of this thesis. For a goal of the thesis is to identify the implications for change strategies based on the findings of systemic issues from investigating the research questions discussed in Chapter One.

This last reason provides a timely context here to introduce the **third** research question. Speaking to thesis **Goal Two**, the third research question is: what are the implications for social work practice in addressing problematic systemic issues and relations found in the thesis research. Addressing this question at the end of this thesis can be seen as this thesis's way to fulfill the practical intent of the critical theory the scholastic research and analytical work is grounded. The strategic discourse that comes out of dealing with this question will no doubt enrich social work wisdom and practice toward “changing society” – to borrow from Leonard's definition above.

## **Summary**

This thesis explores social work as an organizational practice with a specific population sector in a Canadian community. Based on a qualitative study of an experientially based issue – namely, the marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations, this thesis addresses two broad goals:

- **Goal One:** to increase social work understanding of systemic relations of the profession's practice with the ethno-racial minority communities through mainstream organizations, and
- **Goal Two:** based on thesis research findings, to explore implications for social work practice.

Fitting with the study issue and these goals, a critical theory perspective has been taken up to inform the investigative and analytical processes in the research process. Such a perspective lends theoretical standpoints about the problematic nature of societal institutions and its activist orientation to conceptualizing change for a just society. The critical theory perspective, in other words, serves the two thesis goals and the corresponding objectives of this thesis project.

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows:

- **Chapter Two.** An exploration of the organization as a critical factor of social work best practice with ethno-racial minorities from the perspective of North American

societies like Canada. Particular attention will be drawn to making sense of the front-line sentiments on the part of the collegial group of Edmonton social workers, which have inspired this thesis project.

- **Chapter Three.** An exploration of Canadian mainstream human service organizations' perspectives of and approaches to responding to ethno-racial demographic changes in the communities they serve.
- **Chapter Four.** A literature review to examine how much the existing knowledge base informs what this thesis pays attention to: systemic challenges coming from within mainstream human service organizations to their own social workers who hold a professional commitment to serving ethno-racial minority communities.
- **Chapter Five.** A description of the research study, including the methodology, the data collection and analysis process.
- **Chapters Six and Seven.** A report of field research findings will be presented in these two chapters. In these chapters, findings speak to a presentation of thematic data and their analyses working together to lend new evidence-based insights and understanding about the thesis issue of practice marginalization.
- **Chapter Eight.** The concluding chapter will (a) discuss the contributions and limitations of the research findings and (b) draw from key research findings implications of change strategies in order to address the revealing systemic realities based on the thesis research findings.

## Chapter Two

### **Social Work Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities: The Organizational Factor**

#### **Introduction**

A grounding tenet of this thesis is that social work is an organizational practice. Indeed, the thesis problem – that social work practice with ethno-minorities remains a marginal consideration in mainstream human service organizations – has arisen from recognizing that as a systemic entity, the human service organization is a critically important factor of social work practice. As a pioneer of social casework, Perlman (1957) notes “the place” of a human service organization as an integral element in social work helping people to solve problems. Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi (1997: 9) reinforce that “legally incorporated human services agencies” and government organizations are among the sources of sanction for social work. In talking about social workers as agents of Canadian welfare provisions, Hick (2002:11) recognizes the sites of their practice as “all three organizations – public, private non-profit and commercial.” According to systems theory of social work, of course, human service organizations are integral to the theory’s discourse. These systemic entities can be as much a change agency as a change target (Pincus & Minahan 1973). Indeed, perspectives and models of social work practice concerning ethno-racial minority communities in North American societies not only share this recognition but commonly treat mainstream human service organizations as a particularly critical consideration. Green (1999:5-6) resonates in the following reflection of the critical role of the organization in western societies’ mainstream:

“The argument made here explicitly is that social services can and should be provided to people in ways that are culturally acceptable to them and that enhance their sense of ethnic group participation and power....Workers, service agencies, policies and educational and training programs must work to meet client needs in ways that are congruent with each individual’s cultural background and community setting...But how can that be done when the institutions that are to provide empowering services are essentially mono-cultural, and their dominant perspective is that of one group – college-educated, English-speaking whites mostly of middle-class origins and with professional class aspirations?”

This chapter begins to conceptualize the thesis problem by exploring the organizational factor in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. In approaching this subject in this chapter, three key questions are asked. First, how should the term “organization” and the term “mainstream human service organizations” be understood in the context of the thesis problem? Second, in what ways the organization is crucial in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Third, in this disciplinary discourse of the organization, what particular importance can be discerned about mainstream organizations as considered in the thesis problem?

Exploration of these questions will be drawing from two sources. First, literatures relevant to the learning of the organization as a human service agency are reviewed with a view to shed light on the above three questions this chapter addresses. Naturally, particular interest is taken in those materials that look at mainstream human service organizations in relation to socially diverse communities.

Second, the chapter questions are also informed by how the social worker peer group which I have been associated with during off-work hours over time has talked about their human service organization employers marginalizing their practice with ethno-racial minorities. The material source of this information is primarily a collection of entries in my personal journals. While they are far from voluminous, these entries have accumulated over time noting and reflecting on discussions with social work colleagues about their organizational employers in relation to ethno-racial minorities in the community served. These journal entries have been at best sporadic writings from approximately 1990 to present – notes of various lengths and reflective comments. From revisiting these entries, I have come to notice that while there has never been any commitment on my part to journalize discussions about work when social work peers and I visited outside work settings, I have made entries based on those discussions obviously of special meaning to me. Hence, the entries for relevant use in this chapter are but sporadic writing-ups in my personal journals. However, it should then be added that these entries are also particularly significant in terms of their ability to shed meaningful light on the topic of this chapter.

As follows, three core sections of the chapter respectively address the three questions in the order presented in the above introduction. These sections are entitled as follows:

- **Section 2.1** Organization and Mainstream Human Service Organizations: Agency of Social Work Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities
- **Section 2.2** The Organization: Its Place in Social Work Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities
- **Section 2.3** The Mainstream Organization: Its Significance in the Organizational Factor

## **2.1 Organization and Mainstream Human Service Organizations: Agency of Social Work Practice with Ethno-racial Minorities**

The thesis problem and the research questions to investigate the problem place mainstream human service organizations as the focus of research interest in this thesis project. Symbiotic to this focus is clearly the standpoint that the organization as an agency is a critical factor in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in western societies like Canada. Therefore, “the organization” and “mainstream human service organizations” as two key concepts of central investigative focus in this thesis project require defining early on.

The task of conceptualizing “organization” needs to start with going back to how it was organically conceived in relation to the thesis problem. This is so that the conceptual framing of the term is aligned with the thesis research and analysis of the thesis problem. When my social work peer group talked about how in their experiences their employers treated their practice concerning ethno-racial minorities as but a fringe agenda of service delivery, “organization” was essentially talked about in two contexts. In one obvious context, the social workers talked about a broad variety of organizations that are their employers. In this thesis, therefore, when the term “organization” or “human service organization” is used, it refers to what is representative of this organizational variety: governmental or non-governmental, tax-revenue and/or charity fund-based, non-profit-making organizations constituted and mandated to deliver services

and programs responding to identified human and social needs. A public welfare department of a government on the one hand, and on the other hand, a government-funded and charity donation-supported child and family service agency with a voluntary board of directors for governance would be examples of the various kinds of organizations of interest in this thesis project.

The second context in which “organization” was talked about is how it is a practice agency that systemically frames how social workers do their helping work with ethno-racial minorities. By “systemically”, I want to capture how employer organizations in question across my social work peers’ conversations were consistently experienced by them as being purposeful, strategic and coordinated in managing how social work is practiced. This particular experience of the systemic make-up of human service organizations certainly resonates with the word “organization” in semantically defined terms. Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Soanes 2001: 630) defines “organization” as “1. the action of organizing. 2. a systematic arrangement or approach. 3. an organized group of people with a particular purpose.” Together, these three definitional aspects of an organization not only reflect that it is a sustained entity of people in a structure of functions designed for specific reasons and pursuits, but more importantly, imply an authority of governance and managerial structure to ensure the entity’s working within a planned, deliberate framework. In other words, these aspects constitute a work system. Echoing this characterization, Kahle (1972: 194) describes the prototypical systemic profile of human service organization when he describes the bureaucratic nature of what he calls social agencies as follows:

“All agencies are bureaucratic in one form or another. The organizational prototype for most social agencies is a structure intended primarily for business and industry. It is based on a system of clear-cut rules governing purpose, function, and practice, because rules save effort and supposedly create efficiency and continuity. With a key chain of command from top to bottom, efficiency may be maintained, but upward communication is muffled.”

What is important to note is that human service organizations are generally recognized as “deliberately structured activity systems” (Daft 1983: 8) with structures of operational



policies, hierarchies to define how personnel are supervised and various units with different organizational functions (Baker 1991).

From my social work peer group's lived experiences of human service organizations in this second context, a portrayal of mainstream organizations and their orientation for social work practice with ethno-racial minorities begins to emerge. In recalling the critique of mainstream human service organizations by my social work peers, I can isolate two key characteristics of such organizations as voiced. On the one hand, there was a clear collective opinion that these organizations are agencies of what Baines (2007: 4) refers to as "mainstream social work" – that is,

“social work that identifies with professionalism, career advancement and workplace authority, rather than with clients, oppressed communities and agendas for social justice. Although often claiming the opposite, mainstream social work tends to view social problems in a depoliticized way that emphasizes individual shortcomings, pathology and inadequacy. Interventions are aimed largely at the individual with little or no analysis of or intent to challenge power, structures, social relations, culture or economic forces.”

While the peer group is not remembered as using phraseology similar to Baines's to distinguish mainstream social work, what resonates with Baines' characterization is my professional peers' shared experiences of how the workplace was invariably preoccupied with how to manage work of internal nature such as workloads, staffing, financial resources, business planning and the like. In this context, the social workers lamented how - often notwithstanding their claim to value multicultural service delivery - their workplaces would be hesitant, tentative and often rejective about a level of social work staffing and a necessary manner of practice discussion concerning troubling issues faced in the ethno-racial minority community of Edmonton.

On the other hand, mainstream human service organizations were also understood as public service entities established to meet targeted needs of people. The descriptor "public" is particularly operative in this understanding of these organizations as either being open to all from the community with needs addressed by their services and programs, or serving a legislated mandate as exemplified by the government child

welfare service or young offender corrections service. These organizations were also understood by the way they are funded either by tax revenue and/or public donated funding sources – e.g. community foundations. Therefore, mainstream human service organizations also connote a common accountability to the public as its constituents. In other words, these organizations not only serve the public but also account to the public as their constituents. To accomplish the latter in Canadian society, there are different social processes ranging from, in case of government human service departments or agencies, the democratic electoral process, to, in case of non-governmental organizations, periodical reporting on performance outcomes to funders who carry a sense of nurturing a strong, healthy community they care about.

Throughout this thesis, unless otherwise explained, a number of terms are used interchangeably referring to mainstream human service organization. These include mainstream organization, mainstream agency, and mainstream institution. Sometimes, when the context dictates, the single word “organization”, “agency” or “institution” is used instead. Regardless, what is meaningful is how human service organizations of mainstream nature need to be understood on the basis of the discourse of the social work peers who have inspired this thesis project in the first place.

In the next section, the second question for this chapter is addressed: in what ways the organization is crucial in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities? For this section, the focus is to establish the significance of the “organization factor” and therefore, the term “organization” is treated as a generic representation of all human service organizations that employ social work practitioners. While in this generic sense, “organization” includes the mainstream variety, section 2.3 will adjust to even a sharper focus on mainstream human service organizations in addressing the third chapter question.

## **2.2 The Organization: Its Place in Social Work Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities**

Social workers depend on their employing or sponsoring organizations for a practice mandate, resources and supports. Hence, these organizations are an agency of

social work practice. While this is obvious for most social workers who are paid staff of governmental and non-governmental, non-profit community agencies, many private social work practitioners on contract and retained by such institutions as the state child welfare department and the court provide services guided by the contracting institution. Indeed, the organization as a critical factor of social work practice occupies an essentially central place in the discipline's consideration and discourse of serving ethno-racial minority communities. Kahle (1972: 193) affirms the critical significance of the organization by its enabler role for social work practice as follows:

“Basically, social work is carried on within agencies. The work of the social worker is sanctioned by the agency and he in turn is accountable to the agency for the work he does. The nature of the social worker's professional training, the work he does when he is carrying out the functions of the agency and the purposes of the agency in which he works, all combine to cause him to work within a bureaucratic structure.”

The social work literature approaches practice with ethno-racial minority communities from various major perspectives. Together, they constitute a comprehensive case of the organization's critical significance in this area of social work practice. These major perspectives can be categorized as cultural competency, organizational change and, anti-racism.

### **2.2.1 Cultural Competency: A Perspective of the Organizational Factor**

Cultural competency as a perspective of social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities is based on the belief that in a multicultural society like Canada that values social equality, diversity and inclusion, human service delivery needs to be sensitive to cultural needs and issues of its clientele and be able to address these needs and issues effectively (Herberg 1993, Leigh 1998, Devore & Schlesinger 1999, Este 1999, Green 1999, Ngo 2000, Hogan-Garcia 2003, Diller 2004). Consistent in this practice perspective is that along with the helping professionals with the vital skills, knowledge and values, the employing organization is also emphasized as an integral factor in achieving service provision sensitive and responsive to issues and aspirations of communities of visible minorities – in other words, that is culturally competent service

provision. For the organization as a necessary vehicle of professional practice; its governance, operations, management, policies and internal practices need to embrace and support cultural competency and the social values behind it. (Mann 1994, Ryan & Rosen 1994, Sue 1995).

The organizational factor of cultural competency is essentially vital in two ways. The first of these has to do with organizational preparedness to support social work practice focusing on ethno-racial minorities. The second of these has to do with organizations making internal, systemic change efforts to become multi-culturally inclusive in their governance and management worldview and practices.

**Organizational Support for Practice.** As social workers' employer, the organization is needed to enable and empower the practitioner to serve a multicultural community. Reinforcing this aspect of the organizational factor, Devore & Schlesinger's ethno-sensitive generalist practice framework (1999: 162) indicates agency policy as a core element in supporting work with clients whose culture, ethnicity and ethno-racial relations are particularly vital considerations. The organization is clearly considered as an essential factor in determining how much social workers can effectively pursue the social values behind cultural competency as a professional practice perspective. Befitting both the social work professional ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers 2005) and the Canadian state multiculturalism policy, these values include social and institutional inclusion of all ethno-racial, cultural groups; society's responsiveness to issues and needs of ethno-racial minorities; social equality and equity; and social justice (Herberg 1993; Potocky 1997; Leigh 1998; Babins-Wagner, Hoffart & Hoffart, 1999; Devore & Schlesinger 1999; Este 1999; Green 1999, Macleod 1999). With these socially progressive values in mind, Kagle (1988: 35) sums up organizational support for culturally competent social work practice:

“Social workers are...affected by the organizations in which they work and by their role as professionals in society. An important function of the helping profession and of social service is to promote compliance with prevailing institutional and societal norms.”

For Canada, what Kagle is reinforcing is aligned with the state policy of multiculturalism, human service organizations and professionals have the social obligation to practice in their communities in pursuance to the policy's imbedded values and principles. Above all else, in service provision based on a public-service mandate, organizations and professionals must be inclusive of people and communities of diverse ethnicities and cultures. While social workers find that this obligation is not asking them to be or do anything outside of the professional ethical code, human service organizations – particularly those that still need to shift their corporate thinking to significantly reframe who are those constituting “the public” in the ethno-racial sense – may find it challenging to internalize and practice multiculturalism as an uncompromising operating principle. This becomes problematic for social workers employed in these organizations because their practice by and large depends on what these organizations are ready to promote as, in Kagle's words, “institutional and societal norms.”

**Organization's Systemic Change.** The second way that the organizational factor is essentially vital is that cultural competency implies the organization needs to develop itself internally so that it becomes systemically embracing and reflective of the ethno-racial, cultural diversity of the community it serves. In other words, when such organizational development does occur on mass, human service organizations as a sector become a systemic source of resources and opportunities that are complementary to any social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities.

In terms of resources, these minority communities can rely on culturally competent organizations to be able to serve them responsively and effectively through their programs and services. In terms of opportunities, these same communities can expect that these organizations include minority communities as where to hire into all operational, management and governance levels. Moreover, opportunities for upward and horizontal mobility through the organizational ranks welcome and seek out internal applicants that can enhance cultural competency of the organization as a whole. This latter cultural competency aspect is a foundation of the organizational change perspective of the organizational factor, as discussed in the next sub-section.

### **2.2.2 Organizational Change: A Perspective of the Organizational Factor**

The organizational change perspective flows from the cultural competency view about the essential need for organizations to see themselves as change targets (Lie & Este 1999, Green 1999, Ngo 2000, Hogan-Garcia 2003, Lacroix 2003). The change agenda is to address systemic biases against and barriers in embracing and attaining true cultural diversity about the organization. The United Way multicultural organizational change campaign in the United States and Canada through the 1990s represents this change agenda (Babins-Wagner et al 1999: 211) “Multicultural organizational change is a process of dismantling visible and invisible barriers to the full social participation of non-dominant groups and establishing an organization responsive and responsible to the larger community.”

In this perspective, true cultural diversity refers to meeting two objectives: (i) that the organization endeavours to enhance accessibility and responsiveness to all ethno-racial, cultural groups in the community it serves, and (ii) that the organization is governed, managed and operated in a way that its entity of human resources (i.e. line-staff, management staff and governance board members) reflects, values and implements cultural diversification as a core principle of business. These two objectives are conceptually related. The vision of the organization change perspective is that the more the organization is systemically genuine and demonstrative of ethno-racial diversification – i.e. objective (ii), the more it enhances access and is responsive to all ethno-racial, cultural in the community – i.e. objective (i).

Of importance to recognize is that the striving for these objectives is a value-based proposition of the organizational change perspective. Behind these objectives is the recognition that in an increasingly multicultural community, certain ethno-racial minorities are consistently and systemically excluded from the attention, considerations and decisions of organizations and institutions (Edmonton Social Planning Council 2005). These objectives are benchmarks to avert such discriminatory practices of

organizations so that both the clientele and staff compositions reflect the cultural diversity of the community.

In its argument for organizational change, a viewpoint within the organizational change perspective invokes the labour market as a motive for organizations to become more culturally inclusive. When the community's cultural demographics continue to change, as the argument goes, organizations should adapt to such a change from a human resource perspective. The gist of this perspective is that the organizations' viability is strengthened by the fact that it taps into the human resources offered by the growing multicultural minority communities. In this sense, multicultural inclusiveness is injected with an organizational vested-interest motive. It is however difficult to assess, where such a vested-interest is considered, how that motive is balanced with the idea of social inclusion based on such socially progressive values of social equality and social justice. MacLeod (1999: 156) illustrates the market force spin on the organizational change perspective as follows:

“As a workplace becomes increasingly diverse, leaders will be unable to defer implementation of valuing diversity programs. Valuing diversity makes sense not only from a social justice perspective but also from a labour market perspective. The costs to the organization of failing to effectively value the diversity within the workplace include...lost productivity, high turnover rates, limited innovation and underutilization of the skills of all employees.”

### **2.2.3 Anti-Racism: A Perspective of the Organization Factor**

In the case of the cultural competency and its associated organizational change perspectives, a liberal optimism is easily detectable about human service organizations as willing and capable to change to be responsive to needs and concerns of ethno-racial minorities. The anti-racism perspective, however, launches from a very different place. The anti-racism perspective of the organization factor is different in its structural analysis of the organization (Mullaly 1993; Mullaly 2002; Baskin 2003). This analysis clearly departs from a forceful critique of western societies like Canada and the United States as being racially prejudicial in their essentially Eurocentric world view (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees 1995; Potocky 1997; Nelson & McPherson 2003; Sin & Yan 2003). It

seeks to understand the problematic ethno-racial power relations in the western world from a perspective of historical European imperialism and how such historical race relations continue in countries such as Canada and the United States. Organizations and institutions are, therefore, seen as society's structural manifestations of the Eurocentric worldview and dominance in a western world multicultural society. From this perspective, everything about these entities is a practice with racially prejudicial orientation to the detriment of ethno-racial minorities. Henry et al(1995: 153-154) observe these manifestations this way:

“As in the case with other Canadian institutions and systems...a growing body of evidence indicates that racist ideologies and practices affect the administration and operation of human service organizations, the delivery of services to individual clients and communities, the allocation of resources, training and education programs, and the access and participation of people of colour as clients or patients, managers, staff, and volunteers.”

A significant contribution of the anti-racism perspective to understanding the organizational factor in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is its insistence in structural change in organizations as being singularly important. It is not so much that proponents of this perspective would dispute the organizational change process typically found in the cultural competency and organization change perspectives. What these proponents would see as most important is at the end of the day of a change process, whether ethno-racial minorities in the organization and out in the community it serves experience acceptance as social equals by the organization. It's a radical end to reach. From the anti-racism perspective, it is reached not without a controversial process of engaging change on the part of members of the socially dominant group – meaning the white majority (Henry et al 1995; Yee & Dumbrill 2003) – to acknowledge their oppressive privileged social locations and to share or to give up power and authority to achieve ethno-racial equality. In other words, organizations are institutional manifestations of the power-relations along ethno-racial lines in western societies. On the agenda of these organizations, ethno-racial minorities' concerns – including social work practice with their communities – remain marginalized as they are in the larger society.



In Nelson & McPherson's urge for change (Nelson & McPherson 2003: 93), one appreciates how their call about practice paradigm change implies a necessary shift in the culturally-based service delivery world view of organizations in an ethno-racially diversifying community. This shift necessarily encompasses not only an act of change but a process of assertive enforcement of the new practice paradigm in support of social work practice with clients and communities of minority cultures and ethnicities.

“To retain relevance, the profession of social work needs to change its stance. Instead of having the White, Western positivist approach as the unspoken standard by which all other approaches to helping are judged, approaches to helping need to be based on contextual fluidity within a given situation... This new practice model of contextual fluidity would be... adopting what has been called a polycentric perspective.”

Hick (2002:197) provides a glimpse of what this process of assertive enforcement is about:

“...social service agencies must pursue policies and practices that are non-discriminatory, and legislation and government policies must be changed to remove barriers to racial groups. This includes working to eliminate unintentional racism in policy and procedures.”

From three perspectives, the literature ascertains the significant place of the organization in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. This literature about what I call the organizational factor is clearly one about change. For it spawns from a critique that the organization needs to change to keep up with the ethno-racial diversification of the community it serves. The anti-racism perspective stands out in its structuralist, anti-oppression critique of the organization, naturally arguing for internal changes that counter ethno-racial relations in the community that sanctions the organization. The clear change agenda of this literature explicitly and implicitly – but no less clearly - speaks to mainstream organizations in traditionally Euro-ethnic societies and communities like Canada and Edmonton. In the following section, this chapter looks at how the mainstream organization is a significant consideration in the organizational factor of ethno-racial minority community practice for social workers.

### 2.3 The Mainstream Organization: Its Significance in the Organizational Factor

As represented by the perspectives discussed in the previous section, the discourse of the organizational factor in human service-delivery in a multicultural society such as Canada basically is one focusing on the mainstream organization as a change issue. (Mainstream organizations, as conceptualized in section 2.1 above) Diller (2004: 1) prefaces his primer for cultural diversity in human services by noting that “mainstream agencies...may inadvertently make clients feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.” Henry et al (1995:153) are less forgiving with mainstream organizations but likewise target these organizations as the issue to tackle:

“This chapter examines the dynamics of individual, institutional and cultural racism as they are reflected in the policies and practices of traditional, mainstream, human service organizations...social and health-care agencies such as family- and child-service agencies, mental health clinics, child-care facilities and child welfare agencies. Although it does not specifically consider other human services such as hospital and community health clinics and community or recreational centres, the issues are very much the same.”

Hence, the mainstream human service organization occupies a centrally significant place in any consideration of social work practice responding to needs and issues of individuals, families of the ethno-racial minority communities. In closer examination of the literature, three reasons are discernible to explain why Canadian mainstream organizations justifiably capture such a focus of attention.

. **First** of all, Canadian mainstream human service organizations - from government departments to public-funded non-profit agencies – are, by all intents and purposes, public services. When a community such as the city of Edmonton, where this present thesis research is conducted experiences increasing diversification of its population along ethno-racial lines, public services by definition should respond to rising human and social needs emerging from such a demographic situation. This is important from the point of view that public human services are institutional manifestations of Canadian social welfare. In this context, social welfare refers to “an organized set of norms and institutions through which we carry out our collective responsibilities to care

for one another” (Compton & Galaway 1999: 1). The inclusion of ethno-racial minorities as a sector in mainstream human service mindset and provision reflects these individuals, families and communities as integral within this Canadian societal “care for one another” project. Simply put, it is within the core agenda of Canadian multiculturalism as a state policy.

From a professional ethics perspective (Canadian Association of Social Workers 2005), social workers who work for these organizations are obliged to see to it that their employers are inclusive of the minority sectors in their provision of public programs and services. To this end, these mainstream organizations necessarily encourage social work practice initiatives to be actively taken and pursued in response to the social needs of these sectors. One fundamental need is that the social worker feels encouraged and free to exert influence within the organizations or even to pursue internal advocacy to ensure that his/her mainstream organization is indeed socially inclusive. As inclusive organizations in this sense, they are expected to value and practice multiculturalism as a Canadian state vision and policy. In action, that means that these organizations function in all respects – from governance to operations to service delivery – to embrace, serve and attend to the ethno-racial diversity of their public. Through the 3 perspectives examined in the section 2.2 of this chapter, this kind of organizational multiculturalism has consistently been advocated. However, advocating it is one thing; organizational multiculturalism’s true measure is that mainstream organizations demonstrate this value in a way the minority community experiences accessibility as service users and an ability to influence as constituents of these organizations. However, in Canada, social inclusion is experienced as remaining more a rhetorical slogan than a reality. A recent major research study of social inclusion for the city of Edmonton, for instance, has this to say (Edmonton Social Planning Council 2005: Executive Summary):

“Far too many people in Edmonton face genuine and often painful barriers to feeling socially included. All too often institutional, community and personal barriers work against many Edmontonians feeling a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition to their own city. People who are viewed as being different in some way – for example, people who are visible minorities, are openly gay, or have a low-income, face discrimination, personal abuse and

institutional roadblocks. The resulting erosion of social cohesion in our city undermine the quality of life for all Edmontonians.”

**Second**, there is a clear relationship drawn between mainstream organizations’ attitude and attention toward ethno-racial minority communities and how effectively social workers connect clients from these communities with these organizations for social service resources definitive of Canada’s social safety net for its citizens (Devore & Schlesinger 1999, Este 1999, Lieberman & Lester 2003, Williams, 2003). This relationship implies the significance of mainstream organizations at two levels in the Canadian context:

- Mainstream organizations represent the primary social resources of a Canadian community. Their openness to social minorities’ access for service and their efforts to increase their access means that social workers can rely on the mainstream resource base to support the helping work with clients from ethno-racial minority communities.
- At another level, when mainstream organizations incorporates in their operational worldview ethno-racial minority communities as a Canadian public, social work practice to influence and to advocate for service/program development and for social policy change is positively impacted. For mainstream organizations - particularly, institutions such as government departments, hospitals, schools and influential mainstream non-government organizations - are conduits of voices for change and development to decision-makers at the state and institutional governance echelon. In consideration of social change, the ability to pursue such macro level practice incrementally impacts mainstream program and service provisions, and decision-making in response to needs and issues particular to ethno-racial minorities in the community.

**Third**, mainstream organizations as an ally with their social workers in their practice with ethno-racial minorities represent a powerful institutional change agent in relation to the rest of the community (Wineman 1984, Davies & Shragge 1990, Wharf & Mckenzie 1998). The personal agency of the social worker to effect community level change concerning such issues as discrimination and racism can then count on

mainstream organizations' cooperation, partnership and reinforcement. This alliance of personal and institutional agencies adds strength and power to achieving a socially just and caring community for all social minorities. Presenting on the anti-racist social work practice perspective, Hick (2002: 197) observes that "there are many examples of social workers and social service agencies that integrate an anti-racist approach to practice." He goes on to cite front-line examples of such integration practice. In all cases, the common outcomes go beyond individual helping and empowerment to encompass community development and change.

### **Summary**

This chapter surveys the literature in the social work discipline to establish the central significance and relevance of the human service organization in social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Three perspectives are discernible, speaking to the organizational factor. Cultural competence and organizational change are conceptually connected perspectives. They emphasize the practice of developing the organization to be more open, sensitive and responsive to cultural diversity. The anti-racism perspective comes from a structural analysis of Euro-cultural western societies' ethno-racial relations and seeks change in the organization's power relations along ethno-racial lines. In the end, all these different conceptual approaches assert the importance of the organization as a systemic and social resource essential to support social workers' pursuit of best practices with ethno-racial minority communities.

The literature validates that when the human service organization is evoked as a topical issue, it clearly speaks to mainstream organizations as defined for this thesis in the previous chapter. Fundamentally, the significance of mainstream organizations has to do with their socially assigned dual role as representatives and deliverers of primary social resources for a society like Canada. Their alliance with social workers in their practice with ethno-racial minorities contributes to meeting the ethics of and efficacy of this practice.

Chapter Three explores the question: in the disciplinary discourse of social work, what is expected of mainstream human organizations in their response to ethno-racial demographic changes in the communities they serve and thereby, in support of the profession's practice with ethno-racial minorities. In other words, the next chapter establishes the conceptual best practice framework that mainstream organizations are challenged to meet given the particular issues and needs of ethno-racial minorities in a Euro-cultural, western community such as the city of Edmonton.

## Chapter Three

### **Social Work Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities: A Conceptual Understanding of Systemic Supports**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter establishes that the organization – particularly, the mainstream kind - is a critical factor in supporting social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Continuing to examine the significance of the organization as a focal issue in the thesis problem, this present chapter pursues the organizational factor one step further. What follows addresses the question: what mainstream organizations need to concretely do as supports to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities? In fact, addressing this question is to conceptually understand a core aspect of the thesis problem: when the social work peers talked about social work practice with ethno-racial minorities being marginalized in their employing organizations, what kinds of organizational best practices did they or could they expect that would be supportive of such an area of practice?

This chapter stays with most of the literature that informs the previous chapter, this time, with a focus on what it offers in the way of shedding light on these above-posted questions. In addition, like the last chapter, based on what I have recorded in my personal journal from professional peers discussions over the years, I will reference any relevant sentiments to help conceptualize the kinds of organizational best practices in these peer grouping's imagery.

In the dialogic discourse of the social work peer group over the years, there were salient sentiments lending a conceptual image of what organizational support practices look like by contrast of a practice marginalization situation. As this chapter presents, this conceptual image finds substantiation in the literature.

Three systemic levels of an organization have been clearly advocated where actions and changes need to occur and be sustained in order to empower and support

social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. These levels can be categorized as organizational governance, operational administration and service delivery management. I label these as “systemic levels” because coming from these organizational levels, decisions, policies, actions and behaviors have direct or indirect – but still ever so decisive - impact on service provision to the ethno-racial minority sector in the community.

This chapter discusses these three systemic levels in terms of their practices - as the literature proposes - that support and empower social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. However, before going into these discussions, I will first of all define these three systemic levels so as to be clear of their conceptual distinctions as well as how they relate in practice in organizations. These discussions constitute the four core sections entitled as follows:

- **Section 3.1** Organizational Governance, Operational Administration and Service Delivery Management: Systemic Levels of Human Service Organizations
- **Section 3.2** Organizational Governance: Doing Its Supportive Part
- **Section 3.3** Operational Administration: Doing Its Supportive Part
- **Section 3.4** Service Delivery Management: Doing Its Supportive Part

### **3.1 Organizational Governance, Operational Administration and Service Delivery Management: Systemic Levels of Human Service Organizations**

By **organizational governance**, I am referring to the highest policy and decision-making echelon and the level of public accountability of any public service-oriented organization. In the case of Canada’s so-called voluntary sector, which is very much an integral, vital part of the mainstream human service delivery community, the board of directors of a non-profit organization carries out the governance responsibilities. (In the international community, the voluntary sector of non-profit organizations refers to the Non-Government Organizations or NGOs. In Canada, this sector’s “voluntary” label gives recognition to the fact that the core foundation of this type of organizations is of volunteers from the community. The board of directors – the organizational governance – is by law served by volunteers. Operationally, the organization typically functions with



a significant contingent of volunteers who deliver services, run everyday operations and support sustenance efforts such as a fund-raising campaign. The fact that organizations of the volunteer sector significantly depend on charitable donations, also points to the voluntary nature of this revenue source.) Amounting to a duty of public accountability, these governance responsibilities encompass as a Canadian national study on the country's voluntary sector recommends (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector 1999: iv):

- “Ensuring the board understands its responsibilities and avoids conflicts of interest;
- Undertaking strategic planning aimed at carrying out the mission;
- Being transparent, including communicating to members, stakeholders and the public, and responding appropriately to requests of information;
- Developing appropriate structures for the organization;
- Maintaining fiscal responsibility;
- Ensuring that an effective management team is in place and providing oversight of human resources;
- Implementing assessment and control systems; and
- Planning for the succession and diversity of the board.”

This list illustrates that organizational governance is responsible for the organization's ethical best, the strategic pursuit of its mission, the development and maintenance of its fiscal and operational functions, its accountability to the community and the continuity of its governance. In other words, the organization sustains and develops on how well the governance echelon fulfills these responsibilities.

Worth noting for what this thesis addresses is a fundamental assumption behind the above points of governance responsibility. It is that organizational governance needs to appeal to general standards and ethics found in the discipline of commerce and business administration. While that assumption in itself should not point to how the organization behaves with respect to ethno-racial minority members of the community, it does however infer that the mainstream dominant business discipline exerts significant impact on how the organization works and behaves. For example, the implied need to be accountable to “members, stakeholders and the public” is a need meaningfully

understood from the latent recognition that these people refer to the socio-politically dominant public perceived by the organization as representing the most generally agreeable Canadian mainstream business worldview about running a business. The volunteer sector has more reason than ever to attend to a worldview that at best only treats ethno-racial minority needs and demands at the market margins. For, particularly in this time of government funding cutbacks and fiscal restraints, the voluntary sector relies disproportionately on the charitable donations of the socially and politically dominant mainstream public. Therefore, it needs to be acknowledged that the Canadian mainstream worldview can hold sway over policy and practice of the volunteer sector organizations.

