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McGILL UNIVERSITY
A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF RACISM
IN SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES
FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis Submitted to
The School of Social Work
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for
The Master's Degree in Social Work

by
June Ying Yee
Montreal, August 1995



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**A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF RACISM IN
SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES
FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

Much debate on the conceptualization of race and racism currently exists in the literature. By applying a critical approach to the study of the racism, it will be the basis from which to embark on a theoretically informed review of the literature, and to be able to apply my theoretical framework, which is composed of the following concepts: culture, power and dominance to the problem of racism in social service agencies. Specifically, an examination of current approaches, and the introduction of anti-racism strategies as a viable solution will be documented. It is concluded that there is a need to 1) challenge and modify the current knowledge base on racism in social service agencies; and 2) a need to provide social workers and policy-makers with the necessary tools to combat racism in social service agencies.

UNE ANALYSE THÉORIQUE ET CRITIQUE DU RACISME DANS LES ORGANISMES DE SERVICES SOCIAUX

Résumé

De nos jours, la conceptualisation de la race et du racisme fait l'objet d'un large débat dans la littérature. L'approche critique de l'étude du racisme constituera le fondement d'un examen théorique éclairé de la littérature et permettra d'appliquer ma structure théorique qui comprend les notions suivantes : la culture, le pouvoir et la dominance du problème du racisme dans les organismes de services sociaux. En particulier, un examen des approches actuelles et l'introduction de stratégies antiracistes en tant que solution viable seront documentés. En conclusion, il est établi qu'il existe un besoin 1) de défier et de modifier la base de connaissances actuelle sur le racisme dans les organismes de services sociaux et 2) de fournir aux travailleurs sociaux et aux décideurs en matière de politiques les outils nécessaires pour lutter contre racisme au sein des organismes de services sociaux.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF RACISM IN SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

An important reality faced by social service agencies is the immense diversity to be found within their clientele group whether it be based on cultural or language differences. To be able to provide culturally-sensitive services is not a given considering the many documented cases of service users encountering acts of racism.¹ Similarly, visible and invisible barriers to access continue to operate despite the claims of many agencies that they can serve their communities.

By virtue of assuming the existence of racism, it politicizes the issue and conjures feelings of threat and resistance to change on the part of service providers. Part of the problem is the need to acknowledge the reality that racism is a pervasive feature of a capitalist mode of production. More directly, it is necessary to contextualize social service agencies as functioning in a social production of relations where power differences between people are firmly established. Those who benefit from the present system of inequality have an interest in maintaining the status quo. Once racism is placed in its socio-economic context, connections may be made between the macro-function of inequality and the "micro-inequities"² carried out in everyday practices. For example, in an agency, in understanding racism, it is important to draw a relationship between the systemic barriers of access and equity, (i.e. policies, practices and procedures) to the

¹ United Way of Greater Toronto, Action, Access, Diversity: A Guide to Multicultural/Anti-Racist Organizational Change for Social Service Agencies. (Toronto: United Way of Greater Toronto, 1991), p. 4.

² Philomena Essed, Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory. (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1991), p. 37.

individual level (i.e. when a client is receiving service). An omission of relating structure to service reinforces the notion of racism as the irrational, prejudice of a few individuals.

In daily life, name-calling, scapegoating, discrimination and prejudice are the symptoms of racism in everyday practice. Most commonly, racism is understood as only the attitudinal problem of a few isolated individuals. However, research has shown the effects of racism as operating in the policies, practice, and procedures of an organizational structure (United Way, 1991; YWCA, 1987; Pettigrew and Martin, 1987). Identifiable barriers to access and equal participation to services on the part of ethno-specific groups revealed the many social practices of exclusion. In addition, numerous studies have shown mainstream agencies as not providing accessible nor culturally-sensitive services to their ethnic populations (United Way, 1991; YWCA, 1987). The dilemma lay in past approaches to remedying the situation on the part of agencies. The focus was on short-term measures that did not effect any real changes to an agency's discriminatory practices. Examples of remedies included, the use of cultural interpreters, the hiring of multicultural outreach workers and the training of staff to be culturally-sensitive. All of the devised solutions were add-ons to the organization, still leaving intact visible and invisible barriers to access, racist attitudes in service delivery and systemic barriers entrenched in the policies and practices of the organization. Inequities remained both in the structure of the organization and in the provision of services. Any effective analysis, thus, needed a comprehensive approach that grappled all levels of racism: individual, institutional and cultural. Hence, it is the intent of this thesis to

define racism as an active feature of our society requiring more than determining its origins, that is, the "why" does it exist, but also showing how it is created and reproduced in our social structures and institutions. By doing so, it opens the possibility for counter-strategies that may be adopted to promote real changes in social practices.

As an overview, historically in the literature, two central analytic approaches have been adopted to account for the problem of racism. Both of which offer much political and historical promise to addressing issues of racism.³ First, Marxist approaches which centred on class struggle, capitalism and colonialism with an emphasis on ideology as a "distorted consciousness"⁴ that conceals social contradictions in the interests of the dominant class. (Miles, 1982; Bolari and Li, 1988; and Gilroy, 1987). In this approach the class domination of oppressed groups is the critical, organizing force in a capitalist mode of production. Certain groups are dominated by other groups. The basis for domination is the legitimization of exploitation of certain groups of people, an essential aspect for the economic and social development of capitalism. While in the second approach, a cultural analysis of 'race', explained racism as always existing in the discourses of certain people, meaning that prejudice was the result of cultural differences. This position became the foundation for the sociological study of race relations (Rex and Mason, 1986).

In the former, the analysis is a reductionistic, economic account of racism, and the

³ Alrick X. Cambridge and Stephan Feuchtwang., AntiRacist Strategies. (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company Limited, 1990), p. viii.

⁴ Jorge Larraín., The Concept of Ideology. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979.) p. 48.

concept of culture is reduced merely to ideology and as part of the 'superstructure.' Culture as a dynamic, material force in the means of production and social relations was largely neglected (Wuthnow, 1984). Consequently, the limitation in the first approach led to new developments in Marxist theory calling for a focus on the generation and reproduction of racism (Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 1985; and Hall, 1971). Meanwhile, in the latter, the sociological study of race relations has been criticized for perpetuating the myth of 'race' and 'race relations' as concepts that exist in reality rather than as ideological constructions (Miles, 1982). In tackling issues of racism, it meant developing better 'race relations' between cultures, and ignoring the larger issues of inequality and power differences between groups of people.

During the 1950's and the 1960's, in the literature has been a burgeoning area called cultural studies (Grossberg et al., 1992; CCCS, 1982; Glenn and Weedon, 1995; Nelson and Grossberg, 1988). The aim of cultural studies was to combine anthropological and humanist Marxists approaches to the concept of culture.³ Instead of relegating culture to the confines of the superstructure of Marxist theory, culture could become the political site of change for social practices and individual resistance. Grossberg et al., elaborate as follows:

cultural theory is now as likely to study political categories (such as democracy), forms of political practices (such as alliances), and structures of dominance (including otherness) and experience (such as subjectification) as it is to study art, history, philosophy, science, ethics, communicative codes or

³ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

technology.⁶

Just as ideology was the site of revolutionary change, culture, too, provided endless possibilities. For the concept of culture, the use of structuralist assumptions meant the freeing of "the conception of ideology as 'pure' speculation or false consciousness."⁷ Instead, the role of the human subject is considered an active agent capable of resistance and emancipation from the domination and subjugation of an identity based on Eurocentric and essentialist ideas of a unitary, fixed self.

As we enter into a period of disillusionment with identity and culture differences, we begin to reflect on state policies such as multiculturalism and debate whether it has fostered harmony or fortified ethnic absolutism. However, even before we can enter that debate, it still brings us back to the beginning. The question of how do we move towards an inclusionary society free of domination and discrimination? It is here, where I turn to postmodern theory with its critique of modernity as a potential area of theory building in the realm of racism.

In modernity, society believed that science could emancipate people from the negative ills produced by capitalism and, fundamentally, control those aspects of human nature which were deemed destructive. The positive side of modernity was that we were moving towards a progressive society, through our belief that science, as knowledge, would provide truths to solve the mysteries of modern life. This was to be accomplished through the perennial subject on which the many truths, in the form of discourses, could

⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷ Jorge Larraín, *The Concept of Ideology*, p. 154.

be acted upon. As Lawrence Grossberg writes, "subjectivity is the product of ideology's power to interpellate - to place - individuals at particular sites within the field of meanings which it constitutes."⁸ It was not only the state, in ideology, did the ruling class dominate and maintain control over its subject but, also, in the production of knowledge about the "other." The reproduction of a society that was not repressive but self-productive ensured the present social relations of production. In essence, in a postmodern era, the cultural production of identity by means of subjectivity and discourse became the unspoken, means of domination.

Several writers have approached the concept of ideology from a structural perspective, trying to provide linkages between ideology as discourse and its relationship to the material world. (Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1971) In particular, for cultural studies, they became known as the cultural Marxists who "placed the human agent (both individually and socially) at the centre of their theoretical perspective."⁹ This rethinking of Marxism required a coming together of "structuralism and semiotics."¹⁰ Jorge Larraín describes the workings of a cultural Marxist framework:

The traditional approach to ideology took language for granted and concentrated upon the basic features of ideology as found in the content of the discourse. Now attention turns to language itself, that is, in the selection and combination of signs, but also in the sense that material practices which are at the basis of ideology are constructed as systems of

⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, We Gotta Get Out of This Place. (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), pp. 117-118.

