“There is so much meaning, and also it is so stressful”

Wellbeing for Newcomer Workers in the Settlement Sector:

A Participatory Action Research Study

by

Carl Heaman-Warne

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Shelley, and my daughter, Thea. Thank you for your faith in me, your encouragement, your patience, and your sacrifices. You both had my back all the way through. You mean the world to me, and I have only been able to do this because of you and your support.

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Abstract

This is a participatory action research study within a critical realist paradigm, developed to work with a group of Newcomer workers in a settlement sector agency in Canada, to understand the complex set of forces that affect their wellbeing at work, and to make reccommendations for improvement to the organization. The study was comprised of two PAR cycles – one with an initial group of six Newcomer workers at a single organization, and a subsequent cycle with four more Newcomer workers at different organizations.

The study found that within this group of workers, the workers unanimously stated that the barriers in the settlement sector system, the barriers to accessing resources in the local community that they and their clients face, and the disconnect between the workers and the organization, had a far greater impact on their wellbeing than their clients' stories of trauma and loss. The workers expressed the importance of their connections with their clients, which increase the meaningfulness of their work. This meaningfulness, along with their fears of setting boundaries as Newcomers, create a system where the workers donate large amounts of unpaid work as well as provide care to their communities in the off-work hours. With the high level of stressful work, combined with constant changes in the system, there is a disconnect between the workers' focus on their clients' needs, and the management's focus on the needs of the funder, resulting in the workers' needs not being well met. The group developed recommendations to address particular stresses at the organization level, and outcomes were shared with organization management, the team of supervisors, and the larger staff of Newcomer workers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Seeing beyond our own experience and bias to understand someone else's, requires time, effort, empathy, intention and humility. This dissertation is born out of my awareness that in my blindness to my bias, I made a fundamental error as a programming director of a settlement sector agency. I participated in a dominant narrative that privileged the privileged and outsourced accountability to the less enfranchised. This work is the work I should have done at the time, and I believe it is even more important to do now. Through this process I have reflected on my own power and privilege, voice and allyship, and have tried to learn how to engage transformative processes authentically and collaboratively. To me, the process and the outcomes of this research are essential in understanding the experiences of a group of people whose voices have not been well heard. How we engage research and relationships are outcomes in and of themselves, and in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS), how we engage theory and action towards peace needs to be congruent with the outcomes in order to be authentic.

Problem

Although inspired by my professional reflections, this study also addresses a notable gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Newcomer workers in the settlement sector in Canada including the impact of their work with other Newcomers on themselves; such knowledge is key to developing strategies to enhance wellbeing for these workers. The vast majority of literature I have found on the impact of social service work on the workers themselves, privileges western-born workers who are professionals. There are isolated studies that apply mainstream concepts to those working in the settlement sector, and isolated studies that include Newcomer workers as participants, but I have not found any that focus specifically on the experiences of Newcomer workers in the settlement sector.

Correspondingly, the theories of vicarious trauma used in settlement sector programming aimed at improving worker wellbeing for all workers (Canadian born and Newcomer) were not developed with the Newcomer workers' experiences in mind, but rather were developed assuming privileged clinicians encountering the traumatic lived experiences of their clients for the first time. No research has been done to date to explore the needs of Newcomer workers or to identify the complex web of factors that affect their wellbeing in general, let alone the appropriateness of applying the theory of vicarious trauma specifically.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to engage with a group of Newcomer workers in a settlement sector organization in Canada to collaboratively explore the impact of their work on them, and to use this understanding to develop organizational strategies that could improve their wellbeing.

My research questions are as follows:

1. What are the forces affecting the wellbeing of Newcomer workers in a Canadian settlement sector organization?
2. How can the organization respond in ways that enhance wellbeing for Newcomer staff?

Research Approach

Coming from a critical realist (CR) understanding of ontology and epistemology and informed by anti-oppressive research practices, this is a participatory action research (PAR) study. It is comprised of four phases of research across two PAR cycles including collaboration, data collection and analysis with a group of six participants from one Canadian settlement sector organization; additional data collection with four more participants, each from different agencies

outside the region of the first group; further collaboration on analysis and recommendations with the original group; and subsequent meetings with organization leadership (two people), supervisors (thirty people) and Newcomer workers (fifty people) to share outcomes. In total, ten participants were actively involved in the research, and 82 people learned about the outcomes.

Anticipated Outcomes

I believed that the findings of this study would provide insights relevant to individual worker wellbeing; organizational strategies for improving worker wellbeing; and an engagement process that could be replicable with other organizations.

Outcomes related to wellbeing factors

I expected that there would be a number of concepts that would be seen to be relevant to the experiences of the workers. I expected that no one factor would organize the overall impact to their wellbeing specifically, and that it would be a complex system of factors that make their work rewarding and challenging and have an effect on their wellbeing overall. I believed that different workers would have different clusters of impacts, and that most workers would have impacts from some combination of the following concepts: vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, trauma, grief, settlement stress / acculturation, vicarious resilience, burnout, vicarious post-traumatic growth, survivor guilt, privilege guilt, racism, and resilience. Of all of these, I expected that a combination of personal loss/trauma/acculturation, survivor guilt, and compassion fatigue/burnout would be identified significantly.

Outcomes Related to Strategies for the Organization

I expected that there would be significant agreement across the participants on strategies for wellbeing that their organization could undertake, including: self-care strategies for acknowledging needs for connection, peer debriefing in the workplace, and prioritizing physical

and mental/emotional health; strategies for engaging meaningfulness in the work (vicarious resilience); and, strategies for feedback mechanisms in the organization. I also expected that the research would lead to some kind of workshop that may be explored with other workers in other settlement sector agencies.

Outcomes Related to the Process

Beyond helping a particular group of workers to identify the impact of their work on them, I believed that this process could be being exported to other workgroups and replicated to identify specific factors and strategies relevant to those groups.

Researcher Assumptions

I made a number of assumptions in setting up this research. I assumed that workers would want to engage in a process exploring the impact of their work. I assumed that a cohesive group of workers would partner with me in this process. I assumed that workers were impacted in complex ways by the work that they do with other Newcomers. I assumed that there would be common enough experiences that we could engage a conversation with personal difference of experience or emphasis. I assumed that vicarious trauma was not sufficient as a concept to account for all of the major impacts that workers experienced. I assumed that survivor's guilt would be a more relevant concept than privilege guilt. I assumed that being able to help other Newcomers would feel meaningful and would help make meaning of their own sacrifices and struggles.

Researcher Perspectives

This dissertation is my first experience of doing formal research. Throughout my academic career, I have realized that while I have strengths in critical thinking and processing, I am a kinesthetic learner first, followed by visual, and have always chosen a more experiential

path through my undergraduate and graduate programs – choosing a 3yr BA and then working providing counselling services with marginalized groups for a number of years, prior to doing a clinical master's degree. This degree required more work than a research based degree but had the benefit of a clinical experience requirement instead of a thesis project. My continued clinical work, and my experience working with a settlement sector agency doing trauma work supported my application to the PhD program in PACS at the University of Manitoba, but the result is that this is my first experience doing research. More recently, I have learned that I have significant issues with focus and attention that are consistent with my choices privileging interaction and deep conversation, over writing; and I have had to learn how to engage this process with both the strengths and challenges of my neurodiversity.

I am acknowledging this here to be transparent about my challenges in this process, to be accountable to them, and to demonstrate what I did to resource these challenges. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019, p. 140) state that a dissertation is a demonstration of a student's ability to do research. Therefore, I believe that in this dissertation, I need to do and present the research, and I need to also show my understanding of the process of research at a doctoral level.

To achieve this, I have worked within my strengths and have discussed the process and expectations with my advisor, and I have engaged many conversations with colleagues who have completed PhDs in my faculty where I work. I have also looked to the literature on dissertations and I have relied heavily on the structure and guidelines given by Bloomberg and Volpe in their book, *Completing your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End* (2019). I used Roy Bhaskar's *The Order of Natural Necessity* (2017), David Pilgrim's *Critical Realism for Psychologists* (2020), Joseph Maxwell's book, *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research* (2012), and, Andrew Collier's *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*

(1994) to help me think through CR and how to keep my processes through the dissertation congruent with my ontology and epistemology, considering the role of literature in CR, and helping to shape appropriate conclusions within a CR paradigm. In looking specifically to my design and using participatory action research (PAR), I used Herr and Anderson's book, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (2015), Ernest Stringer's *Action Research (4th edition)* (2014), Alice McIntyre's *Participatory Action Research* (2008), Reason and Bradbury's *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (2001), and, McNiff & Whitehead's *All You Need to Know about Action Research (2nd edition)* (2005) to inform my methodology and design. Through these texts, and supported by other texts and articles, I have studied the process of qualitative research and writing a dissertation as a whole, my ontological approach and methodology, and reflected on how to conduct research congruently within PACS. In each of the chapters to follow, I will demonstrate my understanding of the expectations of the process before exploring the content related to my own research project.

Rationale and Significance

While there is a path in the literature (as demonstrated in chapter 3) to validate exploring the concept of vicarious trauma with workers in the settlement sector in Canada, there are current programs aimed at helping workers in the settlement sector (Canadian born and Newcomers) manage these issues, without first understanding how workers' citizenship status and any immigration and/or pre-migration experiences affect how their work impacts them.

This study was designed to do exploratory work with a group of Newcomers who work in the settlement sector to find out how their work affects them and what they need to increase their experience of wellbeing in their work.

This work will be significant to the participants themselves in understanding how their work affects them and for identifying wellbeing strategies. It will also be significant to their organization for strategizing at the leadership level what kinds of programming needs to be considered as they attend to staff development and retention issues. While the goal of PAR is focussed on change for the participants themselves, I believe this study will also be important for other organizations in the settlement sector in Canada, who may want to consider what findings may be relevant for them. I am aware of a tension inside myself between the goals of PAR focussing on the context of the participants, and an interest in a larger applicability of the findings to Newcomer workers across Canada. Caution needs to be taken however as this is a small sample that is specific to one organization in particular. Phase 2 of this research includes comments from participants from four other agencies from other regions which highlights the potential to generalize experiences to other groups, but while these groups will find the outcomes important and interesting, more research will need to be conducted before generalized statements about the needs of Newcomer workers across the settlement sector can be made.

Definitions of Terminology

Newcomer

I have chosen the language of "Newcomers" to Canada as this is the current language in the settlement sector and is used by Newcomers and Newcomer communities. Specific definitions for the term vary in Canada between different government departments and sources in the community, which adopt varying approaches for defining how long someone is in Canada to be considered a Newcomer, and/or whether temporary residents are also considered along with permanent residents (Newyouth, 2024; Immigration.ca, 2024; Government of Canada, 2024).

For the purpose of this study, the term is meant to be inclusive of all people who have come to Canada to settle, and specifically includes immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and international students. I briefly considered narrowing the focus of the study to a specific group of Newcomers (i.e. refugees, who by definition have a "well founded fear of persecution" (United Nations, 1992)), as this would potentially give the workers more in common with their clients, and potentially distinguish them and their experiences and needs from other groups of Newcomer workers. The reality is that while these terms are used by government agencies to specify Newcomers' relationships to Canada, their rights and responsibilities, and to specify their route of immigration; they are less meaningful to differentiate Newcomers' lived experiences. This was demonstrated by the participants in this study, who had similar experiences fleeing political violence, and used whatever route was available to them at the time, coming to Canada as international students, refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. Limiting the study to differentiate between pre-migration experiences of persecution is not possible through distinguishing between routes of immigration. Therefore, I defined the focus of the research project as working with Newcomer workers as a group rather than separating them by administrative designations.

I have chosen to capitalize Newcomer as it is its own identifiable group, and to show respect for the people of that group and their lived experience. If we refer to 'newcomers to Canada' without the capitalization, we refer to them and define them by their relationship to Canada rather than their membership in their own group.

Settlement Sector

I define the settlement sector as the complex web of services and service providers across Canada, largely funded through the Government of Canada Department of Immigrants, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (Government of Canada, 2024b), that offer services directly to

Newcomers. This sector will be described further in the context section (Chapter 2) of this document.

Wellbeing

Throughout this research I use the term, “wellbeing” to refer to a holistic awareness of one’s own health including the spiritual, emotional, mental, relational, and physical domains of our lives; acknowledging that resources and challenges in one domain have a systemic impact on our overall sense of ourselves across all domains. I have based this definition on Diener & Ryan’s definition of subjective well-being, which they state is:

> …an umbrella term used to describe the level of well-being people experience according to their subjective evaluations of their lives. These evaluations, which can be both positive and negative, include judgments and feelings about life satisfaction, interest and engagement, affective reactions such as joy and sadness to life events, and satisfaction with work, relationships, health, recreation, meaning and purpose, and other important domains. (Diener & Ryan, 2009, p. 391)

CHAPTER 2: Context

While the introduction sets up the research problem, the purpose of the research, and the research question, Bloomberg and Volpe state that the context chapter develops the history surrounding the issue to be studied, sets the stage for the literature review and argues why the research is necessary given the history and context of the problem (2019, p. 130). This leaves a wide range of possible contexts to include, but as I was focussed on a congruent process in the research, the context of how I approached the research became as important as what I was studying.

One way to focus the context was to ground it in my intention for the research. As the aim was to work with a particular group of Newcomer workers in a particular agency to understand the forces affecting their wellbeing in their work and to look for strategies that can be undertaken at the organization level to create positive change, how I did this mattered. In Chapter 4, where I will discuss my methodology, I will explain further my choice to use a participatory action research methodology as opposed to using grounded theory or a more general qualitative research methodology; but this choice is relevant here now as just as ontology informs epistemology, and epistemology informs methodology, the choice of the methodology defines the relevant context for the research.

I will begin by considering my own context as a researcher, my history working in the settlement sector, and the mistake I made that motivated this dissertation. I will then look at the contexts of the participants themselves, the diversity of identity and experience that they bring to the research, and the context of the settlement sector in Canada where they work. From there, I will consider the discipline this research exists within – peace and conflict studies, and how this shapes the process and goals of the research. Understanding its location in the PACS field, we

can then understand the ontological and epistemological context for the research, before returning to the relationship between the participants and I, and looking at cross-cultural research and anti-oppressive research practices. Finally, I will explore my own experiences as I shift roles and reflect on the similarities and differences between my clinical role as a family therapist, and my role here as a researcher. I believe understanding this is important for ethical engagement, and learning the role of researcher is key to my context in doing this work.

My Context as Researcher

The first context I need to explore requires some critical reflexivity and explores my process as I have come to this research, my identity as a researcher, and the context that I bring to this work. Fundamentally, the reason I have chosen this research in this way is to right a wrong that I participated in, that has collaborated in reinforcing a dominant narrative which I have come to believe is dangerous.

In 2015, before I began this PhD program, I was a director of mental health programming at an inner-city family therapy center connected to a university. I held a Master's Degree in Marriage & Family Therapy, and taught in the university's Master of Marriage and Family Therapy program as well as oversaw the staff and programming of the Newcomer Program which provided extensive community development initiatives with Newcomers in the settlement sector, funded through the Government of Canada department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The program had begun as a mental health initiative several years before, but had been re-imagined and refunded just prior to my position starting. In the few years that I was there, the program grew significantly (~15x the original budget), and was poised to continue growing. The program developed a specialty in working with Newcomers experiencing trauma, and began diversifying funding with other health related stakeholders along with the

settlement sector funding. This time was incredibly unhealthy for the management team, and of the three of us, 2 had heart attacks and I escaped with a year of debilitating back pain that progressed to chronic health conditions. Staff felt it too: the impacts of constant change and growth; the work with the clients; the expectations of community and funders; the pace of growth; and, the level of need in the local community. During this time, the settlement sector went through several waves of immigration that pushed the system beyond its capacity, first with the influx of Syrian refugees in significant numbers, followed by Yazidi refugee families.

This challenged the system on a number of levels. First, IRCC uses a rolling 3-year average of annual arrivals to determine funding levels for the following year. What this means is that if arrivals have been stable or low for several years, funding maintains at those levels, until the year after year rolling average begins to account for growth (or decline). When there are a significant number of new arrivals in a short period of time, the system (which is not set up for this kind of influx) and the organizations who provide services, are unable to pivot quickly enough to meet the needs and the whole system goes into shock. While this process of rolling averages make sense with other government departments with gradual year to year growth across budget years, it does not make sense for a department that is responding to global crises and violence.

While the system was beyond its capacity, we kept hearing from staff in our programming as well as staff at settlement agencies all around us about the stress and overwork everyone was experiencing. At workshops that I facilitated in the sector, I began using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index (World Health Organization, 2024) and would routinely have 2/3rds or more of the participants responding at the level that is indicative of low-resilience and at risk for depression. While these were given as voluntary self-tests for personal knowledge and not

approached as research or clinical evaluation, the same results repeated across the sector from staff and management.

One of the proposals that I wrote during this time, for which we received ongoing funding, was a vicarious trauma initiative to provide workshops and training to settlement sector workers. This program continues today. While I did a literature review prior to this, and while there is a route through the literature to validate applying these concepts to people working with Newcomers, I made an error in bias and misapplied the lens of my own needs, in line with my mental health training, to the needs of the workers in the settlement sector, regardless of whether they were Canadian born or Newcomer. I now know that this was and continues to be a mistake.

While it is clear that vicarious trauma exists for Newcomer workers in the settlement sector (as is shown by my participants), the mistake exists on two levels. First, the term refers to a concept that was developed on the experiences of white, privileged clinicians encountering the trauma of their clients for the first time, and the resulting identity crisis and collapse (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). This theory privileges the lived experiences of the workers in the settlement sector who match the lived experiences of the original research participants and is being used to represent the needs of all workers. I failed to do the original work that McCann & Pearlman did where they went to the workers themselves and asked how they are being affected by their work with their clients. I used the outcomes of their research, but failed to replicate their process and by doing so, I inadvertently reinforced the privileging of the experiences of white professional workers in the settlement sector and assumed these experiences were universal. My executive director was a white clinician who was born in Canada; our representative at IRCC was white, as was our regional director. This is a sector with a significant discrepancy of race, culture and citizenship from the decision-makers and funders to the front-line workers and the clients.

Secondly, as this study shows, focussing on VT obscures the larger threats to wellbeing for Newcomer workers, and provides a story that removes accountability from the Canadian system, locating the problem in individual workers, hiding its systemic nature.

I realized my error, and I wanted to use the voice that I had as a researcher to do the work that I should have done in the first place – to go to the workers who are underrepresented, workers who are Newcomers themselves, do the exploratory work, ask them how their work is affecting them in challenging and meaningful ways, and what they need to support their wellbeing.

Recognizing that I was working across culture and citizenship experiences, I reflected on my own experience of social identity (see chapter 3), and how I engaged the role of being an ally (see chapter 3). Through this study, I have been aware of privilege and vulnerability in my experiences of my race, my status as a Canadian citizen, my reality as a 1st generation Canadian born to immigrants to Canada, my relationship with gender, my identity and training as a systemic therapist, my relationship with religion and spirituality, my sexual orientation, my marital status, my family's class, and my socio-economic status. I would also add my own experiences of complex loss and trauma, my health status and my own history of vicarious trauma. While I have intersectional identities of marginalization, these are fairly invisible. While I can relate to experiences of marginalization, I am aware that I hold privilege across most of my visible identities and that is how I am largely perceived. This contributes to the power that I have across social relationships and influences the power that I hold as a researcher. This can inhibit relationship, and it can add strength to voices of others in my role as an ally.

Being aware of my bias, through which I participated in reinforcing social privilege and marginalized others, as I make the shift to becoming a researcher, it is important that I stay aware

of the power that I hold in the role and use it as an ally. This was one of the factors I took into consideration when deciding to work with a specific work group and to engage participatory action research – to be able to engage research as an ally where the aim of the research is to improve the wellbeing of the participants more than the status and expertise of the researcher.

The Context of the Participants

As I explain in depth in Chapter 4, this research ended up spanning four phases and two different groups of the main participants. This culminated in phase four, sharing the outcomes with the executive leadership of the original organization (two individuals), supervisors and managers (thirty individuals) and Newcomer front line staff (fifty individuals). In the end, there were ten main participants across the two groups, six in the original workgroup from one organization (phase 1), and four others in in the second group from different agencies from other regions in Canada (phase 2). To introduce the context of the participants, I will introduce them with their own explanations of how they came to Canada, and then I will talk about the settlement sector system where they work. I will describe demographic details in Chapter 4.

In introducing the participants, I am balancing between sharing as much context as possible to to contextualize the forces acting upon the workers, and the need to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the workers and the organization involved. As the settlement sector in Canada (see below) is largely comprised of a few small to medium sized organizations in each region, naming the location of the organization (including just the region), or the size or programming focus of the organization, could reasonably lead to the identification of the organization. Within the group of workers, patterns of speech and patterns of experiences also become identifiable. While I member checked the data with the participants, I am aware that identifying a series of quotes as coming from the same person (regardless if I use a pseudonym),

links a series of personal experiences, that along with patterns of speech, could reasonably lead to identifying the individuals involved within their own organization. To maintain participant confidentiality, I have chosen to use each quote anonymously rather than assigning pseudonyms.

How the participants came to Canada matters as it provides the context for who was involved in the study and differentiates their pre-migration experiences from each other, and differentiates them as a group from their Canadian-born counterparts. It also locates each of them as Newcomers, and contextualizes their personal connection with their clients which becomes relevant in the findings of the study (see Chapter 5: Findings). All the participants were Newcomers, but came to Canada for different reasons:

> I first came as international student, because at first, we were ineligible for the PR [permanent resident program – as an immigrant]
>
> We, you know, have decided because, you know, economic, violent issues, so we decided to move.
>
> I left [Country] initially I thought I was coming for a break. I was working in human rights and things were getting very hot. At first, I felt I don't need to go in exile, …and then, things are getting more difficult so finally say ok, I'm going and I did all the immigration, and I was thinking oh, I'm only going to stay 2 to 3 years.
>
> I've been to Canada a couple of times before I move to Canada, and a when the war started in [my country] I first moved to [country b] because [family lived there]. And my husband and son they couldn't leave [my country] because of their age [and the war], and um, I was living with my daughter in [country b] for like 4 of 5 months… they don't really like Newcomers. Canada on the other

hand is multicultural country. Canada like very welcome to Newcomers so we decided to move to Canada.

I came to Canada, like, I came 4 years ago, as a refugee. We got our asylum, myself and my partner, cause we were both human rights activists.

We had to leave our country yeah because of the war.

I came through economic stream. So, it was I always say we came for all the selfish reasons, very conscious of it when I reflect in terms of was it for economic reasons.

I came with my family. My husband that the one who was the principal applicant. He was a journalist and he couldn't go back home because of his work.

After our passport was expired, and the embassy wasn't going to renew it or anything and it was dangerous for him to go back. So, we was asylum seeker in [country] and registered with UN and we came. Someone sponsored us from here, a friend.

The Settlement Sector in Canada

The workers in the study are all employed in the settlement sector, comprised of organizations in each region of Canada funded through Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program. While the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program coordinates asylum seekers, privately sponsored refugees (PSR) and government assisted refugees (GAR), IRCC's settlement program is focussed mainly on supporting GAR, and it is these refugees who are typically the clients of the workers in this study. Those who have arrived through the Canada Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel

(CUAET) are an interesting example, however, as they are not GAR (they are temporary residents on extended visas, not classed as refugees at all), and do not have access to the same financial support that GAR do; however, they do have access to settlement programming (Government of Canada, 2022). While the workers in the study are primarily working with GAR, they are also working with people who have come through CUAET, and after hours in their own communities, they are typically also supporting PSR and asylum seekers. Each classification has implications for access to resources and different rights.

While the diversity of programming allows Canada (through IRCC) to respond to changing geo-political realities, it has created a complex system with different levels of support for different people. Publicly however, the picture IRCC portrays is much more straight-forward. IRCC states that they work with regional governments, organizations, and other stakeholders to deliver their settlement program. IRCC states it funds organizations to deliver programs to help Newcomers: indentify needs and access resources; learn about life in Canada, receive language training in official languages; receive employment support; integrate into the community; and, access resources to support settlement including childcare, transportation, interpretation, crisis support and resources for people with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2024c).

The participants in this study critique some of these claims (see Chapter 5 & 6) arguing that extensive waiting lists render some programs unattainable, and that funding levels for housing do not match the needs in the local community. Kelly (2024) critiques IRCC's settlement program, particularly from the point of view of smaller communities, arguing that IRCC's funding model uses existing resources where available to deliver services in the most cost effective way, but that this results in uneven service delivery across communities in Canada. They also critique the hierarchical model which centralizes decision-making in the funder,

leaving local organizations and communities poorly prepared to respond to quickly changing needs of the local Newcomer community and incoming arrivals. Braun and Clement (2023) also argue that while IRCC is competing with other countries to attract and retain skilled immigrants and increase the levels of immigration, funding for services have not kept pace with increases in arrivals. They also argue that funding is typically allocated in a few key regions disproportionate to the levels of arrivals, with this being especially concerning in under-resourced smaller locations. Khayambashi (2024) furthers these critiques and concludes that the push to settle Newcomers in smaller centers for local economic reasons is often met with increased economic and social challenges for the Newcomer. Ashton, Pettigrew and Galatsanou (2016) come to similar conclusions showing that municipalities with less than 30,000 residents experience the most challenges with settlement.

Locating the Research within the Field of Peace and Conflict Studies

According to Reimer et al. (2015), the peace and conflict studies (PACS) field is an interdisciplinary field made up of sociology, political studies, psychology, social psychology, international studies, culture and gender studies, anthropology, and others. I believe that each of these fields contributes some knowledge and gives a meta-theoretical frame to addressing the concerns of Peacebuilding, but also contains knowledge and theories that are less relevant specifically to the concerns of PACS. When exploring PACS as a discipline, I believe it is not the subject matter or the knowledge itself that qualifies research as part of the peace and conflict studies canon, but how it is used. Peggy Chinn, in her book, *Peace & power: New directions for building community,* states that "praxis is values made visible through deliberate action" (Chinn, 2013, p. 10), and argues that it is the combination of reflexivity and action "in the direction of transforming the world" (Chinn, 2013, p. 10). Through reading the literature in the field, I have

learned that it is this combination of values, theory and action towards peace that defines the field, and overlaps with other disciplines and integrates them into PACS. Research in this field then is not only about the outcomes themselves, but how they can be used in a PACS setting. What this means for my research is that knowledge generation towards action (praxis) focussed on moving people and systems towards peace is a key component in defining my research as relevant to the PACS field. This requires me to not only look at the subject matter, but how I undertake the study.

There are several models to define the PACS field and Peacebuilding (Lederach & Mansfield, 2019; Schirch, 2013; Reimer et al., 2015). John Paul Lederach and Kate Mansfield summarize the three major areas: justice and healing; violence prevention, conflict response and transformation; and, structural and institutional change. Within these three areas they specify nine sub areas. Lisa Schirch attempts a similar overview. For her, the five pillars that form the foundation for peacebuilding are stable governance and decision-making; access to participation in a socially responsible economy; personal rights of freedom and security; equitable and just legal system; intercultural and inter-identity group acceptance and respect. Schirch then looks at each of these pillars from structural, cultural, relational and personal levels, and organizes peacebuilding approaches accordingly (Schirch, 2013, p. 13).

As much of the literature in the peacebuilding field is a collection from and influenced by a number of disciplines, the potentials for interventions and peacebuilding approaches that support healing, growth and justice are virtually infinite. Where Schirch creates a matrix from her foundational pillars across structural to personal levels, Reimer et al. (2015) organize peacebuilding approaches by community engagement strategies, negotiation, mediation,

restorative justice approaches, interpersonal communication strategies and storytelling approaches.

My proposed research fits within Schirch's peacebuilding area of "social and cultural well-being" (Schirch, 2013, p. 13) at the personal and relational levels. It also fits Lederach's and Mansfield's justice and healing area (2019), focussing heavily on their subdomains of trauma healing and humanitarian action. I would also argue that it fits their other core domains of violence prevention, conflict response and transformation; and, structural and institutional change. Galtung spoke about the interdisciplinary nature of PACS and encouraged us to look beyond negative peace (i.e. the absence of violence) towards positive peace, referring to the ongoing development of stabilizing forces towards peace in a community (Galtung, 2009).

As Steflja and Trisko Darden (2013) encourage us to look beyond definitions of casualties in war that only consider the dead on the battlefield, to definitions that include the physically and psychologically wounded, and the families and communities around them, I would argue that the main focus of much of the PACS literature on trauma is focussed on primary victims and I believe that in keeping with Stefja and Trisko Darden's argument, we need to consider impacts of trauma on secondary victims (friends and family of primary victims) and tertiary victims (those who work with primary and secondary victims, and the community around them). I believe that responding to human needs at all levels (from primary to tertiary victims), is part of conflict response and transformation. This research focusses on tertiary victims primarily as it is focussing on the workers who work with primary victims, acknowledging that many people doing the work with primary victims are primary and secondary victims themselves. Additionally, developing programming to acknowledge the impacts of peacebuilding work on workers requires structural and institutional change, which locates the workers at the primary

level with regards to their organization's context. All of this work is part of the stabilizing move towards peace that Galtung describes as positive peace (Galtung, 2009).

Reimer et al. (2015) articulate four waves of peacebuilding and see the fourth wave as arising from the work of Johan Galtung (2009) and John Paul Lederach (1995, 1997) and the movement from managing conflicts (1st wave), to resolving conflicts (2nd & 3rd waves) to transforming conflict. They argue that through these waves, the peacebuilding field has moved from a focus on tools (1st wave) to the establishment of professionals (2nd wave) and academics (3rd & 4th waves), and from attempts to manage conflicts to transforming relationships through the engagement of conflicts (Reimer et al, 2015, p. 10). I would locate this research as part of this fourth wave looking at transforming relationships towards peacebuilding, working with primary and tertiary victims of international violence.

Reimer et al. (2015) identify conflict transformation as a process that explores individual and collective responses to conflict and the positive and/or negative ways those choices effect the conflict. Through a process of recognizing positive and negative impacts of the conflict, understanding the relational effects of the conflict, looking at the social context for structural causes of the conflict, and understanding the cultural beliefs that may be affecting the conflict, they argue that conflict can be positively transformed and cite the work of John Paul Lederach on conflict transformation. Lederach (1995, p. 17) himself states, "transformation provides a more holistic understanding which can be fleshed out at several levels. Unlike resolution and management, the idea of transformation does not suggest that we simply eliminate or control conflict, but rather points descriptively toward its inherent dialectic nature." Lederach argues that conflict is not negative itself, but is a process that transforms the relationship between the parties,

and even transforms the parties themselves. How it is addressed determines the constructive or destructive nature of the conflict.

Looking at the waves in the PACS field as identified by Reimer et al. is a very westernized view of the history of the field. While Reimer et al. acknowledge that the field is growing to include Indigenous research and practices, they themselves begin their overview of the field with American practices in the 1960s. As a friendly reframe, I assume they are speaking to the development of peacebuilding as an academic discipline, but even as such, the field needs to acknowledge all of the work that has come before it. The notion that peacebuilding is a modern discipline without deep roots in previous fields, cultures and religious contexts, undermines its credibility. Tuso and Flaherty (2016) further this critique that the PACS field has been largely focussed on the American peacebuilding movement at the exclusion of Indigenous peacebuilding practices across the world, and state this is only recently starting to change.

I believe that peacebuilding, in both formal and informal ways, has been with us for the history of our species throughout all cultures and civilizations. Elise Boulding traces peacebuilding practices through major cultures and religions of the world and makes the argument that while all cultures have the potential for war (which most defines the history that is taught) it doesn't mean that the alternate story of waging peace hasn't also existed alongside (Boulding, 2000). Specifically, Boulding looks through indigenous teachings, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and others to highlight organized efforts for peace throughout history. Robert Burrows explores the military strategy of Carl von Clausewitz, published posthumously in 1832 in which he saw peace as the ultimate objective and linked von Clausewitz's theories with the nonviolent defence strategies of Gandhi (Burrowes, 1996). Brian Rice's chapter, "Restorative processes of peace and healing within the governing structures of

the Rotinonshonni 'Longhouse People'", in Sandole, Byrne, Sandole-Staroste and Senehi's *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, details the organization of the Rotinonshonni and how they maintained peace with different cultural groups in the region in the 1700's, becoming part of the inspiration for the early democratic systems of the United States (Rice, 2015). Jarem Sawatzky in his reflexive work *Justpeace Ethics* (2008) locates himself as Mennonite peacebuilder coming from a long history of pacifism and peacebuilding within Mennonite communities. The Quaker publication, *Speak Truth to Power* (American Friends Service Committee, 1962), continues the Quaker tradition of pacifism and activism that has existed for centuries. The League of Nations, precursor to the United Nations, was founded after World War I as an attempt to bring the international community together to create a system for resolution of conflicts (Power, 2013). Power (2013) does an excellent job detailing Lemkin's arduous process flagging genocide and demanding interventions from the international community during the 1930s and 1940s. Reimer et al.'s argument that there are four waves of peacebuilding, and that it began in the United States in the 1960s, unnaturally disconnects the discipline from its history across cultures and nations, and its own roots in international conflict. Privileging only the modern American history shows the same cultural elitism and assumed universality as the policies that assume all workers need the same vicarious trauma workshops, regardless of lived experience. The reality is, like organized aggression, organized peacebuilding has existed across human history.

While I locate this research within the PACS field, I need to stay critically aware of the biases in the field that might privilege some ways of knowing over others. As this was my own blind spot and bias as well, I need to ensure that the way I undertake research does not follow this bias. In order to help me accomplish this, I have looked to an ontology and epistemology

that seeks to understand social forces acting upon us and move towards transformation of these processes towards emancipation and freedom.

Locating the Research within the Context of Critical Realism

Building on Carolyn Oliver's assertion that critical realism provides a "solid philosophical framework for social work research" (Oliver, 2012, p. 371), I believe that critical realism (CR) is in a unique position to inform research in the PACS field, accounting for both positivist and post-modernist understandings of reality; the reciprocal causality and the dynamic tension between social forces and personal agency; and, routes for praxis and transformation as we engage social justice issues. Roy Bhaskar, the originator of CR, states "what critical realism is concerned with doing is to produce a philosophy which you would walk, to produce a talk which you can walk, to produce a philosophy that you can live by and act by in the world" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 9).

Bhaskar critiques the 'epistemic fallacy' that reduces the understanding of ontology to the world of epistemology (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 19). Rather than conflating ontology and epistemology, Bhaskar has created a system that acknowledges the intransitive world of physical reality with its underlying forces and causal mechanisms, and also the transitive world of our experiences. Bhaskar transcends the debate between positivism and postmodernism by positing that they both exist simultaneously and are in relationship with each other, and situating critical realism as the meta-theory accounting for both of them. Bhaskar explains the 'critical realist embrace' welcoming non-critical realists stating, "if you think language is the most important thing in the social world… you are welcome; we have no objection to anything positively you say. We would only have an objection if you try and stop someone else who thought that, say, class or inequality

was the most important thing in the social world doing what he or she wanted to do" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 52).

At its core, CR is based on three complementary premises: ontological realism; epistemological relativism; and, judgmental rationality (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 21; Pilgrim, 2020, p. 3). Ontological realism asserts that objective reality exists independently of our knowledge of it. Even as infants, our lives are governed by forces in physical reality and social constructions, before we are aware of them. While we will grow and develop language to organize our experiences of our inner and outer worlds, and although these thought structures are meaningful, there is a core reality that exists regardless of our awareness of it. Bhaskar includes both physical forces in nature and also social constructions at this intransitive level of reality as both forces exert an organizing power on our lives. Further, as social constructs are just as real in their ability to exert power in our lives as natural ones, they are equally valid objects of research – equating the validity of research in the social sciences to research in the physical sciences.

This brings us to the second principle of CR–- epistemological relativism (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 20). While critical realists hold the belief of ontological realism, they also assert that each of us experiences reality through our own values, beliefs, perceptions, and that there are multiple simultaneous truths at this level. For example, different people will hold differences in political thought, religious or spiritual belief, thoughts about what is good art or not. People can also hold multiple and potentially contradictory views internally. These beliefs are also open to change and people will modify their belief systems over time.

In considering our knowledge of our worlds, it is important to remember that what is real (ontology) and what is known or believed (epistemology) are different, and the forces that exist at the level of ontology shape our belief systems, but beliefs at the epistemological level do not

have the same level of power to change reality. So, engaging epistemological relativity, we have choice and agency in how we make meaning of our world and interact with it, but we are not independent of the ontological reality.

Concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ need definition as different ontologies have different perspectives. Joseph Maxwell, in his book *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research* (2012), explores different realist traditions including CR and states that a key belief they all have in common is the belief that our views of objective truth are open to interpretation and refinement and that it is always possible to have multiple explanations for any event. He states that, “all theories about the world are seen as grounded in a particular perspective and worldview, and all knowledge is partial, incomplete, and fallible” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). Maxwell goes on to quote Frazer and Lacey (1993, in Maxwell, 2012) who demonstrate that critical realists can also hold a range of epistemological beliefs including interpretivism, relativism or constructivism. Each of these differ in the weight they give social constructs and personal interpretations of reality.

Maxwell addresses Lincoln and Guba’s concept of ontological/epistemological collapse and their statement that “the naturalistic/constructivist paradigm effectively brought about the irrelevance of the distinction between ontology and epistemology” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, pp. 175-6, in Maxwell, 2012, p. 12). He argues that CR defends the separation of the two, and sees this separation of ontology and epistemology as a resource for researchers. Rather than saying that reality is unknowable, and all we can explore is how we form knowledge, Maxwell argues that differentiating ontology and epistemology validates both as avenues for research, and allows us to explore the real-world applicability of the concepts that we create.

CR’s third concept, judgmental rationality, holds that perception and reality are different, that multiple understandings of reality can co-exist, and that we can interrogate our

understandings of reality as not all are equal in their ability to reflect reality. For example, when I come home from work and my dog is sitting on my shredded couch with foam everywhere, with a bit of upholstery caught hanging from their mouth, I could have many interpretations of what happened–- ranging anywhere from my dog has eaten my couch, to aliens landed to pillage my home, and my noble pet fought them off, with only the couch as a casualty. How I interpret reality will change how I deal with my dog, but it won't change what actually happened, or what is likely to happen the next time I leave my dog home alone for a number of hours. Reality is reality, and CR's concept of judgmental rationality tells us that interpretations closer to reality are more adaptive in responding to reality.

Building on this, I would argue that when our understandings of our lives are closer to our realities, there is less dissonance between our perspective of the world and the evidence that the world is providing, leading to a more grounded interaction with our world. That isn't to say that we have to like what reality offers, or that there isn't significant pain that accompanies our understanding of what has happened, but that there is less dissonance when we stop fighting what the evidence is suggesting. While epistemic relativity tells us that we can never be sure that we have the 'true' perspective, the closer it is to the truth, the chaos of the complexity of our lives organizes and becomes more predictable to us, allowing for decreases in anxiety and better planning. The less that our theory of our world (our cognitive schemas, or mental maps) accounts for what we experience, the more chaotic the world becomes in our perception as we are unable to find meaning or predictable patterns.

This is the link between the three principles in CR and McCann and Pearlman's (1990) theory on vicarious trauma. McCann and Pearlman explored mental health clinicians' experiences of their clients' stories of trauma, and how through exposure to these stories, the

clinicians themselves developed symptoms of PTSD. They believed that when the existing cognitive schemas of their participants failed to account for the lived experiences of their clients who had suffered trauma, the participants experienced an identity crisis and began a process where their mental maps of the world collapsed and needed to be rebuilt in order to more fully explain the newly expanded social world that the clinicians found themselves in. This process of revision is congruent with judgmental rationality whereby understandings of reality are continually being updated and refined as information about the forces in our social worlds change.