All this should raise questions about the criterion of “diversity” found in the last point of the above list of governance responsibility. One can assume that this is a criterion about opening up opportunities for ethno-racial minority perspectives and voices to have an impact at the governance level. A fundamental test of these opportunities is how much the governance leadership actively resists dominancy of the ethno-racial majority perspectives and discourses as the basis of doing business, and advocates for and implements an alternative governance worldview that allows the organization embrace ethno-racial diversity and differences in all areas. In other words, the introduction of a truly socially diverse governance model is, by definition, an introduction of a constant tension in governance work. Such tension is an energy source for the kind of organizational change called for by Canadian multiculturalism. In this context, tension is not then an undesirable quality as it is an inherent asset in the politics of democracy – just that, in the case of Canada, the democracy has a dimension of ethno-racial diversity. Thus, for an organization, at any of its operational levels, the important point is not whether there should be any tension; it is rather whether there are processes in place to ensure there is such creative tension and that such tension works effectively as a built-in catalyst of change.

In the case of human service agencies – such as social welfare and child protection departments - that are part of the government (for Canada, government may be

any one of the two orders of government as identified in the Canadian constitution: federal, provincial), organizational governance can signify multiple locations at the top end of the government hierarchy. That is, it's unlike non-profit organizations where governance basically resides with this one board of directors. If governance is about who is ultimately accountable and responsible for a government organization in a British-styled parliamentary democracy like Canada, it is clear that the government of the day answers to its policies and decisions to the electorate. However, beyond that, one would discern structural entities at the top end of the government hierarchy that are responsible for policies and decisions as drivers of public service delivery at the street level. These entities typically include the Cabinet and the ministers who run their respective public service bureaucracies by portfolios such as child welfare and protection, health care, education, foreign affairs, public works and national defense. However, these top structural entities of government are not ideologically and politically neutral decision-makers. The government of the kind of political system like Canada represents a political party's ideological worldview, its promises to their supporters in the election and its everyday sense of what is politically expedient in response to influences of such societal forces as diverse pressure and interest groups. These political conditions typically steer the policy and decision directions that are couched in the language of the government's responsible governance and accountability to the public.

**Operational administration** of an organization refers to the senior administrators and managers charged with implementing policies and decisions for which the governance component is accountable to the organization's constituents. In the voluntary sector of non-profit organizations, this echelon typically includes the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and senior managerial staff who together constitute the executive team responsible for the general operations of the organization. In terms of accountability, the CEO answers to the governance level of the organization; the senior managerial staff report to the CEO. (For Canadian non-profit organizations, CEOs typically have the title executive director.)

In larger administrative complex organizations – such as government ministries or departments, or such well established human service organizations as the YMCA and the many Catholic charity social service establishments in North American urban areas, the operational administration echelon tends to be multi-layers. However, typically, it does not digress from the structure of a CEO person with his/her entourage of senior managerial staff reporting to the top administrative position. A typical CEO position for a Canadian government ministry or department's is the deputy minister with his/her assistant deputy ministers.

**Service delivery management** denotes the supervisory functions at the front-line service provision level. When social workers refer to such people in their organizations as “my case work supervisor”, “my clinical supervisor” or – as I have often come across – “my manager”, they are talking about that level of management they respond and report to directly. Service delivery managers often function in that organizational zone between administration and practice of client service delivery. By the way social workers refer to these managers, service delivery management is about putting program and service delivery policies and procedures in everyday practice by front-line social workers. For the front-line, these managers typically are conduits and messengers of these policies and procedures as set at the operational administration level. Just as significantly, as they are on-site supervisors of front-line social workers, they are often part of the service delivery or practice team process at the street-level office and explicitly or implicitly, their consultative recommendations and advices on everyday client service provision/practice issues are seen as organizational decisions or policies for specific client situations arising in the everyday service delivery process.

Now that the three systemic levels are distinguished and conceptually related, this chapter continues with its main agenda of discussing these levels individually in turn, examining what the literature says about each level with respect to supporting and empowering the practice of interest in this thesis.

### **3.2 Organizational Governance: Doing Its Supportive Part**

Organizational governance is, therefore, the ownership of an organization's vision, mission, goals and objectives, and architect of these ideas' implementation. In the latter aspect, it develops a framework of policies and broad strategies inspired by the vision and mission and in turn, toward achieving the broad goals and objectives of the organization. Within this understanding, organizational governance of a mainstream human service organization becomes critically instrumental in ensuring where social work services are provided to a community of ethno-racial diversity, minorities are an integral part of the targeted client population.

For the integration of a community identified as “minority” into the working of a mainstream human service organization implies a necessary shift in value orientation. This shift needs then to manifest itself in how the minority community is mainstreamed into all material practices of the organization's vision and mission. (By material practices, I refer to all practices of everyday running and working of the organization at all levels, that lend observable (e.g., an ethnically diverse board of directors and staff at all levels), quantifiable (e.g., targeted funds, increased proportion of an ethno-racially diverse clientele) and textual (e.g., formal policies, a piece of legislation) evidence that something – here, this something is the diverse ethno-racial minority community – is embraced within and integrated into these organizational practices.) An important beginning question to gauge the integration of ethno-racial minorities into the everyday systemic mindset of the organization is how the top governance level of public, mainstream organizations sees the integration as something socially important and non-negotiable?

In fact, such uncompromising value re-orientation needs to be a fundamental source of broad policies and resources on which social workers depend in practice with ethno-racial minority communities (Adachi 1990; Henry, Carol, Mattis & Rees 1995; Abels 1997; Baines 2002, Christensen 2003; Edmonton Social Planning Council 2005). In his metaphoric way, Abels (1997:233) argues for mainstream human service organizations leading with this value shift:

“The soul of a community is its people and institutions; when these become fragmented, the community becomes fragmented. An agency that services the entire community well brings that community together. The establishment of separate agencies will vaporize the essence of the movement to mutual aid and a more just society.”

He then asks rhetorically in argument for mainstream organizations opening up its mandate to embrace ethno-racial minorities as an integral part of their service community (Abels 1997:239):

“If the split “ethnic” versus “mainstream” develops into a major trend, will we lose the strength of a unified profession? Will we lose the good ideas, the good attachments to each other? Will we promote the balkanization of our clients and of our profession? Will we lose our soul?”

Abels’ questions allow for a Canadian reflection on the mainstream human services’ public obligation to serve a community of ethno-racial diversity. The Canadian state gives official recognition that the country’s population is culturally diverse. Ethno-racial minority Canadians are an integral part of the mainstream citizenry. In the case of Canada as a multicultural country with a Euro-linguistic tradition, mainstream human services - to borrow Ables’ metaphor in his rhetorical question – will represent less than the Canadian soul if they go against state-sponsored and legislated multiculturalism by treating ethno-racial minorities as other than the mainstream clientele. Through their collective experience of how their efforts to serve ethno-racial minorities are marginalized in their employment milieu, the mainstream organization social workers who have inspired this thesis project have born witness to such treatment of these minorities.

Both considering human services within the governmental context, Adachi (1990) and Christensen (2003) advocate for political leadership for and commitment to developing social and service-provision policies responsive and sensitive to ethno-racial minority needs and issues. From Christensen’s perspective concerning specifically Canada, such political qualities manifest not within a social vacuum but within a context of ideologies and running history of race-relations. However, in the end, both of their

arguments are essentially for leadership and commitment to come from the governance level of the public sector.

Responding to what they observe as “racism” in human service delivery in both Canadian public (i.e., governmental) and voluntary sector, Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees (1995:319) suggest, as follows, a governance echelon necessarily courageous and committed in its ideals as a trigger of organizational change:

“Progress toward racial equity can be measured by the degree to which an organization:

- reflects the contributions and interests of all racial groups in Canada in its mission, operations and service delivery;
- acts on a commitment to eradicate all forms of racial discrimination and disadvantage within itself;
- involves members of all its racial groups as full participants in all its levels; and
- fulfils its broader external responsibilities to promote racial equity.”

Significantly, this list reflects an organizational governance value base that is activist in nature. For the top officials of an organization need to collectively prepare to reject, challenge and change race relations that are barriers to achieving a commitment to embrace ethno-racial minorities in the mainstream of everything about the organization. The values from which such a governance echelon operates also necessarily extend to a concern for social change. The organization is typically held out as an example of necessary values and actions for race-relations based on social health and social justice, and as at least an influence of change toward an inclusive community. Such a community would (Edmonton Social Planning council 2005: Executive Summary)

- “incorporate diversity into their institutional structures, functions and processes
- value equity
- provide accessible and culturally sensitive services
- celebrate both the similarities and appreciate the rich of the difference among their citizens.”

Based on a value set endorsing social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, what do concrete supports look like at the governance level of an organization? Speaking about the United States, Potocky (1997) points to development of what he calls multicultural social work toward an anti-racism model where agency barriers to service accessibility and decrease in institutional racism are addressed through reduction and prevention of individual racism and ethnocentrism. Indeed, much that has been developed as concrete change strategies at the governance level is designed to address individual racism and ethnocentrism starting at the top echelon of the organization (Ngo 2000). By and large, these strategies speak exclusively to non-profit human service organizations of the voluntary sector.

From Ngo's cultural competency model – one typical of the widely acceptable approach to improving cultural diversification of Canadian human service organizations, the governance officials, first and foremost, need to initiate to assess themselves as the governing body in terms of its structure, commitment, knowledge and skills in respect to cultural competency. In addition, it is the governance officials' role "to provide themselves an accountability guideline to ensure the fulfillment of the agency's mission, operations and goals with respect to cultural competency" (Ngo 2000:22).

According to this model, the guidelines should hold the governance board accountable to a number of board's jurisdictions. First, the mission statement. Here, the governance board answers to whether the statement recognizes cultural diversity in the community, and reflects the organization's commitment to service culturally diverse people competently. "Competently" would mean that the mainstream organization has the core commitment, sensitivity and capacity to serve people, families and communities from a diversity of cultures. To serve competently encompasses professional responses to both private troubles and public issues in the dual context of inter-cultural and ethno-racial relations concerns and problems. Second, board of directors – the governance board itself. Here the board answers to whether the membership of the governance board is itself culturally diverse in membership as well as in orientation. By orientation, it refers to, for example, whether the board seeks consultation with and participation from a



cross-section of people of socio-economic backgrounds within the culturally diverse communities. Another benchmark is: does the board include culturally diverse client populations in conducting interviews with candidates for board membership?

Third, orientation, training and evaluating board members. In this regard, the board is responsible for including cultural diversity as a value and a practice in the management of board members. Fourth, executive director – the CEO of the organization. It is the board's responsibility that the executive director is committed to the value of cultural diversity in all working and functioning of the organization and that culturally diverse communities are all inclusive in the board's effort to recruit into the CEO position.

Fifth, program/project advisory committee. Here Ngo (2000) is clearly considering the importance of service-provision to ethno-racially diverse minorities in the community. Such a committee is about lending the governance officials advices and wisdom on how the organization can sustain cultural diversity in its practice of service-provision and of decision-making at all levels. To have an effective advisory committee, the board needs to ensure (a) that the membership reflects cultural diversity in the community and among clients, (b) that its terms of reference lends power and importance to the committee and (c) its guidance capacity to influence within the decision-making structure of the organization.

A shortfall of the kind of change model articulated above is that it skirts around the question: how does the governance board of a mainstream human service organization become aware, socially conscious and motivated to initiate these strategies in the first place. Organizations sustain a status quo not without reasons. Invariably and understandably, reasons that explain any status quo reflect vested interests within the organization; any disturbance to the status quo is felt as putting these interests at risk to their stakeholders. The literature of cultural competency is typically silent on how mainstream organizations begin to pursue change to embrace cultural diversity –

particularly, one of ethno-racial minorities against forceful vested interests associated with how business is done conventionally.

The literature also falls short on discussing what the governance echelon of government agencies of human services needs to pursue and to implement concretely as a support base for social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities. In the government sector, the governance echelon as mentioned above is the elected officials of the government of the day – specifically the ministers of government departments, the government caucus and other inner committees of the government’s decision-making process. Perhaps, in a western democratic society like Canada, the most significant governance factor to measure a government against - for what is of interest here - is how much governing elected officials develop a public sector of programs and services responsive to needs and issues of ethno-racial minorities within a high level constitutional and legal framework of human rights and freedoms, and social justice.

Operational administration is the systemic level of an organization where progressive perspectives and, professional expertise and ethics reside and gets put into practice. This is the level of everyday systemic practice where creative, courageous interpretation of organizational policies could happen for service-provision purposes. In the next section, the chapter examines what concretely operational administration has to offer to support social work practice with ethno-racial minorities.

### **3.3 Operational Administration: Doing Its Supportive Part**

Given the description above, the focus of discussion here is on the senior management of mainstream human service organizations. The operational administration echelon includes the CEO and senior managers supporting this position. A key question of interest in this discussion is: what supportive strategies need to occur at the operational administration level for social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities?

Clearly in the literature, operational administration is the systemic level that implements the program and service delivery training, and the hiring necessary to support social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities – i.e., the development and maintenance of a work force necessary to serve ethno-racial minorities and their communities competently. The cultural competency perspective discussed in the previous chapter – and also under 3.2 above - gives particular emphasis on the areas of training and hiring as lynchpins to multicultural sensitive and responsive practice (Potocky 1997, Devore & Schlesinger 1999, Green 1999, Lie & Este 1999, MacLeod 1999). Ngo (2000) points specifically to the executive director (a common positional title for the CEO) as the initiator and source of accountability of developing cultural competency for the organization. Six organizational development responsibilities are assigned to the executive director (Ngo 2000:28-29) who:

- “creates an environment that is respectful of all people
- develops and implements a plan that addresses the agency’s mission statement and goals relating to cultural competency.
- ensures that the agency recruits staff members from culturally diverse groups to reflect the racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic composition in the community and among clients.
- ensures that recruited staff members possess experience and competency in working with culturally diverse people.
- provides opportunities for leadership development and advancement for all staff.
- reports regularly to the board of directors on progress made in the areas of cultural competency in the agency.”

In addressing the issue of serving the ethno-racial minority community, training and hiring are pursued on the basis of a value-based service delivery model. In the literature, what I call a model here may be called a perspective (Devore & Schlesinger 1999), a framework (Davis, Galinsky & Schopler 1996), an approach (Green 1999) or a tool (Hick 2002, Roy & Montgomery 2003). The key point is that these are all conceptual guidances by which training and hiring can be pursued purposefully to achieve desired outcomes. Given a broad policy from the governance level of the organization, the CEO and senior managers need to legitimize and enforce the implementation of a service-delivery model; this model not only guides program and service delivery but serves as a filter through which everyday delivery decisions and

actions are evaluated. Based on my experience of working with mainstream human service organizations, the operational administration has a critically vital leadership role in engaging an encompassing organizational process to develop and to implement a service delivery model in support of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Gutierrez, GlenMaye & DeLois (1996:70) resonates with their observation and findings of the operational administration level's importance in empowering practice:

“Advocacy and encouragement of the empowerment orientation by the leadership of the agency or organization is frequently mentioned by participants as being of fundamental importance. Frequently the administrative leader is also responsible for the vision and development of the program.

Having an administrator on your side as an advocate for consumers and staff is seen by many participants as a critical support for maintaining an atmosphere of empowerment.”

However, ironically, what, in reality, ends up motivating a so-called supportive administrative leadership may not be even a strong value base for service-delivery but rather the availability of material conditions favorable to fulfilling practical administrative functions and objectives (Babins-Wagner et al 1999, MacLeod 1999). Chief among the latter is securing funds for the organization's sustenance. Indeed, the organizational development reality points to availability of material means and political support within the organization as necessary motivators for the CEO and senior managers to pursue supports for service delivery to ethno-racial minority communities.

Thus, if there are no funding sources available for promoting and implementing service delivery to ethno-racial minorities, the operational administration of a mainstream organization is not likely to pursue an organizational development process for that purpose. This implies that the CEO and senior managers need to proactively plan for developing and sustaining support for service delivery to ethno-racial minority communities and to actively pursue funders for their material generosity and flexibility to implement the plan on a long term basis.

In terms of internal political support as a motivator, the CEO and senior managers are also likely to run into resistance to change from within the mainstream organization. They have to win over the resisting elements through the organizational hierarchy, and breaking down entrenched values and attitudes as barriers to the organization's pursuit of an all-encompassing service delivery orientation toward the ethno-racial minority community. All this suggests that support coming from the operational administration level occurs only in proportion to the amount of support CEOs and senior managers can muster for the organization making a significant, reformative – if not radical - change effort to serve ethno-racial minority communities as core organizational value and work. As an ethno-racially diverse city member of the pan-North American charitable human service funding organization, the United Way of the city of Toronto has the following relevant observation on a campaign to engage mainstream human service organizations to become multicultural in their working and serving the community (Babins-Wagner et al 1999:212):

“While the benefits of diversity are many, so are the challenges to enhancing its value in the workplace. This type of change is all encompassing and affects everyone's assumptions and stereotypes. It is important that the process of responding to diversity is motivated by strong political and economic leadership. In the not-for-profit sector, funding organizations can provide such an impetus.”

The kinds of motivators observed in the cultural competency perspective literature that drive the operational administration of mainstream organizations to pursue internal systemic supports for service-delivery to ethno-racial minority communities are, therefore, about pragmatism and expediency. Certainly, these motivators are understood as being far from a social change orientation such as the anti-racism perspective. A social change orientation would direct strategic efforts that confront people and the system with historical race-relations and social domination issues.

On the other hand, the motivators under discussion here however seem to imply public relations strategies based on a concern that any change efforts perceived by funders and existing personnel as being too imposing and aggressive will back-fire on the initiators. For what we are talking here, the latter are the CEOs and senior managers with

the overarching responsibility for the organizational holistic well-being. But it is clear that whether it is a social change orientation or a public relations oriented campaign, the CEO and senior managers cannot avoid being political in their orientation to effecting systemic change in the organization. Political in the sense that they need to convince the organization at all levels to embrace and go along with any change process and also that they need to actively secure funds and material resources within and outside the organization to initiate, develop, implement and sustain the change process.

A saying goes: the proof is in the eating, suggesting for what we are talking about here that social workers' experiences at the front-line of delivery services for their own mainstream organizations are the true tests of whether their practice with ethno-racial minority communities is indeed systemically supported by their employers. Provided supports as examined so far coming from the governance level and the operational administration level, what kinds of complementary supports come from front-line management for social workers concerned about extending their practice to ethno-racial minorities in the community? The next section looks at service delivery management in response to this question.

### **3.4 Service Delivery Management: Doing Its Supportive Part**

By service delivery management, I refer to the immediate supervisors or managers of social workers at the everyday working level. My front-line practice experience as a social worker tells me that a supportive supervisor would make a world of a difference in my ability to work effectively with clients. To this extent, service-delivery management is arguably the most perceptible source of experience for the social worker in terms of whether his/her organization supports practice with ethno-racial minority communities.

The first factor that contributes to front-line managerial support to practice with ethno-racial minority communities is often implicit in the literature's discourse in this area. It is that the social work supervisors need to both be practitioners and advocates themselves for the practice pursuit in question here. For systemic supports desirable for

front-line best practices with ethno-racial minorities invariably speak to a world-view of client-focused values and ethics obligatory for social work practitioners. This suggests strongly that even though service-delivery management personnel have operational directives and administrative constraints to follow, they are also there to support and empower best practices with clients.

The practice discourse identifies broad best practices that front-line supervisors/managers must support. Prominent in the fore-front is the importance of front-line management promoting and providing room and conduits for ethno-racial minority clients to assert their roles as citizens and stakeholders in the helping process. Potocky (1997) talks about client participation and decision-making to ensure cultural knowledge and practices in the helping process are used responsively and competently. From a post-modernist standpoint that rejects the notion of a singular reality external to human subjectivity and therefore, recognizes multiple realities to understand human conditions, Green (1999:37) advocates a practice culture in the front-line that engages social workers in making transparent “salient cultural elements” in case work and issues of practice with ethno-racial minority clients. Accordingly, where necessary, “expressions of insensitivity” need be challenged.

Devore & Schlesinger (1999:156-309) contribute a highly comprehensive practical ethnic sensitivity framework applied to not only different social work practice levels such as direct practice and macro practice, but also various practice settings (e.g., the public sector and health care institution) as well as different clientele (e.g., refugees and immigrants, and families). This framework reaffirms Potocky’s argument for cultural knowledge and practices, and Green’s view on bringing into the open particular life and institutional issues and needs as experienced by ethno-racial minority clients. Devore & Schlesinger’s framework is a pragmatic one in that it encompasses a layer of practice denoted as “adaptation of strategies and procedures for ethnic-sensitive practice”. This is where front-line management’s flexibility and sensitivity are necessary to allow and engage social workers to creatively intervene and practice in the helping

process with ethno-racial minority clients who come with cultural assumptions and customs around such social work notions as helping, support and empowerment.

Hick (2002) notes the importance of a community orientation to serving ethno-racial minorities. Such an orientation to social work practice directs the social worker to develop social connections with formal and informal – but all culturally knowledgeable – resources within particular minority communities. For community relations lend vital opportunities for the social worker to develop working relationships in minority communities benefiting helping work with individuals and families from within those communities. Moreover, minority community relations are a basis of engaging the community to organize or develop its own indigenous resources for self-help and mutual support. In my travel as a social worker, I have observed that where front-line supervisors and managers have a community orientation to managing service delivery, their workers are encouraged to incorporate an approach to practice that reaches out to and draw into the helping process natural, indigenous resource people and leaders from within the ethno-racial minority community. Such kind of service-delivery management support effectively allows strong practice with ethno-racial minorities that is characterized by a lot of learning and awareness-development on the part of the social worker, as well as by intervention and helping strategies based on essential consideration of cultural realities and ethno-racial minority relations issues in the community.

All in all, service-delivery management is needed to be the most intimate supporters of the social worker with respect to pursuing best practices with ethno-racial minorities. It is difficult to imagine the social worker can pull off effective practices if s/he cannot rely on the front-line supervisor or manager to support opportunities, to voice service-delivery and professional practice sentiments in the organizational system and to convince the organization upper echelons to endeavour to create and sustain supports for the work with ethno-racial minority communities.



## Summary

This chapter discusses the kinds of important supports needed from three systemic levels of mainstream human service organizations for social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Through the discussions, what is also indirectly, but clearly demonstrated is that supports would not likely to work to empower this area of practice if they do not come from all levels. For the three systemic levels need to work in unison to sustain each other's supportive actions and decisions. It is in this context that the issue of systemic challenges takes on a worthiness and disciplinary significance as a research focus in this thesis project.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three have explored the disciplinary discourse in the social work literature on the organization factor of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, and the more specific supports mainstream organizations need to provide for this area of practice. This discourse supports the argument that as a Canadian institution, mainstream human service organizations should be multicultural in their collective worldview and in operations, providing services and supporting practices that are sensitive and responsive to private troubles and public issues of an ethno-racially diverse community.

However, it is well worth being aware of a different discourse of human service-provision in a multicultural, ethno-racially diverse North American society. This other way of looking at the issue is that human services to ethno-racial minorities should be ethno-specific. For, as the argument goes, "their own" organizations are more able to respond to the cultural and social needs of the people in question (de Anda 1997). In officially multicultural Canada, this argument is problematic at a couple of levels. At one level, this argument is premised on belief that ethno-racial minorities in Canada are outsiders of the mainstream community and institutions' consciousness in addressing human and social issues. Canadian multiculturalism clearly would not allow for acceptance of this premise as a basis of human service development and provision. What Canada essentially asserts is that the mainstream population is multicultural. Hence, when we identify something as mainstream human services, Canadians need to

acknowledge that these services must be organized in order to respond to needs and issues coming from a multicultural public.

At another level, this argument implies that ethno-specific organizations offer the level and scope of support, material and human resources, professionalism, authority and service to ethno-racial minorities as mainstream organizations claiming to serve the public as a whole. However, the general reality is that ethno-specific organizations in Canadian communities are hand-to-mouth operations that have very little influence on how they are resourced by funders such as government programs and major charitable funding organizations such as the United Way in many Canadian cities. As a result, these organizations by and large provide what I would call dead-end services – i.e., services that offer little answers to the clientele other than helping them to live and cope with social complexities and barriers, including historical injustices, the larger society presents through its institutional policies and practices. In this sense, these organizations often become more problematic than just being assimilationist; they fixate on the individual as a chief maker of his/her own problem. That is, they serve by the medical model, focusing on looking for the individual's pathologies for treatment. As I have observed too, as the mainstream funders are pleased with such a line of addressing presenting client problems, these organizations, as resource-challenged as they are, are encouraged by funding criteria to focus on this general model of service and practice. As a consequence, these organizations are uncomfortable and unprepared to explore, assert and address any societal factors contributing to the person's troubles and problems in the first place – that is, factors which Longres (2000:7-8) explains as “structural origins” of private problems of individuals.

To follow, Chapter Four is a research literature review on the question: what does the literature of social work-related research finds out about the core thesis interests: (i) what are the systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities, and (ii) how are these challenges explicated as part of the findings in the research literature. The review in the next chapter sets the stage for the thesis field research as it shows the extent

of the knowledge base on the above-noted research interests and therefore, informs the kind of gaps of knowledge that this thesis can contribute to filling.

## Chapter Four

### A Literature Review: Informing the Thesis Objectives and Framing a Critical Theory Perspective

#### Introduction

What is the current critical understanding of mainstream organizations as a systemic challenge to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities? By “critical”, I am distinguishing two elements in an effort to understand social issues of concern to ethno-racial minorities. First, it’s an effort to understand from a theoretical standpoint that these minorities are a socially subordinated sector in western world societies (Fleras & Elliott 1992, Fleras & Elliott 1995, Henry et al 1995), of which Canada is one; second, this understanding being pursued in this effort is motivated by an activist orientation to contribute to social change efforts for ethno-racial equality and social justice for minority communities. The previous two chapters establish the case that mainstream human service organizations and the systemic way they are governed and operated are vital factors in support of these organizations’ social work practice with ethno-racial minority people and communities. This present chapter discusses how the literature informs about and falls short on what this thesis sets out to find out – in other words, the two objectives referred to in Chapter One:

- **Objective One:** to explore systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities; and
- **Objective Two:** to understand how these experiences are organized into systemic ruling of practice.

Such a literature review serves the thesis research study in a couple of ways. First, it identifies the knowledge base for a critical theory perspective with respect to the thesis problem. This perspective will serve to inform a methodology of the thesis research – as found in the next chapter and to inform the analysis of research results – as

found in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 to follow. Second, the review lends itself to revealing the knowledge gaps, thereby directing the focuses of this field research of the thesis study.

This chapter will be divided as follows. The first section (**4.1**) describes the critical theory perspective literature this chapter gives focus to. To follow, the main body of the chapter presents a critical review of the literature, structured to address the above-listed thesis objectives. Respective to the two objectives, **Section 4.2** looks at mainstream organizations' systemic challenges to practice with ethno-racial minorities and **Section 4.3**, how the literature explicates this practice issue. The chapter concludes with a summary. Chapter Four's main sections are entitled as follows:

- **Section 4.1** Review of Literature from a Critical Theory Perspective
- **Section 4.2** Mainstream Organizations' Systemic Challenges to Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities: A Literature Review
- **Section 4.3** Explication of Systemic Challenges in the Literature

#### **4.1 Review of Literature from a Critical Theory Perspective**

The thesis objectives that frame this literature review direct an effort to identify and to understand the thesis problem – that social work practice with ethno-racial minorities remains marginalized in mainstream human service organizations. In the literature research for this chapter, focus is given to identifying a literature from a critical theory perspective that can shed light on mainstream organizations' systemic limitations, biases and other issues contributing to creating and perpetuating the practice marginalization of concern. Given this orientation, the literature review in the sections below is largely based on four discernible groups of scholarly materials.

The first group is reports and papers based on researching problems concerning the connectedness between service-delivery or organizational accessibility and ethno-racial minorities in western countries like Canada. The second group is scholarly materials from a structural social work perspective. What structural social work

perspective offers most appropriately to the study of the thesis problem here is its descriptive approach to understanding social work practice issues as structural flaws of “our social institutions function(ing) in such a way that they discriminate against people along the lines of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability and so on” (Mullaly 1993:122). The third group is materials from an anti-oppressive perspective. Emerging from the structural social work theoretical tradition (Baines 2003, Baskin 2003, Baines 2007) the anti-oppressive practice literature offers a rich knowledge base striving toward understanding social marginalization from a micro (everyday personal), mezzo (cultural) and macro structural perspective (Thompson 1997, Mullaly 2002). The fourth and last group of literature is what I would categorize as anti-racist literature primarily drawn from sociology of ethno-racial relations. In this grouping, materials concerning institutional racism are found to be particularly relevant to enhance a perspective of systemic realities for ethno-racial minority in western societies (Fleras & Elliott 1992, Fleras & Elliott 1995, Henry et al 1995). In the text below, I refer this literature group and the anti-oppressive perspective materials as the critical theory literature

As follows, materials from these literature groupings will be infused throughout **Sections 4.2 and 4.3** as they are introduced, critiqued, referenced, quoted and used otherwise as the context discussion calls for.

#### **4.2 Mainstream Organizations’ Systemic Challenges to Practice with Ethno-Racial Minorities: A Literature Review**

In Canada, a landmark study commissioned by the Government of Canada in mid-1980s has raised the collective awareness of the social work profession about the social barriers faced by members of the country’s contemporary immigrant and refugee communities of ethno-racial minorities in their everyday efforts to cope with and to address mental health issues (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Since this catalytic publication, professional discourses in conferences, workshops and publications have clearly expanded to attending the broader issue of mainstream human service organizations’ inherent socio-cultural and structural barriers in the way of ethno-racial minorities accessing helping resources

claimed to serve the “everybody” in the public. The reference materials that inform the last two chapters are a demonstration of a part of the on-going discourse addressing that broader issue. However, the flip-side of any constructive efforts to address the issue is the continuing lament - as based on field practice experiences - that ethno-racial minority Canadians remain a marginalized consideration by mainstream human service organizations in Canada. In fact, the national task force was instrumental in driving that issue home as a stubborn, chronic societal barrier to needy Canadians who are ethno-racial minority immigrants and refugees.

At the roots of the problem, the task force identifies a basic contradiction in Canadian society concerning multiculturalism and the reality of its implementation in addressing mental health: (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988: 11)

“The ideology of multiculturalism accords well with mental health. People with options...are likely to maintain their mental health. Curtailing options through forced assimilation or isolation jeopardizes health and well-being. While Canada’s policy of multiculturalism should help create optimal conditions for immigrant adaptation, the way in which these policies are implemented and the climate of popular opinion compromise this potential. The gap between “ideal” policies and “real” behaviour must be narrowed.”

That mainstream human service organizations constitute a part of ethno-racial minority immigrants and refugees’ marginalization experience in Canadian society is made most poignant by the task force’s finding that public human services of different levels of government should play a critical role in supporting immigrants and refugees but yet were having little, if any at all, to show (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees 1988). Ironically, it has been the Canadian state that rhetoricalizes multiculturalism as a Canadian social ideal about equality among diverse cultures. What emerges from the task force study is that the service delivery policies originate in the inner sanctum of the government bureaucracy isolated from the minority community of immigrants and refugees. As a consequence, mainstream mental health care organizations, which are the creations of these policies and constitute the major service responses and resources to addressing mental health issues, are ill-prepared to

respond to ethno-racial minorities' needs and issues. In particular, these health needs and issues are invariably compounded by their diverse cultural contents and by social attitudes imbedded in troubling relations between the Canadian dominant Euro-cultural majority community and those diverse communities of ethno-racial, visible minorities.

Through its study of immigrants and refugees' mental health issues and of Canadian society's response to them, the task force has contributed to touching off what I would call an advocacy movement in the human service community focusing on addressing institutional responsibilities for serving ethno-racial minority Canadians. It is a movement not in the sense of spontaneous, tumultuous, community-politics driven activist demonstrations and uprisings; it is rather an incremental groundswell of exploring and addressing the issue and it has continued as a passionate, sustained change undertaking by concerned professional service-providers in the human service community.

Out of this development in advocacy, one has witnessed the growth of a literature informing the social work discipline on mainstream human service organizations in relation to serving ethno-racial minorities. As a North American phenomenon, this literature, interestingly, is far from only a Canadian product, but very much contributed by a discourse also out of the United States. This can be accounted for by the fact that the immigrant demographical changes in both North American societies have followed a very similar pattern since the 1960s (Isajiw 1999, Balgopal 2000). Both Canada and the United States have experienced an influx of immigrants from source countries and regions outside of the traditional sources in the European continent. With social and human issues concerning ethno-racial minorities as the bulk of the immigrant community coming to light, research efforts and debates on both side of the border in the 1980s, have fuelled the advocacy movement as a North American development.

An illuminating example of an "advocacy movement" undertaking is a Canadian scholastic review of nearly 400 publications from Canada itself, the United States, Britain and Australia about "Ethno-racial Access, Utilization and Delivery of Social Services"



(Reitz 1995:1). In this broad review effort, an overwhelming revelation emerges that mainstream human service organizations for the examined Euro-cultural countries are relatively inaccessible to the ethno-racial minority immigrants. This results in these immigrant citizens denied of social assistance and support and health services that form the social safety nets of these countries. Reitz (1995:1) summaries as follows:

“...Because of the problem of cultural appropriateness of services the research focus on rates of utilization may actually underestimate the barriers in access to services. Where services are used but are not appropriate to the culture of a group, equivalent benefits may not be derived. Hence access should be considered to be correspondingly less. Barriers in access to services are reported for most types of services and in most jurisdictions. Access barriers also affect social assistance (welfare) utilization. In fact, contrary to widespread concerns, research...consistently show that these groups receive public resources below the level to which they would be entitled based on their tax contribution.”

