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Wilfrid Laurier University, giri4030@mylaurier.ca

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Experiences of Racialized Service Providers who Work with Racialized Clients: Functions and
Constraints of Master and Counter-Narratives of Helping, Racism, and Vicarious Racism

By

Prapti Giri

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Social Work

Wilfrid Laurier University

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ABSTRACT

What are the experiences of racialized frontline workers? How do they experience vicarious racism? I interviewed 8 frontline workers who were involved in counseling racialized individuals. The narrative paradigm, constructivist self-development theory (CSDT), and critical race theory (CRT) were the theoretical frames that guided the interviews and data analysis in order to answer these questions. I conducted a structural narrative analysis, which revealed how participants utilized assumptions from master narratives and at other times countered them. Interviewees occasionally stepped outside of the master narrative entirely, for example, by rejecting the categorization of race. According to CSDT, our meanings are determined by schemas, which can be altered through experiences such as trauma, including vicarious trauma. Vicarious racism was similar to vicarious trauma in that it involved empathic engagement and occasionally, schema or somatic changes. Negative schema changes included: hypervigilance, development of double consciousness, and self-doubt. The primary positive schema change was moving from passive witness to active agent. However, vicarious racism did not always change one's schema as participants used coping skills, such as double consciousness, normalization or counter-narratives, developed from their own experiences of racialization. A sense of belonging, mentorship and/or privilege was related to how vicarious racism was processed and whether or not counter-narratives were sustained. In using CRT as a theoretical lens, I examined not just how meaning is made by individual experiences, but how power relations and master narratives interplay with meaning making and schema development.

Keywords: Critical race theory, White supremacy, racism, empathy, racial contract, master narratives, counter-narratives, vicarious racism, professionalization, narrative analysis, double consciousness.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Just prior to beginning my Master of Social Work (MSW) program I had attained an undergraduate degree in psychology where I completed a thesis on vicarious trauma¹. My hope was to continue with this research; however, after learning about systemic oppression, my interest in incorporating a macro perspective was piqued. When I attempted to speak up about my own experiences of racism in class I felt silenced by classmates in my program. When I talked to my racialized peers about my experiences they began to share their own painful experiences of racism in various institutions where adherence to Whiteness² was implicit, including Laurier. In hearing their stories I found myself even more horrified about the existence of racism and became more hypervigilant about the impact of White supremacy³. I then read *The Racial Contract* by Charles Mills (1997) in order to try to begin understanding why racism exists and how it operates. I learned about the master narrative of White supremacy, its origins and how it continues to shape the world we live in, including our classroom. This book has completely

¹ Vicarious trauma is a negative transformation of one's schema after empathically engaging with and becoming witness to stories of trauma (Pearlman & Saakvitine, 1995; See Section 2.3 for more detail).

² Whiteness is a social relationship and "changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence [...]" the term whiteness signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg, 1993, as cited in Razak & Jeffery, 2002).

³ "White supremacy" and "racism" are used synonymously in this paper; however, "White supremacy" is the preferred term as it makes explicit that the maintenance of racial hierarchies is socially constructed for the purpose of political domination, which secures privileges of those who are already dominant or "White" (Mills, 1997; See Section 2.1.1 for more detail).

changed how I view the world and along with my own experiences at Laurier it also inspired me to change my research topic and to only speak with people of colour whose voices are so often discredited and silenced.

In exploring the literature, I found out that there is a construct called “vicarious racism” and I became curious as to how it may relate to vicarious trauma. I found that the research on this topic was scant and the theoretical foundation of vicarious racism was far from consistent in any of the scholarly work completed so far. I was astonished that no one had incorporated any of the work done on vicarious trauma into theorizing about vicarious racism. In this study, I do so. I incorporate the theoretical frameworks of vicarious trauma, the *Racial Contract* and critical race theory (CRT) to consider master and counter-narratives of racialized frontline workers, and explore how vicarious racism either changes or sustains these narratives. My main research questions are: What are the experiences of racialized service providers who work with racialized clients? How does working with other people of colour impact the narrative of the racialized counselor? Is vicarious racism a factor in how they work with others?

1.2 My Experiences of Racialization: Locating myself in the research

I was born in Nepal, in 1976, into a dominant class of people who were politically and economically endowed with privilege. When my family moved to Canada in 1988, our position changed from privileged and dominant to racialized and marginalized. Before I entered this MSW program, I spent about 14 years as a nurse, mostly in downtown Toronto. I did not have trouble finding a job, my colleagues were of many different backgrounds, but I was made aware that no matter how invisible a minority I tried to be or how much status I gained, I was never going to be the same as a white-skinned immigrant. For example, people always ask me where I *really* come from, sometimes this question is asked before they even know my name. I began to

notice that none of my White peers were asked this question; they got to be *truly Canadian*. As time went on, no matter how much I grew to love this country and give back through my volunteer work, relationships, community building, and employment, I realized that I was never going to belong in the same way as my White-immigrant peers. Still, I didn't conceptualize these experiences as "racism" until I began to learn about oppression in my MSW program and read *The Racial Contract*.

As I began to critically examine my own experiences, I was able to externalize internalized feelings of not being "good enough," feelings cultivated by systemic oppression based on the ideals of White supremacy, sexism, and capitalism. However, it was in the silencing I experienced in the MSW program that I found that CRT was indeed correct: racism is an ordinary and easily disguised experience that privileges the dominant voice.

As I hope to learn how to be a "helper" who works with racialized people and who does not perpetuate social work's horrific history of oppression and colonization, I am motivated to understand how other racialized frontline workers cope with experiences of racism and vicarious racism. How can we escape the master narrative of White supremacy? How do we find our own definition of goodness while operating in institutions where the unquestioned status quo reminds us daily that we are not good enough? Do we need to play into the script of Whiteness to be good or is there another way? What do we learn from our racialized clients? These are the questions I have been asking myself as I have been working through this thesis.

In conducting this research, I have been reminded, first, that I am a settler in Canada and am, therefore, implicated in Canada's project of colonization. Also, I hold privilege as a relatively light skinned person on the spectrum of racialization, as well as my class privilege which has afforded me formal education, credentials and a sense of entitlement. I have also come

to examine my own assumptions about race and the ways in which master narratives that I have unknowingly taken up have constrained the way I am in the world. I realize that I am biased in this study as I wanted to hear stories of strength and empowerment from the people I interviewed. I was searching for hope. Thus, in my interviews, I attempted to create space that invited counter-narratives and stories of resistance and resilience. At the same time, as I witness the world change around me, where master narratives are encouraged by large corporations and tweets of hatred spew from President Trump, I am also biased in that I do not wish to create more divide between racialized and White individuals. I am reminded by Mills (1997) that White supremacy is not primarily about colour, but about power and domination.

1.3 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis has been organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 (*Introduction*) contains my rationale and motivation for this thesis topic as well as an explanation of my location in the research. Chapter 2 (*Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations*) provides an overview of the implications and uses of master and counter-narratives; a very brief summary of *The Racial Contract*; the relationship between critical race theory and counter storytelling; a summary of the theoretical framework for vicarious trauma; as well relevant research on vicarious racism. I conclude Chapter 2 with my research questions and the purpose of my study. In Chapter 3 (*Methodology and Approach to the Study*) I describe narrative methods and critical race theory as a methodology. I also review my methods. Chapter 4 (*Findings*) is divided into three parts: i) Narratives of helping as a performance of White, liberal civility; ii) Personal narratives of racism; iii) Narratives of vicarious racism. Chapter 5 (*Discussion and Implications*) outlines the contributions made through the data analysis to the theoretical understanding of vicarious racism. I also discuss the implications of this study for the profession of social work in general and for

other frontline workers in particular. I then conclude by reflecting on this research journey and summarize the key findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I discuss “master and counter-narratives” as they are understood in CRT and narrative analysis literature in general. Then, I review a specific example of a counter-narrative, *The Racial Contract*, as told by Charles Mills (1997). I then discuss critical race theory and how master and counter-narratives are understood within this theoretical framework. I then explore master narratives of helping as they pertain to service providers in Canada and in social work. In section two, I discuss the research on “vicarious racism” and the theoretical frameworks used to understand this construct. In section three, I discuss constructivist self-development theory which has been used to understand the psychological construct of vicarious trauma. I demonstrate how this theory could both help and limit the understanding of alterations in individual narratives when faced with direct and vicarious experiences of racism. In line with constructivist self-developmental theory I also discuss the role of empathy in vicarious experiences. Finally, in section four I examine the ways in which the theories I have discussed will be amalgamated in this research project and the research questions.

2.1 Master Narratives and Counter-Narratives

In this study, I align myself with theorists who argue that narratives are the way people create meaning of events in their lives. That is, in telling about their experiences, they order events in a particular sequence in order to make and convey, to their particular audience, a particular meaning from their experiences (Chase, 2003; Riessman, 1993; Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour & Bamberg, 1996). Thus, narratives can be considered a meaning making tool that shape the reality of the individual. However, personal narratives are always incomplete and

changing depending on the context (e.g. the audience and time) of the telling (Bamberg, 2004; Jones, 2002; Mischler, 1995). Master narratives, on the other hand, are much more stable and “constrain narratives of personal experiences” (Talbot et al., 1996, p. 225). They are created by the dominant group in society in order to maintain their status as normal and good and whose voices, by virtue of their dominance, are the loudest and asserted as most valuable (Mishler, 1995). Thus, events in master narratives are sequenced to provide guidance as to how anyone can achieve the normalcy and goodness of the dominant group, who are said and “read” to have the right to power and goodness because of their positionality (Bamberg, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, claims made in master narratives are meant to be “self-evident” and not needing any particular defense (Talbot et al., 1996).

For example, in the story of Canadian nationhood, the project of Western colonial conquest is rationalized by narratives told of Europeans coming to a virgin land and turning it into a place that is now habitable, civilized and prosperous. In this telling, Canadians are encouraged to forget that there were already inhabitants in North America and the European and thus Canadian legacy of genocide of Indigenous people is completely erased. Thus, the dominant version of events positions the European conqueror as the exemplar of the good and the moral individual, while the Indigenous being is considered savage and not worth remembering in human history (Mills, 1997). In this way, master narratives create standards of what is normal and good and these standards are only achievable for Whites. Over time, the manifestation of White supremacy has changed, for example, it would no longer be acceptable to call racialized people “savage”; however, they are still only seen as “good” or “human” when they play the White script and mirror the standards set by the White colonizer.

When personal narratives fit into the dominant narrative there is no need for an individual to defend their situation or experience as it is viewed as “isomorphic to “reality” (Talbot et al., 1996, p. 226) and legitimate. Thus, master narratives can serve to guide our own personal narratives and give us direction for and a means of judging our everyday experiences and actions (Bamberg, 2004). The merit of a master narrative is that it helps us function as individuals with a common understanding of what is normal and good. If, however, we are, for whatever reason, positioned outside of the dominant group we have a choice to either see ourselves as bad/immoral, as determined by the master narrative, or we can resist the master narrative with our own counter narrative and justify why we are still worthy of goodness. Either way, in accepting or countering, we always position ourselves in relation to the dominant narrative (Bamberg, 2004). This is to say that the power of the master narrative is not only in *what* it says, but in the way it structurally affects *who* can say.

Counter-narratives are often told by people when master narratives constrain their agency and morality. For example, the master narrative that Europeans built the nation excludes the contribution of, not only Indigenous people, but also of immigrants from other parts of the world. It also fails to reveal how and why others could not participate in that construction. For example, people of colour were not permitted to enter Canada as they were viewed as having “undesirable morality” (Immigration Act, 1906 as cited Boyd & Vickers, 2000). Despite such policies, Chinese and Indian immigrants as well as Black Loyalist and Jamaican Maroon pioneers were recruited as unskilled and semi-skilled laborers, or as domestic workers since the 1800s (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Jackson, 2015). In Canada, they were faced with dangerous working conditions with high accident rates, irregular pay, poor living conditions and many barriers to reuniting with

their own families (Avery, 1995). Such histories of how Canada was built are again left out of history books and the master narrative.

One purpose of the counter-narrative is to challenge the master narrative by making its assumptions explicit, demonstrating who it serves and whose stories are not being told (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). They are also told to demonstrate how individual disobedience to the rules of the master narrative can still redeem the disobedient as good and moral agents (Talbot et al., 1996). For example, critical race theorists counter the epistemic master narrative of positivism which asserts that quantitative data is the only source of truth by asserting that the experiential knowledge of racialized people serves as legitimate data for understanding racial subordination (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Naming stories as legitimate sources of truth is disobedient to the master narrative rules of what truth is (objective numbers) and who has the right to name the truth (institutionally recognized researchers and scientists); in addition, claiming that this very disobedience is the path to truth is a means of reclaiming moral standing for racialized people. I will delve into the tenets of critical race theory after I first review the counter-narrative of White supremacy through *The Racial Contract* as theorized by Charles Mills (1997).

2.1.1 The Racial Contract: A counter-narrative of White supremacy

According to Mills (1997), Europeans and North Americans subscribe to a system of rules and norms as determined by what he calls “the racial contract”. In my view, the term “contract” is another way to say “master narrative”, but he has carefully chosen the word “contract” to make explicit that the norms and moral codes that we operate under are *agreed* upon by the dominant group in order to benefit them. He thus asserts that the social contract is in fact a racial contract. The master narrative of liberalism says that all humans are equal; however,

according to the racial contract only White people (usually wealthy straight men) are fully human and everyone else is “subhuman”. Those who are deemed subhuman are considered: “cognitively inferior, lacking in the essential rationality that would make them fully human” (Mills, 1997, p. 59). Furthermore, when individuals are deemed savage or animal, as opposed to human, they become easier to harm. Thus, according to Mills (1997), there are two moral codes: one for Whites (humans) and one for non-Whites (subhumans). Rights are for (White) humans and charges of criminality, for example, become a legislated method of removing rights and are more readily applied to racialized individuals, women, and the poor. In this way, White people get to be the sites of goodness as standards for what is normal and neutral. They are “unmarked yet racially dominant” (Jeffery, 2005, p. 24).

Furthermore, he uses the term “White supremacy” instead of “racism” to make explicit that this social construct was created to support a long-standing political system of domination that secures the privileges of those who are White, as opposed to using the word “racism” which is often thought of as random, individual acts of hatred on the part of certain White people. It is not about white-skin but about Whiteness and “Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations” (p. 127). Race, being a social construct enmeshed in power relations, changes depending on context in which power is operant. In caste systems of India, for example, “Whiteness” would belong to the people who are dominant in the caste hierarchy while in India; however, if when those same people come to the West, they become racialized or minoritized relative to those who inhabit Whiteness here. At one point in history Irish people were not seen as “White” and, instead, were seen as racialized in North America (Backhouse, 1999). Analogously, there is a spectrum that moves from subhuman to fully human, where people with the darkest skin are at the bottom – most fully exemplifying the ‘subhuman’ - and those with the

most money are at the top, regardless of the colour of their skin (for example, the Ben Carsons of the world). That being said, Mills (1997) is explicit that White supremacy is about global domination and since it is white skinned Europeans who have dominated the globe since the early 1900's, white skin privilege itself does put an individual higher up on the hierarchy whenever they appear.

As Mills (1997) explains, not all White people are signatories to the Racial Contract, but they are all beneficiaries. Signatories are individuals who consent to the rules of domination by enacting them (whether or not they are conscious of it) and remain silent about oppression:

a crucial manifestation [of the racial contract] is simply the failure to ask certain questions, taking for granted as a status quo and baseline the existing color-coded configurations of wealth, poverty, property, and opportunities, the pretense that formal, juridical equality is sufficient to remedy inequities created on a foundation of several hundred years of racial privilege, and that challenging that foundation is a transgression of the terms of the social contract (Mills, 1997, p. 73-74).

I will now turn to other critical race theorists to examine the ways in which they ask questions of the status quo, and how they account for the use of counter-narratives.

2.1.2 Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Counter-Narratives

Charles Mills' (1997) *The Racial Contract* was developed to account for the lack of discussion of race in mainstream political philosophy, specifically in social contract theories like those of Rousseau and Rawls. CRT is a framework that began in legal studies, again, as a response to erasure of race in critical legal studies (Cole, 2012). It began in the United States in order to address the inequities that were legally maintained despite Civil Rights legislation; thus, much of the early focus in CRT was on the Black/White binary (Yosso, 2005). However, people who were also affected by other kinds of oppression, such as women, immigrants, the poor, stressed that it was important to consider intersectionality in order to fully understand the saliency of race and impact of particular kinds of marginalization (Yosso, 2005). Thus,

contemporary critical race theorists show how race, gender, sexual orientation, ability and class intersect to affect racialized people, while keeping race central (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race theorists define race as a social construct where particular characteristics, such as personality, are associated to particular physical traits, such as phenotype, in order to ascribe value and justify a hierarchy that privileges the dominant groups in society (Singh, 2016; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus, I will use the terms “racialization” or “racialized”, rather than “race”, to make explicit that racial categorizations are socially constructed rather than biological (Cole, 2012; Hubain, Allen, Harris & Linder, 2016; Singh, 2016, Yosso, 2005). Racism or White supremacy, through this lens, is viewed as an exercise of power against groups of people who are deemed inferior by individuals and/or institutions in order to maintain a particular status quo in which racial hierarchy is central (Harrell, 2000). CRT acknowledges that racism exists for the sole purpose of social stratification and is an ordinary experience for people of colour as it is embedded in all aspects of social life (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). CRT, therefore, provides a counter-narrative that makes the power dynamics of the master narrative explicit. It also proposes new ways to do research, which counter the master narrative of neutrality and objectivity, and that is by taking experiential knowledge as central (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002) counter-narratives based in experiences of racialized people function to:

1. Build community among marginalized people
2. Challenge the assumptions of cultural norms
3. Open up new possibilities of how reality is experienced and can be interpreted
4. Teach others how to “construct another world that is richer than either story or the reality alone” (p. 36)

Thus, CRT uses counter-narratives to expose the mechanisms of dominance and to go beyond “deficit thinking” (e.g. culture of victimhood); and towards understanding and cherishing the strengths, cultural wealth and sources of resistance and ways of knowing within communities of colour (Yosso, 2005).

Lawrence and Dua (2005) argue that critical race theorists who do not consider the contemporary continuing colonization and decolonization struggles of Indigenous people are complicit in the erasure of their existence. Critical race theorists, they argue, often describe colonization as something that existed in the past, rather than something that is ongoing. They ask us to consider “the ways in which the project of appropriating land shaped the emergence of black/Asian/Hispanic settler formations” (p. 128). Furthermore, they argue that the settlement of racialized people in the Americas continues the colonial project: “people of colour are settlers [...] living on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands” (p. 134). To further delve into the complexities of this argument, Amadahy and Lawrence (2009) examine the complexities of naming people “settlers” when they came to the Americas by force and were enslaved, without access to land and rights. Such complexities can also be drawn in the cases of immigrants and refugees who have come to Canada as a result of environmental and political displacement (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Smith, 2012 as cited in Greensmith, 2015). Lawrence and Dua (2009) advocate for solidarity between Indigenous and marginalized settlers in order to overcome White domination. They turn to examples of times in which racialized communities and Indigenous people worked together successfully in acts of political resistance.

In his more recent works, Mills (2015a; 2015b) also argues for the formation of such alliances. He argues that factors which set up White domination are no longer the same

mechanisms which keep it in operation today. Thus, he makes a case for an alliance which opposes capitalism (i.e. its mechanisms of dominance) and serves the economically disadvantaged. Dua et al. (2005) argue that critical race theorists who do not consider how capitalism influences the social construction of race, miss an important aspect of how power is created and sustained in contemporary society. According to Cole (2013), materialist critical race theorists are interested in just this: how law and labour benefit or disadvantage racial groups. These theorists thus believe that rather than talking about abolishing Whiteness, all people need to “unite around a common purpose” (Cole, 2012, p. 178).

2.1.3 Colonialism and the Master Narrative of Helping in Canada

In Canada, there is a history of violence enacted by social workers upon marginalized populations. This evidence has been masked by a master narrative of “helping”, where the White service provider is viewed as the good, civil, and morally superior subject who helps and represents national identity (Badwall, 2013). This narrative of “helping” disguises control and domination through euphemisms of sacrifice, nurturance, charity and neutrality (Badwall, 2013; Heron, 2007; Jeffery, 2005). Furthermore, “helpers” are viewed as the sites where knowing occurs and where power naturally belongs. The helper is the hero who either saves the savage Native or teaches other subhumans how to come closer to being fully human; that is, by learning the skills of those who dominate, i.e. by becoming more White (Heron, 2007; Jeffery, 2005; Mills, 1997). Modern liberal society, as it is, is assumed to be a place which allows for goodness to be achieved by those who are worthy enough to achieve it. Thus, the helper’s role is to enable the subhuman to become more worthy within the structure as it is. In contrast, those who are helped become epistemically and politically subordinate to the helper (Badwall, 2013; Baines, 2002; Greensmith, 2015). A narrative of helping also aligns with liberal ideologies of individual

meritocracy: Work hard and you shall succeed. Thus, “helpers” teach people how to cope with existing structures and how to take responsibility for their failures to succeed (Ortiz & Jani, 2010).

Greensmith (2015) provides a counter-narrative in arguing that service provision by White settler institutions, regardless of profession, continues to “ensure the mastery over and control of people of colour and Indigenous peoples, which [require] their total domination (and extinction) as peoples” (p. 69). For example, the dominant narrative continues to uphold the story that racialized families cannot care for their children as reflected in the fact that Black children remain disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. Toronto Children’s Aid Society recently revealed that although Black children comprise of only 8% of the Greater Toronto Area, yet they make up 31% of child welfare cases in Toronto, raising internal concerns that there is bias and racial profiling in the reporting of incidents (Rankin, 2015).

Jeffery (2005) also provides a counter-narrative to “helping” that makes the operation of the master narrative explicit in arguing that teaching individuals how to cope with existing structures is actually a way of managing and controlling difference, rather than accommodating difference by asking the system to change. We manage and control difference through the competency and mastery of the helper, all of which reproduces Whiteness and disguises its performance as lawful, civil, obedient and good (Badwall, 2013; Jeffery, 2005). Thus, similar to Mills, both Badwall (2013) and Jeffery (2005) demonstrate the ways in which systemic domination, as opposed to skin colour alone or individual intention, is a means of producing and reproducing Whiteness.

2.1.4 Racialized Service Provider's Experiences of Racism

Badwall (2013) examines how racialized social workers in Toronto experience racism. She discovers that racialized social workers are expected to be both “white and, simultaneously, the Other” (p. 186). In order to function as good, moral and civil workers, i.e. nation builders, they need to take on the scripts of White workers by engaging with clients with the Canadian Association of Social Workers’ official values of empathy, client-centred care, and with critical reflexivity. In other words, social workers of colour also employ the helping ethos by embodying White civility and White goodness and thereby work towards the agenda of colonization (Badwall, 2013).

She found that when racialized workers inevitably experience racism from their clients, which manifest in emotions of anger, confusion, and fear, they are accused of being neither critically reflexive nor client-centred workers. Thus, in order to fit back into the script of the good helper, their own experiences of racism are eclipsed as they are told to return their attention back to the client’s vulnerabilities and traumas. This leaves the racialized worker feeling silenced and ashamed about their experiences of racism (Badwall, 2013). Similarly, Gosine and Pon (2011), who conducted a study with racialized child welfare workers in Toronto, also found that their participants were afraid of speaking up for fear of being labeled as troublemakers or too sensitive. Furthermore, they said that they needed to work harder to prove themselves and that few rise up the ranks to become administrators. Whiteness, therefore, becomes impossible to achieve for racialized workers, even when they play the script with excessive effort. While there were a handful of studies on the impact of racialized workers working in White institutions, I did not find any articles that analyzed the impact of racialized people working with racialized people and how vicarious racism may also affect and complicate the work that they do.

2.2 Vicarious Racism

The literature on vicarious racism has defined this construct as “indirect” racism, that is, racism that is witnessed and not directly experienced. This definition, I argue, is too generic, imprecise and therefore inadequate. We have indirect experiences all the time, some that we pay attention to and some that we discount. So, what allows an indirect experience of racism to be felt *vicariously* as racism by the observer? The research on vicarious racism is scant. While there have been many brief mentions and questions about the impact of indirect exposure to racism in journal articles few distinguish indirect exposure from direct exposure (Truong, Museus, & McGuire, 2016). After a comprehensive search I only found only 6 scholarly journal articles and 4 dissertations where vicarious racism was the main focus. Every one of these studies use Harrell’s (2000) definition of vicarious racism: racism’s influence “through observation and report” (p.45). Heard-Garris et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of journal articles that looked at how vicarious racism impacts children. They found 30 articles, but only 7 explicitly defined vicarious racism. The most common finding (in 7 of the 30 articles) showed that low birthweight and preterm birth were positively associated with vicarious racism. Of the 30 articles, more than half reported null results, which Heard-Garris et al. (2017) thought was due, in part to “the complexity in the conceptualization of vicarious racism” (p. 6); the lack of a common definition of vicarious racism; and no consensus on how it should be measured. I have also found this to be true. For example, Li (2014) uses one single question to measure vicarious racism: “How often have you seen friends treated unfairly because of their race/ethnicity?” (p. 1160). How accurately could one question measure if vicarious racism was actually experienced by the person answering? Using this criterion, they determine that vicarious racism, rather than direct racism, was associated with increased likelihood of mental health disorders in two

subgroups of Asian Americans; however, in a third subgroup they found that it decreased mental health disorders. I argue that these confused findings arise from poor definition and thus imprecise measurement of the phenomenon of vicarious racism.

Chrobot-Mason, Belle, and Linnehan (2013) also measure what they call, “ambient racial harassment” using a similar scale as Li (2014); however, they utilize 18 questions to conduct their analysis. They find that awareness of racial harassment alone is correlated with negative psychological outcomes, in their subjects, such as depression. While they use the term “ambient racial harassment” instead of “vicarious racism” to mean “direct or indirect exposure to racial harassment aimed at others in the workplace” (p. 472), they say that ambient racial harassment “may be as toxic as being the direct target of racial harassment” (p. 485). Is “exposure” sufficient to produce an *experience* of racism? Most studies use the word “vicarious” as synonymous with the word “indirect”. What allows an indirect experience to be felt vicariously by the observer? Heard-Garris et al. (2017) argue that for the exposure to be vicarious, the witness must be “cognizant” (p. 6) of the other person experiencing racism, and that their distress may potentially increase if they identify with the target of racism.

Harrell (2000) adds that vicarious racism is different than collective racism in that vicarious experiences occur when witnessing “specific” incidents involving an “identifiable individual” (p.46), as opposed to a perception of what is happening to the whole group. Can one have a “vicarious experience” if they observe racism happening at the collective level? Even though Mason et al. (2017) use Harrell’s (2000) definition of vicarious racism, they conflate collective and individual levels of racism. They look at vicarious racism as a “national event” (p.175), specifically studying the impact of African Americans observing racism enacted on other people from their own racial group through mass media. They find that people who are

more strongly invested in their Black identity and have more anxiety about becoming a target of racism are also more susceptible to negative effects when experiencing vicarious racism.

Truong et al. (2016) argue that vicarious racism can occur both on the individual and structural levels. The latter they name, “trickledown racism” where the graduate students they interviewed were structurally affected (loss of support) by racism directed at faculty. They also found that vicarious racism has both negative and positive effects. On the negative side are all the negative health consequences of those affected directly by racism (there is extensive literature on the negative health effects of racism; see Harrell (2000) for a thorough review). On the positive side vicarious racism, when coupled with sharing stories with one another, helped their participants normalize and externalize their experiences. It also encouraged them to mobilize and create networks of resistance to racism through collective advocacy. Unfortunately, they found that collectively engaging in anti-racist advocacy also made students more susceptible to first hand experiences of racism and racism-related stress and negative health consequences. Furthermore, retelling of these stories was not always positive as at times it would reproduce the traumatic impacts of vicarious racism.

Similarly, Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) also found that when their participants (Asian American undergraduate students) were exposed to stories of racism through group discussions, this both increased normalization and coping yet, also led to hypervigilance about racism. They use Helms’ (1990) psychodiagnostic model of racial identity development to frame their research questions and explain their findings. As cited in Alvarez et al. (2006) Helms (1990) theorizes that “sociocultural communicators”, which are akin to master narratives, convey race related messages that may impact one’s racial identity schemas and perceptions of racism. Helms (1990; as cited in Alvarez et al., 2006) also suggests that racial identity schemas guide the

individual's perception of their own identity which may increase or decrease the salience of their experiences of racism. As noted above, they found that racial socialization, through discussion with peers, did indeed predict one's perception of racism (normalized or made them hyperaware). Also, one's perception of racism is positively associated with racial identity schemas: "newly awakened consciousness of race-related issues [...] is characterized by hyperawareness of racism" (Alvarez et al., 2006, p. 489).

While Alvarez et al. (2006) demonstrate how vicarious racism *can* change one's schemas, they do not postulate that for an indirect exposure of racism to be "vicarious", it *must* change one's schema. In contrast, the construct of vicarious trauma as explained through constructivist self-development theory says just this: vicarious trauma is said to occur when the worker's own schemas are changed as a result of indirectly and empathically relating to their clients' traumatic stories (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Cohen & Collens, 2013). Do schema changes occur in vicarious racism? Does empathy play a role in translating an observed situation into a *vicarious experience* in cases of vicarious racism as well? I will turn to constructivist self-development theory now in order to consider how this theory may be applied to better understand and define vicarious racism.

2.3 Constructivist Self-Development Theory

Constructivist self-development theory (CSDT) was developed to understand the construct of vicarious trauma, which is defined as: "a [negative] transformation in the therapist's (or other trauma worker's) inner experience resulting from empathetic engagement with the client's trauma material" (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 31). Two factors that distinguish this definition from the definitions typically used to explain vicarious racism is that the worker's inner experience is transformed and that this occurs through empathic engagement. I am

proposing that in vicarious racism, both of these factors are also relevant. As noted above, Alvarez et al. (2006) have demonstrated how vicarious racism can indeed alter one's schema of racial identity and degree of vigilance. Similarly, while Truong et al. (2016) do not use the language of schemas, they do find that hearing stories of racism changed individuals' way of thinking from feeling at fault for experiences of direct racism to normalizing and externalizing these experiences by understanding racism as a systemic problem that they are affected by. Thus, I argue that the schemas, or "inner experiences", of these participants did indeed change from internalization of racism as self-blame to a new understanding their feelings as resulting from systemic oppression. Truong et al. (2016), also show that vicarious racism moves students from feeling helpless about racism to feeling motivated to take group action against racism, which again is a change in one's schema. Neither study, nor Heard-Garris et al. (2017), mention empathy; however, the latter do propose that what they call "identification" with the other could increase the negative affect associated with vicarious racism.

The concept of empathy is contested in the literature (Gibbons, 2011). Lockwood (2016), who conducted a review of neuroscience articles on empathy, understands this construct as both affective and cognitive. Affectively, empathy is when an observer is able to *share* the emotional state of another person through observation or imagination while also being aware that they are not that person. Cognitive-empathy is when the observer is able to *understand* the other person's beliefs, desires and emotions. Vicarious trauma is likely to occur when the therapist has both cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy in light of their clients' traumas (Electris, 2013; Feldman & Kaal, 2007; MacRitchie & Leibowitz, 2010; Wertz, 2000). Is empathy also a critical factor in vicarious racism? First, are frontline workers who engage empathically more susceptible to vicarious racism compared to another bystander? Second, how, if at all, do

frontline workers' schemas change when they are faced with vicarious racism? As this is a qualitative study, I will not be able to answer the first question; however, I do examine the second question closely.

According to CSDT, trauma therapists, through empathic engagement with clients' trauma material, can be shocked (information does not fit into their own schemata) by the vivid descriptions that clients provide. When this shock happens, they negatively accommodate the clients' trauma material by changing their own schemas (Cohen & Collens, 2013). Cognitive schemas shape our beliefs, expectations and assumptions of our world and when there is dissonance between what we once believed and what the client presents us we accommodate our schema to ameliorate the dissonance (Cohen & Collens, 2013; McCann & Pearlman, 1990). For example, a therapist who once felt safe walking outside now feels afraid walking in alleys after hearing repetitive and vivid stories about being assaulted in alleys from a client. In this example, the therapist's schema has changed as they are now experiencing the same fear and dread that they saw in their client. Thus, vicarious trauma is not a momentary disruption, but a permanent schema change as a result of empathically engaging and witnessing another's experience (Pearlman & Saakvitine, 1995). Is it possible that in vicarious racism an individual's schema can change in order to adapt to witnessing shocking stories about racism?

CSDT was specifically designed to theorize the negative changes found in trauma therapists and it has been expanded to also account for schematic changes in other frontline workers (Cohen & Collens, 2013). CSDT is not a broadly applicable theory in that it does not talk about how schemas are developed or how they are influenced by systems, institutions or, for example, by other influences such as master narratives. CSDT has also been narrowly applied to vicarious trauma and in one article to vicarious post-traumatic growth as well (Cohen & Collens,

2013). Like vicarious trauma, vicarious post-traumatic growth comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients; however, by focusing on their clients' strengths and ability to overcome adversity, the therapist is transformed in a positive way (Coehn & Collens, 2013).

In this study, I will be broadening the scope of CSDT by applying it to my analysis of experiences of vicarious racism in frontline workers. Furthermore, I add *The Racial Contract* and CRT frameworks in my analysis since the intersection of race, power, and domination are critical factors in understanding the experiences of racialized front line workers. It is not enough to just understand how one's schema develops and changes on an individual level; we need to also understand how schemas are influenced by systems and power relations in order to understand the impact of racism and vicarious racism on an individual and on collectivity.

2.4. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of racialized frontline workers who also work with racialized clients through the lens of *The Racial Contract*, CRT, and CSDT. I will investigate how racialized workers employ master and counter-narratives and how these narratives, like schemas, guide, constrain or liberate the individual in the work that they do and in the ways they identify themselves. I will explore how experiences of White supremacy and vicarious racism impact the narratives that are being told, if at all. I am, therefore, also exploring the conditions under which counter-narratives are possible and what supports are needed for them to be sustained. I am also curious to explore how counter-narratives can be both liberating and as constraining as a master narrative. Another goal of the study is to expand and develop the concept of vicarious racism as it a relatively new area of study in social science and CRT literature.