Judgmental rationality helps to organize some of my concerns about how I have seen postmodernism applied – as if all stories are equal in their validity. Pilgrim argues that we have watched the extreme form of this play out on the political stage in the United States with the notion of the "post-truth society" (Pilgrim, 2020, p. 37) where opinion has been elevated to the status of truth and conspiracy theories are seen as equally valid to scientific research. Judgmental rationality returns us to the understanding that while everyone has a right to their beliefs, not all beliefs are equally valid in representing reality. We are in a continual process of exploring, understanding and revising our understandings in order to have them better represent what we experience of reality. I find this construct exciting as it allows for epistemological relativism, choice and agency of an individual to make meaning in their life, and allows for a path to evaluate meanings in their ability to represent reality.

Reflexivity and Transformation in Critical Realism

Because of the tension that this process creates – that theories are an attempt at representing reality, and that not all theories are equal in their ability to do so – it is

understandable that Bhaskar states that reflexivity and transformative practice (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 11) are fundamental principles for critical realists, requiring constant internal critiques of why we are thinking and doing what we are doing and how we can develop those thought patterns and actions to be more congruent with the reality that we are experiencing. Bhaskar advocated for all of us to continually question what we believe we know and why, rooting out mistaken beliefs and understanding how and why we came to hold them. "…If emancipation is to be possible, well-grounded explanations of false consciousness and more generally ill-being must be capable of informing self-conscious transformative practice, unfettering human productive developmental, life enhancing and consumptive powers and possibilities" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 53).

This process of judgemental rationality seeking congruence between our knowledge and reality allows for Freire's (2010) concept of conscientization which identifies that once we have become aware of the reality of our oppression, we cannot unknow it, and it changes how we organize our worlds and the choices we make afterwards. This movement from knowledge to action in the direction of peace is transformative praxis. As judgmental rationality allows us to evaluate and crystallize our understandings of the social forces acting upon us, more true understandings become clear and move us towards congruent action.

The stance of researcher humility is essential within CR, as it is for peacebuilders and therapists for the same reasons. The curious stance based on not being certain of knowing 'Truth', whether it is about our own reality, others' experience, or fundamental principles, allows for continued explorations and refinements of our theories. This again can't be confused with not being able to develop working theories based on evidence, or make assertions based on research, but that even these are held as current understandings open to future revision. Gary Hawke, who edited Bhaskar's book *The Order of Natural Necessity* (Bhaskar, 2017), articulated a

methodology for critical realist research based on a chain of 'sense – judge – interpret' where we seek to understand and refine our understandings of the world around us (Hawke, 2017, p. xix). This process is very similar to the 'look – think – act' cycles of Action Research (Stringer, 2014), moving a theoretical process towards action.

This process of critical reflection and moving past simple explanation is similar to Bohm's philosophy in his book, *On Dialogue* (1996). Bohm argues that we need to transcend our reflex thoughts to shift our assumptions and default ways of knowing, to intentionally move past our unconscious limits, in order to touch universal experiences. He sees these automatic thought patterns as locking us into what we already perceive about the world, and that we need to be active in challenging these patterns in order to move past the paradoxes we get stuck in. From a critical realist perspective, if we do not engage reflexivity or judgmental rationality, then we stay within our view of reality, constrained by its limitations. If we are to grow, we need to be aware of and be curious about what is beyond the structures imposed by our view of reality to look for what might be missing from our current frame of reference.

Pillow argues for inclusion of reflexivity in qualitative research, describing what she sees as the four main types of reflexivity (reflexivity as recognition of self; reflexivity as recognition of other; reflexivity as truth; and reflexivity as transcendence). She criticizes the assumptions across qualitative research that we can fundamentally know ourselves, our subjects, our biases and what truth is, and then transcend past these by simply acknowledging them. In contrast she advocates for "reflexivities of discomfort" (Pillow, 2013, p. 187) and argues that reflexivity used this way "would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning" (Pillow, 2013, p. 192).

Three Levels of Reality, Truth, and Action in Critical Realism

Fletcher (2017) uses a metaphor of an iceberg to explain Bhaskar's levels of reality, separating out what we experience above the surface as 'the empirical', while the level of objective reality, which contains what exists with or without our knowledge, resides below the surface. Critical realists further differentiate what happens under the surface into two different levels, and name the level of reality where events occur regardless of our knowledge as 'the actual' (resting just below the surface in Fletcher's model), and name the deepest level 'the real' where the causal forces exist that shape the events at the 'actual' level, for us to experience in the 'empirical' (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183). CR holds that along with the physical forces in our reality, the social constructions and processes exert forces on us that are real as well. Looking at this deepest level of causal forces, Fletcher states "it is the primary goal of CR to explain social events through reference to these causal mechanisms and the effects they can have throughout the three-layered 'iceberg' of reality." (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183).

This multi-tiered view of reality is important to consider as it allows for different definitions of what is true. Statements may hold truth at all three levels. One can simultaneously say, 'it's a dog-eat-dog world out there and you need to fight for your family' (level of empirical – above the surface); 'there are many people who act defensively and violently' (level of actual – below the surface); and, 'due to a combination of scarce resources, competition for basic needs, beliefs about identity and other forces, people have organized in ways to meet their own needs and the needs of their own group at the expense of others' (level of real). All three of these statements are true in different ways, at different levels of reality. The empirical statement tells us what an individual is experiencing and thinking, the actual statement tells us neutrally what is actually going on, and the real statement highlights the causal forces that create the other two.

While all three are true, CR would encourage us to continue to interrogate the truth and see which is the most true.

Pilgrim explains this further in his discussion on judgmental rationality, differentiating between the three phrases: “six million Jews died in the Nazi holocaust; …six million Jews were killed in the Nazi holocaust; …six million Jews were murdered in the Nazi holocaust” (Pilgrim, 2020, p. 4). In his reflection on these statements, he shows how many people tend towards the first two as being the most true and states that he believes this is because of the social forces that push us towards positivism (privileging the process of separating facts from values) leaves the fact that people died seeming to be a more valid statement than the statement that they were murdered. He argues however that the first statement is too vague as there are many ways people can die, and the second statement is still too vague as people may be killed accidentally or in natural disasters, but the third statement is the most true as it captures the social forces and the deliberate targeting and execution of 6,000,000 Jews as part of the Holocaust (Pilgrim, 2020, p. 5). While positivism is a lens that can be applied, Pilgrim argues that its strengths in the physical sciences don’t make its claims universally true, and may inhibit statements that are more true of the complex social forces operating in any context. As a result of understanding these levels, when undertaking research within a critical realist paradigm, we need to use epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality and seek to move past the empirical and the actual levels of reality to find ways to understand the social forces at the level of the real and how they shape cultures, societies, the individual and the relationships between them.

While CR takes a both/and approach to positivism and postmodernism, it also takes a both/and approach to looking at the relationship between the individual and social structures. Collier argues that Bhaskar’s view of the relationship between the individual and society is very

similar to Marx's view, and quotes both to highlight the argument that both make that the individual and society are linked in relationship between them, and in the relationship with the relationships around them (Collier, 1994, p. 139). Collier explores both structuralism and humanism as models for the interaction between individuals and society, highlighting Weber's theory of how individuals shape society, and Durkheim's structuralism where society and social structures shape individuals arguing that Bhaskar proposes a third meta-option referred to as the "transformational model of the society/person connection" (Collier, 1994, p. 145) which is also referred to as the "transformative model of social activity" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 33). Recognizing that individual agency is real, collectively we shape social structures, and that structural forces are real and constrains or socializes individuals, Bhaskar proposes that both of these forces are continuously occurring in a complex relationship with each other, and in relationship to other people's relationships with the structural forces. Further, as they function at the level of the real, these forces exist whether we are aware of them or not. Within the transformational model of the society/person connection, Bhaskar names the dialectical forces as socialization (the force society exerts upon the individual) and transformation (the force individuals exert upon society). In the tension between these forces, he acknowledges "we are living in a world, which largely we have not created, and that means it is very difficult, unfortunately, for us radicals to transform the world in the way we want to. Of course, it does not mean that the world cannot be transformed, but it just imposes a serious constraint on it" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 35).

The simultaneous and reciprocal interaction of these forces of socialization and transformation is an excellent example of what Clark articulates as the difference between simple, complicated and complex systems and why critical realism is uniquely situated to understand complex arrays of forces. He states that much of positivistic science is focused on

simple or complicated causal chains where one or more factors exist in relationship with each other in such a way that there is a reproducible cause and effect (Clark, 2015). He explains that even complicated relationships such as the domino effect, are just series of simple causal relationships linked together. Rather than these relationships between variables that can be isolated within a lab, controlling for any extraneous variables, Clark demonstrates how CR is instead concerned with the complex world outside of the lab where there are ongoing competing interactions that all exude pressure on each other in very complex ways, which cannot be reduced down to simple or even complicated linear causal chains. Considering the 'transformative model of the society/person connection' (Bhaskar, 2017), we begin to see the complex interaction between individual agency, other individuals' agency, socialization forces in society and the power of other social constructions. While we cannot absolutely predict what any individual is going to do in a particular circumstance, we can understand the complex web of agency and social forces acting upon the individual and the 'tendencies' these forces create (Collier, 1994).

Maxwell highlights that this is not an abstract ontological argument, but has profound impacts for how we view individuals' relationships with each other and with society and culture. Arguing that social constructs such as culture are real, Maxwell challenges what he sees as a dominant view of culture within qualitative research, that culture is an abstraction and can be stratified into its own level when we consider the individual and society (Maxwell, 2012, p. 22). Taking the CR view that culture is real, Maxwell proposes a revised version of Kroeber and Parsons' model which shows the interaction between individual, society, personality and culture, articulating that the personality corresponds with individuals as culture corresponds with society, and as individuals and society have a relationship, so do personality and culture (Maxwell, 2012,

p. 23). Further, he argues that using language that culture is shared, removes the agency of the individual. He advocates for discussing culture as being participated in – retaining both the socialization potential of culture, and the agency of the individual (Maxwell, 2012, p. 28). Integrating the view in CR that we are always looking at complex systems in the open system of the real world as opposed to simple closed systems in the laboratory (Maxwell, 2012, p. 49), Maxwell reminds us that in qualitative research from a CR perspective, we are continually looking broadly for diverse experiences of interaction between individuals and social structures rather than attempting to narrow down to a single stable point of interaction.

Bohm shows in his book *On Dialogue* (1996), that when we are locked in a paradox of opposing forces and we can transcend the dichotomy to see a third option, it changes how we understand the nature of the dialogue and the constituent parts, and their relationship with each other. When we can see a meta-picture of the social forces acting upon an individual or group and the diversity of their agency responses, the possibility of transformation of social structures and relationships become possible within a CR ontology. Research based on CR targets this transformation as it seeks to refine our understanding of complex causal relationships in our social world that underpin our events and experiences.

Freire’s concept of conscientization (Freire, 2010) fits in here. His aim in teaching literacy to rural workers in South America was to teach them about their own social worlds–- to raise the level of their consciousness about their class struggles that they may have previously accepted as their lot in life. Freire’s thesis was that education needed to be changed from a banking model where socially sanctioned knowledge was downloaded into workers, keeping them locked into their class, into a consciousness raising process where people became aware of themselves and their social worlds and developed voice to engage social structures. From a CR

perspective, they become aware of the forces in the real as real forces in their lives and engage their own personal agency, challenging their ongoing socialization.

Bhaskar includes transformation and action within his CR ontology. While he is describing a hierarchy of a tiered reality, personal meaning-making and reflexivity, he is also encouraging action towards ethical ends, which in his view is action which challenges oppression (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 91). In considering transformative praxis, Bhaskar encourages us to consider a stratification of society, which includes four levels – material transactions; relationships between people; social structures; and, the embodied personality. He states that true transformative change needs to consider all levels: "one of the problems that the Left in particular has to face is that projects to orientate social change have in general only been directed to the transformation in social structure, whereas to change our social lives, to change society, we need to operate on all four levels. By the same token it can be said that the Right generally has restricted itself to, or tendencies within it, to self-improvement, to the improvements of the level of stratification of the embodied personality. Of course, we need action on all of these fronts for genuine and social change to occur" (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 87).

Integrating an Anti-Oppressive Framework

While CR encourages continuous reflexivity, probing false-consciousness and an analysis of power and oppression, there is a gap in how to move from ontology and epistemology to methodology. I believe engaging anti-oppressive research practices helps fill this gap. Being aware of my own privilege and my failure to be adequately critical in my development of my original vicarious trauma program, I needed to be deliberate to engage anti-oppressive practices in the research that I proposed to do here, and hold myself accountable. Potts and Brown state

that anti-oppressive research is far from a simple task and requires active commitment and politically motivated action on the part of the researcher (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 255). Looking at critical theory, they have identified three core tenets of anti-oppressive research: “anti-oppressive research is social justice and resistance in process and in outcome”; “anti-oppressive research recognizes that all knowledge is socially constructed and political”; and, “anti-oppressive research is all about power and relationships” (Potts & Brown, 2005, pp. 260-262). Highlighting that the process of research is political, they argue that the standard process of research that goes from posing a question to reaching a conclusion doesn’t go far enough as anti-oppressive research requires action on the knowledge created. Articulating a standard process of questioning, designing a research plan, collecting data, meaning making and drawing conclusions, they challenge how typical research processes are built on power relationships and often neglect the needs (and insights) of the participants (Potts & Brown, 2005, pp. 264-276). Research in this vein, similar to my original program, may have the intention of doing good, but leaves in place the power hierarchies and social structures that maintain them. In contrast, anti-oppressive research shines a light on these conditions and forces and enacts ways to challenge them.

Rogers builds on Potts and Brown’s discussion of power in research and adapts Gould’s framework for use in research in the social work field (Rogers, 2012, p. 868). Rogers shows how Gould uses Lukes’ conceptualization of power across three levels (behavioural view; non-decision-making view; and the hegemonic view) (Lukes, 1974, 2005, in Rogers, 2012) and expands it to include a post-structuralist view. Rogers then adapts these four dimensions and shows how social work research (and by extension all social science research) can be oppressive or anti-oppressive at each level. For example, at the behavioural level of power, research can be

done on marginalized groups without critical reflection, or with critical reflexivity and incorporating groups into the research design process; or at the post-structuralist level, using oppressive discourses and language that maintain or emphasize the power hierarchy between the researcher and the participants, versus using empowering and participative research practices (Rogers, 2012, pp. 869-870).

Ransford Danso also builds on the work of Potts and Brown and highlights that research can either be a force for social change, or be used to reinforce the existing power hierarchies in society (Danso, 2015, pp. 572-573). Arguing that social justice research in the social work field needs to "unravel the complexities of the dynamic phenomena and contexts" (Danso, 2015, p. 573), he demonstrates how the lack of empowerment research in the field interrupts researchers' abilities to create "… effective tools for engaging meaningfully with these dynamic processes and contexts and creating positive social change" (Danso, 2015, p. 573). Danso's model, the critical cultural competence and anti-oppressive practice framework (CCAOP), builds from other conceptualizations and includes: (a) a social justice / social change orientation; (b) an egalitarian and consultative relationship between researcher and participants; (c) a spirit of inquiry and holistic engagement with different aspects of the issue being investigated; (d) use of self as research instrument; (e) the researcher as co-learner; (f) use of qualitative methods; (g) emphasis on inductive and emic approaches to understanding experiences and communities; (h) emphasis on context; and (i) accountability to research participants and communities for the products of their work (Danso, 2015, p. 575).

Newman and McNamara focus on the teaching of qualitative research and participatory research practices in the Social Work field in England, arguing that while there are complexities and barriers, it is possible to do research that is congruent with the core beliefs of social work

practice including "critical, anti-oppressive and participatory approaches" (Newman & McNamara, 2016, p. 435). In discussing barriers, Newman and McNamara describe their experience of neoliberal government ideology and policy interfering with anti-oppressive and participatory research. They highlight that policies often promote accountability and prioritize outcome-based research and competence-based approaches, but by doing so, they build distance between researcher and participant and create barriers to participatory research. Using case studies to highlight exceptions where social work students have been able to persevere with anti-oppressive practices, Newman and McNamara push back against the pressure to conform and create space for research to focus on social justice values. Agreeing with Danso, they call for research to "engage with and focus on the complex reality of service user groups, communities and individuals" (Newman & McNamara, 2016, p. 436) and move from problematizing groups to a focus on resilience in the face of adversity.

Leeman, in his article "Balancing the benefits and burdens of storytelling among vulnerable people" (2011), employs a critical reflexivity as he explores the ethics of using narratives with vulnerable people in research questioning the degree that members within disability groups have the equal ability to say 'no' to the researcher. Leeman explores themes of power, choice, and uneven consequences for those participants compared to participants in mainstream groups, and argues that researchers often choose participants whose lives deviate from the mainstream as these are interesting to the researchers and their intended audiences, however these deviations have often left the participants vulnerable to exploitation (Leeman, 2011, p. 108).

Differentiating Roles as Therapist and Researcher

I have spent a lot of time thinking about my dual roles – as therapist and as beginning researcher. At their core, both therapy and qualitative research are essentially conversations between two or more people for a specific purpose. We have constructed roles of therapist/client and researcher/participant and collectively given meaning to these roles, organizing the intention of the conversation and identifying the norms and boundaries of the roles, but these are constructions with a wide playing field, with significant internal disagreements from different theoretical perspectives in each domain about what is and is not acceptable role behaviour (i.e. feminist family therapy vs. Freudian psychoanalysis, or double-blind experiments vs. participatory action research – interestingly, in these examples, feminist family therapy and PAR have more common role behaviours across the research/therapy divide than either of them do with the other paradigm in their own domain). My beginning thought was that I had to hold these roles very separately and that I needed to hold back my therapist self to learn what is appropriate as a researcher, fearing that I would overstep somehow. While I want to be mindful, I don't believe that so strongly anymore. In some ways, therapy has a clearer role boundary for me – through the creation of specific ethical codes (Canadian Association for Couple & Family Therapy (CACFT), 2019; American Associatuion for Marriage & Family Therapy, 2015) based on the values of non-malfeasance and beneficence (do no harm, and the purpose is the benefit of the client), clinical professions from Social Work (Manitoba College of Social Workers, 2024) to Couple and Family Therapy (CACFT, 2024) to Psychology (Canadian Psychological Association, 2024) make it clear what the purpose of therapy is, and who is to gain from the interaction. If therapy stops being beneficial to the client, therapy is to stop. From a research perspective, it is a bit different. My understanding of research ethics (albeit from the dominant

perspective which privileges positivist frameworks) is that ideally participants are not impacted by the research process and are typically seen as witnesses to experience which they share with the researcher. The researcher of course has put in ethical controls so that there is low risk of harm to the participant, but the goal is not the benefit of the participant, it is the benefit of the researcher. Underneath the roles, both fields use specific questions to elicit emotional responses, attend to the balance of stressors and resources and elicit memories of experiences. Both can be transformational experiences for all parties involved. With therapy however, the client approaches the therapist requesting help. In research, it is often the other way around with the researcher seeking out the participant and requesting their help.

Contrary to my initial concern about therapy, I believe that this difference between the more active agency of individuals seeking therapy and the more passive participant in research increases the burden of responsibility on the part of the researcher to do no harm and to ensure informed consent. While in research, it seems that informed consent is an initial conversation and a signature, in ethical therapeutic relationships consent is an ongoing conversation that requires updating every time we engage new content, goals and interventions. Perhaps this is where I need to be even more intentional in research about what questions I ask, and the degree to which I have informed consent from my research participants in an ongoing manner. If I integrate anti-oppressive theories about research into this, it is easy to see why participatory research methodologies create more space for ethical conversations of ongoing informed consent and equalizes the hierarchy of who is benefiting from whom. Ideally, participatory approaches merge the community's needs and the researcher's needs to form a mutually beneficial system where all have expertise, voice, informed choice, and benefit (McIntyre, 2008).

I appreciate the need for ongoing awareness and accountability, and the use of participatory practices in research. My own experiences have taught me about the relevance of what I want to research, but they have also shown me that my experiences are not universal, and when I am in the room with others, my presence and my social identity factors (taller, white, perceived cisgender and heterosexual male) changes the discussion. In doing research with others who have similar and different experiences, I need to be careful that I don't privilege one part of their experience and marginalize the other, but hold the complexity of the whole range of their experience. An easy tendency would be to either 'other' them, seeing them as completely different than I am, and minimize points of our connection; or, equally as easily, I could minimize the differences in their experiences and attempt to argue that we are all the same on the inside. Either side of this is an injustice and privileges the mainstream view of seeing others in the shadow of who we are. The challenge is to hold the differentiated view of both similar and different, and to adopt the mutually curious view of what has shaped our reactions to our experiences.

In doing this research, I needed to maintain a critical and reflexive look at my own experience and privilege as I am asking others about potentially vulnerable experiences, and I am coming from an agent perspective relative to most of my participants in terms of race, culture, citizenship, gender, age, career, and socioeconomic status. While I believe in levelling the hierarchies and using my privilege to give opportunity and volume for other voices, I am not coming from their lived experience; I can choose to witness their experiences, or not. This choice is powerful and one that they do not have. I am an outsider to their experience and to their relationships with each other. My presence as an outsider, what I do with that power as an outsider, and the presence of other outsider perspectives may change the conversation, and I

cannot know if it does or to what extent it does. As Richardson points out, no amount of reflexivity will control for that (Richardson, 1998). No matter how I see myself, others will see me as an outsider and make their own choices for how they participate with me.

Having failed to engage a critical perspective on the research that went into my earlier developed vicarious trauma program, I want to be deliberate in bringing these analyses into the work that I propose to do.

Conclusion

This has been a long walk through my context as a researcher and the history behind the research question, the context of my participants, where this research fits within the context of the peace and conflict studies field, the ontological epistemological and methodological contexts that bound the research, and my reflections differentiating my role as researcher from my experience of being a therapist.

When I considered my history, the history of the problem, the participants I wanted to work with, and their contexts, I believed the most ethical and congruent way to approach this work within the PACS field was to do the research in collaboration with the participants, in a participatory action research project, informed by anti-oppressive research practices, within a critical realist paradigm.

In the chapters ahead, I will demonstrate how I engaged judgmental rationality as I explored related concepts in the literature, looking for a complex array of possible factors that could affect wellbeing for the participants. I will then explain my use of a PAR methodology, how it fits within the ontological and epistemological beliefs, and is congruent with the aims of the field as I explain my research methodology and the process I undertook.

CHAPTER 3: Important theoretical considerations in conducting this research

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the goals of a literature review are to show familiarity with the breadth and history of the field, currency with the literature related to the research question, understanding of the vocabulary and the ongoing debates in the field and to identify key theories, concepts and gaps in the literature. They acknowledge that literature reviews are often deeper in some topics than others, looking for saturation of the literature in key areas relevant to the research. Building on this guidance, I am also aware that the relationship between the current literature in the field and present research must be considered in the context of critical realism. Within critical realism current and past knowledge claims are seen as human constructions, and as such have power (Maxwell, 2012, p. 6). However, as they themselves are constructions, they are held tentatively as representations of reality but not reality in and of itself. Current knowledge is seen as a map of a landscape rather than the landscape. The accuracy of the map and its meaningfulness will depend upon the skill and knowledge of the mapmaker, and how landscape has changed since the map was created.

This awareness to hold knowledge and theories tentatively is very important, especially as we will see below. Theories that are accepted in the general discourse as “true” can be misapplied as I did with vicarious trauma; and, debates in the field can appear to be more about academic ownership of concepts than meaningful differences between terms (e.g., vicarious resilience and vicarious post traumatic growth – see below).

The other factor that I needed to stay aware of comes from using a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. There is a tension between participatory research processes and the standard university research or dissertation processes (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 87; McIntyre, 2008; Stringer, 2014 p. 91). While the standard dissertation process requires a review of the pre-

existing literature, a significant portion of which occurs before the research proposal is accepted and therefore before participant selection, this positions the literature as more knowledgeable about the participants' experiences than they are, and positions the researcher more as expert instead of collaborative team member. So, not only do I hold this review tentatively from a CR perspective, I also hold it tentatively methodologically, and acknowledge that this literature review represents my own introductory 'look' and 'think' stages of a preliminary action research cycle, and had I engaged a full PAR framework outside of a dissertation process, this study would have been done in collaboration with, and informed by the curiosities and hypotheses of the participants as much as it was by mine (McIntryre, 2008).

Another challenge I have faced in this process is the interdisciplinary nature of PACS (Galtung, 2009), and the number of factors relevant to the work and wellbeing of my participants. To help me organize my process through the literature, and to be congruent with the view of literature in CR, I used Mason's (2011) facet methodology to map out different clusters of related concepts to explore. Mason conceptualized phenomena to be researched as many sided gems, with many facets through which a researcher could view the core. Each concept in the literature review could be seen as one of these facets to give a slightly different perspective.

To build on Mason's metaphor, the interdisciplinary nature of PACS means that I am viewing gems from different disciplines, each with a group of facets, all with a different perspective on factors potentially affecting the workers' wellbeing. I believe that this is a strength of this research design, and also a challenge. While the challenge is managing a wide scope of literature, the opportunity is to see the complex web of forces affecting the workers in the study (Clark, 2015). Rather than engaging deductive analysis and testing out a particular hypotheses (one facet of a gem), where I could inadvertently magnify the significance of any particular

concept, I am using CR to map various forces acting upon the workers in the study. What the workers have told me is that while these concepts below are relevant, the largest forces affecting their wellbeing are missed in the literature.

Two Paths in the Literature

There are two main paths in this literature review. The first is the dominant discourse in mental health literature on the impacts of social service work on workers, that traces the concepts listed above starting with vicarious trauma. The second path looks to PACS and other disciplines to understand these potential contexts for the workers and how concepts of identity, community resilience and acculturation strategies among others may have a role to play.

Following the first path, we explore the experiences of mental health clinicians in their work, and see how these concepts have gradually expanded to be applied to those who work with Newcomers, paving the way for exploration of these concepts in this current study. As shown below, there is a gap in the literature for exploring the experiences of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience in Newcomer workers in the settlement sector. The path to that gap, well organized in the literature, could have been used to validate the concepts of vicarious trauma for Newcomer workers in the settlement sector, and to successfully show that experiences of vicarious trauma exist (see Chapter 6). As I developed this study however, I engaged critical reflection and realized that this is also the path of my bias (privileging mental health concepts, my own experience of vicarious trauma, and the experiences of predominantly White educated clinicians in the developed world whose experiences the concepts were based on). If I were to engage research this way, I would have replicated my original mistake – applying my own experience of the world, validating it and applying it universally.

The second path in this literature review is less obvious as it requires a critical cultural critique of the first path. A deeper exploration of the first path, reveals that the theoretical foundations of vicarious trauma do not fit well with the lived experience of Newcomer workers in the settlement sector. Vicarious trauma is premised on workers experiencing traumatic experiences for the first time, through their clients' stories, that cannot be accounted for in the workers' current cognitive schemas. This results in an identity crisis and a loss of ability to make meaning from these experiences, let alone incorporate them into their world view. This collapse of inner working models, and the subsequent rebuilding of new ones, is vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). This conceptualization of vicarious trauma is not necessarily a good fit for many Newcomer workers in the settlement sector who have many of the same pre-migration challenges as their clients, and therefore are less likely to be encountering their traumatic stories for the first time. So, while vicarious trauma could exist for Newcomer workers, it is less likely to be the dominant force affecting Newcomer workers' wellbeing. In critiquing the first path through the literature, I then had to ask what else may be affecting my participants? This question led to a divergent path through different gems and facets.

Recognizing that the first path was congruent with my bias, I am intentionally privileging the concepts in the second path in this literature review and will begin by focussing on the concepts that are relevant to the lived experiences of participants and their clients, and then I will explore the cluster of mental health concepts named in the first path.

Review of Current Literature and Concepts

Beginning with concepts relevant to the lived experiences of the participants and their clients, the current literature is reviewed beginning with pre-migration contexts to understand some of the realities Newcomers face prior to emigration from their home communities. The

review will proceed through collectivist and community understandings of trauma to build on the common understandings of trauma from western perspectives already in our discourse, and move on to understand theories of migration, culture shock and acculturation to explore the concepts relevant to the workers and their experiences as they arrived in Canada, as well as the experiences of their clients. The review will proceed through an exploration of theories of identity and intersectionality, and the role of the ally across identity groups. These are relevant in order to explore some of the dynamics of race and racism as well as to ground my own thinking about my role as an outgroup researcher and be mindful of those power dynamics. The review will also explore resilience from community and individual experiences in order to understand how resilience develops in individuals and groups and supports wellbeing. From there, the review will move to what I identified as the first path in the literature, looking at concepts of survivor guilt, privilege guilt, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious resilience and vicarious post-traumatic growth. All of these concepts are different facets through which to view potential experiences that impact the wellbeing of the workers.

Pre-Migration Context: International Conflicts and the Targeting of Civilians

In order to understand the needs of settlement sector workers who are Newcomers themselves, I needed to better understand the conditions that require people to become refugees initially. One of my “sadder but wiser” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p. 147) experiences in the PACS program has been my growing awareness of the depth of human cruelty. While my core belief is that we are all capable of a full range of experience and behaviour from violence to loving connection, I have been deeply disturbed many times in the program where I have witnessed deliberate attempts at the destruction of people and communities for personal gain.

These readings include genocides across the world over the last century and Lemkin's struggle to have genocide recognized by the international community (Power, 2013), the genocides within Canada and the systemic violence Canada has and is perpetrating on Indigenous peoples and communities (Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015; Bussidor, 2014), and all the reading I have done to understand the deliberate targeting of civilians in international conflicts (see below)

While identity theory helps us to understand in-group and out-group psychology, and Volkan explains how trauma at a community level exacerbates the in-group and out-group definitions, facilitating further violence and trauma (Volkan, 2001), I integrate that first at an intellectual level, but when I pause to take it to a human level, my blood drains from my head, and I react with shock. It is beyond my personal experience how people can deliberately choose mass violence and genocide as a means to a political end. A part of me is relieved to know that after all the personal trauma stories I have heard, there are things that still have me react this way. However, this is exactly the reality that exists beyond my privilege and experience and why I need to include it in my review of the literature.

Hauss, in his book *International Conflict Resolution* states that the majority of conflicts in the world since the end of the cold war are intrastate conflicts, and within these, the majority of casualties are civilians (Hauss, 2010). Having come into adulthood during the first Gulf War in 1991, I am used to hearing the de-humanizing term 'collateral damage' to refer to inadvertent harm to civilians through military strikes, and my instant association is to link the civilian deaths which Hauss refers to, with this idea of collateral (inadvertent) damage. What I found in the research, however, is deliberate and calculated targeting of civilians, by both state and non-state actors, in order to gain power relative to each other, or in their relationships with the international community or a third actor. Lazar states that this process of "killing civilians is

worse than killing soldiers. If any moral principle commands near universal assent, this one does" (Lazar, 2015, p. 91).

In considering the targeting of civilians, most studies use civilian casualty statistics, but Steflja and Trisko Darden (2013, p. 347) caution us to consider the definition of 'casualty', arguing we need to include those affected by rape, HIV, psychological impact and intergenerational effects. Morina et al. build on Steflja and Trisko Darden's research and demonstrate the long-term impact of PTSD in survivors, years after the end of a war (Morina, Rushiti et al., 2010, p. 84; Morina, Sula et al., 2016; Morina, Schnyder et al., 2018).

Stanton (2013) and Asal et al. (2019) demonstrate that non-state actors deliberately choose civilian targets as a means to demand attention from governments, and that the more responsive a government is to its citizenry (i.e., western democracies), the more potential power groups have through the use of targeted violence towards civilians. Stanton's research demonstrates that 79% of groups in conflict with democratic governments used targeted violence towards civilians, while only 17% of groups engaged in targeted civilian violence against anocratic governments, and only 8% of groups engaged with autocratic governments did so (Stanton, 2013).

While many sources refer to the deliberate inciting of fear in civilians through targeted violence by non-state actors as the definition of terrorism (Asal et al., 2019; Thomas, 2014; Fortna, 2015; Siman-Tov, Boda, & Peleg, 2016), Stanton argues that often the goal of terrorism is not the terror itself, but the leverage that that fear gives the non-state actor to signal power to their own membership, the government, the international community or other non-state actors. Stanton further differentiated the decision-making strategies by non-state actors, demonstrating that groups who sought power within a system deliberately chose to target high-value, low

casualty sites as these would yield the highest returns for the level of risk without running the risk of alienating the population whom they may need to rely on. Other groups who are looking to overthrow or develop power outside of the system choose higher-casualty sites in their decision-making.

While non-state actors' decisions to use targeted violence towards civilians commands relatively more attention in the literature, Hicks et al. (2011) argue that governments may also deliberately choose violence towards their own citizenry. Analyzing 226 armed groups engaged in combat between 2002-2007, they demonstrated that 39% of groups targeted civilians. They also found that protracted conflicts lasting over three years correlated with increased civilian targeting, and that smaller scale conflicts were also correlated with increases in civilian targeting. They made a vital discovery in their data analysis as when they controlled for both size and duration of conflict, they found that state and non-state actors participated equally in the targeting of civilians globally.

In considering the motives for states to target their own civilians, Fjelde, Hultman, and Nilsson (2019, p. 106) describe the triangle that civilians are often caught in between state and non-state actors. To the degree that civilians are friendly to non-state groups, providing shelter, food, resources, or hiding them, States may decide to punish communities for these behaviours, attempting to interrupt non-state actors' resources and supply chains by targeting their own communities and citizenry.

In *A Problem from Hell*, Power asks the question "why does the United States stand so idly by?" (Power, 2013, p. 504). While she is writing for an American audience and challenging US apathy in the face of genocide, it is a question that needs to be asked of all of us, on the personal, family, community and global level. While we all need to pay attention to how many

battles we take on at once, we also need to be aware of the cost of collective inaction. Barbara Coloroso challenges this bystander position at the smaller context of the interpersonal level in her book on violence in schools, *The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander* (Colorosso, 2005) – highlighting the power of the bystander position in creating the atmosphere where violence is acceptable and can thrive, or by contrast, challenging it and creating momentum for peace. Freire's famous quote, "washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (Freire, 1985), challenges everyone to consider their personal choice of action vs. inaction in the face of structural violence and the systemic ramifications of those decisions. While inaction can happen for many reasons – from apathy to traumatic fear, my own engagement in peacebuilding and my own research is one meaningful thing I can do in the face of injustice, and is a way I fight back against my own bystander inclinations.

Collectivist and Community Understandings of Trauma

While there is extensive literature concerning western approaches to trauma (Bass & Davis, 2008; Dolan, 2000; Frankl, 2006; Herman, 1997; Johnson, 2002; Levine, 1997, 2024; Levine & Kline, 2007; Lew, 2004; Malchiodi, 2008; Mate, 2000, 2008; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017; Pool & Greaves, 2012; Porges, 2011; Rothschild, 2000, 2009, 2021; Siegel, 2012, 2020; Souers & Hall, 2016; van der Kolk, 2015), the focus of this research is not therapy for settlement related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I acknowledge that a deep dive into trauma literature could be an area to expand the research into in subsequent cycles should study participants show the need, however, this is not the current focus. Many of the concepts and constructs related to western approaches to trauma necessary for this research are already in our vocabulary generally, but the piece that is missing from the common understanding is the understanding of trauma

from collectivist and community-based perspectives. I chose to focus a portion of the literature review on these understandings to acknowledge the literature and perspectives that were absent in my own mental health training.

Vamik Volkan, a psychiatrist interested in the community impacts of trauma, uses the metaphor of a big tent to describe the interplay between personal identity and large group identity (Volkan, 2001, 2013). He articulates that within the large group tent, individual identity is salient – when we are with 'our people', our individuality is meaningful. He states however that when the group is in conflict with an outside group, individual identity becomes less relevant, and the large group identity becomes more salient, even at the individual level – we are group people first, individuals second. In the cases of protracted or historical conflicts, he describes how these conflict-born group identities can exist and integrate with the larger concept of the group's identity, and are part of the group identity that is taught to subsequent generations long after those who were around at the onset of the original conflict have died. This sends a perpetual message to future generations that to be one of 'us' is to be in conflict with 'them'. While much of the trauma healing that I have done has focussed on the individual level of identity, Volkan's theory demonstrates the need for justice and healing at the group level of identity as well. Once a group identity has merged with a conflict identity, it is a valid question for members to ask – who are we if we let go of this conflict?

Kira and Tummala-Narra argue that "refugees face unique social and political traumatogenic ecologies that can play at least an equivalent or even more significant role in traumatic stress compared to that of survivors of interpersonal trauma who do not experience atrocities such as exile, political and religious persecution, and torture" (Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015, p. 449). David Marshall quotes Nguyen-Gillham who states that western NGOs "distort

the social suffering of war into individual illness" (Marshall, 2014, p. 282). Both of these studies highlight the need for collective healing from traumas inflicted at the community level.

Traditional western psychotherapy approaches to trauma target the individual level. Several researchers call for changes to this approach for healing from collective traumas faced by refugees. Janet McLellan describes the "ineffectiveness of Western psychological treatments" (McLellan, 2015, p. 131) and advocates for the integration of cultural practices, spiritual practices, and community engagement. Nancy Farewell studied Eritrean youth who were refugees and who experienced violence targeting civilians. She found the standard western definition of PTSD too narrow, failing to adequately capture or address the psychosocial and family losses of the youth (Farewell, 2003). Stepekoff et al. adapt Judith Herman's three stages of trauma healing model (Herman, 1997), and advocate for a blend of Western and African cultural approaches (Stepekoff et al., 2006, p. 926).

Theories of Migration, Culture Shock and Acculturation

Understanding the larger global context of the deliberate targeting of civilians and how identity forms around community level responses to violence and trauma, we begin to understand some of the context surrounding international migration as a response to political violence. While a "well-founded fear of persecution" based on group membership is the requirement for refugee status according the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (United Nations, 1992), many people immigrate through whatever resources are available to them – immigration through professional or family initiatives, international student visas, seeking asylum, refugee status. Understanding the deliberate actions by state and non-state actors to target civilians gives some insight to the conditions that lead to families and individuals leaving their communities through whatever means available.

While many in western nations assume that the healing process begins as people leave their communities where they are no longer safe, Kira and Tummala-Narra state, “refugees, fleeing oppression, atrocities, discrimination, torture, and/or genocide, experience numerous adversities before leaving their own countries, in transit as refugees in other countries, and upon arrival and resettlement in their host country, facing past as well as ongoing intergroup and interpersonal traumas and societal oppression” (Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015, p. 450). While understandings of trauma and loss help to make sense of the impact of pre-migration, migration and some post-migration experiences, theories of culture shock in intercultural peacebuilding literature help to explain more migration and post migration experiences.

There have been many theories about culture shock – the phenomenon where someone finds themselves in an unfamiliar culture and has no frame of reference for how to adapt and survive. It is marked by feelings of loss, isolation, depression, and hopelessness. Historically, there have been two main models – the U-curve and W-curve approaches (Nash, 1991) which I will explore first. Following those, John Berry has added a third model that addresses the relationship between heritage cultural identity and host cultural identity. Arguing that the eventual goal is bicultural competence, Berry describes how the process to get there includes losses and rebuilding at the identity level (Berry, 2008; Han, Berry, & Zheng, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2016; Dona & Berry, 1994; Kwak & Berry, 2001).