⁹ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

signification.¹¹

The process of signification meant that modes of domination and oppression could be properly located in actual social practices and discourses of knowledge production. In no way did this contradict nor lessen the idea of class domination but it did bring attention to the non-class sites of domination.¹² In particular, Louis Althusser locates subjects as being interpellated by the ideological state apparatuses.¹³ Primacy to the centrality of the state as being the source of social formations is still accorded within this Marxian framework.¹⁴

Conversely, in the works of Michel Foucault, power as an effect of knowledge in discursive practices is granted autonomy from the state, and is how subjects become objects of discourse.¹⁵ Foucault does not reduce power as operating in one location but, instead, claims that multiple sites of power are operating in the structures of our culture. Here lies the subject, available to the normalization and control of discourses produced outside of oneself, yet intrasubjectively laid down, and in the interests of science. How this is made possible, as noted by Jorge Larraín, is by taking a negative view of

¹¹ Jorge Larraín, The Concept of Ideology, p. 130.

¹² Roy Boyne & Ali Rattansi, eds., Postmodernism and Society. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 40.

¹³ Veronica Beechey and James Donald., eds. Subjectivity and Social Relations. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 56-88.

¹⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paul A. Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies. (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 494.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 492.

ideology, where "science is true knowledge"¹⁶ and "while ideology remains trapped in the appearances, science manages to penetrate the phenomenal forms of reality."¹⁷ In Foucault's text entitled Archaeology of Knowledge,¹⁸ he challenges the belief whether science is emancipatory. Rather, Foucault argues that knowledge, in the name of science, is another form of discursive practice from which power operates.

On one level, the purpose of this thesis is to engage in the present theoretical debates surrounding the conceptualization of 'race' and racism. As shown by the literature, various explanations and knowledges about the processes of racism has emerged from the Marxist school of thought. In the Marxist approach many insights are to be garnered in capturing the historical and political basis of racism, and in accounting for the broader, macro-function of inequality. However, to embark on a theoretical analysis also demands an openness in exploring the complexities, contradictions and various formations that arise within any paradigm. For that matter, no paradigm can necessarily explain everything and it is here where alternative frameworks need to be examined. As commented by Stuart Hall, "theorizing is a process...[it] always operates by deconstructing existing paradigms and at the same time snatching important insights from what it is tossing out."¹⁹ The central gap in any Marxist account is whether racism

¹⁶ Jorge Larrain, The Concept of Ideology, p. 173.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

¹⁹ James Donald and Ali Rattansi, eds., Race, Culture and Difference. (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

is the sole product of ideology. Is it not possible to provide an explanation of racism separate from that of ideology without dismissing it altogether? It is here where my thesis begins, and constructs a theoretical framework that challenges the dominant paradigms in favour of a multi-faceted approach linking the macro-function of inequality to the actual, everyday practices of racism.

On another level, I present my theoretical framework as evolving from a review of the literature, and employ Marxian and Postmodernist perspectives, with special emphasis on the role of power, culture and dominance as determining the prevalence of racism in a capitalist mode of production. Previously, in the past not much attention has been given to these concepts as they were subsumed into the other more important phenomenon of Marxist theory, that of, ideology and class analysis. However, with the developments in humanist Marxism and in Postmodernist theory, I suggest to advance, an alternative framework that reconstitutes the role of power, culture and dominance and their relationships, as legitimate in their own right. By doing so, it transcends the positivist, universalist assumptions of Marxian theory to granting a space for counter-hegemonic activity by the individual. Potentially, a world that can open up new spaces for multiple, identities in flux.

More importantly, it is the goal of this analysis to remember the importance of moving beyond a theoretical understanding of racism to providing concrete strategies that can be used within social service organizations. In particular for social workers and policy makers, an alternative framework is presented that may be adopted. The discussion that follows is a theoretical framework that critiques the universalist, notions

Western capitalism, masked in the guise of liberalism, and failing to overcome the inherent contradictions in present policy-making on racism.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Introduction:

For the study of racism, it can be argued that Marxist analyses penetrates most comprehensively into the historical, economic and structural aspects of its effects in a capitalist mode of production. In fact, according to Rex and Mason, the "basic level of agreement between the various Marxist approaches is that they accept that...there is no problem of racism which can be thought of as separate from the structural features of capitalist society."²⁰ But within this perspective, it is also important to note its limitations, that is, of being overly reductionistic and providing a theory of racism based on "an essential theory of race themselves."²¹ Such methodological observations have provided the impetus to search for alternative theoretical frameworks that provide greater, conceptual clarity of key concepts used in the study of racism and to study areas that have been largely neglected, specifically, the "politics of culture and identity."²² Furthermore, in trying to provide strategies to overcoming racism, many writers have had to ask questions that go beyond "traditional Marxist analysis"²³ as the basis for

²⁰ John Rex and David Mason, eds., Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 107.

²¹ Paul Gilroy. Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 20.

²² John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 36.

²³ Ibid., p. 108.

methodological inquiry.

If anything a critique of the positivist Marxian analysis was required in order for the development of new theoretical propositions. As mentioned earlier, in order to explain all the various, complexities of racism, it is in the methodological observations which led to the need for a critical approach to the analysis of racism. Part of this entails, in adopting a new theoretical framework, three suggestions made by John Solomos: 1) a clear theoretical understanding of the questions raised; 2) methods to be used; and 3) the political climate within which the research is to be carried out.²⁴ In this chapter, all three of these suggestions will be addressed through an explicit, description of the methodology used to inform my review of literature, and to my use of the concepts power, culture and dominance to the problem of racism in social service agencies.

Methodology: A Critical Approach to Social Science

To begin, in this chapter, it is important to preface my analysis with an examination of the epistemology in a critical approach. By epistemology, it is referred to as, "the presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and of science that inform practical inquiry."²⁵ In general, it is what underpins and serves as the basis for both method and methodology.²⁶ The guiding epistemology of this research is critical social science. By definition, W. Lawrence Neuman, generally defines critical social science

²⁴ John Solomos, ed., Race and Racism in Britain, p. 80.

²⁵ Lee Harvey, Critical Social Research. (London: Unwin Human, 1990), p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

as "a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change and build a better world for themselves."²⁷ Essentially, it is also what forms the fundamental basis for critical theory. According to Stephen Leonard, the advantage of critical theory is its link between "social theory and political practice."²⁸ Further he states that this occurs by undertaking the following measures:

- (1) it must locate the sources of domination in actual social practices;
- (2) it must present an alternative vision (or at least an outline) of a life free from such domination; and (3) it must translate these tasks in a form that is intelligible to those who are oppressed in society.²⁹

In adopting a critical, review of the literature and, of particular significance, it is expected that the critical approach, "involve an epistemological perspective in which knowledge and critique are intertwined."³⁰ But, it is more than a critique because what evolves from the process is the gaining of the "real objective relations that underlie social relations."³¹ Unmasked are the illusions that appear as reality, and which serve the purpose of hiding the actual set of social relations from those who are oppressed. It is argued that out there in the real world are identifiable and tangible set of social relations to be discovered, unearthed and overcome by a critical social research approach.

²⁷ W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods. (Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), p. 56.

²⁸ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1993), p. 142.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁰ Lee Harvey, Critical Social Research, p. 3.

³¹ W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods, p. 57.

The notable features of a critical social research approach are many. First, it "uncovers myths, reveal hidden truths, and helps people to change the world for themselves."³² This is accomplished by going beneath illusory surface appearances so that the reality of people's experiences can be revealed. Rather than remaining neutral a value position is taken, and through praxis, theory is put into practice in order that theory may be changed.³³ Second, this approach does not deny the inherent political nature of the task and even suggests that "some values are better than others."³⁴ In fact, as commented by Sandra Harding, "some politics - the politics for emancipatory change - can increase the objectivity of science."³⁵ Moreover, the distinguishing aspect of the critical social science approach from that of other approaches is simply "the way in which data are approached and the framework from which data are analyzed that is crucial."³⁶ Of significant value, are the kinds of questions the researcher asks, the way the questions are asked, and the reasons for asking the questions.

The Critical Approach Applied to the Study of Racism:

According to Harvey, in critical social research "substantive questions about

³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁵ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 162.

³⁶ Lee Harvey, *Critical Social Research*, p. 196.

existent social processes"³⁷ are asked of empirical work. Most typically, Harvey notes that past research has been "dominated by theoretical treatises"³⁸ that fail to follow-up with empirical material that would substantiate the analyses. Therefore, an essential part of critical social research is for empirical material to be collected."³⁹ Harvey notes, that it was Karl Marx, who argued that "revealing the real state of affairs was dependent upon a thorough detailed analysis of actual social practices."⁴⁰ In addition, Harvey elaborates with the following statement:

Critical social research is a way of approaching the social world, in which critique is central. It is the way the empirical evidence is approached and interpreted, the methodology not the method of data collection per se, which characterizes critical social research.⁴¹

In this particular case, my central research question was framed accordingly: "how" and "why" does racism operate simultaneously at the both the systemic level of a social service organization (i.e. policies, practices and procedures) and at the individual level (i.e. when a client is receiving service). In addressing this question, it also required the contextualization of the problem within current federal and provincial policies such as multiculturalism, and employment equity as well as previously tried approaches to improving access and equity to social service agencies.

In applying a critical approach to the study of racism, Harvey states that there are

³⁷ Lee Harvey, Critical Social Research, p. 7.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8.

five basic elements: abstraction, totality, essence, praxis, ideology, history and structure.⁴² For the purpose of this research, I wish to draw attention to the areas of abstraction and ideology as essential to my critical, review of the literature and in providing a critique of the conceptualization of racism.

First, by abstraction Harvey is referring to the process by which factual observation are made into abstract concepts. In the critical approach, the concept is not taken for granted as objectively correct but rather "after having understood how a concept is used, critical social research attempts to reveal underlying structures which specify the nature of the abstract concepts, but which themselves been assimilated uncritically into the prevailing conceptualization."⁴³ By critically, evaluating the concept in a different framework, a new conceptualization may be sought. In defining concepts such as culture, power and dominance, new understandings and meanings for these terms can be discovered. On one level, the basis for a changed conceptualization is rooted in the interpretation of actual, everyday experiences of racism. Whereas, on another level, the employment of my theoretical framework, is one where the process, of course, situates everyday practices within the macro-level context of assumed surface appearance that hide the real structures. What emerges is a new conceptualization encapsulating all of the complexities, interrelatedness and relationships between the actual, everyday experiences of people to the broader problem of oppression in a capitalist mode of production.