Two critical, related themes clearly emerge from this literature. First, in multicultural North American societies and specifically in Canada where multicultural equality and integration are officially promoted as societal virtues and practices, mainstream human service organizations are far from multicultural entities in a way ethno-racial minorities are welcome and embraced as an integral part of the organizational structure and of the clientele. Second, this disconnection between societal rhetoric about what is a socially virtuous reality, on the one hand, and how lived reality presents very differently, is very much an issue systemic in nature. In fact, this literature is largely a study of the systemic conditions under which mainstream human service organizations operate in a quiet, defaulted, yet, effectively exclusionary manner as far as ethno-racial minorities are concerned. It is these conditions that contextualize the marginalization of mainstream organization social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, and by which this thesis problem needs be understood.

#### **4.2.1 The Cultural Competency Development Literature: A Discourse of Western Liberal Perspective**

A mainstream literature of interest here advocates and educates on organizational change to become culturally competent (Thomas 1987, Guzzetta 1997, Potocky 1997, Leigh 1998, Devore & Schelinger 1999, Green 1999, Lie & Este 1999, Ngo 2000, Al-

Krenawi & Graham 2003, Lacroix 2003, Anderson, Kirkham, Waxler-Morrison, Herbert, Murphy & Richardson 2005). The problems to which a cultural competent organization responds reflect mainstream human service organizations' status quo. Ngo (2000) observes that these organizations, by serving a public continually presumed to be Euro-cultural Canadians only, provide limited access to their services by those with issues and needs arising from their experiences of being ethno-racial minorities. The issues of access Ngo itemizes illustrate how organization issues can lead to discouraging culturally diverse communities to access services even though those are "public" services (Ngo 2000:5):

- "There is a lack of culturally competent models for service delivery
- There is a lack of innovative outreach strategies among human service organizations to get culturally diverse communities involved.
- Culturally diverse communities continue to be only marginally represented in board, senior staff and volunteer structures.
- Culturally diverse communities are neither very aware nor knowledgeable of services.
- Culturally diverse communities perceive barriers to equitable service delivery in a number of areas and are generally unaware of how to access services.
- Culturally diverse communities perceive that discrimination occurs in service delivery.
- Culturally diverse communities are concerned that their needs are not taken into consideration."

Others of the cultural competency orientation agree with this line of observations about the problem. Este (1999) contextualizes cultural competency development for the Canadian human service mainstream in what people experience as "institutional discrimination". Institutional discrimination, according to Este (1999:15), is often "subtle or 'polite'" in today's Canada; however, it continues to exist and to take effect when mainstream institutions are oriented to Canada's cultural majority – "white and British" (Este 1999:17), defaulting to this majority population's world views, conventions and ways with the effect of excluding certain ethnic and racial groups. Subtlety matters little in being at the receiving end of the blow of institutional discrimination. In fact (Este 1999:16),

"(s)ubtle forms of discrimination are as dangerous as those that are overt. They can easily seep into the policies and practices of institutions, such as government,

education, health, justice, employment and housing. They are more difficult to confront, although there are anti-discrimination laws, subtle and polite forms tend to provide very little documentary evidence. Legal jurisprudence demands that some provable harm be done that can be measured in a tangible manner. In such cases, the results are the same: the individual has denied a rightful opportunity to fair and respectful treatment.”

According to Potocky (1997:321) who speaks about the United States, cultural sensitivity and competency model took hold of multicultural social work in the 1980s. This is a model in response to the systemic issues of “agency barriers to service accessibility” by ethno-racial minorities and “institutional racism”. Guzzetta (1997) echoes Este’s observations and concerns as he responds to an argument in favor of separate human service organizations serving ethno-cultural minority communities. His argument in favor of embracing ethno-racial minorities by mainstream human services complements the values of Canadian official multiculturalism and speaks to problematic ethno-racial relations for Canadian society as far as multiculturalism is concerned. Guzzetta’s rebuttal hints at an institutional attitude at work that underpins mainstream human service organizations’ mindset about ethno-racial minority citizens as secondary others at the societal margins (Guzzetta 1997:63):

“The debate over whether to provide ‘culture-specific’ services is one of the strangest issues in social work. It is a profoundly antidemocratic proposal...Virtually all major research on ethnic populations indicates that their wish is to join the mainstream of American life as quickly as possible, to be treated as ordinary Americans, not as inhabitants in some sort of cultural zoo...The issue is...acceptance. Identification and separation into culturally distinct groups that are treated as ‘different’ does not represent acceptance, and it is not social justice; it should be called by its proper name” ‘segregation’. The major results of such segregation are not justice, but injustice; not unity, but disunity. It does not lead to equality, but to establishment of specific status gradations. It isolates ethnics from the general population and almost always works to the benefit of the majority group, not the ethnic minorities.”

While Guzzetta’s view of culture-specific services as a form of segregation, in effect, highlights an alternate service-delivery model in which mainstream organizations incorporate ethno-racial minorities into their driver-concept “public served”, this desegregating, inclusive model can quickly reveal its true identity as “love with conditions”. Addressing the need of human services delivered with intercultural

sensitivity and responsiveness in the health care system in urban Canada, Anderson, Kirkham, Waxler-Morrison, Herbert, Murphy and Richardson (2005) identify the issue of the mainstream patient care system far from catching up with the increase in this particular need. They take the issue to its broader context where it is connected with a contemporary trend of health care policy. In effect, then, like Ngo and Este's contextual observations cited above, their analysis points to a systemic milieu for the thesis problem being explored here (Anderson et al 2005:323-324):

“Since 1990...Canada has become even more culturally diverse, with immigrants and refugees coming from many parts of the world...In fifteen years there have been major changes in Canadian health care system. The escalating cost of health care has increased pressure for cost effectiveness and efficiency in hospital administration and for more home care. Restraints in health care spending in the 1990s reduced the number of staff who now care for an ever more acute and complex patient population across both hospital and community settings. Increasingly the realities are shortages of hospital beds, rapid patient turnovers, and little on-going in-service education for staff on issues such as intercultural care.”

The literature advocating for cultural competency development for organizations exudes a western liberal optimism about change (Thomas 1987, Lie & Este, 1999, Ngo 2000). The cultural competency orientation invariably betrays a strong faith in the good nature of institutional personnel who want and will support and effect change once they are enlightened of the problem their organization presents to the ethno-racial minorities. Second, the orientation places a high instrumental value on rational strategic steps that incrementally lead to an envisioned place where the problem is adequately addressed for the marginalized. In this process, harmonious negotiation, compromises and peaceful change are assumed and counted on as possible eventualities. Interestingly, not uncommon among the proponents of the cultural competency orientation is that systemic issues are identified as targets for change – such as policies, practices and attitudes that are in effect culturally exclusionary. But, even then, the common solution focus is an incremental process of rational organizational change believed to be readily welcome and effective in overcoming these issues. If there is any recognition of these issues being deep-seeded vested interests to – if only by default - protect the dominant cultural status quo from being disturbed, rarely is any alarming words sounded about the obvious all-

encompassing challenge to make individuals in the organization internalize, assert and act on change needs including themselves as forces of cultural dominance. Illustrating this line of liberal optimism, the following passage identifies what are determined to be cultural exclusionary values and assumptions of an organization and to follow, an observational statement about the organization and many other similar organizations prepared to change (Thomas 1987:15). Noteworthy in this quote is that what allow this optimism to occur are (a) the conspicuous silence on the stakes and vested-interests of those that hold on to the stated values and assumptions and (b) the clear latent belief in these individuals' ability to be objective and reasonable about the need for their organization to shift values and assumptions in instigating a change process.

“Values and Assumptions of the Organization

- Assumed an homogeneity of people in the organization who, amongst other things, would be familiar with Roberts Rules of Order and Christian philosophy
- Assumed Canadian, mainstream-culture approaches to child rearing, celebrations, modes of problem solving, and relations to one's community
- Assumed a value attached to a wide range of skills and abilities, but which still excluded language skills and cross-cultural experience.

Understanding and accepting the need for change is an essential first step. An increasing number of human service organizations...are examining their organizations...deciding that their policies, structures, practices, and attitudes should be based on an acceptance of the diversity of the Canadian population...challenging the intentional and unintentional injustices which currently limit so many Canadians. In order to do this effectively, they are choosing a program of integrated multicultural organizational change. That is, they are planning and organizing an effort which is:

1. organization wide
2. coordinated with the support of top management
3. intended to increase the organization's effectiveness, health and real accessibility
4. implemented through strategic interventions in the organization's processes.”

Next, this chapter turns to a distinct group of work in the relevant literature, which is based on a critical perspective of the ethno-racial structure of western societies such as Canada. If the cultural competency development side of the literature focuses on offering practical and rational steps to effect organizational change, this other group of materials clearly prefers stepping back to look at and to understand the ethno-racial relations big picture as a source of possible solutions to organizational change.

#### **4.2.2 The Critical Theory Literature: A Discourse of Systemic Reality from an Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Perspective**

The literature with a western liberal orientation creates a conundrum for social workers who have experienced undiminished marginalization of their practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations. The liberal optimism is built on the belief that dominant stakeholders of these organizations are simply unaware, rational individuals and that once they become knowledgeable, they will be ready to pursue change for the organization to become multicultural in principle and practice. If this is the crux of the issue, a question should naturally arise: then, why change has not come about over the past two decades of the advocacy movement referred to above?

Another discernible body of work in effect responds to this conundrum by pointing out that the roots issue here is not about dispassionate, unknowing individuals that will champion change about the organization once they become aware of what the problem is and where the problem lies. From an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective, the critical theory literature views that Canadian society basically remains predominantly Euro-centric in its ethno-racial relations and that this societal reality is reflected in how mainstream human service organizations respond to their demographically diverse communities (Henry et al 1995; Dumbrill & Maiter 1996, Mullaly 2002, Shera 2003, Yee 2005, Baines 2007). As they observe that Canadian multiculturalism has a harder time than ever before to advance past the rhetorical realm, Dumbrill & Maiter succinctly put across the anti-racism literature's perspective as follows (2004:12-13):

“After September 11, 2001, the tenuous position of minority groups in Canada became more evident as racist attacks ensued against Muslims, Sikh and other visible minority groups. Driven by these events, the authors reiterate their argument that Canada must move beyond its reluctant acceptance of difference...(It is not possible to understand minority cultures without first understanding the dominant culture...Ethnocentric multiculturalism exists within Canada. White British and French cultures define the nation, while minority cultures are accepted through concession and tolerance...Although understanding minority cultures is an important part of providing social work services in a

multicultural society, this alone cannot lead to the development of equitable services. Social work agencies must do more than try to understand and meet the needs of minority communities. Only if agencies are shaped by and reflect minority communities will a Canadian culture exist that is truly equitable.”

As a whole, the critical theory literature observes that the problem with mainstream human service organizations in being open to ethno-racial minorities is a natural manifestation of the Eurocentric domination in ethno-racial relations in Canada. Particularly, an anti-oppressive practice analysis provides that a society’s dominant culture reproduces itself within its structure of institutions in a way that subordinates and marginalizes certain population sectors (Galper 1975, Galper 1980, Mullaaly 2002, Razack 2002, Yee 2003, Baines 2007) . Thus, in this institutional structure, “‘(d)ifference’ becomes that which does not conform to the European norm and minority cultures are established as existing outside mainstream culture – minority groups are confirmed as ‘them’ and the majority as ‘us’.” (Dumbrill & Maiter 2004:13) It is this “us” mindset dominating the running of mainstream human service organizations that feeds the exclusionary notion that ethno-racial minority citizens are not “us” for whom these organizations are mandated to serve. Lindenberger & Tuzi (2004:14) reinforces as follows:

“Racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has for the most part become covert in the industrialized countries, except for followers of the extreme Right. Legislation in Canada and in many other countries protects the civil and human rights of all its citizens. This, however, cannot guarantee the eradication of ingrained or learned prejudices toward members of designated communities. Systemic racism, for instance, manifests itself often quite subtly. It may occur in hiring practices, in access to services and housing, in how services are organized and delivered, in social ostracism and the non-acceptance of religious and social customs by dominant communities.”

In a mainstream human service organization, systemic racism is found in practices at multiple levels resulting in ethno-racial minorities excluded from the services and opportunities offered by the organization. Hick (2002:196) sees systemic racism as a target of anti-racist social work practice, referring to it as “the existence of policies and structures built into our social institutions that serve to subjugate, oppress and force the

dependence of individuals or groups.” Henry et al (1995:154) offer up a list of “manifestations” of what Hick is talking about:

- “Lack of access to appropriate programs and services
- Ethnocentric values and counseling practices
- Devaluing of the skills and credentials of minority practitioners
- Inadequate funding for ethno-racial community based agencies
- Lack of minority representation in social agencies
- Monocultural or ad hoc multicultural model of service delivery”

Part of this discourse in today’s Canadian society recognizes that systemic racism is not an overt societal conflict characterized by protests and violence; it is rather a subtle everyday unchallenged undercurrent which however remains just as exclusionary to those who are the subjects of domination (Fleras & Elliott 1996, Mullaly 2002). Fleras (March 8, 2004:A17) defines systemic racism as:

“a largely impersonal and unconscious pattern of discrimination that is inherent within the normal functioning of the system (hence systemic). In contrast to many non-systemic expressions of racism which reflect conscious intent and are widely perceived as deviations from the norms of society, the defining feature of systemic racism is its ‘normalcy’.”

The anti-racism literature is not solution-oriented in its offering, unlike the cultural competence development literature which as summarized above, contributes models and processes of organizational change. On the other hand, the power of the anti-racism perspective comes from its persuasive critique of mainstream human service organizations as systemic manifestations of a larger Euro-centric Canadian society in which ethno-racial minority citizens are considered as the “others” peripheral to a dominant ethno-racial, cultural majority. Mullaly (2002:76) makes a connection to illustrate these systemic manifestations:

“...(A)ll social institutions are based on the culture of the dominant group...all ‘other’ cultures are measured against the yardstick of the dominant culture, and the more they deviate from the dominant culture, the more they are judged to be deviant and inferior cultures.”

In summary, the literature brings together a portrait of Canadian mainstream human service organizations as systemically challenged to serve ethno-racial minority



citizens as a natural, integral matter of operations and consideration. This, in turn, implies systemic limitations about social work practice based out of these organizations. Indeed, in examining the challenge of cultural diversity as a point of professional social work practice, Hugman (1996:139) observes that “contemporary social work is in a position where the scope of professionalization is to be found increasingly in the ‘technical’ area but denied...in areas which are perceived as ‘ideological’”. While “ideological” may not be usually used to describe social workers, I have, for instance, both experienced and observed that if, in any effort of internal advocacy, a mainstream organization-employed social worker pushes persistently hard for the cause of serving ethno-racial minorities, s/he gets - often just subtly; sometimes, not so subtly; but always, unmistakably - marked as having a personal agenda. In other words, the social worker is seen as ideological in the sense that s/he carries out his/her work with a personal cause as to what needs to be achieved and that the cause is pursued in ways connoting an ideological mission to change the status quo. These ways are not uncommonly described in less than positive terms as fanatical zeal, emotions, radical expressions of change and a potential to de-stabilize what is working fine. There is often an unspoken but clear indication that this agenda is rabble-rousing and at odds with what the organization is about.

Two main bodies of work in the literature point to organizational issues that are clearly systemic in nature. The cultural competency development materials claim a constructive role by offering instrumental models and processes for organizational change in order to address systemic barriers in the way of the organization to become more accepting and responsive to ethno-racial minorities. These materials typically skip over the question: if the organizational barriers are systemically imbedded, how would the proposed model or process be readily embraced and be allowed to effect fundamental change?

The anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice literature, on the other hand, brings home what I think the cultural competency development literature tends to stop short of exploring. It offers a discourse that shows resistance against the temptation to jump in to fix organizations in question. Instead, it undertakes to bring the bottom-line to the open

that ethno-racial visible minority citizens in North American societies like Canada are marginalized by mainstream human service organizations. Such marginalization is a troubling default for these organizations are an integral part of the larger Euro-centric society. Those of the anti-racism and anti-oppression orientations reject the belief in an easy fix of systemic discrimination of ethno-racial minorities by mainstream institutions. It is as if there is no wonder for them that such discrimination occurs given that North American societies remain exclusionary to ethno-racial minorities in mainstream social and institutional spaces (Galper 1975, Galper 1980, Henry et al 1995). This literature offers broad ideas for change at multiple levels of the individual, culture and social structure and systems (Thompson 1997), rather than didactic models and processes as often delivered by those of the cultural competency development orientation. For this thesis that is aimed to explore the marginalization problem as reflected as social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, the critical theory literature is useful in that it points out that systemic challenges mainstream organizations present to their social workers are not institutional idiosyncrasies but rather issues connected to the larger societal ethno-racial relations.

The next section of this chapter will explore how much the literature explicates systemic challenges to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities so that such practice remains a marginalized consideration of Canadian mainstream human service organizations.

### **4.3 Explication of Systemic Challenges in the Literature**

A central interest of this thesis is to understand how systemic challenges to everyday social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream organizations occur. In reviewing literature, a necessary question to ask is, therefore: to what extent the existing knowledge discourse explicates this organizational issue. Explication is more than explanation. A desk-top dictionary (Soanes 2001:314) refers “explicate” to “analyze and explain (something) in details”, then supplementing with the Latin root of the word “*explicare* ‘unfold’”. “Unfold” is an excellent graphical word that resonates with this major thesis research objective about knowing how systemic challenges emerge, take on

disguises, divert, yet confront and become practice problems. A pursuit of this objective should conjure up the image of unfolding layers of cover of something under wrap to conceal the real identity of what is meant to be hidden from view; the contribution of the unfolding is a deconstruction into details about how the wrapping layers work to cover up what is otherwise not visible.

The literature discussed in the last section also shows an analytical side besides being descriptive of systemic challenges. What comes out loud and clear from the analyses is that these challenges are not organizational issues internally confined, isolatable and definable for efficient resolution. Instead, these challenges to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities are in fact institutional or organizational manifestations of a Canadian ethno-racial and multicultural relations status quo where ethno-racial minority citizens are kept at the margins of mainstream social and political life.

It is in this analytical context that the literature informs about explication for the thesis. On “oppression at the cultural level”, Mullaly (2002) makes a powerful point for this thesis’ exploratory research perspective that mainstream social institutions as agents of transmitting cultural values – including the human service organizations – are very much responsible for the marginalization of minority cultures and their members. Indeed, Adam (1978:30) echoes this cultural role of society’s institutions: “Educational institutions, churches, the mass media, the publishing industry, and other cultural agents serve as conduits of cultural reconstitution, by continually reproducing the language and symbolic universe of society.” As a result (Mullaly 2002:73),

“What we have is a totalizing culture with inclusions and exclusions...A loose argument could be that the more dominant characteristics one has, the more privileged he or she might tend to be. Also, the fact that almost everyone is a member of at least one dominant group makes it difficult to challenge the dominant culture since every one has at least a little stake in preserving it.”

Mullaly and Adam’s observations lend a significant implication about social work practice itself in mainstream organizations. It is that social work practice through these

mainstream organizations is grounded on an entrenched mindset and policies where ethno-racial minority needs as cultural and inter-cultural issues are not among the core concerns. In other words, social work practice in mainstream organizations is itself a part that goes to explaining the profession's limitations in serving these minorities (Mullaly 2002). In fact, by association with society's socio-political, institutional dominant status quo, the profession's limitations to effect social change have been well documented in the general social work literature (Galper 1975, Mullaly 1993, Carniol 1995). Ironically, this analytical viewpoint leads to questioning who the social worker is as a particular individual – his/her particular skills, values, ethnics and convictions – may well be important but not necessarily a decisive factor in mainstream organizations in transformative change toward treating ethno-racial minorities as an integral part of the core business and core operational attention and pursuits.

The analytical literature has gone deeper to describe how everyday human service provision to ethno-racial minorities can be limited within a systemic or organizational context. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) contribute in a major study that examines studies in major western countries such as Canada, the US, the UK and Sweden about everyday discrimination encountered by what they call subordinate groups in a variety of institutional systems. By subordinate groups, these authors definitely give focus to ethno-racial minorities in the western Euro-cultural countries they examine. While their work stops short of looking at social service system per se, Sidanius and Pratto present forceful evidence based on a broad review of studies of international origins that subordinate groups are systematically discriminated against in such systems important to people's personal development, health and citizenry rights as education, health care and justice. Across these systems, discrimination takes the form of differential treatment of many kinds along the process which the affected person accesses, uses and negotiates through the system in question.

For illustration purpose, take the education system which Sidanius and Pratto look at. Their examination of the education system provides a persuasive case about mainstream organizations' limiting impact on social work practice with ethno-racial

minorities. For in Canada the education system is one of the societal institutions that employ social workers. Based on reviewing studies in over a dozen Euro-cultural democracies, they conclude that discrimination against subordinate groups in educational systems occur in all jurisdictions. Common instances of discrimination include differential funding in favor of larger proportions of public education resources for schools representing dominant groups of society; differential referral where children who are poor, non-white, from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely regarded as pathological in terms of their emotions and mental health and referred to segregated educational programs; differential tracking where children from subordinate groups are more likely to end up in non-academic streams of schooling; and differential teacher expectations where children from subordinate groups are cast in critical light about their potential.

Even when Canadian multiculturalism seems to be put in practice in a systemic context, it could be manipulated into a means to marginalize. Following Sidanius and Pratto's analytical focus on the education system as illustrated above, Kelly (1998) looks at black-Canadian students' experience in the counterpart system of Edmonton – my home city. She finds the ironic experience of black students who feel exclusion in situations precisely because their cultural and ethno-racial differences are attended to. But, the attention is unfortunately in order to conveniently exclude rather than to embrace, to celebrate and to include (Kelly 1998:51):

“This new form (of racism)...innocently highlights the naturalness of the physical and cultural differences between us, but then proceeds to argue that it is human nature to cling to one's own kind, one's culture and one's nation. What this leads to is a simplistic rationalization of the exclusion of those who look physically different or who are culturally different.”

Through Sidanius, Pratto and Kelly's work, what is strongly suggested therefore is that where they act as agents of the education system, social workers serving ethno-racial minority students and their families practice within systemic parameters of all kinds of latent, unacknowledged, yet powerful biases that may frame helping interventions leading only to the reproduction these ethno-racial biases. These biases

become framed as norms of doing prudent business. A corollary is that social workers' advocacy on behalf of their own practice values and ethics, or on behalf of their ethno-racial minority clients in the education system may not be even understood, appreciated and welcome.

This level of explication of marginalization of practice necessarily stirs curiosity as to how this process unfolds in the front line? Addressing this question necessarily gets at another curiosity – that is, what powerful phenomena are at work to assimilate a social worker into being a system's agent rather than an advocate of systemic change. In an American study, Pina & Canty-Swapp (1999:87) examines non-profit human service agency workers' discussion of their work with diverse clients, finding that “service providers may resist or perpetuate the social control of people of color.” The dialogic evidence presented in this study reveals what Kelly (1998) observes as a new form of racism is in action. That is where people's ethno-racial and cultural differences are recognized as a reason to intervene as a social anomaly (Pina & Canty-Swapp 1999:87):

“These conversations are understood within the competing social agendas of multiculturalism and assimilation...Findings reveals that people of color were often excluded from provider's notions of American identity. It was common for providers, both white and people of color, to both wittingly and unwittingly describe pressures to assimilate their clients.”

In an organizational systemic context, where assimilationist interventions are resisted, as Pina & Canty-Swapp (1999:87) find, the providers are either recognized as less of an employee or left to their own private re-framing to justify their practice decisions:

“Providers disagreed on the merits and consequences of these assimilation pressures, with some seeing harm done to themselves as well as their clients, and others defending the practice as in their clients' best interest. Other providers resisted pressures to assimilate clients into a white Northern European norm by breaking agency rules that were considered culturally insensitive or by engaging in self-reflection and adjustment-making in their own expectations and behaviors instead of changing their clients' ways.”

Another finding in the literature about how practice marginalization unfolds in the front line comes from Baines (2003) reporting from an ethnographical study of social workers in the Canadian city of Toronto. In this study, social workers talked about their limited opportunities for radical practice in addressing class, gender and race issues. A critical learning was the rapidly changing working conditions in a bureaucratic environment preoccupied with organizational restructuring reflective of an ideological era of neo-conservatism for fiscal efficiency, risk management and public accountability. As illustrated in the quote below (Baines 2003: 59), these conditions made social workers conduct themselves in “a day-to-day kind of survival way” (Baines 2003:62), which limited the kinds of actions they could undertake to address clients and their own workplace issues based on a critical analysis of class, gender and race.

“I noticed that they described a rapidly changing set of working conditions, such as enormous increases in the intensity (severity of cases and increased requirements for service), pace (much less turnaround time per case), and volume of work including massive increases in caseloads and the rapid expansion of the documentation required for each case. These study participants argued that standardization of assessments, intake and case notes displaced worker discretion and control over individual cases and larger caseload issues. Standardization of work or braking work down into ever smaller, repetitive and routine tasks dovetailed with work speed-ups, unpaid overtime, record levels and burnout, huge increases in workplace stress.”

Why would 30 some years of official Canadian multiculturalism policy implementation seem to have so little impact on this kind of practice dilemmas and assimilationist tendency on the service providers’ part? To this question, the literature comes full circle for this review to looking for an understanding in the larger picture of what Dumbrill & Maiter (2004) suggest as Euro-centric multiculturalism being at play in Canada. Dramatically, David See-Chai Lam, a former lieutenant governor (the politically appointed position of the Queen’s Canadian provincial representative) of the province of British Columbia, described this kind of multiculturalism as “You smell, but I can hold my breath.” (Dalglish 1994). The allusion of this way of ground-level practice of multiculturalism is that at the organizational level, the issue is not whether an agency goes multicultural or diverse on ethno-racial mix, but rather whether organizational change for multiculturalism is in reality an assertive and honest pursuit of multicultural

acceptance and equality in all endeavours. Otherwise, multicultural inclusivity is only assimilation in disguise.

Yee (2005:89) invokes the controversial term “whiteness’ to explicate how such Euro-multiculturalism operates in mainstream human service organizations:

“Whiteness can be defined as a complex social process that perpetuates and maintain the dominant and/or majority group’s power within social service organizations and is the primary mechanism that prevents anti-racist workers from changing today’s societal and institutional arrangement.”

Hence, she (2005:98) sees that an organizational undertaking to implement cultural competency development model would perpetuate “(t)his attitude...within a broader socio-political context where ethno-racial minority people were stereotypically deemed as the ‘other’” in relation to the “mainstream” Euro-cultural white community. Such a model would not, in Yee’s view, engage a kind of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities where these citizens as individuals, families and communities are served without a dominant majority group’s perspective of their “otherness”. Henry and Tator (2002:28) note that ethno-racial minorities harbor strong “feelings of marginalization and exclusion and their sense of ‘otherness’ within all (the) cultural and representational systems.”

In summary, the analytical discourse found in the literature directs attention to social work practice in a mainstream organization’s setting as being very much influenced and framed by the organization as a – to borrow from Henry and Tator (2002) – cultural representational system of the ethno-racial relations in the larger society. Thus, what, as a whole, does the literature informs the exploratory mission of the thesis research?

## **Summary**

It is abundantly clear that the literature surveyed in this chapter is very much a body of work about change. At that, it’s emphatically about systemic change. This is true of the different perspectives represented in the literature. The change orientation is grounded in the recognition that in spite of the increasingly multicultural western world



and of the multicultural values many western societies – like Canada - claim to pursue, mainstream human service organizations typically operate in a way that ethno-racial minorities are but marginalized others in the operational reality of these so-called “public” resources. Both the cultural competency development literature and the anti-racism literature agree on the systemic nature of these organizations as a tough challenge. The literature, if only in a limited way, hints that human service providers in these organizations face everyday challenges to realize a culturally sensitive and responsive practice with ethno-racial minorities. One research even suggests that these providers feel systemic pressure to, as a matter of a mainstream Euro-cultural agenda, help ethno-racial minority clients assimilate into, in this case, American society (Pina & Canty-Swapp 1999). The critical analysis in the literature directs attention to the institutional mindset about ethno-racial minorities as other than the mainstream public. Such analysis suggests that unless the minority communities are internalized as a make-up of the mainstream public in all its perceived social importance, change efforts such as cultural competency development remain tokenistic in their meaning and impact on mainstream human service organizations (Yee 2005).

The literature clearly gives the following directions for research:

- The literature in a large part is social work non-specific, although its focus on human service organizations or human service workers does lend insights and implications for social workers as a professional discipline unto itself. There remains a need to understand how specifically social workers experience marginalization through their everyday pursuit of working with ethno-racial minorities on behalf of their mainstream organization employers. The filling of this gap of understanding is important for the social work discipline. For social workers of interest in this thesis are trained professionals that bring to their work values, principles, ethics and skills as drivers of their conviction to serve ethno-racial minorities. A question, therefore, needs to be explored is what and how systemic forces from within the organization are at play that impact the social worker who as a change agent would see the organization as a change target.

This question coincides with the first and second thesis research questions identified in Section 1.2.3 in Chapter One: **first**, what does marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities look like in an organizational setting; **second**, what is there to understand about it as a systemic issue.

- Ethno-racial relations in the larger society are pointed at as a source of organizational attitude around and approach to ethno-racial minorities. The literature however is far from being illustrative of the material manifestations of these problematic relations that have an effect of constructing mainstream organizations? In other words, what do these relations look like in real life and time and in effect, are experienced as everyday lived issues of work for social workers trying to serve ethno-racial minorities? The thesis intends to enrich the literature in exploring this connection as well.

Again, these curiosities lend substance to the mission of the second thesis research question: what is there to understand - as a systemic issue – about the issue of marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities?

- The direct voice of social workers has far from adequately made it into the literature. This voice of experience, insights, critical analysis and wisdom is not only a source of data to understand the thesis problem but a representational expression to further heighten a collective consciousness within a community of like-minded social workers to pursue change. In the end, this front-line, lived reality and experiential insights bring a persuasiveness of the new knowledge for change action this thesis contributes. Also stated in Section 1.2.3 of Chapter One, the third thesis research question concerning identifying change strategy implications from the thesis research findings responds to this point flowing from the literature review.

The next chapter discusses the methodology of the field research study of the thesis problem. This methodological discussion will shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of the qualitative research method implemented for the thesis research and

how the theoretical perspectives fit with studying the research problem as including the questions raised above in this summary. Chapter Five will also describe the procedures of the field research, data and reporting work, as well as result analysis.

## Chapter Five

### Methodology of Field Research

#### Introduction

Social inquiries into realities of social inequality and subordination have given rise to critical theory perspectives. By social inequality and subordination, I refer to human conditions in which certain individuals and groups are minorities in their social milieu most importantly in terms of having little power to influence and control decisions and actions that affect them. Through a body of literatures as exemplified by the review for Chapter Four, these perspectives shed light on systemic, social structure and social relations factors to understand and explicate problematic social realities. Given this, a critical theory perspective instructs this thesis's research methodology in a number of ways.

The first way comes from the perspective's concern about social realities experienced as problematic. This means research into these realities comes from a standpoint of those who live and own these experiences and that the standpoint is an essential element to frame the research goals and objectives. Second, critical theory perspectives recognize lived experiences as essential, valid data in order to understand social inequity and subordination realities as problems to address; for these realities place and hold people in minority power position. This recognition directs research from a critical theory perspective to privilege certain kind of knowledge to heighten social consciousness to effect change. Third, the emphasis on lived experiences as a core unit of inquiry and analysis highlights the researching power of certain research methods. An example is ethnography with its continuing advancement in techniques to enhance the substance of knowledge through lived experiences as social data.

This chapter elaborates on key ideas that lend conceptual and practical substance to the methodology. Essentially, the project is a qualitative research study from a critical theory perspective that directs the conceptual framing of the methodology for field research. Epistemologically speaking, hermeneutic phenomenology and the social change perspective for social inquiry are found to lend meaningful validation to qualitative data with a view toward an

activist scholarship agenda from the critical theory perspective adopted for this thesis project. Grounded in this epistemology, ethnographical concepts and techniques are referenced and employed in the field research. Guided by a critical theory perspective, the researcher conducts dialogues with 10 relevant social workers (research participants) in the city of Edmonton. The investigative dialogues provide data of experiential narratives and insights, informing the key research questions. The research participants also contribute to data analysis. Through the data collection (dialogic) and data analysis stages, the researcher and the 10 research participants are considered as co-creators of data and of meaning of data.

This chapter is organized to, first, present a conceptual framework built with the above-noted three ways of instructing a research methodology from a critical theory perspective, and second, to describe the steps and process of the thesis field research as informed by the conceptual framework. As such, section 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 respectively address the concept of standpoint, the epistemology of the field research and ethnography as the research method of reference. Section 5.4 recounts the steps and process this thesis project has undertaken to investigate, as Chapter One clarifies, the research questions based on the thesis goals and objectives. These core sections are entitled as follows:

- **Section 5.1** Standpoint: An Entry into Studying Social Realities
- **Section 5.2** Epistemology: What Knowledge the Thesis Privileges
- **Section 5.3** The Thesis Field Research: An Ethnographical Exploration
- **Section 5.4** The Thesis Filed Research: Steps and Processes

## **5.1 Standpoint: An Entry into Studying Social Realities**

Two inter-related departure points of this thesis are also beginning defining points of the methodology of the thesis field research. First, the thesis is an academic opportunity to explore a thesis problem that I and my kindred-spirited professional peers have experienced in our everyday work locations. From our standpoint, social work practice with ethno-racial minorities remains a marginalized consideration in Canadian mainstream human service organizations. It is not only a standpoint of experience and concern; the standpoint is taken up as the departure point of the present thesis to explore the systemic challenges to mainstream organization-employed

social workers who pursue a practice with ethno-racial minorities. As stated in Chapter One, the thesis's **Objective One** and **Objective Two** are to understand how marginalization looks and occurs as a systemic process.

Standpoint of human experience as an entry into social research has found its methodological legitimacy in the sociological enterprise to document and explicate women's everyday social realities (Smith 1990). It is a perspective of experiential reality vitally necessary to engage research inquiry into knowing that reality as the problem of study. As Smith (1990: 28) explains the standpoint of women as follows:

“The standpoint of women situates the inquirer in the site of her bodily existence and in the local actualities of her working world. It is a standpoint that positions inquiry but has no specific content. Those who undertake inquiry from this standpoint begin always from women's experience as it is for women. The standpoint of women situates the sociological subject prior to the entry into the abstracted conceptual mode, vested in texts...From this standpoint, we know the everyday world through the particularities of our local practices and activities, the actual places of our work and the actual time it takes.”