Originally, the U-Curve approach identified that people began at the top of a U, functioning well, but begin to decline as they move down the to the bottom of the U where they experience all of the losses of familiarity, connection, cultural understanding and relevance. People stay at the bottom of the U-Curve and eventually begin to move up the other side having adjusted to life in the new culture. The W-Curve model extends the U-Curve, acknowledging in

the second half of the W, that individuals may return home and experience 'reverse culture-shock', dipping down again and having to re-acclimatize to their heritage culture (Brown & Halloway, 2008).

Interestingly, this is a similar path to what McCann and Pearlman describe for therapists exposed to others' trauma (vicarious trauma) – beginning feeling competent, gradually declining as their mental representation of the world deteriorates, struggling through the bottom as they work through an identity crisis unable to account for the profound differences between their own experience and that of their clients, and a gradual emergence with a new working map for how the world works that includes both their own, as well as their clients' lived experiences (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). As such, one may be able to conceive of vicarious trauma as cross-cultural work between someone who has not experienced trauma, with someone who has. The resulting identity crisis is similar to culture shock in no longer having a meaningful frame of reference or way to conceptualize or organize the world in meaningful ways (see Chapter 6 for more on this).

There have been many critiques of the U-Curve and W-Curve (Chien, 2016; Nash, 1991), highlighting that not everyone experiences culture shock, and those who do experience differing degrees. Zhou et al. demonstrate that different branches of psychology that have applied various theories to culture shock – grief; locus of control; selective migration; expectations; negative life-events; social support; value difference; and social skills and cultural learning models (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 64). They state that current theories focus more on the process of acculturation and adaptation to a new culture, citing Berry's model of acculturation.

Berry's model of acculturation looks at acculturation strategies, and perceptions of high or low participation in both the host and heritage cultures. Creating a 2x2 grid of high vs. low competence in the host culture and high vs. low relevance of heritage cultures in daily life,

results in the four quadrants that Berry names integration (high competence/relevance in both host and heritage cultures), assimilation (high competence in host culture, low relevance of heritage culture), separation (low competence in host culture, high relevance of heritage culture) and marginalization (low competence/relevance in both host and heritage cultures). Berry sees these as strategies rather than stages, arguing that while some progress through, some continue to use the same strategy long-term. He also argues that each of these acculturation strategies correspond to the larger societal attitude towards refugees: an integration strategy denotes a multiculturalism value where heritage cultures are welcome; an assimilation strategy corresponds to a melting pot conceptualization where the host culture is predominant and heritage cultures are muted; a separation strategy coincides with segregation; and marginalization occurs with exclusion strategies from the host country (Berry, 2008). Berry's research identifies a correlation between the refugees who use an integration strategy (high participation in both the host culture and their heritage culture) and high scores of wellbeing as well as positive mental health.

This acculturation lens is an important addition to peacebuilding literature helping us understand potential identity struggles as one migrates to a new culture. Failure to account for the impact of shifts in cultural identity highlights the privilege of mainstream ideologies that individualize and problematize challenges adjusting to a new culture. Peacebuilding's stance on understanding the perspective of all parties involved requires us to look at each person's relationship with their cultural identities from the perspective of the person involved. Building on the awareness of pre-migration trauma, acknowledging the stress and acculturation challenges during the migration and post-migration phases, is an important consideration to the experiences of Newcomer workers in the settlement sector. It is useful to consider how workers' own

settlement stress and process affect their relationship with their work, with their organization, with their clients, and how their clients' acculturation processes affect the workers.

Identity, Intersectionality, Power and Discrimination

This section considers concepts of identity, intersectionality, power and discrimination to better understand possible changes in identity that Newcomer workers in the settlement sector may go through and the impact that experiences of racism and discrimination based on those identities may have on them. I also ponder my own relationship with my identities and status as an outgroup researcher and an ally, considering my own privilege relative to the participants.

Celia Cook-Huffman states, "identities are complex, historically bound, socially constructed and thus ever moving." (2009, p. 19) and that identities shift in their salience in the moment depending on the context. Vamik Volkan argues that individual and collective identities increase or decrease in salience depending on the level of threat to the larger group (Volkan, 2013). Cook-Huffman cites Burton and Rubenstein to argue that identity is a core human need, and that both individual and collective identity needs can fuel protracted conflicts on individual and national levels (Cook-Huffman, 2009, p. 22). Karina Korostelina agrees and developed a model that shows how groups move from identity (which by itself does not cause conflict) to a political interest which does (Korostelina, 2009, p. 101). Korostelina argues that once an identity group has developed a political interest, conflicts quickly become protracted. It is essential to be aware of how individual and collective identities form, move in and out of salience depending on the context, and how they may move to rigid identities and political interests which fuel protracted conflicts to consider the complex relationships between Newcomer workers, their clients, the organization, and each other.

Building on the idea that we hold multiple identities, and that identities coalesce or go latent depending on their relevance in the moment, Beverly Tatum (Tatum, 2013) argues that we typically claim the identities that contrast us with the larger group. While one could argue that it is less meaningful to claim identities that confirm our status with the larger group, and that these identities are less relevant at that moment leaving them to be un-claimed (Volkan, 2013), Tatum shows how it is precisely because identities are meaningful that they are left unspoken. Tatum argues that it is the privilege of the majority group to assume that their identity is universal. This assumption of universality, an experience of the privilege of having your own identity group reflected back to you sufficiently that you don't even notice it or claim it, creates meaningful distinctions between in-group and out-group experiences.

In considering how we hold multiple identities, it is important to ground the discussion in the concept of intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Collins, 1998; 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989), writing within the legal field in the United States, surveyed case law at the time to highlight how various arguments were made before the courts to address discrimination based on intersections of both race and gender, and how in case after case the courts failed to understand the compounded impact of racism and gender discrimination. Collins (2015) articulates the challenge in the field to fully understand that intersectionality is the impact of experiences of marginalization based on “race, class and gender” rather than “race *or* class *or* gender” (p.2). Multiple marginalized identities further marginalize us in each of our identity groups creating a compounded isolation and vulnerability, as is described by all the participants in this study about their experiences as Newcomer women, and by the 2SLGBTQ+ participants about their experiences of homophobia/transphobia within Newcomer communities.

Jackson and Hardiman (Jackson & Hardiman, 1997) created a model to show the development process of social identities. They describe how individuals move from a naïve state where they are unaware of group identity and norms; through passive and active acceptance of membership in the group and passive and active resistance to oppressive hierarchies related to that group; to a redefinition of the meaning of their membership in that group and an eventual internalization and integration of that group membership into their identity. Jackson and Hardiman's model highlights the similar process for membership in both agent and target groups, but show how agents and targets experience the stages differently.

Goodman compares Hardiman and Jackson's model with Janet Helms' six stage model focussing on the development of racial identity for White agents (Goodman, 2011, p. 47). Helms' model moves from the contact stage; through disintegration where people begin to be aware of their own belief systems, prejudice and bias; into reintegration where there is a resurgence of White identity; onto pseudo-independence where they challenge the dominant racial hierarchy; and into immersion and eventually autonomy where personal responsibility and accountability manifest and a new racial identity not based on oppression is integrated.

Bobbie Harro also looks at social identity development and has developed the cycle of socialization and the cycle of liberation to show how we become indoctrinated into mainstream definitions of social identities, and how we begin to resist and develop our own identity definitions. Harro argues that humans are immersed in social identities from birth and that whether we want to or not, we are conditioned by them, noting that this process is, "pervasive, consistent, circular, self-perpetuating, and often invisible" (Harro, 2013, p. 45). I believe that this is a key difference between Tatum's discussion of identity, and Harro's. Tatum talks about the choices people make in claiming identity or group membership publicly, and how privilege

informs this choice. While there are some group identities we may choose, Harro highlights how group membership is given to us based on personal characteristics whether we choose it or not. The involuntary nature of these social identities requires the individual to make sense of their relationship with the identity and the larger context and social hierarchy that it is contained within.

Harro's cycle of socialization depicts how individuals are socialized to understand themselves and their world based on organized social identities; how the cycle is self-reinforcing; how it is maintained by "ignorance, insecurity, confusion, obliviousness, [and] fear" (Harro, 2013, p. 46); and how people begin to challenge the process. Starting at birth, Harro identifies that the first socialization is through our family and close connections and it shapes our belief system, how we view ourselves and others, and our values. Within this stage people have a number of incongruent experiences where they come up against established belief structures that don't match their own experience of themselves. The resulting confusion helps strengthen their original social experiences of their prescribed identity. The second wave is our experiences in the world at large and with social institutions as we witness how we and others are valued differently, and take in continuous messaging about ourselves and other identity groups. Harro states that the outcome of the two waves is a powerful construction of social reality that undermines people with either target or agent identities. Identifying that people do have choice and can challenge the system or stay silent, Harro depicts how the cycle perpetuates through collective inaction and participation as each individual becomes the family or social context that helps define others' identities.

While social systems are powerful, and build in negative feedback loops to minimize change to the system, individuals do have choices and can attempt to resist the social forces that

define and perpetuate identity groups. Harro highlights how exception experiences – ones that are discordant with the social hierarchy – can serve as a catalyst for challenging the belief system. Those who put energy into this resistance begin the cycle of liberation.

Harro defines liberation as “critical transformation” (Harro, 2013, p. 52) and links it to Paulo Freire’s work of conscientization. Beginning with a critical incident Harro refers to as “waking up” (Harro, 2013, p. 53), Harro shows how people begin to create supportive connections, empower themselves and challenge what they have been taught about their identity. The process moves forwards from an intrapersonal level of resistance to an interpersonal one as people begin to stand up and “speak truth to power” (American Friends Service Committee, 1962). Through engaging oppression in their social context and increasing their assertiveness, people begin to build relationships and community with others who can help support this new sense of identity. The process continues with the communities coming together, organizing, educating and providing support to others challenging the status quo. The result of this process is transformation of social institutions and identities and beliefs, re-shaping how others are socialized in the first place. While Harro identifies the socialization process as being maintained by ignorance and fear, the cycle of liberation is maintained by “self-love, hope, self-esteem, balance, joy, support, security, spiritual base, [and] authentic love of others” (Harro, 2013, p. 53).

These processes of identity formation, awareness and transformation are important to consider as participants have potentially moved from regions where their social identities are rooted in different social hierarchies and experiences of privilenge and marginalization than what they are encountering in their region in Canada. Exposure to Canadian socialization processes on social identities will impact their sense of their own social identities and pre-migration socialization experiences, and act upon their sense of their identities.

Considering the context of the participants of this research, we need to integrate the processes above of acculturation with the literature on identity formation. While Berry demonstrates how the relationship between the host culture and the heritage culture impacts wellbeing, we need to remember that the identity socialization and liberation process that Harro describes impacts Newcomers as part of their acculturation process as they are taught what their identities mean in the context of the new culture, creating new cycles of identity formation which may be dissonant with how they viewed their own identities pre-migration. Some of the participants describe experiencing racism for the first time in coming to Canada and these experiences change their perceptions of themselves and their identity, and their sense of security and wellbeing in the community.

Allies across Identity Groups

While much of the writing on identity theory charts our experiences with our own identity group, Harro includes being an ally to other groups as part of the cycle of liberation. Many authors have written about allies and allyship (Bishop, 2015; Goodman, 2011; Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016; Case, 2012, 2015; Hesch, 2016; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; Gonzalez, Riggle, & Rostosky, 2015; Perrin, Bhattacharyya, Snipes, Calton, & Heesacker, 2014). In her book, *Becoming an Ally*, Bishop defines the role of the ally as "a collective process of taking responsibility for privilege, guided by those who are a target of that form of oppression and firmly rooted in a structural analysis." (Bishop, 2015, p. 103) and that it is always a state of becoming rather than an outcome, implying that we should actually be talking about the process of allying rather than being one.

I believe the concept of an ally is at the heart of peacebuilding and informs my understanding of my relationship with my participants as well as helps me think through choices

in my role as a researcher. I believe it also can serve as a guide to the workers' relationships across identity groups with some of their clients. Finding a way to join with another in their struggle for justice, dignity and resources in a way that acknowledges differences, lends power but doesn't override their voice is an active peacebuilding intervention resulting from understanding of oppression and social identities. From a research perspective, I believe that there is significant overlap between the idea of being an ally and enacting PAR - a connection which I believe roots PAR itself as a peacebuilding intervention.

Goodman talks about channelling guilt about privilege positively, harnessing it to build allies stating, "After consciousness-raising and motivating, we need to help people from privileged groups find ways to create change. When students feel empowered to challenge bias and inequality, it reduces feelings of guilt and helplessness" (Goodman, 2011, p. 157). Goodman names the previous discussion on altruistic actions and states that regardless of the motives, whether it is empathy based (see Batson & Shaw, 1991a, 1991b), out of principles of justice and moral good (see Eisenberg, 1991), or self-motivated to alleviate guilt, all can be a catalyst for engaging social justice (Goodman, 2011), and challenging the dominant power structures that support oppression (Harro, 2013). Goodman argues that regardless of motives, allies understand that all acts challenging oppression liberate both the ally and members of marginalized groups as the engage social justice principles. However, Goodman cautions that the core motivation for being an ally can create difficulties. Goodman highlights that self-interested allies typically act to maintain their own power and defend specific individuals that they care about but lack the larger understanding of systemic inequalities. She contrasts this with altruistic allies who often cast themselves in a rescuer role, acting paternalistically but seeking approval from the marginalized group members – risking burnout. In contrast to these two motivations, Goodman identifies the

core qualities of allies who are motivated by social justice (the argument of Nancy Eisenberg (1991)) which include: "knowledge of the oppression, …self-awareness, …humility, …non-defensiveness, …ability to choose appropriate action, …commitment to stay conscious and engaged, …[and] accountability" (Goodman, 2011, p. 158). I appreciate the attention to the congruence of belief and action – and relate this back to the concept of praxis – actions informed by theory. When there is congruence between what we believe, our motivation to act, and our behaviour, we send a clear message to those we are with. When our motivation clouds our beliefs or undermines our actions, we create tension within ourselves that undermines our transparency in our relationships. This belief in the importance of congruence requires significant inner work on the part of peacebuilders, and is directly related to researchers' use of critical reflexivity (Pillow, 2013).

In the discussion on allyship, it is easy to fall into simplistic understandings of oppression and ignore the nuanced and complex relationships each identity group has with each other and society as a whole. Audre Lorde (1996) argues passionately that there is no 'hierarchy of oppressions' and that all oppressions diminish all of us, and leave any of us vulnerable to oppression. While allyship is often discussed as members of dominant groups supporting those of marginalized groups (Case, 2012; Droogendyk et al., 2016; Hesch, 2016), and indeed, Perrin et al. (2014) use Broido's definition of allies as "members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Broido, 2000, p. 3); their research identified that those who experienced marginalization in other aspects of their identity were more likely to engage social justice behaviour for members of other disadvantaged groups where they experience relative privilege. So, while we often write about allyship as a person

from a dominant group working towards social justice for a marginalized person, the reality is the majority of this work is carried out by those who experience marginalization working for justice for other marginalized groups. Audre Lorde gives voice to this experience as she writes, "I cannot afford to choose between the fronts upon which I must battle these forces of discrimination, wherever they appear to destroy me. And when they appear to destroy me, it will not be long before they appear to destroy you" (Lorde, 1996, p. 51).

Confronting oppression is meaningful work, and exhausting. While Lorde writes that she cannot afford to choose between the fronts, there are many who burn out from these struggles, face isolation and depression, and give up. Even when the challenge to oppression is meaningful and has positive results, there are a full range of impacts on those who fight oppression, or support those who have been victimized by it. In considering the application of these concepts to my participants, there is a full range of identity effects that participants discuss. It also serves to understand the politics between workers and supervisors or settlement workers and government policies, or Newcomer workers and their Canadian born colleagues, let alone other group divisions between Newcomer workers themselves. While I have done a deeper exploration into allyship in this literature review (privileging seeking to understand my role and relationship with the participants), one aspect that was missing and may need to be addressed in future research is lateral violence between members of marginalized groups. In focussing on allyship, I made assumptions about mutual support between Newcomer workers rather than the potential of difficult relationships across identity groups between the workers as Cook-Huffman (2009) and Korostelina (2009) caution. As the workers themselves described their experiences, this was an error (see Chapter 6).

Wellbeing and Resilience - Individual and community

This section first explores the literature connecting wellbeing with refugee experiences, then explores the theoretical literature on individual and collective notions of resilience. Diener & Ryan (2009) define subjective wellbeing as an umbrella term referring to a personal awareness of a complex series of forces acting on an individual in many spheres of life, as well as an overall sense of their own emotional, mental, spiritual and physical health. Richardson describes resilience as our abilities to reintegrate following disruptions (Richardson, 2002, p. 308), and Bos et al. (2016) differentiate well-being from resilience arguing that well-being is a subjective sense of health that is more than just our abilities to recover after a traumatic experience (i.e. resilience). Growing out of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), there has been considerable research into wellbeing and what helps refugees thrive after resettlement. Across these studies, significant themes emerged that related subjective wellbeing in refugees with social connectedness, security, family connectedness, housing, stable income and a sense of community (Martin-Willett et al.,2019; Khawaja et al., 2017; Correa-Velez et al., 2015; El-Bialy & Mulay, 2015; Mosselson et al.; 2017; Davidson et al., 2008; Zwi et al., 2017; Kahn et al., 2017; Berry & Hou, 2016; Chase, 2013).

Research specific to resilience itself is divided into two frameworks: research into personal resilience growing out of the positive psychology movement; and, research into community or collective resilience coming from an ecological perspective. Both of these perspectives are important to consider as we explore the experiences of the workers collectively and individually.

Within the individual resilience research, Richardson identified that there have been three waves of resilience research at the time of his writing: understanding and identifying protective

factors; how people use their resiliency in times of distress; individual explorations of the struggle to thrive through adversity. In his own model, Richardson identified how individual outcomes to crisis can include emerging more dysfunctionally, back to homeostasis, or with increased resilience (Richardson, 2002, p. 311).

Luthar et al. (2000a, 2000b) critiqued the construct of resilience and identified challenges in the field with how the term has taken on multiple meanings resulting in confusion between regarding resilience as an end state or the process of engaging adversity in resilient ways (Luthar et al., 2000a, pp. 544-545). He highlights this as a meaningful distinction, as looking at resilience as an end-state and simply finding those who score high on wellbeing does not necessarily imply resilience as these individuals may be high wellbeing in a low adversity context. Similar to Berry and Hou's research (2016) into acculturation strategies and their impact on resilience for refugees, Luthar et al. implied that it is how individuals engage their resilience factors (the process of resilience) that is more meaningful than the factors themselves (i.e. someone may have resources they choose not to use, limiting their effectiveness as factors for resilience). Friedman and Robbins (2012) picked up this critique of early resilience research and link it with other positive psychology research which sees resilience as a trait that can be taught as opposed to being in context with other strengths and elements in the environmental context, and challenging the field to think beyond traits and wellbeing based on pleasure to a more nuanced understanding of meaningful engagement.

Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) continued this discussion of resilience as either a trait or a process, challenging the trait theory as it implies that people either have it or don't. Rather, Fletcher and Sarkar argued that resilience can be used contextually or not, and what can support resilience in one context, may be useless in another.

Other research into resilience includes: Keles et al. (2018) who looked at resilience and acculturation among refugee youth; Lakioti et al. (2020) and Hou and Skovholt (2019) who explored resilience factors for therapists; Bonanno (2005) who highlighted that resilience rather than trauma is the most common reaction to disaster; Bonanno et al. (2006, 2007) who looked at resilience factors post 9/11 in the United States; Chen and Bonanno (2020) and PeConga et al. (2020) who looked at resilience during the recent COVID-19 pandemic; Anyan et al. (2020) who evaluated the Resilience Scale for Adults; Shenesey and Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2015) who looked at impacts and resilience for community members living on the shoreline near the Deepwater Horizon Oil disaster; Milstein (2019) who explored the complex role religion played in personal responses to potentially traumatizing events, finding that it can both be an inhibitor and an enabler of resilience; Brown et al. (2012) who explored the dynamics of complex PTSD and how these symptoms usually excluded survivors from resilience research and sees resilience as a complex relationship between protective and risk factors; Rolbiecki et al. (2017) who looked at the use of resilience during experiences of chronic pain; Straud et al. (2018) who looked at the connection between resilience and PTSD, depression and sleep for firefighter paramedics; and Munoz et al. (2019) who looked at resilience in trauma survivors.

Raghavan and Sandanapitchai (2020) come from the social-ecological view of resilience and criticized the individual psychological view of resilience as being construct of western individualistic cultures. Supporting a community/collective view of resilience, they performed a literature review of thirty articles identifying cultural resilience factors finding themes of cultural values, community and social support are necessary for building resilience within communities affected by trauma.

There are a number of other authors exploring resilience from a collective viewpoint. Irwin Sandler (2001) looked at the ability to meet basic human needs across individual and macro-systemic levels and identified resilience resources as either preventive, protective or promotive; Kristen Magis explored thirteen projects connected to community resilience and defined community resilience as, "…the existence, development and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise" (Magis, 2010, p. 402). Focussing on a community's ability to adapt to change as opposed to controlling change, Magis identified community resources as combination of natural capital, human capital, cultural capital, financial capital and social capital and developed an eight dimension self-assessment tool for communities to look at their own resilience. Sonn and Fisher (1998) adopted the same idea as Bonanno (2005) that resilience is the most common outcome from adversity rather than trauma but they apply it to communities instead of individuals. They showed how a sense of community and cultural identity contributes to increased resilience and cite Berry's research on cultural adaptation, showing how his four strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization) are connected to resilience outcomes.

Drury et al. (2015, 2019) looked at how the salience of collective social identity is increased during times of collective distress, and how the increase in group identity corresponded to increases in senses of safety and trust in the group (Drury et al., 2015, p. 533). These conclusions, while coming from the perspective of collective resilience echo the conclusions of Volkan (see above) who was focussed on community responses to trauma and found the salience of the group identity during times of stress became more meaningful than individual identity

(Volkan, 2001, 2013). Where Drury et al. found increases in resilience, Volkan warned of the potential for increases in polarization of identity groups.

Several researchers have taken this awareness of the polarization of identity groups and have identified peacemaking strategies to increase collective resilience while de-escalating polarization between groups. Matthews (2020), who comes from the socio-ecological view of resilience, identifies diversity, redundancy, openness, reserves, feedback and monitoring systems and trust as resilience factors; highlighting that more resilient communities allow for openness and diversity and that these are not perceived as threats to the community. Machinga and Friedman (2013), recognizing polarization and the need to work on increasing resilience on both sides of a conflict, developed a model for their healing and reconciliation interventions in Zimbabwe, promoting peace and community resilience. They identified that it was essential to recognize cultural differences in their model and published different versions for Christian and Traditional communities. Clark et al. (2018) explored similar strategies on micro-level collective resilience, showing how communication and organizational patterns contributed to family resilience for military families facing deployment.

Lyons et al. (2016) and Berkes and Ross (2013) advocate for integrating the divide in the wellbeing and resilience literature between the individual and collective frames. Lyons et al. looked at the interplay of collective resilience and personal wellbeing and used the Fletcher-Lyons Collective Resilience Scale. Berkes and Ross advocated for an integrated approach of personal and collective resilience, and stated that communities made up of resilient people are more likely to be resilient at a community level as well, and see personal, family and collective resilience as all combining to create community resilience.

Survivor Guilt and Privilege Guilt

Building from a grounding in resilience and wellbeing, and acknowledging the impacts of migration and acculturation stress I wanted to consider how cultural identity and migration experience changes the relationship the Newcomer workers may have to the work they do with other Newcomers.

For workers in the settlement sector who were born in Canada, there is often an experience of privilege guilt – coming face to face with the inequities and privileges their lives have provided them in an industrialized nation without a war on its own soil for 150 years. Goodman discussed guilt coming from privilege and highlights that it can be a barrier to helping others as those from dominant groups may become overwhelmed and shut down because of it, and that as they are from dominant groups, they hold the privilege to "opt out" (Goodman, 2011, p. 163). Goodman also sees the potential to harness the guilt about privilege towards creating allyship and motivating change behaviours.

In contrast to privilege guilt, Puvimanasinghe et al. identified "altruism born of suffering" (Puvimanasinghe et al., 2015, p.749) as a key motivator for workers in the settlement sector in Australia who are refugees themselves, which coincides with the concept of survivor's guilt. Ayalon, Perry, Arean, and Horowitz (2007) explored the term 'survivor's guilt', and looked at the moral reasoning of five holocaust survivors before, during and after the second world war.

Robert Lifton worked extensively with survivors of violence and trauma, including survivors of both Auschwitz and Hiroshima. In Cathy Caruth's interview with him (Caruth, 1991), Lifton spoke eloquently about the impact of violence and death on survivors, and their need to numb themselves from the feelings of what they have experienced. He explained that rather than attributing blame to those who perpetrated the attacks, survivors often misattribute

the blame, owning guilt for themselves for having survived where others have not. Rather than experiencing survivor's guilt, he argued that survivors need to take appropriate responsibility and bear true witness to what they experienced, deriving meaning and purpose to their experiences. This interview between Caruth and Lifton occurred around the same time as McCann and Pearlman's original article about vicarious trauma, and in the interview Lifton explained a very similar process of how therapists, in coming face to face with the reality of death that the survivor has experienced, become overwhelmed and reject it unconsciously as a means to defend themselves from their client's reality. Rather than doing this however, Lifton argued that therapists need to be able to experience the full story, including the pain, to the point that they too are a "survivor by proxy" (Caruth, 1991, p. 173).

Wayment (2004), studied survivor guilt in university students who vicariously witnessed the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. Wayment cited Lifton and argued that pro-social helping behaviours come from survivor's guilt, and found that these were effective in helping manage the distress of the university students in her sample.

In my previous work, I witnessed countless hours of unpaid overtime that Newcomer workers put in to help their communities, and the joy and meaning they felt from being able to do it (see Chapter 5 for similar examples from this study's participants). Victor Frankl looked at experiences of suffering as a prisoner of a concentration camp during World War II, and argued that the purpose and meaning behind our suffering was essential for our ability to survive through it. He argued that if suffering was meaningful, we experienced the pain differently, but when we lost sight of any purpose in our suffering, the smallest amount of pain could become insufferable (Frankl, 2006). I applied Frankl's concept of meaning in suffering to the concept of

survivor's guilt and wondered for the workers in this study with survivor's guilt, if working with others could be a process that makes their own sacrifices and pain meaningful.

Piorkowski applied survivor's guilt to first generation university students whose "survival had been purchased at the cost of another's" (Piorkowski, 1983, p. 620). Piorkowski found that these students often experienced a range of emotional and academic challenges, and while initially supported by their families, became distant from them – no longer being able to share experiences and language and experiencing loss through class change. Tate, Williams, and Hardin (2013) united Piokowski's work with Frankl's understanding of meaning in suffering to use meaning-based therapy to help students manage their guilt at leaving friends and family behind.

Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Related Concepts

Having looked at resilience, the impacts of migration and acculturation, and the differences between survivor's guilt and privilege guilt, we now consider the mainstream literature on burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and the more recent vicarious resilience and vicarious post traumatic growth. It is important to note that for the vast majority of these studies, race and culture were not considered, or if they were, they were only considered as client experiences rather than as clinician experiences. The research on all of these concepts primarily assumed a western, educated, clinician being impacted by the work they do.

While the concept of clinicians being affected by their clients has been with us for the history of psychology (see Eleftheriadou, 1999; for a discussion of the history of countertransference), the process through which clinicians begin to show symptoms of PTSD after working with survivors of trauma was coined vicarious trauma by McCann and Pearlman in

1990. McCann and Pearlman reasoned that a major effect of trauma was the disruption of cognitive schemas – resilient beliefs about how the world operated, who could be trusted, what happened in relationships, social roles, etc. They theorized that therapists might experience their own disruptions to their cognitive schemas as they encountered the traumatic experiences of their clients. What McCann and Pearlman found was that as therapists in their study witnessed clients' experiences outside of the therapist's frame of understanding, the severity of the violence and trauma shattered the therapists' internal working models. McCann and Pearlman argued that this was an identity crisis where the therapist no longer had a coherent understanding of self, other or how the world worked.

McCann and Pearlman explored the concept of countertransference and Figley's concept of secondary victimization (Figley, 1983, in McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p. 135) whereby individuals close to survivors with PTSD begin to exhibit symptoms similar to the primary victim, and argued that these processes affect therapists as well. McCann and Pearlman differentiated their work from the concept of burnout, acknowledging links but demonstrated that vicarious trauma is more than just burnout. The concept of burnout in the literature originated with Freudenberger in the 1970's and includes symptoms of sadness, loss of passion, fatigue, irritability, boredom, resistance to change, blaming and critical defensiveness and an increase in work but decrease in productivity (Freudenberger, 1977). Freudenberger highlighted that levels of burnout can gradually build over time so that individuals themselves are often unaware of their own levels of severity. He stated that burnout is caused by overcommitment to work and seeking gratification through work rather than other avenues in life. McCann and Pearlman described how working clinically with those who have experienced trauma may lead to burnout, but differentiated burnout from vicarious trauma as vicarious trauma includes unique impacts

such as: changes in comfort with trust; feelings of safety/vulnerability; sense of powerlessness; impacts to their autonomy, self-esteem and independence; increasing isolation; disruptions to frames of reference and memory/imagery systems in the mind (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, pp. 138-142).

McCann and Pearlman believed that these impacts are pervasive as they affect the whole of the therapist's experience, not just their clinical work; cumulative, as each encounter with a client's traumatic story challenges their identity and world view, building on previous encounters, and are likely to be permanent as therapists do not seem to revert back to previous worldviews even after integration of the experiences (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p. 136).

Dunkley and Whelan (2006) expanded on McCann and Pearlman's theory and discussed how the confluence of internal (counter-transference) and external (burnout) contexts couple with empathic engagement to create a perfect storm for clinicians. They addressed the overlap between compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002; Gentry, 2002) and vicarious trauma, but differentiated them as vicarious trauma is more associated on symptoms of trauma than compassion fatigue is, and is also a less confusing term than secondary traumatic stress. Dunkley and Whelan identified that through vicarious trauma, clinicians experience disruptions to their inner working models, memory, physical, and, emotional effects similar to PTSD's intrusive and avoidant clusters of symptoms. Dunkley and Whelan also highlighted that the existing research regarding if a personal trauma history makes one more vulnerable to vicarious trauma, has mixed results.

Crystal Park's and Susan Folkman's (1997) work on the role of meaning during times of stress deepens our understanding of McCann and Pearlman's theory of impacts to cognitive schemas. Park and Folkman differentiated between global meaning-making and situational

meaning-making arguing that when our global meaning schemas are challenged by our situational meaning making, we experience an internal incongruence based on “discontinuity, incoherence, unpredictability, and feelings of loss or absence of control” (Park & Folkman, 1997, p. 124). This concept relates directly with McCann and Pearlman’s description of disruption to cognitive schemas.

While other researchers build on McCann and Pearlman’s work to highlight the potential for positive growth through clinical work with survivors of trauma (Arnold et al., 2005; Barrington & Shakespeare-Finch, 2013; Engstrom et al., 2008; Frey et al., 2017; Hernandez, Engstrom & Gangsei, 2010; Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2015; Killian et al., 2017; Pack, 2014; Silveira & Boyer, 2015; Puvimanasinghe et al., 2015; Shakespeare-Finch & Barrington, 2012); it is important to acknowledge that growth through witnessing healing from trauma is included in the original work by McCann and Pearlman as well. McCann and Pearlman ended their article stating, “although we may be sadder but wiser, it is important to acknowledge the many ways this important work has enriched our own lives as well as countless others” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p. 147).

Vicarious Post Traumatic Growth & Vicarious Resilience

Two related concepts developed simultaneously to look at the positive aspects of clinicians’ work with traumatized individuals – vicarious post traumatic growth (Arnold et al., 2005) and vicarious resilience.

In 2007, Hernandez, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2007) developed the term vicarious resilience to describe the positive benefits clinicians experienced through their work with trauma survivors (Edelkott, Engstrom, Hernandez-Wolfe, & Gangsei, 2016; Engstrom, Hernandez, & Gangsei, 2008; Hernandez, Gangsei, & Engstrom, 2007; Hernandez-Wolfe, Killian, Engstrom &

Gangsei, 2015; Killian, Hernandez-Wolfe, Engstrom & Gangsei, 2017). They credited the concept to earlier research by Engstrom in 2004, and see it as stemming from the work on vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, empathic stress, and secondary traumatic stress. In a later article (Killian et al., 2017) the team differentiated the concept of vicarious resilience from Arnold's vicarious post traumatic growth highlighting that vicarious resilience does not require the pre-existence of trauma in clients in order for a clinician to experience the positive benefits of the work with clients. Killian et al. defined the elements of vicarious resilience as including: "reflecting on human beings' capacity to heal"; "being inspired by clients' recovery from severe traumas"; "reaffirming the value of therapy"; "reassessing the dimensions of one's own problems"; and, "valuing spiritual dimensions of healing and recovery" (Killian et al., 2017, p. 24). In research comparing the concept of vicarious resilience with vicarious post traumatic growth, compassion fatigue and burnout, they established that while vicarious resilience correlated with vicarious post traumatic growth as they anticipated, it did not correlate with compassion fatigue or burnout, establishing vicarious resilience as a separate concept (Killian et al., 2017).

Hernandez-Wolfe et al. (2015) addressed intersectionality and vicarious resilience in a small grounded theory study of clinicians who work with torture survivors in the United States, advocating for clinicians to be reflexive and look at their own intersectionality in order to relate with their clients. While I applaud their investigation of power and privilege and how it affects the helping relationship, their sample included thirteen clinicians from European descent and one person who identified as south-Asian. While it was titled "Vicarious resilience, vicarious trauma and awareness of equity in trauma work" it was written assuming privileged clinicians working cross-culturally with those who have experienced torture, and encouraged clinicians to consider

their own privilege and the different intersectional identities of their clients. I was shocked that there did not seem to be any awareness that clinicians' own intersectional identities would be meaningful or relevant, or that clinicians may have their own significant experiences of marginalization.

Applying These Concepts to Settlement Sector Workers

There is a small but growing body of research that applies concepts of vicarious trauma, vicarious resilience and post traumatic growth to those who work with refugees, and only a few of these acknowledge that workers themselves may be Newcomers. Eleftheriadou (1999) applied the concept of countertransference to clinicians who work with refugees highlighting that the majority of those who work with immigrants and refugees are immigrants and refugees themselves, and that because of this, it changes the nature of the work for them and puts them at risk for over-identification and issues related to guilt. Finklestein et al. (2015) did a quantitative study of PTSD and vicarious trauma for mental health professionals working with people who had experienced missile attacks in the Gaza Strip and found a correlation between PTSD and vicarious trauma. Iyamuremye and Brysiewicz (2015) used action research to develop an intervention model for mental health workers dealing with secondary traumatic stress in Rwanda highlighting the need for prevention work (increasing awareness and connection between workers); mindfulness; self-assessment; organizational assessment; and treatment including personal self-care and therapy. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015) identified their research as the first in Australia to look at the impact on clinicians working with refugees and asylum seekers and experiences of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience. Approximately 20% of their sample were workers who are refugees themselves. Barrington and Shakespeare-Finch (2013) expanded the concepts of vicarious trauma and vicarious post traumatic growth to those who work with

refugees, and identify through their research that: clinicians develop vicarious trauma before developing vicarious post traumatic growth; that client stories are the main cause of vicarious trauma; and, that active meaning-making is necessary for vicarious post traumatic growth. Changes they saw related to vicarious post traumatic growth include changes in life philosophy including gratitude, openness, changes to spirituality and connection to others; changes in self-perception including confidence and personal strength; and changes in interpersonal relationships including having fewer but deeper connections and taking more assertive stances in relationships.

I have found a single study (grounded theory, mixed methods) by Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011), with a small sample, in one refugee agency in the United Kingdom, which applied the concepts of vicarious trauma, vicarious resilience, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction and burnout to non-clinical support workers working with refugees (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani, 2011). This study validates the need for more exploration of these concepts with non-clinical staff. The study had a sample size of twelve, seven of which were of white British origin, the other five were either Indian, Pakistani, Kurdish and African heritage. There was no exploration how differences within the group of cultural heritage or identity, experiences of past trauma, or immigration experiences, or how these factors may affect the impact of their work with refugees. Still, it expands the concepts of vicarious trauma and resilience, among others, to non-clinical staff working with Newcomers.

While no study combined all the factors, integrating across these studies, the concepts of vicarious trauma and vicarious post-traumatic growth have been applied to those who work with immigrants and refugees, who are non-clinical staff, and are immigrants and refugees themselves from developing nations.

Conclusion

I believe it is a good sign that the literature review that I would do at the end of this research is different than the literature review that I engaged at the beginning of the research. In keeping with the CR view of knowledge creation, I have looked to a breadth of possible factors to consider in various fields, and to the depth of literature produced in many of the key constructs, and held them as potential representations of knowledge, but I am aware that I cannot claim it is ever a complete process. I have not done an exhaustive dive into all the possible factors that exist in reality, and I am limited by my understandings, bias and experience. This is to say that I believe the preceding review of the current literature grounds my research in current theories and understandings of many of the factors potentially affecting my participants, and I acknowledge that there is also literature that would need to be considered if the research was to expand into further cycles, and I would want participants to be involved in that exploration.

As I progressed through the cycles of research, I have identified more areas to consider. The largest gap in my literature review was the limited focus on lateral violence between marginalized communities. While I explored the work of Vamik Volkan (2001, 2013), Cook-Huffman (2009), Korostelina (2009), Drury et al. (2015, 2019), and Tatum (2013), to explore how concepts of personal and group identities form in contrast to others in groups around us, my focus in that section was on liberation from socialization and marginalization based on identity group membership and the literature on allyship. Future work in this context should continue to review theories of lateral violence between members of marginalized groups and strategies for overcoming it.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019, p.183), the purpose of this section is to explain the process of my research and account for every step of my decision-making. This chapter's goals include articulating: the reasoning behind my choice of qualitative methods and approach; how participant selection was undertaken; the reasoning behind my research design; how I collected the data and why; decision-making in data analysis; the ethical challenges I encountered and how I engaged ethical decision-making; how I accounted for trustworthiness in my research; and, my awareness of the limitations of my study and what I did about them. Bloomberg and Volpe's process through this is straightforward, however Herr and Anderson caution that action research cycles typically blur their steps more than other methodologies due to the cyclical nature of the process, and advisory committees that are less familiar with action research may have expectations that fit with other methodologies better. They particularly caution the reality of collaborating with participants and how this often changes the research from what is proposed (2015, p. 89).

Paradigmatic, Theoretical, Methodological Framework

Research Question

My methodological framework was chosen to fit with the aims of my project which are captured in the research questions:

1. What are the forces affecting the wellbeing of Newcomer workers in a Canadian settlement sector organization?
2. How can the organization respond in ways that enhance wellbeing for Newcomer staff?

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

My goal for this research is to better understand the experience of workers in a settlement sector organization who are Newcomers themselves, and the factors that affect their wellbeing. The research is located within the peace and conflict studies field, and is using a critical realist ontology which acknowledges social forces as real and identifies forces of socialization acting upon the individual as well as forces of transformation acting from the individual back onto the larger social structures.