Second, a negative concept of ideology is adopted in my critique. As stated by

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Harvey, a negative view means that "ideology can only be destroyed through praxis which changes the material basis of the production of ideas."⁴⁴ As stated earlier, this is made possible in the theoretical approach of humanist Marxists which offers great promise to showing the interrelationships between ideology and practices. In understanding ideology, actual material practices may be brought about to bring social change. Potentially, one's own subjectivity can be the site of resistance and rejection to the dominant ideology, offering an alternative tool for counter-hegemonic practices.

Another crucial aspect in the critical approach is the contribution of postmodernist theory to challenging the construction of knowledge as evolving from science and the social sciences. In the critical approach a critique of the "positivist" tradition of social science, as true knowledge, is engaged in by postmodernists through the examination of discourse. The emancipation of science from ideology, refutes the claim that science is objective and the proclaimed truth. Moreover, by critiquing the knowledge base of current discourses, the relationship between power and knowledge can be delineated. Power as an effect of knowledge constructs the identity of the "other." If power is articulated through the knowledge that is circulating and functioning about the "other" then, perhaps, it is through subjectivity, discourse and otherness where it is possible to disrupt these essentialist categories of identity.

Choosing to Pursue this Topic: A Personal Comment

It is impossible to separate one's own biography and personal experiences from

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

one's writing, nor to deny its influence in shaping the perspective from which one chooses to work from. Both personal and work experiences have influenced my understandings of racism. As a person of Chinese descent, and being born in Canada with parents who had emigrated to this country, I learned early that racism is not only about being different but it is also about people's everyday experiences of pain, alienation and exclusion. Too often, I have heard the voices of people not understanding where such racist statements come from, and for children, especially, growing up with bi-cultural identities there is much confusion about identity. On the one hand, there is a need to reject one's culture in order to escape the pain of negative stereotypes about one's culture. While, on the other hand, there is the reality of the existence of racism and no matter how much a person denies one's ethnic identity, or asserts one's ethnic identity, mainstream society still sees difference in relation to a much-valued dominant culture.

During the years of 1992-1993, I was employed at a mainstream agency as a multicultural/outreach worker with a job description aimed at providing services to populations whose mother tongue is other than English. The lack of funding, the low priority given to serving ethnic groups, and the political resistance to real change were the common problems encountered at the agency. From this emerged three central questions: 1) Why were services to ethnic groups always served on a piecemeal basis, and, for the most part, willing to appear to be sensitive but in practice still racist?; 2) What were the barriers and obstacles to change, and why the controversy with providing services to ethnic groups?; and 3) Who was benefiting from this system of inequality, and for what purposes? In the latter part of this paper, these questions will be addressed

through the employment of anti-racism strategies as a viable solution to racism, and can be adopted by social workers and policy-makers in the field of cultural work.

As for social science research, the notion that subjective experiences have no place in enhancing the knowledge base because it may be too bias and, therefore, not objective is false, and is a school of thought that perpetuates the belief that some universal truth is to be discovered.⁴¹ It is in the very notion of universalism that has prevented other alternative explanations from being accepted and recognized as equally legitimate and valid. In cross-cultural social work, respecting other cultures as different but, without, the binary opposition of good/bad, superior/inferior or better/worse is not common practice in Western culture. This is not to suggest, that we turn to a state where no standards exist because we run the risk of relativism. But, the only way to gain a true understanding of racism is by a critical, examination of one's own culture. This is because until each of us socially, locate ourselves within the context of Western culture, we will not be able to know about how the "other" is produced and reproduced in society. The "other" only exists in relation to something, that is, Western culture. So, in this thesis, the guiding methodological premise is the importance of grounding all theoretical assertions to the actual everyday practices of racism, including examining the important role of subjectivity.

⁴¹ George S. Howard, "Culture Tales: A Narrative Approach to Thinking, Cross-Cultural Psychology, and Psychotherapy," American Psychologist. (Vol. 46, No. 3, March, 1991), p. 191.

CHAPTER THREE: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE OF LITERATURE ON THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RACE AND RACISM FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction:

In the present, much debate on the conceptualization of race and racism prevails amongst academic scholars. From a critical theory perspective, the limitations of Marxist theory has beckoned the need for greater conceptual clarity on definitions of race and racism, more research on theory-building, and grounding these theoretical developments in empirical research. Consequently, the advantage of critical theory is in its application of social theory to the day-to-day problem of racism in social service agencies. As stated by Robert Mullaly, who eloquently connects theory to praxis, critical theory is about "social transformation -moving from a society characterized by exploitation, inequality and oppression to one that is emancipatory and free from domination."⁴⁶ Moreover, simultaneously, it is "critical of our social, economic and political institutions and practices and seeks to change them."⁴⁷

In the literature, a critical approach to studying racism is for the most part absent, except, in the more recent developments, of critical theory as reflected in the postmodernist works of Foucault and Weedon, and in the extended developments of Marxist theory by such writers as Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser. In both

⁴⁶ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice, p. 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

perspectives, there is a commitment to engaging their work in political practice by involving people to seek social analysis, and to proactively participate in social change.⁴

Likewise, a critical theory perspective is essential to the theoretical framework presented in chapter four. In explaining both the "how" and "why" does racism exist, the concepts culture, power and dominance constituted the framework from which to explore all the complexities, various elements and components of both racist practice and racism in its various forms. Rather than superficially, exploring the manifestations of racism as isolated acts of prejudiced individuals, the role of ideology and other non-ideological operations at work are explored so that the true conditions of domination may be exposed. Specifically, both Marxist and Postmodernist perspectives are examined in this chapter with a focus on: critiquing these theoretical perspectives and their limitations, defining culture, power and dominance, and exploring the barriers and obstacles to social change.

In chapter five, an application of my theoretical framework to the problem of racism in social service agencies is discussed, and serves to ground my theoretical conjectures empirically in social service agencies. The implications of such analyses is that social workers and policy-makers can be given the tools to enable them to promote social change in the interests of the oppressed, and to challenge the current status quo of domination.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

A Historical Review of Literature on the Conceptualization of Race and Racism:

Over the past few decades, several changes in the conceptualization of race and racism has occurred. In sociological studies and in the field of political science, during the 1950's and 1960's, theories on 'race relations' was the favoured explanation of racism, as it was quickly adopted into mainstream political science. A 'race relations' approach interpreted racism in culturalist terms; disharmony was a result of cultural differences, and issues of power and politics were ignored from its analysis.⁴⁹ By focussing on differences in the context of a Western worldview, a 'race relations' approach further inscribed "ethnicist discourses"⁵⁰ that imposed "stereotypic notions of 'common cultural need' upon heterogenous groups with diverse social aspirations and interests."⁵¹ Instead of recognizing difference in a positive frame, it reinscribed cultural stereotypes of the foreign "other",⁵² and furthered the gap in power differentials between cultural groups and mainstream society. A good example of a current, federal policy formulated on a 'race relations' approach is Canada's policy on multiculturalism. Later on in the chapter, the policy of multiculturalism will be discussed.

Also during the 1950's and 1960's, new developments in cultural studies emerged in response to the changing political climate of Great Britain, and were considered a more

⁴⁹ John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁰ James Donald and Ali Rattansi, eds., Race, Culture and Difference, p. 129.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 129.

⁵² Bissoondath, Neil., Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada. (Toronto: Penguin, 1994).

radical perspective but one which grew out of the need for "a more sophisticated Marxism."³³ Coupled with a critique of Marxian studies and the search for a theory that could explain the "complex forms of racialised identities in colonial and post-colonial societies,"³⁴ it remained confined to the radical research stream of Marxism. The difference in theory development, for cultural Marxists, was to no longer conceive the base/superstructure analysis of racism with culture as part of the superstructure. A shift in conceptualization from the economist account of false consciousness and class relations to "questions of meaning, experience and mediations" meant the liberation of culture from ideology to establishing culture as a "central political issue and interpretive problem."³⁵

Consequently, by the 1970's writers were faced with a challenge to reinventing Marxist theory so that an integration of theoretical understandings in philosophy, "the appearance of logical positivism (with its concern for language and knowledge)"³⁶ and phenomenology "(with its focus on meaning and consciousness) could take place."³⁷ At the same time, the impact of modernism on Marxism also called for a reevaluation of the role of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the need to theorize on the production and reproduction of racism in social practices.

For many second generation humanist Marxists, a cultural analysis involved

³³ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 4.

³⁴ John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain, p. 33.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

examining everyday life, that is, popular culture and the media. Both became important sites to study for "complex relations of power and meaning."⁵⁸ Discourse analysis, the means by which to study language and text, involved the thorough examination of its structures, meanings and language. For scholars, discourse analysis provided the empirical data on which to study.⁵⁹ Of significant difference in cultural studies, was the prominent role given to the concept of power in understanding racism, a frequently neglected concept in other analyses. As stated by Nelson and Grossberg, cultural theory "aims to understand the fabric of social experience and everyday life, [and] even the foundations of the production and organization of power itself."⁶⁰ By comparison to previous research on racism, cultural theory had incorporated the shortcomings of the 'race relations' approach by beginning to look at the relationship between culture and power.

By the 1980's, new developments in Marxist theory were introduced by Robert Miles who was opposed to the sociology of race relations. Instead, he argued for the need to examine racism as an essential feature for the development of capitalism. 'Race' was to be understood as an analytical category, created for its ideological effect of masking the economic relations of migrant labourers in a capitalist mode of production.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁹ See Teun A. Van Dijk's work in Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk and Elite Discourse and Racism.