2.4.1 Principle research questions

What are the experiences of racialized frontline workers who work with racialized individuals? How do they subconsciously employ master narratives of helping and White supremacy to frame their stories? How do they employ counter-narratives?

2.4.2 Secondary research questions

What are the resources needed for counter-narratives to emerge? What function do counter-narratives serve in creating meaning about work and self? How do experiences of White supremacy and vicarious racism impact the narrator's sense of self (schema) and their employment of master and counter-narratives? How does empathy play a role in the adjustment of narratives in the face of vicarious racism, if at all?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Methodology

This research study is broadly located within the social-constructivist paradigm, which is concerned with the ways in which contexts impact knowledge creation, specifically social interactions and shared realities (Gergen, 2009). More specifically, I utilize the narrative paradigm and CRT, both of which have guided the interviews and data analysis. According to narrative methodology, meaning is co-created through story-telling and in interaction with an audience and so the researcher cannot be separated from the narratives produced during the interviews (Jones, 2002; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). By adding CRT to the narrative paradigm, I will be examining not just how meaning is made by personal experiences, but also how systemic power structures and interpretations of history (master narratives) interplay with the individual's meaning-making, development of their schemas and counter-narratives.

In narrative analysis, the core assumption is that stories are the way people organize thoughts and make sense of their experiences. They order them through time and define their own location within them in order to communicate meaning (Chase, 2003; Riessman, 1993). Stories, therefore, are not “true” experiences but incomplete representations and interpretations of reality, which are constantly shifting depending on context (Mishler, 1995). According to CRT, first person narratives constitute knowledge as our stories do shape our social worlds (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Riessman (1993) there are five levels of representation, each of which distorts the “true” or raw experience. First, we selectively attend to and reflect upon the primary experience. Second, we select what we choose to tell, depending on our audience and the context. The third and fourth levels of interpretation/distortion occur during

transcription and analysis. Finally, the readers themselves interpret what has been written based on their own viewpoints and histories. Thus, they become part of meaning making. Riessman (1993) fails to note that systems of power are at work in, and frame, all five of these levels.

To be transparent as possible about the levels of interpretation, it is important to preserve as much of the context of each narrative as possible. Thus, narrative methods do not promote fragmenting speech into smaller “meaning units” as is done in other forms of qualitative analysis. Instead, narratives are understood as a whole, including the listener’s response, and the context in which the interview took place (Scheff, 1990). Thus, in the findings section, I have included my own voice (the interviewer) as narratives are co-created with the audience, in this case me. I only spoke to each participant for a very brief period of time; thus, the narratives I am interpreting are based only on this particular context and in this particular period of time. I have also included long quotes from the narrators following the rationale of CRT; that is, to allow marginalized voices to “speak for themselves” and acknowledge that experiential knowledge is epistemically central (Delgado, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, to promote trustworthiness, narrative summaries were sent to each participant for member checking and all participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the final quotes used from their interview for this document.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Ethics, Inclusion Criteria and Recruitment Procedures

Prior to participant recruitment, the research procedures were reviewed and approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University’s Ethics Review Board to ensure conformity with the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Participants were recruited using my own network of peers, the research committee’s network, word of mouth, and using the

snowball/respondent-driven sampling methods. All participants were informed about the purpose of the project by phone before we met, and were given the opportunity to review the Interview Guide (Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B) – provided via email.

Prior to the interviews I also verbally reviewed the consent forms including the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and potential risks. Potential risks included feeling uncomfortable when talking about one's own as well as clients' oppression and traumas. In order to minimize these risks, participants were encouraged to only answer questions that they felt comfortable answering. Also, before and after the interview, I assured them of protecting their anonymity and confidentiality. No participant indicated that they experienced emotional discomfort during the interviews. I also emphasized that they could withdraw from the study completely, or selectively withdraw responses and quotes from the final document. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the final draft of my thesis. Five of the eight participants responded to this opportunity and all said that the quotes and titles (see participant profiles and titles below) they were given were fine.

Participants recruited identified as people who have experienced racism and were frontline service providers who counseled racialized individuals as part of their work. In other words, all participants heard stories of racism as part of the work that they do. Two of the participants did frontline work for over a decade, and were currently not employed in this capacity; however, they were included in the study as they both still engaged in counseling work to some degree. Both were also working with racialized people at the time of the interview.

3.2.2 Participant Profiles

Nine people were approached and eight of them participated. One person did not participate as she worked in private practice and her clients were primarily White. All

participants worked in Southern Ontario. As some of the participants worried about being identified in the study, I did not disclose the types of agency they work for other than to provide very general descriptions. Those who did not want their race identified are simply labeled “racialized”. Participant’s names were not used to protect confidentiality. Pseudonyms that are Christian in origin or originating from other cultural and religious backgrounds were avoided as they have their own connotations. Inspired by O’Neil’s (2010) methods, I assigned a title that was representative of each participant’s narrative. Brief profiles of each participant are provided below and are presented in the order in which I interviewed them.

Becoming

Becoming identifies as a “Black” or “African” male in his 40s who emigrated with his family from the Caribbean in his early childhood. After living and working for roughly three decades in a part of Canada where gun violence occurs regularly, he finally has found himself saying, “I have had enough.” However, his mentor taught him not to give into oppression, but to find ways to maintain his agency and choice by being creative and patient, and through developing strong communication skills. In his helping narrative, he flows and works like water, moving to places where there are gaps and openings. In all his narratives he is *becoming*, using each opportunity to grow. Now he longs to fulfill his own dreams and leave frontline work so he can truly live as his mentor had taught him: without a mask.

Questioning

Questioning is a person in their 30s who did not want their gender or race identified. They have earned a MSW such that they could get into policy work to create systemic changes for marginalized people as they relate their frontline role of being a “pacifier”. In the process of our conversation *Questioning*’s narrative moves from stories of exclusion due to racialization at

work to realizing that vicarious racism has made them hypervigilant and self-conscious about how others see them in their skin and body.

Journey

Journey identifies as a “Native woman” in her 60s who grew up with a sense of belonging on her reserve and where helping was a communal affair and not one for professionals. Her experiences of White supremacy began once she went off reserve to high school and later in her adult life. Her way of helping has been primarily by equalizing the power dynamics between helper and helped, for example, by taking the lead of the person she is helping. She teaches and helps by a doing-with rather than a talking-at. Thus, her responses to vicarious racism is to support the community that is hurt, to support themselves and to understand that healing is a journey worth taking.

Flourish

Flourish is a man in his 30s who identifies as a “Black” or “African” male who emigrated with his family from Africa in his early childhood. He has a MSW and positions himself as a worker who “holds space” for his clients instead of powering over them. He introduces me to the concept of “double consciousness” which he uses to understand his experiences of racialization and also to respond to vicarious racism; however, when it fails him he is forced to respond emotionally to the effects of White supremacy. He describes his father as a man who works at surviving the system; in contrast, he expects to flourish and to change the system by creating safe spaces for people to land on.

Flex

Flex is a woman who is in her 30s. She attained a MSW to have more flexibility in her professional choices; however, she is aware of, and conflicted by, social work’s violent history.

She has worked to counter its master narrative. Thus, she considers herself a “facilitator” who works to create space for people to talk about their dreams. She accepts her identity as “Black”, but only because this helps her to “map [her] experiences of the world” and not because it is a particularly vindicating label. Her response to vicarious racism is a desire to protect the target, yet this impulse is constrained by another narrative of being a facilitator who must be neutral in her positioning.

Bridges

Bridges identifies as a “Black” male in his 40s. In his experiences of racialization he has been labeled a “mongrel” as he is of mixed race. He has searched many places to find belonging. In his childhood, he found belonging amongst Black youth who “took up space”. While he spent decades as a frontline worker, he is currently working in an administrative position and part of his job is to bring young racialized leaders into “board rooms” of established institutions to help them create professional networks. His response to vicarious racism is to protect the other, which he names as a “responsibility”.

Triumph

Triumph is a woman in her 20s who has been working with her MSW for a year. She did not want her race identified. Her helping narrative signifies her own post-traumatic growth, having overcome both personal and systemic trauma. She says that her Indigenous Master of Social Work program was as healing as it was educational: her needs to be spiritual and loving were validated. She counters the narrative of “the helper” who powers-over by creating a space of mutual respect and openings rather than directing and “fixing”. Her response to vicarious racism is to either normalize or, when she can, to follow through and offer protection to the person being oppressed.

Awareness

Awareness is a woman who is in her 40s and did not want her specific “race” identified. The first three decades of her life were spent in her country of origin where she was not racialized. However, after immigrating to Canada she had her first experiences of racism and realized: “This exists”. As a helper, she works to equalize power between herself and the people she is helping by making space for their narratives, working at their pace, and with their goals in mind. However, she is constrained by neoliberal ideology that demands concrete evidence of change and fast results. She responds to vicarious racism with an impulse to protect, which she calls “advocacy” work and frames it as part of her role as a social worker.

3.2.3 Procedures

Interviews were conducted in October and November of 2016. At the start of each interview, participants reviewed the consent form (Appendix A) with me and I highlighted the confidential nature of the interview. I reiterated that participants were free to decline answering questions with which they were uncomfortable. After they signed their consent form we began the interview and they were recorded on an audio recorder. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. One of the participants had more to share and so I interviewed them a second time. All interviews were conducted at the participant’s workplace, except *Questioning*, who chose to be interviewed in their home.

The narrative interviews were semi-structured, loosely based on interview questions (Appendix B). I attempted to ask questions that would require the participant to give detailed examples (narratives, not theories) from their own experiences of the phenomena I was trying to understand: their experiences of helping, racism and vicarious racism. However, as deemed appropriate in narrative methods, I followed each participant’s narrative rather than forcing them

to follow my agenda. It was important to capture their meaning-making, not mine (Chase, 2003; Riessman, 1993; Wengraf, 2001). In this process, with all participants I found that my questions expanded to explore the development of their racial identity, their own experiences of racism not only in their work, but in their childhood development as well.

I transcribed all of the interviews within 24 hours of conducting the interview. After all the interviews were transcribed, I conducted the data analysis.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

The phases of my analysis are as follows: 1. Structural analysis; 2. Narrative summaries for member checking; 3. Analysis of master and counter-narratives through thick descriptions and applying the lens of CRT (macro perspective) and Constructivist Self Development Theory (micro perspective).

Once interviews were transcribed, I used Labov's (1972/1986) method of structural analysis to begin understanding the data. The purpose of the structural analysis is to understand *how* the story is told, rather than focusing on *what* is being told (Riessman, 2008). Questions that may be answered in this process include: What is the narrator trying to convince the audience of in the telling of this story? How does the narrator persuade the audience? What are the unspoken biases and assumptions? According to Labov (1972, 1986), a narrative has six elements: an abstract (a summary of what the narrator wants to say), orientation (time, place, participant), complicating action (sequence of events), resolution (resolves the plot), evaluation (the point of the narrative), and coda (ends the narrative and returns the listener to the present). All narratives within each interview, especially evaluative talk, may not necessarily have all these elements, but most will include at least the orientation, complicating action, resolution, and evaluation. Ambiguities are a natural part of how experiences are told. In other words, not all narratives are a

cohesive whole; meanings and selves are constantly redefined as they are retold (Riessman, 1993). The unfolding narrative is also shaped by the shared (or lack thereof) understanding of both cultural norms and discourses as well as with what is understood to be appropriate to share in the particular context in which the interview takes place (Jones, 2002). See Appendix C for an example of structural analysis from a short section of my interview with *Flourish*.

The structural analysis also helped me get an understanding of the interviews as a whole, from which I created 2-5 page narrative summaries for each participant. The sole purpose of the summary was to shorten the transcript so that it was more accessible for member checking. I sent each participant their respective interview summary to get their feedback on the accuracy of what was written. Only 3 out of 8 participants chose to respond. Two of the participants edited their summaries and gave consent to include them as part of the study (please see Appendix D).

I continued the analysis using the structural analysis of the original interview transcripts. I reviewed this analysis multiple times and I began to see patterns where assumptions were taken for granted and other times when people used more justification to defend their actions in a story. As I continued literature reviews on critical race theory, I came to understand the importance of counter and master narratives as part of CRT methodology and so I did another analysis using these concepts and trying to locate the use of master and counter-narratives in the interviews. As I read through my structural analysis, I asked the following questions posed by Bamberg (2004, p. 363):

1. How are narrators complicit with master narratives and how do they constrain the narrator?
2. Where do counter-narratives emerge?
3. What resources do we need to sustain counter-narratives?

4. How do counter-narratives serve narrators?
5. How does the narrator “create a sense of self and an identity that maneuvers simultaneously between being complicit and countering established narratives that give guidance to one’s actions but at the same time constrain and delineate one’s agency” (p. 363)?

In order to answer these questions, I used evaluative talk and theorizing that participants engaged in, not just “narrative” speech. Riessman and Quinney (2005) insist that narratives are distinguished from other forms of discourse when there is a “*sequence* and *consequence*: events are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (p. 394). However, in order to locate the implications of master narratives and to tease out counter-narratives, my data analysis had to also include participants’ discourse which was less “narrative” and more explanations and theorizing, i.e. “evaluative talk” (Talbot et al., 1996, p. 228). Furthermore, I went back to my structural analysis and reinserted my own voice, all of my questions and comments, so that I could better understand how I was participating in co-creating meaning within each story being told.

The goal of this analysis was to understand how master narratives constrain and guide each narrator, and how they use counter-narratives, if at all, to liberate themselves from the constraints of the master narrative. I also aimed to examine how vicarious racism either changes or sustains these narratives. Thick descriptions (details that contextualize each statement) of each master and counter-narrative were written down (Creswell & Miller, 2000). From this analysis, I noticed that there were themes in how master and counter-narratives were employed and the Findings Chapter has been organized according to these themes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter has four sections: 1. Master and counter-narratives of helping as performance of White, liberal civility; 2. Master and counter-narratives in response to experiences of racism; 3. Master and counter-narratives in response to vicarious experiences of racism; 4. Factors that support counter-narratives.

4.1 Master and Counter-Narratives of Helping

The first questions I asked all of the participants were about how and why they got into front-line work? As mentioned in the methods, two of the participants at the time of the interview were no longer primarily paid in front-line work positions, but both were still counseling in some capacity; therefore, I included their narratives. In this section, I examine master narratives of “helping” as a performance of White, liberal civility (Badwall, 2013; Heron, 2007; Jeffery, 2005) and counter-narratives that oppose this way of being and doing. How do racialized frontline workers navigate the master narrative of the helper who dominates and controls the marginalized/lesser Other (the person in need of help)? Does playing the script of Whiteness (through assimilation; e.g. exercising control over another, demonstrating competencies in their roles as ‘helpers’) allow the racialized helper to justify their own goodness and full humanity? Does playing the White script allow them to step out of being a subhuman or are there other ways to justify their humanity?

In this section, I separated stories told by professionalized and non-professionalized workers since they reference master narratives differently. Five of the participants received education in social work programs and have worked as professionalized frontline workers. They

are more strongly tied to master narratives of helping. When they oppose it, just as was found by Murph (2008), they offer lengthier justifications about their own goodness and credibility despite their disobedience to the master narrative. The other three narrators did not go to university and thus did not enter professionalized frontline work. Their way of speaking about helping comes primarily from their personal experiences of having been helped. Their stories strongly oppose most of the assumptions of the master narratives of helping, especially in resisting the dichotomy between helper and helped.

4.1.1 Helping Narratives of Social Workers

Five of the participants in this study have a Master in Social Work and, without prompting, all spoke about their experiences of the master narrative and how hard they have worked to oppose it. I will begin with *Questioning* who, in great contrast to other narrators (see Section 4.1.2 below,) has not landed in a space where they are able to thrive. In their narrative of why they got into this work they also hint that they do not like the work by pointing out that they have had “lots of bad days”:

Questioning: I was doing my undergrad, I was also volunteering, mostly at hospitals [...] So then I decided I need to do something new with my life. So I did a certificate program in addictions and while I was in that program, I learned that there is a huge need for addictions [counseling] and there are not a lot of people that go into that field.

PG: What drew you into addictions work?

Questioning: I think it is because it is challenging and it is not boring and not every client is the same - and there are good days and lots of bad days.

They then explain how little support there is for frontline workers in this job. At the time of the interview they were looking for work outside of frontline work. They had completed a MSW degree specializing in “policy work” because they said, “I realized that there are a lot of systemic barriers, which need to be addressed on a higher level instead of grassroots levels. So yeah, I

figured that is the way I need to go.” Being at this job taught them that playing the role of the helper according to the master narrative of dominance and control is not productive and they offer a counter-narrative of the system needing to change, rather than the individual. When they describe how they work in this job, they present a self who has no agency and the client has even less. It is the White management who has power:

Well, we don't really get the final call. Management gets the final call. So if they feel that this person is not suitable to be [treated] here, then they make the call. But then if they see there are areas for improvement then they keep them. But they are not the ones that are dealing with them face to face.

Later, during another story they say:

So, it goes back to the area where management makes the calls. They don't know the story or the history. Yeah. Those are the days where I am like, "I need to quit. Why am I still here?"

Many of *Questioning*'s stories are narrated with this sense of helplessness and loss of agency.

They do, however, exhibit some power and agency in declaring their sense of “boundaries” between home and work:

I am just like, this is my time and this is my work time. I have been able to do that. I think that has really helped. I think that is very, very important; establishing your boundaries with work and your personal life otherwise you will definitely burn out and you will quit when that happens.

From *Questioning*'s perspective and according to the master narrative of helping, the boundary that keeps Us apart from Them is the primary method that keeps the helper safe from burning out and keeps them helping effectively. Interestingly, two of the non-professionalized narrators say that this very boundary makes professionals disengaged and ineffective (See section 4.1.2 below).

Flex also talks about how unsupported she is in her workplace and is also looking for a way to leave. In her narrative, the neoliberal system as well as management subvert her ability to work in a way that she would find fulfilling:

What do I want right now? I don't know if I ever will be clear. I feel like I am always moving in terms of what I feel is right for me. Right now, in this space, where I feel it is right for me is to move away from the non-profit sector. Because the way non-profit sectors are funded, it is very unhealthy. It is very unhealthy for workers and for the people that are receiving services. That is the only thing that I am clear about[...]

So the funding itself is very neo-liberal, administrative and top-heavy. It is so far removed from the populations that we service. So funding bodies [...] Their priority is saving money, having people comply, having people use hospitals less often, creating systems that stream line people to be more compliant patients, seeing high numbers of humans - not recognizing why humans arrive at CHC's.

Community Health Centres have historically and presently work with people with complex health issues. The expectation to - in terms of time - to work with individuals with complex health issues is not sufficient. It is just very much putting a Band-Aid on a wound that is gangrene, pretty much. It is just really disgusting. A lot of my caseload is people who have experienced trauma and it's the expectation that I cycle through these very important humans very rapidly. That I see seven people a day in a seven hour time, which is not - it is so gross. It is just really gross. It feels very violent to me.

I have talked to people about it, in senior management positions. They don't understand what I am talking about. They think I am over-exaggerating. So I feel very alone in the work that I do. I have somewhat, I am supposed to have a somewhat community of social workers who work in CHC's. They are also feeling the stress of the work, but there is not really labeling it the same way as I am.

[...] I coached myself a little bit, mainly because of finances to go back to work. But it is really hard. Really hard. Because, again, going back - I find the ministry is very far removed. Where are the spaces for people with complex health issues, what do those spaces look like? We already have the research that tells us what the spaces for people of colour and aboriginal people [look like] - we have the data already. But the way that the work is organized, that isn't recognized.

While *Flex*'s narrative acknowledges the power of "funding bodies" to dictate how she works, her use of language to define this source of power vilifies it and makes it a site of "disgust" and a perpetuator of disease. In sharp contrast, the victims of the funding bodies are the "humans" and she too becomes a victim in this narrative. She attempts to engage her agency by talking to her

superiors and her colleagues; however, she is not understood. She is viewed as “over exaggerating” and is left feeling “alone” despite the “somewhat community” that she is “supposed to have”. This use of language makes explicit that when she opposes dominance, she does not experience belonging in this agency. Finally, she makes explicit that those who operate within the master narrative do not understand and do not hear that these spaces are not safe for those needing help: “Where are the spaces?”

Flex chose to become a social worker to be able to “compete in the job market” as a counselor, which she describes as “work that I really wanted to do”. While she recognizes that the professional designation allows her to get work, she is also conflicted about its history:

[...] How did I get into this work? Hard for me to pinpoint. I have always worked in the human service field for a long time, since I was a teenager. A lot of my work was centred around working with women who experienced domestic violence [...] So I always worked in the field [...] I was just sort of flying under the radar [...] and I knew that the work that I was doing within the shelter system was quite limited in terms of - I didn't have the flexibility. I didn't have the opportunity to do the work that I wanted to do.

That sort of propelled me, a decade and a half later, to go back to school and get my BSW, to get my MSW so I could compete in the job market, do the kind of work that I really wanted to do which was one to one counseling. I think what really pulled me to this work, not so much the profession of social work, because I have a very - relationship to that language, the word "social work" and the history of it - the way it works here in Canada. So I have a very - I am always in conflict with social work in itself. But that was just sort of the mode I decided to take that seemed acceptable at the time to do counseling work with people.

Um, but it always has been very important to me for me to work with people of colour, particularly, people of colour who don't have family in Canada, that may be displaced. Even if they have family in Canada, their experiences have been displacement and lack of community. In terms of opening up a space, of talking and actualizing your own dreams and feeling affirmed, I feel that is so important, that there are so many people [...] Particularly folks of colour that feel very isolated in their community. Even if they are part of the community, still that isolating piece around the mental health piece. I felt it was really important to facilitate that space.

Also - I feel it is really important work and it is very interesting work. It is work that I never get bored of. It is work that has forced me to look at myself in the mirror and be

really critical of what it is I do. To really be mindful of how I hold space with people. So I find my work is really interesting in that way.

In the master narrative of helping, especially in medicalized mental health settings, the goal is to help move people to functionality, not optimality. *Flex* presents a counter-narrative where “folks of colour” are represented as humans who are worthy of aspirations and optimal living.

Furthermore, *Flex*’s counter-narrative makes the White helping narrative explicit. She understands that she is playing along with the White script by becoming a professionalized helper with credentials in order to gain employment as a counselor (which she values); however, even in this role she is a counter character by operating as a “facilitator”, rather than a “social worker” who controls and manages:

Sometimes [clients] go right off the bat, "I need someone to fix my life". That is when I go, “I am not in the business of fixing people's lives. I am not a fixer, but I am willing to work with you. I am really curious about what really great stuff you have going on for you. I believe I have some stuff, but I don't have all the answers, so I am really interested in what is going on with you and what sort of good stuff you are carrying around and how can you use that in terms of mobilizing and where you want to be”. Right? So, that sort of is my posture. I would rather work collaboratively with people.

I don't position myself as the "social worker". It is just that. It is very interesting but not, you know - people just sort of are expecting this expert person that relies a lot on assessment tools and just doing analysis. It is like: that is not my speed. That is not my speed. I feel it is really important to hold space with people.

She refuses to reproduce Whiteness through the domination of others via assessment and analysis. Yet, she is still constrained by the master narrative in her choice to hold the title and therefore legitimacy of a “social worker”. In positioning herself as counter character, she creates an identity where she is able to define agency and resist this master narrative. Her counter self, however, is a position that becomes less solid as she encounters vicarious racism (as will be discussed in the Section 4.3 below).

Flourish also positions himself as a counter character within the helping and White supremacy master narratives. He utilizes the master narrative of helping in identifying himself as “a source” of goodness for others and he is an active agent in choosing this particular line of work as it aligns with his personal “purpose”; however, he is pushed by the master narrative to create a counter story to explain how he can belong in this typically White-feminized role when he is a person “in this [Black and male] body”:

Sounds a bit cliché but I think this line of work lines up with my purpose on earth, which is, I think to be an area of healing for folks. A source of healing; a source of motivation; a source of encouragement for people that are hurting. I have always been interested in the wellbeing of others from a very young age. I didn't know I could make a profession of it. So growing up, that was part of some of the experiences I had to go through.

Being in my body and being interested in these sorts of soft skills. You have people saying, "Why don't you do athletics, sciences or medicine or engineering?" I'm like, "I'm not really interested in that stuff. I care about the human condition." I just - it fit my personality, it fit who I was, it fit the interactions I was having with people, it fit what gave me my sense of purpose. I just went into it. Again, I didn't know you could make a career out of it until my late years of high school when it came time for me to decide what I was going to do in the next few years and I was like, "Hm. Social work. That is pretty cool."

He too talks about the need for safe spaces to do helping work with racialized and marginalized people. He talks about the importance of going to the people rather than expecting them to come to him: “with the young people with the populations that we were working with, often times the sessions happen in my car or happen at a Tim Hortons or a McDonalds”. He, therefore, offers narratives of helping that counter the master narrative by not expecting people to fit into institutionally condoned spaces, but to create and/or find the spaces where they feel safe.

Triumph also positions herself as a counter character within the master narrative and she offers several counter-narratives that strongly oppose social work’s master narrative. First, the reason she is in this work is presented as an “overcoming” of her own personal traumas and the systemic traumas that she has endured as a racialized individual:

I had a lot of trauma in my childhood [...] I noticed that when I would go to counselors I would say things like, "You have no idea what I have gone through. You have no idea." I didn't have the best experiences with counselors because I felt like they were not listening to me. They were telling me what I needed to do to fix myself [...] I still don't agree with the way those counselors went about it. It was very mainstream. So for me, I really wanted to get into the social work field and I developed that passion as a result of my experience: because I was able to overcome them.

I thought that it was important for people like me who have experienced, not the same things as my clients do, but something of trauma that I can share in little ways. I thought [that] this is the best field for me to get into. So that's why I am here today.

She positions professionalized or "mainstream" helpers as ignorant and her self-knowledge and experiences are positioned as superior. The question I ask her next is part of the co-creation of this narrative in that I ask her about overcoming rather than struggle. I thus lead her into a narrative (i.e. a co-creation) about post-traumatic growth.

PG: What helped you overcome all the stuff you have been through? Also a loaded question so however you want to answer that.

Triumph: There is a lot of - for me it is huge spiritual component. I felt like - because in my whole life, I felt like I had nobody and that nobody loved me because when I experienced abuse [Details left out to protect confidentiality] I was the punching bag [...] Because I would go through that at home and I would go to school and I couldn't get good marks. I am of a certain descent, and I am not going to say which descent [...] So I felt that judgement [around expectations of my race] and I could never ever do well in school. The teacher would say, "You know, you shouldn't even go to university." I overcame that.

Long story short, I felt like God really impacted my life in a certain way. I came really close to committing suicide and that is where I had my experience with spirituality. Coming from a person who was an atheist, I used to be an atheist. That is what changed my life, I knew that I needed to get into this work because I felt a calling to be in this type of work. So I went from a person who was failing school to a person who - I have accomplished three degrees now. I think that is just a testament to, for me, that there is something that is above us. That is why I entered into Indigenous social work: because it incorporates that spiritual aspect. That is why I am doing the work I am doing. That is what helped me overcome. That I had the whole (w)holistic aspect to healing for me.

In her experiences of her own trauma, she defines herself as: a "punching bag"; "a piece of crap, garbage, my whole life". However, she becomes agentive after the spiritual intervention, which

serves as a turning point in the narrative: “I knew that I needed to get into this work because I felt a calling to be in this type of work” and “I have accomplished three degrees now”. Attaining specific legitimated competencies to be the masterful helper plays into reproducing Whiteness (Jeffery, 2005); however, for *Triumph* these accomplishments are also her refusal to accept the judgements that placed her as subhuman in the racial contract through messages she received in elementary and high school, such as: “You shouldn't even go to university”. In refusing the role of victim as dictated by a master narrative that says traumatized and racialized people will and should fail, she becomes a counter character who achieves what only White humans are said to be capable of doing. In playing the White script, though, there is a potential that she may use her legitimated credentials to become dominant and control marginalized others. Thus, I next explore how she works and how she uses these credentials.

Following up to her story about spiritual intervention, I ask, “So you have been praying ever since?” In her answer she talks about her way of work, which opposes dominance. My continual prompting about her healing and spirituality is part of co-creating the way she tells this narrative with a positive/triumphant bent:

Triumph: Oh yeah. I pray every day. I noticed that in the work I do, even people at work will say, especially with women, they will open up to me. Or people on the streets will open up to me [...] that is a huge part of - I think there is an energy we give off and maybe what I went through maybe connects to somebody. But for me, I believe that through my prayers and because I believe we are on mother earth and putting my energy out there, putting my positivity out there, not that people aren't, but just putting it out there because that is the work I want to do and that is what makes me able to get this kind of work done. Yeah.

It is ultimately not her “legitimate” credentials that make her an effective helper, but her experiences and spirituality, both of which are absent from the master narrative of helping in Social Work. She ends this story with the affect she works with:

I think that at the end of the day, for me, it is really important for me to come to work and the youth to know that I genuinely love them. Love is a strong word, but I genuinely have so much love for them and them knowing that is the only reason they share with me. I think that every social worker needs to have that love because love is the only thing that is going to change this world. I really believe that.

Explicitly infusing “love” into the way she performs the helper role scrambles the master helper narrative, which is not about love but competent services, or as she says: “fixing” instead of “loving”. Her counter-narrative, therefore, emerges as evidence of post traumatic growth and positions her as the one who is a site of knowing and authentic goodness as opposed to a moral position occupied by those who help. She and *Journey* are the only participants who work in organizations where administrators are from marginalized groups.

Awareness’s reason for getting into this work neither counters the master narrative nor employs it perhaps because she spent most of her life in a different country and is employing the master narratives from that place:

The only purpose of coming [to Canada] was because my partner had already done his education in the States. We said, okay now it is my turn. I am going to get one degree here. That is the purpose of coming to Canada. So I was looking into Masters Programs and it was hard to enroll. They didn't recognize my degree from [my country of origin], of course not. Looking into different programs I came across Social Work which is closer to what I had done.

She does fit into the master narrative of the immigrant who struggles with access to Canadian institutions and also gains prestige or status by obtaining a degree from one of these. However, she does not talk about choosing this career because of a desire to become a helper. When I ask her a question about resilience later in the interview, she speaks more about her “MSW journey and choice of career path”:

Even this MSW journey and working in the field I wouldn't have done one-on-one counseling in [Country of Origin] because there was no such thing when I studied. There was no social work program. Still there is no such thing called "counseling". There are a few that have just started. So I don't know how this happened. I go with the flow. That is my philosophy. It just happened and yeah, that's me.

Like many of the participants, this was neither a career path that she chose nor a calling of any sort. She landed in this job and in this degree because these were the educational spaces that were accessible for her. Like narrators that are well supported in the spaces that they land, her narratives are about thriving in her professional capacity. While she clearly works in an organization that operates according to neoliberal ideology, the support she receives allow her to be more flexible in her work as she explains in the following story:

For five years, one session, one story [...] That is what we did. So it is a stark reminder, time and again: Keep quiet. It is not [about] my goal, it is somebody else's journey. The pace is theirs, not mine. That is a stark reminder and unfortunately does not sit right with the system. The system sees them: 10 sessions, let them go. So the rush is coming from there. But the reality is it is their journey. If they are not ready, they are not ready. I go by my 10 sessions rule. I want to push my agenda maybe because of that. That doesn't work with trauma work. We all know that. But thankfully I work in an organization that does give me the flexibility. If I request, I need to see this woman I have been seeing for five years.

In her counter-narrative, neoliberal ideologies hold power over helpers and are positioned as a harmful, faceless and disembodied force. However, when she is granted agency she uses her power to overcome neoliberal ways. Her language is very clear that she is there to listen and follow the pace of the person she is helping, rather than to fix or change them.

4.1.2 Helping Narratives of Participants Who Are Not Professionalized

The narratives that completely counter and thus resist master narratives of the helper are from people who are not professionalized. What these stories do share in common with professionalized helpers is the emphasis on spaces and mentors who supported their development and the development of their counter-narratives.

Journey's narrative contains the strongest disapproval of the helping master narrative as she has had direct experiences of the helper as the colonizer:

I grew up north of the city. I grew up on the res. Then I moved to [the City] and fooled around for a long time and had lots of fun and then I got serious: I went back to school. I thought I wanted to work in the office. Just do things in the office, help people who were providing a service. When I was growing up there was nobody on the reserve who had a professional job. People on the reserve were artists, they were fishermen, hunters, they were crafts people and other than that there were professional people, but they were not native. The social worker came into town, came to the reserve, whenever. The nurse came into town, got to the reserve whenever. Indian agent came into town; policeman, nurse, doctor, Indian agent, policeman, church person, um, priest, minister and a teacher. They were all non-native people.

[...] You never aspired to be a teacher. You never wanted to be one of those people. You don't want to be a social worker, you don't want to be a doctor. You don't want to be any of those people because they are all yucky people. They come in, their nose is up in the air, they do what they do and they get out. They leave real fast. So you don't want to be any of those people. You cross them off your list and you wonder what you are going to do. So I decided what I want to do is work in the office. You do filing, you do typing, you do all these things - your whole day will be different all day but it would be good. So anyway, I went to school and I was studying in a two year program.

PG: Why did you want to go to school if you didn't want to be professional?

Journey: I didn't want a career

PG: In any of those things

Journey: So I thought I would work in the office. So I went to school and learned all the things you are supposed to learn about the office.

Thus, *Journey*'s personal narrative is a counter story of the narrative of the good, White helpers (police, teacher, social worker, nurse) and counters the colonial narrative as well. First, in her story it is the White professionals who are presented as helpers, but helpers who threaten order and balance. This opposes the master narrative which says that the subordinate savages are the ones who threaten the balance of the good White society (Dei, 2004). Second, White professionals are not seen as good, dominant, powerful or even effective in their helping. Rather, they are positioned as ineffective and arbitrary, disconnected strangers who arrive "whenever".