While this research question could be approached through quantitative methods and/or mixed methods approaches, both of these locate the researcher more as expert and the participants as subjects of the research. I am choosing to use a qualitative research methodology to richly explore the participants' experiences, and to preserve, as best as possible, their own voices in the research. This is important as it addresses errors in my previous work and is the work I should have done originally. This choice is also more congruent with the PACS field and opens up the research to the opportunity of being peacebuilding praxis itself.

Participatory Action Research vs. Grounded Theory

Within qualitative research I considered using participatory action research (PAR) and grounded theory (GT). PAR works with a small group to understand their experiences and develop programming concurrently through multiple look-think-act cycles as the group fine tunes the process to meet their needs. GT has a process of constant comparison (Glaser, 2001, 2012, 2016) that mines the data for emergent themes across participants, looking for theory inductively. Where PAR collaborates with the participants and develops action grounded in their

experience, GT looks across participants and seeks to develop a larger theory with a fit grounded in their experiences. Both of these were appealing to me.

As I considered the larger beliefs under these methodologies, tension emerged between modernist and post-modernist ontologies, and my hesitation to engage an expert, colonizing stance in research within a modernist framework. I am aware there was an ego boost as I considered GT and the potential to be the one to name a new theory in the literature. I am also aware that my ego-perspective caused me to look at my own experience first in my previous work and I reasoned that the route for growth for me was to actively get outside of my own experience. In order to do this, I needed to go beyond just asking about others' experiences, to sharing the process and collaborating on what was being asked about and considered.

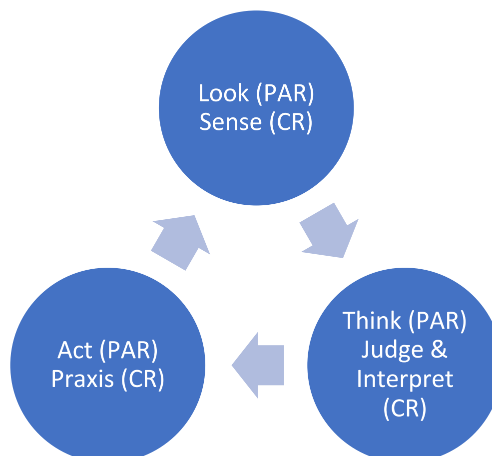
Strauss or Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory attempts to update Glaser's classical grounded theory (Charmaz, 2016; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Hunter et al., 2011) to bring in a postmodernist ontology to GT and while these theories begin to address the modernist/post-modernist debate, they are still focused on theory development. PAR is rooted further into a postmodernist ontology, with a focus on integrating theory and action that is appealing to me, and brings the research more in line with the goals of anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005), and concepts of transformation and praxis in PACS. For all these reasons, I chose to engage my research from a CR ontology and epistemology, and a PAR methodology.

Congruence Between Participatory Action Research and Critical Realism

It was important that my methodology was congruent with the my PACS values, anti-oppressive research and within the ontology – epistemology – methodology chain. I found considerable overlap between PAR and Gary Hawke's summary of Bhaskar's research process of

'sense – judge – interpret' (Hawke, 2017); Bhaskar's emphasis on praxis and action (Bhaskar, 2017); and, anti-oppressive research principles (Potts & Brown, 2005).

Figure 1: ***Comparison of PAR cycle and CR research cycle***



These all tie in congruently with PAR's cycles of look-think-act joining Bhaskar's 'judge' and 'interpret' stages within 'think', and adding his focus on praxis and social justice action into the research process under 'act' (Glassman & Erdem, 2014; Frisby et al, 2005; Mordock & Krasney, 2001; Smith et al., 2017; Starodub, 2019; Stringer, 2014). The core philosophies appear congruent as well, understanding knowledge within local contexts, with all processes benefitting from exploration and revision as we attempt to create change and action.

Fletcher argues that critical realism is a "useful philosophical framework for social science; however, little guidance is available on which precise methods … are best suited to applied CR research" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 181) and offers her article as an example of how she applied critical realism in her Saskatchewan Farm Women's Study. Citing Bhaskar, Fletcher explains that critical realists "begin with a particular problem or question, which has been guided by theory" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 184); however, this theory is held as an initial theory, subject to

critical exploration. Fletcher rooted her work in a number of current theories on farm women's experiences – each which explained a portion of a complex interaction of experiences, then used extensive (broad focused) and intensive (in-depth interviews) data collection methods to identify patterns and demi-regularities. Fletcher argues that critical realists explore the complexity of relationships of underlying causal structures and therefore look for tendencies (structures exerting power) rather than specific causal links. In looking at data analysis methods, Fletcher states that many critical realists use GT, concluding, "grounded theory is not ideal for a CR study" (Fletcher, p. 186). Fletcher's reasons include the avoidance of established theory and the core differences between inductive analysis and retroductive or abductive analyses. Fletcher instead chose Hsieh and Shannon's "deductive yet flexible coding process" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, in Fletcher, 2017) which allowed her to draw on existing theories and literature and update them based on her research.

Craig and Bigby (2015, p 309) similarly conclude – that while CR offers significant advantages for research in the social sciences, highlighting the "emancipatory goal and ontological perspective on both structure and agency," there is a lack of specific methodology to assist researchers in applying CR. Craig and Bigby cite Danermark et al. (2002, in Craig & Bigby, 2015) arguing that it is unnecessary to use a specific methodology under CR, that "established methods should be used in an ontologically consistent way with the underlying philosophy" (Craig & Bigby, 2015, p. 314). They also included Oliver's argument that methodology "would have to be concerned with an explanation of phenomena (not only description), have a social justice aim, and seek to uncover the underlying generative mechanisms that lead to the problem under study" in order to be consistent with CR (Craig & Bigby, 2015, p. 315; Oliver, 2012). Further, Maxwell states that interpretive and participatory

methods are "integral parts of my realist model of research design" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 97) which he identifies as 'systemic' or 'interactive' (2012, p. 77).

While researchers state that it may not be necessary to employ a particular methodology, I found that PAR can work within a CR ontology, and adds specific methodology that is congruent with CR beliefs and anti-oppressive research practices. Stan Houston agrees with this idea and states that action research is the "…method I believe is most appropriate for carrying out research informed by critical realism… because it is directly concerned with emancipatory change and human agency, making it also most relevant to social work" (Houston, 2010, p. 86). Frisby et al. cite Reason and Bradbury's book, *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2001), demonstrating what I would argue is a CR ontology in contrast to positivist and postmodernist ontologies as a base for PAR stating, "a participatory view competes with both the positivism of modern times and with the deconstructive postmodern alternative - and we hold it to be a more adequate and creative paradigm for our times. However, we can also say that it draws on and integrates both paradigms: it follows positivism in arguing that there is a 'real' reality… and draws on the constructionist perspective in acknowledging that as soon as we attempt to articulate this, we enter a world of human language and cultural expression" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 7, in Frisby et al. 2005, p. 368).

Research Design

My initial design was the look and think stages of a PAR cycle, leading towards a post-dissertation action stage. I proposed to work with a group of 8-12 participants in a settlement sector organization using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and envisioned two stages of the research, as follows:

Proposed Stage 1 (Look):

- Participant recruitment (purposeful sampling and snowball sampling) and selection
- Focus group to introduce the project, engage joining, co-create goals, and edit the proposed interview guide
- Semi-structured individual interviews with each focus group participant

Proposed Stage 2 (Think):

- Manual transcription of each interview
- Preliminary coding and organizing of the data including anonymizing
- Member checking individual interviews with each participant
- Combining anonymized data from interviews into aggregate document
- Focus group to analyze data and discuss outcomes and next steps

As discussed below, I had challenges with participant selection and focus group engagement thus altering the path of the research, which ended up being four phases across two PAR cycles:

Actual Phase 1 (Cycle 1 Look and Think):

Phase 1 worked with an initial group of six participants from a settlement sector organization. After a variety of efforts, I was only ever able to get two people into a room at the same time and amended my process to use individual interviews for those unable to make the focus group meeting.

Cycle 1 Look Stage:

- Participant recruitment and selection
- Focus group and 1:1 interviews to introduce the project, engage joining, co-create goals and edit the proposed interview guide
- Semi-structured individual interviews with each participant

Cycle 1 Think Stage:

- Manual transcription of each interview
- Preliminary coding and organizing of the data including anonymizing
- Member checking interviews with each participant individually
- Combining anonymized data from interviews into aggregate document
- Focus group and individual interviews to analyze data and discuss outcomes and next steps

Actual Phase 2 (Cycle 1 Action Stage, Cycle 2 Look Stage)

Due to the limited number of participants in phase 1, I amended my research design to allow for a 2nd phase working with 4 more participants from other organizations (see below for discussion).

Cycle 1 Action Stage:

- Resubmission of ethics application
- Phase 2 Participant recruitment using snowball sampling
- Individual interviews

These interviews had two parts – first, the interview with the same interview guide as phase 1, and second, sharing the aggregate anonymized coded data from phase 1, allowing them to send message of support back to phase 1 participants

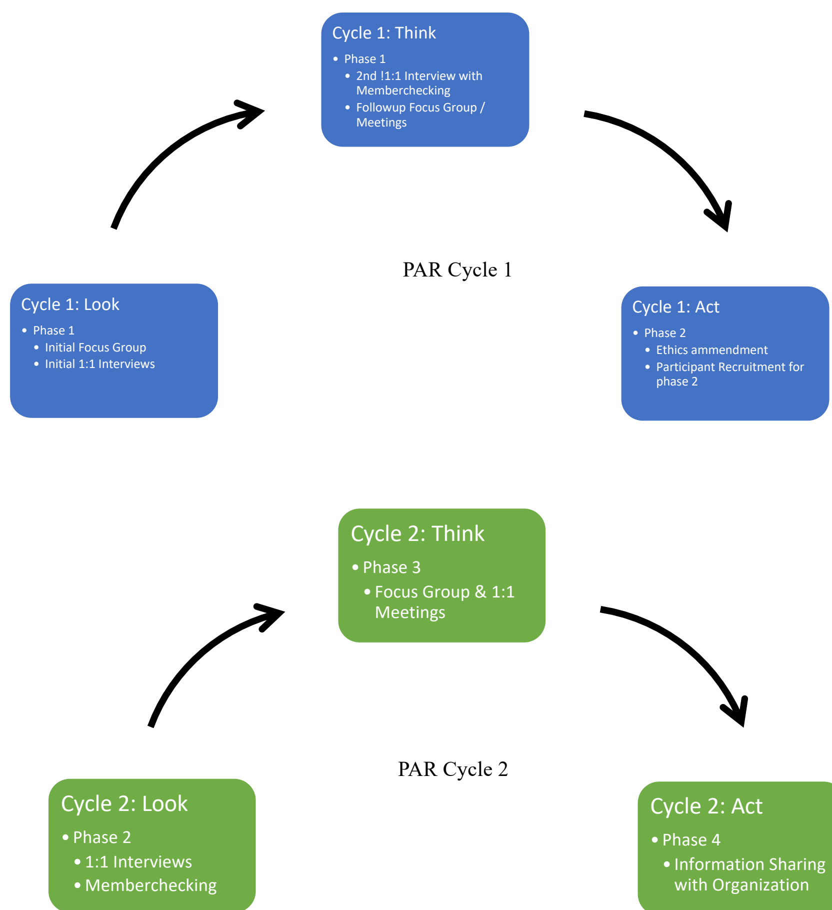
Actual Phase 3 (Cycle 2 Think Stage):

Phase 3 returned to the original group of 6 to share back the messages of support from phase 2 participants, engage analysis of data and recommendations

Actual Phase 4 (Cycle 2 Act Stage):

The original participants decided that they wanted the outcomes of the research and their recommendations for change brought back to the organization. I facilitated three meetings in phase 4 to share outcomes: with leadership; with managers/supervisors; with Newcomer staff.

Figure 2: *PAR cycle 1 & 2 depicting phases of research and actions taken*



Phase 1: (Cycle 1 Look & Think Stages)

Sample Size, Selection Criteria, & Participant Recruitment

My history being a director of programming in a settlement sector agency and having provided a number of workshops to settlement sector groups over the years gave me experience in this field as well as contacts that I could use in my recruitment strategy. While acutely aware of the need to be mindful of these relationships (as I discuss below) my previous experience still facilitated my ability to engage participants and do this research.

In determining sample size, I considered several factors. I wanted a group both large enough for a range of experiences, and a small enough to work meaningfully together in a focus group and potentially engage action. I was also aware that whatever sample size I ended up with created considerations for external validity. I chose to look for a group of 8-12 participants to provide both a manageable balance between the 1st and 2nd criteria, and an acceptable level of validity for the purpose of the study (see below).

With careful consideration, a number of factors were specific selection criteria. Participants needed to be Newcomers to Canada, inclusive of those who come as immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and international students. I was aware that these are typically administrative labels more than experiential labels. While one from outside the sector might assume that immigrants have more privilege and resources overall than refugees in their home countries (or available to them here in Canada), levels of privilege and class shift with different groups of refugees and there is significant discrepancy between experiences of privilege and status within and between groups of Newcomers. I decided not to limit my study at this stage and keep it open to all Newcomers, and that if my data indicated a significant difference in wellbeing between the groups, this would indicate the need for more careful study.

For the purpose of this study, participants' English language ability had to be sufficient to facilitate cross-cultural discussion. I was aware that the more inclusive I was for levels of English-language ability, the more challenging the focus group discussion would be. I was also aware that as I restricted the participant group only to fluent English speakers, I restricted the diversity of the group, as such possibly controlling for privilege and status in the Newcomer community, inadvertently biasing my results. To strike a balance in these issues, I set the inclusion/exclusion criteria to the requirement that participants be employed by a settlement sector agency to work with Newcomers of different language groups, as this was the most meaningful level for the eventual action stage.

I included participants of all genders and sexual orientations, hoping to have a representative sample in my participant group. I believed differences in gender identity and sexual orientation are meaningful and interesting, but that as the research is not focussed on these experiences directly, I believed controlling for this was not necessary. I reasoned that if I ended up with only 1-2 members of a gender or orientation identity group, it would be important to ask about how these identities affected their experience of their work, and depending on their responses relative to the rest of the group, it may be important for follow-up studies to consider these experiences specifically.

I decided to be inclusive of all cultural backgrounds and not to purposefully recruit for cultural and racial diversity. I wanted to keep access open to the initial study and hoped for a broad range of diversity, deciding it was important to find a cohesive enough group to engage discussion and action but not limit or recruit for participation from particular groups.

I excluded children and youth from participation as I focussed on the experiences of the overwhelming majority of Newcomer workers who work in the Settlement Sector, adult workers. I am interested in the impacts on youth as well, but this is beyond the scope of this project, and it may be a worthwhile project to take the aggregate data from this study and sit down with a group of youth to see how their experiences are similar and different.

One of my greatest considerations in participant selection was my relationship with the participants and how that would affect levels of participation. My positionality relative to the work group fell under Herr & Anderson's level 5 of positionality of researcher. This position is identified as "outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 40), and is the position they state is the "most common type of collaborative action research" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 49). From this position it is important to frame the research as doing research with the participants, and not for them, on them, or have the research be by them (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 50). This had implications for how I engaged the research process throughout.

I decided to seek out participants using Purposeful Sampling (Stringer, 2014, p. 77) and to use Snowball Sampling (Stringer, 2014, p. 81) in case there were significant gaps in representation by key stakeholder groups. I engaged a group of programs at a settlement sector agency in Canada with a diverse range of staff. As the goal of PAR is to move towards meaningful action, my intention was to balance the needs for inclusion of a diverse representation of stakeholder groups (Stringer, 2014, p. 79) with a cohesive enough team so that the research may extend beyond this project and implement an action stage and further look, think, act cycles. This was more problematic than I anticipated.

I chose to engage an agency in another region of Canada, concerned about overlapping relationships from my previous role as a director of programming of a settlement agency, a role that had a public face to it and considerable status in the local community. I did not want the power of that role, or the history of the work that I have already done on vicarious trauma in the settlement sector to impact the research. To control for these factors, I decided that while it would be more difficult, it was important to choose an agency in a different region of Canada. This, however, also required me to travel for the research as while videoconferencing was an option for focus groups and interviews, I reasoned that in-person, face-to-face interactions were important for the start of the research relationships and joining with the participants.

I thought about the level of investment of the workers, and their relationship with the agency where they work. In considering the investment/risk/reward for the participants, and who benefits from this work, I realized that the workers had more investment and risk than the agency did, but that the agency would potentially benefit as much or possibly more from worker participation in the research – understanding ways to improve staff morale and potentially productivity, co-worker relationships and retention issues, etc. I knew I could not pay participants meaningfully for their time in the research as that may be seen as biasing the research, and that as this was my dissertation, that magnified the benefit to me from their participation; it was important to me to find an ethical way to value participants for their time and investment in the process. I reasoned that as the research was about the impact of their work on them, and it was focussed on strategizing about ways to improve staff wellbeing at work, it would be reasonable and fair to ask the agency for permission to interview and meet workers during their work time.

There were several times during this process where my values as a researcher resulted in complicating the process for myself and delaying the research, and this was one of them. My decision to ask for the workers to be allowed to use worktime created the question for the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Manitoba (UM) as to whether my project required a contract with the agency or not. During the process of acquiring ethics approval, the REB stated a contract with the agency was required, but the contract department at the UM argued that because there was no exchange of confidential information, no questions about ownership of the research, and no funding for the research, no agreement was necessary. This went back and forth at that level several times. Eventually my application was approved with no contract required, although, as I presumed, I did need to have an introductory letter informing the agency about the research, requesting their support to allow participants to use work time. The agency in question was very happy to provide this letter. I may argue that the delays at the ethics committee level were more about concerns for legal risk than about the ethics of the research, and in my process, the two of those became

confounded. I might humbly propose that universities separate the processes and have academics on ethics committees focus on the ethics of the research, and legal experts decide where legal risk exists.

In the end, I selected an agency in another province where I had previously collaborated on some workshops for their English Language Programming on working with Trauma-Affected Learners. I reasoned that as I had not done vicarious trauma work with them, it insulated this research project from that work, and allowed me to function as Herr & Anderson's 'outsider collaborating with insiders'. I consulted with my advisor about this relationship before proceeding to ensure no conflict of interest. My contact referred me to a colleague who I hadn't worked with yet and who oversaw the settlement programming (a department I hadn't worked with). Aware of my outsider status, I knew that in-group introductions were important in creating relationship opportunities and I tried to balance new relationships to allow for a cleaner research process with the need for relationship building. Working with this representative was instrumental in creating the relationships necessary to engage the research. In discussing with them how to approach the project, in the end we decided that I would provide a workshop to their larger staff team on empowerment approaches in the settlement sector to introduce myself and how I work. This is work that is regularly in my toolkit. I continued consulting with my advisor on this process, as I wanted to be transparent about who I was, so that potential participants could make better informed decisions about working with me, and to do it in a way that didn't obligate participants or skew the research.

In reflecting on my own process as I was navigating this and thinking through the ethics and positioning of these relationships, I related it to a Narrative Therapist (postmodern approach, non-hierarchical, co-construction of meaning, creating communities of support around clients to push back against dominant narratives that are constrictive) justifying their clinical relationship to a Freudian system who expects the therapist to be a blank slate who the client can project upon in complete privacy. Trying to think through ethical relationships that allowed for collaboration and co-construction of meaning and processes within PAR, I had to push back against my own internalized

socialized construction of research that unconsciously privileges modernist, quantitative, double-blind methodologies and assumes they are the norm that everything else is judged against. Understanding the role of relationship in PAR, while still maintaining an ethical stance of my role as a researcher, was very important to me and so throughout this process I stayed aware of my role as outsider, as the researcher, and the different risks and opportunities this research posed for me compared to the participants. Being mindful of this, it felt even more important to me that potential participants had an informed process to learn more about me and how I work than simply an informed consent meeting about the content of the research.

I was nervous about recruitment, and it was, indeed, much more challenging than I anticipated. I had planned to augment purposeful sampling with snowball sampling to recruit members of key stakeholder groups, but in the end, I used snowball sampling just to get sufficient numbers who were willing to participate. My original call resulted in 5 interviews. There was decent diversity across many identity factors, except gender – all were identified female at birth. Two men had approached and provided their contact information to schedule an interview, however repeated attempts to contact went unanswered. A 6th interview (another participant who was assigned female at birth) came in shortly afterwards. I realized that while the interviews achieved an internally consistent thematic network (implying a fair degree of thematic if not meaning saturation), that this was not sufficient for my dissertation. I approached my advisor and committee asking their opinions, and I was gently encouraged to find my original proposed numbers as it would enhance relevance and opportunities to publish afterwards. I was also offered ways to think through saturation from different perspectives and quality criteria in qualitative research (see Quality Criteria below), and to potentially consider a larger qualitative research methodology instead of PAR, if necessary.

Challenges with Recruitment, Re-imagining the Design

Hearing back from my committee gave me some options and I had to really consider what I wanted for this research. The consensus was that a larger sample, which was more in line with my proposal would create a more robust study and be advantageous for my ability to publish and my academic career, and the suggestion was that I consider a step back from a PAR methodology and complete the study with people from other organizations under a more general qualitative research methodology.

This was very disappointing to me, and brought me back to my earlier debate between GT and PAR, however I was in an even more challenging position as I had already invested in the relationships with the 6 current participants, and even more importantly, they had invested in me.

My hope for a cohesive group to work with hadn't materialized. My intended design was to do a focus group to join with and get buy-in at the beginning. Collaborating with the group on the questions for the interviews, I would then engage in individual interviews, transcribe and anonymize them, do a preliminary thematic analysis, join them together in aggregate format, and come back together with the group to engage the data analysis. This would have completed the look-think portions of a PAR cycle while maintaining privacy and confidentiality, and result in recommendations towards the action step.

In reality, when I arrived in the city for the focus group, a large group of refugees arrived at the same time and it was 'all hands on deck'. Only two participants were able to meet for the initial meeting. We proceeded with the focus group, and had a very meaningful discussion where we explored the themes, edited the suggested questions for the interviews, and the participants suggested a few more.

While it was not my vision, I am very glad I proceeded, and throughout this process, I have only ever been able to get a maximum of three participants together at any given time. While one

could wonder if this was commitment to the process, all participants demonstrated significant investment in the project. Upon reflection, I believe that the challenges with getting everyone together was due a combination of factors. On the surface, and perhaps most obvious, there is the constant change and upheaval of the settlement system, the volume of work that the workers talked about, and challenges getting workers from different departments to join together. Underneath, I realized that I was asking the workers to take some time out of their workday to talk about their own wellbeing, and the overwhelming consensus in the data is that everyone is exhausted and there is no time for their own needs as there is always someone else who needs them more. So, while everyone believed this was important and meaningful, the very reason this study was important was also a barrier to the study in the hoped-for format. For me this was another example of Herr and Anderson's caution that I referenced at the opening of this chapter where research processes in PAR need to change from what was initially proposed, depending on participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 89).

In reflecting on the design and process, and sitting with the trust and investment of the orginal six participants, with the hope of their voices being heard and leading to meaningful change, I decided that ethically, I couldn't move backwards in the research design to a GT or general qualitative research model – that was not what participants had agreed to in the informed consent, and had that been the original design, they may or may not have consented. Isomorphically, I realized that I felt the responsibility to the participants in a way that may be similar to what they feel towards their clients.

In order to keep a PAR methodology, I redesigned the study and added three more phases, striking a compromise that would allow me to keep the methodology, and augment the study with participants from other agencies. I looked to the work of David Denborough, a Narrative therapist with the Dulwich Centre who engages strengths-based trauma work at the community level and builds communities of support between various Indigenous communities in Australia, and between

them and Indigenous communities throughout the world (Denborough, 2008). In one of his processes, he collects stories of surviving hard times from a community, and with permission, shares them with another community for comment. The second community reads them, and shares back with the original community how meaningful it was to read their stories, and adds some of their own stories of survival. There is a lot of trauma theory (Denborough, 2008) underneath this process for why they are important – validating stories of hard times, while presenting them as survivable, building bridges so that individuals and communities do not feel alone with their hard times, sharing survival mechanisms so that communities can collaborate and learn from each other, positioning both communities as experts in their own survival rather than needing outside experts to tell them what to do, positioning the individuals and communities as stronger than the hard times they experienced, and more. It also allowed for meaning-making, and having their struggles be meaningful to others.

I realized that this process was an ideal compromise for this research for many of the same reasons, and it would allow me to maintain the original cohort of six participants with sufficient validity to talk about their experiences in their own organization, and plan for ways to enhance their wellbeing at the work-group and agency level, therefore honouring the original intention of the research and the commitment to the participants. At the same time, the change allowed me to augment the study with experiences from other workers in the settlement sector from other agencies, and provide a window into the potential for this research to be generalizable to other workers and agencies in the sector. This also extended the study past the original look and think stages of one PAR cycle that I had originally proposed.

I discussed this idea with my advisor, and then talked with the participants at a combination of a focus group and individual meetings for those who could not make it. The original purpose of the follow-up meeting was to review the aggregate data from all the Phase 1 interviews and the suggested themes, allow them to adjust the themes or suggest alternate ones, and plan next steps leading towards an action stage. In discussing the process and next steps at the meetings, the

consensus was that the process so far was very validating of their experiences; they felt a strengthening of their own position, and there was a desire for this to be presented to the organization so that their voices could be heard. During this stage, I shared that my committee was hopeful that I would get more participants and proposed my solution of sharing the aggregate data with other workers in settlement sector agencies outside their region, and the consensus was to do that prior to approaching the agency as these original participants felt that this would strengthen their voices in the conversation with their organization.

I amended my ethics submission, and received approval to add a second phase (recruitment and interviews with participants from other agencies) and a third phase (bringing the outcomes from phase 2 back to the original participants). In doing the interviews in phase 2, I was purposeful in doing the same interview guide with them first about their own experiences, and then showing them the aggregate data from the phase 1 participants for comment afterwards, in order to not contaminate their own sharing.

Participant Demographics

Because my participants work in small to medium sized organizations, I need to be careful as I describe the diversity of identity factors of the participants. What may be seen as aggregate participant information in other studies may still identify participants within these organizations. As such, I have included the demographic factors of the participants in aggregate form across both groups of participants, so as to not necessarily identify any particular group identity as specific to either group of participants or any one organization.

All participants were Newcomers who worked directly with Newcomers to Canada. All participants were assigned female at birth, with one who identified as genderqueer, the rest as cisgender. Across the ten participants, there was significant religious and cultural diversity,

including participants who identified as non-religious, Muslim, Christian and Jewish; and were born in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe/Ukraine/Russia, Central & South America. Three of the ten participants would be identified as white-appearing. All participants spoke sufficient English to work in an English context, and nine of the ten spoke English as an additional language. All participants were identifiable to a Canadian born natural-English speaker as holding an accent of varying degrees. Participants as a whole were well educated with many but not all holding university degrees or advanced degrees. There was a significant range in time in Canada from less than one year for one participant to more than twenty years for another. Most participants had been in Canada 5-12 years. Two of the ten participants in the study identified as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Method, Data Collection & Analysis

In designing this study, I decided to use both focus group (Smithson, 2000; Stringer, 2014, p. 111) and semi-structured interview (Stringer, 2014, p. 106) methods. I reasoned that using both methods allows for a richer engagement with the data by all participants where they may snowball stories and experiences from group conversation in the focus group, and elaborate more deeply during the individual interviews. An additional consideration was that overlapping methods is one tool for enhancing validity in qualitative research (Mills, 2011).

A challenge that I had with using a PAR methodology was the tension between needing to have my interview questions approved of by the ethics committee, and wanting my participants to collaborate with me on what conversations might be important. In the end, I generated a variety of questions built from Stringer's (2014, p. 109) categories of Grand Tour (general, typical and specific), Activity (guided tour and tasks), and Prompt (extension, encouragement and example) questions, that were approved by the REB (see Appendix). I then presented these for consideration at

the focus group, where participants were able to comment on them, adapt them, delete any, and make suggestions for other questions to be included. The main addition that participants made was asking about where people felt appreciated (see Appendix for final interview guide). The final interview guide included five categories of questions: general experiences, challenging experiences, meaningful experiences, integration with the rest of their life, and wellbeing. I organized them in this format to follow trauma-informed approaches, beginning with joining, then sequencing them from general experience to more specific and moving from challenging to rewarding, with a focus on wellbeing at the end. General experience questions included how participants came to Canada, how they started working with Newcomers, what changes have they noticed in themselves as a result of their work. The challenging experiences questions included questions about what are some challenging experiences they have had, are there personal factors that are affected by their challenging experiences, what leads to a hard day at work, and ends with how they take care of themselves in healthy and unhealthy was. The meaningful category included questions related to what clients they like to work with and why, what connects them to their clients, how their own experiences as a Newcomer relate to the work they do, and when do they feel appreciated in genuine ways. The category asking about integration between work and the rest of their life asked about how their work connected to other areas of their life and where the disconnections were (what do other peole not understand about the importance of your work). The final category of questions related to wellbeing included asking what helped keep them sane, what helps them manage the difficult times at work, what they have seen other workers do to manage challenges, and, what the organization is already doing to support them, and what else could it do.

My process began with a focus group (two participants) and individual meetings (four additional participants). The purpose of these preliminary meetings was for the participants and I to join, review the purpose of the research, have discussions about what part of the research is meaningful to them, goals they have for the research, and brainstorm question that they are curious

about. All of these strategies were designed to democratize the research and increase engagement and a sense of ownership, essential to PAR. They are also in line with research strategies to build rapport and encourage participation as outlined by Spradley (1979) in his stages of rapport building in ethnographic interviews: apprehension; exploration; cooperation; and, participation. To further this goal, I shared a collective document from previous work I have done with other groups in the helping professions to share examples of other professions talking about meaningful and challenging experiences working with others. These documents were developed with the permission to share with others and have aggregate, anonymized data. The purpose for sharing an existing collective document was to normalize the impacts of working with others, depathologize some of the challenging experiences, and validate the resilience we all have in doing this kind of work. My experience from other groups is that this facilitates my joining with the group and increases a sense of purpose and safety for the group members to share their own experiences. I deliberately used a document from others in a helping profession, but not from the settlement sector as I wanted the group to be able to see similarities and differences with their own experiences, and be free to share those rather than just parrot what other groups' experiences are. In short, I wanted to increase safety and engagement without biasing the content of our later conversations.

After the preliminary meetings, I engaged two rounds of individual interviews. The first interview followed the interview guide (see appendix) and was designed to broaden and deepen the sharing that occurred in the focus group. I was careful to begin by letting participants look over the question sheet, and give permission to share only what was relevant for them, and to avoid any questions they didn't want to answer. I also kept aware of verbal and non-verbal cues to continued informed consent processes during the interviews. These first interview sessions were recorded for manual transcription and then the recordings were destroyed in line with the ethics committee application.

Cycle 1: Think

The second interview occurred after the manual transcription, and served as a chance to think through participants' own responses, edit them for content and meaning, ensuring member checking and consent. I used manual transcription, which was both time-consuming and highly meaningful. I anonymized the data, removing references to specific people, agencies, countries of origin and cities as all of these would be potentially identifying within the organization. This process took me much longer than anticipated, and it was an emotionally challenging process for me sitting with the stories as I worked through the interviews. I was aware of the intensity of my participants' connections with their clients, the stress that they carry, and their frustrations with the system. I felt overwhelmed at times by the trust that they put in me, and the task ahead to live up to my commitments to them. While I anticipated some degree of this, it was more intense than I expected. I am used to doing clinical work with individuals and families affected by trauma and had expected that this would be similar, but I believe my role was different enough that it bypassed my usual coping tools for my professional work, and I took these stories in deeper. I noticed this had a dual effect on me – it increased my own experience of the meaningfulness of this project, and it also activated my own avoidance strategies when it became too intense. In the many times that I considered continuing the process or not (due to stress and challenging circumstances in my own context), I was aware that as I connected with the participants, I became more concerned with failing them than failing to finish my PhD program. Isomorphically, I had joined with my participants, and felt the responsibility to them that they feel with their clients, and I believe that I better understood their choices to make the sacrifices they do with their clients. Clinically, I know this is a common part of joining, and requires stabilizing myself and resourcing myself so that I can feel the pull of the relationship and stay grounded and mindful of my own process, boundaries and decisions. As I reflected on that, I wondered what other researchers do at these times who don't have similar clinical training?

Data Analysis

The analysis phase occurred in the middle of the think stage in the first cycle, after the first round of individual interviews. After all the transcriptions were finished, I followed Stringer's format for data analysis in Action Research (Stringer, 2014, p. 135-165), supported by other researchers' work for specific elements. I transcribed and coded the data for themes using processes outlined by Hesse-Biber (2010) and Coffey & Atkinson (1996). Emergent themes were then organized into thematic networks (Attride-Sterling, 2001). I collected all of the thematic networks across all the interviews, harmonized them for meaning and developed an aggregate list of themes. I then went back to each transcript and reorganized the content by the aggregate list of themes for member checking. Once I met with the participants a second time, I engaged a member checking process showing them the thematic network and the quotes that I had organized from their interview. I read the quotes with them, and worked with them to ensure their responses said what they meant to say, and that any identifying information was removed. Participants were allowed to remove or edit any of the quotes I was using. Once the member checking was completed, I compiled all of the quotes organized by themes across all of the interviews, into a master document organized by aggregate themes, as well as created a visual depiction of the thematic network. I believe this visual depiction was especially important as it highlighted where the focus of the settlement sector was on wellbeing (vicarious trauma and self-care) and where the focus of the participants was (impact of barriers, meaningfulness of work, and relationship with supervisor). I found this depiction congruent with CR's concept of levels of truth and reality (see Chapter 2: Context) as it created a representation of a network of real social forces with power in individual workers' lives.

I then brought this preliminary data analysis back to a focus group meeting (with 1:1 meetings to capture everyone unable to attend the focus group), for them to see their own sharing

mixed in with each other's, and for them to have an opportunity to talk about the themes that emerged in the data and share responses to it. The culmination of these meeting was the discussion of next steps and the beginning of Phase 2 – recruitment of the next phase of participants.

Phase 2: (Cycle 1 Act Stage, Cycle 2 Look Stage)

Cycle 1: Act Stage

The action stage for Cycle 1 was achieved by the ethics amendment process to change the research design to incorporate the additional phases of the research, and by engaging snowball sampling to recruit participants. To help with questions of potential generalizability of the data from phase 1 to Newcomer workers in the settlement sector in Canada at different agencies, I sought participants with the same selection criteria as phase 1, but located outside the region and at different agencies. I ended up with four additional interviews, bringing my total number of participants for my study to ten individual participants, in line with my original proposed sample size of 8-12.

Cycle 2: Look Stage

The look stage of cycle 2 occurred through semi-structured interviews with the four participants using the same interview guide developed in phase 1 (See Appendix). I allowed time in the interview for a second portion which included sharing the aggregate document and thematic network from phase 1, and allowing the participant to read through, comment on specifics, and send back a message regarding the meaningfulness for them of the original document. These interviews were transcribed, analyzed for themes using the same thematic network, and member checked in a subsequent 1:1 interview. I kept aware of the possibility of new codes in the phase 2 participants, but none emerged. While this was validating and made me more confident of the data from the phase 1 participants (see discussion in quality criteria below), I needed to be cautious as coding the phase 2 interviews while already aware of the thematic network from phase 1, I could inadvertently be

pushing the data to meet pre-existing codes. A cleaner process would have been to have coded all the data at the same time with no pre-existing ideas for codes, but that was impossible due to how the design unfolded (see above discussion on the challenges with PAR and the changing of the research process). This means that while the data from phase 2 can support the data and the codes from phase 1, I cannot be as confident that I have an exhaustive list of relevant themes affecting the phase 2 participants.

Phase 3 (Cycle 2 Think Stage)

Cycle 2: Think

This third phase of the research returned to the original six participants. I used a focus group (3 participants) and 1:1 meetings (3 participants) to share back the responses from the phase 2 participants with the original group, brainstorm recommendations, and to strategize about next steps. The consensus was that the next step was approaching the leadership of the organization and sharing the outcomes of the study with the organization.

Phase 4 (Cycle 2 Act Stage)

Cycle 2: Act

This final fourth phase of the study enacted the next steps decided upon in phase 3 and included three different meetings at the organization. My first meeting was with the core leadership of the organization and included the person in the CEO / Executive Director position and a Director. The second meeting was with a group of five managers and twenty-five supervisors. The last meeting was with a group of approximately fifty Newcomer front line service workers. I organized the meetings in this order as reporting outcomes and recommendations to the organizational leadership

first enabled me to then meet with the managers/supervisors informing them of what the leadership was already aware of. I then met with the workers to report back to them, as a larger group, about the outcomes and what the leadership and supervisors had been told. While I privileged the leadership by giving them the information first, fundamentally I believe the workers were empowered knowing what had been shared with leadership, the forces that were found to be acting upon the workers, and the recommendations for change. While I could have started with the large meeting of Newcomer workers first, I would have then been able to share only what I intended to do rather than what was heard by their leadership. I reasoned that organizing it this way gave more information to the workers, and provided them information necessary to hold leadership accountable.

Quality Criteria

A key concern in developing this study was the number of participants to engage. Mason (2010) investigated sample size in qualitative research dissertations and, in the sample of 28 Action Research Studies, found a range of 3-67 participants, with the mode being 6 participants and the median being 17. Morse (2000, 2015) discussed saturation in qualitative research as going beyond the number of participants to the depth of the data being collected. She advocated for participant groups to be, "large enough for replication to occur and be noted," and that the people involved are "…experts in the phenomenon of interest" (Morse, 2015, p. 588). Tuckett (2004) made a similar argument for sample sizes in qualitative research, focussing on depth rather than increased sample size, adding that data should be collected sequentially with newer data being added to earlier data. This argument by both Morse and Tuckett transfers the burden of saturation from the sample size to the depth of the conversations with the participants and engagement with the data. O'Reilley and Parker (2012) take a critical review of the use of saturation as a representation of quality in qualitative research reminding us that the term originated in grounded theory and is progressively being used across various qualitative research methods regardless of methodological suitability, and

they raise the concern of simple quality checklists rather than deeper consideration of quality through researchers being transparent about their process.

Hennink, Kaiser, and Weber (2019) researched sample sizes in focus groups across qualitative research and found that code saturation occurred after four focus groups, and meaning saturation occurred after six. Within their research, they found that code saturation was at 60% after one focus group, and 88% after three. Using this finding, I can imply that this study is valid for this research study group (the aim of PAR), and will be important to other similar groups (as evidenced by the phase 2 participant responses), but not necessarily generalizable to all Newcomer workers in the settlement sector until it is replicated a number of times.

It is important to note that the sample size of this research will limit the generalizability of the research; however, Herr and Anderson argued that the point of the research is to lead towards action outcomes for the group itself rather than privileging generalizability to other groups (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 61). As generalization is not the aim of this research, thematic and meaning saturation are less relevant indicators of quality. While there are always questions about the external validity of the research, Herr and Anderson cited Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p.75) arguing that the responsibility for transferability of qualitative research (Herr & Anderson's concept of external validity) lies more with the group applying the research than to the original researcher.