⁶⁰ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 6.

⁶¹ Robert Miles, Racism & Migrant Labour. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

Racism as ideology would serve as the rationalization and justification for the exploitation of migrant labourers and, therefore, maintain dominance and exclusionary political relations. Overall, the significant contribution of Miles's work was in showing how racism is lived through class relations.

But some writers, such as David Theo Goldberg have argued that reducing racism to a part of the social structure is problematic because if racism is merely ideology then what follows is racism as only a set of beliefs.⁶² David Theo Goldberg elaborates with the following comment:

In insisting that racism is an ideology, a 'representational phenomenon, distinguished from exclusionary practice', Miles emphatically denies that it involves any expressions other than a set of beliefs. There are accordingly no racist practices or relations, no practices or relations the effects of which are racially defined exclusion.⁶³

Further, David Theo Goldberg continues his argument by deducing that since 'race' exists only in relation to the domination and exploitation of groups of people then objectively it does not exist outside of those relations.⁶⁴ Yet, particularly, in social service agencies racism prevails and how it operates, is not necessarily for the same purposes of "exploitative economic practices."⁶⁵ The limitation of Miles's class analysis is that it falls into the proverbial trap of reducing racism to an economist interpretation belonging to the traditional Marxist school of thought.

⁶² David Theo Goldberg, Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), p. 93.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

Meanwhile, it was also during the 1980's, that established liberal policies such as multiculturalism came under renewed attack as a form of 'new racism.' It was argued that in the pursuit of liberalism, and in the popular rhetoric which legitimated such discourses, applause was given to multiculturalism as proof of the implicit tolerance towards other cultures. In practice, however, a form of cultural racism prevailed, where "it is not claimed that these outsiders are degenerate, immoral, inferior; they are just different."⁶⁶ What did different mean? As commented by Homi Bhaba, the unspoken meaning behind multiculturalism, with its emphasis on difference, was a sham universalism 'that paradoxically permits diversity' while it 'masks' ethnocentric norms, values and interests.⁶⁷ In many respects, it echoed the same assumptions as the 'race relations' approach, that is, a hierarchy of cultures prevailed, with the dominant culture as superior to all other cultures. As commented by Teun A. Van Dijk, even in our educational systems, knowledge about other cultures in educational textbooks "still remain[ed] Eurocentric replete with stereotypes, and ignorant of racism and ethnic power relations in contemporary Western societies."⁶⁸

The limitations in policies such as multiculturalism which were based on liberalist ideas led to new developments in the research on race and racism. In turning to a critique of modern society, and engaging in postmodernist works, racism was to be studied in a

⁶⁶ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 481.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 485.

⁶⁸ Teun A. Van Dijk. Elite Discourse and Racism. (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1993), p. 287.

more global context of hegemony and dominance of the colonial states over the colonized but in a post-colonial era for Western countries. Liberalism itself born out of this colonial past, created a 'new racism' characteristically belonging of a democratic, Western society. According to Jordan and Weedon, liberalism offered two promises to producing a racially, harmonious society. First, "liberalism seeks to transcend particular historical, social and cultural differences."⁶⁹ Second, "it is concerned with broad identities which insists unites persons on moral grounds, rather than with those identities which divide politically, culturally, geographically or temporarily."⁷⁰ First, in the context of Great Britain, it is known that a 'British way of life' has forged ideas of nationhood and national identity⁷¹ with a view of other cultural identities as 'alien' and, therefore, a threat to the dominant culture. The central immigration problem was how to assimilate these people into a British identity. On the second point, what identity are we speaking about? In Western society, the only identity with force and representation was that of dominant culture, while the racialized "other" was created as a projection by the dominant culture in the form of a Eurocentrist view.⁷²

Today, living in a postmodern world, the structure of 'new racism' is to be found in the ideology of liberalist rhetoric. It is the primary means for public consent to racist

⁶⁹ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷¹ John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain, p. 35.

⁷² Robert J. C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, p. 159.

ideologies. As commented by Stuart Hall:

[ideologies] work most effectively when we are not aware that how we formulate and construct a statement about the world is underpinned by ideological premises; when our formulations seem to be simply descriptive statements about how things are (i.e. must be), or of what we can 'take-for-granted'.⁷³

As part of general discourse in the public domain, common sense images about the "other" are firmly planted into the psyches of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Take for instance, images created about the black family in society, and which have guided much of social work intervention in that area.⁷⁴ Most commonly, it shows "the problems that black people are thought to pose for White society and indeed for themselves, are situated within the organization of black households."⁷⁵ The focus of the problem is to do with the black family and their culture, while bigger issues of discrimination and exclusion from the labour market because of racism are not even mentioned. This is a good example of how the pathologization of the "other" is produced by way of cultural racism.

Thus, ideology is the means by which to legitimate the present, existing social relations and to prevent any challenges to the "hegemonic control of difference, access and prevailing power."⁷⁶ As commented by Kobena Mercer, dominant culture was predicated on a "cultural construction of Little England as a domain of ethnic

⁷³ CCCS, The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain, p. 47.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁶ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World, p. 8.

homogeneity, a unified and monocultural 'imagined community.'⁷⁷ As time passes, the overarching penetration of ideology reaches into all aspects of society, and as commented by Kobena Mercer it is accomplished effectively:

through literary and rhetorical moves that enabled the dissemination of its discourse across the political spectrum, to the point where it became gradually instituted in commonsense and state policies.⁷⁸

In detailing the analysis of common sense language formulated on the public discourse conception of the "other," it meant a new area of study was in "understanding the diverse ideological practices of colonialism."⁷⁹ According to Robert J.C. Young, "it was Said who shifted the study of colonialism among cultural critics towards its discursive operations, showing the intimate connection between the language and forms of knowledge developed for the study of cultures and the history of imperialism."⁸⁰ By adopting Foucault's structural emphasis on language and discourse construction, it carried three theoretical implications. First, ideology could now be seen as a "form of consciousness and as a lived material practice."⁸¹ Second, Said extended the idea of ideology as a false consciousness to a "cultural construction that could be historically

⁷⁷ Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paul A. Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies, p. 436.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 436.

⁷⁹ Robert J.C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 159.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 159.

determining."¹² And third, a focus on the separation of the cultural sphere from the economic sphere meant a rejection of the economic reductionism of traditional Marxist theory.¹³ In the next section, an examination of the shifts in Marxist studies to a structuralist approach is discussed.

A Structuralist Methodology Applied to Culture in Marxist Theory:

An epistemological shift from the "historicist" tradition of Marxist theory to a re-interpretation of Marxist theory from a structuralist perspective was advanced originally by Antonio Gramsci, and later by Louis Althusser. According to Jorge Larraín, in the works of Gramsci, "structuralism wants to free Marx from a conception of ideology as 'pure speculation' or false consciousness."¹⁴ By doing so, ideology may be conceived as having a "material existence which determines the subject."¹⁵ As stated by Jorge Larraín, by rejecting ideology as 'false consciousness' then:

it has to do away with the conception of the subject participating in its origin. Ideology is not a false representation of reality because its source is not the subject but material reality itself.¹⁶

To be able to connect ideology to the actual, material practices of cultural processes was a major breakthrough for Marxist analyses. The objective set of actual relations could

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁴ Jorge Larraín, *The Concept of Ideology*, p. 154.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

now be located in the meanings produced through, and by culture.

Instead of doing away completely with consciousness, for Gramsci, the concept of ideology has "contradictory formations of consciousness."⁸⁷ According to Stuart Hall, Gramsci is arguing for the retention of ideology as a hegemonic force in society, obtained not simply through a "given structure of society or in the given class structure of a mode of production"⁸⁸ but through a "complex series or a process of struggle."⁸⁹ As further eloquently stated by Stuart Hall, "hegemony is the construction and winning of popular consent to that authority among key sectors of the dominated class themselves."⁹⁰ If so, then, hegemony is not purely ideological nor only serving a functional purpose, it may also be mediated through politics in what is known as common sense. Common sense is the process by which contradictory struggles are formulated into everyday knowledge and repackaged into an acceptable discourse that is taken-for-granted by society so that such knowledge is no longer questioned. As mentioned earlier, common sense can be found in the present-day liberal rhetoric on culture. But, more importantly, it is the basis for the self-sustaining social reproduction of knowledge about the "other".

Similarly, according to Jorge Larraín, in the works of Louis Althusser the role of ideology has three important theoretical implications. First, ideology may be viewed

⁸⁷ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 56.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

as an "objective level of social reality, independent of individual subjectivity."⁹¹ Here, it is purported that ideology is taken from the realm of ideas, and located in actual, material practices. In everyday life, ideology is a "system of representations"⁹² and a false one, but one which makes possible the maintenance and cohesion of society despite its many, inherent contradictions. And third, Althusser successfully links how the present relations of production is reproduced through what is known as the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). The ISA's represent the hegemonic state apparatuses, but in practice are the sites from which the ruling ideology can be expressed. An example of an ISA is the educational system. The end result is to show that individuals are interpellated as subjects who are led to believe they are acting by their own free will, but in reality are governed by ideology.

What is important to observe in the analyses offered by Louis Althusser is the need to examine the cultural processes by which subjectification occurs to produce a false representation of reality. To examine how subjects are created by way of discourse implies that ideology is another discursive formation open to counter-hegemonic strategies that challenge the Eurocentric production of identities. Furthermore, to suggest ideology as discourse is to challenge the myth of science as objective knowledge and, more importantly, to begin to conceptualize the separation of science and ideology. This leads to the next section, which provides a discussion of the works of Michel Foucault who relegates the role of ideology as another discursive formation, and one that is acting not

⁹¹ Jorge Larrain, The Concept of Ideology, p. 155.

⁹² Ibid., p. 155.

centrally in state apparatuses but rather dispersively throughout the social formation.”