Second, the collective experience of such institutional marginalization of practice within organizational systems also includes the situation that the sharing of this experience has been very closeted and quiet, confined to those of us social workers whose practice is considered as being assigned to the fringe. The absence of a voice out of the closet, so to speak, to name, to engage, to appeal, to debate, to organize and to effect change is very much part of the marginalization experience. Hence, as noted above, the standpoint from which this thesis was launched is one of concern as well. The concern is that a voice needs be created to identify the problem of the practice marginalization and to name and to advocate change actions.

Scholarly research to give an assertive, descriptive, analytical voice to human and social issues from a change perspective has been a methodological theme in the social research literature (Domhoff 1980, Reason 1988, Kirby & McKenna 1989, Slim & Thompson 1993, Kelly 1998, Campbell & Gregor 2002, Brown & Strega 2005, de Montigny 2005). The voice-making basis of this thesis falls in this change perspective for research. Slim & Thompson (1993: 1) assert this basis of research well when they validate “the power of oral testimony”:

“There has always been a special power in direct speech. The raw recounting of experience has an authenticity and persuasiveness which it is hard to match, and most of us would rather hear someone speak directly...The spoken word...(m)ost importantly, gives voice to the experience of those people whose views are often overlooked or discounted. The significance of this cannot be overestimated. To ignore these voices is to ignore a formidable body of evidence and information.”

All this is about social impact from the change perspective of research; according to Kirby & McKenna (1989: 17),

“(w)hen we talk about doing research from the margins we are talking about being on the margins of the production of knowledge. In researching from the margins we are concerned with how research skills can enable people to create knowledge that will describe, explain and help change the world in which they live.”

This thesis, therefore, responds to a standpoint in order to construct an educated voice of and for change. As a scholarly project, it is this new, constructed voice that adds to the knowledge base of social work as a professional discipline. The methodology is based on research methodological perspectives that support these departure points and is designed to fulfill the mandate of the thesis in terms of the standpoint and the voice it is to make.

## **5.2 Epistemology: What Knowledge the Thesis Privileges**

In this thesis project, I set out to build a voice about the thesis problem. “Voice” is a preferential term to refer to what comes out of persons speaking orally or in writing from experiential understanding and interpreting – in other words, as knowers. Hence this voice I am going after is created, consolidated knowledge of lived experiences and realities. As a basis of change, this knowledge lends itself to building change strategies informed by lived lives explored as field data for this thesis.

The power of personalized voice as knowledge and as catalyst of change is grounded in a number of methodological perspectives. These perspectives share a common epistemological theme: that subjective, experiential knowledge based on individuals who live the reality under investigation bears true witness to that reality as a research problem and ontologically represents a reality from an experienced social location. As touched on repeatedly so far, the driver behind

this thesis project is a community of social workers, including me, who have shared their common experience that their mainstream human service organization employers continue to marginalize their practice with ethno-racial minorities. Such collegial sharing is always lively and rich in practice stories and above all, genuine, attesting to the epistemological theme as articulated earlier. This experience has moved me to explore methodological perspectives that support experiential knowledge research where such collegial sharing becomes a source of data for building knowledge, understanding and formulating change strategies. As below, I want to review the main methodological views that have influenced my epistemological perspective, which becomes a context for the next section in this chapter on ethnography as an influence for the research method of choice for my field research.

### **5.2.1 Qualitative Research Perspectives: Privileging the Subjective as Reality**

The investigative mission to explore, document and create collective voices of lived experiences is well supported by perspectives of qualitative social research. That “the laboratory of the qualitative researcher is everyday life” (Morse 1994:1) encapsulates qualitative research lending itself to encountering, engaging and collecting voices about what has been lived and experienced. Voices as social data are validated by qualitative research perspectives that privilege the subjective as a way of knowing.

By “qualitative research perspectives”, I am referring to a group of methodological worldviews that share the fundamental premise that the social world has no existence outside of the activities and understanding of social actors. (Jackson 1991:1). For social research, this implies that the social world cannot be understood without studying the social actors who shape and are in turn defined within the social world that they continue to produce and re-produce. As a research worldview, phenomenology expresses this premise from its recognition of the everyday world as the presenter of how it works as a social structure – “the fundamental structures of our life-world” (Cohen & Omery 1994:139). In defining the mission to explore this life-world, hermeneutics is a phenomenological practice that therefore, seeks to go beyond simply describing what comes into view by aiming to uncover the hidden meaning of that which is everydayness. As follows, Cohen & Omery (1994:146) explains the observable, audible,



perceptible everyday world as not only a descriptive data source but more significantly for knowledge building, also source of interpretive clues to find meaning in what is only apparent.

“Hermeneutic’s goal is discovery of meaning that is not immediately manifest to our intuiting, analyzing, and describing. Interpreters have to go beyond what is given directly. Yet, in attempting this, they have to use the ordinary, everyday given as a clue for meanings that are not given... Thus every interpretation of ordinary items of daily life is related to a frame or relevance that embraces it, implies a preview looking toward anticipated meanings, and requires conceptual patterns for it.”

By this, I, as the researcher here, am recognized as an inalienable part of the social reality under study. This offers up a critical epistemological point that I am a researcher as well as the researched by virtue of my intimate experience and knowledge of the reality I am studying in this thesis. I will come back to this point later in the chapter when I discuss the ethnographical research method of my field study – particularly, the inclusion of me to introduce and enhance intersubjective properties of knowledge-building.

Hermeneutic phenomenology presents an ontological worldview – i.e., one about what constitutes a social reality that empowers research of the social change perspective. Research as a means to engage social change seeks to depict and understand the marginalized lived realities left, at best, unexplored and at worst, invalidated in mainstream social science research (Smith, 1987). Examining women as a minority in a patriarchal milieu, Finson (1985:115-117) suggests a need for a “hermeneutic of suspicion” in interpreting “not in regard to the words of the women, but rather in regard to the context within which and out of which they are functioning.” Social change research, therefore, is about creating voices otherwise unexposed and therefore, unrepresented in institutional realms where minority interests are insignificant. Creating voices is, in other words, privileging the subjective as completing the total social reality for public exposure and awareness building. As follows is an argument as to how minority voices, investigated and represented, make Third World development accountable (Slim & Thompson 1993: 2-3)

“At the heart of this principle of applied oral testimony is a challenge to the development establishment. The inclusion of direct testimony in the development debate can help to make it less a monologue and more of a dialogue, as people’s testimony begins to require answers and as their voices force the development establishment to be more accountable

for their actions. In short it is not enough for the development “expert” to summarize and interpret the views of others – the “others” must be allowed to speak for themselves.”

### **5.2.2 Research to Build Knowledge about Minorities Realities and for Social Change: Subjective Witnessing and Understanding**

Linking hermeneutic phenomenology with the social change research genre, I would take a closer look at how research with the social change perspective sees the subjective as the source of depicting and understanding social realities. In the first place, the emergence of this genre of social research has been a response to conventional, mainstream scientific social research, which considers subjective knowledge presented in its unreduced, narrative form as data contamination and therefore, a risk to knowing reality free of human biases. “It’s just anecdotal...” This line is often heard from proponents of the mainstream scientific research perspective, who consider “oral expressions” such as stories and dialogues as unscientific and therefore, invalid, ungeneralizable knowledge. The social change research perspective has indeed emerged and formulated largely from the critique of this naming of subjective, experience-based standpoints as unwanted, anti-scientific biases. This critique has constructed an ideology of positivism for what is “scientific” and therefore seen as important and true, discounting human voices as data of social realities in much of mainstream social sciences. This is particularly serious an issue when these voices are those in society who are in troubled, marginalized communities and who need to be heard and be understood. In this respect, hermeneutic phenomenology – often distinguished as “transcendental science” – contributes a basis of a philosophical alternative to mainstream science’s paradigm as applied to understanding social realities (Moustakas 1994:43):

“Transcendental science emerged out of a growing discontent with a philosophy of science based exclusively on studies of material things, a science that failed to take into account the experiencing person and the connection between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world.”

The genre represents a methodological movement in the social sciences to explore, validate and practice alternate ways of knowing in which lived experiences and realities bear witness to marginalizing as well as marginalized human conditions and which therefore, build awareness and consciousness about the need for change. Feminist sociology of knowledge offers a glimpse of the critical view of conventional, mainstream social sciences. The following may

not present the full breath of the gender-focused sociological perspective but it demonstrates that it is part of that social change research genre coming from a critique of the mainstream. Along with that, it intends to build an alternative knowledge base, doing justice to women's experience which as argued, has not been adequately taken up seriously by the mainstream social research enterprise (Smith 1990: 14-15):

“The governing of our kind of society is done in abstract concepts and symbols, and sociology helps create them by transposing the actualities of people's lives and experience into the conceptual currency with which they can be governed...Mental illnesses, crimes, riots, violence, work satisfaction, neighbors and neighborhoods, motivation and so on – these are the constructs of the practice of government. Many of these constructs, such as mental illness, crimes, or neighborhoods are constituted as discrete phenomena in the institutional contexts of ruling; others arise as problems in relation to the actual practice of government or management – e.g., concepts of violence, motivation, or work satisfaction.”

To the extent that this genre of social research sees research as a catalyst of social change, hermeneutic phenomenology is seen as stopping short of a social change perspective. A social change-oriented research calls for lending an empowering voice from the standpoint of a minority community whom the research enterprise serves to advocate for change. Reading research in this genre has given me a sense of the impacts of knowledge building from a social change perspective. I have always found that the presenting knowledge is rich in contextual interpretations that explicate how social marginalization reproduces itself to perpetuate a status quo. Also, as a social worker, I have also always come out of reading feeling more cognizant about the subjective details of people in their problem situation through qualitative data (e.g., oral information) and findings (e.g., what oral data directs to understand more of the systemic context of a troubling lived experience) presented in narrative format. Because of the contextual explication of people's troubling situations, the research study inspires change strategies with clear change targets. Urwick, a Canadian pioneer of social work, is recalled to have echoed this sentiment for the subjective as data for knowledge and change, as follows (Moffatt 2001: 40)

“According to Urwick, social work method was necessarily subjective. He argued that the critical causes of social change lay within individuals and groups, and therefore the causes could not be abstracted from humanity. To seek causes outside of the dynamic of human life was to deny vitality and to deaden the subject of discussion. Subjectivity in social work practice allowed the social worker to be open to the other's essence.”

Ferguson's study, for example, on Canadian visible minority parents' experience in governance participation at their children's child care centres is a piece of qualitative research that typifies the kinds of impacts of the social change research perspective as identified above (Ferguson 2003) have on me. For instance, the study is able to argue as a change strategy "that child care centres can be wonderful vehicles for celebrating cultural diversity, teaching tolerance and appreciation for difference and for fighting racism." (Ferguson 2003:153) This conclusive recommendation is based on the narrative richness of the subjective data collected from interviewing child care centres' parents. These data of unedited personal expressions are illustrative and conducive to inferential knowledge making. Good examples of parents' voices pertinent to and suggestive of the recommended change strategy are quoted in the study, such as (Ferguson 2003: 148-149):

"An East Indian mother with two children stated: 'I did research on it. One of the most fantastic things is that they have an anti-racism committee that involved the parents and the families of the children who attend the daycare...And in this neighborhood there's a great deal of parents who're on subsidy, a great deal of racial minorities.'

A Black African mother with three children under five, who was parenting alone while awaiting her husband (who was still in Africa), spoke about...an occasion of hosting social events with parents...from various cultures: 'I decided to dress the African kids, you know. I told them we should do something a little bit cultural, seeing as there's a lot of cultures – we have all sorts, just name it. We have all sorts, so we decided...from Africa alone we have more than ten children from ten different African countries...It was so nice, it was fun, we all had fun. And we all prepared meals from our country.'"

### **5.2.3 Epistemology of the Thesis Field Research**

This thesis, again, is about creating a collective voice, an expressive, revealing narrative of an organizational practice issue about social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. This is an issue emerging not from a theoretical build-up found in an accumulated body of academic work, but rather from collective front-line experience of social work practice in mainstream institutional settings. The literature review (Chapter Four) indicates that mainstream research and discourses of human service work with ethno-racial minorities have fallen short of illustrating the everyday, lived systemic limitations to support such work and professional

practice. This thesis explores this everyday experience, heightens understanding of it as a systemic construction, and explores implications for change strategies.

This overall thesis agenda gives privilege to subjective knowledge based on lived realities of practice on the part of social workers in the field. Hermeneutic phenomenology validates the exploration of human consciousness grounded in realities that are lived and experienced, as an inner cognitive device to describe and understand meaning of social reality (Moutstakas 1994). This epistemological approach opens up the subjective world to explore in its multiplicity and connectivity. In this case, this means that as the researcher who has shared the problematic reality of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, I bring a real subjective part in co-creating a voice and an understanding about the issue being explored in the research process. This implies that the researcher's role – my role – is a co-creator of knowledge in the exploratory and analysis process by virtue of my legitimacy as a knowledgeable with respect to the thesis problem in question. Hermeneutic phenomenology broadens its validation of the subjective subject as “the researched” to a validation of inter-subjective dynamics between the researcher and the research subject, which lend consensus of new knowledge and understanding as co-creational products. Husserl (1931:256) illustrates intersubjective communication as found in research interviews, as the researcher and the research subject “sifting out intrusive phrases void of meaning...exposing and eliminating errors which here too are possible, as they are in every sphere in which validity counts for something”. Moutstakas (1994: 57) views this dynamics as

“...the persons testing out their understanding of each other and their knowledge of something...In the back and forth of social interaction the challenge is to discover what is really true of the phenomena of interpersonal knowledge and experience.”

The exposé and change agenda of this thesis also informs the privileging of experiential stories and knowledge. This agenda is kin to the social research literature of qualitative knowing – stories, experiences, secrets etc. - from those of minority communities who are knowers of the issue under study to heighten the kind of social awareness that mainstream research of the objective science orientation does not seem to be able to raise and to engage change actions. In the case of this thesis, experiential voices come from a network of social workers who encounter marginalization of their practice. In this sense, the validating and celebration of the subjective –

definitely, including the intersubjective – become those of what could be called coalitionary experiences from the margins (Kirby & McKenna 1989). This privileging aspect lends a social purpose to new phenomenological knowledge this thesis builds – that is, that knowledge and analysis of the experiential basis is toward raising awareness about the issue in question and in this thesis, framing change strategies to address the issue.

### **5.3 The Thesis Field Research: An Ethnographical Exploration**

The phenomenological and change orientation manifests itself in this thesis's research method very much influenced and inspired by ethnography grounded in cultural anthropology (Wolcott 1987, Thomas 1993). I find the following definition of ethnography particularly illustrative of the basic methodological elements of the research method (Creswell 1998: 246):

Ethnography – This is the study of an intact cultural or social group (or an individual or individuals within the group) based primarily on observations and a prolonged period of time spent by the researcher in the field. The ethnographer listens and records the voices of informants with the intent of generating a cultural portrait.

The research method for the thesis field research resonates with this definition. The thesis field research is a study based primarily on two ethnographic processes: (i) exploring through dialogues with 10 social workers in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, who belong to that community of social workers in the researcher's home city, Edmonton, who are employed by mainstream human service organizations and known for sharing a common interest in serving the ethno-racial minority communities in their practice through their employer's programs and services; and (ii) as a practicing social worker myself, my participant observations and reflections on workplace experiences concerning serving ethno-racial minority communities in Edmonton over the past 20 plus years (1985-2009).

In other words, this study is one of the "social group" of interest to this thesis – or individuals, including me, the researcher, representative of this group. It is ethnographic in two senses. First, the learning of this social group comes from my immersion in its midst over time, as a member as well as a critical observer in systemic culture of mainstream social work practice in relation to ethno-racial minorities. Second, the field research dialogues conducted with social

workers of interest allow a focal, intersubjective, co-exploration between the researcher – i.e. me and a relevant colleague.

A methodological strength of this thesis study comes from its quality of reflexivity. This quality refers to me, the ethnographical researcher, “conscious of his or her biases, values, and experiences that are brought to a qualitative research study.” (Creswell 1998:248) The inclusion of my social work practice experience over time and the privileging of intersubjectivity as a data enrichment quality in my research dialogues are based on recognizing reflexivity as an asset rather than a drawback in qualitative methodology. To this extent, “...biases, values, experiences...”, as found in the last quote above, needs to change to re-word as “...standpoints, values, experiences”. For “biases” lends a connotation prejudicial against subjectivity, a quality that is valued as a necessary ingredient in knowledge production in this case. On the other hand, “standpoints” recognizes the source of qualitative data and information is a knower who creates knowledge based on lived realities and recognizable as representing of those realities where they have been commonly experienced and lived (Smith 1990).

Being “conscious” of my reflexive quality provides an analytical position to interpret the research field findings. In other words, it is allowing the recognition and validation of the researcher’s interpretive analysis of field data as a part of the knowledge production process not void of “standpoints, values, experiences”, but rather very much informed by them. Therefore, the inalienable presence and purposeful contribution of relevant practice experiences on my part enrich with “a kind of ‘figural anthropology’ of the self” (Lionnet 1989:99) as a member of the culture of systemically constrained practice with ethno-racial minorities. For this thesis, the essential richness of my practice experience over the years comes from ethnography’s legitimization of the researcher taking into account of his active part in co- creating knowledge – i.e. the reflexive nature of doing ethnography. As Quinney (1998:xiv) sums it all up, “there is no separation between the ethnography and the ethnographer.”

The next section will describe the field research processes as implemented for this thesis.

## 5.4 The Thesis Field Research: Steps and Processes

As follows, Table 5.1 provides a summary of the thesis field research. The subsections to follow provide process details of the research steps shown in the table.

<b>Table 5.1: The Thesis Field Research: A Summary</b>	
<b>Goals</b>	<p><b>Goal One:</b> to increase social work understanding of systemic realities that are directive and determinant of social work practice with the ethno-racial minority communities in mainstream organizations.</p> <p><b>Goal Two:</b> based on thesis research findings, to explore implications for social work practice to influence change within mainstream human service organizations as individual entities as well as an institutional network.</p> <p>These goals in themselves contribute to helping build a representing voice of social workers who pursue continuous improvement in the systemic environment of practice with ethno-racial minority communities.</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p><b>Objective One:</b> to explore systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities.</p> <p><b>Objective Two:</b> to understand how these experiences are organized into systemic ruling of practice.</p>
<b>Key Research Questions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In form of systemic challenges experienced by social workers in the workplace, what does marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities look like?</li> <li>2. What is there to understand about such practice marginalization as a systemic issue?</li> <li>3. What the research findings imply for change strategies?</li> </ol>
<b>Synopsis</b>	<p>The thesis field research is an investigative project based on the above set of related goals, objectives and research questions. This investigative pursuit is in response to a collective front-line experience shared by social workers in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, that social work practice with ethno-racial minorities remains marginalized in mainstream human service organizations.</p> <p>The project is a qualitative research study from a critical theory perspective that directs the conceptual framing of the methodology for field research. Epistemologically speaking, hermeneutic phenomenology and the social change perspective for social inquiry lend validation to qualitative data with a view toward an activist scholarship agenda from the critical theory perspective adopted for this thesis project. Grounded</p>



	<p>in this epistemology, ethnographical concepts and techniques are referenced and employed in the field research. Guided by a critical theory perspective, the researcher conducts dialogues with 10 relevant social workers (research participants) in the city of Edmonton. The investigative dialogues provide data of experiential narratives and insights, informing the key research questions. The research participants also contribute to data analysis. Through the data collection (dialogic) and data analysis stages, the researcher and the 10 research participants are considered as co-creators of data and of meaning of data.</p>
<b>Research Steps</b>	
<p><b>Step One:</b> Data Source and Access</p> <p><b>Step Two:</b> Data Collection: The Dialogues</p> <p><b>Step Three:</b> Thematic and Interpretive Analysis</p> <p><b>Step Four:</b> Reporting</p>	

#### 5.4.1 Data Source and Access

The data source of the thesis field research is a group of eleven social workers: ten research participants plus the researcher. The inclusion of me, the researcher, as a data contributor is ethnographical in that the dialogic data collection process (see details in the next sub-section) is one of intersubjective co-creation of knowledge about the social reality under exploration (Kirby & McKenna 1989, Thomas 1993). In addition to being practicing social workers, research participants share the following criteria of selection for the thesis field research:

- that they are employed by a mainstream human service organization as conceptualized in this thesis,
- that they are in a job position developed because the organization wants to be somehow more ethno-racially diverse in its services and/or operations,
- that they are concerned that social work practice remains marginalized in his/her organization, and

- that given a Consent to Participate Agreement (see Appendix A), they are committed to having an investigative dialogue with the researcher as a data collection process and with the participant’s consent, to participating in further data activities.

As follows, Table 5.2 provides key demographic information of the ten social workers who are research participants:

<b>Table 5.2: Research Participants: Key Demographic Information</b>					
<b>Research Participant (RP)</b>	<b>Social Work Education Credential/s</b>	<b>Registered Social Worker (RSW) (see Note below)</b>	<b>Current Employer (i.e. organization the RP refers to in investigative dialogues in the thesis research)/Employer’s Mandate and how long RP has been employed there</b>	<b>Gender and Ethno-racial identity</b> m=(male) f=(female) vm=(visible minority^^)	<b>As an adult (over 18 years of age), moved from outside North America to Canada within the past 3 decades</b>
RP-1	BSW*	Yes	Governmental/Child Protection – 5+ years	m, vm	√
RP-2	BSW	Yes	Governmental/Education – 3 years	f, vm	√
RP-3	BSW	Yes	Governmental/Preventive Social Services – 5+years	f, vm	√
RP-4	BSW	Yes	Non-Governmental/Family Violence Prevention – 3+years	f, vm	
RP-5	BSW, MSW**	Yes	Non-Governmental/Mental Health Services – 10 years	f, vm	√
RP-6	SW Dip***	Yes	Non-Governmental/Family Services – 2+ years	f, vm	√
RP-7	SW Dip	Yes	Non-Governmental/ Youth Services – 3+years	f, vm	

RP-8	BA**** (Psychology) MA (Social Work)	Yes	Non-Governmental/Child Development – 5+years	f, vm	√
RP-9	MSW	Yes	Governmental/Preventive Social Services – 12+ years	m, vm	√
RP-10	MSW	Yes	Governmental/child Protection – 4 years	m, vm	

\* Bachelor of Social Work

\*\* Master of Social Work

\*\*\* Social Work Diploma (a 2-year college-level credential uniquely offered in the Province of Alberta)

\*\*\*\* Bachelor of Arts

^^ Visible Minority – denotes a non-white individual

**Note:** In the Province of Alberta, all those who are educationally qualified to register as a Registered Social Worker (RSW) and are employed in a position within the definition of social work practice as per Alberta’s Health Profession Act, must be an RSW as regulated by the Alberta College of Social Workers.

Data source access was about securing these individuals’ commitment to participating in the investigative dialogues and other data work activities of the thesis field research. Knowing who to approach to explore interest in research participation began with the researcher’s network of social work peers. Over the years of after-work social networking as discussed throughout the previous chapters allowed immediate ideas as to who I would want to interest in becoming participants. Of the ten research participants, eight were acquaintances and friends from within my social work peer network at the time of these eight being approached about their interest in being involved in the research. Two were social workers I had not known prior to my first contact with them about this research; they were referred to me as good prospects for research participants during the time I was looking for research participants.

Gaining data source access requires responding to prospective research participants' need to commit with a full sense of safety from any repercussions in disfavor to their careers and reputation if necessary due diligence is not ensured. Given that the field research would require research participants to share narratives and insights critical of their employers, it was ethically vital that those approached about research participation could be assured of protection from being put at risk of any actions against them as a result. For this reason, a Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix A) to participate was instituted as a sort of contractual understanding for the researcher and each of the ten research participants. Most importantly, the Letter is to clarify the researcher's ethical responsibilities and the participant's rights in so far as protecting the participant is concerned.

#### **5.4.2 Data Collection: The Dialogues**

The method of data collection is the researcher's face-to-face dialogue/s with each of the ten research participants. These investigative dialogues took place in 2006 and 2007 in the city of Edmonton. The initial research plan was to conduct one dialogue with each research participant. While all the ten dialogues were completed in 2006, the researcher found it necessary to go back to five of the ten research participants to explore further certain information in the original conversational meeting. As a result, research data came from more than the first ten relatively lengthy dialogues with all the research participants. The break-down of the total number of dialogues is that there were all together fifteen dialogues, which include the first ten contacts and five subsequent contacts with five of the ten research participants.

In explaining the data collection method to them, a standard request to the ten research participants after they signed on was that the dialogue would be tape-recorded for later transcription. Eight of the ten participants agreed to that request. As a result, eight of the ten first dialogues were tape-recorded; two recorded by the researcher dictating at the same time the dialogue was taking place. The five subsequent contacts with five research participants involved the researcher taking notes of the conversations.

A measure taken to maximize data accuracy was that the transcribed/dictated texts of the first ten dialogues and notes from the subsequent five contacts were sent to the respective research participants for their review and comments. All research participants reviewed their texts; by and large, all agreed to the general accuracy of what was transpired and then all supplemented with additional notes written in selected places of the text. Based on these responses, added notes served two purposes: to expand on an experiential tale, to correct what was shared in dialogue. To these ends, these notes had an enriching effect on the data as a whole.

The first ten dialogues between the research and the respective research participants reflect two methodological characteristics. Informed by ethnography, the first characteristic is the dialogues' naturalistic quality (Wolcott 1987, Slim & Thompson 1993, Thomas 1993, Lionnet 1989, Creswell 1998, Parmar & Somaia-Carten 2003). The second characteristic is a critical theory perspective imbedded in them.

The dialogues' naturalistic quality refers to their style organic to these dialogues occurring in a collegial, peer culture where in every case of these encounters, two social work peers were having a passionate, focused verbal exchange on a topic of interest. Thus, the dialogues were not structured in the same sense as what one might intend for "a research interview" with a participant who expects to be queried by a pre-determined set of questions and to respond accordingly. To this extent, how the dialogues allowed to flow and to present based on the dynamic exchange between the participant and me as we were moved by the content along the way, was how these dialogues implemented the intersubjective quality of the data.

In all cases, the dialogue always began with the following preamble from me as the initiator of the conversation:

"Thanks for spending this time with me to talk about a practice issue you and I have a common interest to explore through our mutual everyday social work experiences. As I briefly described before, to make this dialogue as having a lot of room for both of us to explore the issue, it flows really in response to what we come upon to talk about. I see I have a vested interest to keep us on topic and on task. But, that's essentially the

“researcher role” I have in the process. To start with, let begin by me asking: What have you found to be the key workplace issues that are in your way of serving ethno-racial minorities.”

From there, the dialogue commenced. Lengths of the ten dialogues as the core part of the field research range from 1 1/2 hour to 3 hours.

The second characteristic has been discernible from sorting out the themes of discussion initiated within the dialogues. The conceptual and theoretical work for this thesis had prepared the researcher in approaching dialoging with these research participants. This preparatory work is of course represented by the preceding chapters in this thesis. Thus, although the dialogues were naturalistic in that they were unstructured as they were not guided by a “menu” of questions, they were definitely grounded in and informed by the researcher’s critical theory perspective.

In an analysis of all the transcribed dialogues, which include conversational exchanges of questions and answers, key themes of discussion across them emerged. These themes are found to be rooted in materials of a critical theory perspective, shown in Table 5.3 as follows:

<b>Table 5.3: Critical Theory Perspective Grounding of Discussion Themes in Investigative Dialogues</b>	
<b>Themes of Discussion</b>	<b>Grounding in Critical Theory Perspective</b>
The research participant’s affective responses to workplace issues related to her/his present job as a facilitator of practice with ethno-racial minorities and how those affective responses influence her/his choices around effecting changes to address those workplace issues.	This theme recognizes a psychic dimension to the research participant’s experience and response to practice marginalization. More importantly, it explores the ways affects influence the research participant’s response to the organization seen as marginalizing practice with ethno-racial minorities. As a building block of anti-oppressive practice perspective, critical psychology finds that a person’s sustained experience of an existence in the social margins of her/his milieu inflicts intra and inter psychic effects on the individual (Friere 1970, Friere 1973, Mullaly 2002). Prime examples of these effects include the marginalized person’s shift to identifying with the culture that subordinates him/her (Friere

	<p>1970, Friere 1973, Young 1999), and an internalized sense of inferiority (Reich 1975, Moreau &amp; Leonard 1989, Mullaly 2002) and powerlessness (Young 1999, Moane 1999). Structural social work theorists (Moreau 1999, Mullaly 2002) confirm such psychic impact on the individual as results of the “ideological hegemony” over the person’s life choices.</p>
<p>Organizational and operational issues experienced as limiting or blocking practice with ethno-racial minorities</p>	<p>This theme most directly speaks to the core concern of this thesis – i.e. systemic challenges to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities. Addressing a western culture society context, the anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice literatures contend that institutions are instruments of ethno-racial domination and subordination and as such, practice in a way to bias toward what Yee &amp; Dumbrill (2003) call “whiteness”. By “whiteness”, she refers to Eurocentrism as the societal paradigm that structures and frames how institutions operates.</p>
<p>Ethno-racial minorities as an “other” public and clientele</p>	<p>This theme explores ethno-racial minorities treated as an “other” in the mainstream organizational mindset as to who are the “Canadian public”. Anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice perspectives address the “othering of social minorities by society’s dominant cultural groups, resulting in minorities groups’ marginalization in their own community (Friere 1970, Friere 1973, Young 1990, Henry &amp; Tator 2002). This theme explores how this othering process is experienced in mainstream human service organizations and how the treatment of ethno-racial minorities as an “other” relates to practice marginalization.</p>
<p>The research participant’s organization as part of the mainstream human service sector serving the ethno-racial minority public</p>	<p>This theme is informed by the structural social work view that within the social structure of a capitalist, liberal-majority-rule/democratic ideology, institutions of human services operate as a systemic sectoral instrument to sustain the social structure (Moreau 1999, Mullaly 2002). Where ethno-racial minorities are discriminated and marginalized by social institutions such as mainstream human services</p>

	<p>in this social structure, anti-racism theorists coin the phrase for this reality as “democratic racism” (Henry et al 1995). Based on this view, this theme explores workplace experiences that point to systemic sectoral factors beyond the research participant’s organization, in an attempt to add critical understanding of the practice marginalization issue.</p>
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**5.4.3 Thematic and Interpretive Analysis**

The transcribed dialogues were thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis is a process of organizing and categorizing the transcribed dialogues. While this kind of analysis is grounded in the substantive data (Glasser & Strauss 1967), a certain amount of my interpretation of data is necessary for thematic categorization to happen. Thus, there needs to be “safe guarding” in the analytical process to ensure that the interpretation is based on the data. What follows are the identifiable steps which I took to thematically analyze the dialogue data.

First, all the audio-taped dialogues were transcribed verbatim. Given the essential nature of intersubjectivity in how data collection is conceptualized for this research, I paid as much attention to transcribing my own recorded comments and narratives shared in the dialogue as I did those of the research participant. By transcribing the audio recording as soon as possible after a dialogue took place, I was more readily reminded of the abundance of affective expressions (e.g., a sigh or sarcastic laughter) recorded along with the spoken words. I made sure that those expressions were noted in their appropriate place in the transcripts. For example: “Well (sigh), again, that has been another particular struggle for me right now. (Jokingly speaking) Can I afford to quit because of this principle of practice (extending her index and middle fingers of both hand to make the quotation signs)...?”

These notation of affective expressions were found to be helpful to attune me to (a) my colleague’s frame of mind at the time; and (b) the motive of a statement being made (e.g., the [Jokingly speaking] identifies for me that the speaker was not making a serious query; but



instead a rhetorical question.) The notations of affective expression recorded on audio-tapes were helpful for me to more accurately understand the meaning of what was said.

The two unrecorded dialogues involved note-making on my part. In order to minimize the interruption of the dialogic flow by note-taking, I only jotted down the critical points of the conversation. I drew simple pictures to indicate worth-noting affective expressions when something was said (e.g., a deep, wide concave line for laughter/jokingly speaking; a small convex line for a negative remark). In both cases, I wasted no time immediately after the dialogue to note in my field data journal content details of all that was transpired, of course, referencing the short notes and expressive symbols made during the dialogue.

Second, I read through the transcripts and the content details (for the two unrecorded dialogues). The intention here was to immerse myself in what my colleagues and I had said and to note in writing my reactions to what was said about practice issues and experiences. Some of my reactions after reviewing one transcript read as follows: "...lack of systemic change, the "diversity" claim masking continuing neglect of visible minorities..."

Third, to validate my own reactions to the data, I re-read all the transcripts and content notes once – that is, without referencing the list of reactions I had created from the first reading. There was a reasonably good consistency of how I reacted to data in the two readings. For instance, I noted following reaction to the same transcript that elicited the list in the preceding paragraph: "...token attention to multicultural service delivery...the rest of the organization can continue to ignore, only now, with the proverbial sigh from a relieved conscience...being multicultural may mean equal attention and treatment to everybody including the those that have always been socially privileged..."

The last step was naming the themes based on these lists from reviewing the raw data twice. Theme-naming is a process of conceptually reducing data into a number of headings which inform the structure of reporting research findings as Chapters Six and Seven demonstrate. Methodologically speaking, I had the confidence that steps two and three above were well

grounded in the substantive research data and that the valid identification of themes in step four is based on interpretive information with strong grounding in the data.

At this juncture of the thematic analysis process, the output was a data document that contains a series of topical themes and under each of these themes, a write-up of the interpretive analysis of relevant dialogic data. All interpretive analysis write-ups in this document presented on the left-hand side of all pages; on the right-hand side of these pages, quotes from all dialogic data found to be supportive of the interpretive narratives on the left-hand side are recorded. In other words, this document was meant to serve to inform research reporting as Chapters Six and Seven present.