I also considered Herr and Anderson's five criteria for validity in action research studies (outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity and dialogic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p.67)) to interrogate my research. For them, outcome validity refers to a study's ability to lead towards an action outcome for the group; process validity refers to the dependability of the methods used; democratic validity refers to how well the research reflects the voices of all the key stakeholders; catalytic validity refers to the ability of the research and process to generate relevant knowledge towards change in their system; and dialogic validity is the engagement of the

wider academic audience to review and critique the research. The key markers for validity of this study will be outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity and catalytic validity.

Both Stringer and Mills, in their texts on Action Research, used Guba's four criteria for validity in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. While many of these concepts overlap with Herr and Anderson, Mills included specific methods that I used to enhance validity of my research including: peer debriefing, triangulation and member checks (credibility); collecting and developing descriptive detailed data about the context (transferability); overlapping methods and establishing and audititing the trail (dependability); and, triangulation and reflexivity (confirmability) (Mills, 2011, pp. 103-105; Stringer, 2014, pp. 91-94).

Mills also cited Wolcott's (1994 in Mills, 2011) strategies for validity in action research, and I used all of them: "talk little, listen a lot"; "record observations accurately"; "begin writing early"; "let readers 'see' for themselves"; "report fully"; "be candid"; "seek feedback"; and, "write accurately" (Mills, 2011, pp. 110-112).

Mills' inclusion of reflexivity is congruent within a CR paradigm and is in line with Pillow's "reflexivity of discomfort" (Pillow, 2003, p. 192) where researchers simultaneously challenge their processes and outcomes while also critiquing the political aspect of their meaning making.

Ethical Considerations

I was very mindful of ethics throughout this process. Herr and Anderson argued that the collaborative nature of PAR requires ongoing attention to ethical considerations (Herr & Anderson, 2015) rather than a static experience at the beginning of the project. As a couple and family therapist, I am used to professional expectations for the ongoing processes of informed consent and confidentiality. I am also responsible to the University of Manitoba processes for protection of human participants, and to the Canadian Association for Couple and Family Therapy, and the

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (where I am registered members), both of whom include protection for research participants in their codes of ethics (CACFT, 2019; AAMFT, 2015).

I knew that I needed to have transparent conversations with all stakeholders (agency representatives and participants) about conflicts of interest, dual roles, voluntary participation, informed and ongoing consent, and confidentiality. This was built into the beginning of the project and ongoing as I moved through each stage.

In reflecting on the potential dynamics as I developed this project, I had a number of concerns to take into account to ensure an ethical process and protect participants from harm. I was aware that there are many layers in this process that reinforce my social power and location and where I am potentially benefiting from the participants' experiences of marginalization. Further, I was asking participants to share stories of challenge and meaning in their experience of their work with other Newcomers. This has the potential to elicit challenging feelings and experiences. It also has the potential to be very meaningful. Being aware of these issues helped me plan this research process to be strengths-based and incorporate trauma-informed approaches (focussing on resilience, meaning, meeting needs, asking only questions necessary for understanding specific impacts of their work rather than exploring trauma). Throughout the research, I needed to stay aware of this power and the uneven experience of risk in this project, and ensure that transparency and choice are built into all levels. I also sought out an agency which has built in socio-emotional supports for participants so that participants are resourced beyond the research project itself.

Potts and Brown highlighted the 3 major tenets to anti-oppressive research as research that: integrates social justice in the process and outcome; sees knowledge as socially constructed; and is concerned with power throughout the research relationships (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 259). I believe I integrated these tenets throughout the project, however, as I will show below, there were some challenging aspects to this in both considering research design, and also the ethics review process.

One challenge I faced in integrating anti-oppressive research practices into the research design is balancing the ideas of doing with vs. doing for. In thinking through this balance, I considered empowerment, respecting choice and voice, differing levels of social power and risk, how to give credit for shared work, respecting confidentiality and privacy. In deciding to speak to the agency leadership, I reflected on the degree to which am I respecting the choices of the participants, lending them the social power that I have to raise their voices up to challenge the system that they are in, from a place of privilege and relative safety, and to what degree am I participating in them staying silent, entrenching the hierarchy of the system and speaking for them. In their interviews, different participants talk about the dynamic of not pushing the system as Newcomers and relying on white co-workers to do that work, and expressed how these beliefs are internalized colonization and keep them stuck, negatively affecting their wellbeing. They also talk about the fear of retribution and the reality for them that losing a job in Canada is akin to "losing your life". I believe that maintaining an awareness of all of these factors is the ongoing work of anti-oppressive research. The balance that I struck was to be reflective about this process myself, consider my own bias (my apprehension about conflict making me hesitant, and my motivation to challenge authority structures motivating me to engage the challenge for my own purposes), and, to collaborate with the participants about these factors, and, allow them to decide what is the right level of risk and participation for themselves. I reasoned that had I failed to bring up the impacts of colonization to them and how it is living out in our process of decision-making enables these constructs to continue to exist unchecked. I also reasoned that making the choice for them heightens the power differences, and presumes I somehow know better what is good for them. I decided that collaborating with participants about how they would choose to use their resources (including my privilege and voice) while being mindful of my own boundaries and limits, supported their autonomy and our continued relationship.

As intended, I engaged critical reflexivity throughout my decision-making processes in this research project. This is not to say that I was not biased, nor that I didn't have blind spots, but I

actively tried to see beyond my own perspective, and to consider how my perspective could be limiting me through assumptions, ignorance, and my own priorities. One strategy I used in conjunction with the critical reflexivity was that I engaged peer debriefing with a couple of colleagues from various cultural backgrounds and citizenship experiences who use anti-oppressive research lenses and practices. While being scrupulous about maintaining participant confidentiality, referring only to my own experiences, I believe this was a key process in getting outside of my perspective, not making my participants responsible for my critical reflexivity processes. This debriefing helped me stay accountable for my processes with and to others who I was not in a hierarchical relationship with and who had no specific interest other than helping me engage good practice.

Challenges in the Ethics Application Process

There were three concerns expressed during my ethics review process. The first I mentioned above – the debate about whether my project required a contract with the agency or not. The second was about data storage, and the third was about crediting my participants vs. anonymity.

The concern about my proposed storage methods was that I wanted to go 'old school' and have digital copies on security USBs along with physical copies, all stored in locked cabinets. The review board wanted me to use online cloud storage. I complied with what was asked of me, although I am still unclear if this was an ethical concern or a procedural one. This concern was heightened for me in the spring of 2024 when the university where I am faculty suffered a cyber-attack and personal health and financial information of thousands of students and employees over 20+ years was stolen, and everyone was locked out of their secure storage for an extended period of time. I am still confused about what the ethical grounds were for the concern expressed about my proposed storage methods.

The third concern was the level of anonymity of my participants. I felt it appropriate to give the participants the choice of being named in the research process or not, and allow for acknowledgment of their contributions to be shared. The ethics committee was concerned that doing so contained an unnecessary level of risk as the participants who, as Newcomers to Canada, are marginalized in the greater system and therefore at too high of a risk if allowed to decide for themselves if they wanted to be acknowledged or not. I consulted with my advisor on this and articulated my disagreement, and what I believed to be a problematic stance that was being adopted which was similar in structure to a colonizing and paternalistic stance, privileging academic resource extraction from a group of marginalized workers as being more ethical than respecting their autonomy to decide if they wanted to have shared acknowledgment of their contributions and work. This was another case where I decided to comply rather than fight, but yet again, I experienced the process of the ethics committee review to be less concerned with the actual ethics of the research design, and more about managing risk. This being my first research project, however, and unsure of the impact of pushing back on their decision-making, I decided to comply. I do believe that this is an ongoing ethical consideration, however, and expect that I will face it again with future projects. I am aware that my choice to not challenge the group with authority over my academic process is isomorphic to the choice that my participants are making in their relationhsips with their organization and system, except that my participants are engaging me as a resource to push back on their system, while I am deferring that challenge until I am in less hierarchical relationship with the systems involved.

CHAPTER 5: Findings

As I understand it, the drive of PAR from a CR perspective in the field of PACS, is to move from individual responses to shared meaning, highlighting underlaying forces affecting the participants, developing praxis leading towards transformation. My purpose in this chapter is to demonstrate how I organized the results of the interviews to allow for meaning-making leading towards identifying the underlaying forces. In order to do so, I will discuss my process of analysis and then present the results of the interview processes, striking a balance between my participants speaking for themselves and showing how I organized the data into the various domains and themes.

Bloomberg and Volpe organize the process across the findings chapter, discussion chapter, and the conclusions chapter as, “if I find this… then I think this… therefore I conclude that… thus a I recommend that…” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 330). While they state that both the findings chapter and the analysis chapter require some analysis of the researcher, for them the purpose of the two chapters differs with the findings chapter including both the raw data and the organization of it, and the following chapter focussing on the interpretation of those findings moving towards a larger integration across findings (p.232).

Analysis Process

Arguing that QR texts often focus on methods but do not typically teach how to engage data analysis, Bloomberg and Volpe cite Brinkman’s (2014 in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) explanations of inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning, privileging deductive analysis for qualitative research in general, and inductive analysis for GT. As my research is holding concepts tentatively and seeking to understand lived experience rather than starting with a concept and

testing it, my process is more congruent with inductive rather than deductive approaches (Hunter et al., 2011; Ghezeljeh & Emami, 2009).

In contrast to deductive and inductive approaches however, Bhaskar and others advocate for the use of retroductive reasoning in CR where researchers begin with an observation in empirical reality, and creatively consider possible underlying structures or mechanisms that could account for them (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 28). Bhaskar sees retroduction as a necessary creative step in the research process of description of a phenomenon > retroduction > eliminate false theories > identify the causal structure > work to correct the theory if elements don't quite work.

After the interviews, I had an unwieldly amount of rich data (broad and deep) which made it difficult to move straight to retroduction. Therefore, I used inductive approaches to organize the data into different domains and to generate themes in each of these. I was then able to use these domains and themes to highlight possible underlaying causal structures and engage retroductive reasoning. I have separated this dual analysis process between this chapter (inductive reasoning organizing and presenting the data) and Chapter 6: Discussion (retroductive reasoning exploring the possible underlaying causal forces).

My process in analyzing the data was to take each of the Phase 1 interviews separately, transcribe them manually word for word, and then code the transcripts. I then made lists of the codes used, and organized them into themes and sub themes (see appendix for full thematic network). I used larger themes as domains to organize the data, moving from the largest context (layer) to the smallest:

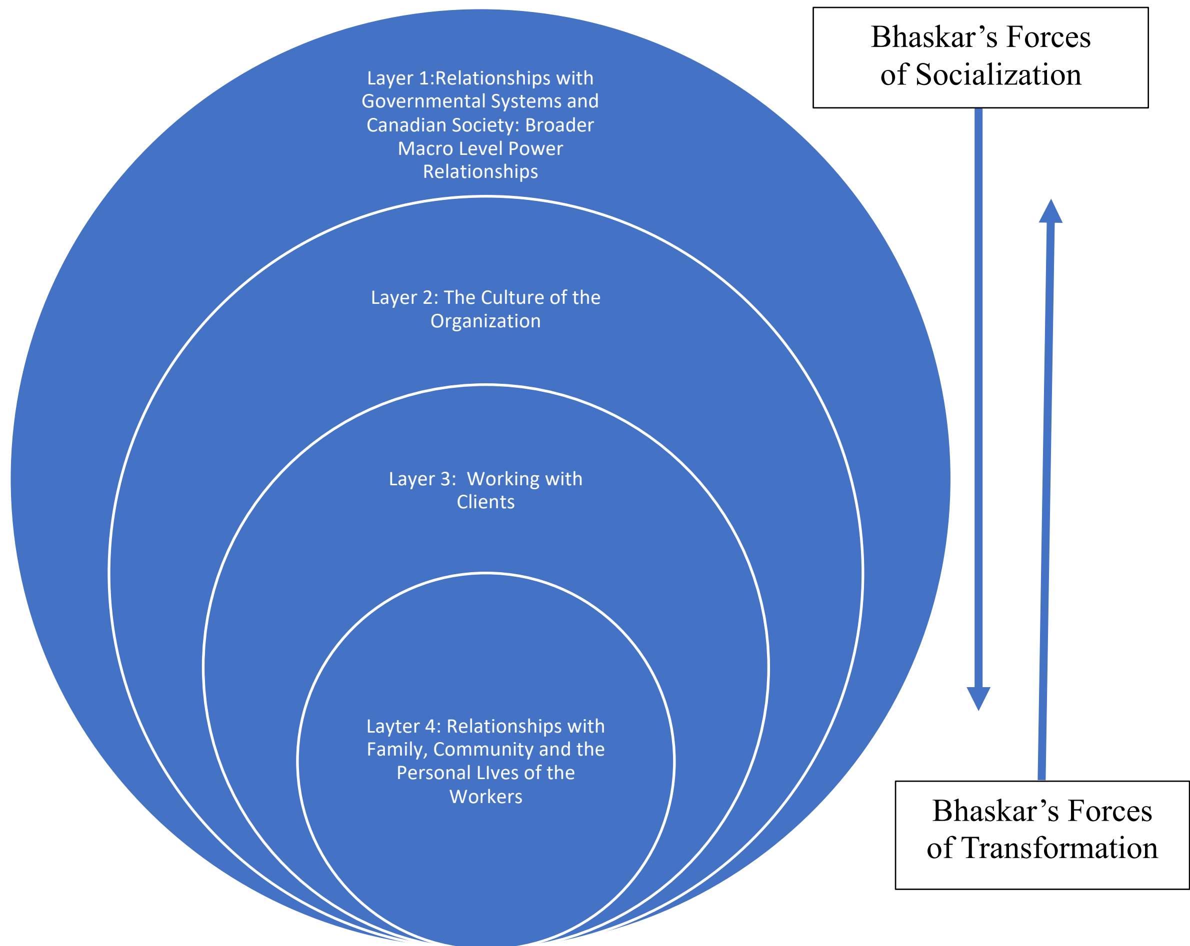
1. Layer 1 – Relationships with Government Systems and Canadian Society: Broader Macro Level Power Relatioships;
2. Layer 2 – The Culture of the Organization;

3. Layer 3 – Working with Clients
4. Layer 4 – Family and Community Relationships, and the Personal Lives of the Workers

The largest context was identified as the layer of macro level power relationships. Within this layer, I included all contributions relevant to experiences working with the larger society as a whole, government programs, the settlement sector systems, etc. The second context was the layer of the organization, and this focussed on relationships with the agency, coworkers, policies, day to day workplace issues, etc. The third context was the layer of the relationship with clients and focussed on the work with clients in the settlement sector and included meaningful and challenging experiences in the context of that relationship. The final context was the layer of the workers and their families, and this included their stories about their own resilience, their settlement story, family challenges, relationship with spirituality/religion, self-care strategies, etc.

This organization by layers is congruent with the hierarchy of levels of reality within CR where subsequent layers of reality are impacted by more fundamental ones, but have less power to shape the more fundamental levels. For example, the factors related to Canada exist and are forces in the workers' lives regardless of the workers' knowledge about them, and they impact the other levels of the system. The second layer, the factors about the organization, exist within the context of the national societal forces and government systems, and can attempt to push back against them, but are typically constrained by the forces at the level of the immigration system in Canada. This process continues for all four levels. Bhaskar identifies forces of socialization where larger social structures exert power on dependent structures, and forces of transformation where smaller structures can push back to create change in larger ones. These forces of socialization and transformation exist between the layers identified in this study (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Bhaskar's Transformative Model of Social Activity theory applied to the 4 layers in the thematic network*



Within the layers, one tool I used to keep a complex view of the system was Hartman's concept of Eco-mapping (Hartman, 1978). I used eco-maps to help diagram the relationship between the forces and the worker, visually depicting the relationships with arrows showing the directionality of the forces – towards (resourcing) the worker or away (depleting) the worker (see

below for examples). To further differentiate the size of the impact on the relationship, Hartman used different sizes of arrows to depict the relative intensity of the effect.

While there are almost infinite ways of organizing the data depending on the emphasis of the research, identifying the relationships between these layers and the forces acting between them is one of the strengths in organizing it in these layers. While a more general QR approach may pick up similar themes across the layers (e.g., gender discrimination, racism and homophobia), and group them together as a force; grouping them outside of their layers of influence disguises the forces that act at different layers (the racism experienced in the layer of relationships with governmental systems and Canadian society has a socialization effect on the layer of the organization and the impact of racism at that level). While the workers can engage transformation upwards to the organization and push back against racism at that level, they have significantly less power to do so at the meta-layer of Canada and the Canadian system. As a result of organizing the data in this way, there will be some repetition of a few themes in different layers; however, as this study is PAR, I am privileging a conceptualization of the data that highlights where the workers and the organization have agency.

As there is overlap between the layers, there was also significant overlap between all of the interviews. When I presented the results back to the participants after the analysis, I used the metaphor of a series of photographs of the night sky – each of them containing many of the same constellations as others but not any one interview necessarily showing them all. Taking this metaphor forwards, I was confident that we captured relevant constellations for this group of participants, and reasonably sure that these are relevant to their immediate colleagues (bolstered by the cohesiveness of the data), but knew that I could not be sure that we have captured the

whole horizon all around, or even all of the constellations for these participants or their colleagues, let alone to generalize for all workers across the sector.

In presenting the research, I have taken a representative sample of comments in each of the themes and have included them below. Where it is relevant, I separate out the comments from the phase 1 participants (the original six participants from a single organization) and phase 2 participants (the additional four participants from agencies outside the region of that organization); however, as I demonstrate below, the conversations with the phase 1 participants were very meaningful to the phase 2 group, and there was little discrepancy between them. I will start by sharing the impact of these conversations on the phase 2 participants, and then proceed with outlining the four layers described above with the themes and data from the interviews.

Comments From Phase 2 Group

I believe that other than co-workers in their own organization, the most relevant audience for the experiences of the six participants from phase 1 were their colleagues in phase 2 who are also Newcomers working in other settlement agencies in Canada. My process for phase 2 was to interview each participant using the same interview guide and then afterwards, I presented them with the anonymized, aggregate data from phase 1, categorized by themes, but without commentary, and asked them if there were any similarities or differences from their own experiences. I also asked them what, if any, comments would they like to send back to the phase 1 group.

All of the participants in phase 2 commented on how they saw themselves in everything the participants from phase 1 said, and how meaningful it was to read their words. Participants stated that they felt validated by reading the experiences of those in phase 1, that they felt empathy with them, and connected to them. They commented on how they shared similar

experiences with clients, organizations, and the system. Two representative comments from different participants from phase 2 include:

> Wow. Those are deep. Very deep. Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for sharing that with me. Sometimes we say things, and we are in our face with our journey and we think we are the only one on that journey and then there are others that are taking the same journey, and we have things in common… [the story that we are telling as workers] that's huge. That's a timebomb. That's a volcano waiting to erupt. And that needed to be done way, way, way, there has been such great need, but it needs a lot of courage to do so.

And:

> I agree with every little piece of information that you shared. In terms of who works in the settlement sector it is mainly Newcomer immigrants and refugees, and yes, we are also the bearer of bad news to the families. It's low paid, it is not sustainable. And even professionalizing the field, it's been talked about for a long time, it makes sense for immigrants and refugees to do this work, but we need training. Most of us are just figuring it out because we have the heart, but as they [phase 1 participants] say, it is the only opportunity we've got and we figure it out.

A theme that emerged across the conversations with participants in phase 2 referred to the hesitation that workers who are Newcomers feel in advocating for themselves, and the discrepancy they see between their Newcomer and Canadian-born colleagues in this. One participant stated:

> Usually advocates are Canadian born people, in many different instances because they have voice, they feel empowered, they are not going to be deported for doing something nasty. In Newcomers, this feeling is real, and so it's kind of a barrier too, pushing for change.

Another participant from phase 2 talked about their own experience of voicelessness, tied it to impacts of internalized colonization and expressed their hope that more Newcomer workers would embrace their own voices and the courage to speak up:

> …believing that we are Canadian citizens and kind of repeating ourselves until we believe it that our voices are important and that we can continue making the systems in Canada better and more flexible and more humane and more just and now we also need to participate in that and to heal from how maybe how colonization impacted us to be, like, submissive, and sort of like, appeasing the people in power, and all of these skills and surviving, coping skills that we've all learned, that maybe we could get out of that into more ourselves. Feel confidence and take a risk in speaking up and making our home which is Canada better for everyone. I'm hoping that all of us here can get excited about that.

A third participant echoed this call to action but spoke of the fears Newcomers face in self-advocacy:

> …if we don't push in that direction, if we don't fight the inequalities, the change we will see will be minimal to the people we support, and it will never stop. But what do you do when you face, when you get employment and you are facing racism and you are about to lose your job and things like that and so, I agree, systemic change is very important and I think because most of us are

> Newcomers ourselves, we are afraid of pushing the system. Or pushing for change. It's really silent.

The messages the participants in phase 2 wanted to send back to the original participants were messages of meaningfulness and connection. They wanted to thank them for their words, let them know they shared all the same experiences, and to tell them how important it is to tell these stories. One participant summed this up saying:

> Thank you, thank you, thank you. Those experiences are like gold. That is like opening a secret, something, just me being able to go through that is like showing me a mirror and I am able to see all. And the work that they are doing, wow. I respect. I honour them. I hold them in a place of compassion in my heart and I walk the journey with them. The message that I would like to send back to them is that they are not alone. That this journey, they may not be able to see this physically, my going through the process, but getting to see these messages is like holding their hands and walking with them. And it feels like we are in connection, and so tell them that a piece of my heart and a part of my heart holds them in this journey and I walk with them.

Layer 1 – Relationships with Government Systems and Canadian Society: Broader Macro Level Power Relationships

Within this theme, comments were divided up into the following subthemes: caught between clients and the system; expectations of Canada; frustrations with the system; challenges settling in Canada; racism in Canada; and, gender discrimination and inequality in Canada.

The Double-bind: Identifying with Clients and Representing the System

A dominant theme throughout the interviews was the participants' experiences being 'caught' between clients and the systems in Canada. In this theme the system often refers to the settlement sector specifically, but workers also highlight the challenges working with their clients as they are attempting to access resources from mainstream services as well. This theme highlights the stress workers face as the representatives of the system as a whole. Workers describe how they have their own frustrations with the systems in their own experience of settlement, but the dissonance being the agent of the system enforcing rules and boundaries on their clients, while simultaneously trying to build relationships with them, and while experiencing the socioemotional connections with their clients' experiences are particularly challenging. One participant stated simply, "for me that is a failure … when I become the system." Another described the powerlessness and empathy they experience because of their clients' suffering as a result of the systemic barriers:

> Everyone was talking about how they're hungry. Yeah. And then they told me half of the clients are still in the hotels and they don't want to come because they are hungry and don't have any energy and they don't have any motivation. You feel it as a human being.

In addition to being caught between clients and the system, workers describe being the target of the frustration and anger of their clients because of these complicated roles. One worker said, "because I was there the anger was towards me." Another worker explained it as, "I am the system to them. I am the person talking to them and they redirect their anger. It is the way they communicate what they are going through and what they went through." Several workers talked about trying to differentiate their roles from the rest of the system. One stated it as, "I am

repeating over and over and over again to our clients, 'I'm not the agency, I'm not the government, I'm not making the decision.'"

The impact of being caught between the rigidity in the system, and the realities of their clients' needs leaves workers with feelings of powerlessness and despair. Several quotes from participants identifying this included:

> I feel like the system is breaking. And there is nothing I can do. I couldn't continue the session because I see the frustration, it was too much and they were very angry and they feel like no one wants to listen to us, no one cares.

And:

> You can't change because this is the reality now. And they don't understand that it is the reality. Somebody may think maybe it is because of racism that I am given this place to stay. Some will say maybe because that person doesn't like me.

One worker added, "it makes you feel like you can't do anything. You are powerless. You are frustrated." Another worker talked about the impact on her stating, "you can't do anything; you can't just change. It just frustrates you, and sometimes as a Newcomer, it makes me feeling being afraid about tomorrow."

Built into the system are service gaps and barriers to services for their clients. While I address the experiences of barriers in factors about the work below, workers also talked about the systemic nature of the barriers. One participant stated:

> I have all this work to do because I don't have enough resources, because we have all these structures, the housing, the health crisis, so the amount of work

> increases and then [the organization] says don’t do overtime, so our stuff is increasing more in ethical dilemmas that cause a lot of pain.

As this worker identifies, service gaps and systemic barriers which exist at the meta-system level, exert forces upon the organization, and collectively both of these layers exert forces upon the worker and their relationship with their client.

Dealing with Client Expectations of Canada: Not Quite as Advertised

There were a number of comments about the image that Canada portrays internationally, and the image of Canada that many Newcomers have as not being realistic. One worker simply stated, “when we come from a third world country, we have that vision that everything here is perfect.” Such disparity between the image and the reality causes significant challenges for the workers. Participants described their own frustrations trying to educate clients about their role and the realities of life in Canada, frustrations with Canada for the image that it portrays globally and the lack of real information for Newcomers before arrival. The consensus between the participants were feelings of frustration and powerlessness for the disparity between the expectations and reality. One worker summarized many of these experiences saying:

> They say when we were told our cases were now in Canada, they said our expectations was high. Like they will never face the struggles they were facing in the camps, like shelter, food, those basic needs. That same thought now is making them kill themselves after arriving in Canada. Some said, ‘I wish I knew this, I wouldn’t come.’ Or some people come and say ‘is there any way to go back?’ So, when you hear that, and you don’t know how to help, that frustrates you because there are no words to comfort them.

Frustration was directed by participants towards the Government of Canada, or Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the main funder and policy making department for the settlement sector within the Government of Canada. Frustrations expressed by the participants include comments related to policies that create income instability as well as the barriers and gaps in the system. Participants expressed how they felt the role conflict between meeting the needs of their clients, and meeting the needs of the Government of Canada and IRCC. One participant summed up many of these comments saying, "most of the time what we are doing is fighting against new things that are dictated by IRCC, that make more difficult the work of our teams." Another participant articulated their perception of the Government's priorities:

> Governments like non-profits to exist because without it they can't do this massive amount of [work] we call it the human business, like helping humans is such huge work, I don't think they can do it alone, but you know, the support is not enough for us to do the work.
>
> The policies they put on immigration issues; they impact us. I don't think it is informed bottom up from the needs of people, of immigrants, of refugees. It is top down, what the public likes to hear and different ideologies around immigration impact what non-profit are able to do.
>
> I think obviously everything is about politics. Even small movements like for example housing right now, there is a housing crisis across Canada, and if you have heard the rhetoric, it is international students are the cause of the housing crisis. In my perspective that is screwed policies really. We know that governments have not been doing enough to build and maintain social housing.

One worker spoke to the frustration with the system and highlighted the adversarial relationship between the government and the workers, seeing themselves and their colleagues in the non-profit sector as the protagonist in the story against the policies of the Government:

> I think governments should do that, they have resources, they can change systems, they have influence over the politics of everything. I feel that non-profits are just people with big mission and good hearts but you can only do so much.

Job Precarity in Canada: Feeling Trapped

While many participants expressed the frustration at the system as a whole, one worker spoke directly to how funding policies affect workers directly creating anxiety about income instability. Many of the organizations in the settlement sector are funded on an annual basis, allowing for changes in volumes of arrivals and funding priorities. The impact on the workers is income-instability, with most workers waiting until the new budgets are announced to know if they will have work the following month, or if they will be unemployed. One participant described the impact as:

> Another thing that keeps me worried is that most of the contracts are a temporary base. Yeah, every year, we wonder 'are we going to be here,' 'should I start looking for another job,' I saw many people being having their contracts ending. Even people that were here for like 20, 23 years.

Mirroring their clients' experiences of settlement in Canada, participants also spoke of job conditions and precarity that increase the stress on the workers for maintaining their performance in their jobs and enforcing the policies and programs. These personal hardships compound the experience of being caught between the system and their clients, and the struggles

with Canada. One participant summed this up saying, "losing a job in Canada means for me, losing my life."

While there is a part of me that reacts to the intensity of that language, I am aware that is from my privilege and perspective. When participants in phase 2 read the statement, they agreed with the sentiment and the level of fear attached to the possibility of losing a job. Most of the participants had significant struggles finding employment at all, and ended up working in the settlement sector because they were unable to find work anywhere else. One participant stated, "they didn't hire me. There are not that many doors open here. This is very real." Another participant talked about how the situation doesn't improve much over time in Canada:

> For some after working here for 10 years, you are still looking at them as Newcomers and they have been in the workforce for 10 years in Canada. It's equal to a person who is 35, after they got graduated here as a Canadian person. Right? So, it doesn't make any sense.

A different participant spoke to the sense of being trapped in their jobs saying, "when you don't have options for employment elsewhere, you are really stuck. It is very stressful."

Most participants also described their family members' struggles finding work and the responsibility they feel as sole providers for their families (see layer 4 below). The feeling of being trapped in a position without real options, while the position is necessary for survival for you and your family exacerbates the powerlessness and impact of other themes. Combining comments from a few participants, the result is that the fear of losing your job in Canada threatens your survival and puts you in a place where you can't set healthy boundaries at work. This fear to set boundaries differentiates the Newcomer workers from their Canadian-born peers. One participant stated it as:

> … I couldn't say no. And that's the thing, as a Newcomer, I didn't know how to set my boundaries very well at first. And those are main things when it comes to what makes another person who is a Canadian, they know what does it mean to set boundaries at work and to set clear communications on what is expected and not. For us, I would say I'm going to do this because I'm always frightened, I'm going to lose this job.

Impact of Racism and Vicarious Racism in Canada:

"It was one of the most painful things that I went through"

This was a significant category, and also one that some participants were hesitant to talk about. When the subject of racism came up in the interview, one participant stated that thinking about racism in Canada scared them; and that they didn't want to believe it was real, and didn't want to talk about it at all. Other participants talked about the impact of experiencing racism, interpersonally and systemically, for the first time in their lives once they came to Canada:

> My husband and my kids felt a lot of rejection when they came here too, so that made them relate with the Newcomers as well, before coming here I never felt below anybody, but when we came here, that's how I felt for many, many, years.
>
> It was very painful for me to deal with racism [here in Canada]. It was one of the most painful things that I went through.
>
> Racism is a new thing. We don't have it back home, and you come here and you have it.

> Yeah – having privileges back home, and here you are rejected. Yeah. I have experienced racism and homophobia in Canada.

Participants also talked about the vicarious racism they experience through the experiences of their clients:

> [watching clients experience racism in Canada] is bad. It makes you feel scared. I don't want to believe it because I know so many good people. Wonderful people. But I think racism can be everywhere. Anyone can be racist. I take it personally, it feels scary.

In addition to the fear as a result of experiencing racism and vicarious racism, many participants also talked about the anger and resentment that they feel as a result of these experiences. One participant stated:

> Because why are people not, why nobody's talking about that? Why nobody's seeing that why are we not accepted as equals because you know we actually you know I reached the point where I think we should even be have more privilege because we paid to be here, we didn't born here accidently, we paid to be here, we gave up our lives to be here, so how come I don't have equal rights? So, it caused me a lot resentment, it caused me a lot of questioning.

Another participant said:

> You become angry. Sometimes I feel very angry and very upset because, oh I feel so emotional [tears up], when we work with idea though … that it was possible to create a different world, equality, we believe that it was possibility for a different world, democratic, ruled by human rights principles, and we are going backwards, so I am very upset with that.

Gender Discrimination in Canada: "If Newcomer women stopped all the unpaid work..."

These comments are connected to a similar category below related to the layer of the organization, however these comments here are focussed on the larger context of gender inequality in Canada. While there are only a couple of comments, this was a theme that was shared across the participants. As I stated in the methodology chapter, all of my participants were assigned female at birth. My selection process was open across gender, and while I did have two men express interest and I followed up several times, in the end only workers assigned female at birth, were willing to speak with me.

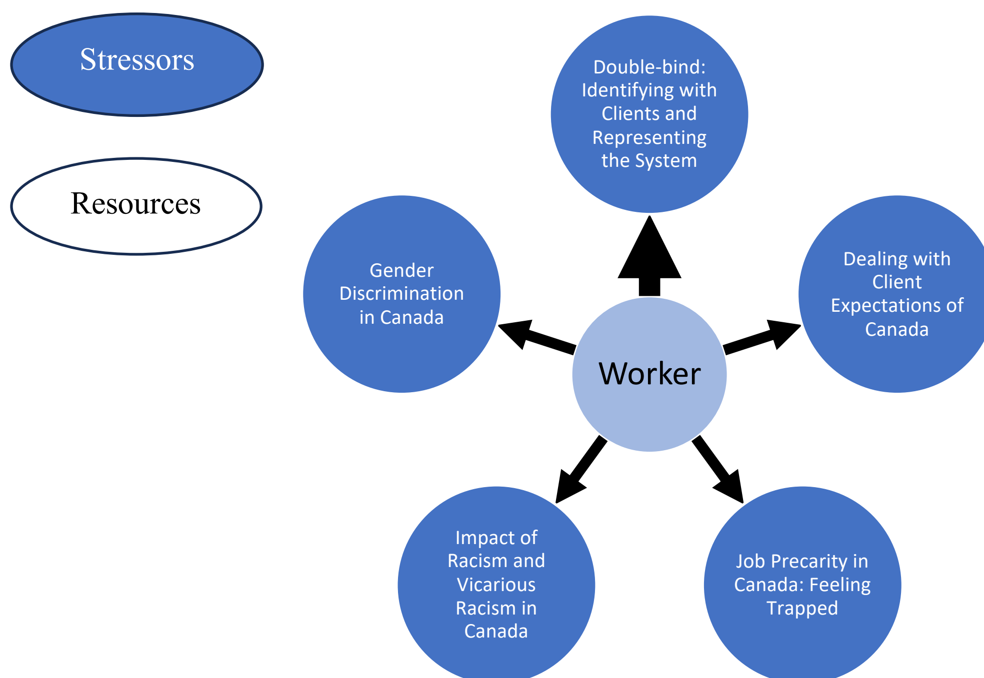
Participants see the inequities based upon gender in their organization, and across the settlement sector as a whole. One participant stated, "all social services are based on the work of women and the work of women is never valued as men are." Another participant agreed, stating, "so, this is all I think about why women are teachers, why women are nurses, because we are caregivers, the story is that women are more in the non-profit sector." A third participant spoke to the systemic inequality and the level of unpaid work that Newcomer women do across the settlement sector, saying, "if Newcomer women stopped all the extra unpaid work that they do, the entire settlement system would grind to a halt."

Summary of Layer 1

All of the themes in this upper layer (see Figure 4) act as depleting forces on the workers' wellbeing, and are forces that the workers themselves (and even the organization) have little influence over. These meta-level experiences however have an impact on the rest of the themes

in the other layers, reinforcing the power of the stressors in the layers of the organization, client relationship and workers' personal lives; while undermining the resources at those levels.

Figure 4: *Eco-map of Layer 1 - Relationships with government systems and Canadian society: Broader macro level power relationships*



Note: The size and weight of the arrows shows the strength of the impact as identified by the workers, and directionality shows flow of resources to or from the worker.

Layer 2 – The Culture of the Organization: "But hold on – I'm a person too"

Participants identified many impacts to their wellbeing that were specific to the workplace itself. Participant identified factors include: being a client of the organization prior to working there; systemic stress in the workplace; the importance of supervisor; racism and lateral racism; experiencing a disconnect with the organization/management; needing more money;

gender discrimination in the organization; morale (including competition at work; constant change; and, lack of training); and, respect for coworkers.

As we are focussing on the relationship between the workers and the organizations, this domain showed the greatest discrepancy between the responses of the phase 1 participants (who are all in the same organization) and the phase 2 participants (who were each in different organizations). In the findings below, I have privileged the phase 1 responses, and highlighted when phase 2 participants had different experiences. Doing this allowed me to highlight the organization involved, the experiences of their own workers, and contrast those experiences with with experiences of other workers in similar organizations from outside the region. At this layer, while these are the aspects the organization has the most influence over, it is important to keep this in context of the forces that exist in Layer 1. While the organization can push back against socialization forces from that layer, they are also limited by them.

Dual Roles: The Impact of Being Their Client Before Being Hired

All of the phase 1 participants described beginning their relationship with the organization as a client before becoming a paid staff. While the interview guide did not specifically focus on this relationship, if this study were replicated, this would be an area to explore further. Participants stated this dual role matter-of-factly saying, “[this organization] was very helpful at the beginning. I also do some volunteer jobs here to get the Canadian experience.” Another participant stated, “I was volunteering at the beginning, conversation circles, getting into different programs, integration program, and then I started working finally.”

Other than the comment above specifying ‘finally’ starting work with the organization, which implies frustration, the impression from the conversations with most of the workers is that

this is a normal process and role. However, I believe that this dual role creates a meaningful difference between the workers who are Newcomers from their colleagues who are Canadian-born; and, between the workers who are Newcomers, and many of their supervisors and the leadership of the organization. This pre-existing client relationship creates expectations of care and a social hierarchy between those who have resources and are able to give care, and those who don't and need support. This needs to be explored further as I don't believe that this pre-existing relationship changes very quickly once clients become staff, and it leaves the workers more attuned to their relationships with the other workers, supervisors and leadership, magnifying discrepancies in social power, and also magnifying the other forces listed below that affect wellbeing.

The Burnout Pace: "the relentless overwhelming amount of work…"

These comments speak to the general level of stress experienced on a day to day basis by the participants. Workers from all organizations commented on the heavy workloads in the settlement sector and feelings of burnout. One participant highlighted this ongoing stress stating:

> It came to the point where they [supervisors] say if you are applying for jobs, let me know. They are relying on me, but they are relying on me in an unhealthy way. And I said that to them. This is unhealthy and stressful. Their workload is not healthy.

Participants from other agencies in phase 2, agreed:

> Sometimes sanity is very difficult. I think sometimes that makes me want to leave the profession. I have been in it for 13 years and I sometimes wonder

> maybe I stayed too long and now I am feeling it? It is really like the relentless overwhelming amount of work that is problematic.

Another participant from a different organization stated:

> And it is not only me, I see it in me, my colleagues, my ED, former leaders. You don't pay people well, people leave, we're always hiring. It's amazing work, but it could be really overwhelming… It's sad, we lost so many people who loved doing the work, but they are not able to afford life or they are, you know, mentally just breaking down.

Participants highlighted several areas impacted by the ongoing stress. One participant talked about co-worker relationships stating, "We usually have each other's backs, … but there still is a hierarchy inside the group and… they can provide you help as long as you don't take too much from them."

While many talked about how amazing their coworkers are, workers also talked about how the stress creates animosity between teams and between workers at times. While some of these hierarchies are invisible, some are overt. One participant shared an example of an overt hierarchy explaining that in one program, personal offices are given to some workers on the team, while other workers on the same team have to float and borrow offices at the discretion of the first group.

Participants were clear about locating the overwhelming stress in the organization itself. Acknowledging the barriers clients face as well (see layer 3 for more on this), one participant clarified the source of their own stress as about the workplace, not the clients:

> Yes, I'm concerned about the clients and you know every day, the client situation is because the client is in real trouble. That doesn't bother me. What bothers me more is all the crap here.

High stress and high workloads interrupt the meaningfulness of the work that participants do ("they hired me to get more into [a particular] lens, but I'm doing a lot of other work"), and results in situations where workers continue to work unpaid overtime, while not allowing themselves to engage in restorative options like sick time and holidays:

> I'm not even taking the sick days. What it means for me, I am going to take the day off, and I have a lot of work, I can't manage all this workload tomorrow, so I have to cut my day and start working in the evening and the afternoon, so that is what I'm doing.