Michel Foucault: Power As an Effect of Knowledge in Postmodernism Theory

The contribution of the work of Michel Foucault is significant in challenging the present debates on knowledge as an “ideological functioning of science.”⁹⁴ This is accomplished through discourse which “constructs particular modes of objectification (knowledges) through which agents are produced as subjects and inscribed within a network of ‘localized’ power relations.”⁹⁵ In contrast to the works of Althusser, which suggests the overdetermination of social processes in both class and non-class sites of sites of domination, Foucault is arguing for the “intereffectivity of these relations.”⁹⁶

More directly, as stated by Foucault, “rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies.”⁹⁷ Specifically, Foucault is referring to three types of struggles:

either against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious);
against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what
they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself
and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago). Summer 1992, p. 780.

against forms of subjectivity and submission.”⁹⁴

But is through knowledge, however, that power is articulated in the three types of struggles. Rather than focussing on the hegemonic, and central activities of the state Foucault states that “what is questioned is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power.”⁹⁵ In general Foucault does illustrate “why” power operates, as reflected in his comment regarding the three types of struggles which is similarly akin to the Marxist notion of ideology. But, in addition, Foucault explains the “how” power operates in society. Power as an effect of knowledge constructs the identity of the “other.” The potential of Foucault’s work is to show the productive function of knowledge creation, and its effects in producing power to maintain struggles of domination, exploitation and subjectivity.

The Influence of Cultural Marxists and Postmodernism on the Conceptualization of Race and Racism:

For the study of race and racism, limitations in Marxist theory with respect to the understandings of ideology meant the confinement of racism to a problem of hegemony, and class relations. To conceptualize racism as outside of these parameters were non-existent, and subsequently determined the approaches to combatting racism. But with the advent of cultural Marxists who critiqued the role of culture and ideology, racism could now be specifically located in cultural practices, apparatuses, and in discursive social

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 781.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 781.

formations.

Likewise, postmodernist theory, helped scholars to provide a critique on the belief that knowledge is true science and its relation to ideology. The problem of racism was not one merely of ideology. Writers such as Foucault paved the way for a conceptualization of racism as occurring in non-class sites of domination and with a particular focus on its discursive formations. The contribution of Foucault's work in many ways were similar to the works of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. As commented by Amariglio, et al.,:

Both Foucault and Althusser shift our understanding of culture-ideology-power conjuncture towards a concern with the specificity of cultural processes and relations of power within which historically determined subjects are created.¹⁰⁰

By comparison, Foucault does argue that ideology is another form of discourse and is falsely elevated to the position of a science, whereas Althusser contends that ideology as "ideas" can be specifically located in state apparatuses. The central difference in their approaches lay in whether the source of racism emanated solely from the central state or was racism located throughout the social formation.

Despite the shifts in conceptualization of racism which did lead to potentially, ground-breaking new insights that could be employed, and one which will be discussed later in the theoretical framework of culture, power and dominance, it is still, nonetheless, necessary to search for a theoretical framework that shows not only "why" racism exists but also "how" racism occurs. Even more so, it is important to situate the

¹⁰⁰ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 494.

theoretical framework in actual, everyday practices in order to support the assertions made. Particularly, in the field of racism actual tools that may be employed to combat racism is needed in order to promote social change, and is an essential feature of critical theory.

For many Marxist humanists, the genesis of the problem lay in a critique of their own knowledge production. As commented by Stanley Aronowitz, "unless we question science, the dominant culture of late capitalism, Marxism can have no independent basis for its explanatory powers."¹⁰¹ This ties in more directly to the problematic found in critical science itself.

In being able to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges the falsity of science, is the problematic of escaping from another form of domination. As stated by Stephen K. White:

Foucault's own theory seems to tell us that such discourse about action can have no other status than that of another act in the "endlessly repeated play of domination." This raises the problem of how his discourse about new social movements can recommend itself to us in a normative sense.¹⁰²

On the one hand, the goal of critical science is to suggest the creation of a utopian discourse that presupposes the incorporation of those real relations, that show their objective conditions. Whereas, on the other hand, there is the danger of this new presentation of discourse as being equally oppressive and dominant. But it is also

¹⁰¹ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 9.

¹⁰² Stephen K. White, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory." American Political Science Review. (Vol. 80, No. 2, June 1986), p. 423.

impossible to deny that today, at this moment, we are living in a postmodern world of competing discourses where the hegemonic force of dominant culture prevails. Perhaps, one possible way in which to act within these competing discourses is through consensus. Jurgen Habermas would describe this as "communicative action." As stated by White, "communicative action" would:

serve as the framework for thinking about the normative or juridical aspects of subjectivity. More specifically, the idea of mutual accountability, between speakers and a possible unconstrained consensus between them provides Habermas with a way of interpreting equality and the mutual recognition of subjects in situations of normative conflict.¹⁰³

As mentioned earlier, however, this takes us back to the fact that today we are living in a post-colonial era where the expression of identities different from that of the dominant culture is suppressed. As stated by Cornel West, this is because of "White supremacist logics"¹⁰⁴ that are "guided by various hegemonic Western philosophies of identity that suppress difference, heterogeneity and multiplicity."¹⁰⁵ If this is the case, to begin is to engage in unpacking those layers of false illusions and to create a representational space for other cultures so that, a positive affirming identity may be discovered outside of a Eurocentric discourse.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.425.

¹⁰⁴ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 23.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

CHAPTER FOUR: A PRESENTATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURE, POWER AND DOMINANCE

Here, I will begin by exploring the concepts of culture, power and dominance by arguing that they are central concepts to both Marxian and Foucaultian perspectives, and essential to showing the "how" and "why" does racism operate simultaneously at both the systemic and individual levels. Before proceeding, however, my analysis will first define commonly used concepts of race, culture, and ethnicity in order to clarify their definitions, and to properly understand its meanings in the context of my conceptual framework of culture, power and dominance. The purpose of this section is to establish a theoretical framework from which racism as operating in an agency's structures and practices may be interpreted, analyzed and remedied.

Several writers have used a Marxian analysis (Bolari and Li, 1988; Miles 1989 and Wetherall and Potter, 1993) to explain how race is used as a social concept to maintain present class relations, and to further the development of capitalism. Specifically, it is accomplished by employing the biological characteristics of race by referring to the observable, physical characteristics of a person.¹⁰⁶ When race manifests into racism, however, it can be seen as serving both a social and political function. Robert Miles has argued that race is a "process of signification"¹⁰⁷ where the categorization of people into a hierarchy of groups serves as the means by which to justify the exclusion/inclusion of

¹⁰⁶ Robert Miles, Racism, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

various groups of people in the distribution and allocation of resources.¹⁰⁸ As noted by Bolari and Li, the economic and social development of Canada relied on the concept of race to justify the exploitation of various groups of people.¹⁰⁹ The changing historical forms of racism is closely tied to the development of capitalism. A fundamental feature of capitalism was the demand for cheap labour in its relations of production. The domination of subordinate populations became the central organizing feature of social relations.

By adopting the term race as a socio-political construct, created for its ideological effect, sets and defines the issue within a macro-level analysis of capitalism, colonialism and the state. Objectively, the term race does not exist except when construed and situated in the ideological and material processes of a capitalist mode of production. By extension, the practice of racism is only understood in its relationship to race and for purposes of maintaining a system of inequality. Similarly, it is understood that there are multiple oppressions based not only on race but also on class, gender, and sex. Hence, as stated by Kevin M. Brown, it is necessary that when discussing race "a specific form of oppression should therefore be investigated for the particularities of its practices and the ideology which informs them."¹¹⁰

According to Jordan and Weedon, the concept of culture is a "contested

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ B. Singh Bolaria and Peter S. Li, Racial Oppression in Canada. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985), p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Kevin M. Brown., "Keeping Their Distance: The Cultural Production and Reproduction of 'Racist Non-Racism'." Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology. (Volume 22, #3, 1986) p. 392.

category"¹¹¹ and is a "concept over whose meaning people are prepared to engage in serious intellectual and political battle."¹¹² Historically, the study of culture as a separate, dynamic areas of its own has not been sought as a field of inquiry due to the bias of the "positivist" tradition of social science.¹¹³ In many Marxian analyses, culture is "little more than ideological subterfuge." As stated by Wuthnow et al.,

from Marx the idea has been inherited that culture is an aspect of 'superstructure', separated as it were from the more object and consequential elements comprising the social 'infrastructure', namely, the means of production and social relations.¹¹⁴

In response to this gap in Marxist analyses, a new definition of culture, emerged from contemporary cultural studies which defined culture as the "signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored."¹¹⁵ By this definition, culture is not a separate sphere, nor is it readily dismissed in Marxist phenomenon but is "a set of material practices which constitutes meanings, values and subjectivities."¹¹⁶ The implications of bringing culture to the forefront is that, first, it suggests that "as human beings create

¹¹¹ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World, p. 6.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹³ Robert Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender and Race and the Postmodern World, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

culture so culture creates them."¹¹⁷ Culture as in the "realm of signifying practices"¹¹⁸ is mediated by representational codes that do not reflect reality or objective conditions but yet, is productive in creating culture. Moreover, the second implication of culture as a signifying system is that "culture determines subjectivity."¹¹⁹ According to Althusser, as stated by Grossberg et al.,

subjectivity is culturally determined, it is a function of the ideological practices by which certain subject positions become historically available.¹²⁰

For writers such as Richard Lichtman, who uses a critical Marxist perspective, culture is the material by which people come to organize our institutions and social relationships.¹²¹ This has profound implications in trying to address the problem of racism in the culture of social service agencies, and is potentially the means by which to adopt an anti-racism workplace and social service agency. Similarly, in the works of Foucault, he argues that discourse operates through the structure of culture. In practice, this is carried out through the totalization and individualization of the subject in relationship to the state. Here, Foucault, is speaking about subjectivity and the struggles

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 479.

¹¹⁹ Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender and Race and the Postmodern World., p. 8.