Similarly, her way of helping also counters the master narrative of domination as she assumes a passive role in her position as helper. The person being helped has the most agency and control:

When I was on the reserve and worked as counselor, I didn't make appointments for them to come into my office. I always said, "Are you going to be home Monday morning, can I come by? How do you like your coffee?" I would show up with coffee and then we would just sit. I would always sit in the seat closest to the door 'cause I didn't want to intrude on the rest of them. Someone who is really busy, a mother who is really busy, her whole house is a mess. Everything is upside down. I don't want her to - I don't want to see things that she doesn't want me to see. I don't want to see the bathroom, the bedrooms, the chaos in her house until she invites me to see it. Once I am in there, I can help her with it. If she needs help with her clothes, I can help her fold her clothes, whatever I help her with. If she is in the kitchen cooking, I can go in and help her in the kitchen or be washing dishes while she cooks or something like that. Cause it is showing her, right? It is showing her how to do things. So it is not sitting down and teaching her how to do stuff, it is going to her house and showing her how to do it.

Becoming's way of helping is very similar to *Journey's*. He begins his story about why he got into this work with positive experiences of being helped by people he considers "mentors" rather than "Helpers". He followed in the footsteps of his mentor who completely countered the master narrative of the professionalized helper, first, by blurring the boundary between helper and helped. *Becoming* talks about the importance of being involved in his mentor's home and family life:

I feel it is very important that when you work in a community like here, like [This Community], just doing the 7 or 8 hours of work in your office, you wear that mask and you wear it to deliver what you need to deliver, is not enough to really root something in somebody who is having major challenges living in this community. When a person who lives in this community who has major challenges is able to see you as a real, real person, they strive to aspire to want to be like you and be better than what they are. So for me, growing up in this community, it was very important to me to see [my mentor] in his home. When his mother died, one of her requests was that I play drums at the funeral. I felt like not only I had my own family, I felt like I was a part of something that wasn't [This Community], but it was [This Community]. So for me [after meeting his mentor], I didn't want to fight [anymore]. I wanted to be better. So for a lot of the kids that I deal with right now, it is the same thing.

In this counter-narrative, he is very clear that the master narrative way of working is ineffective. Like *Journey*, he gauges professionalized helpers as ineffective because of their lack of actual engagement with the community. *Becoming* also works with the same philosophy as *Journey*, in that he goes to the people he is helping rather than expecting them to come to him and expecting them to play a particular role of someone who is worthy of being helped. In fact, he talks about getting to understand the narratives that the youth are operating under in order to help them feel a sense of belonging:

If you can't tap into that subculture, you're at risk of losing kids that are so called 'doing good' is great because you just can't understand the demand of that subculture. For a lot of kids who get into that, it is really a sense of feeling like they're part of something.

This ability to tap into the subculture is his way of working. He later describes how he achieves this:

For me, it is entering a situation where you are never thinking that the way you are thinking as a worker you got to make sure it happens because you have expectations. I don't have any expectations. If you come today and we talk for five hours and we don't move one inch, that is okay. You know what I mean?

I ask both *Journey* and *Becoming* questions that come from the master narrative of people who dominate. They are questions that assume that it is difficult for helpers to not dominate those whom they are helping and that healing should be immediate. I realize now that these assumptions come from liberal, neoliberal, and capitalist ideology where healing must be rushed because time is money and gains need to match or be greater than costs. Secondly, my questions assume that the most important learning happens in schools. Both *Becoming* and *Journey* counter and expose my assumptions:

PG: How is it okay with you? How do you make - I mean, yes, it makes sense. I would like to be like that too. How do you do that?

Becoming: [laughs] I am a strong believer that if that person doesn't decide it for themselves, it is not - they are not going to embrace that unless it is real.

PG: How did you come to this?

Becoming: It is for me too. If I want to do something and someone is trying to convince me to do it, if I don't want to do it I am not going to do it.

To the same questions, *Journey* responds in a similar manner:

Journey: I don't know. I guess it is just because I know how that feels. When someone knocks on the door and I open it up and they say "I am so and so" I think, "Should I let this person in or not?" So it all depends on how I feel. Even if I let them in a little bit, I let them sit in that chair, but I won't invite them in to sit on the couch or the comfy chairs, I guess. You don't invite them in until you feel like it. If they try to push in, then you push back and you take them back to the door.

The lived experience of helpers who were intrusive has, in part, inspired both these narrators to position themselves as people who can do better. They know how it feels to be the recipient of help, and this knowing guide them in the work that they do. The admission of having needed help in their past also runs counter to the master narrative of helping. For both of them, to be helped is a normal activity.

In another instance, *Journey* makes my assumption explicitly clear when I expose my own ignorance coming in with a master narrative of the reserve as place of desolation:

PG: You know every time I hear a story about somebody on a reserve it really gets me. Also, so I am - pretty impacted even though you haven't said a whole lot about the outsiders coming in, how they felt yucky to you. Knowing a little bit about the history about Indigenous people in Canada, how it affects one's self-esteem when you are just really shafted like that. Plus you are a woman and we are already shafted being women. I am wondering where you got the courage to leave the reserve, to study, to just take on this job and then apply. When I think about myself there are a lot self-esteem things that would not let me do that.

Journey: Growing up on a reserve is really different. It is not as sad as you think it is.

PG: Tell me about that.

Journey: When there is no non-native people on the reserve it is a really nice harmonious place. Everybody helps each other, everybody looks after each other. So nobody really goes hungry because everybody helps that person or that family. When anybody is hurt

everybody - like you are in it together. The only time it is - the only time the non-native people come into the community it is when there is a crisis.

Later in her narrative this vignette of harmony is contradicted, however, we can see that this preliminary presentation strongly opposes my ignorance and assumptions of a totalized hard life on the reserve. Again, we are co-creating this story as I am the audience to which she is catering her story. Her narrative also speaks of the normalcy of helping, which is done by and for community members. The outside helpers, the colonizers, and the performers of Whiteness are only associated with crisis. *Becoming's* story of the nature of helping in his country of origin is similar:

One of the things with me and I think who I am is what my life has been [...] I come from a family of eight. I have spent from 1 until 10 with my grandmother. My mom lived in Canada. My father, I knew of him. I didn't know him [...] Growing up [in Country of Origin] we were always living or being with other people. We were never in one household. Then my father built a house but the food that we eat would be somebody cooking next door and sending us some food; or a person checking on us when the night comes on or early in the morning. So I understand what it is to care [...] So I had that in me [...] It never gets to a point where it is a burden or it is scary.

Both narrators come from cultures where different peoples care for one another and effective helping is a community affair, rather than a strictly family affair or a commodity where boundaried professionals step in and step out. While both *Journey* and *Becoming* are in paid roles, neither hold “professionalized” titles. They both seem to navigate the tension of being paid to help and performing this community-role by being as unscripted as possible in their roles as helpers.

Like *Journey*, *Bridges* also fell into this line of work rather than choosing it. Because of life circumstances, he dropped out of university and began volunteering at a community agency. In this agency, he had mentors and opportunities for employment “using [his] skills and talents at that time [...] to get involved and try to generate some revenue for [himself]. That was just it.”

Luckily, this space and the people within it allowed him to thrive. He uses the language of spirituality to describe the reason why he took on roles of frontline work:

I just didn't intentionally set a path to end up in this work. I thought I was going to be an artist, a musician, a painter, photographer, or a writer. That is the image I had for myself. As life has it, there was another plan. Some might call it a subconscious plan and others might call it a universal plan. There is something in between.

I walked through the doors of [This Community Centre] and I met my friend [...] who I saw in community events as a musician, but never really [had] connected with [...] we connected instantly. He had a welcoming spirit. He welcomed me into [this Agency]. He is an employee there. [...] This job] was about survival but it quickly, it didn't take long for me to realize that this made sense for me in so many ways in my life. I began to trace back the story. I started to think of my choices in high school. I started to realize that the challenges experienced as young people - here I am, I can try to do something about that in other people's lives. So this path became - made sense to me very quickly.

Unlike *Journey* and *Becoming*, *Bridges* positions himself as agentive in his helping. However, his way of being an agent still counters the master narrative as he does not use his power to control and fix, but to create new spaces where people can thrive. He is not aiming to change people, but to change the system in which they live. In the last 10 years he has been in an administrative role where he says he works to help marginalized youth create “professional networks”; i.e. entry points and supports. He adds: “I commit to myself as one of those members that can offer a professional network. In that way I [continue to] meet people directly, one-on-one.” Thus, the way he works now is connected back to how he got into this work; access to spaces that offered work and mentorship are foundational to the help he received and how he chooses to help today. Some of the projects he describes are about creating physical spaces for marginalized people, for example, he worked with youth to create:

...youth dedicated space. Not the library, not just the community centre. There are some people who keep getting kicked out of those spaces and we need a space for those people. So we built those spaces. So, I feel good about what we had started.

Space becomes an important theme in this research, as I will explore in the *White Supremacy* section and again in the *Discussion*. Most participants talk about not having enough space for racialized individuals and communities. *Bridges'* story goes to show how imperative a supportive and safe space, like the Agency he lands in, is for anyone trying to find their way.

All three narrators who are not professionalized give narratives that are not based on the master narrative of dominance and control. *Journey* and *Becoming* seem to have developed standards and ways according to how help was modelled in the communities where they were raised. *Bridges* has also set his standards of helping according to his own experiences of how a particular space (and the mentorship within this space) allowed him to find and follow his higher purpose. Thus, while their helping narratives counter White supremacy and colonial master narratives of helping, they do not justify their ways until I ask my questions which carry assumptions from the master narrative.

4.1.3 Summary of Master and Counter-Narratives of Helping

In examining why and how each of the narrator's chose to become helpers I have found that they employ both master and counter-narratives to articulate the goodness of being racialized helpers. As the interviewer, I also influenced how the narratives are told. For example, *Journey's* narrative of a "harmonious" life on the reserve is in response to my assumptions of the sadness that I assumed was embodied by all people who were "shafted" to reserves. She corrects with a story of agency where I had assumed victimhood. In the narratives of the professionals who did not talk about personal experiences as influencing their work, I ask directly about personal life history which then gets woven into their stories of helping.

4.2 Personal Narratives of Racism: Living within master narratives of White supremacy

While my initial intention in doing this study was to explore the construct of “vicarious racism”, with the exceptions of *Becoming* and *Journey*, participants were eager to share stories of direct experiences of racism. These two participants said that racism is an “everyday occurrence.” *Journey*’s narrative was more focused on valorizing Native ideology and people, than on the negatives of racism and colonialism. *Becoming*’s narrative was more focused on creating meaningful change for the people who are most, he believes, in need of help; that is, urban youth who are directly involved in gang violence.

In this section I show that the primary ways that narrators cope with experiences of White supremacy is through double consciousness: an understanding the oppressor’s perspective *and* one’s own as two separate ways of being. It is *Flourish* who teaches me about double consciousness when he talks about coping with racism (see page 71 below). I examine how it is a tool to make sense of oneself within the confines of White supremacy. It becomes a tool used to anticipate, guard against and normalize White supremacy (“normalization” refers to viewing White supremacy as an everyday and normal occurrence). When racism is experienced without the protection of double consciousness, narrators experience confusion as their schemas of being good, normal, and human are challenged. In this section, I will explore how narrators process that confusion. The outcome of this processing is either a change in schema or a return back to normalizing White supremacy/racism as inevitable.

I begin this section by looking at how participants understood racialization in their childhood experiences (how did they enter the master narrative of White supremacy?) and then look at their narratives of adult experiences of White supremacy in their workplaces. Again, “master narratives” define who is human and normal, and how such normal humans achieve

goodness. How do racialized people justify their goodness within the master narrative and/or how they reclaim their goodness and humanity in counter-narratives?

4.2.1 Participant's Narratives about Early Experiences of Racialization

Growing up with a sense of belonging

Three of the participants did not remember experiences of racialization in their early life: *Awareness* and *Questioning* who identify as “visible minorities” and *Journey*, who identifies as “Native”.

Awareness spent her entire childhood and the majority of her adult life in her country of origin. There, she was in the dominant group:

PG: “What about [racism] in [you Country of Origin]? How did your race matter if at all?”

Awareness: “It didn't. At all. I was not even aware - or I did not pay attention to any of these things. My ignorance.

PG: I wonder if you could reflect on how that might have - it is hard to - but how it might have impacted you to grow up in a place where race wasn't an issue. Or something you had to be aware of.

Awareness: Have an impact on?

PG: You, as a person.

Awareness: Because it didn't affect me? Carefree. Right? Wouldn't even pay attention to anything around you. So, it was a blessing for me when that [incident of racism] happened. A couple of incidents in [University] happened. It made me aware. I was more mindful. Probably I was very ignorant. It was a good lesson for me. It prepared me to work in this field for sure. I was ignorant because I didn't have to deal with any of these, right? When I was in [Country of Origin], I didn't have to. I was privileged, I have to say, right?

Her account exemplifies positions of privilege (one benefiting from the master narrative) where one is “carefree” and has the luxury of not even thinking about how the master narrative operates. However, she still has a counter-narrative, framing “privilege” as a place of ignorance and the experiences of racism as “a blessing” because it “made [her] aware. [She] was more

mindful.” She says her experiences of racism: “prepared me to work in this field for sure. I was ignorant because I didn't have to deal with any of these”.

This sense of being prepared by explicit, direct and personal experiences of White supremacy speaks volumes about what she did not learn in her formal education, her MSW courses. This forces us to ask: How well does formal Canadian education actually do in challenging the status quo? Do these few lived experiences or even many experiences “prepare” us to work with other racialized clients? Are then only racialized people going to be prepared to work with racialized others?

Questioning says that they did not feel racialized growing up in Canada because they say: “I was raised in a Black community for 15 to 18 years of my life.” Thus, they say that they never thought about being racialized themselves until university:

Until I was in university and doing courses, like, "Gender, Race and Sex". It is like, "What are these foreign concepts?" Why are people spending \$900 on a course to talk about race? [...]Then I guess when you start to look at it in a different lens [...] you reflect back in your life and you are like, "Ok, this is why this happened" [...] it has been there, I just never paid attention to it.

Thus, *Questioning* never had to think about race when they were amongst people who were also racialized; who allowed them to feel normal and value-neutral. However, when they received an education which made the master narrative of racism explicit, they were able to reflect on their experiences and understand, “This is why this happened”. In other words, they discovered retroactively how they may have been influenced by White supremacy, and also that they are not part of the dominant and neutral/unmarked group in the racist society.

Journey also does not remember explicit instances of racism in her childhood because everybody was Native on the reserve and then in high school she noticed skin difference, but did not experience it as ‘racism’:

When I started going to high school, we had to go to town to go to high school. That is when you noticed White and Native: [...] So I am in a classroom with 30 kids and five of us are Native. Again, you stick with the native people. You don't pay attention to other people. You get off the bus together, you all walk to school together, when school is finished you all walk down the hill together to catch the bus.

PG: Did you get a sense of what the people, what the other group thought of you?

Journey: No, you don't care. It doesn't bother you. You know it is there, you feel it, but you don't even try to identify it. You stick with who you are and those people are the ones who are your best friends. You see them after school, you see them on the weekends, you hang with them. Parents are coming over, you are going over there to their house. So you don't pay attention to any of that stuff. What you learn is gradual. You learn all that stuff gradually because you can't always be in that group. You have to separate yourself.

Thus, while this narrative contains some awareness that there is a system of White dominance in place around her, and where she is not in the dominant group, the narrator defies having been impacted by it because of the power given to her through her sense of belonging in this group. Still, one of the mechanisms of White supremacy is to keep people segregated in their own groups in order to prevent them from participating fully in society (Peake & Kobayashi, 2002). Thus, while *Journey* may not consciously be aware of this master narrative running through her story, it does seem, at least in part, to be implicit in her account of belonging. Still, belonging also allows her to define herself as human as opposed to subhuman. Furthermore, her narrative sets up a picture of “everyday” people who are normal and neutral and in doing so takes power away from the master narrative, making it unimportant. However, she does acknowledge the pervasiveness of White supremacy in her phrase, “what you learn is gradual”. An intact sense of belonging isn't always possible: “you can't always be in that group. You have to separate yourself.”

In summary, the position of the narrator within a group that has shielded them either through privilege and/or belonging is what unifies these three narratives of childhoods where

racialization did not matter. In contrast, *Bridges* talks about childhood experiences where he struggled to belong.

Growing up while yearning for belonging

Bridges was under the age of 10 when his family immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean. He identifies his ethnic and racial heritage as being “a mixture of Chinese, Black, Indian, Indigenous and Welsh”. However, because he was closest to the people who identified as “Black” in his family, he says, “I think I have a predominately Black identity.” He adds: “I had this other Chinese identity. I can play between the two.” However, he also explains that there is pain in not being able to have one identity: “you are not Chinese enough or you are not Black enough or you are seen as some mongrel somehow”. He says about his first experiences in Canada:

People couldn't figure out what we were, we were mixed, right? So that was a common question for me and my brother, "What are you? We don't know if you are a nigger, or a paki or a chink? Which one are you?" We would say, "What the hell?"

[It was] incredibly painful in the sense of isolation, confusion, rejection. You know, you are a new immigrant to the country, you just want to belong. You want to be cool friends with everybody. So, the racial lines that are drawn very early in the elementary school yard, challenges, challenged me, challenged the child in me, challenged my childhood to really figure out where you belong. I think it led to awkwardness, I think it led to sheepishness, I think it led to insecurities that played out throughout my high school life, into my adult life. I think 100% that it did that. It led to overcompensating in many ways, which is at the heart a behavior manifesting in insecurity; struggling to form some kind of identity that made sense.

In these early memories of a child not being able to be “cool friends with everybody”, he expresses a desire to assimilate as plain human. Name calling puts him in the position of ‘other’ and as a child he lacks agency and power. White supremacy is power and some of the kids in the playground are conveyors of this narrative. The only way the child in this story can counter them is through the private thought: “What the hell?” This thought conveys shock and breaches the

way he sees reality. As he emphasizes in the repeating of “challenged me” in the narrative above, his was an experience where a sense of self was constantly shaken – in this way, racism was felt as a pervasive trauma which, he says has impacted the way he experiences even his adult life.

When we have belonging, we can experience security in the world and in our sense of self;

Bridges did not feel this belonging in his early exposure to the Canadian playground. However, in his later childhood he does find belonging and is able to counter White supremacy through his Black identity:

Because the music, food and accents of the Caribbean were so imprinted on me, I gravitated to wherever that manifested. In the neighborhood that I grew up, the strongest way in which that manifested was amongst the Jamaican population and so I gravitated to the Jamaican community. I adopted the accent, even though I am not a Jamaican [...] sought friendships amongst the young Black boys and young Black girls. This was certainly more so in my moving into my pre-teens [...] Up to grade 6, I didn't have a place. I didn't have anything to attach to. I was trying to dodge the “paki”, dodge the “chink”, dodge the “nigger”: Violence, verbal violence and physical violence that was thrown my way.

Name calling is meant to put the subhuman in his proper sub-place. While he was trying to ‘dodge’ these labels he had nowhere else to go. He becomes passive in the master narrative of the immigrant and racialized Other within a system dominated by White supremacy. Then there is a turning point:

I think that when I started to see strengths as represented in the kids who had Jamaican heritage, I said, "I am going over there" [laughs]. "I am aligning myself with those folks". They sound like Caribbean's, they have the same food. I am not ashamed of curry, they love curry. I am not ashamed of roti, I am not ashamed. I don't feel the shame that I struggled to run away from when I tried to make friends and build social connection to other groups. I don't feel like the monkey who can cook hot dogs so we are just like Garry and Collin down the hallway, right? "Don't cook curry, mom. It scares the people away." So you know, I didn't have to feel shame amongst those friends although they all ate fries and hamburgers like everyone else, but they got curry and roti. They understood it, right? So okay, alliance, commonality, community, "I am going over there". It wasn't [Country of Origin] culture by any means, but it was close enough, man. It was like, "I'll take it". Jamaicans cook curry chicken different from my mom but they still cook curry chicken, I don't care [laughs].

In this part of the story, he finds his agency again: “I am going over there”. This is an exercise of choice and an option about space that he did not have before. While his ability to belong to other people categorized as “subhumans” is part of the master narrative, he counters this narrative by giving the Jamaican Other characteristics of humanity: people who embody “strength” and “community”. Furthermore, even within this group, he can positively acknowledge his difference, “Jamaicans cook curry chicken different from my mom but they still cook curry chicken, I don't care”, without any of it being associated with shame. I become curious about his counter story and ask more questions as we co-create this narrative:

PG: What you identified as strengths in that group was their ability to be like openly loving their culture?

Bridges: Yes, but there was also physical strength; and that, as I understand it now, is part of the survival mechanism of youth of colour, particularly Black youth.

PG: Physical strength, how did you know?

Bridges: Oh, you know. People take up space. They take up space and they walk with their shoulders back and their heads held high. Like “do not fuck around”. I was “I want some of that do not fuck around please! I want some of that because I am tired of this over here. I want to get beside that!” and I found that I could relate. It wasn't hard to translate the [Country of Origin] accent, the [Country of Origin] language that made me laugh and brought me joy and gave me such a sense of home whenever I heard it. It wasn't difficult for me to translate and find a link to the Jamaican accent and words that they used. It was actually, “Okay, I can get into this”.

Not only is belonging an important resource to counter White supremacy, but so is the ability to “take up space”. In the master narrative, this strength and “do not fuck around” is seen as immoral, aggressive, an inability to assimilate and therefore labeled as criminal and dangerous. In *Bridges*' counter-narrative, however, Black bodies that “take up space” provides relief from White domination. His narrative thus ends with a repetition of reclaiming agency: “Okay, I can get into this”. Thus, while belonging does not prevent him from being impacted by racialization

as it may have for the first three narrators, it does give *Bridges* the experience of safety from White supremacy.

Proving to the Educational System that I am Human (and good enough)

Three of the participants talk about their primary childhood experiences of racialization and White supremacy as occurring in educational institutions where they were told they were not good enough and would not succeed. In all of their countering narratives, they overcome the inadequacy label by demonstrating intelligence either through the attainment of academic merit or acknowledgement of intelligence from their colleagues.

Before I turn to *Flourish*'s school experiences, I will begin with what he says is his earliest memory of understanding his own difference:

I don't think I knew about race until my last few years of high school [...] Before that I knew I was dealing with issues of identity which had more to do with culture and heritage and cultural practices. I remember walking downtown one time with my mom and I said, "You know, Mom, when I grow up I am going to change my last name. I don't want to be [*Flourish*] anymore. I want to take on" - I actually felt that I wanted to take on a Whiter name. This is me at the age of five or six, not older than ten, saying to my mother that I want to change my last name and take on a White name. Not knowing what that White name was, but I knew it was something different than my name, [*Flourish*]."

Even at this young age he can sense that he is not part of the dominant group and that those who are dominant and have White sounding family names. As a child, he is clearly subsumed by the master narrative and desires to be seen as human within it by taking on a "Whiter" identity. I ask more about this story to understand how his racial identity developed:

PG: Do you know how your mom might have reacted?

Flourish: She didn't react too positively to it. I think she was taken aback by it but it became this sort of internal joke between her and I for a couple of years while I was growing up. Whenever there would be successes of Blackness for example, she would pull on that joke, "Oh and you wanted to change your last name to a White name, right?" That was something - one thing I did appreciate was that my parents, although they didn't spend time on crafting a consciousness around Blackness for me, they were not afraid of having those conversations. They weren't telling me how to think, but at the same time

they weren't afraid of having discussion about difference, about their own experiences of treatment of Blacks.

He explains that his mother encouraged assimilation through messages like: “You know, everybody should be the same. Don't go drawing any undue attention to you. Do as they are doing. Try to be that good kid like everybody else. Be the other kind of Black kid.” Thus, she points out that there can be Black counter characters who step out of stereotypes and play White scripts (assimilate) and succeed within the master narrative. Despite his success at being this assimilated counter character, he is still perceived as “Black” in the White supremacy narrative at school:

I would be received as "the other kind of Black kid" at school. What I mean by that is I was involved in athletics, I was involved in student council, my graduating year I was athlete of the year [...] I had all these accolades that were attached to my name and yet the interpersonal treatment between me and the instructors, other students who occupied identities of privilege and dominance weren't reflective of my accolades. It was like it doesn't matter what you have under your name, you are still Black. So I started to open my mind a little bit more to: “What does it mean to be in my body as a Black male body?”

I had teachers who were telling me, "Don't worry about University" or telling me not to apply to universities that I wanted to [...] I wasn't aware of the impact on me until my later years of high school. It was like, "Huh. So when you tell me to take College math courses, it actually leads me down a particular path vs. somebody else". I am in class having conversations with these folks and they are probably struggling with the content more than me and yet they are receiving messages to go into things like University, math, and you know. It didn't sit well with me.

The teachers are the helpers and positioned as the ones with the power and knowledge “until [his] later years of high school” when he starts to question what they are saying and in doing so he reclaims his own power and rationality. Still, the language is soft: “It didn’t sit well with me”. He is not expressing anger or even frustration, just a tension. Without emotion, he maintains his role in the narrative as a rational character, and therefore remains a good and moral character in the narrative; rather than becoming the stereotypical angry Black man. Is there room for emotion

for Black individuals or is there a fear that any emotion should be interpreted as subhuman? In doing this analysis I am well aware that although I am racialized, my skin is lighter – I am not Black. I am the audience who this narrative is being told to. How much emotion is permitted when the audience members (both me and the readers of this text) are perceived as being closer to the oppressor in the hierarchy established by the racial contract?

Triumph also prizes in the accolades she achieves, but this happens in her University career. Her public school story is told through the lens of White supremacy where she is positioned as inferior:

I would go to school and I couldn't get good marks. I am of a certain descent, and I am not going to say which descent [...] So I felt that judgement and I could never ever do well in school. The teacher would say, "You know, you shouldn't even go to university." I overcame that. Long story short, I felt like God really impacted my life in a certain way.

First, her reluctance to identify her race speaks loudly about her awareness of the implications of facing the fact of White supremacy. Secondly, as in her helping narrative, spiritual intervention is credited for turning her life around where she “went from a person who was failing school to a person who - I have accomplished three degrees now. I think that is just a testament to, for me, that there is something that is above us.” Like *Flourish*, she positions herself as an exception, a counter character who is able to achieve the accolades that are expected of (White) humans.

A third narrator has a similar story to share. *Becoming* does not label the following childhood experience as “racism”; however, I will argue that this story most likely is about experiences of White supremacy and developing the skills to cope with it:

When I came to Canada, my understanding of reading or writing was very limited. So in my public school life I was constantly fighting. I didn't really pay attention where I should have paid attention [...] So I went to a Special Ed program. That was a big deal because everyone bothered you. They assumed that you were dumb and stupid, which in some sense, in the literal term of reading and writing I took on that hat and wore it for a while. So for me, where everybody is one step, I am always two or three steps ahead of

you. Because I just had to do that to appear to be normal. So I know what it is to wear a mask.

He develops a double consciousness, “always two to three steps ahead of you” (where “you” is the oppressor and general public), in his resistance to the implications of the “Special Ed” label. *Becoming* also offers a counter-narrative of his own success as an adult as proof of overcoming this labeling:

In terms of the way I survived, a lot of people just wonder how did I do it[...] They also say, ““You are beyond smart. How did you do it?” So many things that I do: "How did you do it?" You know what I mean? I just say "it is just who I am." I can read people, all the skills that I developed in my school I apply it in my work. A lot of people just say that I have a unique way and I just say, "No, this is the only way that I know." I could see people without even realizing that. So, I ask these questions until we get to a place where we are very comfortable, until we get to a place that is very magical.”

However, *Becoming* reflects on how the “Special Ed” label is still partially internalized:

There are some limitations that I have put on myself. It is hardest to acknowledge trying to shake those limitations to move on [...] One thing about myself, I am very loyal [...] I think to myself why I have been working here for as long as I have. I have kind of devalued my work because of my ability to read and write. So maybe I wouldn't do it as well in another arena. Because I know this arena so well and I play it like Michael Jordan in the fourth quarter, I am comfortable here, but I am almost, in a sense, limiting myself. I can understand people who sell drugs and do these things in order to survive. I can truly understand it, but it is like I know how to bring them. I move them. I guess that is the beauty of it.

He does not talk about these limitations in terms of systemic barriers, racism, and a poor education system, but faults himself: “limitations I have put on”. He utilizes the liberal master narrative that the individual agent is responsible for their own wellbeing. Thus, he ends his story about his skills and positions himself as a site of action and knowledge: “I know how to bring them.” When I ask directly if his experiences can be linked to racism:

PG: I am wondering about this limitations - the one about "maybe I can't do well in another arena" - do you think that racism had any impact on that? Like you being told that you can't read and write in school?

Becoming: Yeah. Huge.

PG: Yeah? Tell me about that.

Becoming: I met a teacher [...who] was the first person who really got me to open up. A lot of teachers that I met before that, they were very adamant about where I am going to be and also the fact that I fit the typical picture that they normally see.

PG: What typical picture?

Becoming: Black, loves to fight, has no respect for authority. So that was the picture that I fit, so I was labeled "Special Ed" and I was pushed into this particular class. So my normal, cause we checked in in the morning in the normal class with 30 kids and everybody knew. At quarter after ten, the reason that I get up to go to the Special Ed class - everybody knew it. So it was almost like: "Here you go". So I was conscious of that. For a lot of teachers they were like, "Okay, he is outta here, let's get to real work".

In his response to my pushing him to talk about racism directly he tells me the story I want to hear about the impact of White supremacy, but he ends this story the way he wants to end it and that is by taking the responsibility back and referring to his "limitations" as "something that I have been avoiding".

Summary of Development of Racialization in Childhood

Early childhood experiences with White supremacy shape the narrator's view of their own identity and how they are perceived in this world. Some develop double consciousness and use it to guard themselves from the impact of White supremacy. Other participants remember childhoods where they yearned to assimilate and belong. As children, all narrators depict themselves as passive recipients of the master narrative and coping comes in form of social assimilation and internalization of racism. However, with adequate supports in place and a sense of belonging, each one of them creates counter stories, which serve to return power and humanity back to them.

4.2.2 White Supremacy: Adult experiences

In accounts of more recent experiences of racism narrators often cope by normalizing through double consciousness; however, in some instances, racism still comes as a shock which is overcome with time and a re-writing of one's own schema.

Being identified as Black is not a choice

A dominant theme that emerges in the narratives of four participants is a refusal to accept racialization with any positive "racial identity" and instead an insistence that they step out of White supremacy labels altogether. I will begin with *Bridges*, whose adult narrative contains the theme of his childhood narrative: a yearning for belonging. He shares a story about going to Ethiopia to understand his African heritage, but when he gets there, the kids call him "foteh", which means "foreigner or White". When I ask him how it feels to tell this story, he says:

It feels, I think I am in a place of acceptance of it. But in going back and recalling that story, I can honestly say, I was angry, I was upset, I wanted to scream, "don't call me that because I am you." I actually have attached my sense of self, my history, my political values, my social values to an African identity. That experience helped me to realize that I cannot do that.

I have an assumption of what the African identity is based on academic reading, which I took upon myself. But it is not - that academic reading is not what is translating on day to day lives of people who live and are born and raised in Africa. Not to say that amongst adults I wasn't embraced as "yes, you are a brother and we recognize you as a descendant." That is beautiful and I felt the belonging that I wanted to feel when that was acknowledged [...]

But I have been reading recently this idea of "Blackness" and how Blackness is carried in different ways. So it is causing me to revisit my thoughts again about, "okay, was I thinking about that in a very box, regimented way?" Because there are many experiences of Blackness. Perhaps I need to rethink that. That is one end of my thinking and the other end of my thinking is: why do I need to define myself within those paradigms anyway? How limiting is that?" Right? So that is where I am right now.

His response to being Othered is more complex in his adult narrative and he is able to wonder about the ambiguity and diversity in these apparently fixed identities. Furthermore, he asks

questions of the status quo: “Why do I need to define myself within those paradigms anyway?”

Is racialization something we want to counter with positive racial identities or can we step aside these narratives altogether?

As if in response, *Flex* says:

[My racial identity] is always changing. The one constant though, I would say, I have always identified as a "Black woman". So that has been constant. Um. But sometimes I will say "Black Canadian woman" [...] I think I have used quite a few but haven't really hold on to. I think my basic go-to, I will just identify as a Black woman. Nationality is just too heavy to carry [...] belong to either. I don't really feel like I belong here, in Canada. I don't feel like I belong in [Country of Recent Ancestors...] people there see me as a foreigner. I really don't feel like, I don't have - Nationalism doesn't really play a strong role for me. I really don't really get it. It doesn't really fit with me so I tend to, "I am a Black woman". That is the only thing that kinda makes sense in my head.

PG: What does it mean to be a Black woman?

Flex: I think in the simplest terms, I feel comfortable identifying my race as "Black". Going back to labels, I think you know, there are the times that I would say, "I am a daughter of a diaspora"; I don't even say that anymore: My race is Black, I am a Black woman, my experience of the woman of the world is as a Black woman, people treat me as a Black woman, if someone wants to dis me, they are not calling me a "bitch" they are calling me a "Black bitch". So that is just my experience [laughs]. That just sort of is the title I gave myself - just to sort of map my experience of the world."

She uses “Black woman” as a way to “map [her] experience of the world”, but not because this label locates her with any accuracy. In other words, while living within a society that is dominated by White supremacy she is perceived as “Black” and often with negative connotations like, “Black bitch”. As the interviewer, I yearn for a positive message and so I push in the co-creation of a positive narrative and she pushes back:

PG: Is there a sense of belonging that comes with that identity?

Flex: I don't know if there has ever been - I think there are moments of belonging with that identity, but I wouldn't be able to classify this as a great sense of belonging. I connect it as sort of, my experiences in the world, particularly oppressive experiences in the world - that particular label. Not even a label, but you know, how I see myself. I hold the identification in great regard in terms of some of my favorite writers and activists are Black women. But it never has been something I nestled into or snuggled up to or really

felt secure in. I never felt secure like this is my home. It is just language I know to use to describe myself. It is language that I know strangers or on-lookers - they know how to label it too. I know how to explain it to other people. For me, in terms of language of really simple language to use. In terms of language and explaining to people: this is who I am in the world.