Another participant stated similarly, "it is so busy, I am not even taking my holidays, because if I take my holidays, there is double the work when I come back so it is not even worth it."

All the participants describe the ongoing stress and unending crises that need attention, as leading to feelings of burnout and exhaustion.

Feeling Heard or Unheard by Supervisors: "I get angry at not having somebody telling me how to better support them. I have to beg for advice"

This was a very significant theme, with the widest range of experiences within the phase 1 participants from the same organization, and also the largest difference in experiences between the group from the agency in phase 1, and the participants from different agencies in phase 2. It is obvious that in these workers' lives, who the supervisor is, and the quality of the supervisory

relationship, is crucial for their wellbeing. For instance, some participants see the supervisor as a key support:

> I've never been as happy as with my personal team and my personal connection you know with my supervisor and my manager. I feel they are really trying the best to support us as a team and me individually. There's also a trust there. I, I trust them. I can speak freely and as freely as I want to that I can and do you know bring things forwards and things like that. And you know, they will also say what they can do and cannot do. End of story. So, I like that. I like that a lot. I wish that for everybody.

Another participant shared, "we meet with [supervisor] every week and if we have any kind of case, any kind of issue, we go to her, she supports us." In contrast, other participants talked about their frustration with their experience of feeling unheard, or uncared for by their supervisors. One participant stated:

> When I started, I feel that people were happier here. I didn't hear so much complaining from my colleagues. And [my previous supervisor] was [x] and I used to have very good relationship with [x] and I saw that shift…. She's angry. She's always defensive.

Another participant said their supervisor, "…brought this competitiveness to the team and it is not healthy." Another participant talked about their supervisor being unavailable, "sometimes I need that simple question, and I go to my supervisor, and my supervisor says, ask your colleagues, but some of our colleagues don't know, or if they do, sometimes they don't know the whole thing."

Most of the participants expressed their frustration at their supervisors' focus on statistics at meetings, but underneath this was the story that supervisors were focussed on the needs of the organization (i.e. meeting the needs of the funder), rather than the needs of the staff (how to support clients). On the surface, one worker summed it up saying, "so many stats, it's always the stats." Another worker went a bit further and located the blame on the system and IRCC stating, "IRCC more and more the reports are how many clients how many services? What kept you away from the target? If you are on the target you don't need to say anything."

Within the complaints about the focus on statistics, participants were frustrated that the complex and challenging work that they did with clients was reduced to simplistic attendance records, and that their supervisor's focus was on the reporting obligations rather than supporting staff with their clients:

> Supervision is not about numbers. That is not the priority. Priority is what is your relationship with your client. How do you understand your client? That is your priority. What do you need to understand your client?

Another participant stated:

> Some of them [clients] I know are lying to me, to my face, but I know why they are lying because they are afraid of Immigration. They come from a place where they learn not to trust each other. I have a family from [x], I know, we grow up not trusting each other, or police, or family, the neighbor. So, I don't get angry at them, I get angry at not having somebody telling me how to better support them. I have to beg for advice.

Several workers talked about not feeling valued or appreciated by their supervisors. One participant commented on feeling undervalued, stating "I never heard any compliment from my

leadership ever." Another participant said, "take our own experiences and take our inputs seriously in the work, it could be starting from being heard." Another participant talked about how they watched a colleague's expertise from past roles back home go un-noticed or under-utilized by the agency, and watching others be not valued for their uniqueness and expertise.

The result of the breakdown in the supervisory relationship is increased isolation, increased mistrust, increased burnout, and an increased feeling of disconnection in the relationship with the organization. Participants repeatedly characterized their experience as the client and worker on one team, and the supervisor and the leadership of the organization on a different team.

Racism, Lateral Violence, and Discrimination between Co-workers: "Even among immigrants, there's a lot of prejudice"

The participants shared their experiences of watching racism between colleagues and clients and the impact that it had on them and their relationships with these coworkers; discussed their own surprise at the amount of racism that exists between coworkers; and, talked about how lateral violence between coworkers undermines morale and wellbeing at work. One participant talked about one program where the staff were mainly from one cultural group, who privileged clients from their culture, and allocated resources to these clients at the expense of clients from other regions or cultures. While the actions were specifically in worker-client relationships, the impact is that colleagues from other backgrounds are aware of the racism and avoid or distrust interaction with this group of workers. Another worker expressed their surprise at the presence of lateral racism saying:

> Every day it confirmed that we have so many biases, for example, I thought at first that all the Newcomers would have empathy with each other, which is not true. At the beginning I had higher expectations with other immigrants because I thought that 'ok, we're on the same boat,' so I was very naïve.

Another participant described it saying:

> We're all here all here struggling, all here for different reasons, but we're all trying to make our lives better and providing for our families so everybody will kind of help you, but it's not like that even among immigrants, there's a lot of prejudice. I see that.

One participant contrasted their experience of white, Canadian born colleagues with their colleagues who are Newcomers, and their surprise that the racism came from other Newcomers rather than the Canadian-born colleagues:

> I thought that white Canadians wouldn't be able to empathize with the clients, but the only white Canadian lady that is on the team is one of the best settlement workers … she is the one that empathizes the most…that was a surprise for me. Oh my gosh, she's like a white woman and from this tiny place here and she always lived here, but she is the one that is willing to go extra mile for the clients. At the same time, I saw some of my colleagues that are people of colour they have issues with other immigrants from different origins… That was causing me was self-reflection, a lot of self-reflection, and a lot of resentment.

Another participant talking about the impact of the racism between their colleagues stated, "I can't work in an environment where I might be feeling the racism," She identified the lateral racism as a significant factor for seeking work elsewhere. Another participant talked about

their experience of the diverse skills and abilities of workers who are Newcomers not being fully utilized or valued by the organization, and the resulting feelings of being devalued.

Participants from the different agencies in phase 2 connected with the experiences of the workers in the agency in phase 1, sharing that lateral racism exists where they work as well. Two of the participants in phase two took the discussion further and spoke to the experiences of 2SLGBTQ staff, and homophobia/transphobia in Newcomer communities. One who identified as an ally stated:

> Have you looked into the impacts on LGBTQ workers? Because when they come here that is really hard, the rest of the services don't get the culture part, and the Newcomer cultures don't often get the LGBTQ part. That's really hard.

Another phase 2 participant, who identifies as part of the 2SLGBTQ community stated that she has experienced racism at work, but that the homophobia there has been more distressing:

> I think that I have experienced more homophobia though. As a lesbian working in a Newcomer community in an agency where the powerful people in the agency are Newcomers and from other cultures… I get to do my work and focus on my work, and I can sense the discomfort that they [have], and how the discomfort translates to mistrust. And I see it, I feel it, and so maybe racism, and at my agency, it is more [homophobia] I think. Does it have an impact on me, yes it does. For my own sake, and also part of my belief system, that maybe, kindness and respect; maybe if I show them what I would like to see from them [tears up], that maybe they will be able to do it later. That maybe, so yeah [cries softly].

The Disconnect with the Organization & Management: "But hold on, I'm a person too"

Across the participants, the stories that the workers told were that the workers see themselves as client-facing, and they see the organization as funder-facing. Several participants (ones with positive relationships with their supervisor) were deliberate to point out their perception that the leadership was doing what they could, and that they are aware of the pressures put on the organization by the funding model, but that the workers were also aware of the disconnect that many of their colleagues experience. Participants who did not feel supported by their supervisors felt more disconnected. While this discrepancy of focus (clients vs. funders) is structural in non-profit organizations, the workers say that the impact of the disconnect is that people stop perceiving that they are on the same team. In this case, the workers expressed their belief that their job was to meet the needs of their clients, and then to meet the needs of their supervisors/management, but largely the perception is that there is not sufficient time or resources for the supervisors/management to be concerned about the workers' needs. This leads to a perception of not mattering, or feeling devalued as a human, in a relational sense.

The workers emphasized that workers need to feel that they matter to the organization, and one way for the organization to achieve this is to show them that what matters to them (their relationships with their clients) matters to the organization too. One participant stated it as:

> This work with Newcomers brings me back, I am always trying to balance, I need to understand them, I need to empathize with them. I need to learn from them. I need to learn their perspective. At the same time, how come nobody is talking about that, nobody is looking at my needs. I am always trying to balance being a good [worker], but hold on, I'm a person too.

Workers often feel stuck and unable to get back home to visit family, while their Canadian-born colleagues can go home or visit family for a short period of time, but the travel and expense make it impossible to go home for a short visit for them. This worker talked about the vacation policies as being restrictive and unconcerned with their reality as a Newcomer and wished there was a way they could extend vacations, take time off without pay, save up vacation for a following year for a longer trip, etc.

Other workers talked about the challenges with internal conflicts in the organization and the lack of appropriate response from leadership or HR. One participant stated, "Once I needed help, I went to HR, HR is pathetic. When I had issue with [workgroup], it's not an issue with [workgroup], it's [seen as] me that wasn't adapting." Another participant talked about their experience watching a colleague be affected by racism from a client and the lack of support from the organization:

> I had another colleague; she had a client refusing to work with her because she is Black, she is African. I was outraged. Instead of [the organization] having her back, and say it's her or nothing, they accepted and put another person towards this client. So, this colleague of mine felt completely alone because she has no one to protect her... Take accountability for what is not working. That is the first step. They don't even go to the first step because they do not allow it, they don't have any type of acknowledgement. Even cases of abuse, and aggression and racism, everything's just filed. They have conversations, they have meetings and conversations but bullying and harassment, it doesn't go anywhere.

One participant from a different organization in phase 2 shared their frustration with their management when they were included on a committee because of their race and then people expressed surprise that she had meaningful things to say, leaving her the impression that she was supposed to be present and allow the committee to use her race to show inclusion, but not to participate meaningfully.

In contrast, another phase 2 participant, having read the responses from the phase 1 group shared how she wouldn't be able to work in an environment like what was being described. She shared her experience of feeling trusted and valued in her role:

> I think that for me, my place of work still has the culture that we kind of had a few years ago of like trust. So, this idea that you come and you do your work and nobody is trying to [catch you] or if you come late or stay late or come early or this idea that you like giving us choice and freedom and trust, I think that goes a long way in my inner sense of like I don't have to worry about what people at work think about me. It gives me the flexibility to like maybe I will have two sessions and tomorrow I will have five. It gives me the opportunity to take care of myself. I think that is one of the major things, that trusting the people to do the work.

Many of the workers commented on the lower salaries and the perception of a largely immigrant and female workforce and lower pay. This has implications both financially and emotionally as the message received is that their work is not valued, and that the workers themselves are not valued, and the racism and gender discrimination that they see in the system and the community is also present in the organization. One participant stated, "I feel that IRCC, for example, the low salaries we have, it is because we are immigrants, it is simple. Cheap work

force." The reinforcement of these messages on different levels makes them far more powerful in their impacts. In commenting on money, several participants were deliberate in pointing out that other aspects of the job are rewarding and worth more than the money, referring to the meaningfulness of their client work and the moments where they see clients achieving security and successes as the real reward. One participant explained her husband's frustration with her salary and explained that for her, "it is not only about the money, yes? It's about, I don't know, you and your place in this world." These stories of personal meaning exist in Layers 3 and 4 (working with clients and the workers' personal lives), and are examples of forces at those levels engaging transformative force against the forces at this layer. While the presence of meaningfulness in the relationships with the clients, and the personal values and beliefs about their place in the world are resourcing to the worker, they do not undo the experience of the disconnect with the organization at this layer, rather, the workers experience both of these forces of socialization and transformation simultaneously.

Gender Discrimination in the Organization: "To have the same value I have to do three times more"

Adding to the impact of lateral racism at work, and the stories of racism by clients being tolerated, many participants talked about their experiences of systemic discrimination based on gender in their work. The common perception is that because they are women, they are less valued and it is assumed that they will work past normal hours for no pay to care for others. One participant explained it saying:

> They (management) said, you know, you have to be 100% on this. You know you have to put in extra hours, you have to work on Saturdays and Sundays. And

> I said yes, I've been doing that on the other team. So, we are expected to do that. If we don't, we're less, and because we are all women, many of us are immigrants, women of colour we always have that mentality, that to have the same value I have to do 3x more. And that is emphasized in this role. I have to do that.

Another participant shared her perspective, saying "and it's all women, men don't last, and the supervisor is a women, and the manager is a woman, and the director is a woman, and the CEO is a woman." Another participant commented on their perception of the difference between men and women in the organization:

> They [men] don't do as many hours, they put their health and the health of their families in the first place. Except for [x], I don't even see the other guys here. Honestly, they have more boundaries, and they are super valued. They leave because, oh, I should be making so much more money than I am so they leave, so the ones that stay they have a lot more boundaries, that's how I feel.

Another participant commented on how policies are applied differently with male and female workers, using dress code as an example:

> Things like, stupid things, we cannot wear jeans here, now after covid, we sort of, we cannot have jeans, but you see men, our colleague men wearing jeans and coming very informal, but if we do, they will come [and reprimand us].

Another participant talked about other policies that affect the female workers differently than the male workers because of gender roles in the family, pointing to "all the issues about flexible time, children getting sick" and how they uniquely stress the women in the organization who have the majority of the responsibility for care in their families.

Worker Morale and Feeling Defeated: "They are all giving up"

All of the workers talked about issues of morale in the organization, and in particular the impact of constant change, a competitive environment, and the lack of training.

Participants commented on the negativity in the workplace and its impact on workplace culture. Several talked about the complaining they hear around them, "my coworkers complain a lot about their clients." One noted how the culture of negativity around her impacts her saying "this constant complaining is affecting [me], it's contagious." Another participant stated how she is aware of her coworkers looking for work outside the agency as a result of the morale:

> They started like me, very motivated and now two of them already told me that they are job searching. And these are very well educated young ladies, but they are all giving up.

Another participant shared that for her, the negativity came from the management, not from her coworkers:

> I'm very insecure all the time. And whenever I have a feedback, … what they bring is always what you're not doing, what you're supposed to be doing, what is lacking, your never [hear], 'oh, you already know that, that's wonderful, you already know that, that's great, what do you think you still need help with?' So, it's the tone, the approach that I'm always feeling. For example, I have a meeting with my supervisor, I already know what's coming, I'm anxious about that because I know what's coming.

Morale: Competition at Work

Several participants talked about the culture of competition that exists within teams and between programs. One stated, "once they decided to divide the team, a competition begun." Another said:

> I noticed that once they split it became something completely different, there is this competition, there is this pushing us… it is not clear for us, where the work from [Program A] ends, and when the [Program B] work starts. I see the competition inside our team, [The supervisor] is bringing this competitiveness to the team.... She brought this competitiveness to the team and it is not healthy.

Morale: Constant Change

Participants also talked about the impact of constant organizational change on morale. For instance, one stated:

> On top of the new division, the new management, the new colleagues, the there's a lot of people coming and going especially in [Program A], many people the supervisor that started in [Program A] with me is already leaving. She is here for 1 year. The turnover is very big. So, we are always dealing with people that are constantly are training. They never know the job.

Another participant said:

> [Supervisor A] is not experienced enough to give us the support so I feel that things are always changing, changing and changing. And I welcome change and I need a break. We don't ever have a break, and I need a break.

A third participant stated, “so, it is all the things, the guidelines, the management, the colleagues, the procedures are always changing so we get lost.” Another participant explained that the impact of the constant change is bewildering and unsettling, “I feel that I am always stepping on eggshells because I never know what’s gonna change or where should I go if I need something.”

Morale: Lack of Training

The constant change works in conjunction with the perceived lack of training with the result that the workers never feel confident in what their role is. One worker stated, “[x] doesn’t have time or patience, she doesn’t have the support or she doesn’t know how to train the team.” Other workers also spoke to the lack of training saying:

> Because they don’t communicate. They don’t train each other. They don’t have a manual. They don’t have a uniform training to provide. So, we do what we can, we learn a little from here, a little from there, we’re putting this puzzle together and there’s always missing pieces.

And:

> There was very little training involved, I just came so raw, basically also just trying to struggle and find my way. Probably also not the strongest client centered approach at that point, it was more the blind leading the blind.

Respect for Coworkers: “People do this job because they are kind and loving people”

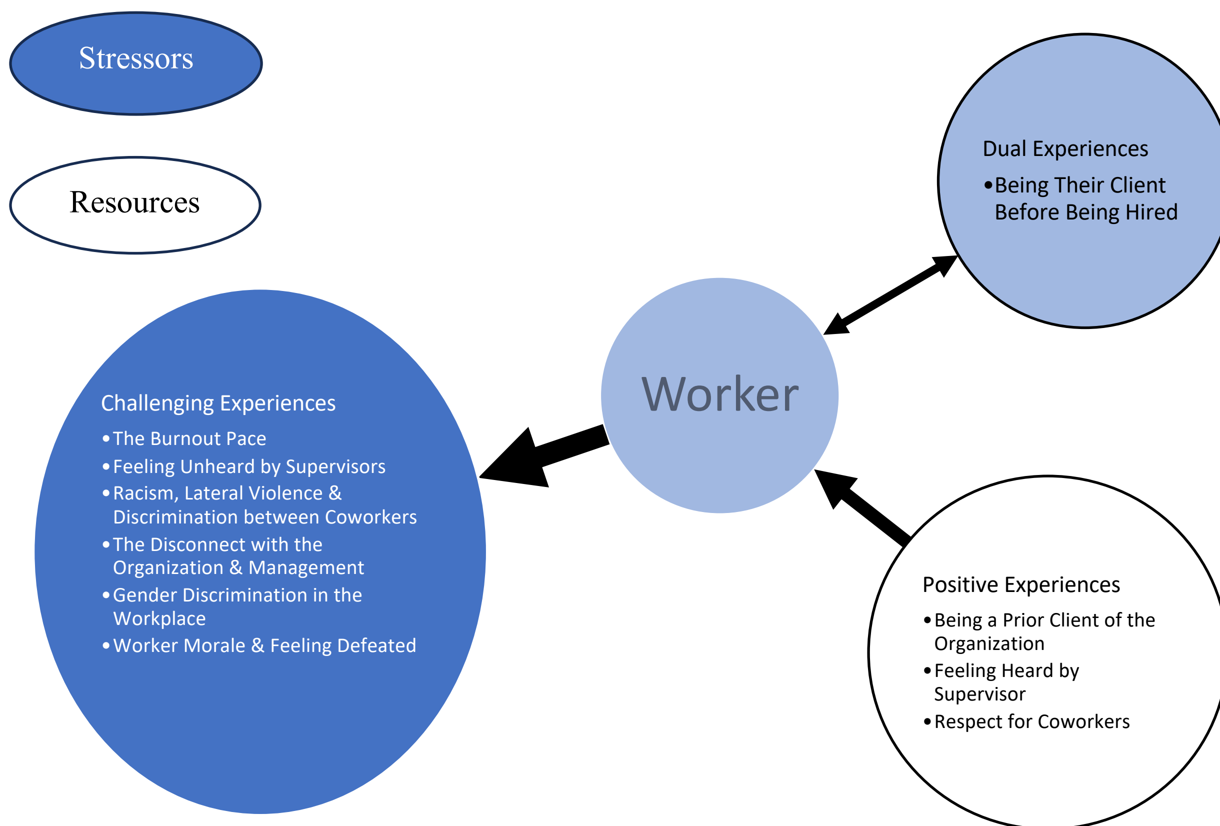
Amidst the conversations about competition, morale, systemic discrimination, disconnections with management; workers expressed positive feelings towards their colleagues.

One worker stated, "I love my team. And we have a very good sense of humour and sometime is dark humour, very dark [laughs]." Another worker shared, "the other thing is that I also have a true appreciation for my coworkers. I want them to be well. I feel that people do this job because they love it and because they are good people and kind people and loving people." Another stated, "I have colleagues who really work hard to help clients. I really admire them." Another worker talked about her colleagues saying, "they are so gentle; I have colleagues who are very gentle and they always think of other ways to help Newcomers."

Summary of Layer 2

The themes in this area highlighted a concerning relationship between the workers and the organization (see figure 5) where the workers express feeling significantly more negative experiences than positive. These themes are impacted by Layer 1, and the presence of the marginalization within the context of Canadian society and the Canadian government systems, strengthens the negative experiences with the organization, and adds to a more global experience of marginalization in the workers' lives.

Figure 5: *Eco-map of Layer 2 - The Culture of the Organization*



Note: The size and weight of the arrows shows the strength of the impact as identified by the workers, and directionality shows flow of resources to or from the worker.

Layer 3 - Working with Clients: "There is so much meaning, and it is also so stressful"

This domain contained the most comments by far, and that is no surprise. The focus of the workers is on the work that they do with their clients, and story after story reinforced that these relationships are the largest impacts on the workers' day to day wellbeing. As this 3rd layer exists within the context of the 1st and 2nd layers, forces in those layers affect the themes that are identified here, however, while these themes exist within the context of the workers' roles in the

organization, the organization itself doesn’t have direct control over the impacts at this layer. It does however have significant influence, and as shown in Layer 2 above, the workers themselves are asking for help in supporting their relationships with their clients. Finding ways to help workers manage the impacts they experience within their client relationships, and finding ways to support workers to engage the resilience that these relationships nurture, will be one important consideration for organizations improving worker wellbeing.

As we explore the themes in this domain, there is a significant duality of the experience – on one side there is the meaningfulness the workers experience of the work that they do, their empathy and personal connection with their clients which brings the workers closer to their clients, and also increases the workers’ wellbeing. On the other side, there is the stress of the work, the impact of the barriers and the client stories of hardship and trauma which challenge worker wellbeing. One participant talked about the duality directly, saying, “That’s how complex this is, eh? There is so much meaning and it is also so stressful. And it can really personally get to you.”

There is a very interesting theme that arose in the discussions related to the impact of the clients’ stories of hardship and trauma, the workers’ experiences of vicarious trauma, and the impact of the barriers in the system their clients are facing presently. As discussed earlier in the literature review, empathy is identified as a risk factor for vicarious trauma. We can see a duality in the data below that the workers’ connections with their clients and their empathy for their clients are rewarding; and, at the same time, they also increase the impacts of the clients’ struggles on the workers. Where the current literature focusses on the relationship between empathy and the impact of the stories, it is powerful to note that every single participant from both phases stated that while hearing their clients’ stories of trauma is hard, it is the barriers that

their clients currently face that are even more difficult to deal with and are what are causing the overwhelming stress in their roles. It is also important to keep awareness of the duality of the impact that the workers talk about – both positives and negatives at the same time. In the discussions in the focus group, they commented that this isn't a zero sum relationship, with the good outweighing the bad, or vice versa, but the reality is that both the meaningfulness and challenges are very powerful (and exhausting by themselves), and the combination is even more intense. Simplistic strategies to enhance wellbeing by focussing on the positive aspects of the role do not take this complexity into consideration, and workers are saying that they need less intensity overall as well as a better balance between the positive and negative forces.

This layer is full of significant themes: impact of the work with clients; impact of the clients' stories; dealing with barriers; personal connections; vicarious resilience; and, a sense of purpose.

Worn-out and Exhausted: "I can't think of anyone who is feeling healthy right now"

The work with clients is the main focus for the participants, and participants noted the range of impacts it had on their lives including an increased negative outlook, increased stress, lack of energy in life outside of work, negative impacts to their spirituality, negative impacts to family, and feeling more humble and intentional about connections in their lives.

Several participants commented on a general slide into a negative perception of life, and how they see this in themselves and the people around them. One participant stated about their coworkers, "I can't think of anyone who is feeling healthy right now." Another participant said, "it's completely changed my life and that's why I open my eyes and I see the problems now."

Participants commented on the increased stress they experience as a result of their work roles. One person talked about being at their limit for stress and how their "stress is up to here and I don't want anybody to ask me anything." Another one talked about how the work feels endless and how they alternate between procrastinating and then doing extra work at home on their time off:

> When I go home, I procrastinate, and sometimes I find myself doing admin work at home which is not good. And it can be Sunday, Saturday, I just open and start doing, and, I think, for our profession burnout is there. But knowing what you feel, and always being aware of the changes in your maybe emotions and you physical thing or anything, just, be aware, and take care of yourself, I can say, otherwise there is burnout.

All participants talked about burnout and the experience of having no energy in other areas of their lives as a result of the impact of their work. Comments from participants on this theme include:

> I'm feeling this tired and not doing things that the way I'm supposed to do. It makes me feel guilty. It doesn't make me feel good. I feel like things are not under my control.
>
> I feel my personal life has been compromised. Because when I started working, I was eight kilos lighter [laughs]. I was eating better, I was exercising more often, I was dating my husband more often. Now, I don't have energy for anything. I am eating garbage all the time. It's affecting my relationship at home. I'm bringing all this garbage home.

> I'm drained, I'm quiet. When I get home, my kids are asking me if I am ok, all the time they are asking if I am ok. I say why? And they say because you are serious. When I get home, I am very quiet.
>
> It gets harder in the night, when I go to bed, that's when it hits me harder.
>
> I am so tired that the only thing I want is to go into the last series I am watching, and not talk at all to anybody. Don't ask me anything.
>
> I have an on and off button. My husband always says you have an on and off but not in between so, when I'm at work, I'm at work, but when I go home in the evening … I don't want to struggle through any social event, no.
>
> Tired, like I don't have the motivation to work. Like we do admin works after we do the sessions, we put the names, we need to do, then you will lose all your motivation for work. You'll feel like tired. Yeah. You feel like you don't want to do anything. You finish your work and even going home you don't want to touch anything.
>
> You just yeah you are tired, yes, and sometimes you just get irritated, simply, easy.
>
> Sometimes when you are tired, I don't want to do anything. If I have to go, like the community people expect you, if there is someone who is sick to go visit, or to just call and say hi, or sometimes you have to invite people because they invite you and if I am tired, I don't want to go, I just want to be lazy. I don't want to go there; I don't want to do anything.

Some participants talked about how the burnout affects their relationship with their spirituality and religion. One participant said, "spiritually, you don't want to go to church or pray

or do anything." Another one talked about the burnout explaining that you are "too tired to pray, you don't want to do anything." A third participant talked about the impact to her spirituality on a deeper level saying, "… and with my spirituality, I feel I have become very skeptical and very, you know, …[trails off]. I probably am angry with whatever is up there."

Workers also talked about how the realities of their work also affected people close to them. One shared how the work has made them more thoughtful about the world and their place within it, and how they have brought this home to their family: "It brings me a lot of self-reflection, and I bring those, some of those reflections to my family, I talk about that quite a lot, I felt that my kids grew so much when we came here."

In addition to all the stress, workers shared some positive outcomes of their work on them. One worker commented, "I am more humble, more patient." Another participant shared, "[Overall, the] impact was more positive than negative because I feel that I am a completely different person now. I see people differently." Another one said:

> So, in a good way, I think I am more with friends and my family and we joke, I think we are more open to different experiences, and I think that is part of me working here, we are more involved in peace in the Middle East, against the war, things like that. So, I think there is more openness.

The Impact of Clients' Stories: A Critical Look at Role Vicarious Trauma Plays

In this section I focus specifically on the impact of the clients' stories that the participants hear daily as part of their work and explore the complex relationship they have with the stories. It is important as we consider these contributions, that we keep a rich complex understanding of the various forces acting upon the workers.

As we talk about the impact of clients' stories on the workers, we need to remain aware that these impacts are heightened by the personal connection the participants have with their clients. One worker stated, "there are stories that you hear, that take you back to your own stories." Another worker reflected on their connection to a client story saying, "my two daughters, it could have been one of them." I develop this theme further below, but I feel it is important to mention here as it helps provide context to what the workers find distressing about their work and the impact of their clients' stories.

One worker kept the stress of the impact of their clients' stories in context saying:

> I feel that the cause of my stress is not client related. Because as much as their lives are a lot harder than mine, and I hear horrific stories, it's not the story that gets me. It's when I see them not seeing a future. But you can move forward, because we all can strive. We all can come from ashes and keep going. So, I can deal with that. That's not what gets me. What gets me is the lack of support that I feel from the organization.

Another worker contextualized the impact of their clients' stories saying:

> The people will have some stories of grief and loss and pain and, that's, I think that's life, right? It's hard in the moment, I mean pain and grief is there and, you know, whether you cry with somebody or not, how you cope in the moment, that's one thing, that's humanity. That's not the part that I struggle with. Not with the humanity. Not with the pain. What I struggle with if I cannot do my job because I cannot provide a connection, for me that is a failure.

Another participant shared their way of accepting their clients' stories, and focussing on the path forwards:

> I can like normally hear such stories, normally listen to people who share such kind of stories. And still, for sure, it's hard to understand that people, they didn't deserve anything like this, nobody deserve anything like this. They, the good thing about it is they survived and they moved forwards, and we can help them with this to rebuild their lives to like to live. And I'm good example. Because I did it [laughs]. And so, I know that other people can do it.

As a whole, the participants shared that hearing the stories of hardship and trauma were challenging, but they used a variety of ways to cope with these and manage the impacts. While workers agreed that vicarious trauma exists in their work, every single participant from both phases rated the negative impact of the stories as easier to deal with than the experience of watching their clients encounter against barriers in the system. In asking one participant in particular whether the stories of pain and loss and trauma were harder to deal with or the barriers their clients face, the worker quickly responded:

> The barriers. Because people are resilient. The barriers are, why, trauma is the same, but let's say that we are here to support naming the healing process, and when we are facing the barriers, we are no helping people in the healing process. They are coming here with the promise that this is going to be safe. And we are part of the structure, the big system that is in place to help you to be safe yeah? But you don't have a family doctor. But, where you are living is a shitty place with cockroaches, and the landlord is a, so, and you are living there. I think that is the part, where sometimes I think, we are contributing to them being more discriminated against. So, the stories are not new. What bothers me is that how can this client can have their language assessment done she needs to start having

> English classes so she can feel home. How are you supposed to feel home when you cannot communicate with other people. This is what bothers me. How come clients are still in the waitlist for the English classes? How come IRCC is not funding more English teachers and classes for these people? That's what gets me.

Other participants shared their own versions of this sentiment. One stated it is, "not being able to see a future is because of the barriers that are there." Another participant acknowledged their experience of vicarious trauma saying, "at the beginning, it was all new, and it was all difficult to imagine, the cruelty and how we treat each other as people, and, there was like some sense of helplessness and a disappointment or even maybe clarity around who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed." They went on to clarify how the more important focus is on life now, "people will tell you their story briefly, but what they really want is to feel safe now and settle. This is their major worry."

Dealing with Barriers: "When I am with them … we are facing those barriers together"

Across all participants from both phases, dealing with present barriers in their clients' lives was universally seen as the most negatively impactful on the workers' wellbeing and significantly more than the impact of the clients' stories of trauma and loss. In discussing the barriers specifically, workers referred to extensive waiting lists; challenges accessing language training; lack of funding for programs to meet the complex and challenging needs that multi-stressed refugee families face; lack of services within the settlement sector for 2SLGTBQ+ clients; lack of supports appropriate for refugee families within mainstream social supports in Canada in the mental health system, physical healthcare system and the child welfare system;

and, housing supports that are out of step with the current housing markets and the needs of larger refugee families.

Describing the barriers as the most impactful is significant as it highlights the impacts of gaps in the Canadian immigration system and attributes accountability for those negative impacts back on the system rather than on their clients' stories of trauma or loss from experiences in their countries of origin.

Participants talked about this in different ways:

> [If I'm awake in the middle of the night thinking about a client,] I'm thinking about their barriers. Because if the barriers were not there, their lives would be made easier. And sometimes I feel like we can deal with that trauma and work with things, but with the barriers, they become a trauma.

Another worker stated:

> [comparing the impact of the client stories and the challenges dealing with barriers in the system – which is harder?] I would say the system. And I say that because I've developed some resilience through my work in terms of handling their stories and applying some vicarious trauma strategies – avoiding vicarious trauma, you know we have systems debriefing, different things we do to take care of ourselves… It used to in the past make me sad, there were times I would cry, I sat down and interviewed clients for programs and I cried and cried. We are a good organization because we are aware that vicarious trauma is real in our sector. We have social workers that check in with people. But to me, it is the systems. I just need to help them [clients]. I need to answer their questions. I need to see them relieved from whatever is stressing them out or whatever they

> are worried about. I think some bigger worries are for example, gang involvement of their children. I lost two of my clients to gang violence. Those are harder. They haunt me.

Another participant shared:

> I think I have gained skills in taking care of myself and doing things after work to recharge to not take the stories home with me to sit with that. It is part of people's stories. I still have stories that I talk about that were from years back, it's part of us as people, part of who we are, and if I am not able to sit with that pain with them, who will? So, I think I have become pretty good at that part of it, and I think after work I have become pretty good at putting a boundary and finding a way to release. But the lack of movement, I find more challenging.
>
> I think the systemic issues that they face here [are harder to deal with than the impact of the stories] because that is harder for them it seems; it is more present now.

While the workers see the barriers as more challenging to deal with, they are also the dominant focus of their work. One participant explained it as:

> Most of the work involves working with families that are trying and are facing barriers every day. When I am with them and we are facing those barriers together, I feel like pushing even harder. In my capacity as a person as a human being, my circle of control, it is me as an individual what I can influence and then the systems that I can't influence.

> I am constantly thinking about how can I influence that will eventually change the systems that I can't. It is also frustrating because it is chipping little, little, little, but I don't see the systems changing.

Other participants echoed this theme of powerlessness to change broader structural issues that create barriers. One participant said, "you have to sit with the difficulty of that and none of us in the system, me or them, have any power to make changes." Another participant shared their experience of failure with a specific client when they were "…not able to move things forwards in 18 months. That is our failure. I became so angry I was so angry because I felt that how can we fail somebody so desperately for so long." A third participant explained the worst part for them as simply, "when you feel like you can't help your client in any way, when you feel like you are stuck."

Another participant picked up this theme of being stuck saying:

> I think what defines a good day or a hard day at work for all of us is when that we see that our work has had minimal impact in the clients we are working with. When we are doing a lot of things, you know, I mean things that we are required to do or fighting with landlords, and there is nothing that moves, people get tired, and you get very exhausted. When things don't move.

Workers attribute responsibility for the powerlessness in different ways. Some emphasize the generative role of systems and structures. One participant said that the hardest part for them is "…if people can't receive the same service because of the gap in the system, that drives me insane. If that happens, if people are harmed through the system [that's the hardest part]." Another worker generally mentioned the lack of resources available, "I was a lot of frustration when I worked, with the [cultural] group, not because of the clients, but because of the lack of

resources available to them." In contrast, other participants expressed a more resigned acceptance of 'unending' client needs, as in:

> You see so much need. But you can only cover some of it. Not all of it. Though our approach is working with governments, partners, similar organizations, community, sometimes you just even after doing all that, you need more.

While the workers were aware of the impacts on themselves of the barriers in the system, they were also very aware of how the gaps affected their clients. In this sense, as noted earlier, workers feel that they are a stand-in for the system and receive the frustrations. Here the worker is not talking about the impact of the clients' anger, but their empathy watching their clients experience the barriers in the system:

> That frustrated me immensely to see people struggle where families were split, divided because husbands were still actively in a conscripted war situation, where they were here. And people were coping, struggling to survive here, struggling to make a better life for their children here, but the effect and the toll on their mental health is immense.

The reality that the workers are aware of is that if they are not able to help a client or client family with these needs, the needs will go unmet. So while there is an awareness of the unending needs and the impacts of the barriers to meeting the needs, there is also a despair at collective powerlessness they face in addressing these needs at their level of the system. When you contextualize these experiences within the disconnect with the organization in layer 2, and the frustrations with the Canadian system in layer 1, workers feel they are alone in trying to provide for the survival needs of their clients, and watching these needs go unmet.

The Emotional Connection with Clients: "Their life is broken as my life was broken"

The next three themes within the domain of the work with clients evidence connection between the workers and their clients: personal connection and empathy for clients; vicarious resilience; and a sense of purpose. These themes join the workers with their clients, making their struggles personal for the workers, and inspire and reward the workers for the effort they put into these relationships.

Of the three, connections at a personal level are presented first as they shape how participants understood their relationships with clients as more than just professional, which sets the stage to increase the power of vicarious resilience and a sense of purpose. We need to remember that these personal connections also increase the stress and impacts of the barriers (as described above). In the comments below, participants explain how their experiences connect them with their clients, how they join with their clients in emotional release in the context of their work, and how the work with their clients brings up their own longing for family, their past traumas, and their grief.

Describing the personal connection experienced with clients, one worker said:

> It is a new country, you don't know anyone, you don't know the system, you don't know several things, even if you think you know English, we don't know that much. When you start working in English it is so difficult. I see so many Newcomers the same way, struggling like me.

Another participant echoed a similar experience upon arrival in Canada, saying, "I was busy looking for a house, it was very hard. I had a very thick accent and I got somebody to speak on my behalf. I was running out of money." Another worker stated, "It is so close [the clients'

experiences and my experiences]. People have no idea that this this close to me and nobody is talking about that here. Nobody is talking about that." Another worker shared how some of her clients' stories affected her personally and when she was with them, she thought of her own family, "my two daughters, it could have been one of them." Another worker elaborated on her connection and how the work with her clients activates her own trauma and grief:

> I fled the country, I'm still living in this, I feel it in my body, it's all about the generational trauma. And the I see it in most of the work that we are doing. The intergenerational trauma is happening now and we're reflecting on it and I feel we are reflecting on it when I face other people who are reminding me of my home.

Conceptually, how client stories activate the workers' own experiences of grief and trauma is not vicarious trauma as the client stories are not breaking currently held constructions about identity and relationships, but rather a deep experience of empathy and possible activation of workers' own grief and/or trauma – flooding them with memories and sensations while they are with their clients. In response to this, the worker may temporarily dissociate from the outer world with their client in the present moment, and associate into their own inner worlds, memories and feelings. One worker referenced her experience of this process and how her personal loss and trauma can be activated by the connections with her clients saying:

> I had to pull myself out of remembering, bringing my own traumas to the table. Sometimes you can control yourself. Sometimes you can't control your thoughts, but I can control my mouth. I didn't remember anything and talk about it, but it's there. It's affecting me. I miss my mom. I'm still missing my mom. I'm not living with my family. I miss my family. It's a lot of triggers.

Though these experiences can be personally activating, other workers talked about using their prior experiences or personal connections to trauma to help them better understand what their clients were going through (i.e. to make them better at their work). One worker explained this process as:

> I always think about my honest feelings when I moved here, all the fear that I had. I think around at least the first year, always hard, this knot in your stomach, being very scared about what was going to happen, about how you were going to survive, I don't understand what is going on here yeah? So, I always use that experience to work with the clients I work with, how vulnerable you feel, how angry you feel because you were like not that only a few months before.

Another worker talked how she uses the connections with her clients to join with them:

> Something that connects me to the positive points is that you are safe, you can do it, if you're able to get here, you can move forward because we are always gonna be able to reinvent ourselves, you are always able to start over again so that is the message that I like to connect with them. Start from zero, let's reset it. I feel I know it's hard, I know it's cold. I know it's expensive, I know people are different. I know food is a little bit bland [laughs].

Another worker talked about how she uses the connection with shared experiences of pain in life to give her passion for the work, saying, "it's almost like I'm coming to support people here, who, their life is broken as my life was broken, so that is my mission." Another worker talked about this similarly stating, "I'm also the same like my clients, I feel the same way they feel, and it makes me feel like I am happy to help them."