¹²⁰ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 7.

¹²¹ Richard Lichtman, "The Production of Human By Means of Human Nature," Capitalism, Nature, Socialism. (Vol. 4, 1989).

against the "government of individualization."¹²² In both the Marxian and Foucaultian perspectives, culture is the primary medium in which social practices can be constructed. The advantage of combining these two perspectives is in drawing a relationship between culture and social structure which normally has been a neglected area of study.¹²³

The prominent role given to the concept of culture with an understanding of its connection to material practices, means that race is not to be defined according to an 'essentialist' version of Marxist theory, nor is it to be defined as a form of cultural racism as adopted in multiculturalism policy, or, lastly, it is not to be defined in the form of the 'new racism' of liberalist rhetoric.¹²⁴ Rather, race is understood in context to its signifying practice, and particularly in relation to culture.

In turning to a definition for the term ethnicity, most commonly, it "acknowledges the place of history, language, and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity."¹²⁵ If the term ethnicity, however, is placed in its socio-political context, the root word ethnic carries specific connotations. According to Barb Thomas, in relation to the dominant culture, ethnic can be defined as the "non-dominant or less powerful cultural identities in Canada."¹²⁶ For example, in social service delivery systems, ethno-

¹²² Michel Foucault, "the Subject and Power," Critical Inquiry, p. 780.

¹²³ Robert Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas, p. 248.

¹²⁴ James Donald and Ali Rattansi, eds., Race, Culture and Difference.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 257.

¹²⁶ Barb Thomas, Multiculturalism At Work: A Guide to Organizational Change. (Toronto: YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto, 1987), p. 5.

specific agencies were created to fill in the gaps in service delivery that were not provided by mainstream agencies. But, in comparison to mainstream agencies, the survival of ethno-specific agencies was always tenuous as they were typically plagued with chronic underfunding, low salaries and high staff turnover.¹²⁷ It is of little surprise when considering that their role and purpose was to support the non-dominant cultures of society.

In the context of Western society, as commented by Hall, present conceptions of ethnicity are "predicated on difference and diversity."¹²⁸ On the one hand, there is the "hegemonic conception of 'Englishness'"¹²⁹ that "...stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses and which, because it is hegemonic, does not represent itself as an ethnicity at all."¹³⁰ While, on the other hand, there is the suppression of difference, in terms of expressing one's ethnicity, that it exists only in the margins and periphery of dominant discourse. The problem is to move ethnic discourse from the periphery into a representational space that is a positively, centred discourse. Because afterall, it is safe to argue, as commented by Hall, "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture."¹³¹ And, consequently, it is in ethnic identities that creates the subjective sense of who each and

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²⁸ James Donald and Ali Rattansi, eds., Race, Culture and Difference, p. 257.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

one of us are.

Power, as a concept in and of itself means very little. However, in the Marxian analysis power plays a central role. Marxist theory locates the origins and causes of inequality in a particular group, whose main purpose is to maintain their position of power through what is known as hegemony. By comparison, a Foucaultian perspective does not identify a particular power elite but rather views power as operating in multiple sites, in what is known as "discursive practices"¹³² in our society.

The operation of "discursive practices" is informed by the knowledge production-making about the "other" as expressed in language, discourse and subjectivity. Thus, power as an effect of knowledge constructs the identity of the "other". As stated by Foucault, it is "a technique, a form of power"¹³³ that "applies itself to everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth upon him which he must recognize and which others have come to recognize in him."¹³⁴ Similarly, the concept of discourse, as enacted through the mediation of culture, also plays a significant role in the works of Althusser, in that:

the social world be conceived as a system of valorizations or meanings that are sites of struggle ("contests of representation") between groups for social power.¹³⁵

¹³² Breuer, Stefan, "Foucault and Beyond: Towards a Theory of the Disciplinary Society." International Social Science Journal. (May 1989, Vol. 41, #2), p. 235.

¹³³ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," p. 781.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 781.

¹³⁵ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 480.

From these relations of power, evolve the creation of marginalized and oppressed groups whose identities are determined, reproduced and circumscribed in a set of relations of domination.

Domination is exercised through the use of power. Power can operate in two ways: through the ideology of a controlling class and through subjectivity, otherness and modernity. In the first instance, the concept of ideology is one in which the dominant group has a vested interest in falsifying reality through distortion. This is a negative concept of ideology intended to obscure the reality of exploitation and domination.¹³⁶

In practice, as noted by Wetherall and Potter:

ideology is the means by which the ruling class consolidates and reproduces its advantage through presenting its partial and sectional interests as the universal interests of the entire community.¹³⁷

In the second instance, Michel Foucault claims that power is not exerted directly by the state apparatus but rather through the domination and subjugation of those who are excluded in society.¹³⁸ The relationship between power and knowledge shows the productive function of an information economy. For example, the media, school, and places are places of knowledge production. The power of discourse penetrates all aspects of society as it eventually becomes commonsense in that it dictates the values, beliefs and attitudes of society in general. More importantly, it also enters into state policies as a

¹³⁶ Margaret Wetherall and Jonathan Potter, Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 31.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹³⁸ Breuer Stefan, "Foucault and Beyond: Towards a Theory of the Disciplinary Society," p. 236.

legitimate form of knowledge presented as a liberal ideology.

In modern society, Breuer interprets the discursivation process as the codification and rationalization of people into a disciplinary subject.¹³⁹ Breuer states:

the juridical subject becomes the focal point of a classifying and objectifying mode of perception, which then recruits the individual into a complex framework of justiciable characteristics and evidential facts.¹⁴⁰

The techniques of power operates in the individual through the objectification of oneself to the knowledge that is circulating and functioning about the "other". So instead of society being controlled and regulated by a particular political elite, the masses are being produced by the discursive practices of knowledge about the "other." Knowledge created through discourse is productive and self-constituting. The basis of which is rooted in Eurocentric notions of commonsense knowledge about the "other". The form it takes is in the many competing discourses that are produced, and determined by whoever holds power in society. For example, the suppression of identities that are contrary to what is deemed acceptable in mainstream society results in their stigmatization and exclusion. In many ways, it is a form of social control that does not require overt control of the social body. Instead, it is socially inscribed by the images created by the media, and popular culture on what is considered normal in society.

In Western society, discourses produced by mainstream society about the "other" carry within them assumptions of superiority, and differential power relations. The

¹³⁹ Stefan Breuer, "Foucault and Beyond: Towards a Disciplinary Society," p, 236.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

internalization of dominant culture's definition of the "other," on the part of ethnic groups, creates feelings of oppression and alienation from one's own cultural identity. In addition, it is a form of regulation to the dominant groups' definition of ethnic groups. The social and political function of racist statements is to maintain dominance over subordinate groups, and to silence oppressed groups. An effective means by which to prevent any challenges to the present hegemonic, discourse.

The distortion in the production of reality by the dominant group serves to maintain the hegemonic interests of the ruling class. Even the oppressed are no longer able to see beneath this illusion as reality becomes apparent:

power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.¹⁴¹

In many respects, Foucault is referring to the concept of the cultural production of identity. Originally developed by Bourdieu (1973), the idea of cultural reproduction was mainly confined to the education system as it was defined as "the function of the education system as being to reproduce the culture of the dominant classes, thus helping to ensure their continued dominance and to perpetuate their covert exercise of power."¹⁴² In this framework, what is important to note, is the productive function of culture in reproducing present class, social, and economic relations of production. As stated by Chris Jenks:

culture, as a process, is emergent, it is forthcoming, it is continuous

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁴² Chris Jenks, ed., Cultural Reproduction. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.

in the way of reproducing, and as all social processes, it provides the grounds and the parallel context of social action itself.¹⁴³

A similar idea is to be found in the works of Louis Althusser who argues for a theory of ideology that is, essentially, "the theory of the necessary domination of ideology." As stated by Jorge Larraín, Althusser argues that:

ideology is a functional requirement of society which constitutes subjects in their imaginary relations to their world as if their minds were just helpless and passive.¹⁴⁴

Thus, "ideology is defined by those cultural processes where effect is the constitution of subjects." It is the process of subjectification that allows ideology to function in the form of domination. Like Foucault, subjects are created by discourse and "this discursive content is made up of naming and narration that constitute a view of agents as subjects inscribed within and marked by social processes."¹⁴⁵ Specifically, it is through the process of "interpellation" where subjects are created.¹⁴⁶ But, moreover, according to Amariglio et al., in relation to the social structure, it is the actual "ideological 'practices'"¹⁴⁷ that:

particular class processes are one of the conditions of existence of the reproduction or transformation of these apparatuses, which require the distribution of surplus labour both to themselves and to the agents

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Jorge Larraín, The Concept of Ideology, p. 163.

¹⁴⁵ Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, p. 493.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 493.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 494.

responsible for their direction and operation.¹⁴⁸

This is to ensure the present class relations, and the occupation of particular class positions by both dominate and dominated populations.

It can be argued, subsequently, that the cultural production of a negative identity is a key component to producing feelings of powerlessness in oppressed groups, and serves to justify the actions of the oppressor. The competing discourses are the site of political struggle and is how each individual is able to construct his/her identity. In a social service agency, racist statements are social meanings created without the consent of the subjugated. The purpose of racist discourse can, thus, be examined in relation to the social and material conditions of a capitalist mode of production.