Thus, she resists the possibility of racialization as positive and in doing so makes the master narrative of White supremacy utterly explicit: Racialization is oppressive. In her counter-narrative she is also clear that she does not want to belong to this oppressive category and she reclaims her humanity by this refusal. The most affirmative “moments” of holding this label are when she identifies with a collective of “Black women” who are challenging the establishment:

I think the moments are when you know, when we're challenging. I say 'we' because I mean me and other Black women are challenging the establishment. There are moments where I feel like I am being sassy and sort of smart with White people and I am letting them know that I can read them and you know, “You can't do this with me. You know, you can't do this with me and you can't do this with any other Black woman”. There are moments like that where I feel the strength to sort of challenge people. I know there isn't something unique in me challenging it. It just comes from long history of Black women challenging it.

She uses her ‘sassiness’ to make White people aware of her double consciousness, “I can read them” and to declare: “you can’t do this to another Black woman [humans]”. However, this is not a story where she is positioned as a glorious hero. This fight is not one that she has chosen; it is one that has been handed down for her to carry:

Just sort of the torch has been passed on to me, but there is a heaviness to it. There is a heaviness to it even challenging the system, whether it is the medical system or the helping system. It is heavy. It is heavy. It is not a lightness.

While double consciousness allows her to be “sassy” and aware of the oppressor’s narrative, this awareness and the fight for one’s own humanity is exhausting. The felt “heavy torch” is a burden and a duty. Yet, she does gain some energy in her hope for Black youth:

I am very inspired over the past two years, with young people's activism. In the past two years, particularly. Black folks' activism. I guess people under 30, I have been really impressed by the way they mobilize and mobilize in the way that is not palatable to mainstream, but in a way that makes sense for them.

Here, she is not identifying with “them”; rather, these are people she draws inspiration from.

Age, thus, becomes a factor in how racialization and belonging is experienced.

Becoming also resists racialization as an identity he owns. However, unlike *Flex*, he goes further by resisting oppression as part of his explicit experience and he does position himself as triumphant over the master narrative. Our conversation on this topic begins:

PG: How do you identify in terms of race?

Becoming: How do I identify?

PG: In terms of your race? What race or ethnicity or how do you answer that question?

Becoming: I say I'm African. I am from [Country of Origin]. But I consider myself a Black man. I think in high school that was a huge problem. You know, being Black was a challenge in a lot of ways.

His use of “African” conveys a sense of identity and “Black man” sounds more like the label he is given. From this statement about labels, he goes straight into a story about a job he had as a young man where he experienced racism. In this story, a racialized youth, who is from a different non-European lineage, that he has worked hard to build a relationship with, says to him, “You are not like the guys that sell drugs.” The next part of the narrative is as follows:

So that was the first time that he acknowledged in saying that the reason that he was so standoffish [was] because I was Black and for everybody that he sees that sells drugs in the building was Black. So he automatically assumed me into that same package. I said, "No, no, no. I don't sell drugs. A lot of people that sell drugs are White too and different colours," but I could get what he was thinking.

“It is good for you to ask questions and get a greater understanding because if you don't you limit yourself”.

So what happened from that moment: I was invited to his house, met his parents, and it is like this whole world just opened up. I got to understand a lot about their culture.

This story began with my question about his racial identity and he began answering by saying that racism was a big problem. However, the story ends with race being positioned as a problem

for the people who perpetuate racism (who hold the least power being both children and marginalized themselves) and not for the narrator. He then recaps the story to give the evaluative function of the story (the reason it was told):

That was the first time that I saw it in this community that race is a huge, huge thing. You know, I could have been a worker and I could have said, "I'm just going to stay in my lane. I am just going to deal with Black kids." But I think it is really, really important to push the ground.

He uses double consciousness, "I could get what he was thinking," as a way of being able to expect and normalize the racist remark. His awareness of White supremacy allows him to stay calm and remain curious about these remarks. Does anger have a space here? Where did it go? Where is the sense of injustice? He paints a picture of opening up space, creating safety and becoming a container to the racism and in doing so, he holds power in this dynamic. In being this safe container, he counters the narrative of the drug dealing Black man and the elimination of anger also emphasizes his rationality, which is taken away in the master narrative of White supremacy. His own analysis is as follows:

[The kid] already put me in a basket. You know? He got to find out, you know what, no I am not really in that basket. You know? But have a greater understanding about what the basket is about. For him, everybody that sold drugs was Black. Any Black person he came engaged with, he automatically put them to that category.

Again, he takes responsibility and the power to make space for the healing of this person's bigotry by showing him that there is more to the story. In his counter story, he is forcing others to experience his humanity. The "basket" that he will not be part of is the one that says "drug-dealers-Black". His basket might have his name on it but it is full of rich identities.

Experiences of White Supremacy in “Educational” Institutions

Educational institutions continue to be sites where White supremacy is the most blatant, even in adult experience. *Triumph*'s experiences are so traumatizing that she decided to switch out of her undergraduate program in university:

My instructor was so racist - would call out on me all the time [...] She would say things like she is better and she helped this group of people as if she is like this and everybody else is like this. She would say, "Oh [*Triumph*] your people [...] you must have experienced racism here" like calling me out a lot [...] She would fail me in everything. She would happen to "not see" the assignments that I had handed in. She would make comments like, "Oh your people [...] your people generally take longer to finish school" and I would be like, "What do you mean by 'my people'? What are you talking about?" Yeah. I didn't actually say that. I was thinking that. I would keep my mouth shut. I was so taken aback, "Your people take longer".

She is countering the narrative of the educator as helper by making this particular person's declarations of sympathy sound demeaning rather than moral. Furthermore, she opposes the category of "your people." While there is a lot of anger in her narrative, this anger only paralyzes her: "I would keep my mouth shut". She was "so taken aback" and when we are in a state of overwhelm, we cannot respond. In other words, her schema that she is a human, an individual, is shaken when she is categorized as "your people" and associated with being stupid. She is being put in the subhuman category and all she has in response are questions, but questions that are not spoken:

I was so angry that I became mute. That person had power over me and I think I was still, I was strong in who I was, but her saying that to me, she said a lot. I could just go on and on. It wasn't just me. Every visible minority in that class felt like really, they were really targeted by this instructor, you know?

Here, she is not a victim unlike her passive positioning in her childhood narratives. Rather, she expresses the conflict of being both "mute" and "strong". Part of her strength comes from the validity of her anger which was provided by her racialized colleagues who felt the same way as her. Again, belonging offers a buffer from White supremacy.

In her present day stories around racism it is clear that her anger now mobilizes her (See *Vicarious Racism*; Section 4.3 below). She credits her new mobilization of anger to the support of God, her family and friends, and several factors in her Indigenous MSW program where she learned to channel her anger into passion. First, she says that this Master's program accepted the spiritual:

Even though I am spiritual, if someone is throwing [me] down, if somebody teaching me that everything is physical, emotional, mental, then I am practicing with people [in this way]. I was taught [in the mainstream program] that you cannot talk about spiritual. It goes against you know ethics and things [...] that is the experience I had at that particular university.

The second was that she was taught how to process her feelings of anger in the Indigenous MSW program:

It was such a powerful program. Because a lot of what we were learning was not only a history of what has happened to indigenous people but what is currently happening or taking place. But the most powerful piece to my MSW program is that we would sit in circle and share our current difficulties and experiences as a collective. So people would disclose things that they are dealing with. Even if it is racism, they would disclose that and we would deal with it accordingly.

[...] My BSW trained me in both theory and practice which I also learned in my Master's. The difference however between my BSW and MSW is that my MSW focused on: "How do I deal with what I am hearing every day? What do I do with myself and how in turn could I change my anger?" So they taught us that every single day. It was ingrained in us. I am so thankful. The things I hear [now, at work], do not shock me or put me into outrage because I have received proper self-care training [...] I have never been in an educational program where I could share my experiences, fears and joys in a circle where I feel that I belong. Being in circle with my classmates taught me hundreds of theories that are being put into practice. It was an amazing experience. I could go on and on. It was amazing [...] Just people listening to me. That is what made this program stand out to me. I was happy that I was heard and cared for because that is what the social work profession is all about!

Her description of the Indigenous MSW stream is a counter story to both my own experience and every narrative I have heard about mainstream MSW programs. First, the emphasis on learning about both the history and current experiences of Indigenous people is only touched upon in the

stories of mainstream programs. Second, talking about racism and White supremacy are often viewed as tentative and risky topics in the mainstream. Third, while MSW programs seem to pride themselves on critical reflexivity, in this program, there was an extra step where reflexion becomes a community and shared experience of “people listening” and the feeling that “theories are being put into practice.” The result is that experiences at work, while they may anger her now, do not shock her. The awareness and emotional processing skills taught to her in school have equipped her to be the kind of helper that she considers effective.

Flourish has much the same experiences that *Triumph* had in her BSW program. As in her story, there are very few racialized individuals in his program and he has a limited sense of belonging in this space. He describes his attempts to cope with White dominance:

Scanning, trying to figure out. So when I couldn't find strength in the race representation, I had to find strength in the gender representation. In our field being predominantly female dominant, I would say 70% females, 30% males, that still didn't create an equal playing field for us - for me, I should say.

In his choice to go to university, in soft skills, despite the Black male body that he lives in, he has inadvertently been placed in the role of a counter character. When he cannot find belonging his differences are not safe to inhabit and hold so he “scans” for “strength”. Unlike *Triumph*, he does not go mute, and finds his voice as other people make space for it:

So there were some challenges with me finding my voice, asking questions, not wanting to be seen as "that guy". I found whenever we would have classes that talked about issues of race, gender, oppression, marginalization, they weren't as robust as other conversations. I always felt a yearning for more - I want to talk more about that and I didn't want to be the only one to centre those issues. So, I would feel silenced. Sometimes you wait for other people to speak and then you find your oxygen.

According to the master narrative, “that guy” is the only one who still wants to talk about racism because he does not realize that we are in a “post-race” era where race is not an issue anymore. He is just “sensitive”, i.e. irrational and resentful. The feeling of being “silenced” comes from

learned experiences, from stories we have heard, lessons we are taught directly by our teachers, in our textbooks: your experience does not matter. As *Journey* has said above, “what you learn is gradual”. The experience of being racialized is a learned experience of how to keep our safety. In order to survive in this master narrative, there are certain things we have to do – one of which may be to stay quiet. However, over time he found that when he spoke, people listened. While he appreciated being heard, he also felt “tokenized”:

In all of that I found was that people took to what I said. Although I struggled to find my voice, when I did find my voice, people listened, people were interested, people would encourage me to share and talk to me more about that. Which was interesting because I felt like people needed me in my body to speak about these issues. Although they felt it, maybe they felt some position about inequality. They didn't want to be the ones to speak about it. They wanted that body to speak about it so often times I would speak on behalf of folks whether in bodies of dominance or not. I was speaking on behalf of issues of oppression and inequity just because this is the body that should speak on these things [...]

There are feelings of being tokenized. "Oh you are going to speak again; Black guy is going to talk again". So there was a feeling of being tokenized. There are some moments where you feel special, "people actually want to hear what I have to say". But generally I felt it had a lot more to do with being tokenized. My statements validated for others what they felt about something: "If he is saying it, it must be true".

Here he is shimmied back into the master narrative and reminded that he is Black. Being the “Black guy” in this space he is given agency to speak as “Black Guy” only and be the site of generic “Black guy” knowledge. People respect him, but there is a sense that they do not engage him as such, “they didn’t want to be the ones to speak about it”. When we cannot engage in dialogue, the racialized body becomes a character who is put on a pedestal by guilty White bodies for the period of time that we are discussing “racism”. Racism is then viewed as an act that occurs only in instances that “Black guy” points out, rather than as a system of power relations. Why does this happen? Why are racialized people presumed to be the knowers and teachers of oppression, while the dominant group becomes the passive recipient of the teachings?

In many of the participants stories, people who perpetuate racism include racialized others who are not aware of master narratives, but enact them. What would it take for White bodies to become vulnerable enough to engage curiosity and dialogue about racism without bringing in their own experiences of oppression?

In *Flourish's* Master's program, he was the only racialized person, and again there were very few males – only three out of 70 students. Because he was entering a graduate program he had higher expectations and again was disappointed by what he found:

I also found that instructors weren't necessarily comfortable with entering some discussions around diversity. I am not sure. Sometimes I ask the question: If there was more than one body, one racialized body in the classroom, would we be more comfortable talking about those things? Does our willingness to talk about diversity reflective of - is our willingness reflective of the numbers in the classroom? Will I only talk about race if I see what five racialized students? Will I only talk about issues of LGBTQ if I notice that there are five members of the community here? What is that based on? So I found often times there was tiptoeing around these issues.

So in my scholarship, in what I wrote in papers and stuff, my slant had to do with issues or racialization and the experience of racialized kids in care - is what I did my final paper on. I found that whenever [*Flourish*] would get up and speak it would be like, "Oh him again. Here he goes again" right? I almost have to preface my presentation by saying things like, "You know, there are other issues of oppression at hand, however, for my presentation I am going to centring race". You know, there is this preamble that I would have to give in order to clear the ground for "Oh okay, other issues are present but he is only going to talk about race this time". So yeah, I had to develop this way of navigating those spaces.

What is the risk of speaking on these issues if you are alone? Here he is assuming that people won't care because it is not their issue. Maybe this is part of the problem of the individualistic culture: You have your freedom and I have mine. We are not connected in this particular issue. Although he felt tokenized in his BSW, others had an interest in him and gave him space to speak. In his MSW, he presents the dominant group as being bored of him. In order to capture their interest, he has to make sure to consider their position and acknowledge their individual

issues. This preamble keeps him safe, but holds tension as it is clear that he cannot expect a cemented belonging or resumption of understanding from the group.

Flourish explains how he copes with these situations and introduces me to the concept of “double consciousness”, which he learned about from reading W.E.B. Du Bois. He summarizes his understanding:

It is this awareness of what the oppressor views you as and the awareness of what you view yourself as. You are navigating those two worlds [...] I think when you have had the privilege, in a racialized body, to exist in these spaces of dominance for so long you become very aware of the tools of dominance, right? Not necessarily the bodies of dominance, but the tools, the mechanisms, the discourses, the messages, the subtle treatment of dominance. So you can anticipate. You can anticipate [...]

When I enter these spaces, I am very aware of how they see me. Some of it is conscious to them; some of it is very unconscious. I have gotten to a place where I am even more rehearsed in, "Okay, this is what is happening for them because of me right now". At the same time too, I am very aware of what I am and what I want to project out into the world. So I have to hold those two perspectives and maintain the tensions of those two perspectives in order to be functional in whatever spaces I get into. So that has been an interesting journey for me and is a perspective that I own. This idea of, "Oh that is what you are thinking, well let me meet you half way" kind of thing. And often, Prapti, it is about meeting them halfway. It is about meeting dominance half way in order to create a level of functionality, in order to be effective, in order to create outcomes, in order to produce something. I need to meet them halfway.

So, I take on a bit of pressure around that. Sometimes my posturing and my presence may seem hypervigilant, maybe not on the surface level. I try to stay cool, calm, and collected as possible. But on the inside, I am just "Oh my gosh!" You are a bit hypervigilant working around these spaces that you need to occupy and interact in.

Here, his racialized body is positioned as a site of privilege because he now has double consciousness, which allows him to have the power to: 1. Appear calm and collected; 2. Be “hypervigilant” about how his bodily presence impacts the oppressor; 3. Understand how to meet the dominant other halfway. This strategy of employing double consciousness allows him to separate his intention from their perceptions of it and therefore preserve some kind of space of his own. Although this is a lot of work, it is the way he creates agency and choice to “meet them

half way” so that he can “create a level of functionality, in order to be effective, in order to create outcomes, in order to produce something”. Thus, double consciousness allows him to take some of his power instead of succumbing to (or internalizing) the master narrative. The downside is that the responsibility for efficacy and outcomes is his own and this is exhausting. He understands that flatly opposing the master narrative will not lead to any fruitful outcome. Thus, he contains his disgust for the master narrative and knows that to “meet them halfway” is to also remain “cool, calm, and collected as possible”.

Experiences of White supremacy at work

Flourish also gives a few examples of how White supremacy has manifested in his work place. In these stories double consciousness was absent. In one incident the perpetrator was a racialized friend and in the other, the accusation came out of left field.

In his story of the racialized colleague, he recounts the day she called him in for a meeting to say, “I experience you as intimidating around the work. You come across as aggressive. You come across as entitled to the work.” To this accusation, he whispers, “Whoa! Really?” He had considered this person a “good friend” of his; however, their relationship changed once she moved up in the ranks in the organization. He talks about how this experience was “disarming” and a “shock”. These accusations of being “intimidating” and “aggressive” are completely opposed to how he sees himself as “calm, cool, and collected” and to the work he has done to present himself as moral and good despite White supremacy narratives. Perhaps he had believed that with racialized friends double consciousness was not needed and thus her accusations came as a “shock” and he was “disarmed” and says, “I was silenced”. He explains below:

So I experienced that moment as violent. Like gun shots: boom boom boom, right? I didn't even know why the senior manager, a person in another racialized body, was

allowing this kind of an exchange to happen in the moment. Now she was not privy to this work dynamic, however, some of the statements like "intimidating"; "aggressive"; dadadada those bring up a certain connotation when you are attached to a certain body. You are a racialized person. So I was thinking to myself, "Do you not see what is going on here?" I was silenced in that meeting. I was disarmed, I was silenced. The conversation had nothing to do with my work performance. It was all about my presence, my personality [...] how I am making people feel; my body. It was so bizarre to me. I remember being at the meeting and asking them, "So, do you have anything to say about my work?" They literally said, "No, your work is fine" and I was like, "Whoa. Okay. So what we are talking about here is nothing to do with my work. It is all about perceptions, right?" So yeah, you know, girl, I've got stories [laughing].

The personal narrative he has about himself and his relationship with this colleague was suddenly made false and he left not knowing how to perceive himself in the world in this moment. His schema about this "friend" is no longer intact, the world does not make sense and he only has feeling. However, his telling of the story is a counter-narrative where he exposes the mechanisms of dominance and does not internalize the accusations in his assessment, "The conversation had nothing to do with my work performance. It was all about my presence, my personality [...] how I am making people feel; my body." However, the story turns again and ends as a tragedy:

I walked away feeling totally unsafe about the work environment, feeling unsafe about my colleagues. It had me really second guessing myself around some things. One of the challenges in the social services sector, as a Black male, you have to - your reputation, it matters. Your reputation makes or breaks you. So everything you do has to be thoughtful. Everything you say. Where ever your eyes land, it all has to be intentional and thought out, right? So when she made those comments to me and me thinking that I am already operating with this awareness, this consciousness of the impact of my body on her, when she made those comments to me I was like, "wow" - it discouraged me around the work. I use the term, "disarmed me" because for me relationship is my - is what I use in the work. Relationship is what I use in the classroom, is what I use with my colleagues. I feel people need to know you in order to expect something from you. I need those relationships. So when somebody gives me those messages, it's just like "Whoa, okay, then where do I, what do I have?" So that left a very negative impact on me for a couple of months, actually. We just didn't come to a resolution.

Here he reveals he did indeed internalize the racism by "second guessing" himself; his schema shifted from feeling sure of his way to being unable to trust the environment or himself. While it

did take him months, he was able to regain his sense of self, if not the relationship, and now has an analysis of the situation.

I ask him how he regained his armor again. He says he used “self-reflection” and “revisiting [my] purpose” and through understanding “that often times [...] the institutions that we work with construct selves for us that we are not attuned to”. He also leaned on his community, his mentors who suggested other ways to create change and others who helped to normalize the situation. Finally, he spent a lot of time in prayer, “just asking for insight into why this person felt this way about me and what I could do differently.” He says that while this situation “dug away at me [...] I never thought I would leave that kind of an impact on somebody”, he also adds: “I don’t blame her”. Once he is able to reset his schema of self-worth, an analysis of the wider situation reemerges:

The institutions that we work with construct selves for us that we are not attuned to. I don't believe that her making those comments came from her as a person. They come from her in her positionality, in the agency[...] So what ends up happening is the tools and mechanisms of dominance that I am talking about are sometimes end up constructing an institutional self for us. Our relationships, our interactions are governed by that institutional self. Yeah. I don't blame her. I don't blame her.

Thus, in this new telling of the story he takes power away from the person who hurt him and in reappropriating his own purpose as independent from the master narrative, his schemas are reset and he finds ground again.

He tells me many such stories from different work settings. Later, another colleague accuses him of being inadequate because he is “touchy feely”. In this case, there was no context given as to why he was thought of as “touchy feely” and when he reported this to the higher up, the perpetrator “denied everything”. Again, he reflects:

Now, most recently, Prapti, it has been my personality. So, one of the statements that has been made towards me, not directly at me but with others [...] I had to nip it in the bud at the beginning of the year, was, this person had made a comment that my style is too

touchy feely [...] You know I think it has a lot to do with who we have said intelligence belongs to, generally systemic chatter [...] who we feel sporadic or unthoughtful behavior belongs to. We have actually given characteristics to net stuff out - to racialized people. That is what we do with racialized people. We attach attributes to their bodies.

While, as the interviewer, I am dumbfounded by the range of name calling he has experienced, all the way from aggressive to touchy feely, in his work he cannot afford to stagger. He uses his understanding of systemic oppression and the ways in which these structures shape our identities to cope with these accusations:

One thing I am aware of is this colleague of mine who was attacking how I am teaching [...] and how my credentials are and all of that. I am very conscious that she is not aware of these things [...] So in order to not get upset and still be able to function, I have to resort to - it is not her.

Again, in this story by saying “it is not her” and understanding the “mechanisms of dominance” better than she does, he takes power away from her by placing her in a position of ignorance vis-à-vis systemic analysis. He also takes on the burdened responsibility for knowing right from wrong.

Later in the interview, he talks about situations where he says a colleague “infantilizes” him by calling him “Junior”; in telling these stories he does not react to it with emotion. His power lies in his patience and his rationality, playing the White script of the “professional”. His story demonstrates the escalations in the mechanisms of dominance: first he is accused of inadequacy because of his education, then because of his experience and when all of those accusations come out as false, they charge him with faults in his personality. Again, this is “disarming” because “touchy feely” is not an insult typically given to a Black man. It was not a stereotype that had pre-emptively entered his double consciousness and therefore he was unprepared. However, overtime, normalization is the go-to coping strategy:

We have got to normalize that stuff [...] because if you don't you are going to be depressed - like high blood pressure! Listen, you are going to be taking sick leaves. We

have to normalize that [...] I am not saying it is okay, but we need to normalize that dynamic so that we can find ways to deal with it.

He says that normalizing has a cost for both the dominant and the marginalized. For the dominant, he says they are less able “to be authentic to real issues [...] We adopt that institutional self and they have to tap into those mechanisms of dominance to perpetuate dominance and oppression”. He says that for people like him:

[...] who do not occupy those positions of power, the cost is this yearning for change [...] When] we are not aware of [the mechanisms of dominance] our expectations of those bodies [in power] are greater than what they can actually create for us.

If we assume the master narrative is true, that those in power are the good and moral helpers of the weak and powerless, then those with less power become confused when dominance is explicitly cruel. In hope we are vulnerable and forget to use our double consciousness; we forget the other part of the narrative that says that those who are weak and powerless are also wrong and bad, i.e. should hope for nothing.

Bridges experiences of White supremacy at work are not as explicit. He says:

I have had painful moments in this world, in this particular scope of work where a colleague who is now a great friend actually, just said the most ignorant things to me. Not - I really believe that this person was not being malicious in any way. Their complete ignorance - they just made a comment that hit so many racial taboos that I didn't know what to do with. I had to go in another room and just download and debrief with my colleague. Then [I] was encouraged to elevate it to the upper most to the CEO and the resident and say, "Here is what is going on right now. I don't know how to deal with this".

It was a comparison this individual made that touched on racial sexual stereotypes that was inappropriate in a workplace. I want to be clear: it wasn't directed at me, the inappropriate sexual comment. It was just an analogy that this person was drawing using race and relationships but not realizing that they were playing into these really loaded taboo stereotypes about men of colour and White women. It was just like, "What the fuck am I hearing right now? This is your perception of the relationships at work? You are walking around with that? What the hell?"

Like *Flourish* he excuses his colleague by explaining her joke telling as “complete ignorance”; he senses the operation of systemic oppression in a way she does not. Thus, he becomes the site of knowledge and regains the power that was taken away by the joke. Still, this analysis is after the event has occurred and he indicates that his first reaction is of shock: “What the hell?” While this joke was not directed at him, it reminds him that what the status quo says is okay. There is also an implication in the sharing of the joke that he is as human as anyone else, therefore, equal enough to hear this racist joke. However, in this assumption, the person telling the joke fails to understand the effort a racialized person (especially those who are “in Black bodies” as said by *Flourish*) is exerting in order to even play the White script, to be viewed as normal and equal enough. He does not hold the same privilege as a white skinned colleague who has the privilege of flipping back and forth between being serious and rude without it impacting how he is defined. With support, *Bridges* is able to step out of the shock and take action by launching a complaint. Again, in doing this, he moves from the role of a victim to an agent in the narrative.

In another similar situation where another joke is told to a group of Black men, he says that people eventually understood why these stereotypes are not okay. Still, he says about the process:

It took so long and a really long process to get folks to understand [...] the staff is already sensitive about how they are being perceived by a predominantly White organization as a department that is predominantly racialized, predominantly of colour. So that is exhausting. That is painful. Learning to be patient and navigate that can be infuriating at times. When you react and respond in as professional a way as you possibly can you are then managed.

The management system kicks in: we need to control this. We have some upset individuals. It plays into: "Oh my gosh, we can't let the coloured people get upset. We don't know what is going to happen". Even if that is not in their mind, that is how we are thinking they are thinking of us. So we are carrying that in our mind. But I would certainly suggest that there is enough evidence to indicate that they are thinking that too. But we walk around with this constantly - with this narrative in our head. Right? How are we perceived, feared?

Thus, the process of correcting the situation becomes exhausting because the dominant group takes so long to understand the counter story. *Bridges* also reveals that double consciousness serves him by helping him anticipate that his attempts to correct the situation may be perceived with fear and, therefore, the “need to control this”. However, he also casts doubt on the knowledge that comes from double consciousness: fear and control are not necessarily the ways in which management responded, but only what previous experiences have taught him to expect.

Experiences of White supremacy at home

Awareness immigrated to Canada in her 30’s and decided to make it her home. Her first experience of racism was in Canada:

It started from the bus. It is interesting, few days I used to drive, few days I used to take the Greyhound. The Greyhound driver - I don't even want to talk about it so I feel for my clients who actually go through trauma; how difficult it is [to talk about]. The Greyhound driver would never stop at the stop where I would request him to stop. Never. He would even yell. He would speed and stop at a wrong place. Would never. Even though I would pull that string. It is so interesting. The other person would go, ask. He would stop, even in the middle where there is no bus stop. That was the first time: Oh, this exists. Until then, I didn't have any experience [of racism].

In this narrative, *Awareness*’s ability to choose was disregarded and made impotent. She now has to insert the experience of racism in her categories of experience: “this exists”. I follow up on her story:

PG: So you are saying it is interesting but I am wondering how you feel. How did it make you feel?

Awareness: Insulted. Angry. I started to think - that made me wonder; or explore more about what is this? What is going on? Because we always - I always thought that Canada is way different than the States. That was the assumption that we came here with. We lived in [A Bigger City in Canada] for 2 years – [it] was different. Way more inclusive than [This Small Town]. When we moved [here] it was 90% white, very few people of colour; very few.

She had already lived in the United States prior to coming to Canada and was aware of our national narrative which says that we are a special country that celebrates diversity and multiculturalism. She was able to experience this fable as true when she was in larger and more diverse cities both in the USA and in Canada, therefore, she expected to be viewed as “everyone else” as opposed to racialized. However, in a city that is “90% white” the fable appears as fable. Her experience of racism also leaves her feeling confused, “What is this? What is going on?” So there is both “this exists” and “what is this?” Clearly, this is a jarring of her own schema of how she identifies in the world and what she had expected in Canada. She continues:

It was very interesting. People would stare when you walk around in the store. So, that was the environment and probably the Greyhound driver also was used to - and interestingly he was from a racialized minority as well [...] and he would treat me like that.

Again, like *Flourish*'s colleague, she is even more surprised at this treatment because the driver is also racialized. The us vs. them is not so clear. As *Flourish* has experienced, it is difficult to intuitively identify the oppressor when we can all occupy both roles of oppressor and oppressed depending on the context that we find ourselves in. Several of the narrators have stories that indicate how racialized people also attempt to dominate and gain power as offered by White supremacy.

Journey offers a narrative of this kind of experience where police officers on her reserve, who are now Native, also perpetuate White supremacy. First, I will share an earlier memory of White police officers who came to her house, on the reserve, after catching her son driving her car underage. She says that while the White police are explaining the situation they also say:

“Oh my God, at one point I used to come to this reserve and everybody, every house they were all drunk. Everybody was a drunk. It was so awful to see.” He says, “This time I come into this house and it looks all normal.”

She is appalled that they would suggest that “normal” families on the reserve are rare. Her response is as follows:

"You guys are a bunch of bastards." I said, "I grew up on this reserve. Many of these houses, all of these people, in all of this area, they are not drunks. I don't remember a time anybody, where the whole family was drunk". So they got up immediately 'cause they thought it was going to be a friendly conversation and they were going to sit and have tea with me and I was so mad at them. The kids were all there watching. They were all scared that they knew they were going to get in trouble once they left. I told them, "It is not good to hear that. It is not good for the kids to be hearing that! I don't think it's fair. You can't talk to me like that".

Here enters the master narrative of the off-reserve non-Native cop and the story of the “drunken Indian”. While she admits that her own father was an alcoholic, she defies stereotypes and generalizations. In her own narrative she is positioned as the site of knowledge and the “professionals” are ignorant. While double consciousness is less explicit in this story it allows her to call out the oppressor. There is another story that happens in the schools where her son’s teacher calls him “Chief”. She responds very similarly upon learning about this, by addressing the oppressor directly:

They would try to talk their way out of that. I said, "No, that is a racist statement. I don't want my son being called “Chief” unless he grows up being elected a chief and then you can call him that! But not right now." I think people like to think that they are not prejudice. It shows.

Like most of the narrators, this double consciousness allows her to be the site of knowledge and use her knowledge to have her guard up appropriately. In this case, she does not normalize racism but uses double consciousness to call out the oppressor and position herself as the counter character.

After she tells this story, she describes the feeling of experiencing racism:

You just feel yucky. When things feel yucky you know you have to respond, right? [...] You are having a normal conversation and all of a sudden changes. Everything in your body stops. Like the flow of the blood stops, it doesn't know which way it should go - it doesn't know if it should go back or forward or what. Then you have to examine that. I

have to step away and figure out what that is about and then I can. When I examine that it is usually the words, what I hear or what I feel, and then I can go back and I can address it.

So when you feel yucky a lot, you know you have to get out of the situation. You can't stay there. People say, "come back, come back. Teach us. We need to know. You have so much to share, you have so much to give us". I don't. I am not that strong. I don't want to spend my whole day teaching you guys. That is not my business. If you want your staff, the people in your community to know that, you go out and you raise the money and you pay someone a damn good dollar to come in and teach ya. I am not going to do that. That is not my job. My job is to be happy, be a good mom, be a good community person. I want to do that work - I enjoy doing that.

She describes how the “sudden” shock to her cognitive schemas leaves her feeling “yucky” and even the flow of blood in her own body does not know how to make sense. Like all the narrators have described, it takes time and space to process what has occurred in order to become an agent in her own narrative again.

Repetitive experiences of White supremacy become dangerous enough that she has to leave. Again, she is not the victim fleeing. She positions herself as the counter character who holds wisdom and can tell the people who want her to stay that what they are asking of her is not her own to give. She counters the idea of duty to her community, the idea of sacrifice and returns to her own path and purpose, “My job is to be happy, be a good mom, and be a good community person.”

It is how her son is treated that makes her want to leave the reserve. When her son is a bit older, the police on the reserve are now all Native. Still, they pick on the boys just like the non-Native police:

The police - the only ones allowed on the reserve were the Native police. They are the ones who came to your house. They are the ones who patrol the whole area. Anyway. One guy was hired and he was picking on all of those boys. They were probably all bad but they were all picked on. One of the other kids told me that he - one of the cops pointed at my son and he said, "I am watching you and I am gonna get you".

I think, "He probably will" because my son is not an angel but what he is doing is not jail time related! So, when I could I applied for a job in [the City] and moved back here and most of those kids who came to visit and they are all bad. Still bad. He picked up non-Native friends in [the City] and they were all bad like that, going out all night, riding their bicycles and doing stupid things. So my son says, "Why did we move?" I say, "Because you would be in jail by now otherwise".

Here she counters her own narrative from her childhood, where only non-Native professionals were the villains. Now, the Native police are conveyors of White supremacy as well. While they do not hold power by virtue of their skin colour, they can hold power by signing the racial contract and enacting White values to colonize the savage/criminal Native. This narrative illustrates that racism is primarily a system of power; not skin colour or ancestry.

Journey recognizes the master narrative and does not let this story end as a tragedy:

Yeah. There aren't a lot of crimes. There are no murders on the reserve. There are no drugs. So the cops, their jobs were piddly little [laughs]. So if someone broke into your house or broke into your car, all of the cops swarmed around to find out who the criminal was [laughing] - and that guy would be punished to the end. You know? That is the way it is on the reserve [laughing]. So I said, "I know that if we stayed on the reserve he would have been in jail. He would have experienced all of those things."

What she is pointing to is the systemic oppression that criminalizes people who are engaging in normal human behavior. She returns to her narrative of life on the reserve as all good. Again, this may be to counter my own narrative as the reserve being a "sad" place that people are forced to be on, rather than a place that is home. The media also portrays reserves as being a place of exclusive hardship, crime, drugs and murder. She is firmly countering these simplistic narratives.