The principle of intersubjectivity implemented at this stage also adds vigor to the data analysis process. When the data document was completed through the above-noted steps, research participants were provided an opportunity to review, edit and validate the contents.. They were contacted and invited to review this data document and where they would see fit, to edit any interpretive narratives by the researcher. Following the initial contacts, research participants were e-mailed this document. This invitation for data work participation elicited responses as follows:

- Written editing comments were received from five of the ten research participants.
- Three of the remaining five research participants telephoned the researcher; in both cases, the gist of their common feedback was that the data document was highly representative of their individual lived experiences and that the document would be – in the word of one of them – “good to go”.
- Two of the research participants were not heard from. One had moved to another city because of a new job; although she wrote back to say she would read the document and get back to the research, no further contact was followed up to her email. Nor was a “reminder” email by the researcher replied to. The other researcher had fallen ill for a period of time; no feedback was received subsequently, nor was any “reminder” email sent to her by the researcher.

#### 5.4.4 Reporting

The next two chapters report on the research findings for this thesis. They take on a flavor of an ethnographical narrative. By that, I am referring to a flowing text based on the perspective of me as the ethnographer experiencing and studying the cultural community of mainstream-organization employed social workers trying to serve the local ethno-racial minorities communities. The resulting style of the next two chapters reflects the way in which Quinney (1998:xiii) appreciates the relationship between ethnographical research and writing:

“Ethnography, to me, is in the telling, is in the writing. Rather than being an adjunct to observation, the writing – the ethnographic writing – is the ethnography. The world of lived experience is observed, described, and interpreted all at once, in the course of the writing. There is no ethnography without the telling, without the writing – without the writer.”

Reporting from an ethnographical understanding is a narration of interpretive analysis of field data. This means that the researcher reports his inferential findings speaking to the raw data (in this case, the thematically categorized dialogic data). In this particular research, the researcher’s ability to infer is grounded in two places: first, that he himself is a social worker who has experienced the issue under investigation and that based on the data collection method, he is a co-creator of the data; and second, that he plays an ethnographer role in that through dialoging with research participants, he was experiencing the “culture” being studied as presented through its inhabitants (i.e. research participants). Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul (1999:16) support this perspective as follows:

“What we are suggesting is that researchers have done themselves a disservice by overemphasizing the concept of field-as-external as opposed to the concept of field-as-internal. To us, this is a view that plays right into the either/or distinction of an outside objective truth and an inner subjective truth. True, it may be far easier for some researchers to think of the field as essentially external...We have discovered through our own research that the transaction between what we’re experiencing and how we feel about what we are experiencing deserves to be written about as part of our representation of the ‘field’.”

These ethnography academics suggest reporting from the “I” perspective – the perspective of the researcher. The first person singular pronoun “I” may well be largely silent in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7; however, the narrative as a whole reflects writing from the idea of

“witnessing” a culture in the research process as well as from recognizing the researcher as an experienced knower of that culture. Bishop (1992) contends that the ethnographer has a scholarly right to present from his or her perspective. She observes that ethnographic research validity hinges on the constructed author emerging from the cultural blend-in process (Spigelman 2001).

### **Summary**

This chapter describes the methodology of the thesis field research. Hermeneutic phenomenology and social change research perspective inform an ethnographical approach to study the research question. Voicing from within the silent or silenced community – a central motivation of the thesis – inspires the reporting format of an ethnographical narrative coming from the researcher’s perspective. This perspective finds methodological validity from honoring such ethnographical research qualities as intersubjectivity and the researcher’s status as the constructed author through cultural immersion. These qualities are key sources of both data and their analysis.

## Chapter Six

### **The Marginalization of Practice with Ethno-racial Minorities in Mainstream Organizations: The Social Worker as a “Front-line Systemic Actor”**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven report on findings based on the thesis field research – i.e., the dialogues with 10 social workers employed by mainstream human service organizations in the city of Edmonton. (Hereafter, these 10 social workers are generally referred to as research participants) These two chapters are descriptive and analytical at the same time, based on what has emerged thematically from the investigative dialogues during field research.

Two purposes are adhered to in such reporting. First, the descriptive aspect identifies issues as shared experiences in mainstream organizations, which impacted on the research participants’ practice with ethno-racial minorities. Through this aspect, this thesis begins to portray what practice marginalization looks like – **the thesis’s first research question**. By way of answering this research question, the thesis’s **Objective One** - to explore systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities – is addressed. Second, the analytical aspect responds to the question: what in the dialogues point to how these issues are constructed and reproduce themselves so that these practice issues are systemic – i.e. **Objective Two** and **the thesis’s second research question**. As a whole, these chapters are composed so as to attempt to portray mainstream social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in terms of not only its everyday systemic issues but also these issues as systemic products and their own reproducers.

As this present chapter title designed to convey, the reporting focus here is on a rather ironic finding that the research participants themselves were connected to the systemic marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities. “Front-line systemic

actor” is a phrase I have borrowed from a research participant as the rubric under which certain experiences are thematically categorized for reporting. It emerged in a dialogue with a research participant when she offered a very revealing insight about herself working for a mainstream human service organization. Her experientially based insight is that as an employee of the organization, she had ended up assimilated into the “system of operations” that “at the end of the day, treat(s) the ethno-racial minority communities as secondary, and most of the time, irrelevant.” She continued,

“Honestly, I am totally powerless in being the lone voice at the office trying to integrate needs and issues of cultural minority clients and their communities on the everyday formal and informal agendas in meetings...in case discussions...in coffee break conversations. After a while...I have been there for four years now, I have just stopped trying out of frustration. I find it embarrassing that I begin to hear myself mechanically repeating verbatim bureaucratic lines that rationalize why I can’t go extra miles to address tremendous needs for my cultural minority families. Should I say, I have become a....uh...let’s see, what would be a good way to describe me...**front-line systemic actor**. How’s that for a role!”

That is just the phrase I was looking for to represent a range of thematically connected problematic experiences shared in the field research. These experiences invariably reveal how the research participant as an individual social worker constructed into a systemic actor that in turn reproduces the problematic situations resulting in the marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities in the mainstream organizations. This is a significant finding of this research; Chapter Six is devoted to identify these problematic situations as systemic issues and to analyze how they are constructed and continue to impact practice.

Thematically emerging from the field data are a collection of personal situational experiences connected with the research participant as an employed individual of the mainstream organization in question. The following sections in this chapter report on these experiences thematically under two broad issues, which may well have been experienced as personal situations at work, but are structurally located within the system of employment:

- Internalization of tokenistic multiculturalism and constructed powerlessness
- Personal Employment and Economics

These issues will form the following two sections entitled as follows:

- **Section 6.1** Internalization of Tokenistic Multiculturalism and Constructed Powerlessness
- **Section 6.2** Personal Employment and Economics: A Systemic Factor of Practice Marginalization in Disguise

In **Section 6.3**, the two systemic issues reported and analyzed in the previous sections are elevated to a broader conceptual level. This, final main section of the chapter, in effect, is purported to lend a ‘forest’ view of the problematic system. **Section 6.3** flushes out systemic formative characteristics that problematize mainstream human service organizations as a system unto itself. Based on the ‘trees’ in the form everyday systemic issues reported in **Section 6.1** and **Section 6.2**, this ‘forest’ of broader issues becomes the issue setting in which this thesis considers and addresses implied systemic change strategies (see Chapter Eight).

## **6.1 Internalization of Tokenistic Multiculturalism and Constructed Powerlessness**

The first thematic narrative is about social workers coming to internalizing the reality that their employing mainstream organizations practice what could be termed as **tokenistic multiculturalism** and how that reality constructs their sense of powerlessness. Such a reality of organizational practice discourages social workers’ professional sense of mission to work with ethno-racial minorities and marginalizes their practice with that sector in the community. As the investigative dialogues show below, in face of the problematic reality of tokenistic multiculturalism, research participants first resigned to it, experienced a shift to internalizing it and in the end, sensed a powerlessness to effect change to turn the situation around. However, data in the investigative dialogues also reveal that what seems to be obvious as social workers’ personal intra-psychic shifts - as terms like “resignation”, “internalization” and “powerlessness” would invoke - should

necessarily and importantly be recognized as a systemic issue of practice with ethno-racial minorities.

One common experience of research participants reveals that over time, they had become resigned to the situation that their mainstream organizations could only pursue multicultural service delivery in a way that social work practice with ethno-racial minorities would continue to be marginalized. Narratives of a personal inner shift to resignation indicate that research participants had accepted, or internalized, that multiculturalism – a term applied here to handily refer to as a mainstream human service organization’s express value for ethno-racial diversity in its service delivery – was but a tokenistic value in their workplaces. An exemplary comment of tokenistic multiculturalism and its psychological effect on the social worker is found coming from a research participant:

It is frustrating to see that they write in funding applications about how they see the importance of becoming multicultural in response to the increasing racially diversified Edmonton, and how they anticipate the continuation of this demographic trend due to immigration. Somebody like me should like very much to see such a show of this value (of multiculturalism) because it would mean that they’re gonna hire more staff who are interested in serving the immigrant and refugee families. Unfortunately, I have been around for a few years now. I am still the only non-white social worker; and I take interest in serving the sizable Chinese and Asian immigrant community in this area. What about the East Indian people who are a large part of this area’s population as well...what about the emerging pockets of refugee families from Sudan and the African region. These newcomers coming from refugee camps are showing all kinds of adjustment issues. Multicultural service delivery is such an occasional thing that the agency takes out for its self-interests such as showing the right stuff on a funding application. Not that the board, the managers are prejudicial people or something...far from that. These are normal, kind, caring, thinking people, but unfortunately, they are also mainstream white folks who see real life is not multicultural...if you know what I mean.

The sentiments towards tokenistic multiculturalism cut across research participants’ experiences. Through these sentiments, the problem presents its symptomatic characteristics. The research participant above introduced the disjuncture between rhetoric and reality. Other research participants also echoed that experience of mainstream organization practice of multiculturalism. One other research participant



recalled her government child protection organization had over time included “the concepts of social diversity and inclusion in its practice framework, proposals and other planning stuff”. However, she had seen “hardly any regulatory directives” so that front-line “management and workers” would be “obliged to make these concepts happen in everyday practice by everybody not just the ones of us who look ‘ethnic’ to the rest of the organization”. By this, this research participant was lamenting her experience that notwithstanding the progressive documents produced to assert the organization’s commitment to the values of social diversity and inclusion, there was no follow-up management actions to ensure these values would be operationalized and practiced across all management and front-line service-delivery personnel; what ended up in her observation was that a small group of ‘ethnic’ social workers, including herself, became the organization’s “proof to the world” of social diversity and inclusion.

Another research participant saw the irony that tokenistic multiculturalism became that much more apparent in light of her organization having taken very progressive steps to be “multicultural” as a service delivery system. In this case, her organization, which is a major family-support player in the Edmonton human service community, established a staff position “to promote and steer multiculturalism for the organization.” By securing project funding, this designated position had accomplished a number of high profile developments for the organizations. While the research participant saw this special staffing initiative as involving mainly one colleague designated to give focus to multicultural development of the organization, she verbalized that one colleague – along with a secretary shared with another internal unit - as a “multicultural office”. This is indicative of the significance this staffing move had for the research participant, who would like to see her organization devoting resources and attention to ethno-racial minorities as an integral part of the mainstream public. In terms of the accomplishments of this single-staffer “office”, the research participant made special mention of the “Multicultural Policy”; the development of a multicultural in-service training manual and a compulsory workshop based on the manual for all front-line staff. The following is her assessment of what such ‘progressive steps’ meant:

“Well, are we more multicultural now compared to two years ago when the multicultural office started? I don’t think so. It’s really funny; I get the feeling that because we have this office, my Caucasian colleagues can leave it to these people to deal with multiculturalism. We go to this office to ask them to plan for us, to connect with us to ethnic groups etc. It is as if we can’t do stuff without involving this office. So, instead of this office making the organization as a whole attitudinally different...going out with higher awareness and a sense of concern to connect, join with, work with our immigrant/refugee communities, we have all the attention to this office. It’s almost the office is a hindrance rather than a catalyst and inspirator of change. The final irony is that the organization has been blowing its horn in whatever opportunity it has about its multicultural work.”

An analysis of research participants’ narratives of the various manifestations of multiculturalism as a problematic organizational undertaking clearly indicates that what is systemic about such an undertaking is how the reality of it has psychically worn out these social workers. Imbedded in these research participants’ experiential sharing were terms of self-identity in relation to their perspectives on their professional roles in their mainstream human service organizations. These terms include “internal advocate”, “first hire for multicultural practice”, “system change agent”, “shit-disturber”, rabble-rouser” – to name the ones that jump out of the taped/transcribed dialogues with these social workers. Commonly, these terms were invoked to describe how they clearly took on a personal agency to support and to engage the organization’s initiative to be more responsive and in tune with the needs of ethno-racial minorities in their service communities. Personal agency refers to what Moffatt (2001) focuses on in his *Poetics of Social Work: Personal Agency and Social Transformation in Canada, 1920-1939*; it is that the medium of change is the social worker himself/herself engaging and applying his/her capacities based on a personal sense of professional ethics and one’s professional skills and knowledge. These personal agency capacities are further described by Heinonen & Spearman (2001:345) when they define agency as “the capacity to act or to exert power”.

The dialogues indeed reveal a regressive shift over time in these social workers' self-identity in relation to their role in the organization's effort to be multicultural. The following is a dramatic expression of such a shift, not untypical of others' experiences shared in the research dialogues:

“I was excited about starting with the department; I was looking forward to serving the Chinese immigrant community. Part of my excitement came from what they told me in the job interview that the department would make innovative efforts to outreach to the culturally diverse families in Edmonton. They told me that the position I was interviewed for was a kind of a “system change agent” supporting the department to be more multicultural in its service delivery.

That was, what, two years ago? For sure, I have become busy with a case load of Chinese immigrant families. I can say, as far as the Chinese community goes, the department has become more accessible because of me. But, what has the department done systemically to increase service-delivery to other visible minority immigrant groups. Practically zilch! Zero! I went to this conference on multiculturalism and social service and was asked to circulate articles and my notes around among different offices. That's as systemic as the department has got in using me as a “system change agent”. Big deal! The department is as white as before as a whole. So, I lost the excitement I had when I started with the department and that sense of forward-looking about my job being one to influence the department to be more multicultural. I don't believe the department has that genuine intention to change.”

What was demonstrated in the above piece of experiential sharing is the social worker internalizing tokenistic multiculturalism as an organization practice. Internalization occurred for this social worker when she decided and accepted that her organization was not serious about what it was thought of as being committed to and that no further planned change actions would be taken. Throughout other dialogues in the field research, research participants showed that tokenistic multiculturalism has become the best mainstream organizations can be expected to deliver. This often grudging acceptance of organization inertia is shown through a sense of powerlessness on the research participant's part in being able to do anything to revert their employer's de-prioritization of multicultural practice of social work.

Such a sense of powerlessness is vividly brought out in the first quote in the introduction of this chapter. In this case, the research participant lamented the personal attitudinal change over time as she bore witness to her employer's inaction in promoting and enhancing a multicultural capacity to serve ethno-racial minority communities. In the end, what was constructed in her was a personal psychology of surrender to her employer's evident lack of an authentic agenda to promote multicultural service-delivery and social work practice. Others, if not as elaborate in delivery of a trail of personal shift in attitude and sense of power, also lent evidence of such constructed powerlessness. "I just do what I am told now." "There are only those few of us talking among ourselves about serving the ethnic communities." "A lot of words and talk. But, where's the funding and the 'diverse workforce' that they have been talking about? I am holding up the multicultural fort – if you will. That's too much. I am back on the job-search mode."

This last group of comments concerning tokenistic multiculturalism is a materialist assessment; for essentially these research participants held their organizations to show material resources and actions to move rhetoric into reality and, grew frustrated and hapless when their employers failed to follow through on which rhetoric effectively implies and impresses. An example of this materialist response to the issue of tokenism relates to the last quote in the paragraph above. The organization referred to had in its yearly strategic plan to seek funding to hire two "Full Time Equivalent" - i.e. full-time social workers – to engage and explore family service development for a slowly, but steadily growing Ethiopian immigrant neighborhood in the community. By a revision of her job description, the research participant was assigned as the "multicultural community support worker". In this capacity for a year, she researched and reported to management her findings of multicultural developments and issues in the community. It was based on her recommendation that the strategic decision was made to pursue funding for staffing resources to serve the emergent African immigrant community. When the research participant made the quoted comment in the dialogue for this thesis research, she had found out that the organization's new business plan budget included no provision for a plan to pursue revenue for the additional staff the organization had strategized during the year. She inquired with her manager who shared that senior management decided to

postpone that strategy for a year given “current revenue situation” the organization was facing.

In summary, the dialogues with research participants show that resignation to tokenistic multiculturalism had been a pathway to internalization of the problematic reality and an intra-psychic destination of feeling powerless. The sense of powerlessness is also understood within a materialist dimension of research participants’ mindsets. It is a dimension where power to command and direct resources and decision-making differentiates and segregate the dominant (the organizations that employed the research participants) and the subordinated (the research participants as individual social workers) in that reality. However, what precisely makes the research participants’ intra-psychic shifts - from resignation to internalizing an unwanted reality to a sense of powerlessness – is a systemic issue. The nature of the issue is that these changes in a person’s inner world are organizationally rooted. The depiction of the social worker ending up becoming a “front-line systemic actor” – the metaphoric term adopted to represent the thematic issues in this chapter - hints at the cyclical nature of the intra-psychic shifts. In other words, internalization of token multiculturalism practiced by mainstream human service organizations and the resultant sense of powerlessness loop back to reinforce the social worker’s resignation to the problematic status quo. Staying in this cycle is understandably a powerful, necessary condition for a social worker to become a ‘front-line systemic actor’ – one that practices as a non-subversive – if not uncritical - representative of the employing and related system with a low capacity to see effecting change to the human service system as realistic. The making of social workers into “systemic actors” is profoundly a systemic issue that, in the context of our exploration, contributes decisively to marginalizing the practice with ethno-racial minorities.

## **6.2 Personal Employment and Economics: A Systemic Factor of Practice Marginalization in Disguise**

Reflexive sharing of experiences by research participants uncovers a connection between the social worker’s consideration of personal employment and economics on the one hand, and the employing organization’s marginalization of practice with ethno-racial

minorities on the other hand. By reflexive sharing, I am referring to the research participant sharing insights into some aspects of his/her social location and related realities toward understanding how s/he is functioning within the systemic relations of a problematic reality in question. In the shared stories, the social worker's personal employment and economics demonstrate as a powerful, ruling factor in the person's decision to "go along" with the employing system even if this system behaves in ways of marginalizing practice with ethno-racial minorities. As demonstrated below, these "ways" are constructed within the unequal economic relations of the human service organizations, as well as within the ethno-racial relations existing in mainstream human service field and workplaces.

Below are two examples of reflexive sharing from the investigative dialogues that provide an entry into the interesting, socially constructed connection between a private concern (personal employment and economics) and a systemic problematic reality (organizational marginalization of a practice area):

"For a while, I was working part-time in group homes – for kids, for addicts, you know, and in short-term projects that last so long as there's funding for a year or two. I was always worried about where I would work next. Here, my job is government; I am part of a union. It's a sense of having a career here and a job I can depend on. It's hard to knock financial stability. That's good for my family. So, when you asked if I would look for another job where I can work more with immigrants and refugees, it's a tough thing to do. I don't like how this place has only a lot of words and talk about serving the multicultural community and hardly done anything beyond having me serving one ethnic immigrant community. But, I don't think agency B is doing anything different either."

From another research participant who also now works as a social worker in government position:

"I came from working for this very progressive immigrant-serving non-profit organization. We had a very multicultural staff contingent...we were able to respond to the major minority cultural groups in our suburbia community. It was great. We were paid dirt though. We got these project dollars. As an agency and individually for all the staff... hand-to-mouth, you know.. But, you know, my sense is that that's typical of the immigrant-helping sector that serves non-white people.

The practice with, as you call them, ethno-racial minorities is limited despite all the yapping going on about multicultural this and diversity that. But, hey, the pay is great compared to what I was making. So, between pay and practice. What do you think I would go for now. The mortgage, the family, career...”

For these research participants quoted above, the inner tension between a moralistic sense of a mission to work with visible minority immigrant/refugee communities and a personal desire to make a career in the human service field was understandably pulled to a taut by the reality of human service economics. This sectoral economy is one of a socially organized divide between haves and have-nots. Government agencies – e.g. state departments of child protection, social welfare and youth corrections – provide jobs that belong to the “haves” categories. Social workers hired into these positions are unionized and have a clear corporate career path for the individual to advance along if so desired. On the other hand, the human service world has a community of the relatively have-not Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) where social workers work for non-union wages and salaries much lower than those made by their government-employed counterparts and have a limited – if any to talk about seriously - career structure to advance in. In this latter category of organizations, significant financial reliance is on government departments purchasing NGOs’ services, which, in this era of ideology for lean government, is invariably a euphemism for downloading public services in the name of lower costs and efficiency (Browne 1966, Burman 1996). NGOs are also in part sustained by on-going term funding by charitable foundations whose fiscal capacity is at the mercy of the donor community, investment markets and therefore, the ups and downs of the economy as a whole. In the case of one of the above quoted research participants, such charitable foundation funding meant a series of unstable project positions he worked in that in his view, “had no future for a career”.

In this analysis, the private dilemma of staying in a disappointing job with a mainstream human service organization ceases to be a personal reality but a systemic one. The social worker's difficult choice of tolerating and accepting the employer's continued marginalization of service delivery and practice concerning ethno-racial minorities is made in an employment and economic context systemically ruling over the

individual involved. The alternative to quit and to return to the non-profit, immigrant/refugee serving sector needs to be made at real risk of the social worker's career and economic losses. For a number of research participants, their systemically organized rational calculation and choosing of "pay" over their passion of practice with ethno-racial minorities was evidently more persuasive. (The word "pay" in quotation marks refers to the term used by one research participant to globalize his self-interest in making a financially descent living and being secured in a place with prospects for a human service career advancement.)

Further exploration with research participants on their moral bind to justify going with staying in their mainstream human service organization positions even these jobs had turned out to be frustrating a desire to work with ethno-racial minorities, there are hints of another powerful factor that adds another dimension of complexity to start a career which is not easy to give up. This is the factor of the challenges experienced by ethno-racial minority social workers in starting a promising human service career in a Canadian milieu. As follows is an illustrative case. One research participant, an ethno-racial minority individual from the northern African region 10 years ago, at one point in the research dialogue leaned over toward the researcher, lowering his voice to a bit higher than a whisper, "I had tried for a government position four times over the past two years. I would always get interviewed but then I never got hired before now. Now, I don't know if I would have been hired this time if this job wasn't about working with the multicultural community. So, finally I got in the door..." As to what was his take on the reasons why he ran into difficulties to get hired on by the government, his sense was, "...like they would write the real reasons down for you (a smirk tugging at his lips). My accent? I look different? Take your pick."

This research participant believed his experience was a situation of – in his succinct phraseology with, perhaps, a tint of polite reservation in the indictment – "latent racial discrimination". One time, he tried to follow up with an interviewer after he found out he was not successful with a government position he applied and was interviewed for. He wanted to find out why he was not chosen as he felt he did well in the interview. He



found the interviewer came across “cold” and “reluctant”, who could only say that the person offered the position was better qualified. He was left in the dark, feeling rejected one more time by the “system” – a word of his choice indicative of a shift in his worldview of what is in his way in the global Canadian community where he was taking an everyday effort to build a career as a passionate social work professional.

Another case in point has come from one research participant who started out in the dialogue talking about her professional orientation to work with families of her own heritage as an East-Indian and to be, in her words, an “internal advocate to exert influence on the child and family support agency to serve more an ethno-racially diverse clientele.” Her experiential sharing shifted to a lament of her agency actually showing a lot of reluctance to develop for more staffing and resources toward serving families of more visible minority groups in the community. As her reflective experiential narrative continued, she touched on how her India university master degree level social work academic credential was not immediately recognized in Canada after she immigrated. She ended up working for a large immigrant-serving non-profit organization, all the while resentful of being in a position, in her metaphoric terms, making her “a ward-boy” when she was “a surgeon”. Her understanding of her predicament suggests a penned-up feeling of racial discrimination as reflected in her view that “Canada is still not used to coloured people”. She treasured her present job with a mainstream organization highly integrated within the government child welfare delivery system.

“Finally, I feel I am working at the level of my education. To be called formally “social worker” is important to me, giving me and my professional identity a legitimacy I was so looking for as a new immigrant myself. I know the agency has a long way to go with multicultural service delivery – what I see as very important for me to practice at my best, but, at the same time, I feel very privileged for having a steady social work job here.”

Feeling racially judged and discriminated in fact is not uncommon among visible minority social workers in relation to mainstream human service organizations (Yee, Wong & Janczur 2006). A Canadian study indicates that ethno-racial minority social workers face exclusionary and discriminatory practices in mainstream human service organizations for they do not have the equal “personal access to power and privilege” in

the work environment as their Caucasian white peers (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition 2004:7). It is such access that reproduces what Yee & Dumbrill (2003:107) observe as “the privileged social location of Whiteness” where the dominant culture in these organizations “may determine and limit the type of social services, supports, and resources available to ethno-racial communities” (Yee & Dumbrill 2003:107).

One workplace encounter by a different research participant lends a glimpse of what this “privileged social location of Whiteness” could be about. In this example below, such a social location is in the form of a counseling framework reflective of Eurocentric assumptions of helping as a cultural endeavor. In a social work staff meeting to discuss a counseling framework to address wife abuse, a research participant, who herself is a Canadian of Chinese heritage, raised the issue that the concept of self, which is taken for granted in the western existentialist worldview as universally significant in the defining of quality of life, may not be seen by many non-western cultures as an overarching, driving motivation for personal well-being. She argued that a framework responsive to families of diverse culture and ethnicities should speak to different cultural paradigms of helping and that before the organization would jump to writing up a framework document, research be undertaken by involving the key multicultural communities to conceptualize these paradigms. The research participant completed the encounter as follows:

“The manager commented that what I said was important but that however, they needed the framework done within a short timeline so that it would go in with a proposal to go to a couple of potential funders. I saw several of my colleagues nod to the manager’s comments. The manager then offered that perhaps, the organization could explore the feasibility of a referral process for “multicultural” families and that “somebody like you” – meaning me – can serve more insightfully these families. With that, the staff felt comfortable returning to discussing the writing of a counseling framework. The issue of cultural variance on considering the self was never part of the dialogue. Yet, when the framework has become formalized for the organization, in reality, we all are now required to follow it. And even the manager sounded supportive of my view, the organization really has no legitimate processes to formalize alternate ways of helping because some client families come from very different perspectives as to what is helpful from a counselor.”

In summary, as a systemic factor of practice marginalization, personal employment and economics have emerged from the investigative dialogues when research participants shared their sense of progressive career attainment in terms of their working for their agencies of the “mainstream” stature. Research participants talked positively about their employment with mainstream organizations in the context of trying to lend an understanding to their silent tolerance and grudging acceptance of their employer falling short in promoting and pursuing multicultural service delivery and social work practice. As such, they entered into the assimilated place of “a systemic actor”. In this research, it is found that a social worker’s consideration of staying employed with a mainstream human service organization can trump her professional commitment to pursue a practice priority.

“Trumping” was definitely not entirely a personal choice, but a choice systemically constructed. Systemically, mainstream organizations are assessed as a higher order of employers for social workers from an employment stability and from a career development perspective. This systemic factor has been shown to be critical in the social worker’s inner calculation as to how much s/he is willing to pursue an area of practice deemed important but marginalized by the employment organization. Nuances of this “trumping” phenomenon are found to be within the socio-economic relations within the human service field where mainstream human service organizations were considered by research participants as superior work settings in terms of pay and prospects for career advancement. Additionally, for research participants who are themselves non-white minorities, troubling ethno-racial discrimination in hiring practices and in everyday operations of mainstream human service organizations was reality to live with rather than reason to give up on working for these organizations as superior human service work places. Such social organization of the psyche and choices makes what is apparently psychological and personal – therefore, individualistic – profoundly systemic; for any suggestions for resolving any personal dilemmas arising from available choices involved can no longer be sufficient if they bypass the issue of the socio-economic inequalities of organizations in human service field and the issue of ethno-racially biased practices by mainstream organizations.

### **6.3 Mainstream Human Service Organizations: A System's Broader Issues**

Thematic findings in this chapter allow for identifying issues broadened in a way conducive to the development of systemic strategies for change. Two broader issues are evident here. The first of these is mainstream benevolence and the second of these, social work as an employment regime.

Mainstream benevolence refers to the reality that the individual social worker depends on the mainstream organization employer as the ultimate, ruling decision-maker to grant an opportunity for multicultural service delivery and therefore, practice with ethno-racial minorities. Experiential evidence in this research has shown that if the employer decides multicultural operations are such that social work with ethno-racial minorities is outside the essential core business practice, the individual social worker ends up as having to work within the systemic constraints of that decision. This situation recalls the connotations of “mainstream” that reflect the race relations defining who's the majority and who's the minority in Canadian communities. The term “mainstream” connotes the general public; and in the constitutive nuances of Canadian multiculturalism, the term is inclusive of all cultures of Canadians through generation of immigration to the country. While this term's meaning clearly implies full inclusion of all residents with no regards to personal characteristics such as gender, race, culture etc., in practice, mainstream organizations, as shown in our dialogic findings, behave in ways short of reflecting an acceptance of the fact that the mainstream public has become and continues to become more of a multicultural public. The literature as previous discussed in the thesis identifies such exclusion as systemic racism, referring to the reality that when the public is defined in terms of the dominant Euro-centric values, perspectives, needs and issues, these considerations become the defining framework of service delivery. And such systemic racism certainly help explain the social differentiation and stratification of human service organizations and racialized hiring practice experienced by research participants; both of these troubling situations reflect back to a systemic attitude toward ethno-racial minorities and their needs and issues .

Social work as an employed regime is about how the profession, as the research findings in this chapter reminds, has, at best, highly precarious practice autonomy, unlike medicine and law. Everyday social work practice is an employed regime. That is, “employed” in a couple of senses. First, the social work practitioner is an employee of an organization. When it is a mainstream human service organization, the social worker, as demonstrated by findings here, behaves as a good employee defined as one expected to be assimilated into the whole regime of service delivery, labor relations and opportunities that come with being a member of the organization. Evidently, this systemic package of being employed has a decisive, steering of the social worker toward where s/he focuses practice and service-delivery – or, just as importantly for this thesis, where s/he would not give a focus to in practice. Second, social work is employed by an organization to achieve its organization mandate. In this sense, the disciplinary paradigm of social work practice, which is firmly grounded in a dual agency of micro and macro change ethically guided by values concerning the individual’s holistic wellness and social justice, must be readily subjecting itself to demands for adjustments in order to accommodate organizational expediencies and priorities. A comment by a research participant who works for a provincial government child protection ministry is illustrative here:

“A few of us was a kind of caucus of multicultural practice. Nothing formal, but we have made it a point to raise cultural sensitivity concerns and needs in the work we do with cultural minority immigrant families on a daily basis. We did this in staff meetings or whenever we are asked to input to any internal policy type processes. I think the response has been always...how should I say...polite. You might see our comments and inputs recorded in minutes and even, more formally in reports going far up the bureaucracy for decision-making. But when you look at the child welfare policy and procedures as a whole, you would see some definite acknowledgement of the importance of cultural sensitivity and respect. But where are the specific policies and procedures reflective of an honoring and embracing of diverse child-rearing and family practices of different cultures and ethnicities? In the end, value-wise, you say you respect and welcome and so on and so forth. But there’s no material actions to operationalize what you say in a way ethno-racial minority groups would find anything specifically respectful and welcoming their differences. In other words, everything in child welfare protection practice remains very Canadian in the white culture sense.”

Another government-employed research participant observed that internal advocacy in her mainstream organization is by nature an “often solitary small ‘p’ political” pursuit, then sarcastically reflecting

“...but then, who asks for your opinion as to how things should be run anyway? You are a public servant who happens to be a social worker. Opinion-making that ends up leading the organization to where it’s supposed to go is the Minister’s and the Deputy Minister’s job. Not you.”

Thus, social work as a practice has an employed status, one that presumes the organizational system as the primary determinant of how social work functions and the profession’s scope of not only every practice but most significantly, what values and principles in which the profession as an employed agent can rightfully ground itself.

### **Summary**

Research participants’ personal experiences and inward assessment of themselves have emerged as an entry into looking at systemic ruling of social workers as professional practitioners. In this research, this systemic impact on the person occurs in the form of the social worker’s psychic state of resignation where s/he – if only reluctantly – has arrived at a pragmatism to simply go along with the employing system in terms of this system’s limited ways of responding to the ethno-racial minority community. In this chapter, two key personal situations are found to be systemic in their construction, both contributing to making social workers into “systemic actors” complicit in keeping practice with ethno-racial minority in a marginalized place of the mainstream human service organization. One is internalization of tokenistic multiculturalism and the resultant sense of powerlessness; the other, personal employment and economics.

Based on the dialogic data, these personal situations are integrally connected. When mainstream human service organizations present themselves as their own formidable barriers of multicultural service delivery as a core operational business and of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, social workers as employees can, in the final analysis, only accept or internalize whatever tokenism the organization in actuality is practicing for the minority community. As illustrated in the findings, a psychological

construction occurs where - ironically, given the change agency function of the social work profession – a sense of powerlessness sets in for the individual social worker. This regressive shift comes in the general form, as one research participant put it representatively, that

“I’m just doing what I am told now. My white colleagues don’t care; they are happy I am the ‘multicultural worker’ (researcher’s note: she raises the index fingers to signal an invisible quotation marks)...No, I am not being ridiculous...not asking everybody to be able to serve all cultures...but, being multicultural as an organizational value should mean that all social workers should assert this value and participate actively and authentically to address the issues and needs of human diversity and inclusion in society. It should not be a practice value of just one or two assigned to that value.”

To the extent that this powerlessness toward organizational change is a psychological consequence of a work-place condition, it is systemically constructed and should be understood and addressed as such.

“Fish or cut bait”, a phrase often used – such as by Canada’s Prime Minister recently in his challenge to his political opponents to make a decision on whether to support his government’s Throne Speech – to describe an either-or dichotomy to resolve a dilemma. Another level of thematic findings reported in this chapter is that the systemic positioning of mainstream human service organizations as employers of social workers and the ethno-racial minority social worker’s experience of discriminatory hiring practices by mainstream human service organizations are critical factors in a social worker’s choice to live with the kind of powerlessness as discussed. This choice effectively contributes to prolonging the marginalized location of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations. “Continue to fish” is evidently the likely choice as reflected in the “pay over practice” resolution for one research participant.