Vicarious Resilience: "To me, the impact is really resilience"

Through their connection with their clients, the workers expressed significant experiences of inspiration and hope resulting from witnessing their client's successes. Thus their relational connection with clients was not only viewed as increasing the impact of the clients' experiences of injustice (racism and barriers in the system), but also providing opportunities for greater understanding of the resilience of the human spirit, in a way that helped workers to feel hopeful. This process of developing resilience through witnessing the experiences of others is what Hernandez, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2007) named vicarious resilience (see Chapter 3). A few stories from participants stood out:

> I met somebody again recently after a couple of years … and her curiosity to learn things was so inspiring. She is such a fantastic student. And it's so inspiring to me because the excitement that she gets from life and life didn't always give her the best opportunities… It's inspiring for me on a personal level because compared to her I have so much. I also see how people can grow and overcome so many things and still have a spark, and be so real.
>
> [one example of being inspired is] this specific woman, they received a letter of eviction from her landlord … [and the options we offered were not adequate for her family's needs] … and I was 'you have to be realistic, you'll be on the street' and she said, 'no, I'm not going.' And in the end, that is where she stayed, where she wanted to be. I thought that because culturally for me, there is this norm that if the authority comes down, then I have to do this and just follow those rules. She had no language and no ability to communicate on her own but through her interpreters, the message was yup, no. She was still able to receive

> me after so many years, and accept me back into her life to do work with me. The capacity that I find with people that have been wronged repeatedly to overlook your failures and work with you again is inspiring.
>
> I have shared many of their pains they have shared with me. To me the impact is really resilience. I am really impacted by their resilience.
>
> Of course, they [inspire me], because you see where they were at. To see someone with that amount of trauma and pain to move forwards like that and achieve that, of course I'm inspired by that.

A Sense of Purpose: "Seeing the progress… feeling that I am helping"

This theme had the most comments of all the themes in all categories. Workers talked at length about the satisfaction they experience in their work with clients, their sense of pride in their work and their clients, and the sense of purpose their work gives them. These experiences are seen as the largest contributing factor to continuing to persevere in their roles in the midst of the struggles with barriers, challenges in the organization, and the exhaustion as a result of the work.

Participants stated this in various ways. One stated, "that's the only thing that holds me here – is that rewarding feeling that I am helping someone that the families are striving." Another participant said, "it kept me going, it was growing me. I even think about going back to school and studying social services now because this is something that I want to pursue until I retire." Another shared, "[seeing my clients happy is] my reward. I feel like that's more than being paid money, it is a good feeling."

One worker specifically connected the meaningfulness of their work with valuing their own experience as a Newcomer and using it to give to their community and the larger society:

> It's great job, rewarding, I'm giving back in a way to the community and also to Canada itself for its welcoming people, lots of people like us, giving a safe space. With all those challenges that I wasn't ready for, … I'm cut off from my roots, but I feel like I am connected to working and serving not only white people because I'm in a white dominant country with white dominant services, but for me bringing my perspective to the table as a Newcomer makes me feel the self-rewarding feeling all the time. That's the good part of it.

Many workers shared anecdotes about favorite clients and client families who they worked with, and the experience of watching them grow, learn and thrive over years. Some workers talked about being in the community with their own families on days off and having clients approach the workers' husbands to tell them how amazing the worker was for them. There were too many of these anecdotes to include here but a representative sample of stories include:

> I love this family, it's an adorable family, and I had this interpreter, and he said the client is telling me that you are best person he met since he arrived in Canada and he's saying that his family is very lucky to have you. And then he added, you are the best case-worker that I've worked with since I started here, because I've never seen a case worker doing so much for a client as you do. So, this is what keeps me here, I don't know if it's an ego thing or if it is legit satisfaction with their wellbeing. I think it's a mix of both because I feel validated and it's good for my ego but at the same time, I feel that they're

> actually happy, they are safe and they are happy. And when I see the kids striving, I love working with children because they heal so fast.

Another participant described a family of a mother and her daughters, who were initially very 'quiet', 'embarrassed' and 'sad' that they had never been able to attend school in their home country, so could not write or read. The participant told them about a colleague who was in a similar situation who has since graduated from a professional program:

> And they were so excited because they saw themselves in the future doing the same, so this is, this is the reward you know. I want them to believe that they can do that too. And they can because they are very, very, smart ladies, they just didn't have the chance, I truly believe that. So, I was really happy when they started believing in themselves and they started taking the first steps towards that.

Another worker shared:

> Seeing people striving and adapting and learning. And doing by themselves… I was so proud of them, I'm oh my God, you're so grown, I hugged them, so that's how I feel healthy and whole.

Another worker shared a story about a family who touched everyone's hearts:

> I had clients that I worked with as the settlement counsellor that were labelled 'difficult'? [laughs] Who wasn't difficult? They shared their video of their Canadian citizenship with me and the son passed it and they were such a beautiful family … in how proud they were of everything. He wasn't the only child, but how proud they were of everything he's done, and he was, he was also delightful. He would often verbalize things he was upset with and how he

> thanked the immigration judge and how he said I am now a proud Canadian, it was so lovely and I know it was me, I cried and then sent it to [director], and she cried, and everybody, and it was so joyous.

Another worker talked about watching progress happen, and how rewarding it was:

> It looks very small but you see clients are coming confused, sometimes they lose hope, they can't see tomorrow, they see everything is dark, and so they come and they find someone like me here, a Newcomer who is here like 5 years, but when they see me, my English is not that perfect, and then I am working like this is my dream job, for me, me, yeah, so when they see that and then sometimes they feel most of the time, they feel like I can see now, I can see I can do something when we talk about dreams, hopes, and I give some hope.

Another participant commented on the meaningfulness of pushing back on the system to address some of the gaps and barriers:

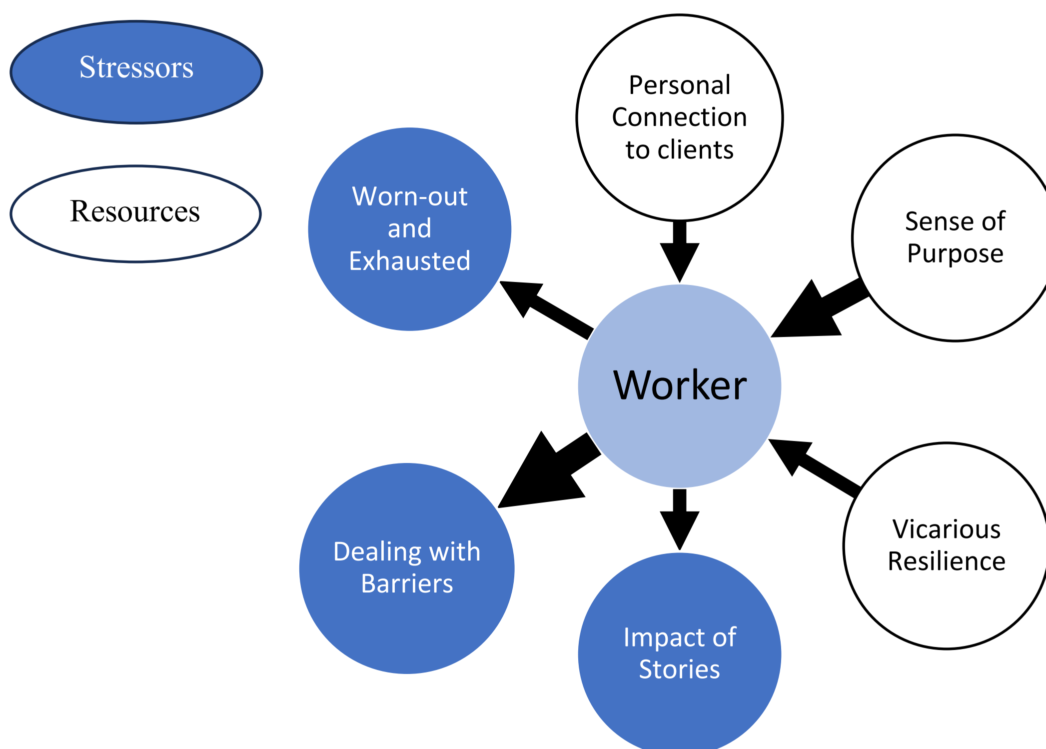
> [What is meaningful for me] is trying to influence those with the power over those that I serve, it is trying to change the system so that they can accept those that I serve or they can give them room or see or look at things differently or understand where they are coming from.

Summarizing Layer 3

Participants shared rich stories about their experiences of their work with their clients and the impact that that work, and those relationships, had on them. We begin to see more rewarding experiences at this layer than in the previous layers, and we also see significant stressors. These themes are experienced within the context of Layers 1 and 2, which heighten their impacts.

When we consider the interactions between all of the themes in this layer (see figure 6), it is important to return to the concept at the beginning of the findings in this 3rd layer, that the resources identified here, and the stressors are not a simple balance leger, but all add to the emotional intensity of the work with clients for the workers. While the meaningfulness of the work, the personal connections with the clients and the vicarious resilience are rewarding; and the impact of the stories and the barriers are very depleting; the collective emotional impact of the meaningfulness and the powerlessness is exhausting.

Figure 6: *Eco-map of Layer 3 – Working with Clients: "There is so much meaning, and it is also so stressful"*



Note: The size and weight of the arrows shows the strength of the impact as identified by the workers, and directionality shows flow of resources to or from the worker.

Layer 4: Family and Community Relationships, and the Personal Lives of the Workers

This layer included themes and comments connected to the workers' personal lives: a larger sense of community; the impact of global violence; awareness of their own privilege; challenges in their lives at home including experiences of settlement stress and culture shock; relationship with their own communities; beliefs about resilience; importance of family; and, self-care strategies.

A Larger Sense of Community: Connections to Global Violence

I debated back and forth whether this should be the with or above the 1st layer, where unrest in the world creates the conditions for refugees and immigration, which acts upon the national level and the national system, which acts upon the organization, the relationships with clients and the work itself, and then the personal lives of the workers; or, to have it where I have placed it as a personal factor. I have chosen to put it here in the personal lives of the workers and their families as the stories are stories of personal impact, and therefore the result of the above chain of forces, now acting upon the individual worker; however, I acknowledge that the larger context also exists.

The comments in this section demonstrate how the relationships with clients change the workers' sense of the world and makes the impact of global unrest and violence much more personal, heightening the potential impacts to their wellbeing as violence and catastrophes happen globally. One worker shared that the result of working in the settlement sector for her was:

> You become more connected to the whole world. So you look, and you like music from different parts of the world, food from different parts of the world. I

> was planning on going to Mongolia, I want to go to see what people tell me, how beautiful is their country, things like that. So, you become more, it is cliché, citizen of the world, but at the same time you feel all the pain of things that are happening everywhere. Palestine is not just Hamas, it is the mother of so and so. The Israeli part is the family of so and so who is a Jew, and X is family. So, the joy of eating nice food, and the pain of knowing so.

Another worker talked about her personal connection to global conflict, and the grief and powerlessness she felt as part of her home was destroyed:

> What happened is I heard a couple of days ago that they bombed part of that land and I was so, like I was thinking, if I heard about the house was bombed or half of it, but not the trees. I felt like I want to see this, I don't have memories there, it is just stone for me, but the trees I feel is very connected, I was crying because of the trees. It is not like they didn't bomb it, they bombed with phosphorous so we can't plant anything for like 3 years.

One worker talked about her struggle to limit her contact with the news, and the constant exposure she has to violence at home through social media, and the trauma she suffers as a result:

> To practice to pull myself out of the news is really hard in my life, so I have to stop a lot of news applications, but now I feel like I'm still thinking of it and I'm trying to go to other websites that is not a good place to check, for example, Instagram is not a good place to check the news because all I am seeing is blood and people shattered. I do not want to see this part, so I watch the news every

> day, it's all the news, I can't watch the movies. I can't read. I'm setting my book here, I got some good books for healing myself and I can't, I can't read.

Awareness of Privilege: "I have grown in understanding my own privilege and the power that I hold over them"

Most participants commented that one outcome of their work was becoming more aware of their own privilege. One participant simply stated, "my first reaction is my awareness that I have of my privilege." Another participant connected the work that they do and their active awareness of their privilege:

> When I compare it to the struggles of refugees who are starting from literacy and learning ABC's instead of providing for their family and all that. That's where even me as immigrant from African country and internationally educated, with a Master's from back home, I really feel privileged and I always reflect on it in terms of serving other Newcomers.

One participant summed up the connection between their experience of their own privilege, and what they want to do with it:

> The way that it is has affected me is that I have grown in understanding my own privilege and the power that I hold over them. One of the greatest things is giving them back their power.

Another worker made the same connection between experiencing their own privilege and using it to empower others:

> …My privilege to be able to communicate. 'Cause it's not a shared experience that other Newcomers have. It's a privilege that I have that because

> of what I look like, I get accepted easier. I don't wear a hijab so there is not a bias attached around that. So, that degree of privilege I didn't have to struggle or have to explain or have to, you know, explain my sexual orientation, my religion, you know, all of that. I very quickly become aware that I'm lucky in so many ways. It is my duty to make sure that everybody can experience that, so I feel that it's my duty to make sure that other people have the shared experience which I know, will never happen. I'm realistic, but it, yeah, I need to make it easier for other people.

Challenges in Home Life including Settlement Stress and Culture Shock

As seen in many of the comments above, stress at work affects home, and stress at home affects work. As there are so many personal connections that the workers share with their clients, stresses that clients share about their lives and their family's life often is similar to stresses in the workers' own lives. Also, as is demonstrated in the self-care theme below, home is a key place for recharge for the workers and is identified as a safe place to recuperate from the impacts of the job stress; as a result, challenges in their home lives interrupt this important resource. Many of the workers talked about their own immigration process, the culture shock and settlement stress that they went through, and the challenges their family have had adjusting to life in Canada. One participant connected the struggles between work and home saying:

> I'm dealing with several issues with my family in my personal life where I don't have control over at all. That is killing me. And so, I don't have any power so the only thing that I need to do is accept and accept and accept and accept

> [laughs]. So, when I come here [work], there are also a lot of things that I don't have any power at all and I have to accept, and accept and accept.

Another participant explained her feeling of being lost between countries as, "you don't belong back home, you don't belong here, but some parts of you belong here." Another participant shared their own settlement process saying:

> It was really hard in the beginning. Living the life of refugees, … that was another level for us to deal with around all the expectations of being a refugee here and finding the, you know, IRCC like payments and also getting to the housing, and issues and everything and then the covid started. It was really one of the worst times of my life.

While some of the participants talked about their settlement stress in the past, many talked about the current settlement stress that they and their families face. Several participants talked about how the gender roles in their families have changes as they are the ones who are employed and are the breadwinners in the family, while their husbands are unemployed or underemployed. One participant shared her husband's struggle with employment saying:

> I'm also thinking about finances and how it impacts people. When my husband came here, he didn't get a part time job, for 5-6 years he didn't have a full time job, and he took on more house stuff and kid stuff and we were ok, but we would have struggles. And then there's pressure to send money back home too.

Another worker elaborated on the impact on her husband of his underemployment:

> The main issue now is my husband who can't find the job, it's hard. For him it's much harder because in [our country] we have like still man is the main

person in family who earn money for the family. And now I'm working, and husband doesn't, so it's hard for him, and especially because he was like big manager back home, he has Master's degree, he has lots of international certifications, he speaks English much better than me, and still, I don't know why.

One worker explained that beyond the financial impact, like her clients, there is the worry about the future that results from her husband's unemployment, saying "I know the struggle. My husband struggles with settling, so, just make you feel, like, uncertain about tomorrow."

In discussing the stress at home, many of the workers shared their stories of loss and homesickness. One worker shared this stating:

> For me living abroad that long time is really hard, I'm not used to that and for us, coming from community or communities have this very close-knit families having this culture of this importance of family… I really need to see the family. It is so everything about it. Even preparing the food, it is all about family. I cannot do myself, I have to be with a couple other women with me. I have to do this as part of a community. Even the food, it's very into group setting, it's more in family setting, it's not individual… Even if I am so grateful to be here where I am safe, half of me is still connected to that place and half of me is still grown on that land, on that soil and half of me is still there. I am trying to find the belonging feeling here, but as much as I created, I spent thirty years at that land.

One worker explained their experience of isolation here in Canada saying:

> [When I arrived] I didn't have anyone here. Not even a community member that I know… my connection to everybody that is still there, even though I've

> tried to connect here, and I can't find the community, and find people, it's totally different people.

This worker elaborated that while there are people from their country here, there are significant religious and cultural differences in their country, and the values of much of the local community do not match with their home community. Further, as someone who is also 2SLGBTQ+, they feel very isolated within their own cultural community here, as well as isolated as a Newcomer in the larger mainstream community.

The impacts of the settlement stress that the workers and their families face are wide reaching. They connect them with their clients, reinforcing a sense of 'we are all in this together' which deepens the empathy and impact when clients face barriers in the system. The powerlessness to help at home also reinforces the powerlessness the workers feel in the other layers, leading to a larger sense of despair. Further, having family members unable to find work increases the sense of survival for the worker for maintaining their job, magnifying the anxiety about the disconnections with leadership and the organization, and increasing the feeling of being trapped in their roles.

Relationship With Their Own Community:

"At home, everybody calls me and everybody says 'help me'"

Participants in both phases also highlighted that another factor affecting wellbeing was their relationship with their own cultural communities, and the impact that their work has on this relationship. If these workers were not employed in the settlement sector, their relationships to their own communities would be more straightforward - they would be a member of the community and free to engage or resist as they chose. As their work puts them in a professional

role with community members, community members approach them for their professional role, and this freedom of choice is limited. Also, choices they make at work (setting boundaries, being supportive, facilitating resources, etc.) have an effect on their relationship with their own cultural community as a whole. Through this interaction, their professional lives have a direct impact on their personal lives. One participant talked about her experience of continually being a resource for her community at work and at home:

> People in my community, they know that I work in the sector and so at home, everybody calls me and everybody says help me build my resume, help me find a job, so it's always you are working in the background, so it's refugees and non-refugees.

Another participant talked about her community's expectations of her and the double bind she finds herself in because of her work in the settlement sector:

> I like people there, and I communicate a lot with [people from my country] we have some groups in [social media] so we use them a lot, and then I understand that there is some misunderstanding between [people from my country] and such organizations. It is hard, because in our culture when you have like friend, and here we don't have much friend, and so some people you know for like a month or your neighbors, they are really like as your friends. You treat them as your friends, and they treat you as a friend, so you try to help them, and in our culture, we always help friends, we help with everything, that is why they are our friends so we can help in difficult situations. We celebrate something good and we help each other in difficult situations. Some like hard times. But here, because of this limitation of my role and procedures, I can't

> help them properly, as much as I want to help, as much as they expected from me.

Another worker talked about this double bind, and the cost of saying no or setting boundaries:

> I think there is another layer too – when we can't help clients because of a systemic thing, those clients are going to talk about us in the community and that has an impact too right? 'They didn't do this for me, and they didn't do this before, and I heard…'

These relationships with workers' communities are essential in the settlement sector. Organizations build on these connections to facilitate relationships with community elders, get access to participants, and seek to understand community politics and conflicts that would affect the organization. They are also key supports for the workers in their personal lives, and the informal support done within community addresses many of the gaps in the settlement sector system to support people establishing themselves in Canada. Loyalties to community, and one's standing in community is a large concern for many of the workers, and therefore impacts to those relationships because of their work role is very significant. While organizations benefit from these relationships, the sense from the workers is that while they can help community members with information sometimes, the organization benefits more from their role at the expense of their connection to community. Further, the professional role the workers have often gives them some status in community, but that also means they are a resource to the community, and boundaries that are developed in Canadian systems are often not well understood in community relationships, this creates a double bind between loyalty to work role, and loyalty to community.

Beliefs that Support Resilience: "You are always able to start over again"

One of the more inspiring aspects of the interviews was the theme of resilience that wove through the workers' own stories, and how this sense of resilience has helped protect them from some of the stress they experience. Sometimes this was shared as specific beliefs that create resilience, "I think it is in my core that nothing is going to bend me. I can bend, but I won't fall." Other times it was simply an acknowledgement of the resilience they feel, "this year has been a very tough year. I realize I am very strong." Both of these were focussed on self, however another worker shared a belief that she uses for both herself and her clients:

> If you're able to get here, you can move forward because we are always gonna be able to re-invent ourselves, it doesn't matter how old you are, you are always able to start over again.

One worker stated that she was able to see strength in the middle of the settlement stress she and her family experienced coming to Canada:

> I think it was very early in our moving here that I said its one of the best things that we've ever done because I didn't realize the resiliency and strength that we have.

Another participant who left active war in her country shared that even amidst the devastation of war, she was able to see positives:

> But those kind of situations like war or some other like global problems in the country they, on the one hand it's horrible yes, on the other hand you can see how people, like I don't know, get closer yes? Help each other? And some people, they need help, and some other people, they can help, yea?

Other workers showed resilience in their beliefs about clients and the larger community. One worker stated her view that "the clients bring opportunities. The alleged difficult client is an opportunity to move towards a change to use the challenges for change." This belief about 'difficult clients' helps make them some of her favorites to work with.

Another worker talked about how she maintains a sense of being grounded saying:

> One thing that I learned here that I didn't know is a big learning thing is that you can look at the world and it is muddy and there's good individuals in the world and those are the ones you can focus on.

This ability to return to hope and faith in humanity is an essential resource, especially as it exists in opposition to many of the feelings the workers experience in the themes in Layers 1 and 2. Workers' ability to continue to persevere and hold onto humanitarian beliefs, bolstered by their own choices to sacrifice and support others, enables them to come back to resilience in the face of dehumanizing experiences.

Importance of Family: "We are always feeding each others' hope and faith"

In identifying what helps keep them going, participants routinely talked about their connections to their families, here in Canada, and the ones back home. In talking about how important family is, workers shared both the stress of separation from them as well as the meaningfulness of the relationships.

When asked what helps keep you going, one participant responded, "faith, and my family for sure." Another said that their family provided a focus to come back to, and that they needed to keep going for their family's sake:

> For my family, I need to, I need to keep myself sane. Sometimes I really want to disappear, but just thinking that [my family] needs my support, helps me to say, ok, what are the things I need to be sane, because my family needs me to be sane.

Another participant talked about how they were caught between their parents' and extended family's wishes, and the needs of their family with their husband and children:

> I said 'I don't care; my family is the most important. I'll do whatever it takes to make them safe' and one thing feeds the other, you know when I see them striving, it boosts my faith, when I have hard times, I go back to my faith to get the strength to pass along to them, yeah, and same with my family and my husband and my children. We are always feeding each other's hope and faith.

Another one talked about the hardships their family is facing in the current city and how they are considering moving again in order to support their children better:

> And my daughters were struggling here too, they were struggling because they feel they don't fit. They both want to move. They both want to go to a bigger city. It doesn't matter if we have to move again, we move again. I did not come this far to be away from you so if, if they decide they want to move to [another province], whatever, my husband and I will figure it out, we go and we restart again because we need to be together and we need to be supporting each other, that's what I'm here for, I don't care, how many times I need to start over.

A different participant expressed that being with family as the definition of home for them, wherever that is:

> I'm not attached to numbers or locations. Oh, this is my room, this is my house. No, if I'm with my family, if we are safe, if our family can be anywhere and that's what I like to tell them.

Other participants talked about how their families support them and help them return to wellbeing:

> With a hard day, I can say to my husband my day was not good. I can tell him, and I do tell him I'm kinda cranky right now and it feels like that is where there is some openness and that really helps me.

Another participant, when asked who supports them, responded:

> … my husband and my kid. There is just spending time with them, there is something that you know from all that noise you come back down when you are with your people and they are there with you and there is a sense of feeling grateful.

As participants talked about their families, their voices softened, they smiled, and their presence became lighter. Tears emerged at times, and they spoke with conviction. Each family has come through significant change and hardship, and the way they each got through the difficulties was through taking care of each other. In contrast to many experiences in their lives where they feel like outsiders, the workers describe home and family as the place where they feel a sense of belonging.

Intentionally Caring for Themselves and Loved Ones:

"Sometimes I… and that helps keep me sane."

While I separated out beliefs that supported resilience above, this collection of experiences includes aspects of daily life participants engage in to enhance wellbeing. Self-care strategies included engaging faith, grounding/meditation practice, relationships with pets, personal boundaries, mental health supports, social supports, having a sense of humour, exercise, keeping busy, relationship with food, and being home.

Many of the participants brought up their relationship with faith and prayer as a key resource in their lives. One participant shared this, saying:

> I have a spare bedroom where I have my morning devotion, and I just sit there and lay there and it is so peaceful and quiet and sometimes I laugh and sometimes I cry and I pray and that helps keep my sane.

Another participant talked about morning rituals, meditation or reflective practices that help ground them. One shared her routine:

> … I don't want to bring that to my husband. Oh my God, he already has so many issues in his work. He is dealing with his own things. I don't want to bring my stuff to him. So, every morning, I light a candle, I listen to my podcast – five minute podcast. That's what I do every day. Light candle. Podcast. I kinda try to brainwash myself every morning.

Another worker had less of a routine, but prioritized quiet reflective time in her life saying, "I just stay alone for some time because it helps me to like become calm and organize everything in my head." Another worker talked about her mindfulness practices and how they help keep her grounded in a crisis. She said, "I have developed a meditation practice, and mindfulness practice

for a long time so that when crisis comes, I have it handy." One worker talked about journaling as her reflective practice, "I journal a lot. I've journaled since I was 17. That gives me grounding."

Several workers talked about their relationships with their pets. One talked about the stress she experienced in coming to Canada and how to bring her dog with her. In the end she was relieved, "I also had like my pets with me. I'm lucky that I managed, for like, my dog to travel. In the end he arrived before me in Canada." Another participant talked about the unconditional love she feels from her dogs:

> The joy in my life is my 2 dogs because animals, they just give, so that when I come home it is insanity, and they are just so happy to see me and I cannot believe anybody could be so happy to see me.

Several workers talked about the theme of boundaries – feeling unsure about setting boundaries as Newcomers in Canada, thinking through boundaries at work, thinking through healthy relationships with their community, and thinking through work/home balance. One worker envied a colleague who seemed to be doing it better than she is, highlighting that this co-worker, "… has a system, she works from Monday to Thursday and she works overtime and she works I receive emails from her at 9 pm, 9:30pm, and she takes Fridays off and she takes Saturdays off."

Another worker spoke to the nuanced impact of needing boundaries around their time away from work, but how it has also affected their social relationships:

> I am very protective of my time outside of work. Because of working with people and give so much of myself, I do not keep too many friends. Back in [my own country] I had so many friends. But I know some of my relationships have

been affected and maybe it is because I have more boundaries than before and maybe they are not used to boundaries.

A few workers talked about formal mental health supports (counsellors, therapists). One worker shared, "I have a wonderful counsellor that I have seen since I came to Canada, so she is the person who knows me the most." Another person said, "[…] is my counsellor, [laughs] I think she keeps me sane."

Many participants talked about how the love of family ("I think the love that I have for my family [sustains me]") and friends ("I have a lot of friends that love me.") helped support them in their lives. One worker shared:

> I have a really good spouse that is very supportive of everything and anything I want to do, and very compassionate person, and so he would do anything to make things ok and I can sound off about anything. So that is a huge connection.

One participant was deliberate to talk about how important a co-worker is in being a social support for her when she's had a particularly hard day:

> Even if it was horrible, we can't change that, it's done. You need somebody so, and find people that we can connect with. So, [a co-worker], I felt as a human being and a co-worker, she was amazing. And I call her and then she said do you want to talk, and I said YES and we'd talk. And she was one of those people I could talk to not just to hear all of the things that I want to hear she would also challenge me; do you mind if I say this? No, no, no, I need to hear this, and that was good."

Other workers talked about friends and community members and how that helps them:

> I do walking, and then we meet with people in our community every week, not big but we meet, most of the time the church, we have a community, a small church, that is also a good support, and we also try to meet like people like to do parties most of the time, so you go there, you laugh, you meet people, you forget your problems.

Some workers spoke about their own sense of humour as an essential resource in supporting their wellbeing. One shared that, "we have a very good sense of humour and sometime is dark humour, very dark and it is good. That is helpful."

Many workers talked about the role exercise plays in helping to create wellbeing. One worker shared, "exercise helps me a lot. I do yoga every morning, I try to walk every day, I do exercise every morning." Another said, "in summer, I walked a lot with my dog so it helped me." Another participant linked her walking specifically with an attempt to cope with overwhelming thoughts:

> Most of the time when I have this kind of thoughts in my mind, I go out, I go home, change my clothes and go out for a walk. I like taking a walk until I get tired.

Another worker also used exercise to relieve stress:

> One of the things that I do is that if I have a hard day or hard sessions, I need to have a cardio thing, go for a bike ride, swim more, like 'whoooph', release it.

Another participant linked the exercise she does with trainings she has done on trauma-informed care:

> I think when I start applying what I know about trauma to myself. When I recognize that a part of the impact of trauma is in the nervous system and in my

> body, and then it is not gonna, talking about it more and more is not going to, I need to find physical ways to release this impact and bring this body into balance. So like swimming, and walking, and all that stuff. And singing."

Other workers talked about keeping busy as a means to manage the overwhelming thoughts and feelings that come up when they slow down:

> I always try to load myself with different meetings, activities and so on, also I communicate a lot with my friends or people from our community, I attend lots of meetings and some workshops, something like that.

Several workers talked specifically about their relationship with food and the impact that this has on wellbeing. One worker talked about the needs she feels for comfort foods and how it connects her to her mother's care:

> I'm aware of what I'm doing. I think that carbohydrate comfort thing, it's immediate, it's what I learned as a child, it's what my mom helped me to learn because, when I was sad, or when I was physically injured, I was comforted by food. That is what she had to give me. So, it is my immediate thing.

Another worker talked about controlling her relationship with food as a way to have some control over something inside her:

> I do weight watchers, and I think it has been like an anchor for me. I think it is an anchor in terms of what helps you and what doesn't help you. And very often it is the only thing you have control over in your life, what goes into your mouth. The rest is everything is falling apart and the only thing you can make is you make a choice do I eat this food this bag of chips or do I have an apple, and

I think sometimes that is the only choice you have in life. And I think that is very helpful.

Several of the participants commented on how important home was in their life. One said simply, “my home connection is, is, my point of safety.” Another one said, “this [my home], is my hiding place.” One worker shared a bit more about what she needs from home in times of stress:

> I need to stay at my home. I need to limit my social so that’s the payoff. People think my public persona, I need to have the social thing going. No, it’s completely the opposite. The more challenging I find the thing, the more slower I want the things at home. And time off is not having any social contact.

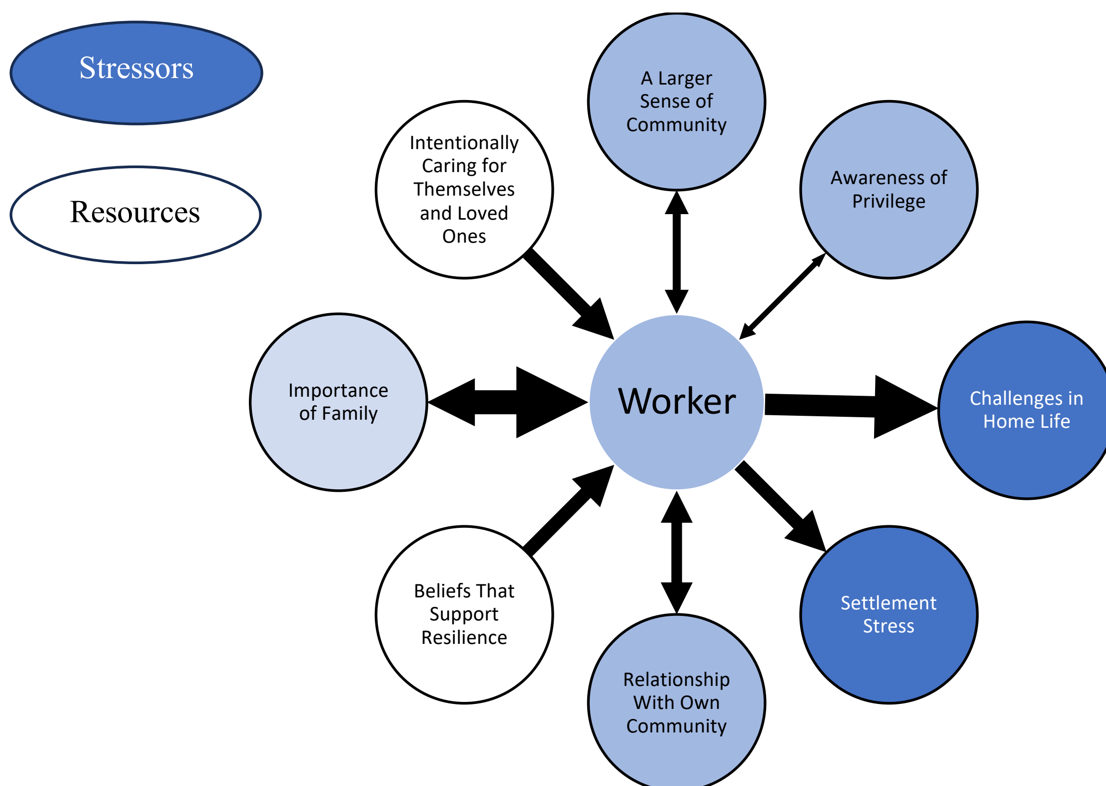
Each worker had their own collection of active things they do to recharge. Often in discussions of self-care, it can devolve into listmaking as if the self-care is inherent in the activity itself. I think it is important to emphasize here that workers choices in this section speak to how they engage a relationship with themselves and those they care about, from a place of care. It is not the activity necessarily that holds the impact, but the prioritization of their own, and their loved ones’ needs, that is the caring activity. I have included the variety of activities here, not as a list for reccommendations, but to honour the creativity and show the range of how the participants deliberately care in ways that restores them. In a larger system where their needs are not well considered in Layers 1, 2 and 3, choices in this layer to identify and privilege their needs stand out as exception experiences.

Summarizing Layer 4

There is a powerful complexity across the participants' relationships with family and community and in their personal lives (see figure 7). Family, in Canada and back home, is an incredible resource, and, at the same time some people feel the stress of caring for family back home and hide the stress that they feel from them so as to project an image of success. Adding to that, challenges in their home lives, and their partners' struggles to settle and find work are a significant source of stress which underminine a sense of security and hope for the future, as well as limiting the sense of home as a refuge from the stress of work.

Other impacts in this layer, including a larger sense of community, awareness of their own privilege and their relationships with their own community, are mixed and act as both resources and stressors. The workers own beliefs about resilience, and strategies for caring for themselves help them to release stress and bring them back towards a sense of groundedness, peace and hope. Depending what is active in the other layers, and the contexts existing at home and in community, the balances between many of these factors shift, and while this is the layer that the workers have the greatest influence over and have a transformative force on the higher layers, resources in this layer are not sufficient to undo the stress from Layers 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 7: *Eco-map of Layer 4 - Family and Community Relationships, and the Personal Lives of the Workers*



Note: The size and weight of the arrows shows the strength of the impact as identified by the workers, and directionality shows flow of resources to or from the worker.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

Whereas the preceding chapter organized and presented the data in the thematic network, my goal in this chapter is to weave the themes together to present a larger picture of the complex multilayered forces shaping workers' wellbeing. Where Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) identify the previous stage as moving from raw data to findings, their purpose for this chapter is to interpret the findings in light of the original research questions:

1. What are the forces affecting the wellbeing of Newcomer workers in a Canadian settlement sector organization?
2. How can the organization respond in ways that enhance wellbeing for Newcomer staff?

I am aware that as I do this, I need to stay congruent with my ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and therefore, I return to the combined focus of CR and PAR – to identify social forces acting in the domain of the real (and therefore acting on the workers whether they are aware of them or not), to collaborate with the workers on identifying these forces, and find ways to engage their own forces of transformation towards action and emancipation (Bhaskar, 2017; Collier, 1994). Where the previous chapter used inductive analysis to develop themes from the data, this chapter privileges a retroductive analysis and asks the question, 'what forces could be operating under these themes?'

This discussion will prioritize the search for these forces within each of the themes in the thematic network, and across domains. Clark's (2015) discussion of complex systems in CR is important here. He reminds us that we are not trying to reduce the data to a single cause and effect, or even a complicated chain of causes and effects, but to map the variety of social forces that are acting upon the phenomenon.

First, to facilitate retroductive reasoning, I used Lewis's argument for incorporating metaphor in CR as a means to identify social forces and causal structures (Lewis, 1996). While Bhaskar calls for creativity on the part of the researcher to come up with possible underlying structures to explain observations (Bhaskar, 2017), Lewis proposes that metaphor is a key tool by which to do so. Articulating the layered CR view of reality as empirical-actual-real, Lewis argues that all that we know can be imagined as a circle comprising the totality of our awareness at the empirical level. The challenge he highlights is the question of how do we go beyond the limits of the circle and learn what is out of our own knowledge? Lewis's solution is that we expand our horizons through the use of metaphor. By comparing something on the edge of our awareness, or beyond it, to something that is already in our awareness we can begin to describe its qualities as if it functions similarly to something we already know. While Bhaskar is vague on the tools used in retroduction, Lewis fills that gap with this process of metaphor and refinement. While I use metaphors clinically, and I love how people symbolically organize their worlds, I have never heard of this explanation before, and it beautifully organizes and extends my experience of metaphors.

Taking this argument forwards, the concepts that we already have in the literature function as metaphors – extending our understanding into the unknown. Another CR researcher, Richardson, describes the use of metaphor as the "backbone of social science writing" (Richardson, 1998, p. 351) and shows how metaphors allow for unconscious awareness and meanings to be made obvious. Richardson reminds us that in CR, concepts are seen as fallible constructions that are approximations of reality but that they need to continue to be refined. What this means to me is that we acknowledge all of the work done so far, and at the same time, we hold the concepts in the literature tentatively while we seek to continually refine and explore a

richer view of the landscape. I think about this as a 'yes, and' approach to research instead of a 'no, but'. I am not interested in tearing down the highly meaningful work of McCann and Pearlman (1990) with their concept of vicarious trauma, but to add into the space around it, identifying other social forces that exist in the real and exert power in the lives of my participants beyond this concept.

Process

Building on the analysis process that I outlined in the methodology and findings chapters, my process through this stage of the project was to sit with the thematic networks, write about them, engage with my advisor, and talk with colleagues. As I talked through the themes again and again, gradually a larger picture formed. Phase 4 (the final phase which included meetings at the organization with leadership, supervisors and workers) worked to coalesce my retroductive analysis and allowed me to talk directly with a group of 50 Newcomer workers about the forces identified in this project. Their resonance with the outcomes validated what I predicted – that this research was very relevant to the larger group of Newcomer workers at the organization. It also strengthened my assumption that what I found in the research is likely relevant to other Newcomer workers in other agencies in Canada.

Limitations

It is important for me to talk about the limitations prior to getting into the discussion of forces as a way to help me stay accountable through the process. If I were to leave the discussion of the limitations to the end, they would act as a caveat contextualizing the discussion that has already happened, where acknowledging them at the beginning allows the reader to keep the discussions in context.

While the data that came from the interviews is very rich, one limitation is that due to care for the confidentiality of the participants, I chose to not link quotes coming from particular participants. I reasoned that within an organization, by the time I linked stories of how people came to Canada, how they started work at the organization, their frustrations and appreciations of co-workers and supervisors, along with their ways of speaking, it would become very easy for the participants to be identified by the organization. While I believe this is essential to protect the privacy of the participants, I also recognize that the richness of the data could be even more had I been able to do extensive case studies with each participant. I believe this is a potential area for future research in a larger qualitative study of Newcomer workers across Canada. For this study however, I stayed with the domain of PAR and the focus on the participants' needs and participants' and the organization's abilities to enact transformation.