4.2.2 Summary of Personal Narratives of Racism

Early childhood experiences of White supremacy were described where narrators were positioned as passive recipients of insults, which then became internalized. Most of these experiences of racialization occurred in schools. All narrators talked about ways that they were able to overcome the master narrative through experiences of love, spirituality, and belonging.

Some developed double consciousness early in their lives while other narrators talked about it as developing in their adult experiences of racialization.

Adult experiences of White supremacy were mostly worked through with double consciousness and normalization. However, in some instances double consciousness was used not to normalize racism, but to mobilize the narrator to take action and directly address the oppressor. In other instances, when double consciousness was not at the ready, racism jarred the narrator's schemas and left them vulnerable to internalizing the insult once again. It takes time to process jarred schemas; however, once racism was processed over the period of weeks or months, each narrator indicated a shift from somatic and/or cognitive confusion to either taking action or returning back to normalization and understanding. Finally, some narrators talked about refusing the categorization of race altogether as it did not fit their identity at all.

4.3 Experiences of Vicarious Racism

In order to understand how vicarious racism impacts each participant, I consider their narratives of helping (Section 4.1) and of racialization (Section 4.2). I continue to employ CRT in the analysis of master narratives that come into play when hearing stories of vicarious racism. I also use CSDT in my analysis and ask: How do the schemas of the narrators change, if at all, when confronted with vicarious racism? Under which of these conditions do their schemas change and does this translate into the formation of a counter-narrative or a return to the master narrative? I also look at how empathy may or may not play a role in experiences of vicarious racism.

I begin this section with the most common response to vicarious racism: it affirms each narrator's own experiences of systemic oppression. In some cases, it returns the narrator back to normalization; however, in other instances normalization, as a go-to coping style, breaks down

and these participants' schemas are challenged as they become aware of the violence and power of master narratives on an emotional level. I then look at how vicarious racism challenges the narratives of the professionalized helper who is viewed as good only if they remain neutral despite their empathy and desire to protect the victim of racism. For some, there is a way to take action and give up neutrality, which seems to be the most obvious choice in narratives of non-professionalized helpers. I then turn to the stories of *Becoming* and *Journey* who respond to vicarious racism by finding ways to step out of the master narrative, to neither employ it nor counter it, but to work in a different way altogether, making their own table and breaking the rules. Finally, I end with *Bridges*' story where he uses his helper narrative, his experiences of racialization and growth to respond to vicarious racism with determination to bridge the gap between oppressor and oppressed.

4.3.1 Normalization: That is just life

In narratives where vicarious racism returns narrators to normalizing the impacts of White supremacy, schemas are not affected but narrators recount other affective outcomes such as numbness in the face of overwhelming experiences.

I will use *Triumph*'s story as an example of this process of normalization. She tells a story of helping a young racialized woman whose stories about being raped are not believed by White police officers. She only speaks two short sentences about the story and in listening and empathizing with her story, I began to feel her discomfort. After these first two sentences she switches to talking about how she processes her overwhelming feelings in order to *prevent* her schemas from changing to hatred for "Caucasians":

It was disclosed to me that one of the youth was raped. She said this is the third time that she was raped and the police and doing absolutely nothing. In the morning I had to wake up and pray about it and say it out loud how I am feeling, just like I am speaking to you. I say it out loud, even if I sound crazy because I have to be able to acknowledge that that -

my own reverse racism is in my head and I have to let go of it to go into work because I don't want to see a Caucasian person. Even if I talk to that person just like anybody else, I need to feel that I connect to that person just like I connect to everybody else. Otherwise I am not practicing what I am preaching every day. So. That is what I do. It is a lot of work, but I do it. I think it is really important.

She then moves again to telling a story where vicarious racism did not overwhelm her in the same way because she was able to take action and create change (see *Vicarious Racism Catalyzes Action*, Section 4.3.4 below). She then returns to reflect back on the rape story:

So in the case of that rape, I was angry but I just had to - the sad thing is that as a visible minority I know that it is just life. As sad as it is, that is just the way it is. If I linger on how sucky it is and how much it makes me angry, I can't do the work I need to do every day. It is still going to happen. We have to work slowly to make it stop. It doesn't just happen like this. It takes time.

Processing her anger through prayer enabled her to let go of her anger and preserve her original schemas which include: refusing the role of victim (as she did in stories of helping and racialization, see Sections 4.1 and 4.2 above); realigning herself with a general “we” who work to make change possible; and recognizing that this change is slow. CSDT says that vicarious trauma occurs when there is a permanent change to one’s schema (Pearlman & Saakvitine, 1995). Even though *Triumph* is able to maintain her original schema by processing her anger, I argue that she has experienced “vicarious racism” as she has engaged empathically with the racialization of her client. Indeed, her anger demonstrates an emotional response to the client’s story, thus vicariously feeling the impact of White supremacy on another.

4.3.2 From Processing to Hypervigilance to Paralysis: I am always guarded

In these next reflections, participants’ narratives indicate that when they cannot take any action vicarious racism impacts their bodies, leaves them feeling helpless, paralyzed and leads to schema changes such as hypervigilance. In these analyses I frame hypervigilance as a *hyper-double-consciousness* where double consciousness leads to anxiety rather than normalization. I

will first begin with *Journey* and *Awareness* who are supported at work. *Journey* is able to process her pain and *Awareness* is able to find a voice for her hypervigilance. I then move to *Flex* and *Flourish* who are not supported at work (see Section 4.1) and are impacted with permanent schema changes.

Processing Pain and Hypervigilance in Supportive Environments

When *Journey* does not offer any stories of racism, I ask her explicitly:

PG: Can we talk about – do you get clients who talk about racism with you?

Journey: I mean it is everyday life like I was saying. It is everyday life. So depending on how fresh it is. If I am on the internet and they walk in and there is a story about another murdered woman and they can sit down and talk about "my sister" or "my niece" or whatever native woman being murdered and they will talk about that. We will smudge and talk about it some more. Also what they want to pursue, we will work on that. It is just about having someone listen to them about it.

PG: Does it impact you? You are a native woman so having someone sitting in this chair and going like, "Another one". How does that impact you?

Journey: We go through it together. I say, "Yeah! Another one, God Damn." and you know we will talk about it. Sometimes we stand up, stomp around a little bit. I can feel that, I can understand that, I can appreciate it and I am happy that they are able to express themselves like that.

PG: Are there more moments that are more exhausting for you? [Laughing] I am trying to pry out the more negative [stories], but they may not be there for you!

Journey: The ones who don't want to go there but I have moments - I can't get them to express it. Their mouths are shut and they can't do anything. So I can't. The ones that I can't reach.

PG: That impacts you

Journey: Yeah that impacts me.

PG: How does it impact you?

Journey: It impacts my body. I feel like when I get up and walk I think, "Oh my God", I can hardly walk down the stairs so I know it's something there, right?"

Her first answer is to normalize, “it is everyday life”. As in *Triumph*’s story, when she is able to help the person process their pain vicarious racism does not leave a lasting impression and her schema does not change. The impact is only negative when she cannot reach a person and in her case it causes physical pain; however, she is able to process this pain and her schemas are unaffected:

PG: How do you process that then - when it is sitting in your body?

Journey: That is my job. I have to do that. Yesterday, I went to a sweat yesterday and I was able to process it. Go talk to an elder and he helps you through it. You phone your friends on the weekend. Go [up north] for the weekend. It is a nine hour drive. So you fill your car up with women and you drive. You drink coffee. You usually go at night because that is when everyone finish work. You are in your car after dark and everybody is silly and crazy [...] It is a nine hour drive north. So you go up there and by the time you get up there you are feeling tired, but you are feeling good because all of that shit has been - we have already regurgitated everything, eh? They have talked about their stuff so we have already talked about it. So when you get up there, you get tired, but then you are in a different frame of mind.

Journey is in a workplace that is run by other marginalized people and earlier in her interview she has spoken about being able to talk to other staff and managers in order to get help. Here she reflects on how vicarious racism has not changed her helping narrative and remains firm in her agentive stance:

PG: So are there days where you think, "I don't want to go back tomorrow?"

Journey: No. No. Not for the residents, no.

PG: What keeps you coming back?

Journey: I enjoy it. I enjoy it.

PG: It's the joy.

Journey: Yup! I don't have work that - there is nothing in my life that says I have to go to work. I didn't put myself into debt so I have to work every day. I can quit today and owe maybe a thousand dollars. If I collected welfare on Monday of next week, I wouldn't have to - It wouldn't be a real stress. I own little. I don't have a whole bunch of stuff. I am very sparse. I can pack up and leave. I don't owe anybody anything.

Similarly, while *Awareness* feels hypervigilant as a result of vicarious racism, she is also able process its effects with supportive colleagues and managers:

PG: I am just wondering how your view of your race or racism has changed after hearing so [many stories of] racism in work or working with racist people.

Awareness: My views have changed in what ways?

PG: Have they at all around how you conceptualize your own race or your own identity or your own passion around racism?

Awareness: Or you are hyper sensitive about racism. If somebody does something - oh, are they doing it because of this?

PG: Has that happened for you?

Awareness: Of course the idea comes up, simple as that. Let's take an example of a referral process. So when the referral comes in, it used to be like automatically these unique names or the last names would come to me because I don't know if you call it racism or some kind of an ism. It is expected: oh she will be a better fit for this population [...] I did bring it up [with my peers...] and we all laughed [...] In the beginning it started, "Oh there you go, she is here" and now we distribute.

Awareness, *Journey*, and *Triumph* are all well supported in their workplaces. Managers and colleagues listen and there is space for processing this difficult work.

Hypervigilance Remains

In contrast, *Flex* feels alone in her workplace around issues of racialization (see Section 4.2) and hypervigilance is not resolved:

PG: Does - or how does, does it impact how you experience your own self as a racialized person when you are witnessing this? Does it change your own conception of your identity or how you navigate the world or how you navigate your relationship with the receptionist, for example?

Flex: I don't know that it changes my perception of the world - it just affirms my experience of the world more than anything. It just sort of affirms my perception that people of colour need more safe spaces. Not "safe" but "safer" spaces to get their needs met. Particularly folks who have experienced trauma [who] may not have the skills in the moment to regulate their emotions. Those are the folks that I worry about the most.

Because, not everyone is operating from the trauma informed way. So they don't know how to organize the behaviour in their head. So I worry, that cops will be called unnecessarily. That has happened. That has been the effect in old work places that I worked in where police were called on racialized women and they were not called on White women. White women were just told to leave and racialized women the cops were called. I have had that experience so I am very hypervigilant about that. I am also very hypervigilant about size. I find that larger women and men are seen as intimidating. I am very vigilant around all these pieces and it is draining sometimes. Sometimes I put a shield on as though it doesn't affect me so much, but that shield does not come on every day.

The schemas that are reinforced by vicarious racism are not of her counter-narrative, but of White supremacy. Her worry expresses empathy and when she does not have a “shield” her internal schema changes where she becomes hypervigilant, which is exhausting.

Flourish agrees, saying that witnessing racism “[...] adds to [my own experiences of racialization] - I think what it does is it sort of reminds you that this stuff is real.” To protect himself, he too puts up a shield:

PG: How do these stories or experiences impact the way you work or go about your daily life, do you think?

Flourish: I am always guarded, in a sense. I always have my sixth sense up. I am always conscious and sensitive of things. For me, there is no liberty in who my professional sense is. I have to be on guard. I can't slip. I can't make the wrong comment. I have to balance that with, at the same time, being this soft space for racialized people to land on.

Thus, he too describes vicarious racism as affirming the master narrative and reminding him of the importance of his counter-narrative, of his ability to have a “sixth sense”, i.e. his double consciousness (see Section 4.2).

Paralysis without Action

In some experiences of vicarious racism, narrators are left feeling paralyzed when they are hit with emotion elicited by what they are witnessing. In all of these stories, narrators view themselves as ineffective to create change.

Flourish tells a horrific story about a client who has experienced racism at the hands of another professionalized helper. However, he is supported by a group of racialized peers and this is where he and his peers are able to let go of normalization and feel:

Flourish: I remember the day we heard, we had to call an emergency meeting. People were crying, people were - I don't know how to describe it, you know. Vicarious trauma is a real thing, but I think what has ended up happening is that we have to be mindful in how we express it. So without the opportunity to express it within this committee, people would have just been operating like everything is okay and still dealing with our kids as if everything is okay without that outlet to express what is really going for ourselves as professionals.

PG: Can you tell me a little bit more about what the tears are about? What they are releasing or feeling?

Flourish: Yeah. Just deep sadness, you know. That it is happening to a Black body. I think the sense of community is great amongst racialized bodies. So what happens to one happens to all. I think the sense of responsibility to one another is great. Often times you don't have an opportunity to cry about your own experiences until it happens to somebody else.

Because it is about survival and I cannot let them see that what is happening is really affecting me. I am strong, I am resilient within it all. So it remains contained until we can see it in somebody else. Then that is when we feel it - this is my outlet, this is my opportunity to cry. It has to do with confusion. Why do I have to see these things happening? It has a lot to do with those things.

PG: Is there a sense of helplessness in the confusion?

Flourish: Absolutely, yeah. I think it has a lot to do with feelings of helplessness as well.

In this shared experience of vicarious racism the shields of normalization and denial are dropped and together the group is permitted to feel the impact of the operations of the master narrative. Indeed, it seems that normalization is a last resort that occurs when there is no safety to feel. In the group, shared “responsibility” becomes a means of coping. Furthermore, together they are able to externalize the hurt caused by White supremacy, rather than internalizing it by, for example, concluding that they are just “too sensitive” for having an emotional reaction to an

“everyday” occurrence. Their tears make the master narrative explicit and together they experience their counter-narratives as indeed normal and human.

Again, both direct and indirect experiences of racism are first met with confusion as it obliterates one’s sense of their identity as human and reminds them of the subhuman space that they are forced into. I follow up to his story about the collective crying with a question that comes from privilege and from my own position of dominance within the master narrative:

PG: As a team or individually even, you could write a letter to the psychology college or whatever. Did you guys think about doing that or why not?

Flourish: Part of the tears also has to do with this: historical distrust of institutions and the tools of dominance. If I am seeing the pain in my fellow community member, yes it is similar to the pain I am feeling but I don't know what to do about it. If I write that letter it might not be valued as somebody else writing that letter. If I make that phone call to the Member of Parliament it might just be taken as complaint as opposed to real constructive input. There is just deep historical distrust of the institution and the mechanisms of dominance. We cry because we don't know what to do, essentially.

I think if there were levels of equity in what we were doing and the mechanisms of power would create equitable outcomes, it wouldn't be, tears of helplessness, it would be roars of resilience, I think. It would just be a bit more, "We can take it. We can handle this. We can do something about this". Yeah.

Because I have been raised as a privileged person and my own history comes from a family who held power in Nepal I embody some sense of entitlement that my voice, and each voice, should matter. My question also comes from the liberal master narratives which has me believe that I am free and can create change. However, *Flourish* reminds me that those who have been put in categories of the “subhuman” have been told that their actions are “complaints” or will be seen as dangerous (see Section 4.2). Furthermore, even if racialized individuals have viewed themselves as agents of change, vicarious racism reminds them that they too are seen as subhuman and too impotent to take action. Inaction, is becomes the effect of a “historical distrust” as well as a survival mechanism. When it is safe enough to realize that normalization

has failed as a survival mechanism, there is a new helplessness: “we cry because we don’t know what to do”.

Flourish restarts his counter-narrative when he makes the point that if there was equity, then there would be “roars of resilience”. In many of the stories where there is resilience in response to vicarious racism, there is either support from administration or privilege.

Flex is able to feel the emotions of vicarious racism without the group support and for her as well, emotion becomes fatigue. She also lacks support in her work place and empathy for her clients leads to “paralysis” when she witnesses the impact of White supremacy at work:

PG: That is the whole vicarious piece - how does that impact you when you witness racism towards your clients?

Flex: It enrages me. Some clients, it enrages me to the point where I feel paralyzed. I am like, I can't change these people. I don't always have the energy to fight with them [...] Sometimes it is more of a situation where I am intervening and I am like, I am just telling the client, "Can you just forget them for five minutes and focus on me. I really need you to forget about them right now and just follow me to my office." [...] I often don't have the energy to deal with it. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I can't deal. It is just - I can't deal.

I try to do little things where/with certain individuals who are not quiet, is I tell them: "Do me a favour. Don't deal with the front desk. Just wait for me in front of my office" [...] So I try to mitigate it a little bit that way because I really don't have the energy.

In Section 4.3.3 below, I will share *Flex*’s narratives of taking action in response to vicarious racism; however, she judges these actions and desire to protect her clients as “ridiculous” and as opposing her own helper narrative as she becomes helpless in the face of White supremacy, just like the client whose suffering she witnesses.

Despite her schema changes and lack of support at work, she offers a counter-narrative of vicarious resilience and justifies why she continues to work:

I often feel honoured that they feel safe enough to share their experience in the world with me. I always feel very blessed. I always feel very blessed. I am always in awe. I am

always speechless around their resilience and their strength. I am always in awe. It really humbles me. Usually once I get to know them, it is just absolutely amazing.

Questioning's narrative shows how White supremacy, lack of support, direct and indirect experiences of racism lead them to a development of double consciousness which nevertheless does not allow for externalization. Theirs leads to an internalization where their schemas change and their sense of self-worth is affected. It is at the end of our interview that they come to this realization:

I don't think I cared what other people thought until being in a position of like, being a person of colour in a work space, witnessing racism, not being able to do anything about it and just like going home. Living your day to day life. Just what are they thinking of me?

PG: Sounds like your work has impacted you.

Questioning: Uh yes! I can see that now. The way that I think has changed.

This change was a gradual process, and to try to understand it I will first share a story where they are forced to normalize because there is no option to process the pain of vicarious racism, and then I will move to a story where they take on and even double the client's helplessness. Like *Flex*, they disapprove of their own desire to protect the client as this desire counters the helping master narrative.

In this first story White community members come into the agency demanding the removal of the Black folk:

Questioning: [...] It was people who were living in the million dollar homes, they came to complain that there were like, "There are Black kids hanging outside of the building and smoking. I don't like the way it makes our community look. You need to do something about them. Get rid of them". They came and they were screaming at the front where it is like open to everybody to hear. I think like, I was just like in shock. "How can you come in and say something like that in front of like. There are kids there too. It is open to the community [...] and my manager was like, "Why don't you come into my office and then we can talk".

There was this other part of me that wanted to swear and curse at them but I couldn't do that because I am at work and that would jeopardize my job and maybe lose my job. I don't know what I would have said.

PG: What did you do with that anger?

Questioning: I think I just went back upstairs to my office and I played some music and [sighs], just deep sighs. I don't even think I talked to anybody about it. Just another day at work.

PG: Yeah. How does that make you feel about being a person of colour? You drive around that neighborhood. Does it affect?

Questioning: I don't know, sometimes when I feel like when I am driving in that part of the neighborhood I'm like "Are they looking at me and thinking, "Oh, how are they even driving a car? Are they on welfare? How do they afford that?" I am pretty sure that those are thoughts that go through people's heads [...] I feel like I am always thinking what other people might be thinking of me [...] like people have their eyes on me [...]

PG: Do you think you had those thoughts?

Questioning: Before? No! Never!

In continuously witnessing racism the narrator ends up in a position of passive observer.

Vicarious racism is felt as a "shock". As in direct experiences of racism, *Questioning*'s schema of people of colour being valued as human like everyone else, i.e. worthy of respect, is challenged by this incident. In order to keep their schema intact, they need to "swear and curse", but they are silenced by class power structures as they fear that they may jeopardize their job by speaking up. They return to their office and begin normalizing, "just another day at work." Over time, when vicarious racism is consistent, such changes to their schema become lasting.

This next story is about *Questioning* working with a Black youth who was using "the N-word". The organization's helping plan was to have him stop using this word. Witnessing and operating within White supremacy leaves *Questioning* feeling just as helpless as the client. While they want to help their clients, the master narrative's ideal of neutrality obstructs the process:

There are some workers who don't address [the N word] - they are like, "Oh, I didn't hear anything. I am just going to keep going". They are White. They are just like, "Okay". I feel like they feel like it is an awkward conversation to have. That is what I think. Since I am a person of colour and I feel like he relates to me more and he has opened up - He only actually talks to all the [racialized] people too at work. Yeah, it is strange. Yeah. So, it is hard. *You can't change things*. It is so hard to change people in the way that they have been brought up and it won't be fair to just tell them to leave because this is what he has been raised in. So, it goes back to the area where management makes the calls. They don't know the story or the history. Yeah. Those are the days where I am like, "I need to quit. Why am I still here?"

PG: Tell me a little bit about that thought. I am just wondering about that impact when you are working with someone for seven months, the tediousness of it and also knowing that this kid has suffered so much racism being in CAS his whole life. What happens internally, for you? What is the feeling?

Questioning: Hope-Less. Yeah. Very hopeless. It is just like, I don't know. There is also the other part of me that I am given a chance [...] to work with them on what they need to work on and then there is the other side, you are challenged by management, "You are not getting any work done with them. Why are they still here? You need to, they need to leave or they need to be showing some sort of effort that they are doing something."

It is hard to, I don't know how to say it. Just like, they don't know how we feel! [...] [...] You almost feel like, I sometimes feel like they are my kids. But like, Ugh. I don't know [...] I guess you become in a parent role for them as well. Most of them are not connected with their parents [...] But at the same time, there is a part of me that is needing to draw the line. This is your client and it's like, you can't enmesh into what they're wanting, which is like a [parent].

PG: What is the impact? Say more explicitly when that relationship becomes that close?

Questioning: I guess it is like you, I feel like I instill hope in them. Someone actually cares for them. There is somebody there that is going to listen to me. Somebody that is gonna help me along the way that I can talk to and like be genuine and be open with. Then it is gone in a year. Like, I don't know, it's like giving a pacifier to a baby and then taking it out of their mouth. It's like, "okay, now it is your turn to do it on your own". I think about a lot of my clients that just dropped off and then they don't keep in touch. I wonder what they are doing now. Are they going to be circling through the system? Am I going to see them ten years from now?

PG: Yeah. I guess that is kind of where your desire to do policy stuff comes in.

Questioning: So I don't have to see them again. We should have got it right the first time.

Part of this story is told with the lens of the master helping narrative where the client is the one with the least power and the management has the most power; however, unlike the master narrative *Questioning* is also positioned as passive saying “you can’t change things”. The little power *Questioning* has is taken by management and without any agency they begin to wonder: “Why am I still here?” They are left feeling “Hope-Less”, where this word is enunciated emphasizing “less”. Through empathy with the client and within the constraints of White supremacy, they become as powerless as the client. As in *Flex*’s helper narrative (see Section 4.1) they express frustration with the institution’s emphasis on the functional compliant client. If there is no effect of the treatment, the blame is put on the individual receiving help rather than on the system. The client is then put in the category of subhuman, that is, not worth helping and hope-less. Thus, *Questioning*’s thinking has changed because of several factors: 1. experiencing vicarious racism; 2. “not being able to do anything about it”; 3. having to both normalize it 4. *and* having to deny that anything happened, i.e. “living your day to day life”. As a result of their experiences, they have developed double consciousness which has resulted in a sense of self-doubt. It isn’t “I know what they are thinking” but “what are they thinking of me?” In most of the stories thus far, double consciousness has been used to the narrator’s advantage, but in this case it stops at making the narrator fear the oppressor.

While *Questioning* feels hopeless, they also want to keep helping by taking on “a parent role”. In part, they accept that closeness is helpful as the clients “are not connected with their parents”. In this acceptance they gain agency in the narrative, “I feel like I instill hope in them”; however, the narrative of professional standards constrains them and tells them that they need to “draw the line [...] you can’t enmesh”. Still, they end the narrative with their own counter-narrative to the neoliberal system, recognizing that forced timelines for helping and strict

boundaries for compliance are serving as a “pacifier” rather than actually helping to create lasting change. Thus, they develop a desire to work in policy, to actively work to change the master narrative and the system.

4.3.3 Constrained by Professionalized Helper Narratives: Unnecessarily protective

I have demonstrated how *Questioning* experiences the constraints of the social work master narrative that forbids the helper to become “enmeshed” with the client and instead pushes for clear boundaries and neutrality (Jeffery, 2005). *Flourish* and *Flex* are also constrained by this master narrative.

Flex is also constrained by her own counter-narrative of being the facilitator (see Section 4.1) who also happens to be neutral and boundaried. She calls her responses to vicarious racism, “unnecessarily protective”. This is her story:

I am still trying to work out how I work with other Black folk. I am still trying to process that because I know that there is a part of me that is unnecessarily protective. I didn't know that in the beginning, but I am aware of that.

I will give you an example of unnecessarily protective. So I was working with this young Black man and he was telling me how he was harassed and that no one was listening to him. He was the typical you know, I guess “noncompliant person”. He didn't go to school every day. He didn't always have the best access to language, so sometimes his language would come across as “angsty”. Talking to him about [how] anger is very powerful and it is very useful, it is a very good: “if you take the time, you learn how to harness that energy, you can use it for a lot of good - it is not a bad thing to be angry”.

I told him, “In my experience, often people who are angry have a very good reason. Let's talk about it”, but at the same time, I was talking out the other side of my mouth. I was laying on him: “Listen, you are a Black male and you are six feet! I am going to ask you, when you come into this space, you can be a hot mess around me, but I am asking you to not be a hot mess when you enter the space and you talk the receptionist because they get scared. They cannot manage those pieces and they jump the gun.”

So that was the protective piece that I don't really know was necessary but I do find myself saying that. In terms of saying - the person already knows they are Black and six feet tall, but [laughs] mirroring - we are racial - sometimes people get scared unnecessarily. Is there a way you can - I can help you navigate this so you are not so profiled? [laughs]. I am not saying to sell out, I am not saying you have to become a

different person, but I said, "I am concerned that you are going to get kicked out of this space." Because, I said, "Just because your friend is acting the fool, doesn't mean that you can act the fool". I have said that to some young folks. I have said, "Listen, your friend is a white kid, he can act the fool but he will be invited to come back into this space in one week. You may be banned for six months." So - I always feel uneasy about that. I do it, but I am trying to not do that so much anymore. But just stay with the person around, you know, what are some of the triggers around being angry.

Here, the client is already positioned as “noncompliant” by the master narrative (see Section 4.1 for analysis). Though, the client is positioned as a victim of the system the narrator reframes his emotions as healthy human feelings. She also attempts to make him aware of the master narrative and help him navigate it by appearing more “complaint”. That is, she is trying to teach him how to play the White script of a person worthy of helping, i.e. a passive (good) recipient. However, she is “uneasy” with giving this message. She ends her answer by calling her instinct to protect, “ridiculous”:

Part of me is protective and “this is what is going on”. You can download on this person and that person, but can we figure out a way to keep you here so you don't get profiled? The reality is that kid is probably already getting profiled. He is keeping his nose clean. But there is a part of me that is like: Let's just play with the race card, and it just seems ridiculous. It just seems ridiculous. I am trying to manage that a lot better, by recognizing the ridiculousness in it.

Again, in downplaying her need to protect it seems that she is constrained within the liberal master narrative that a ‘good’ helper is one who is neutral and objective. I want to know if the client perceived her as “ridiculous” so I ask:

PG: How does the client react to that?

Flex: He was cool with it. He was cool with it. But at the same time, I am like "I am not his mom. Why am I laying this on this kid?" He is not coming here for this, right? I don't do that with other clients is what I am saying, so why am I doing it now? I am just trying to figure out another way [...] If I have a Chinese man in the office, I am not laying that on. I am very clear about that, right? [...] I guess the question I have for myself is, me doing that piece, is that more self-serving more than anything? I am not doing that for other clients. I am very clear about that in my head [...] So letting go of that - the reality is that my role is not to be a protector. I am there to support and facilitate my client

reaching their own goals and meeting their own needs. I am very clear that is my role. When I go beyond that I wonder, I know I am hurting myself - that I know about.

As in *Questioning*'s story, protection and parenting run counter to the neutral helper narrative and ends up in a role that is possibly intrusive as opposed to loving/caring. She asks why she only has this protection response to Black folk? I did not ask her if she witnesses this degree of racism enacted on her other racialized clients. *Flex*, *Becoming*, and *Bridges* all talk about the impact of White supremacy as being most ruthless on the largest and darkest bodies. Or, is *Flex* more empathic towards Black folk because of her own personal experiences as a Black woman?

Furthermore, *Flex* is aware that as long as she plays her role she has won some privileges of Whiteness. The same receptionist who was racist towards a client reacts differently to *Flex*:

[The receptionist] had the persona, "I love everyone. Everyone is cool." But I have seen, not just in that instance, but in other instances that she doesn't know how to deal with people of colour. She does not know how to deal with it. I go right up to her and she goes: "I love everybody"; she doesn't see colour. Like, okay. She is like, "I like you" - Of course you like me, I am a social worker. [laughs]. I don't even count.

Many of the narratives speak about how being in a professionalized role allows others to perceive them as legitimate and human.

Flex also describes how her empathy for people whom she closely identifies with also becomes her own hurt, similar to the way *Questioning* took on "Hope-Less":

It hurts me in that I take on that particular hurt, the struggle in this world. In some ways it becomes my own; especially in folks that I feel a lot of resemblance [...]that is not okay. That is not okay for me to carry that because that does not - part of it is it does not belong to me. Just really trying to tease that out in my mind and in my body. I think I have already teased that out of my head, so my head is very clear that I share this experience, but I don't own it. I have teased that in my head, but I haven't teased that out from my inner workings - in terms of my mode of response.

When we take on the other person's hurt as if it is our own, we impose our own frame of reference and values on them as *Awareness* explains:

When you see people from your own race, there is a little bit of judgement that comes in too because of that place of privilege. You grow up this way and yeah, other people are struggling because they didn't have that [same] privilege. So you judge.

PG: What is the judgement?

Awareness: You notice that. Were you accepting of that or did you ask him to change? Did you push him? So to me, that is how they grew up - that is okay. But you are like, "Okay, why not do it? Let's do it". There is a tendency to push that I have to be mindful when I am dealing with my clients - because I come from that place of privilege. Not everyone has that ability, it takes time. Why is he reluctant? I need to keep that in check.

Awareness experiences vicarious racism yet her sense of protection coupled with her position of privilege manifests as pushing the client to do better. *Flourish* also speaks to this kind of empathy where he takes on the other person's pain:

When I am hearing others go through it, I am hurting. My head - I am thinking about so many things, to ease you, to console you. My head is always there. I am thinking solution. I don't want to get stuck there. Jump to solution right? I don't know how effective that is. Sometimes you need people to be in that emotion for a bit before you determine the solution. I think that is what is happening for me.

Narrator's own experiences of racialization seem to magnify the dis-ease of vicarious racism as they take on the pain of the other. Like the other two narrators, *Flourish* is also critical of this urge to protect because it closes up autonomous space for the client/other to feel and have their process. He acknowledges the importance of time and presence as opposed to the quick rescue. Do our workplaces afford us this time and space? Is the protection instinct unhealthy or is it the agency that is unhealthy by pushing us to come up with quick solutions? Is the protection instinct a response to being in systems where White supremacy rules and definitions of success is the norm rather than an undisciplined reaction to wanting to ease one's own pain?

In *Flourish*'s story of being a youth advocate in schools, he recounts how he was infantilized and then taken seriously only when he was able to assert his professional status.

When he arrives late to this meeting he learns that the representatives of the school have already made most of the decisions before he arrived:

[In my job] I had to go to schools to try to advocate to try to get young people back into schools [...] I remember this one time, in particular, I was running a bit late to a school meeting.[...] They were processing this meeting in a very rapid way [...]They had him in everything but academic courses [...] So I literally had to stop the meeting [...] I made a statement.

What I said is, "To the point that is not to rush through this type of decision making as we typically do. We need to make sure that we give him the unique opportunity to craft his educational outcome."

That was met with just "dat dat dat" and "Oh well, you know, that is why we start the meeting on time."

So they started to blame me for being late, for the outcome of these courses. I owned it. I said, "Listen, I agree. I was late. But, do you guys think that it is appropriate to not give him [the student] his voice on these courses?"

Long story short, we ended up getting him a couple more academic courses.

PG: [...] What is the impact on you when you are witnessing this happening?

Flourish: It is not easy to watch. Particularly because the young man and his mom are marginalized bodies [...]The young man already because of some of his behaviors in the school doesn't even want him back in the school. So they are already marginalized. Then you have me, dat dat da [sound of triumph] with my badge coming in, you know: Social worker, racialized guy. So they are forced to receive me differently than mom and young man. But I can still tap into what they are experiencing because of identity. Although I am sitting there in my privileged position as social worker and you guys are dealing with him in this way, I can still feel what mom and young man are going through. So for me, it is painful, it is painful.

You know, with social work practice and some of our ethics, I am not supposed to do for them. At the same time, I cannot just sit there and watch mom and young man have to navigate these spaces by themselves. So it puts me in a very precarious position. If we are not careful, if I am not careful, sometimes I end up swooping in and doing for them and protect them, wrap myself around them and you know: Stay Away! What do you mean, - you know.

So it puts me in a really weird position sometimes.

Even though *Flourish* is scolded as if he is a child, “that is why we start the meeting on time”, he uses his professional status to maintain his agency. Even though he is the agent and creates change, vicarious racism makes this experience “painful” as does the conflict of being in the privileged position of a professional (Whiter than the clients), which prevents the complete protection he longs to enact. In other words, allegiance to the professional badge constrains him: “I am not supposed to do for them”.