The consideration of personal employment and economics over one’s opportunity to practice in an area socially meaningful and professionally important to oneself has a decisively systemic dimension. At one level, as reported by research participants, the

alternate settings where opportunities to work with ethno-racial minorities are guaranteed and many are immigrant/refugee serving non-profit community agencies. These are characteristically insecurely funded or under-funded places where social work jobs come and go depending on funding availability. Nor, as per research participants, are these organizations with established career paths for social workers to plan and develop their professional future. In contrast, research participants' present employers – mainstream human service organizations – were considered as providing secured employment and opportunities for a career. Evidently, a social worker's assessment of such a stratification of human service employers in the terms used here has a direct effect on what the social worker is prepared to pursue in relation to engaging his/her mainstream employers to move social work practice with ethno-racial minorities from the operational margins. Then, at another level, a number of research participants who themselves are ethno-racial minorities reported experiences of having been discriminated against when they tried to get hired on by mainstream human service organizations. They in turn came across with a strong feeling of arrival in their present mainstream organization jobs, seeing prospects of a career path open to them – something difficult to give up just because they felt unhappy about their opportunity to work with ethno-racial minorities being curtailed by their employers' actions or inactions.

This chapter makes also an effort to interpret analytically broader systemic issues based on the thematic findings of everyday problematic experiences of research participants in their employer-organizations. Two such broader systemic issues are identified; the first of these is mainstream benevolence and the second of these, social work as an employment regime. These allow for systemic change strategy considerations as fully explored in Chapter Eight.

As follows, Chapter Seven reports on those systemic issues that are operational and trans-organizational in nature. Operational issues refer to everyday collegial and managerial situations and organizational provisions such as policies and procedures that marginalize practice with ethno-racial minorities in the mainstream organization in question. On the other hand, issues of trans-organizational type are those situations with



marginalizing impact on practice that originate from the larger mainstream systemic milieu in which the organization in question exists.

## Chapter Seven

### **The Marginalization of Practice with Ethno-racial Minorities In Mainstream Organizations: Operational and Trans-Organizational Issues**

#### **Introduction**

The investigative dialogues for this thesis bring into view systemic issues of mainstream human service organizations at two working levels. At one level are these organizations as individual entities. On the other hand, systemic issues are also identifiable as related to these organizations as a community of entities, where systemic operational relations have been experienced as problematic to social work practice with ethno-racial minorities.

Corresponding to these two levels of seeing these organizations, this chapter reports on research findings described as operational and trans-organizational issues. The former refer to every day collegial and managerial situations and organizational provisions such as policies and procedures that marginalize practice with ethno-racial minorities. Additionally, trans-organizational issues are situations with marginalizing impact on practice that originate from the larger mainstream systemic milieu of mainstream organizations.

This chapter reports on systemic issues, as follows:

- Segregated “Multicultural” Work as Marginalized Practice. This thematic finding includes experiences pointing to systemic organization of multicultural work in the front-line, operational context that marginalizes practice with ethno-racial minorities.
- Mainstream-as-Public-Service Orientation as a Practice Barrier. This issue relates to a common orientation of mainstream organizations to equality in diversity that sets up road blocks in the way of practice in response to critical issues of ethno-racial minorities.
- The thematic finding of trans-organizational issues is about how social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is systemically affected by the paradigmatic way

mainstream human service-delivery community as a whole operates when it comes to serving this minority public.

Respectively, three sections address these three issues, entitled as follows:

- **Section 7.1** Operational Issues: Segregated “Multicultural” Work as Marginalized Practice
- **Section 7.2** Marginalized-as-Public-Service orientation as a Practice Barrier
- **Section 7.3** Trans-Organizational Issues: Mainstream Human Service Organizations as a Systemic Entity

In **Section 7.4**, the three systemic issues reported and analyzed in the previous sections are elevated to a broader conceptual level. This final main section of the chapter, in effect, is purported to lend a ‘forest’ view of the problematic system.

**Section 7.4** flushes out systemic formative characteristics that problematize mainstream human service organizations as a system unto itself. Based on the ‘trees’ in the form everyday systemic issues reported in **Section 7.1**, **Section 7.2** and **Section 7.3**, this ‘forest’ of broader issues becomes the issue setting in which this thesis considers and addresses implied systemic change strategies (see Chapter Eight).

### **7.1 Operational Issues: Segregated “Multicultural” Work as Marginalized Practice**

Invariably, “multicultural” is the descriptor research participants used to refer to how their mainstream human service organizations identified their practice and work with ethno-racial minorities. Thus, one government child protection social worker would be known in her agency as “having a multicultural caseload”. A Chinese-speaking social worker who is a counselor in a mental health service agency was aligned to in the agency literature as “delivering multicultural mental health services”. A research participant was his organization’s “multicultural lead” – the term used in an application to a funding program that gives priority to applicants having a “multicultural orientation to service delivery”. What emerges from examples like these throughout the investigative

dialogues reflects an organizational discourse for multicultural practice that by frontline experiences, lends significant impact on how practice with ethno-racial minorities is organized in everyday operations.

A thematic, common experience among research participants that floats out from the dialogues is that they were in very explicit ways identified as the de facto representatives of their individual organizations' "multicultural" service delivery. As these social workers explained this aspect of their experience, it has become apparent that such specialized representation – be it formal or informal, planned or of a matter of convenience for the organization – took on an effect of marginalizing service-delivery to and practice with ethno-racial minorities. This manifests in the form of multicultural specialization as a disincentive for mainstreaming of practice with ethno-racial minorities.

Multicultural specialization as a disincentive for mainstreaming of practice with ethno-racial minorities refers to the reality that multicultural service-delivery becomes a specialized function far from integrated into mainstream organizational work processes. As one research participant saw it, "it is as if the organization can be left alone to go about its 'normal' (she signals the quotation marks with her fingers) business now that there's a multicultural person given the job to work with the non-white immigrant community." Two highly illustrative examples were cited to explain multicultural specialization as a change disincentive.

One instance came from a research participant with a family support agency run primarily on government contract dollars to do counseling with "non-mainstream culture" families with child and parenting issues referred by child welfare and youth justice authorities. Her agency took on an operational initiative to develop counseling guidelines for their Family Counseling Program. As in the following quote, the research participant's experiences illustrate how specialization in one person as "multicultural" breeds organizational complacency. More significantly, such specialization does hardly anything to break down the attitudinal road blocks in any initiative to integrate

throughout the organization the kind of sensitivity and the mindset for responsiveness essential to guide and promote practice with ethno-racial minorities.

“We have this committee to develop a practice – they call it – framework for our FCP – that is, the Family Counseling Program. I am a member. We are at a stage where the board committee that oversees programming is looking at the final draft of the framework and signing it off. So, we have this document on the verge of framing counseling. You know what, let me tell you, there’s nothing in the counseling framework right now that makes this agency more ethno-racially sensitive or responsive than before they hired me and embarked on trying to be multicultural. A highlight of this framework is Brief Therapy as our approach to helping families. I was quite uncomfortable with a lot of assumptions and practice implications of this counseling orientation when it comes to the many immigrant and refugee families. Past traumatic experiences – e.g. many years of refugee camp life, cultural adjustment and every day settlement challenges in Canada, family relations issues bound up in living in a western culture community....these families need much longer counselor-client relationship than Brief Therapy assumes. And this helping relationship is very different from one between a mainstream white Canadian families and a mainstream white counselor – which represents the typical case in my agency. When I am a counselor with a family of a non-white, non-Euro-cultural heritage and often, with language challenges, I am more than a clinician. I do a lot of hands-on, roll-up-my-sleeves kind of helping where necessary. Cut it to the chase...it was as if the agenda was pre-determined to have Brief Therapy as our helping model, hell and high water. I made my case, but my plea was quickly dealt with by suggesting that counselors be advocate, helpful referral agent so that families can be directed to where they can get more culturally sensitive help. As a manager shut down the discussion as she looked at me, “Ming (researcher’s note: this is a make-up name to respect confidentiality) is our multicultural guru, part of her mandate is to enable the agency to do that kind of referral effectively.” For me, that kind of lazy, simplistic solution has always been around for my agency – with me or without me there. My being there makes the agency not one iota more multicultural integrated in the service delivery. My question is where was the critique of Brief Therapy and all the assumptions behind any favoring of it in the consideration of helping families outside the mainstream, Euro-cultural, Canadian families?”

When multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness are limited to a job position as THE care-taker of non-cultural mainstream sectors of the community, practice with ethno-racial minorities remains outside the organization’s operational work processes. The above-quote reflects a reality that systemically, social work practice with ethno-racial minorities could be justifiably reduced to a referral practice and no more professionally sophisticated than that. However, the research participant in this case

made a further illustrative comment about referral as a seriously significant practice in relation to the marginalizing experience on this committee.

“Granted out-referral is the practice response to needs of ethno-racial minority families. The committee, however, just threw in referral as what I, the guru, would do for these families. If we are truly professional about our multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness, the committee should have by then opened a whole new area of guidelines and policies in the framework. We should have asked and decided on questions like what would culturally sensitive and responsive referrals look like? How do we make sure we refer responsibly with a lot of genuine professional caring for families we say we don’t know a lot culturally? So, we don’t just get rid of them. What does Brief Therapy contribute to our understanding of responsible referrals? None of these kinds of questions were raised. We just ploughed on through the original agenda “so that we can get it done for the board meeting next week” – that is what the chairperson said to us.”

The second piece of illustrative experience shared in the investigative dialogues came from a social worker who was seconded from his normal front-line duties to a one-year term, Multicultural Coordinator in a city-wide, tax-supported preventive social service organization. Through neighborhood offices, the organization has social workers who do supportive/educative counseling, group work and community work. Through a government grant, the multicultural coordinator position was created “to develop a cultural competency training program” for the organization. The following is an assessment of the “Cultural Competency Project” by the social worker-coordinator five years after his one-year secondment was completed.

“Our Operations Manager was a strong leader in developing this one-year project. For her, the organization was too, in her own words, “white, middle-class” while Edmonton was fast turning into a very culturally diverse place. And a lot of these new immigrants live not easy lives and the mainstream people basically don’t care about these people. A sociology book I was reading explains this problem as “othering”...how some people are shunned as less important than others who have the power to define what is mainstream and what is not. Anyway, the project was meaningful. I was so excited to get that secondment. It took me a year to research and put together a cultural competency training manual. Senior management was happy about it and decided to test the training materials by having a cultural competency training day. Mandatory attendance by all employees was required – just like the literature advises. The training took place. One manager later gleefully proclaimed ‘Now everybody is trained up.’ We were in a room; I remembered there was chorus of “Yes”, “Great” and such expressions

of agreement in response to this manager's observation. A lot of heads nodding. That was 5 years ago. Our Operation Manager has since left for greener pasture. I don't think I can say I have heard one word about multicultural service delivery at the senior people's level since the conclusion of that project. I am back to my regular social work position. Where is the management to ride on the momentum 5 year ago to really force the change of the organization?"

In this second case, multicultural specialization was operationalized through a senior manager's personal leadership and a funded term position to generate change momentum. These specialized locations had remained – borrowing a conceptual perspective in the quote – fringe “others” in the scheme of mainstream operations. The training manual and the mandatory staff training were no small, yet ground-breaking accomplishment to be built on. However, with the departure of the managerial champion and the conclusion of the job secondment, a leadership vacuum emerged to try to continue the organizational change effort.

The manager's comment “Now everybody is trained up” that elicited a collective sense of “having a load off our back” - as the research participant later also observed reflects a systemic assumption of cultural competency training many mainstream organizations provide. The assumption is that the task of staff training is change itself – that when the organization has organized a training opportunity and the staff completed the training, the organization has demonstrated multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness. The case here demonstrates a typical organizational self-congratulatory response to training accomplished – an accomplishment that was not experienced as leading to any integrative material change.

It must also be noted at the same time that in this case, the progress made in what I call specialized locations – progress being, specifically, the cultural competency training manual and the mandatory staff training – shared the same inferior place in the consciousness of the organization. The development of a specialized function for organizational change did not in the research participant's experience leave a legacy of change to promote and mainstream practice with ethno-racial minorities.

In the next section, we look at what I have for the title “Mainstream-as-Public-Service Orientation to as a Practice Barrier”. As noted above, this issue relates to a common orientation of mainstream organizations to equality in diversity that sets up road blocks in the way of practice in response to critical issues of ethno-racial minorities.

## **7.2 Mainstream-as-Public-Service Orientation as a Practice Barrier**

The identity “mainstream human service organization” assumes that it serves the whole of the public. In the Canadian context, government departments and agencies are prime examples of such public services. The investigative dialogues for this thesis however draw attention to the ironic reality that the public service orientation of mainstream human service organization erects barriers to serving the ethno-racial minority sector of the general public. Such barriers in turn continue to keep social work practice with this sector at the very fringe of these organizations’ operations.

In the investigative dialogues, a common sub-theme of systemic issue that demands attention is the way mainstream human service organizations conceptualize multicultural service delivery in the context of their public service mandate. Two places in the dialogic sharing process give strong emphasis in describing how this sub-theme reflects itself as a problematic condition for practice with ethno-racial minorities.

**First, the Problem of the Public-Service Discourse and Practice.** In the context of discussing their mainstream organizations’ standpoints on serving the ethno-racial minorities, research participants drifted into reflecting on how their organizations talked about organizational change to become more sensitive and responsive to ethno-racial minorities and the outcome of that change effort. Such reflective sharing indicates that by necessity, mainstream human service organizations create a discourse of organizational change within the context of themselves as public services. As a result, multicultural service delivery and practice with ethno-racial minorities become limited as reflected in these organizations’ reluctance or limitation to address many structural issues such as racial discrimination and institutional Euro-centrism that are at the roots of



everyday challenges faced by ethno-racial minorities. A quote from the investigative dialogues helps to shed light on this problem, as follows:

“Finally, the senior managers gathered in one room to discuss whether or not to give green-light to create a pilot advocate position to support African refugee families from the Southeast Asia and African regions in their access and liaison with schools, hospitals, government services etc. The immigrant/refugee serving agencies have long identified that these families being new to the Edmonton multicultural community are particularly vulnerable. I and a couple of social workers are proposing this pilot. We see a social worker specifically assigned as an advocacy agent can help and empower these families a lot to negotiate and to get the necessary considerations and resources helpful to them. In that meeting, we ended up with an hour of managerial criticism of the proposal. A couple of managers reminded that diversity and inclusion as an organizational service principle should mean that we treat all cultural groups equal and that the project would amount to special treatment of a single group when everybody needs support to access resources in the city. Then, the other two managers commented to the effect that if such an advocate position is created for the refugee community, there’s risk of other groups starting to demand special services for their communities. Anyway, in the end, for all intents and purposes, the proposal was as good as shelved.”

As evident by other experiences shared in the investigative dialogues, the managers in this meeting described in the above quote were demonstrating a not uncommon approach to multicultural service delivery by mainstream human service organizations. This approach distinguishes itself as adopting and acting on the values of cultural diversity and multicultural inclusion for service-delivery, invariably drawing from the liberal democratic principle of equality. Conceptualized as such, equality is valued within the broader context of individual freedoms and rights within a competitive market place (Henry & Tator 2002, Chappell 2006). Chappell (2006:376) illustrates how equality as a liberal democratic principle is ideologically contextualized:

“Liberalism...a political ideology that emphasizes liberty, individualism and competitive private enterprise and, at the same time, promotes equality and respect for human rights.”

In other words, nothing in the managers’ arguments cited in the above quote was in a real sense contrary to key tenets of the humanistic philosophy of a Canadian liberal democratic state. The argument for equal in diversity and inclusion fits snugly into the

public service mandate of mainstream organizations. However, a key limitation of such an approach as noted by research participants is that it is not based on an acceptance that deliberate, affirmative actions are needed to correct on-going and past inequalities for ethno-racial minorities in order that they are brought up to the level of equality with the mainstream public. By shared narratives in the field research, it appears that the public-service orientation takes on a tone that is ideological in nature when, as managers in the above quote demonstrated, mainstream organizations close down corrective initiatives lest these would violate the principle of equality because of “reversed discrimination” – to quote another research participant. For ideology has the functionality “to explain, justify, legitimate and perpetuate circumstances in which a collectivity finds itself” (Henry & Tator 2002:246). Thus, a result of such institutional ‘road-blocking’ to assertive corrective initiatives is that multicultural service delivery as a context for social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is often acceptable and workable for mainstream organizations to a point but not beyond when the status quo of ethno-racial relations reflected in their systems begin to be at risk of being restructured. The quote below excerpted from a research participant’s sharing captures the gist of this issue; in this case, he was talking about his own government department and his experience of working with other human-service-type government agencies, seeing them as...

“... concerned about the optics of not treating everybody equal. So they are never prepared to in a very public way address issues arising from certain immigrant groups in society being kept powerless and marginalized. But we all know treating every body equal helps nothing for groups with no political clout, little capacity and few resources to take advantages of mainstream opportunities.”

### **Second, the Problem of Economic Development as Ethno-racial Minority**

**Inclusion.** Evident in the investigative dialogues with social workers is another dimension of mainstream public service orientation in multicultural service-delivery that hampers social work practice with ethno-racial minority. This orientation is toward government’s concern about economic development as a key priority when it considers the increasing ethno-racial diversity in the urban Canadian community such as Edmonton. The following is a quote composed by drawing from investigative dialogues with 4 research participants; the composite narrative shed light on where this orientation originates.

“Canada’s immigration policy is nothing but an economic policy. White Canadians are not making babies. Not an overnight thing, it’s been a demographic phenomenon for a long time. I remember a sociology text book was already telling me that when I was in second year back in the 70s. Hey, the country needs people to fill the labor force; let’s drain the population of the world. So, the world – particularly, China, India, Southeast Asia – all of a sudden finds this Canadian door open. Through the humanitarian bent of the policy and the refugee policy, you started to see villages of non-white immigrants arriving. Do the Anglo and French and other Euro-Canadian folks prefer a huge non-white diversity? I think these non-whites just showed up before they knew it. The government must convince the majority why it’s important to have immigrants. For the growth of our economy. Throw into the mix of the message, please let’s play nice...be tolerant of people that are difference...we need them for our Canadian employers who need and can’t find people to fill jobs. I always feel, implicitly but behaviorally the government and all the mainstream institutions continue to say ‘hey, my mainstream public,’ you know, wink, wink - ‘you still count most.’”

Other research participants expanded on this economic orientation of the public service in relation to human services. As a case in point, a government-employed social worker referred to a recently adopted policy on immigration and immigrant services. This policy was made to provide high-level directions to the public services in their efforts to develop and implement programs and services complementary to the government’s immigration objective. The research participant observed that the policy preambles explicitly the importance of immigration as a source of addressing the labor scarcity because of the oil and industry-driven economic boom in his province. In this own words:

“Out of this economic imperative, the rest of the policy flows. It’s interesting to note how immigrant services in terms of ‘making them feel welcome’ and ‘supporting their successful settlement and integration’ are under the main thrust of building labor capacity for the growth and development of the province’s economy”

For this social worker who worked in a capacity to roll out a funding program under this policy to community agencies to provide immigrant services, he observed how such a policy was having a ruling influence on his practice. This influence manifested and made its impact where this social worker had to report on 3 key outcomes related to (i) employer’s awareness of a market of skilled immigrants, (ii) immigrants increased

capacity to apply for job opportunities; and (iii) immigrants secure permanent employment. While he acknowledged that these were very important outcomes from the immigrant individual's standpoint,

“...these are pretty one-dimensional about people's economic well-being; as a social worker I hear stories from community agencies we fund that many immigrants attending their programs are going through a lot of intercultural adjustment issues...poverty, homelessness, language, troubling family stuff...teenager problems at home...all these troubling immigrant experiences. As much as I think these life challenges are important priorities for these agencies to help them address, my practice is restricted to the mandate of the funding program which is so economic outcome focused. What doesn't make sense is that the agencies and I are stuck with this conversation about achieving the funding outcomes I am accountable back at the ranch. But, as a social worker, you know that's not the people's most urgent concerns we are talking about.”

Two other research participants reflected on their work in government welfare programs having a significant caseload of ethno-racial minority immigrant families in hard time. In both testimonial accounts, social work practice with these families was systemically constructed within a regime serving an overriding key criterion of success of their programs. This measure of program performance was how soon the families in question are off welfare, back in employment – “for that matter, any kind of employment including jobs putting less money in these families' pockets than welfare”, according to one of these social workers. Thus, even though their workplaces had promoted multicultural sensitivity and front-line welfare program staff took “compulsory” cultural competency training, these two social workers worked within the restrictive mandate of the welfare programs “flowing from a much powerful, ideological policy levels of the government”. In other words, when stripped of the rhetoric of supporting “a clientele of cultural diversity” as a research participant quoted from a program brochure, the social work practice would be reduced to returning people to society's economic production line. As follows is a reflective comment by one of the research participants suggesting the kind of schism of social work practice as needed and social work practice in quotation as answering to these government welfare programs:

“...so, what if all of us are sensitive to the families' problems based on our cultural competency in drawing connections with all kinds of complex

experiences because you are an immigrant – a non-white at that etc. etc...all these are working against you in getting gainful employment. That is – if you really buy what the government says it wants to do to help you – ‘gainful’ referring to these opportunities as truly empowering you and your families to not just exist in impoverished conditions, but to have realistic hopes for a career path and life path so that you and your families are self-actualizing in the country that calls you a citizen. As a social worker in this program, all that is none of my business.”

At this point of thematic reporting of research findings on operational issues, it is indicative that mainstream human service organizations are driven by structural forces that trump the not uncommon organizational motivation to be sensitive, responsive and inclusive of a growing diversity of ethno-racial minorities. The investigative dialogues have identified two such structural forces. One is the entrenched orientation of public service which sustains itself and works for its own sustenance in such a way that limits how multicultural government mainstream human service organizations can get and how their social workers can practice with ethno-racial minorities. The other structural force was the economic development agenda of governmental immigration policy, which has a ruling influence on defining multicultural service delivery and the social work practice parameters.

The next section on what I call trans-organizational issues describes how mainstream human service organizations systemically behave as being multiculturally responsive and how this systemic way of responsiveness is a disjuncture with the rhetorical claims in such institutional terms as multicultural service delivery, diversity and inclusion and cultural competency.

### **7.3 Trans-Organizational Issues: Mainstream Human Service Organizations as a Systemic Entity**

In the investigative dialogues, research participants shared a collection of experiences and observations that lend themselves to a bird’s eye view of mainstream human service organizations as one institutional sector in Edmonton. This group of narrative data opens up the possibility of transcending this thesis’s analytical look at practice-marginalizing systemic issues as experienced in individual mainstream human service organizations. These data enable an analysis of these organizations as one

systemic entity, shifting my (the researcher's) study focus on the problematic working of these organizations in relational terms. This additional level of findings and analysis is particularly powerful for they speak of how social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is marginalized within mainstream human service organizations as a system of service-delivery. The issues spoken of by these findings and analyses are in other words systemic at a much broader, more problematic levels. This lends itself to a different stratum of considering implications for social worker practice.

Two trans-organizational issues were thematically raised in dialogue. The first is how as a sector, mainstream human service organizations problematize ethno-racial minorities as a population. The second is how the sector sees serving ethno-racial minorities as merely a question of cognitive challenge.

**First, Problematization of Ethno-racial Minorities.** In one research participant's words, "...by virtue of their skin-colors and their immigrant status, they are seen as a problem for society to address." This observation speaks of an emphatic point made in a number of places in the dialogic data that being ethno- racially different from the mainstream population – in this case, the white, Euro-cultural majority, is socially problematic in the discourse of mainstream human service delivery. Experientially, this predisposed view of people in turn determines and constrains social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in the mainstream service delivery context. One research participant gave an example of such problematization and its effect on social work practice in a meeting about parenting in immigrant families. This was an interagency gathering of professionals such as social workers, psychologists, family counselors and teachers, who represented mainstream human service organizations and schools in Edmonton. In the research participant's words, these professionals were "a group of people of the majority culture – white Canadians you see on the streets of Edmonton."

"...one teacher was raising an issue of her experience of "these parents" (researcher's note: research participant used fingers to signal quotation marks) being a challenge to work with. She talked about "one kind" (researcher's note: research participant used fingers to signal quotation marks) as never attending parents-teachers meetings. She spoke empathically that many of these parents

work two jobs. She switched to describing other parents who have insufficient understanding of “Canadian education” (researcher’s note: research participant used fingers to signal quotation marks) because they constantly complain about how little homework is given. These parents think their kids have too much time on their hands; that kids should study hard after school.

The amazing thing I started to see was that there was such a follow-up chorus of agreement with this teacher’s view of immigrant parents. Including some social workers and immigrant-serving agency people! They added their comments about how these parents need to change. It was clear that at the end of exchanges based on the teacher’s little rant, immigrant parents are a problem to be solved by all those working with children.”

Other research participants observed the problematization process in very similar context – that mainstream human service-dominated discourses in interagency settings. A community presentation by an adult literacy development organization was, for instance, ended with imprinting in minds of the participants that “we in the human service industry – government services, family agencies etc. – should be sensitive to the low literacy of today’s immigrants.” For this research participants, this is “a kind of production of dangerous prejudicial profiling of visible minority Canadians.” For this impression of immigrants “was taken as fact and to be worked with.”

In one community discussion of child care service, a consensus was observed that immigrant children should be exposed to opportunities to stimulate social, physical and cognitive development during their time spent in day care and after-school care. The reason given was that, as a mainstream family service organization psychologist in the discussion was paraphrased by a research participant, “we don’t want these children to miss out these opportunities when they are home.” According to the research participant, this comment was duly noted in the meeting minutes.

Experiences among research participants tell of two consequences that work together so that such problematization of visible minority immigrants and refugees marginalize social work practice. One is that such, as one social worker put it, “industrial scale’ of seeing people in a particular light forcefully steers a mainstream social work practice discourse that pathologizes them. One research participant put it succinctly:

“When you see people as problems just because they are there, you assess them as having deficits and you decide they need help by you or the society you represent ...that is, a paternalistic mainstream society that sees itself as knowing what is good for these people.”

The result of pathologization of people, as the second consequence, is that it leads social work practice down the medical model path. That means, in one research participant's words, “that classical casework process involving diagnosis and treatment of what is wrong.” Given the problematization of immigrants and refugees of the ethno-racial minority population is an, to borrow the phrase, “industrial scale” issue, social work practice in mainstream human service system gives preponderant emphasis in casework based on finding deficits about clients and treating them. Correspondingly, what is deemphasized systemically is such other practice approaches as mutual aid group work, community organization - approaches that recognize people in troubling conditions as results of their socio-political environment and that they have inherent strengths and abilities to effect change not only for themselves and their families but at the community and social relations levels. The systemic issues identified in the previous chapter where practitioners become frustrated about their limited latitude to influence larger changes in organizational settings resonate with the eventual consequence about practice as a result of the problem of problematization.

**Second, serving ethno-racial minorities as merely a question of cognitive challenge.** “It is as if everybody thinks the answer to how to make themselves change is a course on cultural competency for their employees.” This comment is by a research participant who worked for a large family service agency, in a one-time funded, one-year term project to help her organization become more multicultural. An interesting component of her work is that as part of this project, she was engaged by other mainstream organizations such as governmental human service agencies to provide consultation around these other organizations' change efforts. Her comment captures the essence of the second trans-organizational issue.



Indeed, a common observation from the investigative dialogues is that mainstream human service organizations demonstrate a natural, collective faith in education as a panacea to cure all their ills that block change to being more attentive, responsive and empowering to the ethno-racial minority sector of the population. This reduces the challenge to one of cognition. The research participant introduced in the paragraph above noted through her survey of cultural competency training curricula that

“...the idea of training in itself is not a problem; a key issue for me is the assumption that an employee, workplace course can impact the cultural status quo in the workplace to an extent to effect enough change from top-to-bottom to make ethno-racial minorities are treated equally as the white majority.”

Based on relevant experiences and insights in the investigative dialogues, the issue of seeing serving ethno-racial minorities as merely a question of cognitive challenge has the following two dimensions. These dimensions again construct and limit what social work practice is about with ethno-racial minorities.

First, cultural competency training curricula contribute to questioning and raising issues with the status quo but to no clear change actions. One research participant observed that while the training she took identified such problems as systemic racism in her organization, at the end, “the only consensus of the 30-some employees in that two day course was that they individually need to be responsible for their attitudinal and behavioral change.” Lack of clarity of change actions is often lack of details as to what is the change action and its implementation. Another research participant related his experience in this regard as follows:

“It was a great course because all these mainstream groups spent the whole day to talk about the problem. The exercises really made people think of themselves; how they themselves are part of treating people differently...not equals. That’s until the end when we came to identifying now what? What as organizations we need to do now, now that we are all so socially conscious? For instance, I raised my hand to point out that while it was a great suggestion that in every thing we do from board room to the street level office we must satisfy ourselves that ethno-racial minorities are considered, we would need to clearly identify the whats, hows, whos, hows, whens of such a change strategy. Otherwise, we would just go home after course at 4:30 pm happy about what we said but having absolutely no idea as to who takes responsible to carry out our recommendations and how to implement etc etc. There

was a dead silence in the room. The consultant could only say the diplomatic line that it's up to the individuals there to take messages back to their organizations and decide a change process – listen to this – ‘comfortable to their organization’. That somehow broke the ice. The agenda moved forward. My comment was not acknowledged as important, but that's all it is. There were no details to these change recommendations. They were all words, as far as I am concerned.”

Second, as a change effort, cultural competency training rarely comes with any accountability. This problematic aspect follows nicely the lively comment above. Planned change implies not only identifying what the issue is and change strategies – which seems to be the level addressed by cultural competency training for employees in mainstream organizations, but also implementation of these strategies and an accountability process. Research participants who commented on this problematic aspect indicated that cultural competency employee training in mainstream human service organizations are typically initiated as a one-time event billed as an organizational change project. But, just as typical as reflected in these social workers' experiences with their employers' offering of such training is that after the training event is completed, there are no organized processes to implement continued change strategies if any, and to measure and evaluate outcomes of these strategies. If accountability is about somebody in the organization answering to commitments made along with some sense shared throughout the organizational system as to the costs of falling short of desired outcomes, there is no evidence in the investigative dialogues that accountability had ever been experienced as having any part in cultural competency training. The following is from the dialogue with a research participant; the quote is chosen to represent the gist of similar comments from other research participants:

“What irks me is that after all the talk about how important multiculturalism is...how great we are that we have everybody trained up to be quote-unquote competent...and finally, about how we need to make sure we don't lose momentum. All of a sudden, literally, everything comes to a halt after the training. Everybody going back into the woodwork. So, where is the accountability to follow through to keep things moving, to ensure change...who is holding whom responsible and what will happen if what's supposed to happen doesn't. Is there a head to roll? I sound cynical. But, why this stuff would not sound cynical if we were talking about mainstream government business where all the bells and whistles of accountability all of a sudden are totally legit...making everybody from the deputy minister to the secretaries slaving away

like no tomorrow. You asked about how mainstream outfits marginalize multicultural practice. This is clearly about that.”

How these problematic aspects adversely impact social work practice with ethno-racial minorities was also talked about by research participants. According to them, the impacts occur through two observed phenomena. The first phenomenon is a community of mainstream human service organizations internalizing a false consciousness of themselves as changed institutions. The second phenomenon is that this community of organizations turns themselves into constructing a normative model of serving ethno-racial minorities that these organizations can continue to ignore the transformative challenge to mainstream social work practice with this population sector as part of their service delivery. One research participant gave representation of both of these phenomena and their impact on practice, as follows:

“I have been in all kinds of meeting - and these meetings are many these days, where agencies get together to talk about immigrant issues and related service-delivery issues. It is nice to see all these government people there. Mainstream family support agencies. Then you have the key immigrant-serving agencies. Nice, because it’s a sign that these mainstream service providers care about immigrant settlement stuff. For them, they see themselves as sensitive and responsive. I suspect they have been to some cultural competency camp (researcher’s note: research participant laughs). But very typically, these meeting come down to this one practice mindset for these mainstream folks – how to get the immigrant-serving agencies with their multicultural workers take over serving immigrants of the non-mainstream kind – i.e. non-white, non-English-speaking, non-western culture. You asked me about how my government job limit my work with ethno-racial minorities. This is how – that this kind of so-called responsiveness makes somebody like me a referral agent. It’s not very sophisticated practice, to tell you the truth.”

In this section, two trans-organizational issues are identified and studied through references in the thesis’s investigative dialogues. Both problematization of ethno-racial minorities and treating the challenge of serving this sector as but a cognitive question evidently restrict social work practice with this sector. In the concluding section as follows, an overview of findings reported in this chapter provides an entry into learning of issues broader in perspective, which this thesis is intended to address with recommendations for social work practice in the final chapter

#### **7.4 Mainstream Human Service Organizations: A System's Broader Issues**

Thus, what do all these issue-trees say about the forest – that is, the broader systemic issues. In the investigative dialogues, research participants made reflective comments that bring the forest into view.

First, when it comes to being multicultural inclusive and responsive, mainstream organizations operate from, in one research participant's words, "a thrill perspective". He was reflecting how his employer seeing his work as a "Multicultural Project Coordinator" a "special initiative" doing things in a silo systemically with no symbiotic connection to the everyday core operational, service-delivery "concerns and considerations in the agency's boardroom". The thematic findings about operations and in the trans-organizational context speak to such an operational perspective. Multicultural work as a segregated function, the public service orientation where the invocation of the ideal of cultural diversity allows for, at best, superficial understanding of life issues of ethno-racial minority immigrants and change efforts, and how change efforts typically amount to in-service cultural competency training with no accountability for necessary multi-level changes as advocated in such training's curriculum – all these present as sectoral forces that systemically marginalize and limit social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in the milieu of mainstream human service organizations.