The concepts culture, power and dominance; central to both the critical Marxian and Foucaultian perspectives, and to unravelling the many complexities of racism in a capitalist mode of production. Culture is a dynamic, material force that operates either ideologically or non-ideologically to produce relations of domination. From a Marxist perspective, Althusser's notion of ideology, purports that the:

concept of discourse allows a deconstruction of the opposition between culture (as a realm of signifying practices) and society (as a realm of experience or life that is supposedly prediscursive, a sort of nature or objectivity that is not shaped by representational codes or mediated by signifying practices).¹⁴⁹

It is to suggest that a counter-hegemonic discourse act as a form of resistance to the power articulated through domination. Similarly, in the Foucaultian perspective it is

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

important to take it one step further, that is, to advocate for the production of a positively, centred discourse based not on the Eurocentric conceptualization of race and racism, but instead, a non-racialist discourse that accepts the inclusion of cultural identities, valid to their own expression. The problematic in post-colonial societies is the non-acceptance of multiple identities because of the binary, universalist notions of subjectivity . Too often, in Western discourse, we still hear about other cultures in binary opposition to the "hegemonic Western philosophies of identity"¹³⁰ as "true/false, good/evil, pure/impure"¹³¹ The challenge, for a postmodern world, is to find ways to disrupt these impositions of a colonialist worldview of people dominated because of their race, as it is carried into present-day discourse.

Barriers and Obstacles to Social Change:

In a post-colonial era, the challenge is to recognize the changing, historical forms of racism, and the many barriers and obstacles to its eradication. The conceptualization of cultural differences is to somehow fit these ethnic people into dominant society. To illustrate, in examining past approaches to remedying racism, such as the hiring of multicultural outreach workers, and the hiring of cultural interpreters, suggest that "we don't have any problem of racism, the problem is to do with cultural differences." Yet, in practice, what happens, by adopting this approach, is the compartmentalization of ethnic clients from mainstream clients. Similarly, this is reflected in the staff and

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 23.

resource power-sharing of the organization. The provision of separate services rather than an integration of services, results in the ghettoization of ethnic clients, their staff, and funding from the organization itself. This approach is yet another form of cultural racism. According to Barb Thomas, the assumptions behind add-on approaches is as follows:

- (1) Canadians are primarily white, of European origins, English speaking.
- (2) While most immigrants assimilate to Canadian norms, some require special assistance.
- (3) Some minority people experience prejudice, which is mainly a form of ignorance.
- (4) Prejudice can be addressed by personal contact and accurate information.¹³²

Hence, in tackling racism in social service agencies requires first and foremost the need to end what Lena Dominelli, describes as "the conspiracy of silence about the presence of racism in social work."¹³³ For the most part, culturally-sensitive services has not been defined synonymously with racism. The failure of past approaches in providing services is due to the need to adopt an approach which clearly recognizes both the structural and attitudinal aspects of culturally-sensitive services. Until the conceptualization of race and racism is contextualized in a post-colonial era, and its attendant barriers to social change, social workers and policy-makers will continue to flounder in a form of cultural racism, leaving issues of power, culture and dominance to neglect. On the one hand, services may be provided according to the belief that barriers

¹³² Barb Thomas, Multiculturalism at Work: A Guide to Organizational Change. p.32.

¹³³ Lena Dominelli, "Tackling Racism at Organizations: Working of Agency Policies and Practices." Sister Outsider. (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1988), p. 127.

to culturally-sensitive services is a result of cultural misunderstandings. Or, on the other hand, services may be provided according to an acknowledgement of the existence of racism, which may be defined as "not only social attitudes towards non-dominant ethnic and racial groups, but also to social structures and actions which oppress, exclude and discriminate against such individuals and groups."¹⁵⁴

In the next section, a discussion of racism in social service agencies with an application of the concepts of culture, power and dominance as integral to its conceptualization. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide anti-racism strategies that may be used to eradicate the problem of racism in social service agencies, and to describe the barriers that may be encountered in the process. More importantly, an emphasis is given to the role of subjectivity on the part of the dominated, and to the responsibility of social service agencies to critically, examine their own organizations as part of the problem.

¹⁵⁴ Barb Thomas, Multiculturalism at Work: A Guide to Organizational Change, p. 6.

CHAPTER FIVE: RACISM IN SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES: ANTI-RACISM STRATEGIES, A VIABLE SOLUTION

Today, on the part of social service agencies, incentives to change towards adopting the practice of an anti-racism organization are numerous. First, statistics overwhelmingly confirm that Canada is changing more and more into an ethnically-diverse country. If an agency's mandate is to serve their community, then agencies need to respond to these changing demographics. For instance, Canada statistics report that "over one third of adult landed immigrants have no knowledge of English or French prior to arrival in Canada."¹⁵⁵ In addition, in the 1986 census, 38 percent of the Canadian population are reported to having "some non-British or non-French ethnic origin."¹⁵⁶ In light of these demographics, failing to respond to the needs of the community, would lend itself to a form of racism that perpetuates a dominant ideology of exclusion.

Superficial changes in the delivery of social services did not produce permanent change in the way organizations functioned. Social services operate in the context of a capitalist mode of production which, consequently, produces relations of domination, exclusion and exploitation of various oppressed groups of people. People are discriminated not only on the basis of race but also on class, gender, age and ability/disability. The oppression of marginalized members of society is embedded in our

¹⁵⁵ United Way of Greater Toronto, Action, Access, Diversity: A Guide to Multicultural/Anti-Racist Organizational Change for Social Service Agencies, p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

social structures and institutions. The purpose of social services is limited to compensating those individuals who suffer from the negative ills produced by the capitalist mode of production. Social workers, as employees of the state are coopted into the state apparatus which function to maintain the present inequalities of the capitalist state.¹⁵⁷ In studying racism, it is not merely an isolated problem of a few individuals but rather is intimately connected to the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, placing racism in its socio-political context is paramount to providing the linkages between the macro-functions of inequality and the "micro-inequities"¹⁵⁸ carried out in everyday practices.

Examining both a social service agency's structures and practices depends on using social theory and, in this instance, applying the concepts power, culture and dominance as central variables responsible for maintaining the present dynamics of inequality within the culture of a social service agency. Such concepts are central to both Marxian and Foucaultian perspectives, and essential to showing the "how" and "why" racism operates simultaneously at both the systemic and individual level. As defined by Rowe, systemic racism:

marks the meeting point between structural and interactional forms of racism and exists within the specificity of the 'ethos' or sociocultural environment of the organization.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice, p. 80.

¹⁵⁸ Philomena Essed, Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory, p. 37.

¹⁵⁹ Philomena Essed, Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory, p. 37.

By operating at both levels, racism is reinforced and supported not only by the structures of an organization such as the staffing, policies, practices and procedures, but also by everyone in the organization, including management, front-line workers, board and volunteers.

To begin, for social workers employed in social service organizations, it is important to note that power exercised by the dominant group is not an all encompassing force which leave no opportunities for change. In fact, anti-racism strategies can be employed to challenge and confront the many forms of inequality existing in social service against visible minority service users. More generally, anti-racism strategies work by focussing on two areas. First, it is a critical appraisal of an agency's policies and practices within the context of a capitalist mode of production. Second, it directly addresses inequities by eliminating barriers to access and participation of visible minorities.¹⁶⁰ In addition, any efforts made towards anti-racism strategies recognizes that work must be carried out at all levels of an organization which means gaining the involvement of the centres of power in an organization, that is, management, in the struggle for organizational change.

As with any organizational structure, it is in the policies and programs that determine service delivery, and is where the locus of power is to be found. The decisions made in policy by management affect, determine and decide the inclusion/exclusion of equitable service delivery. Consequently, the structures that are created in a organization

¹⁶⁰ United Way of Greater Toronto, Action, Access, Diversity: A Guide to Multicultural/Anti-Racist Organizational Change for Social Service Agencies, p. 3.

are very much a representation of the ethnic composition of the board, staff and management. In many social service agencies, the ethnic composition of those in positions of power reveal that it is exclusively the preserve of White, middle-class people. Thus, changing these structures is a formidable task since, as stated by Audrey Lourde, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."¹⁶¹ Inequalities that are built into the structures of an organization must begin by challenging the hegemonic view of the dominant group. As noted in a report by United Way, opposition to anti-racism change will "arise out of fear, issues of power, racism, and past experiences with change."¹⁶² Therefore, in order to instigate, the giving up of hegemonic power to a sharing of power, within an anti-racism framework, requires the employment of anti-racism policies, and employment equity policies that, in the eventual end, will promote long-lasting changes both to service delivery and employment practices.

The rationale for focussing on employment equity policies is to gradually have staff, volunteers and board reflect the community they serve. Ethnic diversity in the organization will serve two purposes. First, it will accurately reflect the broader views of the community and, therefore, allow for a sharing of power with members who are more representative of the community itself. Second, it will increase the opportunities for people who will most likely challenge the status quo. Specifically, a combination of

¹⁶¹ Audrey Lourde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Sister Outsider. (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 123.

¹⁶² United Way of Greater Toronto, Action, Access, Diversity: A Guide to Multicultural/Anti-Racist Organizational Change for Social Service Agencies, p. 99.

identifying barriers to employment participation and active recruitment of visible minorities will change the ethnic composition. Similarly, this should be accompanied by involving ethno-racial communities in the "planning, delivery and evaluation of services."¹⁶³ Too often, organizations claim to know the needs of the community, and develop programs with little consultation from community members. To reflect these changes, mainstream agencies will need to incorporate the diversity of their community by stating this in their mandate, brochures, and other methods of communication.

At the same time, an anti-racism organization has mechanisms in place within its structure to appropriately handle racist statements. It is of little value to respond only to the complaint itself because the problem is not simply an isolated act of prejudice, it is also about taking action that holds the structure, service delivery and staff accountable to racism. As noted by Dominelli, anti-racism social work has three components to it:

1. verify and demonstrate the existence of racism in social work practice in its varied forms;
2. take a stand against these; and
3. work both individually and collectively in bringing about anti-racist policies and practices.¹⁶⁴

The purpose in countering individual acts of racism is to demonstrate to all who are involved in the organization that it is not tolerated, nor accepted. Further, a complaint centre that is connected to policy and practice will objectively identify the patterns of discrimination operating in an organization. The process that may be gained from these

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Dominelli, Lena, "Tackling Racism at the Organizational Level: Working on Agency Policy and Practices," p. 128.

experiences can form the material in which to create the anti-racism policy, and to modify practices compatible to an anti-racism organization. Input can come from staff, volunteers and board, and, more significantly, from community members who are users of the services.