In all of these stories where protection is viewed as wrong, narrators are conflicted because the protection and closeness also feels right. For example, *Questioning* indicates that the closeness that they share with their clients “instills hope in them” because this is the relationship that allows clients to feel like “someone actually cares for them”. Even *Flex* admits that in her office, safe from the eyes and heavy hand of White supremacy, she can protect her clients freely:

I do like a lot of pleading with people: “I want you to be safe in my office and be very big, but I can't promise I can protect you when you are out there in the waiting room. That is a promise I can't make [...] I can protect you in my office: if you want to scream and if you want to shout, you can do that in my office and I won't tell you to stop” [...] Anything outside of my office, I can't I can't I can't - that is the part I have to be careful about when I talk to clients about those pieces. They already know they are Black, I don't need to tell them that [...] Especially when I am working with people where they don't necessarily have that analysis. They know that racism exists but they don't know how - not that they know how it exists, but they just know it is happening to them and sometimes because they are experiencing so much pain, they don't see the operation of it unfold.

There is a sense of freedom in her ability to protect the client in her office, to provide the space to scream and shout. Her repeating of “I can't” signifies the level of distress she experiences in not being able to protect her clients outside of the office just as *Questioning* equates their frontline work to ultimately being a “pacifier” in the grand scheme of things.

4.3.4 Vicarious Racism Catalyzes Action: I have had enough

Next, I discuss ways in which professionalized helpers justify their goodness despite breaching the boundaries of neutrality. I then analyze non-professionalized helpers who protect with ease and a sense of duty. In all of these stories, vicarious racism is a catalyst for action, and when protection is viewed as effective it solidifies schemas that affirm counter-narratives.

Professionalized helpers justify protection: How many people stood up for me?

Triumph, *Flourish*, and *Awareness* talk about ways in which they justify how they can be both professional and not neutral. I begin with *Triumph* who has redefined the norms of social work in terms of love: “every social worker needs to have that love because love will change the world” (Section 4.1). Thus, she describes protection as duty:

One time I saw two police officers kind of trying to get a rise out of one of the youth and the youth just proceeded to - the youth is of African-Indigenous descent, so mixed. The youth proceeded to come this way. I saw them doing it and they are looking at each other and trying to get a rise out of him without touching him, but I could hear what they are saying and he came up to me and he was like, "Let's go inside, [*Triumph*], right now". He is like protecting me and bringing me in. I was like, "What happened?" But I heard. I was so mad and I went out and I said to [the police officers], I can't remember, I was really angry, but I said that we need to always remember as professionals where we come from and we need to remember that the people around us who we serve have their own narrative and we need to be careful and care about them because how can we be in this work [otherwise].

Then they proceed to ask what title I have and it was only when I shared it with them that they respected what I had to say. That makes me angry. That makes me really angry. But it is not all cops and not all social workers that are corrupt, but there are some that are out there. He was like, "Don't worry about it". They just have to let it go to get through.

[...] So, even me having that conversation with the police officers hopefully that will make some sort of impact.

Triumph clearly does not dominate the youth in order to protect; indeed, she begins the story with the youth protecting her, as he regulates emotions for both of them, and provides an account of events even though she has already witnessed it. Thus, she maintains her counter helping

narrative by positioning him in a place of power. However, witnessing the incident leaves her feeling angry, mobilized, and wanting to serve and protect him from the White police. Still, in taking power into her own hands *Triumph* remains in the role of a counter character by not using this power to assimilate or control the youth's difference, but to stand up for it; she stands up for his humanity. Her response to vicarious racism is to feel anger and be mobilized by it. In cautioning the police she takes power over the oppressor and reveals that they are not neutral or good. She is working to protect the youth's innocence, not hers. Indeed, she is willing to give up her perceived innocence by positioning herself as the site of emotion, of anger. Still, she continues to position herself as the hero and therefore is still constrained by the hero narrative of social work (Badwall, 2013). However, to be careful not to fall into a position of dominance herself, she ends the story with: "but it is not all cops and not all social workers that are corrupt, but there are some that are out there."

It is her legitimacy as a social worker that allows her actions to be effective and she expresses frustration about this:

PG: How did [the police] respond once they heard your title?

Triumph: They were respectful.

PG: How do you know that they were being respectful? What changed?

Triumph: They were rolling their eyes and looking at each other and looking up; just very demeaning. The moment I said my role, they were - like - I don't know, it's like sixth [sense] - when you - you just learn to read people well. Their demeanor changed. They were kind of scared. I knew. They knew that I knew what I was talking about.

She is recognized by the police as human and good when she identifies herself as someone who is defined as good according to the White script. Thus, the master narrative also constrains her because to be recognized as human, i.e. someone who is rational enough to know, she has to identify and work with a specific kind of privilege. Here, her double consciousness, which she

identifies as a “sixth [sense]”, allows her to utilize the power that she holds by adhering to the master narrative and owning her professionalization, which permits her, in this scenario, to be the site of knowledge and the defender of the youth.

Awareness's story of protection is about giving up neutrality by trying to educate the oppressor who, in this case, is her racialized client attacking another person of colour. She teaches the client about the importance of tolerance. She describes the impetus to protect as coming both from vicarious racism, bystander responsibility, and her own experiences of racialization:

When a client is attacking another client - that happened here. I cannot let go of that. I need to bring that person in and have a dialogue, "You know what, let's talk about this [...] You can have your ideas with you, that doesn't mean that you can go and create a scene" [...] Lots of education and awareness comes into play here [...] Like attacking another person - it is difficult to sit with that and not do anything about it. I am not a change maker here, but at the same time I don't want to let go of that opportunity [...] I had to. It just couldn't, didn't sit right with me.

PG: What was the outcome in that particular scenario that you are thinking of?

Awareness: Not a big difference. But I did my role. I felt good. I am a social worker. What is my role? I do a lot of advocacy. The person who got attacked, isn't that same oppression that I got attacked? [...] How many people stood up for me and did anything about it? How did that make me feel? Is that a right thing to do? It is not a right thing to let that continue to happen, to continue to be a bystander. Even though I am a social worker - there is another role. It is not imposing my views, just putting it out there [...]

PG: Yeah. So tell me just a bit more about how you felt better. How do you imagine you might have felt if you hadn't done that piece?

Awareness: Letting the other person feel the oppression, nobody did anything about it - right? I felt relieved that I did my best. Whether she is going to take it or not - I had no control over - so it is not imposing. I am just sharing this.

PG: How did it affect your dynamic between you and her?

Awareness: Still the same. She still comes to see me.

She responds to vicarious racism with action. In this case, the effectiveness of her action is not measured by a change in the oppressor, but in her own fulfillment of her role, “I did my best”.

Like *Triumph*, she too defines this protection of a client as the duty of a social worker. Also similar to *Triumph*’s story, she positions herself as the knower who uses this power to respond to oppression; not to say which belief system is better, but to educate about tolerance. Like *Flourish* said earlier, the primary purpose of this action is to ease her own vicarious pain, but she does not classify it as wrong: it becomes part of her own counter-narrative that redefines the good helper.

In *Flex*’s story of educating her client of how his “Black and six feet tall” body impacts the White people outside of the office, she admitted that even though she didn’t approve of taking these kinds of actions, the client was “cool with it”. Similarly, *Awareness* also says that her intervention did not harm the relationship between herself and the client. She does not position the education as an imposition or as “ridiculous” (*Flex*). Her boundary here is in not expecting the client to change and in understanding that she cannot control another.

Professional neutrality is not required in this next story as *Flourish* protects a racialized colleague, rather than a client. When he does not have to be neutral, he can respond to vicarious racism with freedom. Protection here also comes by educating the target of racism about “the mechanisms of dominance”:

So one thing that I have done is I have given [my colleague] language to start to articulate some of her experiences of racism. I have also said to her, "It is okay to talk about race. It is not a taboo issue" [...] In a team meeting, I remember literally saying, “I know this [colleague] has some issues to share with you.” So I created a space for her. She has been on the team longer than me, but I created a space for her on that team to now talk about her experiences.

In his ability to follow through with his desire to protect, he remains an agent in the story and has power over the master narrative through his helping. His helping is not power over his peer because he gives her a way to find her own voice and ways to navigate.

In all of these stories of effective helping, narrators use their professional status and privilege to advocate for the target of White supremacy. In doing this, their counter-narratives are affirmed while they all remain both empathic and agentive.

Influence of Vicarious Racism on Parenting

Narrators who were parents said that their own parenting was impacted by vicarious racism. Rather than become more protective of their children, narrators said all talked about ways that they now teach their children to step out of the confines of the master narrative.

Journey talks about how both vicarious racism and resilience have made her more flexible in her boundaries between home and work and how she shares her work with her family and friends:

Journey: Yeah, I think [my work and witnessing racism] has had an impact on how I raise my son. I think that we had a good life together. I think he is doing really well. People around me, friends want to come back and volunteer and do things with me here when I - if I am going somewhere with [clients] they want to go too. I think I share lots with them and they want to be involved in this kind of work [...My son] has had no rules. He has no boundaries. He can come and go. He comes and goes. He is part of my life at work as much as he wants it or not at all, he'll pull himself away.

Similarly, in response to direct and indirect experiences of racism, *Becoming* has also taught his children to adjust the boundaries set by the master narrative. He says to them:

Frustration is okay. Realize that you are mad about something. There is nothing wrong with that, but what are you going to do about that? You have choices. Some people, when they are mad about something they are going to hurt that person that they are mad about. That is a choice.

Similar to *Journey*, vicarious racism has made it important for him to teach his children how to have their own counter-narratives, to create choices and resist the exceptions of the master narrative, i.e. to be an “angry Black man”. *Becoming* also involves his family in his work:

One of the things that I do, my kids know a lot of the kids that I work with at work. I try as much as possible to entwine my home with my work. When we go [on trips with

clients], my kids come on the camping trip with me. The odd times, maybe twice a year, I try to invite [clients] to my place.

Whether this way of working is a result of his own helper narrative created by the way his mentor worked with him (Section 4.1), direct experiences of White supremacy, or vicarious racism is difficult to say. However, this way of working is imperative in how he helps youth involved in gun violence as I will demonstrate below.

Protecting outside of the confines of professionalism: It is my duty

The narrators who cannot use professionalization to legitimize themselves do not have the same means to Whiteness as the racialized social workers, and thus have to work much harder to prove that their thoughts and actions are worthwhile. Still, vicarious racism fuels them to keep working and to take action to protect and parent the people they are helping when necessary.

While *Bridges* is not professionalized, he is privileged in his leadership and administrative roles in a large organization. He frames protection as his way of taking responsibility for this privilege. In the following story, he talks about vicarious racism as he witnesses young racialized leaders in a board room with White administrators who unknowingly perpetuate White supremacy as they attempt to neutralize potentially racializing language.

What it boils down to is the codified language is finding different ways to talk about exclusion without saying "exclusion". Find different ways to talk about racism, without naming "racism". This is explicitly racist. We see that in the changing language of youth at risk, marginalized youth, youth facing multiple barriers, NEET [Not in Education Employment or Training] youth. [When in fact], they are predominately racialized youth, who are predominately of African descent [...] Don't change the language because it takes us further away from the truth of who is actually being affected here. [...] That is an example of how, and I see this in my work, to either soften the language or avoid race-charged language actually dilutes and diverts from the issues. It gives an avenue for mainstream leaders to talk about diversity and inclusion instead of talking about anti-Black racism or anti-indigenous racism, because people are so uncomfortable with that subject. It is just loaded with anxiety and guilt and discomfort.

[...] I could see how the avoidance of naming the issues, which is a form of racism because it deflects and disempowers you from attaching you to what is really happening, was leading to frustration for the young people who were at the [board room] table. It was moving the conversation at an academic level or at an institutional level to which they were not comfortable [...] So it was already shutting them down. I could see the frustration. More importantly, what I could see was a reaction from these young leaders who are trying to affect change to posturing down:

“Okay, you are not going to demean me right now. You are not going to make me small. Actually, I’m going to make myself bigger now in this space.”

So you saw the attitudes kind of rise up in them. Not violent in any way, but more assertive and aggressive. So it was becoming less of a productive conversation and it became this tension point between these young people who are feeling like, “I thought you invited me here to talk about real issues that are hitting my community and how we can solve them, but I feel like I am getting a song and dance.”

[...] So the impact on me was about professional responsibility, social responsibility, and a reaffirmation of how systemic exclusion really looks [...] It is unfair to invite young racialized leaders into spaces that we are saying you should be at the table and you should be a change agent. That is all true, but doing that without preparing them to be in those spaces and familiarizing them with the culture of those spaces, the language of those spaces and giving them skill sets to know how to sit through that, navigate that, is unfair to them. It is frustrating to them and had they not been as resilient as they were, it could be completely disheartening to them [...] So the impact on me was about professional responsibility, social responsibility, and a reaffirmation of how systemic or how, yes, systemic exclusion really looks.

This is a counter-narrative that positions the racialized youth as humans with legitimate feelings and knowledge, and White dominance is positioned as ignorant. *Bridges* also shows how academic language is a mechanism of dominance. If the dominant were to actually acknowledge race and White supremacy they would also have to acknowledge the ways in which they are complicit in oppression. Acknowledging complicity often induces helpless guilt in White allies rather than constructive listening and accompanying of the Other. Thus, the colonizer attempts to neutralize the racialized into their world(s) rather than work to understand how their very language was problematic for the people that were invited into the room to be listened to. Neutralized language is a way to deny complicity. *Bridges* does not use neutral language in this

narrative. He explicitly names that the people who are most likely to be not-seen as human are “Black and Indigenous”.

In this story, vicarious racism is experienced as a “reaffirmation of [...]how systemic exclusion really looks” and leads *Bridges* to be protective. Protection is framed as a “responsibility” and an obligation to educate as to increase chances of success in various contexts. *Triumph* and *Awareness* were a little different as they both protected by following through with their obligation to teach the oppressor, not the marginalized person. *Bridges* wants to teach the youth about systemic oppression, but also how to navigate these systems; not necessarily by being “the other kind of Black guy” or by being more compliant, but by understanding the linguistic games in which White supremacy operates.

Similarly, protection is fluid with the way *Becoming* helps. As mentioned above *Becoming* values the “enmeshing” of home and work that *Questioning* and professional helpers tend to eschew. He understands that White supremacy also criminalizes the parents of the youth he is working with, therefore making parental figures less available in families. Thus, part of *Becoming*’s protective role is to offer parental support or home-space over the long term. In this next story, he talks about a youth that he worked with two decades ago and maintains a mentoring/parenting relationship with him:

It is amazing sometimes where he just pops out of the blue and comes to my house and we sit down for two hours and we talk [...] We start to get into the real meat and potatoes by the third hour. He is the person that I really have a lot of love for. I would like to see him do a lot of great things with his life. He is trapped in something and he is slowly getting to see the wrong in it. The way he is seeing the wrong in it is that he doesn't want to see the same thing happen to his kids. He never really understood that you have already committed your kids to that particular life. That is the only thing they know of life. That is the only stuff they know is what you have shown them. So how do you break that without changing anything yourself?

As in *Triumph*'s story, love is a component of how he works. *Becoming* explains that he is not replacing the youths' parents, but offering skills and a space to talk:

I try to, not replace what a parent is in their life. What I figure they need are the skills so that they can confide in me. If you feel a particular way, if you are thinking of trying to do a particular issue, you can come to me without feeling like I am going to judge you; I am going to ridicule you. I am going to listen to you and I am going to talk to you in a way where you come to an understanding, "You know what, I shouldn't go kill that person".

As the interviewer, I am astonished not just by the conviction and love in his counter-narratives, but also by the subject matter of the conversations he has with the youth. He is talking to them about gun violence and avoiding murder by holding a space of presence and patience. He creates space and relationship over decades; fit for people worthy of their humanity. *Becoming* does not talk about the duty to report. There is no urgency in his helping, no labeling, and no criminalization. If these youth were to see a professionalized counselor, would they all be arrested or hospitalized? Again, there is space to speak truthfully and process in the way that

Becoming practices:

They know it is wrong. It is amazing, but they know it is wrong. All they are asking for is a person to listen to what they are upset about. Not about what they really want to do, but what they are upset about. It is like anything, when you are frustrated, 1) you want to get it off your chest. You want to get it out. It is amazing when a person can listen to that you will be receiving something back without actually knowing you are receiving it. That is what I have come out a lot in some of these discussions with some of these guys on real serious issues in their lives. That is really, really important.

While *Becoming* does not ask the people he is helping to be "compliant", in his telling of these stories, he is clear about what is right and wrong. He offers the youth his advice and counters their narratives; however, in doing so he also gives a lot of space for them to speak until they are done speaking, or to come up with a new narrative along with him. In other words, he does not over power and helping is not about commodity. Helping is about building relationships and community, taking time, and sometimes protecting through advice and education.

Both of *Bridges* and *Becoming* respond to vicarious racism by protecting and educating the people they are helping. In their stories, vicarious racism may or may not change schemas, but they do confirm each narrator's counter-narratives about helping and racialization. They are both explicit that the people they are helping are humans and have choice. With mentorship, which privileged people have and take for granted, they can learn to resist White supremacy and create their own counter-narratives.

4.3.5 Beyond the Counter-Narrative: Why don't you make your own table?

Becoming and *Journey* talk about ways that they step out of the master narrative altogether. As *Becoming* is more explicit, I will begin with his story.

My interview with *Becoming* began with his own childhood story and losing a friend to gun violence. Even as a youth he did not break down in the face of these extreme impacts of White supremacy, but instead works to understand both the system and himself with the support of his own mentor. After a lifetime of experiencing the negative impacts of White supremacy, after two decades of working with youth involved in drugs and gangs, one day his endurance breaks down and he says, "I have had enough". Still, much like his early narrative, he follows this expression of frustration by rallying the community to create change and again becomes an agent in the narrative once again (I am leaving out the details of the incident to preserve confidentiality):

When [Child's Name] died, when [he] got murdered [...]Got shot [...]When he died [...]There was a lot of support from teachers who loved him, parents who loved him, everybody that loved him. It was like, 'cause I have seen this many times, you kinda see who did it [...]Literally, that is the first time I broke down. That is the first time that I ever cried. The tears were not that I was sad. The tears were like: I had enough.

I literally called people out, professional people. I said, "If we do not start to acknowledge these things in a particular way, we are only giving power to situations like [Child's name]". If we are talking about grieving or counseling for these kids it isn't somebody from the [City] coming in to do the grief counseling.

I said: "The problem is that we have got to get into the corners of when these kids sitting in the stairwells smoking, after these kinds of incidents. These are the places we have to go. We might not like some of the things we have to hear, but if we don't do it, all of [Child's] friends is going to jump over the fence because they think that is the thing to do - to survive or to defend [his] death."

It was really frustrating because everyone on the professional team wanted to follow step 1 and step 2 and step 3. I said, "Sometimes steps, you have to just throw it out of the window and be out of the box." This sort of situation, it is the first time we have had a [kid shot in this brutal manner]! You know? All his friends were just thinking that the only way to revenge [his] death or survive was to become. If all of these kids jump over the fence, we have lost. These kids are like 13, 14, they have friends who are 8 and 9. We are going to lose a big, huge generation. Everyone went, "No" and I said, "Yes!" Exactly what happened? Is [exactly] what I said.

PG: When you say, "I have had enough" you have had enough of what?

Becoming: I have had enough of, for instance: "Shooting in [City]. Youth Died. Blah blah blah blah blah".

"Oh we need to apply for funding"

"Oh we need to get some money to do some work"

I think one time we got, I think it was maybe five million dollars. The people that we need to hire are not people with a degree. Let's create some opportunities for these guys who are involved.

PG: That's not what happened?

Becoming: [shakes head] Four or five years they managed to hire four people. Nothing changed, it got worse. So, when [Child's name] happened it was very public and everything. So everybody was like, "You need money to do this. Let's get it". So all the organizations were rallying up to only thinking about ways to get money, not really understanding [his] situation.

PG: How does racism play into this?

Becoming: Huge!

PG: Tell me

Becoming: I think a lot of - This organization is great compared to other organizations here in this community [...] I hate the fact that they like to use the word, "at risk". The kids they are talking about are the ones killing each other and selling drugs. When they

get the money to do the work with those kids it is never those kids that they focus on. It is all the kids that are pretty mainstream.

PG: Why?

Becoming: They feel they can understand that.

This long section of the interview is presented uninterrupted to follow narrative and CRT methodology *and* to honor the narrator who has shared with such vulnerability and honesty about “the first time [he] broke down.”

Vicarious racism has the power to make the narrative of White supremacy explicit for *Becoming*. He understands that the institution ignores the people who need the most help; those it considers subhuman. He has therefore “had enough” of playing a role in it, even as counter character. He has witnessed how following the rules, “step 1 and step 2 and step 3” has led to more deaths. Funding is not the solution. He is asking questions of the status quo: what are we doing with the funding? Where is the money going? Why are we not actually helping the people who are involved in gun violence? Why is it so easy to criminalize them instead? He is yearning for a *new narrative* altogether, with new players:

The cost to me is you are never going to be invited to the table. Why don’t you make your own table? The reason that I say that is that I believe there is already a table set and a dinner happening. As much as you think that one of these days they are going to pull the chair out and invite you sit there, it is never going to happen. So in your illusion to think that you are one of the people that are going to sit at that table, and if you are lucky enough to touch somebody sitting at that table, that is divine. Divine. You know what I mean?

I think racism is something that is embedded. I think that a lot of the time the people who are a victim of it. If somebody is spending enough time to develop a system to oppress people, and you go to school and you end up failing - at the end of the day their goal is for you is not for you to rise. How do you rise other than to start to understand yourself? Love yourself. You know? You feel like you never have any time to do it.

Subhumans are not invited to the table. The other trick of the capitalist efficiency machine is to make sure “you feel like you never have time to do it”. Once again, *Becoming* does not give into

oppression: he finds and makes time. Even in this story, he enlists “you”, the people, to rise and “to understand yourself” and “love yourself”. As in all of *Becoming*’s narratives he is consistently placing himself as an agent who does rise, who takes every opportunity to learn about and use his capabilities.

After this “I have had enough” shooting, he finally gets the organization to support him to work with kids directly involved in gun violence and drugs in the way that he wants to. He takes them on a trip which changes their lives (unfortunately, I have to leave out the story of this trip to protect confidentiality). I now explore the process of finally making his own table with the support of the White organization:

I always challenge people, for example this trip, other people would say, “It doesn’t need to happen”.

I would say, “Whether it is going to happen now? It is going to happen. If this doesn’t happen we are not going to make an impact on all of these kids that are choosing to do all these things with their lives because you cannot speak to them in their element. You know. You need to up the ante on what you are doing in your organization. If you don’t do it you are not going to compete [with the street. The youth] have to come to a point where [they] say to [themselves]: you are worth more than what they are telling you.”

That is one of the messages I push all the time when these kids use the word “Nigger”: That is less than a human being. Although you are not intending the same thing, it is going to resonate to everyone who is watching you or hearing you use it. At the end of the day you are saying to that person you are less than a human being. So pulling out that gun and you have the conflict of shooting that person, you think nothing about it because at the end of the day that word means this particular thing. So I always tell them: “You are worth more than that, man. You have got to challenge things”.

It is hard to get them to believe that they have to do that. At the end of the day that is out of my control. I can’t control all of these things that are out there.

Throughout the interview he repeats: “I have been saying for years, we have not really been competing with the street.” He has proposed many ways of competing with the street and most of these suggestions have fallen on deaf ears or been swallowed up by institutions who have then changed the programs to target “youth at risk” who he says are “mainstream” and would likely

get by without the programming anyway. He says that the kids who really need help, “the kids they are talking about [who] are the ones killing each other and selling drugs” in the stairwells, are ignored. Instead, funding goes into the hands of dominance, the White management, who use the money to control the most compliant Other.

He says that the fight to get their support was exhausting, but again, he ends on a positive note:

This trip [...]it took a lot, a lot out of me. I normally take a month off and I didn't take a month off this year. Just to be dealing with people that don't believe in my vision and at the same time giving them a particular experience [...]But it was worth it. Now it is on a track to happen again. The people who said it is going to happen again, they are saying, "This is how it is going to happen". So these people who were doubting before, we no longer need to hear that negative energy. It was really empowering to hear that from these people. It was no longer me alone needing to say, "This needs to happen, this needs to happen". Now everyone knows this needs to happen. So now it feels good that you have kind of evolved or you have kind of created something [...]You have to constantly prove yourself.

While vicarious racism pushes *Becoming* to “make [his] own table” -- a new narrative -- what makes this work sustainable is support, not just of his marginalized peers, but also of the people in power. It is with this support that he can say, “It was no longer me alone”. The co-operation of Whiteness as ally is an important resource for a new narrative and this counter character. Still, he says with a quieter voice, when I push him to talk about racism:

When you work with the people that we work with in communities like [this one where people] are primarily from places like Jamaica, the Islands, Third World countries that come here and the whole focus of these organizations is to help people move from this point and start to enjoy the system. But why have the Chinese managed to move on? The Indians have moved on. But the Black is always maintained.

The racial contract runs on a hierarchy of oppression. The darkest and largest bodies, I am learning from these narratives, are the ones who are pushed down most brutally by its design.

Becoming's discourse on racism does not end on such a tragic note. He talks about change, love

and understanding. His workplace, while being a space that perpetuates White supremacy, is also a place where he has been working, with success, to prove himself.

Because *Journey* works in a supportive environment, none of her narratives have to do with proving herself at work. Also, her response to vicarious racism is not to protect or to make narratives of White supremacy explicit. Rather, she responds by supporting the community that is hurt to support themselves, and by creating space to make this possible. Her narrative steps outside of the master narrative completely – otherwise than the counter-narrative – and unlike *Becoming*'s new narrative, hers is achieved with ease.

In the following story, she talks about a man who died with “the needle still in his arm” outside, next to the place where she works. His death impacts all the people she helps at the agency. While this is not explicitly said to be about “race”, it is an example of White supremacy which also impacts the poor. White supremacy is about taking power over particular intersections of marginalization: poor, female, racialized, disabled, etc.; all who are lower in the hierarchy of White supremacy and are also viewed in the master narrative as subhuman:

Those are the crises when you come into work and everybody is upset. You gotta be there for everybody. You burn a lot of sage that day. They are talking to each other. You make it possible so that they can all talk. You give them the room, you smudge with them, you let them talk and you leave them. You don't say that "you are supposed to be in bed by now" and all that stuff, you bend all of the rules to make sure they are okay and you just let them all talk. You don't have to be in the room, you don't have to be included in the conversation. I can come back here but they will still be there talking. You go in once in a while just to - you know?

This moves beyond the master and counter-narrative as the helper is not the site of knowledge.

Those within the hurt community are the ones who know what is best. As in *Becoming*'s story, *Journey* also believes that following rules without taking account for context can cause more harm than good. It is definitely outside of the master narrative to have any faith in the competence of people who are hurting to be able to regulate themselves. Processing tragedy is

contingent on bending the rules that are normally there to control and manage. In her story crises are the times to observe and to take the opportunity to create new narratives. So I enquire further:

PG: How do you find your strength to keep doing that?

Journey: You just do it. You are on automatic pilot. After a while, you have to look after yourself and by going down and talking to the staff, or a manager. Or else you go home and try to find someone. Often times I walk out of here almost crippled and crawl right into bed and I say, "Don't talk to me, I don't want to talk to you." I sleep and sleep and sleep. I can sleep for eighteen hours after leaving work here.

Here she reveals that the ease with which she occasionally steps out of the master narrative takes a toll on her. Even with support, this work is exhausting, just as it is for *Becoming*.

4.3.6 Resisting Racism and Vicarious Racism: All that stuff, it takes time

One factor that pushes narrators to continue with the work that they do, despite their direct and indirect experiences of racism, is the empathy and compassion they have for the people they are helping. Other factors include remembering client's and their own resilience and having a broader understanding of history and how change happens; that is, slowly. Here I will share the analysis of how *Bridges* and *Journey* say they keep on keeping on.

Bridges is also exhausted by his work as having the power and privilege of being an administrator has its own challenges:

What I am observing is in terms of the energy required is really working with young people who are hungry for change, who desire to see authentic engagement. Some who have the skills, the communication skills and the kind of sophistication to navigate the codified language [...] and there are some young people who are raging. I don't mean raging or ready to blow the place up. They are raging for change.

It's like: "Come on, give me something. Everything in the world tells me my community and all of its children are under attack and that is putting us in an emotional and mental position of desperation or defensiveness and you cannot be upset when we are sensitive. You can't be upset when we respond."

[...] Because when young people are coming in, they want to know that I hold power and I can do something. That is their perception. Also letting go of my ego is saying, "This is the limitation of my power, actually"; and being able to look at the disappointment in

their eyes. I am supposed to be the guy behind the curtain. No, I am not [...] So the energy is about dealing with that impatience and challenging myself to meet young leaders in a place that acknowledges the truth of their existence, the urgency of change that they feel, that they are demanding. Their sense of safety and belonging that is at stake and helping them to pause, breathe and think about how to do that strategically. They are pushing.

He wants to coach these young leaders how to push in a way that organizations can hear, without killing their passion and fuel for change. So he says to them:

“Okay, I get why you are angry, I understand why you are upset, but if you really want to affect change, you can't play into that. They are ready for that. They are ready for the young angry Black guy; they are ready for the young angry Black woman. There is all kind of systems waiting for you. So you have to come at it a different way. You have to channel that anger or urgency very differently.”

[...] I look behind my shoulder and I say, "they are coming" [...] You cannot push it back behind this line. We need to get about 100 feet further but for a number of reasons, I may only move you [the organization/the system] an inch, but at least you are not going to move me back. I refuse to be moved back any further than what we have accomplished. I don't want to lose ground. I want to make sure that the position that I am in, the work that we are doing, is creating the conditions for the next generation to come and say, "Okay, they held the ground, we want five feet. We want five feet."

He replies to the youth:

“I can't just give you advice and you are going to be different tomorrow. This is a five year journey with you, potentially. I have seen that with some young leaders that I have worked with who are now in a position to say, "I get it."

So he concludes, “It feels worth it to keep holding this line because [they] are going to be released in five or six years”. He “holds the line” is by taking advantage of the policies that are put in place, but policies are only words until people hold the organization accountable to them:

When you are dealing in the professional environment you have things that you can leverage [...] You can say, ‘Okay. One of the values in this organization is diversity, inclusion, equity. Here is what that means to me’ [...] So it gives building blocks [...] There is a relatively common value system playing out [...] So, the exhaustion can come out in ways in which you expect better because we are in the same line so you make an assumption that you get it [...] Then you have to remind yourself, ‘Change comes with repetition repetition repetition repetition and maybe that is all your role is going to be: Maybe just repeat repeat repeat repeat’ [...] Sometimes, my role is just to

hold the line. I am not actually going to score the touch down and part of that is letting go of your ego.

He too has faith in gradual change. To “hold the line” means to repeat. This alone becomes worthwhile as he reflects on the youth who are coming to join the ranks to push some more. Also, by acknowledging his privilege, he is not returned to innocence as suggested by Badwall (2013); rather, he is forced into accountability. What does one do with their power within White supremacy? *Bridges* decides that he can affect change from within. He is obligated to help the people he identifies with to experience these spaces of dominance differently. Again, he is not in a professionalized position and so there is less, if any, pretense about neutrality and biases. Here, double consciousness serves as a skill, when used with privilege, to bridge many worlds.

Journey also talks about her work as a slow journey. As mentioned above this work is also taxing for her, but she too takes strength through her understanding of both systemic oppression and the actual speed in which change happens:

It might take us all day, it might take us all year. It might take six years. Some people who are adopted a long time ago when they are babies and there are no records anywhere and you look and you look and find out if they are status, if they are from a reserve, find out if their mother is alive. All that stuff, it takes time.

Clearly, this kind of narrative is only spoken by people who have the privilege of being supported by an agency to take “six years” to work with one person. For the professionalized working in neoliberal agencies, this same understanding can lead to frustration rather than relief. *Journey* says that she has learned the art of taking time from her work through witnessing her clients’ resilience:

Journey: The answer is not as important as the journey to get to it. So, I don't know...You don't have to worry about any of that stuff, how it turns out. At the end it doesn't matter.

PG: What is important about the journey? What tells you that you are on a good journey?

Journey: Oh, the people that you meet! The people that you talk to; all the stories, all of that, it helps.

4.3.7 Summary of Experiences of Vicarious Racism

Vicarious racism impacted all the narrators. In some cases, it affirmed the master narrative, leading the narrator to normalize White supremacy. When the narrator was positioned as privileged, had support, or a sense of belonging, then vicarious racism supported counter-narratives. In many other stories, vicarious racism led to changes in the narrator's schema. That is, the way they perceived the world was changed by witnessing another's suffering. In some cases, narrators talked about vicarious racism causing hypervigilance about the impacts of White supremacy. In other cases where the narrator was in a position of privilege or power, vicarious racism led to an increase in a sense of duty to protect the oppressed from the oppressor. Protection of the people they help was achieved through education of the mechanisms of dominance, bringing them into their home spaces or personal lives, and/or directly speaking to the oppressor. In professionalized roles where there was little to no support in the workplace, despite the privilege that comes from holding these professional positions, the instinct to protect conflicted with the need to maintain neutrality even when the need to protect was labeled as "enmeshing" or "ridiculous". Thus, people's own schema could change positively or negatively depending on their place of privilege and power when the vicarious racism was experienced. All the narrators, however, talked witnessing racism as being exhausting.

Finally, some narrators talked about needing to step outside of the master narrative altogether, moving beyond the counter-narrative, especially during times of crisis when the crisis-inducing impacts of the rules and assumptions of the master narrative were made explicit.

4.4 Sustaining Counter-Narratives

In all of stories, narrators spoke about spaces, supports and/or mentors who helped them either learn or sustain their counter ways. I have already discussed *Becoming's* mentor at length in previous sections. Here, I will share *Flourish's* story about mentors who helped him understand how to make a career in the helping profession and another mentor who showed him that racialized men, like him, can hold power (where male privilege is also of benefit) and create systemic changes:

Everything I knew of the social services sector, being a racialized man in the social services sector came through my experience in taking programs when I was a young person [...] when I saw [my new mentor] in the role that he occupied [as director], I was like "man, this is so awesome" [...] I think it is the positionality he had [...] I also think about things like racialized bodies and aesthetically what is acceptable in social services sector [...] he visually may not present as the status quo professional. I admired that about him. The fact that he was able to carve a space for himself in the social services sector and still function in that role of director and have the authority that was given to him as a result of his role [was inspiring].