The second board issue is that the mainstream organization sector evidently approaches ethno-racial minorities as a clientele and the flip side that it remains far from embracing this population as also the sector where the organization's constituents come from. This distinction between clientele and constituents refers to the latter conceptualized as not only a community sector where not only service-seeking clients will come from but also their service needs and their citizenry clout are understood, considered and referenced as first and foremost drivers of the organization. In the reported findings in this chapter, organizations have been experienced as building their multicultural service delivery from two troubling conceptual locations: first, the trans-organization standpoint that ethno-racial minorities have inherent problems that society should fix, and second, the instrumentalist perspective of today's ethno-racial minority

immigrants as a labor force summoned by the state program called immigration. These conceptual locations in effect construct a model of social work practice that emphasizes treating deficits about people. In this case, a deficit treatment practice for all intents and purposes can be understood as being a part of the national project of ensuring that contemporary ethno-racial minority immigrants are assimilated into Canadian dominant socio-cultural values, norms and standards so that they are homogenized to the extent that they function in the production/consumption process of the economy.

As reported, through the investigative dialogues, there was a common lament as to how social work practice with ethno-racial minorities had fallen short of the necessary range of interventions at both the micro, mezzo and macro levels to address the needs and issues of this minority sector that are constructed from a Canadian ethno-racial centrism. Of these two board issues, the “forest” has come to light to explicate how such a practice shortfall could realistically occur. The forest presents as powerful social forces that as experientially evident, exert ruling influence on where and how social work practice with ethno-racial minorities should be in mainstream human service organization settings.

## **Summary**

In closure to this chapter, this section summaries the reported systemic issues of operational and of trans-organizational nature and additionally, what these issues imply about the mainstream human service community as an entire system unto itself. This latter effort is to describe the problematic forest with reference to the trees of issues that have been thematically discussed and analyzed in the chapter. This lends itself to crafting strategic recommendations in Chapter 8 as contributions of this thesis to addressing the practice marginalization issue.

Operationally, mainstream organizations are commonly found to be organizing services and work concerning ethno-racial minorities into a segregated piece of function. Contending that this way of giving attention to this population sector ironically guarantees its position outside what the organization considers as mainstream work, one research participant found metaphoric significance of her “multicultural project office” in

a poorly-lit corner of her agency's office. For her, her work area symbolized her work as "unessential" and in practice, did discourage any mainstreaming of her work to promote organizational multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness.

The public service orientation of mainstream organizations – definitely, typical of government agencies – evidently limits themselves to promoting "cultural diversity" in their operations. This limitation allows these organizations to – in the words of one research participant – "continue to be in the safety zone without singling out the Eurocentric ways of doing things as roots of everyday discrimination visible minority folks experience". As revealed in the findings, this means that these organizations can present as being progressive in their claim of embracing of citizens of all cultures and ethnicities, but most interestingly, can continue to ignore addressing ethno-racial relations concerns such as everyday racial discrimination in a Eurocentric community as the mainstream constituent; for cultural diversity implies equality and inclusion and the irrelevance of cultural domination in society as an issue.

Another revealed aspect of the public service orientation at issue is that an overriding basis of government-sponsored services and programs for the immigrant sector is the state's concern of this sector as human resources of economic development. Research participants found that their practice in these services and programs is primarily about plugging immigrants into the labor force. Social workers in such practice would experience many of problematic conditions of the immigrant life outside their work mandate but may not address these conditions although such conditions have definite influence on people's quality of life.

Where research participants were exposed to mainstream human service organizations as a network of agencies, two issues were identified as being trans-organizational – that is, characteristic of not of any particular organizations but rather of this network as whole. One issue is these organizations' common perspective of ethno-racial minorities as a social problem. The second issue is that these organizations believe all barriers within their system to change in order to be sensitive and responsive to ethno-

racial minorities' needs and issues are cognitive challenge. In combination, these two issues have been experienced as cornering social work practice to fixing people and families on the one hand, and in the case of organizational change work, to providing in-service cultural competency training as an end in itself – that is, as leading to no concrete change actions with accountability measures and conditions to ensure meaningful outcomes.

This chapter makes also an effort to interpret analytically broader systemic issues based on the thematic findings of everyday problematic experiences of research participants in their employer-organizations. Two such broader systemic issues are identified; the first of these is multicultural service delivery as a thrill and the second of these, clientization of ethno-racial minorities. These allow for systemic change strategy considerations as fully explored in Chapter Eight.

To follow, Chapter 8 is the concluding discussion of the thesis. Much learning from primary voices has taken place and analytically reported in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. The final chapter closes by (a) taking account of the contributions and limitations of the research findings and in terms of **Goal Two** of this thesis, (b) addressing the so-what question: what are the implications for change strategies given these systemic issues of practice marginalization.

## Chapter Eight

### From Findings to Implications for Change Strategies: A Closing Discussion

#### Introduction

As explored in Chapter One, the idea of this thesis has sprung from my exposure over many years of social work practice to front-line experiences in Edmonton that social work practice with ethno-racial minorities has remained marginalized in mainstream human service organizations. This thesis is designed to explore how practice-marginalizing systemic issues are experienced in everyday work life in these organizational settings. The exploratory research lends not only new knowledge of the whats and hows of practice marginalization, but, as intended, also a collective voice of the issue and an opportunity to strategize about change in response to the issue. Indeed, the rich, passionate dialogues with ten social workers in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada point to a problematic, systemic dimension of their practice with ethno-racial minorities.

In this closing chapter, two main numbered sections and their respective subsections, as follows, aim to formulate an accountable, practice-focused statement for the thesis:

- **Section 8.1** Thesis Research Findings: Contributions and Limitations

This section discusses – through sub-sections 8.1.1, 8.1.1.1, 8.1.1.2, 8.1.1.3 and 8.1.1.4 - how the thesis research findings contribute to addressing the goals, objectives and research questions of the thesis project and just as importantly, (sub-section 8.1.2) the inherent limitations of these knowledge contributions in terms of implications for future scholastic inquiries. In response to the first question (8.1.1 and its subsections), an analytical model from the anti-discriminatory practice perspective (Thompson 1997) is applied to take stock of the key knowledge contributions of the thesis research.

- **Section 8.2** Systemic Issues and Implications for Change Strategies

This is a substantive part of the thesis project as this section is the juncture in this thesis where **Goal Two** is addressed: based on thesis research findings, to explore implications



for social work practice to influence change within mainstream human service organizations as individual entities as well as an institutional network. Sub-sections give separate focuses to strategizing in responses to the broader systemic issues identified in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. These sub-section are:

- 8.2.1 reviews the systemic issues of mainstream benevolence and social work as an employment regime, and 8.2.1.1 discusses these issues’ implications for change strategies.
- 8.2.2 reviews the systemic issues of multicultural service delivery as a thrill and clientization of ethno-racial minorities, and 8.2.2.1 discusses these issues’ implications for change strategies.

The chapter closes with a summary of key messages in the previous sections and with a succinct reflective remark. The remark reaffirms the foundational elements of the thesis supported by some basic social values and social ethics driving the scholastic project. It will also highlight the practical stimulation this thesis can bring to addressing the issue of marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in Canadian mainstream human service organizations.

## **8.1 Thesis Research Findings: Contributions and Limitations**

Identified at the outset (**Chapter One**), **Goal One** of the thesis is to increase understanding of systemic realities that are directive or determinant of social work practice with ethno-racial minority communities in mainstream human service organizations. **Section 8.1** together with its subsections here focuses on this first goal as the research is the thesis project’s core effort to address this first goal with its accompanying objectives and research questions

The thesis research addresses **Goal One** by investigating two questions which respectively speak to two objectives as follows:

<p><b>Objective One:</b> to explore systemic challenges coming from within mainstream organizations as experienced by their social workers with a practice focus of serving ethno-racial minorities</p>	<p><b>Research Question One:</b> how does marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities look in an organizational setting?</p>
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<b>Objective Two:</b> to understand how these experiences are organized into systemic ruling of practice	<b>Research Question Two:</b> what is there to understand about such practice marginalization as a systemic issue?
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In terms of this set of a goal, objectives and research questions, the following sub-sections form the discussion of **Section 8.1:**

- Knowledge Contributions: Research Findings (8.1.1) and four sub-sections as follows:
  - 8.1.1.1 Thompson’s PCS Model of Analysis: A Summarizing Framework
  - 8.1.1.2 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Personal Level
  - 8.1.1.3 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Cultural Level
  - 8.1.1.4 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Structural Level
- Research Findings: Limitations (8.1.2)

### **8.1.1 Knowledge Contributions: Research Findings**

This sub-section is intended to take stock of how the research findings as reported in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven answer the two research questions and through doing that, fulfilling the respective thesis objectives and the larger **Goal One**. To organize this task, Thompson’s PCS model of analysis (Thompson 1997) to explain and conceptualize social discrimination is found useful and applied as in the discussion to follow in subsection 8.1.1.1. PCS stands for Personal, Cultural and Structural - the three dimensions within this model which can helpfully illustrate reported key research findings as systemic issues responsive to the research questions. It needs to be remarked in the outset that the use of Thompson’s model presumes no indictment of Canadian mainstream organizations as, by conspiratorial design, institutions discriminatory toward ethno-racial minorities. However, the thesis research data and findings should definitely re-affirm intellectual curiosity about mainstream organizations’ ethno-racial discriminatory behaviors, but should not be taken as having proven definitively such institutional behaviors beyond a collection of experiences of their problematic existence

and consequences. However, as a conceptual framework of social discrimination, Thompson's model fits well to organize the experiential data and findings in this exploratory, qualitative research in that these data and findings clearly lend a thematic picture of a shared experience in which mainstream organizations of the research participants have treated social work practice with ethno-racial minorities differentially. The model will neatly summarize as below how key data and findings are conceptualized within a wholistic set of the interrelated personal, cultural and structural dimensions.

Sub-section 8.1.1.1 introduces Thompson's PCS model of analysis. This brief introductory discussion paves the way to a knowledge contribution summary by way of framing this thesis's key research findings within the Thompsonian model. In three further sub-sections, the summary is organized as follows:

- 8.1.1.2 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Personal Level
- 8.1.1.3 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Cultural Level
- 8.1.1.4 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Structural Level

#### **8.1.1.1 Thompson's PCS Model of Analysis: A Summarizing Framework**

Leading into summarizing thesis findings using Thompson's PCS model of analysis (Thompson 1997), a brief description of the conceptual framework will lend meaningful appreciation of its application in further subsections to follow.

In his anti-discriminatory practice framework, Thompson (1997) proposes a three-dimensional perspective – “the PCS model of analysis” – to explain how social discrimination occurs at the personal (for the ‘P’), cultural (for the ‘C’) and structural (for the ‘S’) levels and how these three levels work relationally to reproduce and perpetuate discriminatory conditions for subordinated groups and individuals in the community. This perspective lends itself to appreciating the knowledge contributions of the thesis

research findings. Through this perspective, not only can findings be talked about at each of these three levels as organizing concepts, they can also be analytically understood as relational conditions to construct practice marginalization as something systemic and therefore, as unproblematic. Indeed, marginalization is a necessary condition of social discrimination (Thompson 1997, Mullaly 2002, Thompson 2006) – i.e. a condition ethically binding for the social work profession to address.

The use of this model for the summarizing purpose here is highly appropriate in two important senses. First, as referred to earlier, this model is about discrimination as a social reality, therefore very much predisposed to shed light on experiences reported in this thesis of a practice and its practitioners differentially treated in systemic settings. Second, these three levels of analysis are not purported to explain causation of social discrimination but rather to contextualize the systemic relations of discrimination when we look at the social issue at one or more levels as key interrelated systemic dimensions. Thompson sounds this caution some years later as follows (Thompson 2006: 29):

“PCS analysis is not deterministic, it does not imply that culture ‘causes’ our actions, but rather that individual behavior has to be understood in the wider social and cultural context...But even this cultural context needs to be understood in terms of wider context – the structural. That is, the C level is embedded in the S level.”

In other words, the conceptual design of this model as used here serves as a relational framework for the personal, cultural and structural experiences reported in the thesis research findings within each other’s contexts. This allows the summary of findings to be no more than an outcome of enhanced understanding of the systemic issues of the practice marginalization of concern and how these issues relate among themselves as reported based on the thesis research. Importantly, used as conceptualized, the model poses no threat of over-interpretation from any temptation to find “definitive causes” in the reported data and findings of the practice marginalization of concern.

To reinforce this point, in a discussion of anti-oppressive practice perspective, Mullaly betrays his appreciation of Thompson’s model of analysis as a conceptual tool

for contextual understanding of the dynamics of social oppression, as follows (Mullaly 2002: 48):

“These three levels or locations of oppression are in dynamic interaction with one-another, with each level supporting, reinforcing, and influencing oppression on the other two levels and in turn, being supported, reinforced and influenced by the other two levels...(T)his multi-dimensional... ‘PCS’ model of analysis, which extends oppression beyond the individual to individual interactions, is adopted ...as working model of oppression/anti-oppression.”

To follow are the next three subsections to summarize research findings as knowledge contributions based on the Thompson’s PCS model of analysis.

#### **8.1.1.2 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Personal Level**

In response to the first research question which seeks to fulfill an objective to describe workplaces’ systemic challenges as contributing to marginalizing social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, a number of key findings speak to relevant, thematic experiences at the personal level of research participants. Passionate narratives collected through investigative dialogues reveal a common psychological toll on research participants who experienced frustration and disappointment over continued marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities in their mainstream workplaces. Within these narratives reporting on what is termed as “token multiculturalism”, elements construct a trail of emotional stages research participants went through. These experiential elements illustrate the progression from frustration to a sense of powerlessness, lending strong suggestion of these research participants grudgingly resigning to and living with what they were experiencing as problematic systemic realities. Significantly, this emotional progression – or more appropriately, regression – is found to have begun with these research participants as describing themselves in professionally progressive roles in their job positions which were supposed to be or to implement innovative opportunities to practice with ethno-racial minorities. It is this descriptive finding that the term “a front-line systemic actor” is selected from a research participant’s quote to indicate how the practice marginalization of concern in this thesis is sustained in part by the social worker retreating to being resigned to going along with

problematic systemic realities. In other words, thesis findings describe a process of systemic molding of the social worker into “a front-line systemic actor”.

This description of the social worker’s emotional regression as a systemic issue recalls human conditions associated with social marginalization. The critical theory perspective literature describes that social marginalization necessarily involves exclusion of meaningful social participation and that individuals subject to marginalization cannot exercise their capacities in socially defined and recognized ways (Adam 1978, Freire 1970, Mullaly 2002). As Mullaly (2002: 44) observes, the resultant psychological impact on a socially marginalized group includes, “...feelings of uselessness, boredom, and a lack of self-respect.” The behavioral consequence of capitulating to the system as reflected in this thesis’s findings goes toward substantiating a necessary psychological condition marginalization would lead to.

The same literature also brings to light psychological consequences of socially subordinate people and groups that, in effect, produce, reproduce and perpetuate social discrimination and marginalization. Adam (1978) identifies the condition of internalized inferiority on the part of socially dominated people – a necessary psychological phenomenon for socially dominant groups to justify the subordinate location of the discriminated and marginalized. Freire (1970) observes that oppressed people in society tend to exhibit such characteristics as fatalism, self-depreciation, and attraction toward the oppressor. While the thesis research proves no such psychological and behavioral traits on the part of the research participants, the reported emotional regression is an emerging revelation in this thesis that plays a systemic function insofar as the reported feelings and resultant behaviors, (a) at best, agitate no obvious change actions on the research participants’ part to halt or reverse the practice marginalization as lived, and (b) at worst, sustain the problematic realities limiting practice with ethno-racial minorities. It is also in this context that the metaphor “front-line systemic actor” is invoked – that these research participants become de facto actors of their systems.

### **8.1.1.3 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Cultural Level**

Cultural-level social marginalization results from (Mullaly 2002:95)

“(t)he culture of the dominant group (i.e. the dominant culture) privileging that group at the same time that it carries out cultural imperialism by suppressing and/or repressing all subordinate cultures. The dominant culture is presented and promoted as the universal norm (i.e. the official culture) by the dominant group. It is continually produced and reproduced by such cultural agents as...our social institutions.”

In a critical theory perspective parlance, Mullaly’s explication lends a context to help understand how in a society with a multicultural packing order like Canada, institutions understandably defaults to working from a normative worldview reflective of a socio-politically dominant mainstream culture with an effect of marginalizing needs and practices of those considered as non-mainstream others. Human service organizations - as part of the society management infrastructure – are within the total institutional network.

While Mullaly’s statement is based on the critical theory perspective dichotomy of social dominance and subordination with an implication of an intra-societal motive of imperial colonialism, the thesis research presents no evidence to that Mullalyan effect when it comes to seeing our findings in the light of cultural-level of social marginalization. However, the thesis research does serve up an important glimpse of institutional marginalization of minority culture and ethnicities as currencies of service delivery and social work practice in mainstream human service organizations.

Such institutional marginalization of minority cultures helps make sense of two related scenarios as key findings which describe how individual social workers were co-opted into a status quo of practice marginalization:

(a) experiences of research participants that they found it hard to get themselves hired on by mainstream human service organizations. These experiences construct for these ethno-racial minority social workers a sense that they were racially discriminated in the mainstream hiring process. But if the culture of mainstream human service

organizations as potential employers presented barriers to getting employed on easily, there were no clear expressions of negative, protesting affects toward the injustice in the research findings. What, instead, has been found is that research participants focused on these organizations as more desirable employers for a career notwithstanding their experiences of discrimination.

- (b) when in the cases cited in the reported findings, the research participants finally found themselves working for a mainstream human service organization, these social workers could not bring themselves to consider the option of giving up the career opportunities available in their mainstream organization settings just because their employers' continued marginalization of service-delivery to and social work practice with ethno-racial minorities frustrated them.

These two scenarios describe further the making of “systemic actors” out of social workers. The outcome of these scenarios saw the social workers' capitulation to the dominancy of how mainstream human service organizations had always operated. How these social institutions work point to an operational culture at work. Precisely, it is this operational culture that holds the key to marginalizing or de-marginalizing practice with ethno-racial minorities. Yet, it is this same operational culture – including its hiring practices and, its containment of services and practices to meet diverse and different cultural thinking and needs - that continues to reproduce itself for its own dominancy. Of interest here are research findings that reflect cultural reproduction within mainstream human service organizations through (a) how ethno-racial minority social workers are systemically set up to be protective of such personal stakes as being employed with a mainstream human service organization and career advancement opportunities, and (b) how systemically constructed personal interests become a medium of assimilating these social workers into the institutional cultural status quo in which practice with and service to ethno-racial minorities have been marginalized.



#### **8.1.1.4 Toward an Understanding of Systemic Marginalization of Practice at the Structural Level**

According to Thompson (1997), structural-level social marginalization is about ways by which marginalization is institutionalized in society. These ways consist of “...social divisions, practices and processes, along with social institutions, laws, policies, and the economic and political systems, all work(ing) together to benefit the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups.” (Mullaly 2002:96).

Chapter Seven draws themes of operational and trans-organizational issues that call to mind Mullaly’s description above. In terms of social divisions that locate practice with ethno-racial minorities at the margins of mainstream organization work, research participants described experiences telling of multicultural work physically and socially segregated from what was considered as core practice and business of a mainstreamed workplace. Interestingly, when mainstream human service organizations behave expectedly as a public service, this service orientation was experienced as a barrier to practice with ethno-racial minorities. Social divisions in this sense are appreciated most ironically from a discourse and promotion of such liberal, multicultural values as diversity, inclusion and equality on the part of mainstream human service organizations. Research findings show that part of implementing these values was necessarily an organizational inertia to institute change to an extent that some public – including those of the dominant Euro-cultural majority in Edmonton – might feel that they would be treated unequally.

Social divisions are also reflected in themes speaking to not the individual organizations of particular research participants but to mainstream human service organizations as a sector. The phenomenon of problematization of ethno-racial minorities – that they are regarded as having deficits and problems – points to a social hierarchy of the public based on ethno-racial characteristics. The phenomenon necessarily comes from a standpoint of the organizational sector purporting to be representing a dominant public that sees itself as knowing that which represents as what is non-problematic and as being capable of assessing who is socially deficient and

problematic in society. Thus, when a people is a problem on a wholesale perspective, the approach to addressing them is necessarily a process of pathologizing, which leads to helping responses of the medical model. This means the helping/service-delivery relationship is one in which the helpee is cast in the mode of an unwell, unknowing and generally hapless seeker of professional services from a helper who sees him/herself and at the same time, is socio-culturally legitimized as knowing all about causes of the helpee's situation and the cure for it.

Practices and processes within mainstream human service organizations are also noted to have contributed to the marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities. A simplistic sector-wide strategic practice to engage organizations to change to become more culturally sensitive and responsive is identified. This is the strategy of education in the form of staff development and training as research findings show. A critique of this strategy is not one of education as a change strategy, which is beyond doubt. It is the sector's pervasive reliance of this strategy that needs to be critiqued. The reliance on this strategy reflects an unquestioned faith in cognition and the accompanying assumption that mainstream organization personnel lack knowledge to do better and that once they have been trained they all work for becoming more sensitive and responsive to ethno-racial minorities. This represents a liberal optimism about change that falls short of such realities as inter-group prejudicial relations – those realities that the issue of problematization as noted in the last paragraph, for example, clearly suggests.

When it comes to processes, there is suggestion of a structure of immigrant processing for ethno-racial minorities who constitute a significant majority of the urban Canadian immigrant sector. Research participants revealed a thematic issue that mainstream human service organizations are part of a Canadian and an Albertan (i.e. the province's) movement to recruit immigrants to replenish the labor force so that the economy is sustained and has a hopeful future. Service-delivery involving ethno-racial minority clients often mediates an economic development-focused Canadian immigration policy and the job markets that can use immigrant labor. This service orientation in effect places practice with ethno-racial minorities at the fringe of core mainstream

services and programs whose constituents and clients are readily seen as having issues and needs different from those who are ethno-racially different. That is, different in the sense that ethno-racial minority people are expected to avail themselves to assimilate as soon as possible into the mainstream, dominant economic and social lives as they are expected to do as a result of the widespread public discourse of these individuals as immigrants - Canadians to labor as a condition to deserve all the citizen rights and privileges.

Further helping to speak to the second research question - what to understand about marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations as a systemic issue, the Thompson PCS model for analyzing social discrimination describes these three levels – Personal, Cultural and Structural - also as necessarily working systemically. It is issues experienced at these separate levels reinforcing each others that a system of discriminatory realities reproduces and sustains itself. The passionate, rich narratives of workplace experiences from the investigative dialogues not only describe but also are analytical to an extent that narratives allow for understanding how thematic everyday workplace issues work as a system lending itself to practice marginalization.

In the summative discussion up to this point of this section, systemic issues are understood at the separate levels of Thompson's PCS model of analysis; however, at the same time, to the extent that these separate-level issues are systemic, they inherently connect with each other and more importantly reinforce each other to perpetuate a system of marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities.

The assimilation of social workers into the systemic actor role is found to be a psychological process constructed within social relations. Ethno-racial relations in a Canadian multicultural community where mainstream human service organizations continue to operate from a socio-culturally and therefore, politically dominant worldview were experienced as keeping practice with ethno-racial minorities at the fringe of service-delivery. At the same time, economic relations of the human service

organization sector, in which non-profit ethno-racial minority immigrants-serving community agencies are unequally funded and less organized, gravitate social workers toward pursuing careers within mainstream human service organizations like government agencies and non-profit community organizations of mainstream significance. After they are hired on, they, as stories from the investigative dialogues indicate, opt to stay on for a better career future rather than to give up their job even it does not give them the extensive opportunity to practice as they expect on the basis of what their employer may have promised.

These social relations make further sense within the context of broader structural framing of ethno-racial minority immigrants by mainstream human service organizations. This sector is seen as people as society's "others" with exotic differences and natural deficits that need to be empathized and then fixed in order to fit with what the dominant Canadian mainstream public sees as socially fitting and normal. The reliance on cognitive strategies to change organizations to become more sensitive and responsive to ethno-racial minorities enables personnel of dominant culture in these mainstream outfits to continue to see institutional ethno-racial prejudices as a knowledge issue of the individual service provider rather than a profoundly systemic, structural issue of discrimination and subordination in multicultural Canadian communities. The stagnation of systemic change within the mainstream human service organization sector, as a result, then goes back to triggering the psychological impact and regression at the individual social worker's level at the workplace. This regenerates the systemic loop through the different levels resulting in the continued marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities in these organizations.

The thesis research contributes to the understanding of how systemically marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities occurs in mainstream human service organizations. Before this chapter addresses change strategies as a goal for this thesis, the sub-section below discusses the limitations of the thesis research findings.

### 8.1.2 Limitations: Research Findings

Arising from a collective critical voice of social work peers in the city of Edmonton (Alberta, Canada), this thesis project is conceptualized as an exploratory inquiry toward an enhanced understanding and voicing of a common practice marginalization experience in mainstream human service organizations. This genesis, as noted through out the earlier chapters, lends itself to adopting a critical theory perspective to address the goals, objectives and research questions of the thesis research. While in the first sub-section, an accounting of contributions of the research findings is conducted, these findings – encompassed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven – come with a couple of natural limitations given the genesis and the conceptualization of the thesis based on that genesis.

The **first limitation** is that the research findings are those of a critical theory perspective as opposed to a multi-theoretical perspective. This perspective is drawn from within a heterodox of critical theories and perspectives. Baines (2007: 22) defines heterodox as “beliefs tend to fold in or bring together multiple theories and perspectives that challenge orthodoxy...” As primarily referenced through the literature review in Chapter Three, the key heterodox literatures informing this thesis project are those of structural social work, anti-racism, institutional ethnography and anti-oppressive practice.

The limitation however reflects a planful conceptual framing of this thesis project speaking to distinctive, vital needs. The critical theory perspective has been argued as a purposeful adoption to fit the critical context the thesis issue has arisen to inspire this project in the first place. In this context, three needs have been noted: (i) the need to fill the knowledge gap in order to understand social work practice marginalization with ethno-racial minorities as a mainstream system issue from the standpoint of the practitioner, (ii) the need to enhance voicing of this lived reality of practice in mainstream human service organizations, and (iii) to identify change strategies based on research findings – strategies that counter powerful systemic forces that sustain a status quo with reluctance to shift. In other words, the limitation is a necessary outcome of a thesis project that speaks to a knowledge gap that may have been responsible for

shortfalls in acknowledgement and acceptance of the thesis issue in the real world of social work practice.

The **second limitation** is that the research findings are location-specific (i.e. specific to ten different mainstream human service organizations in one Canadian city) and therefore, that these findings cannot be generalized in the sense positivist social research defines generalization as research findings represent through methodological manipulations to study social realities existing outside the subjective world. However, as an exploratory inquiry, this thesis, as noted in the discussion of the first limitation, is about enhancing understanding and voicing of a common problematic social work practice experience in mainstream workplaces. This has been methodologically accomplished through tapping into realities subjectively experienced by relevant subjects.

To follow, **Section 8.2** (Systemic Issues and Implications for Change Strategies) covers the practical contributions of the research findings. The section speaks to the second goal of the thesis and the research question that goes with it, as follows:

<b>Goal Two:</b> to explore implications for social work practice to influence change within mainstream human service organizations as individual entities as well as an institutional network	<b>Research Question Three:</b> what the research findings imply for change strategies?
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## 8.2 Systemic Issues and Implications for Change Strategies

To give an appropriate closure to the problem this thesis sets out to investigate, this section is an effort to respond to **the third research question:** what the research findings imply for change strategies? The approach to fulfilling the thesis goal (**Goal Two**) this question speaks to is to revisit “the forest” of systemic issues – that is, the broader issues as identified at the conclusions in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. This revisit will shift into addressing the question. In this case, change strategies are those action ideas for effecting high-level change – that is, change targeting structurally entrenched realities that are found to be problematic. As the structural social work

literature establishes, systemic issues call for a level of change in the structural dimensions of social institutions – in this case, mainstream human service organizations (Mullaly 1993, Mullaly 2002, Shera 2003, Baines 2007).

The “forest” presents four broader systemic issues in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. In Chapter Six, these issues are mainstream benevolence and social work as an employment regime; in Chapter Seven, multicultural service delivery from a thrill perspective and clientization of ethno-racial minorities. The following two sub-sections (8.2.1 and 8.2.2) respectively begin with summarizing the four broader systemic issues and then discuss strategic change implications of these issues (8.2.1.1 and 8.2.2.1).

### **8.2.1 Mainstream Benevolence and Social Work as an Employment Regime**

As a systemic issue, mainstream benevolence refers to the reality that the individual social worker depends on the mainstream organization employer’s charitable good will to grant an opportunity for multicultural service delivery and therefore, practice with ethno-racial minorities. In other words, the ability to practice with ethno-racial minorities is a function of a presumptuous benevolence of the necessary good will of the employing organization. On the other hand, social work as an employment regime reflects the reality that the practice of social work is organized as what the employing organization defines what the practice is and is about, not by the social workers themselves as a profession of the social work discipline. Together these two issues reflect the social relations of social workers find themselves systemically tied to, affecting them intra-psychically when their professional value for ethical practice conflicts with their employer-organizations’ operational dictates. As research findings show, research participants experienced intra-psychic disempowerment, a not uncommon condition found with human service workers who take issue with their employer-organizations on an ethical front but at the same time, feel, among other emotions, powerlessness and fear to confront and initiate change actions targeting their employers (Mullaly 1993, Mullaly 2007).

Investigative dialogues reported and discussed in Chapter Six speak to how mainstream benevolence and social work as an employment regime affect social workers at a personal level. A sense of powerlessness to change the limiting, yet ruling, benevolence of their employers and a sense of co-optation into an employment regime that marginalizes practice with ethno-racial minorities – these psychological consequences beg for change strategies to empower the individual social workers.

### **8.2.1.1 Implications for Change Strategies: Empowerment through Politicization and Activism of Inclusive Workplace Caucuses**

Clearly, change strategies should aim to empower the individual social workers to influence and to effect systemic change. For the systemic issues reported are clearly power differential issues where individual social workers betrayed a sense that they stood little chance - if any at all - in asserting their practice with ethno-racial minorities in face of systemic conditions stifling and marginalizing this practice focus in the organization. The structural and anti-oppressive social work literature has lent a strategic language useful in conceptualizing systemic change in response to issues that boil down to the mainstream organization's ruling over the individual social worker's practice. In this language, two strategic terms are particular inspirational and worth exploring to find strategic insights for change; these are politicization and activism. (Mullaly 1993, Mullaly 2002, Shera 2003, Baines 2007).

In the context of what is being addressed, politicization and activism are ingredients of individual empowerment. According to Baines (2007:51), "to politicize...someone is to introduce the idea that everything has political elements; that is, nothing is neutral, everything involves struggle over power, resources and affirming identities." This description is a call for critical consciousness-raising integral to efforts aimed at empowering the socially marginalized elements of a community to act for change (Freire 1973, Turner & Moosa-Mitha 2005). What is important to note in Baines' statement is that accordingly, empowerment of social workers in mainstream organizations to move ethno-racial minorities' service needs and responsive practice to



front and center of their employers' agendas calls for an engagement mechanism where critical consciousness-raising can take place.

In other words, politicization has within it a call for activist efforts to move those stuck in a mode of social paralysis under a system of ruling and control to a capacity to mobilize and to effect change. These efforts must in this context be taken as mobilization for change. As a macro-level change strategy, community social work would point to the necessary initiative of some kind of a forum where individuals – in this case, social workers experiencing marginalization in their own employing organizations – are engaged as well as engaging each other and key allies to name and to achieve a critical understanding of the systemic forces pinning them in a common disempowering, demoralizing location. However, change at the consciousness level for the individual is but a means to an end in the business of political activism. How the now socially wiser individuals are able to translate their collective critical consciousness into change actions must be the true measure of their empowerment in the systemic milieu. The structuralist, anti-oppressive perspective validates this view of systemic activism – i.e. transformational change actions grounded in and borne of a critical understanding of how the systemic environment is the source of individuals' disempowerment and social marginalization. Echoing this relationship between raised consciousness and change actions, Mullaly (2002: 210-211) references two community development principles as important guidelines for anti-oppressive practice:

“First, the most effective way to overcome apathy and passivity in organizing and mobilizing groups is to identify the major sources of discontent within a community, stimulate that discontent and turn it into anger so that community members want to do something about their situation; and second, channel the anger onto the source of the discontent and develop long- and short-term strategies to change the situation.”

A question of strategic detail needs to be explored as it engages the analytical thinking of the kind of planned change of interest here. The concept of a forum is invoked in our discussion above; thus, what kind of forum is being proposed? It would definitely be a kind of forum with the promising prospect of giving form to a tangential escape from those systemic centripetal forces that keep the individual social worker

circulating in a cycle of dependency on mainstream benevolence and social work as an employment regime. Of course, the results of such a dependency have presented themselves to be personal disempowerment and continued marginalization of practice with ethno-racial minorities.

The idea of a forum denotes a purposeful, organized gathering of people who share an interest in communicate, dialogue and somehow, gain from these expressive interactions for oneself as well as for the collective. In the context of interest here, such a forum refers to an organized opportunity for two groups representing the two sides of the issue of practice marginalization. Of course, the first group is like-minded social workers to share, reflect, analyze, understand and address their common concerns of their employer's actions or inactions resulting in marginalization of their practice with ethno-racial minorities. Just as importantly, the forum should bring into its folds leadership representatives of ethno-racial minority communities who share the general concern of how mainstream institutions subordinate ethno-racial minorities as a public and users of their services and programs, and who want to join force with others to address this societal issue.

The term "caucus" comes to mind as an appropriate identity for the kind of forum being considered here to help think of the strategic features of such an organization-based opportunity. For "caucuses" have been workplace and institutional entities where groups of shared minority identities such as women, African-Americans and, gays and lesbians build a collective power-base to exert their influence to address needs and issues and to advance their interests within the system in question. In this mode, caucuses are instruments of politicization of people sharing an identity who see the need to empower themselves to effect change (Galper 1980, Sherman and Wenocur 1983). Referring to themselves as a "Black Caucus" – the name of their academic journal, the National Association of Black Social Workers is an illustrative example of what an activist caucus is about in terms of the group's mission statement (National Association of Social Workers):

“The National Association of Black Social Workers, Inc....is committed to enhancing the quality of life and empowering people of African ancestry through advocacy, human service delivery, and research.

The NABSW, Inc. will work to create a world in which people of African ancestry will live free from racial discrimination, economic exploitation and cultural oppression. In collaboration with national, international and other appropriate groups, NABSW will continue to leverage its expertise to strategically develop capacity of people of African ancestry to sustain and flourish...”