If an agency is to adopt any changes to its structures and practices, commitment and responsibility must come from board and management. Certainly, the impetus may start from front-line workers, but in order for permanent changes to occur accountability from the people who hold power in the agency is needed, otherwise, the agency will return to the familiar practice of bringing only minor, superficial changes. If the advocates for change are primarily front-line workers, despite their intentions, they too can become part of the oppressive structures. Instead of changing the power structures, front-line workers become collaborators of it. For example, it was not uncommon to find the ghettoization of ethnic, minority workers in program areas that nobody else wanted to work in, and usually the client population was composed of visible minority populations. Evidence to support existing power differentials, was shown by the fact that, typically, multicultural services were the first to be axed or, if in place, were considered a low priority within the organization as it was plagued with chronic funding problems.¹⁶³

For people engaged in anti-racism social work, being able to challenge the status quo requires being able to speak out about the problem. Many writers (Dominelli, 1988;

¹⁶³ My experience working as a multicultural outreach workers in a mainstream agency. June Yee, 1992.

Spender, 1985) have written about the silence on the prevalence and existence of racism, particularly on the part of those affected by racism, and those who feel helpless in promoting change. The biggest obstacle to challenging the system, is workers being faced with the same feelings of the oppressed, that is, the "alienation and powerlessness of the subordinate classes."¹⁶⁶ Powerlessness can be defined as the "lack of control persons have over their environment and their destiny."¹⁶⁷ A Postmodernism critique, however, offers a place of resistance to this form of domination and subjugation by using one's identity as a source of power to reject the imposition of a social meaning created without the person's consent. Walkerdine comments eloquently on the powerful effects of speaking out:

we are beginning to speak of our histories, and as we do, it will be to reveal the burden of pain and desire that formed us and, in so doing, expose the terrifying fraudulence of our subjugation.¹⁶⁸

Speaking out breaks the silencing effect of feelings of powerlessness. Language is critical to according value to actions that are exclusionary, derogatory, or unjust. Thus, it is important that the word racism can be used to name such discriminatory practices. As further commented by Walkerdine, "reclaim that, name it, speak it, for it lies a childhood like so many, and yet all too easily explained away in a pathologization of difference."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice, p. 160.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁶⁸ Valerie Walkerdine, "Dreams From an Ordinary Childhood," Schoolgirl Fictions. (London: Verso, 1991), p. 170.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

In a workplace setting, developing support groups composed of allies who are committed to the change process of an organization will help reduce the immobilizing feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Being involved in an anti-racism social work practice relies on what we have in ourselves to create change. The way an agency is structurally organized depends on the people working in it, since it those people who create the culture of the organization. In fact, from a critical Marxist perspective, Lichtman's statement that "we are simultaneously the subject and object of our activity"¹⁷⁰ suggests the possibility that it is the people themselves who determine the culture of the organization. Assuming there is a relationship between culture and social structure, then as workers we can effect change in an organization's practice.

Therefore, working from a cultural Marxist perspective, culture is the primary medium by which social practices are determined. In a post-colonial world, the domination of other cultures by a Eurocentrist concept of relations lies beneath the surface illusions of acceptance and equality. Even on an unconscious level, culture determines the actions and behaviours of those working in an organization. As stated by Bhaba:

the structure of the Oedipus complex may emerge in the colonial situation but only because the colonial subject is constructed through imposed cultural and political forms which are internalized as a condition of psychic reality and then reproduced as the basis for normative social experience.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Richard Lichtman, "The Production of Human Nature By Means of Human Nature," p. 14.

¹⁷¹ Robert J.C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, p. 171.

Here, it is shown that on the hand, culture is produced so as to recreate conditions of domination. While, on the other hand, culture is sustained through the people's normalization of the present social, economic and political relationships of inequality.

In many mainstream agencies, board and management dictate the policies and practices of the organization. According to critical Marxist theory, they can be identified as the dominant group making all the decisions, however, it can also be argued that they are only one discourse within an organization. Contrary to viewing board and management as one, big monolith, controlling all the power in the organization there also exists what Spender states "conflict and contradiction"¹⁷² which can also be the "very vehicles of change and progress."¹⁷³ In capitalist society, exists a basic contradiction which is phrased by Lichtman as "the reality of social domination and the ideology of pure self-realization."¹⁷⁴ Lichtman elaborates by stating that:

the self is not the main form of reality but the main illusion by the compacted reality of complex, alienated structures of social domination.¹⁷⁵

Because our institutions and political systems are embedded with racist thought, ideology and practices, many ethnic groups become disconnected from their own cultural identities, and are not even aware of this alienation from themselves. For example, clients who are

¹⁷² Dale Spender, "Constructing Women's Silence." Man-Made Language, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 6.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Lichtman, "The Production of Human Nature By Means of Human Nature," p. 38.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

not from mainstream society have had experiences of racism but the problem is that their story can never be heard. They are silenced into believing that it is because of some fault of their own. The myth of capitalism, is the belief of such statements as: "if only, I tried harder I could have had the job." The myth here, is the belief that everyone has an equal opportunity. But, this denies the reality that structural barriers to access and participation for non-dominant groups is a part of that alienation from oneself and from the structures of our political and social institutions.

Part of the process in connecting the self to reality, is for people to begin engaging in critical thinking and feeling about the status quo in order to deconstruct the oppressive notions of race, class and gender that they have come to normalize within themselves. Similarly, on the part of service providers, they too participate in this process of illusion creation, except that their role is one of self-interest, that is, in maintaining the present state of inequality. For instance, a barrier for board and management to give full support to an anti-racism organizational change program is a failure to critically examine their own strategic position in the system. The threat of a loss of power, is to disrupt the hegemonic power of management and board who are the major stakeholders in any social service agency. Thus, one of the most strongest barriers to change is from management. Paulo Freire accounts for management's resistance as being due to the fact that "the oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves."¹⁷⁶ Evidence to support this argument is how many times, an agency, even when instigated by management, will show great interest in

¹⁷⁶ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice, p. 158.

adopting anti-racism strategies, yet actually putting this to practice is non-existent.¹⁷⁷

Finally, a central component to the change process is to give voice and to representation to non-dominant groups.¹⁷⁸ The purpose of encouraging the participation of non-dominant groups is twofold. First, it can be a strong source of resistance and opposition which challenges the dominant discourse held by those in positions of power within an agency. Second, new discourses can be created by the people who are using the services. By doing so, it will give greater power to visible, minority groups by allowing them to define their needs in service delivery. Social services by virtue of being a part of the state apparatus, excludes and oppresses visible minority groups by defining their needs through the "loci of the individualizing (subjugating) effects of power"¹⁷⁹ with little attention given to the socio-political context of their circumstances. Mullaly argues that the pathologization of people's private troubles serves social control functions which directly supports the interests of the dominant group.¹⁸⁰ More attention should be given to understanding the historical background and experiences of different populations, and their role in relationship to the capitalist state.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ The Executive Director of an agency frequently stated that an anti-racism organization was a top priority but the financial reality is that the agency cannot afford to maintain the program.

¹⁷⁸ Dr. Usha George, Presentation on Anti-Racism Strategies, June 1994.

¹⁷⁹ William Bogard, "Discipline and Deterrence: Rethinking Foucault on the Question of Power in Contemporary Society." The Social Science Journal. (Vol. 28, Number 3), p. 336.

¹⁸⁰ Robert Mullaly, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice, p. 158.

¹⁸¹ Dr. Usha George, Presentation on Anti-Racism Strategies, June 1994.

In conclusion, breaking down the structural barriers to the access and participation of non-dominant groups in social service agencies is central to any anti-racism organizational change program. Social workers can play a vital role in the process by making connections, to their role and function as workers of the state apparatus, in relation to ethnic groups, and how this contributes to the marginalization of non-dominant groups. Gaining awareness of one's own culture is closely related to being able to understand other cultures. The two are inseparable processes.¹¹² For starters, we need to begin to listen to the experiences and needs of ethno-racial communities, and part of that process involves being critical of your own self-identity as being enmeshed in the capitalist mode of production. Racism is not only about people but it is also about social structures and institutions. And finally, the employment of anti-racism strategies is about engaging in a process for social change in order to produce equity, equal access and fair outcomes for non-dominant members of society.

¹¹² Edward T. Hall, Beyond Culture. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1976), p. 69.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS

In conclusion, for social service agencies, being able to intervene in helpful ways stresses the need for cultural practices that are anti-racist and accepting of differences. In a capitalist mode of production, the category of race exists to create the "other," and is the means by which people can be dominated. The "other" is excluded and devalued for being different from what the Enlightenment period has defined as an acceptable, universal standard.¹⁰ Hence, placing the profession of social work in its socio-political context was paramount to identifying the barriers to creating, perhaps, what may be called an authentic social work practice. Authentic social work practice is about legitimating a client's story or narration with a critical stance towards imposing Western values and assumptions in cross-cultural social work. More generally, it is also about acknowledging the role of colonialism, capitalism and the state in producing oppressive structures and practices.

Possible future research, from a critical theory perspective, could document the many way in which racism operates in everyday practice in order to further substantiate the theoretical framework of power, culture, and dominance. For instance, the use of discourse analysis could show connections between the surface illusions of common-sense images of racism to the objective, actual conditions of social relations. A more extensive study showing actual, talk about racism to the everyday experiences of visible, minority service users could be compared. The advantage of such research, is of course, the

¹⁰ Stephen K. White, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory," p. 420.

importance of further, empirically grounded evidence that demonstrates how racism operates in everyday practice rather than theoretical treatises that contribute to forms of 'new racism' in liberalist rhetoric.

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