Other narrators have spoken about friends and family who have supported them along the way. *Flex* talks about how she processes her experiences of racism:

[I have a] small community of folks that I can talk to, that won't silence me [...] having those folks affirm my experience is very liberating. Also just taking time to witness is very important [...] When someone really takes you in, you just feel safe.

Triumph speaks about how her family support her:

Even though I am in a good place, I need that community because at any time anything could happen and I could get pulled down. Especially being in this work, I hear things like: prostitution, rape - these are things that I am hearing every day and so I need that community to be able to help and hold me up [...] I need a whole community, not just one counselor. I need multiple people in my circle [...] I don't even call it my "community". I call it my "family".

As I have already shared, *Triumph* uses prayer and spirituality as a source of support to get her through her work. *Becoming* also speaks about the support of his spiritual beliefs:

I think [spirituality] is one of the things that has been a beacon for me [...] For me, it is just a sense of "I know who I am". I come from a place of truth and right [...] So I think a lot of them identify with me because of the way I move. I am never in a rush to get/go anywhere. I lean and I have tons of patience. I think that is why I connect with kids in different ways than other people [...] Yes, you definitely need [faith]. Without it you would definitely get weak.

In all of these stories narrators also have spoken about how landing in safe spaces supports counter-narratives. While *Bridges* was not explicit about the importance of the space he landed in when he got his first job as a frontline helper, he does talk about how the people in this space encouraged him and how the work matched up with his values and helped him self-actualize. His story is also a sharp contrast with *Questioning's*, whose work is in a space that is completely unsupportive and unsafe left them questioning themselves.

In a scenario where *Bridges* experiences racial violence, he also says that not only does it help to have support from racialized peers and family, but from White peers as well:

I think [what helped] was validation that this was not right [...] I got it from White people. Because I knew I could go to my friends of colour and they would react: you need to do this, you need to do that [...] I was like: I want to throw this up against people who might have a different perspective. A) Because I want to [...] check myself; if I am missing something. I don't want to go down a road of indignation only to look and say, "Oh, I didn't realize I did that or I didn't realize that I missed that or I should have thought of that". So I threw it up against some folks who are friends of mine, colleagues and they said, "No, that is not right" and so that gave me enough validation to say: Okay, I want to do something about this.

Wherever narrators were able to take action against the forces of White supremacy, they either had support or some kind of authority or privilege where their counter-narratives would be less subject to threat.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

My primary research question is: What are the experiences of racialized frontline workers who work with racialized others? Vicarious racism certainly is an effect and co-factor of doing this work and is amplified by participants' own experiences of racialization. I have found that participants' experiences vary depending on whether or not they were professionalized and how supportive their work places were of their counter ways of doing and being. Those who were not professionalized and those who were in supportive workplaces were more free to work in ways that they considered "right" or "good". They were less worried about always following the rules and more able to focus on doing their work well.

Those who were professionalized and who were not in supportive workplaces were deterred from following their gut instincts to bend the rules. Similarly, Gosine and Pon (2011) also found that racialized child support workers understood how harmful institutional rules can be for marginalized people and they too wanted to bend these rules to work more effectively with their marginalized clients. However, attempts to bend the rules were labeled as favoritism or as biased by the organizations they worked for. I also found that vicarious racism was responded to with a need to protect clients, for example, by giving them more time and becoming more emotionally available for the client. Professionalized helpers who expressed how these instincts were clearly "wrong" according to professional ethical standards, experienced schema changes and internalization of the racism they witnessed. As much as helpers countered White supremacy, many of them expressed relief when they were supported by White colleagues and administrators. It is through acceptance of their experiences and values that racialized helpers said that they were able to work with the most ease, efficacy, and satisfaction.

Using CRT as the framework, I explore the functions of master and counter-narratives and situations that sustain each in the subsection below. Then, I summarize the roles of double consciousness as presented in the participants' narratives and consider the possibility of stepping outside of both the master and counter-narratives. I then explore what these narratives and analyses of vicarious racism say about CSDT and contrast it to vicarious trauma. I examine the role of empathy and offer a new definition for vicarious racism. Finally, I end with practice implications, limitations of this study and concluding reflections.

5.1 Master Narratives: What are they good for?

The premise of the theories of master narratives is that all humans wish to be viewed as good and moral and master narratives provide a standard and “normal” way to achieve that goodness and morality (Talbot et al., 1996; Bamberg, 2004). I have approached the data analysis with this premise, demonstrating that all narrators valued being perceived as good and justified their various actions as attempts to achieve goodness. Interestingly, most narrators also implied that their way of achieving goodness countered what is viewed as good by the master narrative (i.e. by the status quo).

According to White supremacy, the way to be good and human is to be White and dominate those who are not. One way of dominating others is by becoming a professional helper who controls and manages non-Whites (Badwall, 2013; Heron, 2007). Racialized Others can achieve some level of goodness by following this path, e.g. by becoming a professionalized helper, and also ensuring that the hierarchy of power is not disturbed and peace is maintained within it (Badwall, 2013; Jeffery, 2005). However, master narratives are also constraining in that they require certain categories of people (e.g. non-Whites, women, the poor) to become subordinate in order for Whiteness to succeed. Thus, the second premise of this study is that

people develop counter-narratives to justify their goodness and humanity despite their disobedience to the master narrative (Mischler, 2005; Talbot et al., 1996). Still, this comes back to the first premise that whether or not they employ a master narrative, narrators are telling their stories to justify their own goodness and need to be viewed as fully human.

Every narrator in this study has framed their experiences in terms of master narratives at some point during the interview. CRT, *The Racial Contract* (Mills, 1997) and participants' own counter-narratives clearly demonstrate how master narratives are constraining. However, before considering the merits of counter-narratives, I raise a discussion question: *In what ways did master narratives serve the narrators in this study? Is there room for these cultural norms and universal principles for all, or do they become flawed by virtue of their structural necessity of limiting certain categories of people who cannot comply?*

According to Bamberg (2004), personal stories are necessarily told in the context of master narratives, and while they do limit what is viewed as 'normal' or 'natural' (and therefore also limit our actions), they are "not automatically hegemonic" (p. 360). He argues, rather, that master narratives "give guidance and direction to the everyday actions of subjects; without this guidance and sense of direction, we would be lost" (p. 360). Thus, master narratives are similar to schemas, in that we all need them to function cohesively with others (through shared understanding) and to make the world around us intelligible. Narrators in this study have indeed framed their stories with many of the standards from master narratives, and some have even used these very same standards to liberate themselves, to some degree, from the constraints of being racialized. For example, *Becoming*, used liberal ideology of *free will and choice* as a way of resisting White supremacy. His narratives were about using his rationality, creativity and *freedom* to find ways to out of oppressive situations. While he did admit, at one point, that living

and working in Canada as a Black man often meant that he would “not be invited to the table” even in admitting this limitation he added that he therefore needed to make his own table. Thus, rather than offer a counter-narrative like *The Racial Contract* (Mills, 1997), which makes explicit that equality is only for those who are White and therefore fully human, *Becoming* claims the very ideology of freedom and equality to assert his own and other Others’ humanity.

More commonly, master narratives were used to benefit the narrators when they utilized the professional helper narratives. The White professional helper narrative says: a) professional competency is a way of achieving Whiteness, i.e. full rights as a citizen; b) credentials such as university degrees are a means to attain professional competency; and c) competencies are used to then dominate and control the other (Badwall, 2013; Razack & Jeffery, 2002). While narrators did not employ the latter aspect of the helper master narrative, they did use their status as professionals to be seen as fully human in the eyes of other White helpers. Akin to Badwall’s (2013) findings, racialized professionals then used this status to advocate for the rights of other racialized individuals to also be seen as fully human, rather than attempting to control and manage them. Secondly, rather than using university credentials to perpetuate the mandate of White supremacy, these credentials were framed as accomplishments that proved that narrators had overcome the limitations of White supremacy. In other words, acquiring credentials served as proof that racialized people can also accomplish what is set up as a privilege for White people only. Furthermore, their professional credentials did not epistemically trump the knowledge they had already gained from lived experience as racialized persons and so they were able to hold on to counter-narratives as truths.

In all of these situations, narrators used the criteria of the master narrative to reclaim their power and status as fully human as opposed to employing a counter-narrative. Perhaps master

narratives are good for creating a moral universe to help people identify ways in achieving goodness (Talbot et al., 1996). However, their very inflexible rules and assumptions are felt as harmful by many of the participants, and thus in such cases, it may be imperative to keep master narratives in check by asking certain questions about the assumptions they hold; pushing against the status quo. When the restrictions of master narratives block individuals/groups from opportunities of self-development and full participation in society counter-narratives may emerge as a form of resistance and liberation (Mullaly, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

5.2 Counter-Narratives: Functions, supports, constraints

Counter-narratives in this study, as proposed by critical race theorists, Solorzano and Yosso (2002), served to challenge the assumptions of master narratives and cultural norms as well as to create new ways of interpretive reality. In addition, this study shows that counter-narratives were also used to help negotiate the tensions of having to play a role in the master narrative as a racialized helper. Finally, I discuss the constraints of counter narratives and the idea of working within institutions of dominance.

5.2.1 Functions of Counter-Narratives

I will summarize the four main functions of counter-narratives as analyzed in this study:

1. Unveiling the master narrative; 2. Justifying other ways of working (though the facilitation of love, community, and spaces); 3. Justify playing the White script; 4. Providing hope.

Unveiling the Master Narrative

Every narrator used counter-narratives at some point during the interview to make master narratives explicit thereby exposing the assumptions within it. In these stories, the oppressor was placed in a position of ignorance and in some cases naivety. For example, some narrators explained that conveyors of White supremacy were subsumed by this master narrative without an

understanding of what they were doing and therefore, the narrator repositioned themselves as the site of knowledge and the conveyor as the site of ignorance. Thus, when narrators took “blame” away from the oppressor, they also took away agency and reclaimed it for themselves.

In cases where neoliberal funding was positioned as a disembodied machine interested in numbers instead of people, narrators framed the funder as still powerful in its disease-making process. However, they did appropriate knowledge and wisdom from neoliberal funders for themselves *and* the people they were aimed at helping. While in many of these stories, the frontline worker was still left in positions of helplessness, the racialized people needing help (those viewed as ‘non-compliant’ or ‘not worth helping’ by the master narrative) were given back their humanity and prioritized as the people deserving of space, success, and a new way.

Finally, when master narratives were made explicit, both narrators and the communities that they are from were removed from subordinate positions and relocated to positions of self-understanding, experience, and wisdom. Narrators compared the ways that their own communities created belonging and ways of helping that were far more effective and loving than the White-professional, and capitalist models that run service provision today.

Love, Community, and Spaces

Narrators used counter-narratives to justify their way of knowing and doing as good even though the master narrative would say that those ways are wrong. A couple of the narrators talked about the importance of love and loving in the work that they do. For them, love was a way of embodying integrity and was compared to “mainstream” helpers who perform a role, but do so without love, care and engagement. Thus, love and loving was a way to ensure that narrators would not replicate their own bad experiences of being powered-over by professionals in their pasts.

Furthermore, helping was also spoken about as a way of creating community and a means to create co-belonging for the people they were helping. In order to allow people to feel belonging, narrators talked about the importance of intertwining self, family and home with the community. Of course, as one of the narrators pointed out, merging home and work would be frowned upon by professional bodies of helpers and would be called “enmeshment”. However, the narrators who merged more of themselves into their work also admitted their personal limits and that they cannot ultimately control another or change institutions and histories alone or quickly. This self-knowledge and expression of limitations were not called “boundaries” by the narrators themselves, but do demonstrate that racialized workers who have non-mainstream ways of working do still have their own means of protecting themselves and making their work sustainable. As a matter of fact, the two people who had the longest careers of helping (over 20 years) were the two people who spoke most freely about the importance of integrating work and home. In contrast, narrators who were in the most professional, neoliberal, and boundaried roles spoke most frequently in terms of burn out and feeling misunderstood.

Finally, one narrator, *Becoming*, spoke about the importance of “tapping into the subculture” of the people that we are helping. In order to help others, we need to go to them rather than expecting them to come to us to be boxed and labeled as ‘helpable’. He talked about the importance of competing with “the element” on the street that attract young people and trap them. Thus, his language was not about people being “non-compliant”, but of the system lacking in an ability to truly understand the people they say they care about. Thus, counter-narratives were means of justifying other ways of helping. All people need spaces to be heard and to self-actualize. Rather than active professional intervention, all people benefit from networks to belong in, role models, and respect.

Playing the White script

Counter-narratives also served as a means of negotiating the tensions between: having to play the White script (following rules of the master narrative) while disagreeing with much of what the script and master narrative entail. For those who used their professional badge as a means to get a job, create change, or earn the respect of a colleague, counter-narratives helped to justify that even though they had to play a White script to get the badge, they would not serve the master narrative. For example, the role of the “facilitator” was used as a means to negotiate between 1. being a social worker who is therefore part of the profession’s oppressive history and 2. a refusal to be in this role in order to control and manage other people’s difference. In other examples, the professional badge allowed racialized helpers to be heard among other White professionals, which allowed them to gain status but also conflicted with their empathy and feelings of pain for clients who were silenced in spaces of shared racialization. Here, counter-narratives were told to express how the badge of professionalism and the Whiteness earned by it did not make the narrator feel good but rather conflicted. The narrator’s goodness was only returned in the expression of this conflict and in some cases through other non-mainstream means of helping such as loving and creating safe spaces for their clients.

Hope

Finally, counter-narratives (most explicitly in *Bridges*’ interview) were used as a means to create hope for both communities of racialized and White people. While in these narratives White people were positioned as ignorant, they were also framed as sometimes willing to understand and heal. Analogously, racialized people were framed as needing change, but also as willing to learn White scripts and codes in order to communicate and negotiate with White power. With both parties labeled as willing, *Bridges* then had a willingness to “repeat, repeat”.

His endurance and hope rested on his practical understanding of slow change and also in witnessing the next generation's "raging" to be treated as human. Similarly, other narrators were also encouraged by their connection to the people who persevered before them and those who are following with a new tenacity.

5.2.2 Double Consciousness

"Double consciousness" is a construct that was introduced to me by one of the participants, *Flourish*, to help me understand how he copes with White supremacy. He learned the term from Du Bois who describes it as:

[...] this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3).

Prendergast (1998) argues that double consciousness is the means by which critical race theorists "counteract the rhetoric which have obscured rather than revealed unconscious racism and its effects" (p. 41). Similarly, the primary way in which double consciousness was used by the narrators in this study was to make the mechanisms of dominance explicit to themselves and the audience of their narratives. When narrators were able to anticipate how others would feel about their presence through double consciousness, they could prepare themselves to counter these potential effects. For example, narrators prepared themselves for situations where the oppressor was expecting them to emote by presenting themselves as calm and collected. In other situations where the oppressor expected ignorance from the racialized narrator, they responded with "sass" (*Flex*) or rationality, demonstrating that they were already "three steps ahead" (*Becoming*) of the game. In other instances, knowledge of how the oppressor viewed the racialized body allowed the narrator to "meet them half way" (*Flourish*) or to directly call them out in order to facilitate

change. In all of these stories, double consciousness (in contrast to the often wholly ignorant oppressor) allowed the narrator to be positioned as the site of knowledge and as a person who can choose how to react. However, regardless of the power and agency actually attained, double consciousness manifested as hypervigilance, a shield, and being guarded, all of which were described as being exhausting.

In all of these situations, double consciousness helped to normalize the existence of White supremacy. The narrators indicated that with their double consciousness they did not expect to be seen as human by White others unless they walked the White script or outsmarted the White person/institution. However, in some situations, normalizing racism through double consciousness became, not a tool to embody agency and knowledge, but instead an internalization of the oppressor's will (Singh, 2016). In these cases, the understanding gleaned from double consciousness -- that their racialized body was feared by the oppressor -- lead to shutting down; for example, some narrators' perpetual experiences of White supremacy led to feelings of self-doubt or silencing for fear of being viewed as "too sensitive" or "dangerous". These are labels circulating within the master narrative and unfortunately came to be part of narrators' own labels through many experiences of racism and vicarious racism. Thus, in these cases, counter-narratives did not just end on positive notes.

What allowed for double consciousness to be a tool that enabled freedom and externalization of White supremacy, as opposed it leading to internalization and self-doubt?

5.2.3 Supports for Counter-Narratives

Counter-narratives need to be supported in order to endure. It appears that in narratives where self-doubt and internalization of White supremacy did *not* occur, narrators had support of mentors, families, friends, spirituality, and spaces where they could thrive. Secondly, when

double consciousness was not enough to shield narrators and racism proved to be capable of shocking again, transforming feelings of confusion into coherent thoughts took time: from weeks to months. In some cases, these thoughts became lasting internalized feelings of self-doubt; however, where supports were present narrators were able to externalize what happened and to understand the event as a product of the mechanisms of dominance, i.e. “I don’t blame her”.

5.2.4 Constraints of Counter-Narratives

According to CRT and, as shown above, counter-narratives are meant to help us become free of the master narrative. However, do counter-narratives also constrain us? Do they too hold hidden assumptions that are limiting and if so, how do we expose these assumptions? White supremacy negates difference or offers to tolerate it; however, there can be counter-narratives which also over-emphasize difference and thus can lead to justification of stereotypes (Mullaly, 2010). Furthermore, counter narratives that merely oppose the master narrative refer back to it and give it credibility.

One example of a limiting counter-narrative in my study was that of the facilitator. *Flex* positioned herself as a “facilitator” to counter the historically controlling positionality of the social worker. She defined the facilitator as someone who opens space for conversations that may not be safe to have in other contexts. While she described many ways that this positionality countered that of the social worker, she also discussed how important neutrality was in this position. This premise of neutrality, I have argued, comes from within oppressive assumptions of the helping master narrative (Badwall, 2013; Jeffery, 2005; Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014). As neutrality intertwined with her counter position as facilitator she was restricted in her response to vicarious racism. Where *Triumph*, for example, was able to protect clients who were facing racism with her ideal of love, *Flex* was not able to do so as she saw

protection as breaching her neutral position as facilitator. Thus, perhaps it was not her counter position that was constraining, but her buying into some of the language of professionalism. Perhaps this buy-in was a result of the context: working in a neoliberal, White institution where she did not feel safe or supported to discuss issues of racism.

As a matter of fact, most counter-narratives relied to some degree on the master narrative or on the help of White institutions. Even *Becoming*, who embarked upon making his own table by creating a new program for kids involved in gun violence, still relied on the White institution to support him. Furthermore, he expressed great relief when his White bosses and peers finally believed and saw that his ideas and the program were legitimate and valuable. Similarly, *Bridges* also said that he needed validation from his White colleagues. Counter-narratives are not completely outside of the master narrative (Bamberg, 2004). We cannot invent a new language completely outside of the language that dominance speaks since we are living in the same spaces and part of the same economy, if not the same culture. *Bridges*, *Flourish* and *Becoming* emphasize this point: for counter narratives to succeed in becoming transformational, we need “to meet them halfway”. Rather than dismantle or oppose the master narrative completely, we need cooperation and communication and a willingness to understand one another. Many participants argued that we cannot completely escape or dismantle institutions of dominance alone or in one lifetime: change is slow. Creating change from within these institutions may be more feasible for some and a legitimate means to liberation. Therefore, these participants argue that having institutional buy-in is a key means to creating change for racialized individuals. Perhaps, instead of asking: How do we ensure that counter-narratives are not as restrictive as the master narrative itself? The more appropriate question may be: How do we continue asking

questions of the status quo while also unveiling the assumptions implicit in any of our narratives?

5.3 Third Space: Beyond the counter-narrative

The clearest examples of narrators moving beyond the counter-narrative were when three of the Black narrators resisted my questions about the possibility of a positive racial identity. In these cases, they did not say that “Black” was negative or positive, but instead they asked why they need to be labeled at all when the label just does not fit. Singh (2016) argues that resisting racialization is a means to live authentically outside of the categories assigned by White supremacy. He asks how we can have anti-racist projects when such projects fundamentally rely on the legitimacy of the category of race in order to talk about its systems.

Similarly, Williams and Chau (2007) argue that anti-racist feminist movements cannot exclude White women because all women need to reflect on how racism is experienced and perpetuated. They argue that separate sisterhoods are not a long-term strategy because ultimately, they maintain the hierarchies that we are trying to break down:

We need to stop looking for sisters and start looking for collaborators. These would be people who share our political vision and are willing to participate in collective political action. Privileging political commitment over identity equivalence opens up new possibilities. We could have collaborators in places that were previously placed off-limits by dichotomies that reinforced insider/outsider status and empowered/disempowered hierarchies (Williams & Chau, 2007, p. 293).

Mills (2015b) also argues for a “transracial alliance of the economically disadvantaged” (p. 44), which includes intersectionality of the categories of marginalization. He argues that those who have been benefiting from White supremacy are the same people who are benefiting from a divided nation and our focus on identity politics keeps us further divided. The factors which set up White domination are not necessarily the same mechanisms which keep it in operation today. For example, racism as prejudicial ideas and beliefs about individual races may be eliminated

while White domination continues, invisible through the neoliberalization of health care services (Mills, 2015a). Thus, one way to resist racialization and step out of the master narrative, rather than counter it, is to come together as a people and combat any of the causes of racialization such as greed, capital and all forms of domination (Mills, 2015b).

5.4 Vicarious Racism

All front line workers experienced both direct and indirect (vicarious) racism at work. Educational institutions were the most common places where these experiences occurred. This is also well documented in the research (Jeffery, 2005; Leonardo, 2013; Mills, 2015b; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Truong et al., 2016). In this section I will discuss how vicarious racism, as found in the stories in this study, do and do not relate to CSDT.

5.4.1 Relationship to CSDT

According to CSDT, therapists who engage with trauma stories in an empathic manner can become so shocked by what they hear that their own schema, or framework for how the world operates, can change permanently, i.e. they experience vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Their client's trauma is felt as their own. Unlike the phenomenon of vicarious trauma, however, vicarious racism did not cause a schema change in all instances mainly because narrators experienced racialization themselves and had already developed coping strategies. These same coping strategies were available and utilized when experiencing vicarious racism and prevented destabilizing schema changes. How can these experiences then be called "vicarious" if schema changes did not occur? In all of these stories, empathy played a huge role: each narrator said that they could feel the pain of the targets of racism. I will discuss the role of empathy in the next section. First, however, I will discuss situations where schema changes did occur.

In some cases, narrators talked about vicarious racism as impacting them, but the impact was overcome by time, rest, sleep and processing through friends, prayer and self-reflection. In these cases, schema changes were temporary. Narrators expressed emotion and frustration about an event, but after processing, were able to return back to normalization or their original way of thinking about the world. In *Journey's* case, she spoke about vicarious racism impacting her body, and not her thoughts. CSDT is, therefore, limited in its ability to understand her process as it only looks at vicarious trauma as impacting the mind, that is, cognitions. In all of *Journey's* stories the impacts of trauma and racism, whether direct or indirect, were felt in her body. Thus, to understand her process, CSDT would also need to include somatic changes, not just cognitive schematic ones. Importantly, *Journey* was able to process her physical changes and she also spoke about coming back to work every day because of her love for the people she works with and the joy of doing the work itself.

When narrators did not have a means to process the mental or somatic pain of vicarious racism, mostly in unsupportive work environments, they did indeed experience permanent schema changes. Negative schema changes included: hypervigilance, development of double consciousness, and self-doubt. Positive schema changes also occurred as found in Truong et al.'s (2016) study. The primary positive change was moving from character role of witness to becoming an active agent of change. In all of these stories, it is unclear if the schema change was a cumulative result of the narrator's own experiences of racialization combined with witnessing it or if it was instigated by vicarious racism alone. Furthermore, I can't know, really, if these changes were permanent.

5.4.2 Empathy and a New Definition of Vicarious Racism

Narrators communicated strong feelings of empathy for the people that they were helping. Empathic responses were more available when narrators were not actually normalizing and had dedicated spaces to process their feelings, especially when they were together with other racialized peers. Again, empathic engagement did not lead to schema changes in every case, but each narrator did talk about the feelings that they experienced in witnessing or in hearing accounts of racism. Thus, I propose that a definition of vicarious racism needs to include the active presence of empathy: *Vicarious racism is an indirect experience of White supremacy where the witness experiences an empathic response towards the victim. Positive or negative schema changes may or may not result from vicarious racism.* Heard-Garris et al. (2017) add to their definition, “Exposure of vicarious racism is irrespective of the race of the indirect target” (p. 6); however, I cannot comment on this as the race of the target compared to race of the witness was not discussed in most of the interviews.

5.4.3 Impact on the Helping Narrative

Vicarious racism clearly impacted helping narratives by either catalyzing the helper into action and/or fostering a stronger desire to protect the victim of racism. When narrators were in unsupportive neoliberal organizations, their desire to protect was labeled as “wrong” as it opposed the professionalized-helper value of neutrality. People who were not professionalized and the one social worker who worked from an “Indigenous” perspective, framed their sense of protection as duty, responsibility and/or as coming from a place of love (i.e. from goodness). Thus, for these helpers, vicarious racism did not interfere with their own counter-narratives and instead corroborated the necessity of their ways of helping.

5.5 Implications for Social Work

5.5.1 Where are the spaces?

Practices based on CRT endeavor to change systems and structures that are the source of the problem, which is why it is critical of practices like psychotherapy where the individual client is meant to learn how to cope within the existing structure and take responsibility for their subjugation (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). One way to create structural changes is to create spaces where racialized people can talk about their experiences together. As stated by Dua et al. (2005), racism is a spatial project where people of particular identities have been ordered and contained in specific locations. Thus, “non-compliant” medical clients, like the youth who are beyond the “at risk” category, end up trapped in stairwells then mental institutions then jailed. Narrators in this study have repeatedly asked, “Where are the spaces” for these individuals whom the master narrative has deemed unhelpable.

Thus, one major implication from this study is that those of us who are able to *name* our privilege also need go a step further and *use* our power and privilege to create these various spaces for the people we are helping; especially for the people who we find almost too hard to help. As *Becoming* has suggested, we need to “compete with the street” and talk to the people to find out how they experience belonging. In order to do this, we must go to them wherever they are in space rather than expect them to come to us in our offices or classrooms. *Becoming*, like *Journey*, suggested that funding should not go to professionalized helpers, but directly to those individuals who are involved in the problems we are trying to solve. Thus, structural changes also need to happen at a policy and government levels where decisions about funding are made.

Secondly, racialized helpers also need dedicated spaces to speak to one another about their experiences of White supremacy such that these experiences do not remain private and

become internalized (Badwall, 2013). Arao & Clemens (2013) critique the notion of “safe spaces”, which they claim can often exclude disagreements. Naming oppression and the expression of pain is likely to bring up feelings of conflict and may be unwelcomed in “safe spaces.” Inspired by “courageous conversations about race” (p. 141), Arao & Clemens (2013) argue that we “cultivate brave spaces” (p. 141). They argue that spaces that allow us to take risks, speak up and challenge one another are more likely to produce transformative conversations. This idea of brave spaces reminds me of words of Martin Luther King Jr. (1997): “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice”.

Counter-narratives need support, nurturance and brave spaces to thrive. For example, even though Williams and Chau (2007) have argued that racialized and White women should work together, they also argue for separate spaces for women of colour to ensure that their specific goals are also addressed.

5.5.2 Love, spirituality, and belonging

The widest possible reach of social work practice and education clearly needs to include other ways of training helpers other than the mainstream methods of psychotherapy, counseling, advocacy and policy change. Narrators in this study spoke about the importance of love, spirituality and belonging in their own healing as well as in their practices of helping others. Exclusion of these practices from education and workplaces, and labeling them as “wrong” and as dangerous “enmeshment” ignore the wisdom of large groups of people who have demonstrated how these practices are indeed healing for individuals and communities. Colleges of Social Workers (regulating bodies) and Universities could look to communities, such as Indigenous Studies Programs run by Indigenous people, to ask how boundaries and safety are conceptualized by them. Simply naming “non-mainstream” practices as available in the world is

not good enough – we need to legitimize these practices. There is a separation between theory and practice that needs to be bridged (Jeffery, 2005). In Badwall's (2013) dissertation, for example, one of her Native participants was suspended without pay for "crossing professional boundaries" (p. 74), which could, she argues, be called: resisting dehumanizing practices of her organization, and disrupting White civility. There are alternate ways to conceive and ensure that boundaries between client and helper are kept; ways which allow spirituality and love to become part of the helping act. Non-professionalized frontline workers in this study have created personal boundaries through their practices of understanding their own limitations and ensuring that they have constant mentorship.

5.5.3 The being and doing divide

According to Jeffery (2005) White individuals are able to benefit from White supremacy through a "being/doing divide" where being good is not the same as doing good. For example, being good for social workers happens through self-reflexivity of privilege and social location, but doing good still necessitates performances of White domination in the helping role. Self-reflexivity returns the White helper from oppressor to innocence when they simply name their privilege and without any change in their behavior ("doing"). Jeffery (2005) argues that people of colour, on the other hand, cannot simply claim they are good because they are always marked by their colour as bad. Therefore, for a racialized person to be and remain good, they have to constantly justify their goodness through actions. However, the racialized helper is caught in a terrible bind where "doing" good entails playing the White script, which conflicts with their own ideology and experiences of being helped and controlled. Some of the narratives have indicated how racialized helpers who take on actions of dominance become actors in White supremacy.

Social work education needs to help all students understand how to live with such unavoidable contradictions. It also has to allow the dialogue that we may indeed be doing bad, that is, dominating the lives of others through our work. How can we effectively negotiate these tensions and contradictions we simultaneously inhabit in our roles as oppressive-helper, oppressed, protector, settler, and people who just want to do/be good? Clearly, merely naming our social location and our own categories of oppression, which is the current level of expectation in education, is not enough (Greensmith, 2015).

Triumph talked about how her education in Indigenous Social Work prepared her for these emotions through talking circles as well as history lessons. Can mainstream social work education be improved by using practices such as Circle Methodology? *Bridges* also talked about taking responsibility for his privilege by working to bridge the gap between White institutions and racialized youth, both of whose languages he understands. One way he tried to create this bridge was by creating spaces for marginalized youth and also by helping them to create professional networks so that they too could rise up in the ranks and attain privilege. Could social work education also include this kind of active, creative reflexion where students not only name their privilege but talk about ways in which they might refuse to be signatories of the racial contract? In other words, how can social work education help students tolerate and accept their guilt for being systemically complicit in oppression, and transform this to action? Why does the goal need to stop at eliminating guilt by naming privilege and thus permitting the helper to then continue their performance of Whiteness (Chapman, 2013)? How can we help students learn to transform policies and organizations that talk about “inclusion” into actions and accountability to actually accept Other ways of being and doing?

5.5.4 Language of transparency vs. neutrality

It became clear in many of the stories that language was used as a mechanism of dominance and as a way to help narrators negotiate this dominance. Neutral language, which is meant to be free of racial connotations, was experienced as negating the reality of racialized people. As stated by Badwall (2013), “naming racism turns the gaze towards Whiteness” (p. 120) and threatens the site of goodness; thus, it may be safer for the White person not to name racism, but it certainly was shown to be harmful for the racialized people in the stories told in this study. Participants have argued that both White and racialized people need to use transparent language to talk about what they are talking about. According to the participants and in my own experience, social workers are still not taught how to talk about race and racism adequately in their formal education. They talk about the unfair assumption that our racialization makes us experts on how to talk about “race”. Thus, both racialized and White students and teachers need to learn how to be actively more transparent about the insidious and ubiquitous influences of White supremacy.

5.6 Limitations

First, this is only a preliminary examination of the experiences of racialized counselors who work with racialized people in a particular urban area, and not designed to develop a fully revised theory of the construct of vicarious racism. Thus, the theoretical claims developed from the findings are only tentative and will need to be examined in more depth and with different populations and other contexts to allow for transferability. Second, in keeping true to CRT I attempted to keep race central in the interviews and during data collection. In doing this downplayed the other tenet of CRT, which is to attend to the influence of intersectionality, e.g. the influence of gender, age, ability and sexual orientation. Third, while I mentioned “class” in

some of my analysis it definitely could be an axis of its own, combined with a more thorough analysis of the political and economic contexts in which racialization is produced. A study on how neoliberal institutions influence experiences of vicarious racism and the formation of counter narratives may be of value. Finally, while I made a case for the importance of considering the relationship between racialized settlers' complicity in colonization, I did not analyze this relationship in this study. This study did include one Indigenous participant; however, it was only luck and chance that she was included in this study (recruitment through snow ball method). I did not have the intention to specifically address colonization in this work. However, in examining and exposing the master narratives that I had walked into the interviews with, I hope to have at least exposed the ways in which my own assumptions as a settler influenced by the master narrative of colonization influenced the data obtained during my interview with *Journey*. Furthermore, in sharing her story using long quotes and analyzing the context in which they were told, I hope to have provided space for both her Indigenous voice and her individual voice to be heard. Still, a thorough examination of settler colonialism was beyond the scope of this study.

5.7 Conclusions and Reflections

This study has explored how racialized helpers are constrained and enabled by master narratives. Even when they offer a counter-narrative, narrators still refer back to the master narrative by directly opposing it. Only on a few occasions did the narrators refuse any relationship to the master narrative and these examples have been the most inspiring for me. For example, the refusal to take on any racial identity was eye-opening. These narrators have self-consciously moved outside of identity politics and are more interested in doing what is most effective for the people they are helping, including getting support from White institutions. They

have shown me how binary categories are limiting and can pull helpers away from the actual needs of the people who are most disenfranchised.

Still, even when we step outside of it, master narratives hound us and also map our experience of the world. As *Flex* explains, the identity of “Black”, while it is one that she refuses, also “maps” her experiences of the world. Knowledge of our histories, of how master narratives have shaped our location in this world, is undeniably important. I have learned, through this study, how important being aware of master narratives, of the assumptions presented by the status quo, can be toward liberation in itself. When we understand the assumptions that underlie everyday expectations we can, minimally, see and maybe then argue for other ways of being and doing.