Thus in this activist tradition, caucuses within institutions serve two purposes that should inform the kind of forum being considered here: (i) to support and empower each and every individual in the caucus to act as a person in charge of his/her personal mission, and (ii) to empower the individuals as a collective to act in order to effect systemic change. These purposes speak most fittingly to the key systemic issues reported in Chapter Six, where the individual social worker’s intra-psychic changes feed the continued marginalization of social work practice with and service delivery to ethno-racial minorities.

Dialogic evidence reported in Chapter Six hints at a number of thematic considerations about caucuses serving these purposes, as follows:

- It is vitally necessary to identify and to agree to what is the unspoken but fundamentally powerful cemented-down status quo for mainstream organizations and therefore, what needs to change fundamentally. The unspoken is these organizations’ worldview that defines what is socially correct and functional for governance, operations and service-delivery, and that lends legitimacy for the organization to approach ethno-racial minorities as a public marginal to a mainstream core community to which the organization has a higher sense of accountability. Thus, it is essential, in the first place, that caucus members – who include social work colleagues and ethno-racial community leaders - achieve a recognition that the mainstream organization in question operates from this monolithic worldview reflective of a particular power base of the community and that this worldview is behind the common push-back against any change initiatives toward strengthening

and empowering internal capacities to be more sensitive and responsive to ethno-racial minorities' needs and issues in the community.

- The caucus is a place (a) to strengthen and to provide emotional support to members who are social work colleagues to each other and who are troubled by everyday marginalizing experience in connection with their practice with ethno-racial minorities; and (b) to strategize for collective actions to resist, confront and change systemic situations for the affected social workers. A proviso that needs to be put into practice is that however challenging it is, strategizing must take into consideration both making a change favorable to sustaining and enhancing practice with ethno-racial minorities and also how to at the same time protect the affected social worker's employment and career prospect in the organization. The caucus of this nature is strengthened that much more by its community members from the ethno-racial communities. This community-based membership will add authenticity, validity and force to the collective voice from within the caucus, strengthening the legitimacy of the social workers' collective concern of their employer's behaviors with respect to supporting service-delivery to and practice with ethno-racial minorities.
- The caucus – by what it is about in the broader context – has an external function to promote and to support its kind of staff organizing in other mainstream human service organizations, and to work with other caucuses to strengthen the coalitionary bonding among all of them with the view of enhancing change actions' effectiveness across the sector of mainstream human service organizations.
- With reference to research participants' materialist perspective in their critique of their employers, it is important that the caucus must be but a means to an end. While the caucus's output is necessarily emotionally strengthened and career-secured social workers, and a socio-politically empowered group of them in their employer organization, its end-outcome needs to be transformational changes about their organization so that ethno-racial minorities in the community are treated as the organization's equal constituents whose issues and needs are among the key drivers of policies, services and programming. It is in the context of this fundamental level of change that social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is de-marginalized

and mainstreamed within the organization. It is also necessarily with this commitment to effecting organizational change that the caucus membership from ethno-racial minority communities will find its sense of solidarity with the social workers as well as relevant meaning in their continued involvement with the caucus.

- A thought-provoking consideration for an effort to sustain a helpful, useful, change-oriented workplace caucus for the purposes of interest here comes from structuralist social work strategic discourse about effecting systemic change from within organizations employing the change agent (Mullaly 1993, Baines 2007, Mullaly 2007, Smith 2007). It is that for a workplace caucus to assert and to protect its autonomy and power-base and to be an effective space and place to emote, to articulate issues, to strategize and to implement planned change strategies, it may well benefit from existing and operating “beyond the radar of managerial surveillance” (Smith 2007: 152-153). The discourse on “stealth social work practice” (Smith 2007: 152-153) validates an autonomous existence for social work practice based out of the workplace targeting practitioners’ own organizations’ systemic change. Conceptualized for effecting change “from within” (Mullaly 1993), such practice is validated on the ground to protect and therefore, to empower social workers – as those in dialogue for this thesis – who have all the reasons to fear that their opportunity to work as social workers and to advance career-wise would be at dire risk if they practice from the perspective of professional activism with a view to effect transformational change targeting their own employers. Smith (2007: 152-153) describes how practice in stealth can come about:

While acknowledging the limits of practices that did not address broader policy measures, workers seemed to believe that the current context of practice rendered more overt advocacy efforts fruitless. Fortright lobbying for changes to policies and procedures had been replaced by these “other ways” down more hidden and quiet paths of resistance. For this group of social workers, painfully aware that they needed to avoid scrutiny to escape regulation. “Best Practices” had gone underground.

Another likely benefit for having a workplace caucus kept out of knowledge and jurisdiction of the organizational system is that caucus members from ethno-racial communities and the social workers will readily share a sense of being one community

with a clear agenda of change. The solidarity and trust that come from this community identity will be vitally necessary substances to advance the planned change work of the caucus – a strategic direction the following section will explore.

Thus, in the section to follow, the caucus idea will be further explored in terms of its extended reaches to effect changes systemically. In other words, organization-based caucuses need to be considered in terms of their potential for a level of effective systemic transformation necessarily desirable given the macro issues reported in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

### **8.2.2 Multicultural Service Delivery as a Thrill and Clientization of Ethno-racial Minorities**

In Chapter Seven, two broad systemic issues are distilled. First, mainstream organizations practice service-delivery to ethno-racial minorities as a thrill. In other words, these public service-oriented organizations default to a mandate of attending to service needs of a mainstream primary constituent public conceptually exclusionary to ethno-racial minority communities, and as a result, quite readily back out, if necessary, of any innovational initiatives toward integrating ethno-racial minorities into the organization's consciousness and operations. As evident by experiences shared in the research, such "thrill" operations are often no more than training exercises. Cultural competency training becomes an action that lends evidence of doing something educationally progressive, but that allows for a lack of any organizational change follow-through actions in material, measurable terms where ethno-racial minorities needs and issues become part of the core business. In this context, social work practice with this minority sector is inherently at risk of marginalization despite the rhetorical acknowledgement of the importance of serving this sector.

The second systemic issue of a broad scope is the clientization of ethno-racial minorities as a mainstream organization orientation. Two problems about this contribute to practice marginalization. First, clientization is anchored to the presumptive reality that ethno-racial minorities are a deviant sector so that organizational change to attend to their

needs and issues is about them as what to be fixed. Second, not unrelated to the first problem, clientization desensitizes mainstream organizations to see ethno-racial minorities as their constituents. Constituents refer to that public whose collective needs and aspirations expressed through political, community and institutional processes (e.g., public consultations, elections, opinion surveys, the media and the like) become primary references for organizational decision-making and presumed drivers of core business. All this allows the organization to continue to operate by its internalized mode of an organization serving a community ethno-racially unchanged over time. This calls for organizational change efforts that first and foremost, encourage and promote meaningful inclusion of ethno-racial minorities in the role and functions as constituents of mainstream institutions of society. Meaningful inclusion denotes normative opportunities for ethno-racial minority individuals to contribute to shaping the governance, operations and service delivery of the organization.

The two broad systemic issues make sense to each other. Clientization of ethno-racial minorities serves as a means to continuing assigning the sector to being a socially non-normative element in a Canadian community. This fits with the finding that these minorities are not considered as constituents of mainstream human service organizations. This worldview about these minorities allows for a sense of charity and the ease with which mainstream human service organizations limit, curtail or discontinue initiatives to change in order to be more multicultural inclusive, sensitive and responsive. As the thesis research participants indicated, these organizational initiatives resulting in their hiring had made these social workers think progressively and ambitiously about what they could accomplish as practitioners addressing needs and issues of ethno-racial minorities. However, when a whole sector of ethno-racial minority people is viewed systemically as a potential clientele, organizational initiatives to engage social work practice with that sector would necessarily be gravitated toward people-fixing on the basis of a socio-cultural paradigm as to what is normative, what is not and if not, what is tolerable by reason of those who represent the mainstream paradigm of reference. These kinds of initiatives would be disappointing to practitioners whose ideas for best practice with that minority sector of the public compulsorily include challenging mainstream

institutions' prejudicial mindset about it as a people of social deficits, and also the mainstream concept of what is effective helping.

It is no wonder any special organizational plan or project to become more multicultural in orientation can readily drift to the margins of organizational thinking and operations. For in the final analysis, the normative worldview of the majority community takes precedent over other ethno-cultural worldviews, defaulting to itself when the thrill of any impulse to centre ethno-racial differences inevitably loses its relevancy as it cannot last very long without beginning to threaten the long-standing operational status quo of mainstream organizations. In a significant part, such an operational status quo's longevity relies on an in-grown inertia to see ethno-racial diversification in the community as a key driver for organizational change to serve a multicultural public and needs arising from ethno-racial relations issues. In the literature, this reality is referred to as a manifestation of systemic racism (Henry et al 1995; Potocky 1997; Nelson & McPherson 2003; Sin & Yan 2003). In the human service delivery field and in the academic circle, that this is any kind of racism is and expectedly continues to be highly debatable. However, what this thesis at this point can offer from the research analytical learning point of view is a question to challenge mainstream organizations to assess themselves. The question is: given the human service sector's proclivity to vocalize its value and practice of honoring individual differences and situational uniqueness in the helping process, what sense can be made of mainstream human service organizations when they continue to operate with a systemic worldview that ethno-racial minorities as a Canadian public are an optional constituency and clientele? The stubborn status quo about mainstream organizations can be further challenged by the fact that since the declaration of multiculturalism as a national policy and with the parallel infrastructure of human rights and freedoms legislations – including Canada's constitution, Canada has championed ethno-cultural diversity as a measure of nation-building. Within that championing effort, the Canadian state has always rhetorically come across by policies and programs with a dutiful willingness to build ethno-cultural diversity and inclusivity within the discourse of public service-delivery – including how today's mainstream



human service organizations should serve their multiculturalizing communities (Statistics Canada 2006 Census).

### **8.2.2.1 Implications for Change Strategies: Organization of Workplace Caucuses and Knowledge-based Framework Building for Systemic Transformation**

Thus, what are the implications for change strategies? The caucusing strategy discussed in the previous section needs to extend to address the broad systemic issues of organizational operations and of mainstream organizations as a sector. As implied before, in order to transform mainstream organizations so that service to and practice with ethno-racial minorities are core operations, workplace caucuses that bring social workers and ethno-racial minority community leaders together must be also organized to create empowering supports for social workers trying to effect change across their mainstream organization workplaces. Again, the social work principle of mobilizing and building a community of change lends certain essential considerations.

First, from a community development perspective, it makes natural sense that caucuses within individual organizations build for themselves an umbrella organization with the key mandate to transform mainstream organizations into truly public service entities that center ethno-racial minorities' needs and issues at all levels of decision-making and operations. An operative word worth unpacking here is "center". Centering must denote a materially evident change having taken place and sustained. In this context, change means the explicit rejection by the mainstream organization itself of the reality that it is systemically biased toward marginalizing ethno-racial minority needs and issues. Centering change also means an overt, systematic, transparent, accountable, results-oriented change process that addresses ethno-racial minorities' needs and issues as standing items of deliberations at all levels of core business decision-making. Defining a change process in these terms points to the nature of the change effort the umbrella group of organizational caucuses needs to take. What centering is about then implies that the engagement work with mainstream organizations will be to a large extent conflictual in nature and in practice. For these organizations are essentially being asked to see themselves as targets of change and if they ever do so, they are expected to re-build

mandates, structures, processes and services/programs which measurably address the needs and issues of ethno-racial minorities as an integral part of the core drivers of these organizations.

Second, as an engine of systemic change, the umbrella organization strategically needs to bring the social work profession as a whole on side with the change movement. Thus, building a strategic alliance with the major institutions within the social work community is a vitally necessary step for a building block. Some strategic considerations can be highlighted about the alliance-building work.

In the case of the Province of Alberta, where the thesis research takes place, the chief institutional constituents of the social work profession include the Alberta College of Social Workers, the regulatory body of all practitioners, and the social work education programs with the University of Calgary (in the city of Calgary) and a number of colleges throughout the province. The pursuit of their uncompromised support to the cause of the umbrella organization would likely be a political process unto itself. For these institutions – notwithstanding their rhetoric in support of social diversity and inclusivity – are located within the mainstream human/social service complex with the state being the most powerful sponsor. It makes sense that these institutions are an integral part of the systemic status quo as they need state and each other's supports to claim, sustain and elevate their respective and mutual social legitimacy and influences. The problem this situation presents for our attention here is that it is exactly this human/social service complex that is the target of systemic change. Thus, the suggestion of gaining these social work entities' support to radically change what is a mainstream reality is itself ironic and problematic, if not tactically naïve.

Two slithers of hope that come to mind bring optimism to the workability value of this strategic consideration. One source of hope comes from the fact that these social work institutions operate and teach from the profession's Code of Ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers 2005), which in the Province of Alberta is an integral part of the law that regulates social work practice. This Code clearly and unequivocally

demands the social work profession to address systemic issues experienced by the disadvantaged and disempowered. Thus, from a philosophical, principled location, these entities can be taken as being readily open to working with the caucus umbrella organization on the master project to transform mainstream human service organizations as a sector.

A fundamentally first and foremost step in a change process is for the umbrella organization to engage key institutions within the social work profession to build a joint framework for effecting change for multicultural service delivery and practice in mainstream human service organizations. In the case of the province of Alberta, these key institutions would include Alberta College of Social Workers; Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary; and the group of college-level social work diploma programs. A key step toward this framework should be these institutions along with the caucus umbrella organization joining force to stimulate and initiate research to enrich the knowledge base concerning systemic gaps and changes speaking to mainstream human service organizations in relation to ethno-racial minorities as a public. A most recommendable methodological strategy for research is that ethno-racial minority communities are involved as key sources of data to inform research projects to strengthen this knowledge base to lend power to the systemic transformation movement. The research activities and the expanding knowledge base as growing evidence to support change will impact with strong credibility and persuasive power because the whole learning enterprise and body of new knowledge will have come from broad-based participation by the social work profession community and ethno-racial minority communities as represented and mobilized through the caucus milieu. Knowledge generated from research activities will be directed toward a process to build a highly evidence-based framework for effecting change in the mainstream organization milieu.

With validation from ethno-racial minority communities involved in the whole developmental process and of course, research findings, the framework is essentially “the same song sheet” from which the social work profession and discipline along with their ethno-racial minority communities as allies advocate for organizational change. A

condition of this framework-building alliance needs to be that the framework must begin with commitments from all the social work institutional partners to their own change and development and articulations of what and how to “walk the talk” with respect to inclusivity of ethno-racial minorities. If they are to set off change in the directions toward addressing the kinds of systemic issues found in this thesis, these commitments and articulations will have to come from these social work institutions’ reflexive acknowledgement that their own locations in the power structure of society could be easily and perilously a powerful hindrance and when that happens, the framework is likely ending up, at best, an instrument of public relations, and at worst, a dust gatherer on book shelves. On the other hand, reflexive acknowledgement could also be recognizing how from the same locations in the power structure of society they can lend tremendous social legitimate force to the framework and the change work to follow.

Committing these social work mainstream entities to their own change initiatives can be a powerful beginning in pursuit of systemic influence and change. For example, university and college social work programs can institute into their curricula compulsory courses to raise social consciousness and professional competency level for social work students to work effectively in response to needs and issues of ethno-racial minorities in the community. Research evidence show that “work effectively” is definitely not about fixing people to fit into western cultural norms and expectations, but rather about “brokering and advocacy” (Russell & White 2002: 647) to empower a public with social, psycho-social and economic needs that its members are able to voice and that society as a whole is obliged to address. As academic institutions, they can readily take leadership and amass resources to implement the research strategy mentioned earlier in this discussion as knowledge base building in the change framework development process.

On another front, a regulatory body for social work at the Canadian provincial level such as Alberta College of Social Workers can decide on funding research initiatives in connection with this organizational change movement. It should also fund initiatives to promote awareness, best practices and staff development in human/social service agencies that increase these mainstream workplaces’ capacity for internal

advocacy and activism so that practice with ethno-racial minorities and service-delivery to them are centred in everyday working. Two strategies can further lend these initiatives more power of influence: (i) that these initiatives are funded by the regulatory body's revenue from membership dues, as opposed to an outside funding source such as the government. This arrangement immediately creates financial relations that tie that much more tightly and intimately all social worker-members represented by the regulatory body to the goals and objectives of the change initiatives that have received the funds and (ii) that these initiatives be co-sponsored by Canadian Association of Social Workers, which can advocate and promote the cause of practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations at the national level and on a national scale.

The other source of hope comes from the awareness that social justice-oriented activism is represented among individual practitioners and academics in these social work profession institutions. It is strategically important to recruit those within these institutions who share and want to join force to act on the issue of mainstream marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities.

Thus, what does all this imply for another strategic consideration for this proverbial umbrella organization? It certainly comes down to the reckoning that the source of empowerment and activism remains with the umbrella caucus organization itself. Informed by a change framework built through research speaking from and to the social work profession and ethno-racial minority communities, change has to come from the organization's continued active as well as activist advocacy and public education work targeting institutions and individuals for their alliance. Advocacy and public education work need to be critical, anti-racist and activist in intent and action.

“Critical” refers to the work's clarity in the open about the rejection of the status quo about mainstream organizations' collective marginalization of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities, and about the demand for transformative change where the new reality for these organizations is truly inclusive and embracing these minority citizens as core constituents and core clientele. “Anti-racist” refers to work inspired by

and grounded in analyses with focal concern for social justice issues and with an etiology that these issues arise and continue to persist to marginalize people because of power differential and the resultant social exclusionism along ethno-racial lines. Last but certainly not least, “activist” refers to exactly that – assertive, strategic, tenacious, confrontational, purposeful, systematic actions continue to take place with sights set on observable, experiential and material results of transformational work targeting mainstream organizations as individual entities as well as an institution.

The strategic considerations in this section are about informed collaborative activism to transform mainstream organizations. They are natural extension of earlier strategic considerations around forming work-place based caucuses for social workers and ethno-racial minority leaders. In this section, systemic issues found in the thesis research set focus on empowerment as a fundamental enabler of individual social workers and of a collective of social workers who seek transformative change in mainstream organizations so that ethno-racial minorities are part of what is their core in their operations and governance. Empowerment is the conceptual parameters for the exploration of change strategy implications. How the systemic issues lend conceptual parameters within which strategic ideas are explored reinforces the reality that these issues are ones of a power relations status quo. Such a status quo sustains a paradigm of mainstream organization operations and governance in which the ethno-racial minority public features only at the margins of systemic thinking and activities. Correspondingly, the marginalization of service-delivery to and social work practice with ethno-racial minorities is a manifestation of the socially entrenched power relations in action in these organizations.

## **Summary**

In sum, this thesis, through its research findings, makes contributions to voicing and understanding some important systemic issues in and across mainstream human service organizations, which were experienced in marginalized social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. These issues existed not only at the personal, cultural and structural levels of these organizations; they reproduced

themselves as they reinforced each other. As a necessary systemic layer, the unbroken loop of these issues is found to feed on a staple of social relational contexts involving human service organizations stratified by what they offered or could not offer to social workers as career settings, and also involving mainstream human service organizations' ethno-racial bias in their hiring practices.

While the critical theory perspective and related methodology spell limitations to the extent one can generalize the research findings, the research findings offer a forceful voice to systemic issues that marginalize social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream service-delivery settings. More importantly, the findings should serve to stimulate continued relevant research initiatives.

In terms of implications for strategic change, research findings call for an approach of politicization and activism taken up by social workers in their mainstream workplaces. Stealthy organization of workplace caucuses involving like-minded social workers and ethno-racial minority leaders is thought of as opening spaces for emotional support and empowerment as well as collective internal advocacy for practice with ethno-racial minorities. A higher level of organization is seen as important when caucuses form a coalition to build an alliance with ethno-racial minority communities and mainstream institutions of the social work profession. It is argued that a foremost prerequisite of going any further from this alliance is to develop a framework of change actions through a research strategy that involves ethno-racial communities as co-investigators as well as sources of data and knowledge. Based on this joint action framework, the alliance promotes and advocates for mainstream human service organizations to operationally centre practice with and service responses to ethno-racial minorities as an equal constituent sector of these organizations. However, the mainstream social work profession institutions – e.g. tertiary social work education programs and the profession's regulatory body – are highlighted as the first ones that need to fulfill the challenge of their own affirmative actions to support social work practice with ethno-racial minorities.

A top-down view of the implied change strategies would reveal a few key thematic directions this thesis has constructively pointed in, as follows:

- Dialoguing, in that the dialogue concerning the practice marginalization issue needs to continue and to expand with stakeholders sharing the same concern. The workplace caucusing notion speaks to this thematic direction, involving concerned social workers employed by the organization in question as well as ethno-racial minority community leaders. In this context, dialoguing becomes an interactive strategy to validate the issue, to plan change and to therefore support and empower workplace caucus members to move change strategies forward.
- Community social work as a practice modality; in particular coalition and alliance building with key stakeholders of the practice marginalization issue, notably, ethno-racial minority communities and social work profession's primary institutions.
- Participatory research involving a community sharing concern of the practice marginalization issue, including social work profession institutions and ethno-racial minority communities – as knowledge-base builder for a broad-base activist endeavour to effect change to mainstream human service organizations. The notion of “community sharing concern of the practice marginalization issue” should be read as including representatives of mainstream human service organizations. These research partners should be individuals who (a) have leadership capacities in their mainstream human service organizations, (b) fully identify with the practice marginalization issue, (c) are able to provide a reflexive critical analysis of their organizations from Canadian Euro-cultural perspectives they themselves bring and (d) are committed to working with other stakeholders to effect organizational change to address all marginalization issues currently in disfavor to ethno-racial minority communities. From the anti-oppressive practice perspective, “reflexive critical analysis” in this context refers to unpacking how Euro-cultural dominance continues to systemically reproduce itself, resulting in other ethno-racial, cultural perspectives being subordinated as an organizational agenda. This approach to analysis should also be informing structural and systemic change strategies in mainstream organizations so that systemic openings are created for ethno-racial minority perspectives from the community and from the social work profession to assert



meaningful influence on practice and service delivery. Such openings – again, from the anti-oppressive practice perspective – are forms and forums of power-privilege-sharing, an essential material change to counter a dominant-subordinate relation as the practice marginalization issue represents in this thesis.

This thesis is a voice for practice as it has stayed throughout to be so. On reflection at this end-point of the scholastic project, this orientation aligns with the change action mandate of the social work discipline which this thesis is centrally about. This discipline is about planned change based on ethical values explicit about honoring - not in theory but in everyday professional practice and activities - humanity as inherently equal, rightful, worthy and capable. Professions have organized themselves into their “without-borders” versions; so there are *Physicians Without Borders* and *Engineers Without Borders* etc. All of them are activist manifestations of professionals recognizing (a) the need to treat people as humanity – a global community of people of equal worthiness with no regard of their socio-political locations, (b) problematic human conditions of social injustice, and (c) the immorality of continuing the silence contributing to reproducing these conditions and of inaction about changing these conditions.

In the same vein, an under-girding value driving this thesis project is seeing ethno-racial minority individuals and families as equal citizens in the Canadian community – just as rhetorically recognized in the country’s constitution and particularly, laws enacted to be explicit about equal rights and freedoms of all Canadians. Marginalization of social work practice with this population sector is taken up in this thesis as a problem of the profession contextualized in a systemic bias towards ethno-racial minorities. This bias exists, continues, hardens and impacts against the fact that these minorities are an integral sector of Canada’s citizenry whose collective needs and concerns constitute the *raison d’être* and the mandate of mainstream human service organizations.

As a voice for practice, the thesis makes a contribution to the continued discourse and activism concerning mainstream organizations' problematic attention to ethno-racial minorities' needs and issues. Mainstream human service organizations' own transformation as a whole institutional sector is fundamental in shifting the problematic social attitude towards ethno-racial minorities as Canada's "others". This shift is vitally significant in the ethno-racial minority sector's own shift to being who they should be – core, equal constituents of what makes up the Canadian state. It is such a change of paradigmatic magnitude that will enable the centering of social work practice with ethno-racial minorities in mainstream human service organizations.

## Appendix A

### Letter of Informed Consent

#### **Re: Participation in a research dialogue as part of Eugene Ip's Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) thesis research project**

This is to state my consent to participate in a dialogue as part of Eugene Ip's research project in his doctoral studies with the Department of Social Work, University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria, Republic of South Africa (RSA).

I am satisfied with the information given me by Eugene Ip (the researcher) regarding the doctoral thesis research project and the nature of the dialogue as the primary data source for this project. The project explores systemic issues that affect social work practice with ethno-racial minorities/visible minorities in mainstream agencies.

It is my understanding that:

- My participation in the research project is completely voluntary and I reserve the right to withdraw from participation any time for any reason and without prior notification to the researcher. If I exercise my right to withdraw, any information obtained from me for this research study will not be used in any way without my express consent.
- I will not be directly/indirectly identified in any publications in connection with this research project, including the thesis itself.
- Data obtained from me will be kept confidential. The audio-taped records of the research dialogues will be erased after the completion of the thesis; and until such time, the recorded audiotapes will be kept in a secured file drawer at the researcher's residence.
- This research project is the researcher's personal academic undertaking. My place of employment has no part in any aspect of this project. Participation or non-participation in this research project has absolutely no bearing on my employment status.

**Date:**

**Research Dialogue Participant (Signature and Printed Name):**

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**Witness:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Eugene Ip RSW (Alberta), BA, BSW, MSW, DPhil (in progress)  
Researcher  
11526 – 170 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5X 5Z4

**Attachment:** Doctoral Thesis Research Project: An Outline

Copy of Letter of Informed Consent to: Research Dialogue Participant

## **Doctoral Thesis Research Project: An Outline (Attachment to Letter of Informed Consent)**

**Researcher:** Eugene Ip RSW (Alberta), BA, BSW, MSW (University of Victoria, Canada), D.Phil (In Progress) (University of South Africa, Republic of South Africa [RSA])

**Thesis Research Interest:** Workplace challenges for mainstream human service organization social workers who serve clients from ethno-racial minority communities

**Graduate Program:** Doctoral (DPhil) program with the Department of Social Work, University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria, RSA.

### **Thesis Supervisors:**

- Primary supervisor: Professor W. Van Delft, DPhil (Social Work), Department of Social Work, Unisa, Pretoria, RSA (Contact information: VDELFWF@unisa.ac.za)
- Supervisor in Canada: Dr. Pieter Steyn, DPhil (Social Work), University College of the Fraser Valley, Chilliwack, BC

## **Outline of Thesis Research Project**

### **Research Focus**

The research project is a qualitative study to explore the everyday workplace challenges for mainstream human service organization social workers who serve ethno-racial minority clients.

### **Methodology**

The research study involves dialoging with social workers who are employed by a human service agency/organization with a mandate to serve the general public and who identify themselves as having a role/an interest in serving ethno-racial minority individuals and families. For the purpose of this research study, social workers are defined as those who are Registered Social Workers (RSWs) or equivalent or are not RSWs but have graduated from a post-secondary social work program at any level.

The dialogues are audio-taped as research data. The audio-taped contents are transcribed for result reporting and analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

No research dialogue will take place before the prospective research participant's informed consent is secured. Informed consent is obtained in the form of a duly completed and signed letter (with a copy for the research participant to keep). This consent is primarily a written guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality to the research participant.

For further information, please contact:

Eugene Ip

11526 170 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5X 5Z4

Telephone #s: (Home) (780) 457 5516,

(Work) (780) 415 6074

Email: [eugeneip@shaw.ca](mailto:eugeneip@shaw.ca)

## Appendix B

### Glossary of Key Terms

As its name implies, this glossary is meant to be a convenient reference of definitions of selected terms from the thesis. Terms below are selected as core concepts that hold vital contextual meanings particular to this thesis project. These meanings need to be clearly articulated as they are critically important in the conceptualization of the thesis problem of investigation.

#### Key Terms

- **Critical theory perspective** – The theoretical perspective adopted to study the practice marginalization issue in this thesis. This perspective represents a school of not one but multiple critical theories. Leonard (1990:3) provides a succinct statement to describe what a critical theory is, as follows:

“A critical theory...is defined as a theory having practical intent. As its name suggests, it is critical of existing social and political institutions and practices, but the criticisms it levels are not intended simply to show how present society is unjust, only to leave everything as it is. A critical theory of society is understood by its advocates as playing a crucial role in changing society.”

As a school of social thoughts, critical theory is constructed with intellectual and conceptual building blocks that speak to the level of analysis and strategizing for change demanded for addressing the practice marginalization issue investigated in this thesis. To this thesis project, a critical theory perspective brings theoretical traditions such as theories of a Marxist lineage (Leonard 1990, Thompson 1997, Mullaly 2007), feminist and anti-racist sociology (Smith 1987, Smith 1990, Smith 1992, Dominelli 1997), liberal psychology (Moane 1999), structural and anti-oppressive social work (Friere 1970, Friere 1973, Baines 2007, Mullaly 2007) – to name some key “building blocks”, that provide the necessary explanatory and analytical perspectives to shed light on the systemic practices and forces contributing to the practice marginalization central to this thesis’s interest.

Also, a critical theory perspective lends itself to understanding social problems in a way that engages strategic considerations for change at the structural and systemic level. An example would be referencing Friere's perspective on how social subordination is internalized by the oppressed to help understand how social workers feel a paralysis to effect systemic change in response to the practice marginalization issue (Friere 1970). Further from there, Friere's anti-oppressive, liberation thoughts on conscientization or consciousness-raising (Friere 1970, Friere 1973) will lend ideas for change strategies proposed as an output of this thesis. For a goal of the thesis is to identify the implications for change strategies based on the findings of systemic issues from investigating the research questions.

- **Ethno-racial minorities** – In this thesis, this term refers to individuals and their families who are readily identifiable as non-whites in Canada. (Although Canada's aboriginal peoples are commonly considered when ethno-racial relations issues are addressed; the aboriginal population sector is not within the realm of this thesis project.)

In conceptualizing this term for the thesis project, a number of characteristics of Canada's ethno-racial minorities are both implicitly and explicitly acknowledged:

- That this sector represents a significant majority of immigrants and refugees in contemporary Canada.
- That their minority status is the result of lack of access to power, privilege, and prestige in relation to the Canadian Euro-cultural, white majority sector (Henry et al 1995).
- That while they are a growing part of the Canadian citizenry, they experience as being marginalized in Canada's social, economic, political and institutional milieus.
- That although they constitute and contribute to Canada's celebrated multicultural identity, they are subjected to powerful assimilative forces and pressures. These forces and pressures to completely adopt the dominant culture in all its manifestations come from public/social institutions (public services, the professions, education, health care system, arts and entertainment etc) that collectively reaffirm and reproduce a Canadian ethno-racial, cultural status quo that treats citizens of ethno-racial minority backgrounds as exotic others on the societal fringes.

- **Eurocentrism** – a term for mainstream human service organizations in Canada operate on a belief that European thought, knowledge, ways of knowing and practices are universally normative and should be the standard by which others are judged and interpreted (Fleras & Elliott 1996). In practice in the running of mainstream human service organizations, Eurocentrism typically shows up as decisions and actions defended and celebrated as what makes sense to “most people” – a code name for stakeholders that exclude the ethno-racial minority public.
- **Mainstream** – In this thesis, “mainstream” denotes “Canadian public”; “mainstream human service organizations” refers to organizations that present themselves as serving the Canadian public in their communities. In the critique that mainstream human service organizations marginalize the ethno-racial minority sector in their definition of who is their constituency and clientele, it directs attention to the social problem that as far as these organizations are concerned, the minority sector is not integral to a reference mainstream public for representation of who is a Canadian and Canadian values, norms and culture.
- **Mainstream human service organizations** – From recalling the frontline critique of mainstream human service organizations that has inspired the thesis project, two key characteristics of such organizations are discernible. On the one hand, there was a clear collective opinion that these organizations are agencies of what Baines (2007: 4) refers to as “mainstream social work” – that is,

“social work that identifies with professionalism, career advancement and workplace authority, rather than with clients, oppressed communities and agendas for social justice. Although often claiming the opposite, mainstream social work tends to view social problems in a depoliticized way that emphasizes individual shortcomings, pathology and inadequacy. Interventions are aimed largely at the individual with little or no analysis of or intent to challenge power, structures, social relations, culture or economic forces.”

This definition resonates with front-line common experiences that inform this thesis. These experiences highlight that notwithstanding their claim to value multicultural service



delivery – mainstream human service organizations typically are hesitant, tentative and often rejective about a level of social work staffing and a necessary discourse and manner of practice to attend to troubling human conditions and social justice issues faced in the ethno-racial minority communities.

On the other hand, mainstream human service organizations are also understood as public service entities established to meet targeted needs of people. The descriptor “public” is particularly operative in this understanding of these organizations as either being open to all from the community with needs addressed by their services and programs, or serving a legislated mandate as exemplified by the government child welfare service or young offender corrections service. These organizations are also understood by the way they are funded either by tax revenue and/or public donated funding sources – e.g. community foundations. Therefore, mainstream human service organizations also connote a common accountability to the public as its constituents. In other words, these organizations not only serve the public but also account to the public as their constituents. To accomplish the latter in Canadian society, there are different social processes ranging from, in case of government human service departments or agencies, the democratic electoral process, to, in case of non-governmental organizations, periodical reporting on performance outcomes to funders who carry a sense of nurturing a strong, healthy community they care about.

Throughout this thesis, unless otherwise explained, a number of terms are used interchangeably referring to mainstream human service organization. These include mainstream organization, mainstream agency, and mainstream institution. Sometimes, when the context dictates, the single word “organization”, “agency” or “institution” is used instead. Regardless, what is meaningful is how human service organizations of mainstream nature need to be understood on the basis of the discourse of the social work peers who have inspired this thesis project in the first place.

- **Marginalization** – a term firmly grounded in the anti-oppressive practice literature as exemplified by Mullaly’s *Challenging Oppression: A Critical Social Work Approach* (Mullaly 2002). In the context of the thesis issue, the term refers to mainstream human service

organizations being experienced by front-line social workers as systemically subordinating social work practice with the ethno-racial minority sector and confining it to the very fringes of the organization's overall core business agenda. In this sense, such practice marginalization reflects an organizational status quo in the human service field that is, in effect, discriminatory along ethno-racial lines.