In completing this project, I have wondered about ways in which I have been complicit in domination over the participants. While I am an insider, I am also participating in a hierarchical system where I have the power to write these words, to locate self as a site of knowledge and tell a bigger audience what was said. I realize that I am always implicated in power dynamics established by White supremacy, for example, by having lighter skin than some and in being a settler in relationship to those who are Indigenous. Furthermore, I have access to graduate education and may come from a more privileged class background than some of the participants. I have attempted to mitigate my own role in dominance by being diligent about the context of the narratives and my own influence in how they were shaped. I have also contacted all of the participants to ensure that they have a say in how their quotes are represented in this study. I have been constrained by the institutional requirements of a “Master’s thesis” at Wilfrid Laurier, for example, style, page and time limitations. Fortunately, my advisors have given me allowances to have a longer thesis that accommodates long contextualized quotes from the

interviews and an extra semester to complete the writing. Still, I wonder if or how I could have presented the narratives in a more raw and authentic format without corrupting it to the same degree with interpretation.

That being said, I believe that in engaging the narratives with current literature on CSDT, CRT, and vicarious racism has added some insights. I have attempted to add some practical implications for social work education and added some race theory insight to the basic construct of vicarious racism. Vicarious racism, according to the narratives, does involve empathy and can involve schema changes. In the participants' narratives, negative schema changes (for example, internalization of racism; self-doubt) reinforced the master narrative and were more likely when counter-narratives were not supported. On the other hand, positive schema changes (for example, taking on the role of a change-maker) reinforced counter narratives and were more likely when individuals were supported or in positions of privilege. This study has also shown how integrating master and counter-narratives with constructivist theories involving the idea of schemas can be a fruitful way to study the impacts of racism and vicarious racism.

My own empathy for the participants and their experiences produced many vicarious responses in me. In conducting this study, I have moved from feelings of anger, helplessness, guilt and fatigue to feelings of reassurance and hope. I am grateful to the participants, my partner, and Chapman (2013) for reminding me that my guilt and my pain are worth feeling and can serve as a means to transformation. I have also learned from all of the participants to remember that I am a part of a greater "we", a collective that will keep moving forward towards justice one inch at a time. Finally, I realize that I need to utilize my own privilege to make new spaces for many, rather than to give in to the web of master narratives which offer a sound path to normalcy for one "kind" of human.

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Appendix A

Wilfrid Laurier Informed Consent Statement

Narratives of Racialized Trauma Therapists and Counselors in Canada

Principle Investigator: Prapti Giri

Advisor: Dr. Eliana Suarez

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from August 2016 to March 2017. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participant.

OBJECTIVES

This research project is concerned with the experiences of counselors and therapists who identify as “racialized” in Canada and are currently providing service for other racialized minorities. We are interested in the ways racialized therapists experience their work, are potentially changed by it, and what keeps them going. I, Prapti Giri, am a master’s student at Wilfrid Laurier and this research project is a partial requirement for my MSW. Dr. Eliana Suarez in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University is supervising my work. I am hoping to recruit a total of six participants for this study.

METHODS

I will be conducting 1 to 2 one-on-one interview with you and ask you to participate in a focus group in November, 2016 with other racialized trauma workers. You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study and the methods I am using. The interview and focus group will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The audio recordings will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. After the interview I will transcribe the recordings for the purposes of data analysis. The transcripts and recordings will be stored securely on a password-protected hard drive and will be accessible only to myself and Dr. Eliana Suarez for a period of five years after the completion of the study. After this time, August 1, 2021, all audio recordings and transcripts will be permanently deleted from the hard drive.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In other words, you do not have to participate at all, or, even if you agree now, you can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including transcripts and audio recordings) will be

destroyed and omitted from the study within 24 hours of notice of withdrawal. You also are free to skip any question that is asked of you. All of the information that you report will be kept completely anonymous.

CONFIDENTIALITY, FEEDBACK and PUBLICATION

Although none of the questions will be about the specifics of any one client, you may want to talk about how your clients impact you. I will ask you to refrain from mentioning any details about clients that may reveal their identities, and I will not include any information about your clients in written reports that could possibly identify individual cases.

All the information you report will be kept completely confidential. I may be using quotes from the interview(s) and focus group in my written report. I will remove any identifying information from the quotes used in my final report and your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous, as will the identities of any people described in the interview. I will give you the opportunity to vet the quotes and edit them to ensure confidentiality. While the interview transcripts will not be published in full, you have the right to review your own transcript if you choose. Your interview data will be synthesized into a one to two paged narrative summary which you can choose to review and provide feedback. You may choose to participate in the project and not have any quotes used from the interviews or focus group.

Please initial here to indicate that you understand that you have the right to review your interview transcript, any quotes and/or summary before they are used in any written reports: _____

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: directly to the participants, presentations in academic and non-academic settings, dissertation, and published articles.

BENEFITS

A benefit you may experience by participating in this research is greater knowledge of your potential experiences of burnout, racism, and resilience as well as an increased knowledge of coping strategies used by other trauma therapists and workers.

RISKS

By participating in this research, you may risk feeling uncomfortable when talking about difficulties you have experienced while working with clients who have had traumatic experiences and in talking about your difficulties with racism,

thus we encourage you to look over the interview guide and disclose only that which you feel comfortable sharing.

CONTACT

Again, thank you for taking the time to complete this research. Your participation is valuable to us and greatly appreciated. This project has received approval from the Wilfrid Laurier Research Ethics Board (#5015). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca. If you have any question about the study itself please contact me, Prapti Giri, at giri4030@mylaurier.ca, 647-746-9482 or Dr. Eliana Suarez at esuarez@wlu.ca, 519-884-0710x5273.

**I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE AND I AM
VOLUNTARILY AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I
HAVE RECEIVED A COPY OF THIS FORM.**

Sign or initialize

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix B

Interview Guide (one-on-one interview)

The purpose of this interview is to hear about your personal experiences of being a racialized therapist/counselor and how this work influences you both professionally and personally.

Background/opening questions

1. How did you come to be involved in this work/profession? Why this profession?
2. Could you share with me the methods you use in therapy/counseling and how they have evolved over the years?
3. In your estimation, what percentage of the clients you see are “racialized”? What percentage of your clients would you say have experienced “racial violence”? “Racial violence” is any form of aggression perpetrated against another because of their physical characteristics such as colour, language, or dress. Racial violence can occur on a spectrum from pushing and name calling to rape, murder and genocide.
4. Based on your experience, how many of them come to see you about incidents of racial violence?

Influence of counseling work and race on the therapist

5. Can you give me an example of what it may mean to “bear witness” to trauma in a client’s life? How has “bearing witness” to someone else’s trauma impacted you? How do you cope with the impact?
6. How has race played a role in the work you do, if at all? How do you cope with it?
- 5 a) How has your sense of safety changed since you have begun working with racialized individuals (if at all)?

b) How has your sense of spirituality or interconnectedness changed since you have begun working with racialized individuals (if at all)?

7. a) Could you share some examples from your work that illustrates the reasons why you still practice today? What motivates you to keep practicing despite the challenges?

b) What has been the most moving circumstance you have helped a racialized client through? How did the change this client experience impact you?

c) How does race impact your clients and their therapeutic process, if at all?

c) Could you share with me any experiences of resilience among your clients? How has your perception of yourself changed by your clients' resilience?

d) How as your general outlook on the world changed in working with racialized clients?

8. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your work?

9. What gives you the greatest senses of accomplishment in the work that you do?

10. What strengthens or hinders your capacity to continue fighting for change?

(How do you maintain hope? Is hope important in your work? What is hope?)

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix C

An Example of Structural Analysis from *Flourish's* Interview

AB = Abstract; O = Orientation; CA = Complicating Action; EV = Evaluation; RE = resolution

O: I remember walking downtown one time with my mom

CA: and I said, "You know, Mom. When I grow up I am going to change my last name. I don't want to be [Last Name] anymore. I want to take on" - I actually felt that I wanted to take on a Whiter name.

O: This is me at the age of five or six, not older than ten,

CA: saying to my mother that I want to change my last name and take on a White name. Not knowing what that White name was, but I knew it was something different than my name, [Last Name].

EV: She didn't react too positively to it. I think she was taken aback by it

RE: but it became this sort of internal joke between her and I for a couple of years while I was growing up. Whenever there would be successes of Blackness for example, she would pull on that joke, "Oh and you wanted to change your last name to a White name, right?"

Coda: That was something - one thing I did appreciate was that my parents, although they didn't spend time on crafting a consciousness around Blackness for me, they were not afraid of having those conversations.

They weren't telling me how to think, but at the same time they weren't afraid of having discussion about difference, about their own experiences of treatment of Blacks.

AB: My father, when he came, ran into a bit of racism at work.

O: He has always been a general laborer. His skill trade is in welding. So since coming to Canada he has always worked in general labor positions.

CA: And he had experienced racism at work. It was continuous, it was consistent racism.

CA: It got to a point where he actually had to react violently to somebody on the job site.

That got him involved with the law and all these kinds of things.

RE: It got dealt with so that he put this behind him.

EV: But I know that for my father that has left a very negative taste in his mouth regarding the issues of race and racism. He is always very afraid of the law now. Or very conscious of the law.

Coda: and so, he - I sense levels of frustration in him because of the experience he had and because of what he has seen happening regarding race.

PG: It has been present, his attitude.

AB: Oh yes. His attitude has been very present for me in my development, in the development of my consciousness.

EV: It is interesting.

O/EV: I have my father who is sort of - he is hurting and he has experienced pain regarding issues of race.

And then I have my mother who is very much more around ideas of assimilating, at least in the past it has been.

RE: Now I think given some of the stuff she has seen on the news, in the South and me sharing of my own experiences, she is shifting a bit more from the idea of assimilation to uniqueness. There is a uniqueness that we bring to the table.

Appendix D

Flourish's Narrative Summary

Flourish is a 31 year old male who has done front-line work with a child-advocacy agency and counseled in this space. He continues to counsel informally, however his main role now is as an educator. He identifies as “Black” in terms of race. His family came from Africa and he moved here when he was three years old. His father came first, through a “connection”. When this “connection” was made, he had to come to Canada immediately, and *Flourish* was not born at this time. He wanted to come here “for a better life”. When he came to Canada, he experienced “consistent racism” at work. Eventually, he “had to react violently to somebody on the job site” and got in trouble with the law as a result:

“I know that for my father that has left a very negative taste in his mouth regarding the issues of race and racism. He is always very afraid of the law now. Or very conscious of the law. So [...] I sense levels of frustration in him because of the experience he had and because of what he has seen happening regarding race.”

Flourish has been influenced by his father’s critiques of the dominant system and Whiteness and the hurt that it has caused him. He has also been influenced by his mother who, when he was growing up, favored assimilation giving messages like:

“Everybody should be the same. Don't go drawing any undue attention to you. Do as they are doing. Try to be that good kid like everybody else. Be the other kind of Black kid.”

At the same time, he recalls a story when he was somewhere around the age of 6 and 10 and declaring to his mother that when he grows up he would switch his name from his African-sounding last name to one that was more White. He describes his mom as being “taken aback by it”, but also turning it into a joke between the two of them:

“It became this sort of internal joke between her and I for a couple of years while I was growing up. Whenever there would be successes of Blackness for example, she would pull on that joke, ‘Oh and you wanted to change your last name to a White name, right?’”

He says that he appreciates the way his parents did not shy away from the topic of race:

“One thing I did appreciate was that my parents, although they didn't spend time on crafting a consciousness around Blackness for me, they were not afraid of having those conversations. They weren't telling me how to think, but at the same time they weren't afraid of having discussion about difference, about their own experiences of treatment of Blacks. “

It wasn't until high school that he started to become more aware of how racism was impacting him directly. He worked hard to be “the other kind of Black kid” and “was involved in athletics, I was involved in student council, my graduating year I was athlete of the year[...]”. Still, he found that these accolades were disregarded:

“I had all these accolades that were attached to my name and yet the interpersonal treatment between me and the instructors, other students who occupied identities of privilege and

dominance weren't reflective of my accolades. It was like it doesn't matter what you have under your name, you are still Black. So I started to open my mind a little bit more to what does it mean to be in my body as a Black male body?

I had teachers who were telling me, "Don't worry about University" or telling me not to apply to universities that I wanted to. In fact, I had one instructor discourage me so I ended up applying just for three universities out of the six that I had in mind, and got into one of them. I got into two actually[...]It was these types of messages that I was receiving. I wasn't aware of the impact on me until my later years of high school. It was like, 'Huh. So when you tell me to take College math courses, it actually leads me down a particular path vs. somebody else who[...] I am in class having conversations with these folks and they are probably struggling with the content more than me and yet they are receiving messages to go into things like University, math, and you know. It didn't sit well with me."

Fortunately, he had mentors in some of the programs that he was involved in in the community and they helped to guide him into the line of work that fit his personality rather than what was expected of someone in his body:

"Being in my body and being interested in these sorts of soft skills[...]people [would say], 'Why don't you do athletics, sciences or medicine or engineering?' I'm like, 'I'm not really interested in that stuff. I care about the human condition'."

He learned that many of his mentors had training in either "Child and Youth Care" or "Social Work". He says about this line of work:

"this line of work lines up with my purpose on earth, which is, I think to be an area of healing for folks. A source of healing, a source of motivation, a source of encouragement for people that are hurting."

When he was in his late teens, he went back to Africa for the first time. There, he discovered his connection to and passion for drumming. When he returned to Canada, one of his mentors connected him to another Black man who was both involved in the social service sector and in the art of drumming. Meeting this man opened his eyes to the possibilities of other ways of being in the social service sector and from here, this man also became his mentor:

"I think he provided for me another visual of what it means to be a racialized man in the social services sector. Everything I knew of the social services sector, being a racialized man in the social services sector came through my experience in taking programs when I was a young person[...] when I saw [my new mentor] in the role that he occupied [as director], I was like "man, this is so awesome"[...]I think it is the positionality he had as a [administrator...]I also think about things like racialized bodies and aesthetically what is acceptable in social services sector[...] he visually may not present as the status quo professional. I admired that about him. The fact that he was able to carve a space for himself in the social services sector and still function in that role of director and have the authority that was given to him as a result of his role."

When he went to university, as in most social service programs, he found that there were very few males and in his program there were even fewer people of colour. Being in such a minority

group, he says, “there were some challenges with me finding my voice, asking questions, not wanting to be seen as “that guy”.” He also says that “I found whenever we would have classes that talked about issues of race, gender, oppression, marginalization, they weren’t as robust as other conversations. I always felt a yearning for more – I want to talk more about that and I didn’t want to be the only one to centre those issues. So, I would feel silenced. “ However, over time he found that when he spoke, people listened. While he appreciated being heard, he also felt “tokenized”:

“I felt like people needed me in my body to speak about these issues. Although they felt it, maybe they felt some position about inequality. They didn’t want to be the ones to speak about it. They wanted that body to speak about it so often times I would speak on behalf of folks whether in bodies of dominance or not. I was speaking on behalf of issues of oppression and inequity just because this is the body that should speak on these things.”

In his master’s program, he was the only racialized person, and again there were very few males – only three out of 70 students. Here, he expected that the students and instructors would engage in deeper levels of conversation, but instead he found people were “tiptoeing around issues of diversity”. Again, he felt that he, in his Black body, was the one who would talk about race and the response around him would be: “Oh him again. Here he goes again”.

From these experiences, as well as his experiences at work, he feels that he operates with a “double consciousness”. He learned this term from reading Du Bois:

“It is this awareness of what the oppressor views you as and the awareness of what you view yourself as. You are navigating those two worlds[...] I think when you have had the privilege, in a racialized body, to exist in these spaces of dominance for so long, you become very aware of the tools of dominance, right? Not necessarily the bodies of dominance, but the tools, the mechanisms, the discourses, the messages, the subtle treatment of dominance. So you can anticipate. You can anticipate[...] When I enter these spaces, I am very aware of how they see me. Some of it is conscious to them, some of it is very unconscious. I have gotten to a place where I am even more rehearsed in, “Okay, this is what is happening for them because of me right now”. And yet at the same time too, I am very aware of what I am and what I want to project out into the world. So I have to hold those two perspectives and maintain the tensions of those two perspectives in order to be functional in whatever spaces I get into.”

While he appears very calm and collected on the inside, he says that his need for double consciousness has both taught him how to be “hypervigilant” about his environment and the people in it and he has learned how to meet the dominant other halfway.

He gives a few examples of racism he has experienced in his work place. First, he talks about a colleague whom he considered a “good friend” of his. However, once she moved up in the hierarchy, her attitude changed and she called him “intimidating” and “aggressive”. He talks about how this experiencing was “disarming” and a “shock”. First, he works hard to be perceived as gentle and second, this was a friend of his and third both she and their boss are people of colour. In his experience of being disarmed, he says “I was silenced”. When he asked about his work performance, this person and their supervisor said that his work is “fine”:

“The conversation had nothing to do with my work performance. It was all about my presence, my personality, my you know, how I am making people feel. My body. It was so bizarre to me[...] What ended up happening was that we both walked away from that meeting with no clear resolution. No clear resolution. I walked away feeling totally unsafe about the work environment, feeling unsafe about my colleagues.”

In this story, there is no meeting ‘halfway’ except that he and this person ended up working side by side, but with minimal interaction, “It was just two folks operating in the same space. So I had my views about her and she had her views about me and we just kept on working.”

While he says this experience “discouraged me around the work” and had him “second guessing some things”, he persevered in the work, through “self-reflection” and “revisiting [my] purpose” and through understanding “that often times[...]the institutions that we work with construct selves for us that we are not in-tuned to”. He also leaned on his community, his mentors who suggested other ways to create change and others who helped to normalize the situation. Finally, he spent a lot of time in prayer, “just asking for insight into why this person felt this way about me and what I could do differently.” He says that while this situation “dug away at me[...]I never thought I would leave that kind of an impact on somebody” [...]he also says now, “I don’t blame her”.

In a very different work setting, an educational institution in which he teaches, he has had experiences of having his credentials questioned – in terms of his education and work experience – even by people who have graduated from the very same university with the very same degree as him. Again, where this has failed to show any fault, the aggressor has challenged him on his personality. In this setting, the accusation has been that he is inadequate because he is “touchy feely”. In this case, there was no context given as to why he was thought of as “touchy feely” and when he reported this to the Dean, the perpetrator “denied everything”. Again, he reflects:

“You know I think it has a lot to do with who we have said intelligence belongs to, generally systemic chatter. Who we feel intelligence belongs to; who we feel sporadic or unthoughtful behavior belongs to. We have actually given characteristics to net stuff out - to racialized people. That is what we do with racialized people. We attach attributes to their bodies.”

Again, he uses this understanding of systemic oppression and the ways in which these structures shape our identities, he learns how to cope with these faulty accusations:

“One thing I am aware of is this colleague of mine who was attacking how I am teaching [the class] and how my credentials are and all of that. I am very conscious that she is not aware of these things[...] So in order to not get upset and still be able to function, I have to resort to - it is not her. ”

He has found that awareness of the mechanisms of dominance and then normalizing is the primary way in which he copes with racism:

“We have got to normalize that stuff[...]because if you don't you are going to be depressed - like high blood pressure! Listen, you are going to be taking sick leaves. We have to normalize that[...]I am not saying it is okay, but we need to normalize that dynamic so that we can find ways to deal with it.” He says that normalizing has a cost for both the dominant and the

marginalized. For the dominant, they are less able “to be authentic to real issues[...] We adopt that institutional self and they have to tap into those mechanisms of dominance to perpetuate dominance and oppression”. For those “who do not occupy those positions of power, the cost is this yearning for change [...When] we are not aware of [the mechanisms of dominance] our expectations of those bodies [in power] are greater than what they can actually create for us”. He says that this often results in the marginalized people “communicating [their] loss of trust, [their] loss of faith” through “violent” or “disrespectful” means.

He names “infantilization” as a mechanism of oppression in his experiences. For example, he has found that White professionals within educational institutions have dismissed his contributions at meetings by drawing attention to his tardiness, or by calling him “Junior”. In these cases, he has had to push through by reasserting himself and restating that the material he is talking about is valid and important.

Another example of infantilization is when he was a new employee at an agency. He remembers his first day at work, “before my first cup of tea”, when one of the White team leaders mocked and interrogated him by loudly “projecting to everybody and screaming[...] ‘Who are you and what are you doing here?’” In this example, the team leader’s tone changes quickly when she sees another person in power who explains who *Flourish* is and what he is doing there.

This situation was so jarring for *Flourish* that he documented it in order to process it somewhat. From that writing:

“I decided to get up and prepare myself a tea before getting settled. I picked up my mug, my bag of tea and was making my way to the servery when I was stopped in the hallway abruptly by a woman, who later identified herself as an administrative assistant. She asked me, “are you moving in here,” making reference to my cubicle. With a certainty and a smile I responded by saying, “I sure am.” The woman, attempting to make her point and presence known snapped back by saying, “no you’re not.” I was confused and dismayed, not understanding the climate within her response or where I could then sit.”

Further removed from the situation now, he says, “I feel was totally about my body, about my racialized body[...].there are levels of curiosity[...]but it felt very – it was almost like an interrogation”.

It is one thing to normalize his own experiences, but when he witnesses racialized clients going through this experience he says “it is painful. It is painful”. He notices that in these times he has worked hard to remain professional and therefore, resisted his urge of “swooping in and doing for them and protect them - wrap myself around them”.

He gives a few examples of clients who have been impacted by racism. In one story, it is the teachers who don’t want to deal with student who has been criminalized – they want to “move on” and so they try to give him courses that have no academic merit and are mostly extracurricular in nature.

In another example, a White foster mom uses a token system to hand out hygiene products for a Black kid, who is large in size, and she deems as a person who is “always acting out” and labels

as “bad”. So, in order for this child to have his basic needs met, “he had to work out being this bad guy”.

In a final story, he shares the experience of working with a Black client who experiences racism in the hands of another professional. In this experience, *Flourish* recalls being able to share the grief and hurt of physical harm caused by acts of oppression with his peers of colour at this workplace. He says:

“I think the sense of community is great amongst racialized bodies. So what happens to one happens to all. I think the sense of responsibility to one another is great. Often times you don't have an opportunity to cry about your own experiences until it happens to somebody else. Because it is about survival and I cannot let them see that what is happening is really affecting me. I am strong, I am resilient within it all. So it remains contained until we can see it in somebody else. Then that is when we feel it - this is my outlet, this is my opportunity to cry. It has to do with confusion. Why do I have to see these things happening?”

He also talks about the fact that the team leaders did write letters to complain about the psychologist, but only to say they were ‘aware’ of the situation. They did not stop referring clients to this person. Also, *Flourish* and his peers did not themselves write letters demanding action. He says:

“Part of the tears also has to do with this: historical distrust of institutions and the tools of dominance. If I am seeing the pain in my fellow community member, yes it is similar to the pain I am feeling but I don't know what to do about it. If I write that letter it might not be valued as somebody else writing that letter. If I make that phone call to the Member of Parliament it might just be taken as complaint as opposed to real constructive input. There is just deep historical distrust of the institution and the mechanisms of dominance. We cry because we don't know what to do, essentially.”

Again, because one cannot afford to be crying all the time, he keeps his guard up while also authentically servicing his clients:

“I am always guarded, in a sense. I always have my sixth sense up. I am always conscious and sensitive of things. For me, there is no liberty in who my professional sense is. I have to be on guard. I can't slip, I can't make the wrong comment. I have to balance that with, at the same time, being this soft space for racialized people to land on.”

He says briefly, that he maintains this soft space by being in community with other racialized individuals who share in his struggles and through his connection to and awareness of mentors who have not just survived, but succeeded in this profession:

“And yet when we come to the board room, we look at each other: “we're all right, we are all right. I know you are struggling, I am struggling, you know.” So it is not easy. I have now found respect for racialized members who are able to be successful in this field and in this institution. You know, not just Black folks, just racialized folks in general. Because the challenges we go through daily are just amazing. It is a lot. It is a lot.”

He says that when he teaches Anti-Oppression in the classroom, he makes sure that does not teach from a personal perspective – first and foremost by using quantitative data that show the impact of systemic structures of power and oppression:

“We have real concrete numbers that show inequity and oppression and power dynamics. So it is not just these Black youth that are crying racism, but in the school system, we can see racism happening .”

Secondly, he teaches about oppression in terms of systemic oppressions rather than individual pain. Finally, He also makes sure to talk about other kinds of oppression, other than racism, and has “been intentional in talking about intersectionality”. Also, very recently the Ministry of Training of Colleges and Universities as said that AO education is needed, he feels like there is more credibility for integrating this perspective in what he teaches.

At his current workplace, he continues to support both colleagues and students by “creating a space” for them to speak openly about what is on their mind, reflect upon it, and figure out a way to name and identify their experience:

“Sometimes students don't know it is racism. They have that thing in their belly, "ah, it doesn't feel good", and they need someone to bounce it off of. So I do a lot of work around, "Why do you think it is racism?" Sometimes it is not about racism. Sometimes it is just about not being mindful about the treatment towards you. Sometimes it is blatant racism and I empower them to revisit the issues with their instructor and try to give them processes to talk it out.”

He says his experience of racism is an “ugh”, “a knot in your stomach[...]sometimes in your throat”. It is an experience where “you retreat into yourself, it is protective. You just don’t want to let anybody in.” Thus, when he speaks up about these experiences:

“Often times I tremble, I shake. Because I think it is a sharing of my soul. I am sharing with you what hurts me about my identity: what you said hurts me about my identity. So, that sort of offering is a deep offering. I shake, I tremble when I am sharing. When I am hearing others go through it, I am hurting. My head - I am thinking about so many things, to ease you, to console you. My head is always there. I am thinking solution. I don't want to get stuck there.”

In contrast, when he witnesses or experiences resilience, the sound is “yeah”; “you want to celebrate it. You want to draw attention to it. Spotlight: This is possible.” He reflects upon his relationship to history as a means to achieve resilience himself:

“I can appreciate the journey that those before me have walked. Because, I am now doing the work that I am doing. The part of me that appreciates the journey that they have walked has to be with the resiliency they showed, the determination that they showed to press on and create some kind of change, some kind of better outcome for individuals in the community.

So for me, when I see the successes like the young girl in care or the fact that my colleague is becoming a lot more competent but also getting more and more courage and talking about issues, for me it is like: yeah, we are resilient people.

Our journey is going to be long but we are going to get there[...]. We will get to a level of, if I may even use the word "homeostasis". We will get to that level where things are good. [Where] we are not fighting in the boardroom, we are not fighting in the classroom, we are not fighting when we hop into our cars when we are driving down the street. Things will get better. Because I believe things will get better, this fight is worth fighting."

He also remembers his purpose – to help and heal others – and one final method to achieve this that he reflects upon is to serve as a role model:

"For young Black males to walk into a classroom and see somebody like me teaching a quote unquote 'soft core skills course', I think it gives them a sense of possibility which they need in order to navigate racism. What allows you to navigate racism is your understanding that there is something better[...] They see my visual, and they say 'All the challenges I am having with school are worth fighting because this battle for our individual and collective lives is worth fighting for.'"

Triumph's Narrative Summary

Triumph is a 24 year old woman who has been in the field of social work for one year. She has an educational background in Sociology (BA), Social Work (BSW, MSW) and is currently enrolled in a full-time PhD program. She asked to not disclose her racial identity because it is often stereotyped. She says that she "noticed very young, that my colour was different"; however it did not bother her in her early years because she was in a very multi-cultured neighborhood, "there are other people so it didn't bother me." However, after the age of 10, she moved to a neighborhood where she says, "I was the only person of colour" and so she adds, "I really noticed [my colour difference]." She said that she had an "identity crisis as a result of being a second generation Canadian":

"I questioned where I fit in because I have my culture but also have the Canadian culture as part of my identity as well; I did not know how to navigate that. They are two different cultures and how to put that together was really weird for me[...]it was hard."

Upon the completion of her MSW, she began working at an agency where she feels well supported while supporting others. She shares that early in her history, she "had a lot of trauma in [her] childhood". She found that counselors were too prescriptive, didn't understand her. They were "very mainstream", and overall unhelpful.

Another reason that she doesn't trust counselors or social workers, especially of Caucasian appearance, is because of her family's historic experience of them. For example, she tells a story of when one of her siblings died. While she did not directly experience the story of how her parents and sibling was treated in hospital, she is very familiar with the story. Her sister was not seen by a doctor even though she was really sick and so she died. Rather than consoling and supporting her parents, the social worker at the hospital told her father "that he doesn't have the right to be angry" and put blame on the parents for her death:

"A social worker putting the blame on parents who just lost their child is an act of racism and discrimination in its greatest form[...]Even my aunty who is a nurse, who worked at that hospital experienced significant racism."

She says, “I still struggle with that forgiveness and being able to overcome [that historic/family trauma].”

It was through connection with spirituality that she was able to overcome the hurdles she faces in a moment of feeling the absolute “lowest of the low”. She describes this contact with spirit as spontaneous and a connection with love. Through this connection she feels like she moved from feeling like “an object; invisible”, to a person who has a higher purpose. From this point forward, she felt a “calling to be in this type of work”. She decided that she wanted to practice social work and counseling to provide help for people who had suffered as deeply as she had and using more (w)holistic perspectives than her ineffective counselors had.

In her BSW training, she experienced substantial racism from both teachers and people in the small town where her school was, “one time there was a beer bottle thrown at me just because of my colour of skin.” She also remembers a specific Instructor in the social work program calling on her by referring to her history in a discriminatory way, saying things like, “your people generally take longer to finish school.” Indeed, this was a comment that she had also heard in her secondary education where teachers would say, “you know, University may not be for you.” The challenges in her social work program in university got so difficult that she actually switched programs. She went on to complete a MSW “with the second highest average in the program”.

Fortunately, she chose a non-traditional Master’s program where she felt a sense of belonging. In fact she says, “I didn’t feel race[...]it was such respect that I had never experienced before.” She also admired her Instructors, “I looked up to the Instructors that I had. It was the most incredible program that I could ever ask for.” In this program, she was taught about the importance of community and spirituality:

“Even though I have those things in place, the teachings that were given influenced me to take a strong look at my life and find areas that I need to grow in.”

She says, however, that the most powerful part of her program was that they made the students self-reflect everyday, both individually and as a collective:

“The most powerful piece to my MSW program is that we would sit in circle and share our current difficulties and experiences as a collective. So people would disclose things that they are dealing with. Even if it is racism, they would disclose that and we would deal with it accordingly[...].My BSW trained me in both theory and practice which I also learned in my Master’s. The difference however between my BSW and MSW is that my MSW focused on: “How do I deal with what I am hearing every day? What do I do with myself and how in turn could I change my anger?” So they taught us that every single day. It was ingrained in us. I am so thankful. The things I hear [now, at work], do not shock me or put me into outrage because I have received proper self-care training[...] I have never been in an educational program where I could share my experiences, fears and joys in a circle where I feel that I belong. Being in circle with my classmates taught me hundreds of theories that are being put into practice. It was an amazing experience. I could go on and on. It was amazing.”

Another outcome from this non-traditional MSW training is that she has learned how to mobilize her anger and turn it into passion to take action. She says that in her mainstream BSW program,

she would feel angry but she says, “I would keep my mouth shut. I was so taken aback”; thus, anger was paralyzing. In her MSW program, on the other hand, she says “I felt safe” and she was able to process her emotions:

“Just people listening to me. That is what made this program stand out to me. I was happy that I was heard and cared for because that is what the social work profession is all about!”

Thus, she has developed this skill to know how it feels to find others with whom she can safely disclose a charged emotion and feel heard.

She finds that she can easily connect with her clients and that people from vast backgrounds open up to her. She believes that her past, her healing, her prayers and connection to spirituality all aid in making connection with others possible and more open. She emphasizes the way that she carries and shares love now, as being the main reason that clients open up with her:

“Love is a strong word, but I genuinely have so much love for them and them knowing that is the only reason they share with me. I think that every social worker needs to have that love because love will change the world. I really believe that.”

Her work is challenging and she counsels people through traumatic events “everyday”. Thus, she says that she needs multiple ways of coping. The first is through prayer, “I pray every day”. The second is through the support of her community, which she calls her “family[...] Even though they are not my blood, I would not be here without that support around me.” They may not be her biological family, but they are people in her life who mentor her and support her and so she says, “I call them my family”:

“Even though I am in a good place, I need my community because there is always the possibility that I may get triggered. Especially being in this work, I hear things like: prostitution, rape - these are things that I am hearing every day and so I need that community to be able to help and hold me up[...] I need a whole community, not just one counselor. I need multiple people in my circle.”

She realizes that these coping mechanisms help her both love her clients and maintain a boundary that is healthy between herself and her work. She credits the development of her self-awareness and her coping skills to her training in her MSW program, “They trained me to deal with my stuff.”

She gives an example of a story where Caucasian police officers “try to get a rise” out of a racialized youth. Keep in mind that her partner is Caucasian and in the policing field. She took that opportunity to instead of speaking to the police officers while the youth was present, to ask him to go inside so she can have that conversation. She then went back out to speak to the police officers to tell them, calmly,

“we need to always remember as professionals where we come from and we need to remember that the people around us who we serve have their own narrative and we need to be careful and care about them because how can we be in this work otherwise?”

Despite her rationale, she says the officers did not believe her until she told them her role and her official, professional status at the agency: “it was only when I shared [my title] with them that they respected what I had to say.”

She says that through her healing process and education she has come know “know myself now. I can recognize when I am being triggered”. Thus, when a client situation is particularly overwhelming, she knows that she needs to use the supports that are in place. Also, because many of her clients are marginalized because of their racial and cultural background, she hears several stories where racism is a major component – usually Caucasian authorities oppressing her racialized clients.

She says that the job she has now has “changed my life[...]it has made me grow as a person[...] I was meant to be here.” It has given her a sense of purpose and it is a place where her struggles exist to bring her closer to others:

“I value my life so much more every day. I go home and I just feel so thankful for my life and I realize that you know what, I thought my life was hard and I hear stories and I can't even compare my life[...]it has made my life better because I feel a passion to fight for them and advocate for them and just love them.”