Watching my process at this stage is a cautionary tale for me. As my participants are connected to their clients and want good things for them, so am I connected to my participants. I am also aware that through joining with them, I have emotional responses to the stressors they face, and the meaningfulness they experience. The connection I feel creates energy within me to want to make larger claims than is wise, and I need to be transparent about this, and keep myself in check. I also witnessed the meaningfulness of the findings to the phase 2 participants, and the energy and resonance from the larger group of workers in phase 4. I was aware of my excitement at those stages as it validated what the participants were saying and implied there was a generalizable experience that was being described, and, that is the role for more research.

This was a small sample size (10 participants total, 6 of whom are from the same agency in Phase 1, 4 from different agencies in Phase 2). This unique balance gives me good validity to highlight experiences within the agency in Phase 1, but it is not sufficient to make claims about

settlement sector workers across Canada in all locations. The Phase 2 addition of the four participants from other agencies in different locations creates interesting opportunities, and further cautions at the same time. Having the stories of the Phase 1 participants be validated by the Phase 2 participants increases the validity of the outcomes, but it is not sufficient to make larger claims about the settlement sector. Similarly, the resonance of the large group of 50 workers in Phase 4 gives me more confidence in the claims that I am making, and I need to stay aware that this is not the same as each of them taking the time to go through the interview process where more nuances, themes or exceptions may come out. Hennink, Kaiser, and Weber (2019) found that code saturation in focus group research occurred after 4 studies and meaning saturation occurred after 6 studies - showing that while I achieved saturation within the phase 1 group, this study would need to be replicated a number of times before there was sufficient data to make larger claims about the general experience of workers in the settlement sector. While the contributions of the Phase 2 participants are encouraging that the Phase 1 participants' experiences are relevant to Newcomer workers in other agencies/settings in Canada, more research will be needed to support these claims.

This doesn't mean the outcomes are not significant. This research, especially with the cohesion between the themes and comments, make these experiences highly relevant to this group of participants and their colleagues. As this research is a PAR study, understanding the local experience of the participants and engaging change at that level is the ultimate goal of the research. The energy to make larger claims must be tempered by the limits of the sample size, and the original goal of the research.

Lateral Violence and Collective Trauma

Many participants talked about conflicts between identity groups (based on race, culture, gender/sexual identity, or religion) in the workplace, and how surprised they were by these, and how distressing they are. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, and Islamophobia were all referred to. Many of the participants talked about first experiencing racism in their lives when they came to Canada, and then were shocked to find Newcomers being racist to each other rather than adopting the larger Newcomer identity and supporting each other in settlement. Workers told stories of trying various strategies to manage the polarization – ignoring it, being direct with the person and educating them, going to HR or managers to complain, and setting a personal example of inclusion. No strategy seemed to be effective in changing the conflict or the impact.

I was surprised by the prevalence of lateral violence as well. When I shared the finding in phase 4 (with the larger group of 50 Newcomer workers), that lateral violence and discrimination between workers exists, the room went silent and everyone nodded, but nobody spoke. It was clear that everyone was aware of the issue, and that it wasn't something that we could talk openly about.

I have spent a lot of time reflecting on why I hadn't anticipated this. I like to think that I am aware of power and privilege in groups based on social identity, and I also know that as many of my intersectional identitities give me unearned privilege, and that part of that is that I have the privilege of chosing whether I see it or default to unawareness. I am also very aware that everyone has the capacity for hatred, and while allies are often people with marginalized identities supporting eachother (Perrin et al., 2014), the capacity for othering exists across marginalized and privileged identity groups.

I have thought back to my team when I was in leadership at a settlement sector agency. I was aware of a preference for some workers to work with people from their own community (as is demonstrated in this group of participants as well), but I also saw active recruitment and acceptance of members from other communities into these groups to diversify and build cross-cultural support. I am curious about what I was not aware of, and I believe that our work-group context was somewhat different as each staff person was from a different ethnocultural community, and there was less opportunity for identity groups to form within the staff team.

I believe that my own privilege in my race, gender and status, made me less aware of nuances of power between identity groups in my own team, and with the organization that I worked with for this research, however, I believe it is too simplistic to stop the analysis at that point. As the participants were also surprised by the level of lateral violence, I believe we all participated in a larger identity group of 'Newcomer and Newcomer-allies', and projected this identity onto everyone working with Newcomers, rather than acknowledging that for all of us, our own ethnocultural identity, with protracted intergroup conflicts (Volkan, 2013), would be salient as well. This existed between the workers at the organization, and within the participant group as well. Within the research group, there were instances of one person expressing their values and seeking support for their experience of their own group's suffering of mass violence, and by doing so, increased feelings of fear and exclusion for another participant.

I believe that my hope for a coherent work team, and my anxiety about this research being successful, had me focus more on the Newcomer identity as the most salient (what I was screening for in my participant selection), at the expense of simultaneously holding each person's range of intersectional identities as equally salient (or even moreso). In this respect, I believe my anxiety in my role as researcher reduced my awareness of intergroup nuances. My own anxiety

rooted me in my perspective, and I failed to anticipate the level of intergroup conflict amongst the staff team. In hindsight, lateral violence was a concept that I should have developed further, and I believe will be especially relevant to explore in future research in this area.

Survivor Guilt and Privilege Guilt

While I had anticipated more conversations about survivors' guilt, this was not a concept well identified by the participants. Participants discussed the role of family back home, the yearning to be together, the felt obligation to support them and send money home or to put on a good face to show them that they are doing well. One could push these in the direction of survivor guilt, but the participants talked about it in terms of collective family systems and the importance of these relationships, not wanting family to worry about them, wanting to help, missing them. One surprise for me in the interviews was how pronounced the theme of privilege was for all participants. Each worker was very aware and mindful of their relative privilege to their clients' experiences, and their own privilege in their own settlement process. As demonstrated in the findings chapter, current experiences of privilege absolutely motivated workers to empower their clients. Awareness of their own privilege increased compassion for their clients, and also their motivation to continue to work harder to benefit their clients.

Beyond Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, …

While the interviews showed that vicarious trauma did exist as a relevant concept to Newcomer workers in the settlement sector, they also showed that its impact was muted compared to other concepts. Workers spoke directly to how this work can create vicarious trauma, and how they experienced times of waking up in the middle of the night thinking about their clients and the traumas they have gone through, and that typically these were harder early in

their careers. This is exactly the progression that McCann and Pearlman describe (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

I also saw evidence congruent with compassion fatigue (stories about workers being frustrated with clients when they used to be compassionate) and burnout (all the conversations about exhaustion and being tired and stopping doing the resourcing things in their lives outside of work due to the exhaustion from work). While all of these are relevant concepts to explore, it was interesting which the workers identified as contributing more to worker stress– the stories the clients shared about past experiences, or the clients' current experiences of barriers in the Canadian system. Every single participant in both phases stated it was harder to deal with their clients' experiences of systemic barriers than the impact of the stories of their clients' past experiences.

Analyzing these concepts in particular highlighted for me the strength of retroductive analysis and looking for complex systems of forces rather than single concepts. While I could have done this study looking to validate any number of particular theories, and indeed my data could be used to validate a number of specific theories by careful selection of the data set, the stories told by the participants are that many forces affect their wellbeing, and the ones predicted in the literature were not the most powerful ones.

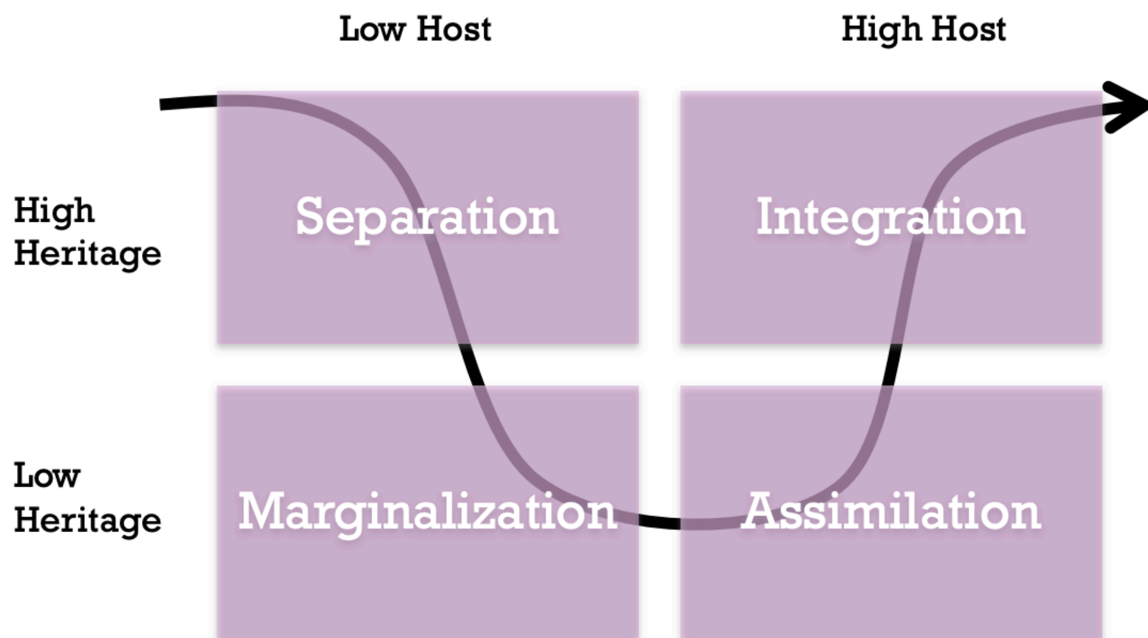
Vicarious Trauma as Culture Shock

While VT was not identified as a strong force affecting the workers' wellbeing, I believe it is worth looking at the concept of VT from an acculturation perspective.We need to remember the original theory of VT here and separate it out from the common usage which has it synonymous with any negative emotional or psychological impact of working with other people. VT is the experience of exposure to experiences of trauma that are outside of the workers'

current realm of experience that sufficiently challenge their current inner working models of the world to render them useless at helping them explain what is going on. Lacking adequate working models, workers descend into feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, despair, and feel overwhelmed and unable to help their clients chart a path forwards. McCann and Pearlman state that over time, workers build new models that account for the traumas faced by their clients and emerge from this period "sadder and wiser" (McCann and Pearlman, 1990) for the innocence lost and the new understandings gained.

If we integrate this theory with John Berry's acculturation models (Berry, 2008), we can gain new insight. While the previous acculturation models (U-curve and W-curve) highlighted a path through an acculturation process, Berry identified four strategies that immigrants may use to function in their new context depending on their competence with the new culture and the relevance of their heritage culture in their daily life. While Berry's model acknowledges that individuals may stay in one strategy for the rest of their lives and not change, the wisdom of the U-curve model is that many progress through a process. If we overlap the U-curve model with Berry's strategies (see figure 8), it is possible to see a progression through his strategies towards bicultural fluency:

Figure 8: *Berry's acculturation model overlapped with the u-curve hypothesis for culture shock*

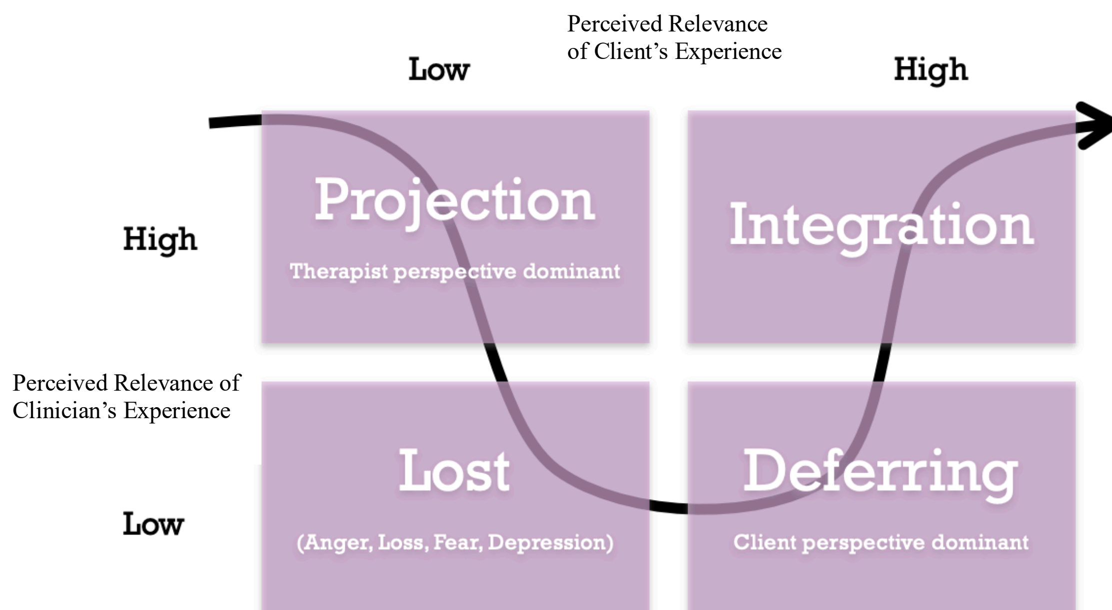


In this process people move from the original strategy – Separation (focussing on their own knowledge from their own cultural view, with low fluency in the host culture), through Marginalization (when their own cultural knowledges no longer function to support their life in the new culture and they do not yet have fluency in the new host culture), into Assimilation (where they have begun to achieve some fluency in the new culture and focus their energies there) to Integration where they can bring back focus on their heritage culture as relevant to their experience as well as navigate the new host culture fluently. While Berry is wise to argue that a person does not necessarily progress through these quadrants as stages, one can also see how many can and do.

The advantage of this integration of the U-Curve hypothesis and Berry's acculturation strategies is that we can now apply this integrated model to a process of VT (see figure 9), and use culture shock as a metaphor for worker's experiences as they attempt to navigate the unique

cultural world of their clients where they are not yet fluent. While more research is necessary to validate this, I would hypothesize that many workers move through Projection (Berry's Separation where a worker's focus is on the worker's own knowledge/worldview), into Despair (Berry's Marginalization, McCann & Pearlman's VT - as a worker's worldview fails to account for clients' experiences and collapses), into Deferring (Berry's Assimilation and a continuation of McCann & Pearlman's VT – where a worker's focus on the client as the expert and do not trust their own abilities or knowledges to help the client to navigate their world) to Integration (Berry's Integration and McCann & Pearlman's "sadder but wiser" where workers are able to integrate both the client's and their own worldviews to collaborate towards new outcomes).

Figure 9: *Representation of hypothesis integrating Berry's acculturation strategies model, u-curve hypothesis, and vicarious trauma*



Where McCann & Pearlman's original work focusses on the process people engage through coming to terms with the stories they hear, Berry's critique of the U-Curve model is

relevant here as well. There are no guarantees that therapists (as McCann & Pearlman were working with) will necessarily progress through stages and emerge “sadder but wiser” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p. 147). As Berry argues that individuals may remain in particular acculturation strategies and never achieve integration, one can also argue that many mental health workers may exit the profession or get stuck and never move through their VT experiences. Still, while not all progress, it is still useful to know that many do, and what that path may look like. Seeing it as an acculturation process may help social service workers to reframe their experiences as a form of culture shock, and validates the need to hold onto meaning from their own lives while working to include the experiences of their clients. Specific strategies to integrate what part of the workers’ experience and role is useful, with the lived experience of the clients, may create better outcomes for workers experiencing vicarious trauma, as it does for Newcomers working through acculturation processes. This is beyond the scope of this research, but is a very interesting question that arises from this work.

Internalized Colonization

The concept of internalized colonization appeared significantly in the conversations with the phase 2 participants, as well as in conversations with the larger group of workers at the organization in phase 4 when I shared the research outcomes back with the organization. The workers were clear that it took significant courage and risk to stand up to authority as a Newcomer in Canada, and that typically it was their white colleagues who addressed systemic issues in the workplace and the system. The messages that the workers in phase 1 internalized was that it was not safe to say “no” to requests from management (as they feared being deported and/or losing their family’s source of income) and their role was to comply with what was asked of them. In talking with the supervisors, managers, director and the executive director in phase 4

(the vast majority of whom were white Canadians), the expectation was that workers would be clear about what they needed and advocate for their clients. Both of these dynamics (the internalized rules of silence and compliance on the part of the workers, and the assumed universal privilege on the part of those in leadership) show an unconscious internalized adoption of a colonial system of relatioships that is self-sustaining.

Where the workers in phase 2 talked about the need for Newcomers to work to stand up for themselves and use their voice; as this is a systemic issue for the group of workers rather than a challenge for an individual worker, the same needs to be said for the leadership's duty to acknowledge the systemic barriers to Newcomer workers engaging advocacy. As such, it is actually more incumbent on the leadership to seek out feedback and identify unmet needs than it is for the workers to voice them. Where the workers have attempted to push back on unjust experiences through HR, the results are that the workers themselves are typically blamed, or there has been no follow-up or investigation of the problems. As the system in the organization acts to preserve homeostasis, solutions that make it the workers' responsibility to advocate for change scapegoat the workers, and allow the organization to continue with no changes.

The internalized colonization in the workers and the management functions to minimize the power that the workers hold, and as such acts to magnify all the other forces that challenge their wellbeing, and dilute the forces that resource them.

Doing the System's Dirty Work

The concept of 'being caught between the system and the clients' represented the most salient representation of their interpretations of structural constraints, from participants' perspectives. This category can be understood as representing the intersection of clients' expectations of Canada and workers' own system frustrations, as well as their settlement

hardships and experiences of discrimination. Workers have limited options for alternate employment or means of survival for them and their families, and the racism and sexism they experience directly and vicariously reminds them continually that there will be limits on how other workplaces will accept them or what will be required of them based on other people's attitudes about their race and gender. Workers' own demoralization constricts their aspirations. And just as workers become caught with their clients' expectations of Canada and try to temper their expectations, the workers themselves are in a similar process of tempering their own expectations and hopes for what is possible. From that disempowered place, it becomes even more stressful on the worker to then be reduced to being a representative of the system participating in the disempowerment of the clients.

In turn, although the workers can presumably exert more influence on the organization they work for, the workers themselves talk about internalized colonization that keeps them from challenging unhealthy workplace practices that lead to systemic stress. While the findings highlighted how organizations are limited by the system and funders' policies and priorities, and yet how the choices they make within these limits and how supervisors relate with their staff matters for worker wellbeing.

The Impact of Dual Roles: Being a Client, then a Worker

One particularly noteworthy finding is that all participants in phase 1 began their relationship with the organization as a client of the organization. For some, the move from client to staff member included a transition through volunteer roles. Some participants also mentioned that their family members are current clients of the organization. While these stories seemed to be either neutral or positive for the workers, it is worth considering how the genesis of their relationship with the organization impacts their expectations of the organization currently, and

their expectations of themselves. I had not anticipated this relationship prior to setting up the interview guide so there were not specific questions to explore the impact of this further, however that is certainly a consideration for further research. In phase four, when I shared the outcome of the research with the organization, the extent of this prior client relationship was a surprise at all three levels – senior leadership, managers/supervisors and workers. As a result, discussions occurred at each level about how this relationship could be a risk factor for exploitation of the worker. From the perspective of the mental health and psychotherapy fields, this would be seen as a potential conflict of interest and potentially exploitative as there is a duty of care from the organization, and a relationship of trust that is established. Being a client of a person or service during times of increased stress, dependency and decreased resources heightens the power differences between the client and the service, and creates loyalties and expectations of care. These loyalties and expectations of care decrease agency and create a situation where workers are less likely to set appropriate boundaries or advocate for their needs, leading to a potential for exploitation of past-clients. For the workers who talked about their relationship with their supervisor in positive ways, it appeared that these relationships of care continued, but for those who didn't have a positive experience of their supervisor, there was a break in this relationship. This break was also demonstrated between the workers and leadership team.

Understanding the Functionality of the Gap Between the Organization and the Worker

While all workers understood that supervisors and the leadership team were caught in the same system and were overworked as well, the overwhelming consensus was that the good supervisors cared about their teams and about their workers individually, and cared about their workers' relationships with their clients. Other supervisors were seen as caring more about statistics (necessary for program outcomes and funding reports) and policies (their needs in their

roles as supervisors) than about the workers' needs or the clients' needs. As such, where the workers believed that they were sacrificing themselves for the needs of the clients and the program, they saw some of the supervisors as focussed on the supervisor's own needs first. Within that experience of disconnect, feeling undervalued, undertrained, and working in a highly competitive culture undergoing constant change, become more difficult to tolerate.

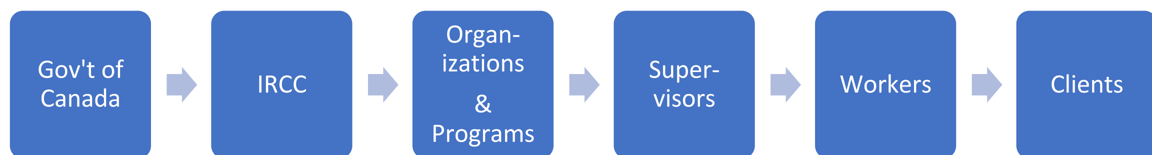
Within the context of the disconnections experienced, workers talked about gender discrimination within the organization and how it was reinforced by the larger systemic gender discrimination across the settlement sector in Canada. Specific policies in the organization on dress codes, family leave, and family responsibilities as well as differences in pay due to raises were raised as being discriminatory. Workers also talked about racism within the organization and shared stories about how particular identity groups of workers privileged clients from the same identity group and how this affected service delivery and choices of programming, housing options, etc. There were also stories of racism between worker to worker, and that when these were brought to management or HR, no action was seen to be taken. The result of this was to heighten experiences of isolation, powerlessness, bullying, othering, and was a key factor in workers' discussions about wanting to leave the organization if they could. In comparison, stories about working cross-culturally with white colleagues were positive, noting the increased empathy these co-workers displayed and their willingness to take on advocacy roles.

All of this occurs within the context of the systemic stress at work. The systemic stress acts to magnify the impacts of each of these other themes as either helping to resource the worker in the face of the systemic stress, or, becoming even more intolerable as a result of it.

If we look deeper into the forces underneath these dynamics, we can see a deeper systemic narrative that the organization, supervisors and workers are all caught up in, that helps

contextualize the disconnect experienced by the participants. To do this, we need to consider the social service model in Canada where the settlement sector operates. A simplistic explanation of the model (see figure 10) is that priorities are decided by the Government of Canada and enacted through IRCC which supplies funding to organizations, for specific programs run by managers, who oversee supervisors, who oversee the workers, as they deliver services to clients:

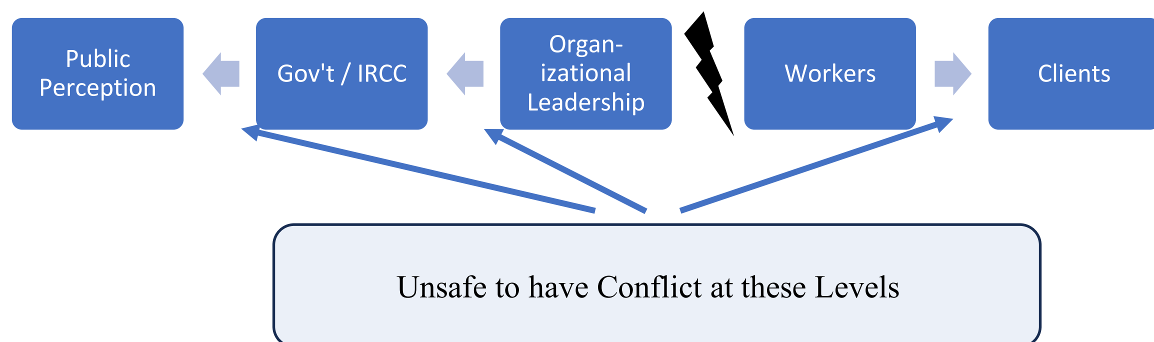
Figure 10: *Flow of resources in the settlement sector*



However, the experience the workers shared is different than what is depicted here. The workers do not separate the Government of Canada and IRCC, but see IRCC catering to public perception about immigrants. From the workers' perspectives, IRCC's focus is on statistics of services offered and 'success stories'. Indeed, IRCC publishes these success stories on the front page of their website (Government of Canada, 2024b, 2024c), with equal privilege to explanations of programs offered and routes of immigration. As it is a competitive funding model, with each organization in the region competing with every other organization in the region for the same funding dollars, organizational leadership becomes focussed on the needs of the funders (i.e., statistics and success stories). In contrast, workers then describe themselves as being focussed on their clients' needs. The result of this bidirectional model from the workers' perspective looks more like what is depicted in Figure 11 below, with supervisors either being on Team Organization or Team Worker depending on the perception of the relationship between the supervisor and the workers. In considering relationships between the parties in figure 10, we

need to pay attention to the impact conflict between the parties would have on the system. Conflict between the IRCC, the government and the public is threatening to the funder. Conflict between the organization and the funder is threatening to the organization, and conflict between the workers and their clients is stressful for the workers and potentially threatening to their livlihoods. As a result, the gap between the organization and worker becomes the safest place for stress to show in the system, from the perspective of the system:

Figure 11: *Systemic view of the disconnect between organization and workers*



In this model, the focus of each level of the system is on their own priorities, and the result is a systemic gap between the organization and the worker. This gap is functional as it is the only level of the system where ongoing conflict can be absorbed. When I shared this model in phase 4, people at all levels of the organization recognized the implication of the larger systemic view, and what it meant for the marginalization of the workers' needs in the system. While one may argue that the organization needs workers to function, the story that the workers tell is that they are expendable and not valued, that there is a constant turnover in staffing, and, that supervisors and managers do not seem to expect them to stay long in positions. So, while organizations need workers, functionally, this is the most replaceable part of the system, and conflicts at this level do not threaten the overall system.

To the degree that this is true, we can say that the Canadian public's perception of immigration puts pressure on all levels of the system which results in a disconnect between the organization which has to focus on the needs of the funder, and the worker whose focus is their clients. The specific complaints within the organization, or the breakdowns in relationships between workers, then serve to be the catalyst where the conflict erupts, but these conflicts are a symptom of the system, rather than specific problems in and of themselves. That isn't to say that the organization shouldn't enact change at this level – absolutely it should. It also needs to realize that the larger issue they face is coming together as an organization (and likely across organizations) to push back on the system. For example, changing the dress code will remove an irritant, but will not fundamentally change the workers' role in the larger system.

This model helps contextualize all of the other factors at the level of the work with clients, or in the personal domain of the lives of the workers and their families. Factors that connect the workers with their clients, or overwhelm the workers in their relationships with their clients, exist within the context of the systemic gap between the workers and the organization. The barriers workers face in meeting the needs of their clients also occur within this context, and serve to further marginalize the workers who are experiencing barriers on multiple levels of the system.

The Duality of the Work with Clients

The duality of the impact of the work, the push/pull of the work itself with forces pulling the workers to engage more (meaning, personal connection, empathy and 'vicarious resilience') as well as pushing workers away (vicarious trauma; and witnessing barriers) were the themes most talked about by the workers. I believe the impact of the pull forces encourage and reward the workers for doing more for their clients than they might otherwise do. This happens as they

feel a personal connection with their clients (i.e., this could be me, my family, my friends; we are all in this together), and the rewards of the meaningfulness of the work and the vicarious resilience (i.e., increased sense of meaning, wellbeing, resilience, hope). These forces encourage the workers not to set limits, to continue to work from home after hours, to think about their clients during their home lives, and to not take holiday or sick time. As such, there is a powerful duality to these pull forces as while they are rewarding, they also encourage other behaviours that negatively affect wellbeing and exacerbate experiences of burnout and compassion fatigue.

The second concern in this area are the forces pushing workers away from the work. This is the relationship between 'impact of the stories' and 'dealing with barriers'. As discussed above in the 'beyond vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, …' section of this chapter, there is evidence of vicarious trauma as a relevant concept for these workers and that the impact of the stories that their clients share are challenging and negatively affect wellbeing, especially at the beginning of workers' careers. While there is VT impact, all the participants shared that that vicariously experiencing the systemic barriers that their clients face have a far greater impact on their own wellbeing than their clients' stories of loss and trauma. In this respect, as Kira and Tummala-Narra (2015) highlight, while developed nations primarily expect that that refugees face most challenges pre-migration, or even during the process of migration; the impact of post-migration settlement challenges are illuminated as greatly under-emphasized and misunderstood.

I need to be careful how I label this. Saying that 'refugees face post-migration challenges' locates the struggle in the refugee, rather than holding the host country accountable. This brings us back to the Pilgrim's discussion of truth in CR (Pilgrim, 2020), and Bhaskar's concept of judgemental rationality (Bhaskar, 2017). Pilgrim argues that statements which name the social forces that are operating are more true than simple objective observations, as these forces are

operating at a deeper level of reality. In this vein, while it is true to say that refugees face post migration challenges (simple observation), within CR, it would be more true to say that the social forces in Canada which create barriers and gaps in the settlement system, create hardships for refugees and negatively impact the wellbeing of the Newcomer workers in this organization.

The workers in this study were absolutely clear that the barriers in the Canadian system were intolerable. When we layer this onto workers' felt experiences of personal connection and empathy, and their feelings of caught between clients and the system, these barriers become even more stressful for workers as the costs of the barriers become personal, and, as the workers themselves are responsible to communicate and/or enforce the barriers, they also face the anger and desperation of their clients as the de facto representatives of the system.

The Work Continues at Home

As mentioned above, the factors predicted in the literature on wellbeing relevant to refugees came up repeatedly in the conversations around the personal factors. These included social connectedness, security, family connectedness, housing, stable income and a sense of community (Martin-Willett et al., 2019; Khawaja et al., 2017; Correa-Velez et al., 2015; El-Bialy & Mulay, 2015; Mosselson et al.; 2017; Davidson et al., 2008; Zwi et al., 2018; Kahn et al., 2017; Berry & Hou, 2016; Chase, 2013).

Settlement stress at home increased the connections with clients and the impact on the workers of client stress, restricted their abilities to recuperate when not at work, and increased the impact of the stress in the organization. Keeping their wellbeing in their work in context to their larger lives, helped me consider what reasonable expectations for their overall wellbeing was, and to stay mindful of how the work stories were activating not only past hardships, but current ones.

Workers universally spoke about their awareness of their own privilege – pre-migration, during their own settlement process, and post migration. Their work with Newcomers highlights their own journeys, struggles, and resources and there was a universal awareness of their own privileges that made their process easier than their current clients'. This experience of privilege motivates the workers to be grateful for what they have and to strive to share resources meaningfully with those who are struggling.

While being aware of their own privileges, many workers also spoke about their own settlement stress as well as their family's challenges settling in Canada. These factors connect the workers with their clients, make the clients' struggles more real and personal to them, and contribute to a multi-stressed experience for workers where they are challenged to create a space to recuperate from the stresses at work. The combination of the privilege and the settlement stress creates a situation where workers either feel humbly aware / guilty for what they have, and united with their clients for what they collectively don't have or are struggling to do.

The themes of resilience, importance of family and self-care strategies were all storied as resourcing factors that positively affected the workers' sense of wellbeing, and also as being negatively affected by the stress they face in their work.

The relationship with their own community is similar, but separate here, as it is most directly affected by the participants' work. As the participants' work is in relationship with community members, the role conflicts that the workers experience between their role at work with their own community members, and their personal role in community, are difficult to resolve. Many workers talk about the necessity of creating boundaries between their roles at work and their personal roles with their own communities. While some workers push back against this, the nature of the work, the expectations of community members, and being caught

between the clients and the system create a very challenging role conflict for the workers and create friction in these rela tionships important for wellbeing.

At all levels of the system (system, organization, worker) there is a push to improve self-care, and this push across the system is problematic. While all the the workers in the study discuss their own motivation to do more to take care of themselves, and the challenges to do so, it is important to consider this push critically. While at the personal level, it is important to have coping strategies within our locus of control to improve resilience, this focus becomes problematic when done at the level of the system or organization.

When the system and the organization focus on self-care as a strategy for managing the stress of the work, they create an expectation that it is possible to manage systemic stress individually, and they outsource the accountability for the ongoing stress to the worker – the lowest level of the system with the least amount of control over the structural problems at the system or organization level. When either the system or the organization focuses on individual workers engaging self care, they reinforce the dominant narrative that the stress is individual and not systemic, and it is the responsibility of the individual, not the organization or the system. The implication of this is that if the workers are stressed, they are not doing enough to take care of themselves, and it is their responsibility, not the organization's or the system's. Even in the positive message by organizations to encourage workers to care for themselves, the focus is still at the individual level. Workers, in turn, buy into this narrative as at the personal level of the system, it is the level that they actually have some influence over. However, as the dominant narrative isn't challenged, there is no change or acknowledgement at the organization or system level and the worker has been successfully scapegoated for their own stress. The metaphor from Greek mythology of Sisyphus rolling the boulder uphill only to have it roll down in perpetuity

seems very poignant. Workers' strategies to manage their experience of rolling the boulder endlessly does not change the boulder, or the hill.

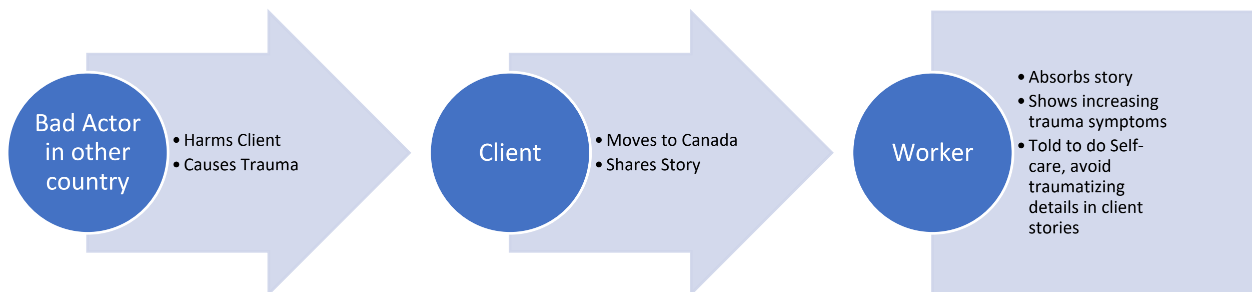
This is not to say that workers themselves should not seek to stabilize their lives, resource themselves and enhance their own resilience; however, employing this as a strategy in the settlement sector by the sector and by organizations is problematic, especially without a context of accountability and action by the organizations and by the funders.

Beyond Stories of Vicarious Trauma and Self-care: Locating Accountability

Considering each of the levels of the thematic network, a mutually reinforcing web of forces become apparent, serving to strengthen and challenge the resilience and wellbeing of the workers. Themes of responsibility, personal connection, meaningfulness and powerlessness intertwine to bring workers closer to their clients only to experience the barriers their clients face in the Canadian settlement system, become the agents of the system in their clients' lives, and face their anger and despair.

As the participants described, they are aware of the discussion of vicarious trauma in the settlement sector and the encouragement to debrief with social workers, limit exposure to client stories, and do self care as some means to manage it. All of these strategies are congruent with the original theory by McCann & Pearlman (1990) and are used throughout the mental health and social services sector in North America to manage vicarious trauma. In addition to the challenges with the settlement sector system and organizations focussing on self-care as a strategy (as discussed above), we need to add one more layer to that critique – the focus on vicarious trauma. The simple process of vicarious trauma is outlined in figure 12 below:

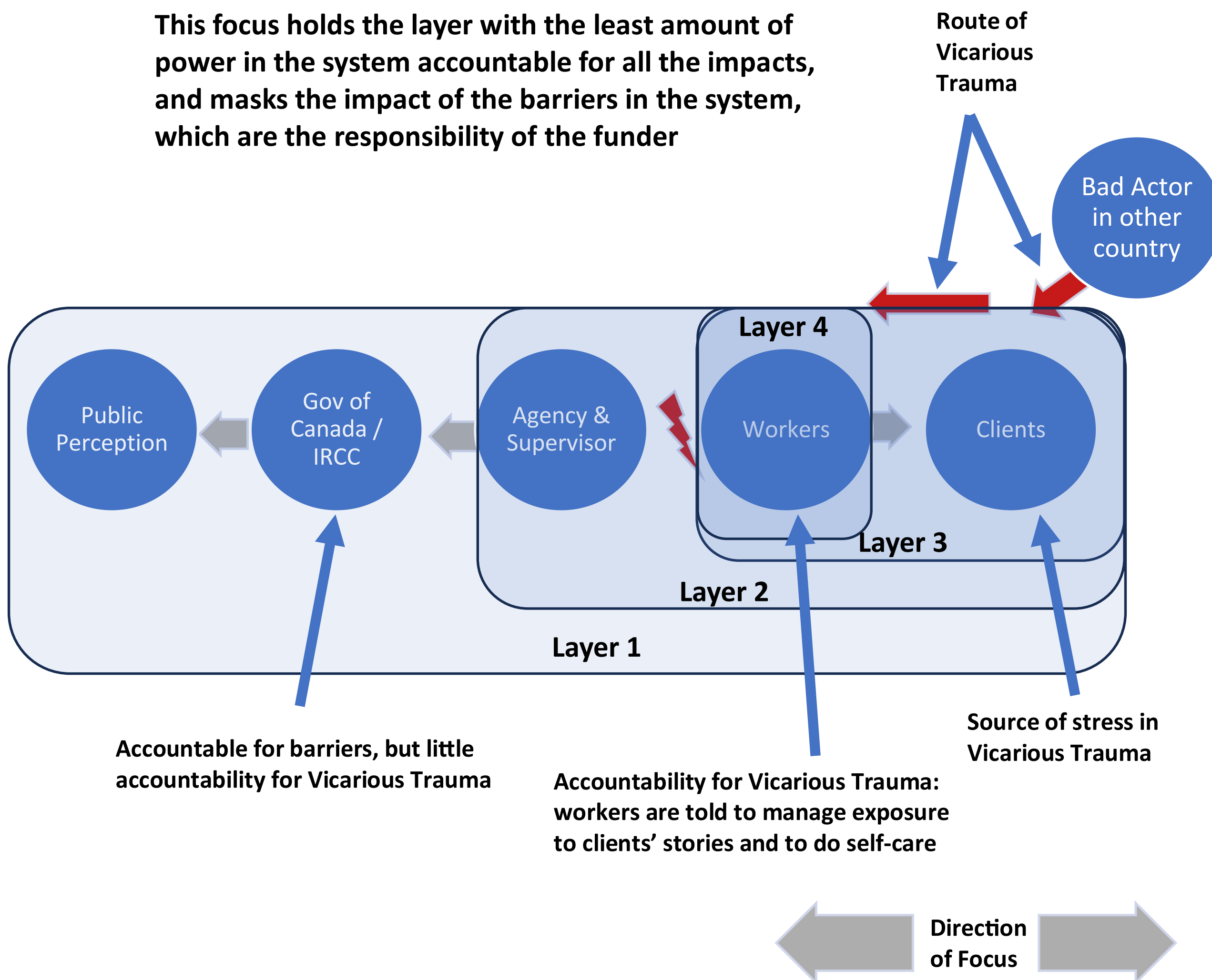
Figure 12: *Process of vicarious trauma*



The system's focus on vicarious trauma and self-care strategies is the same pattern as my privileging those narratives in my own programming historically. Where I have perceived my world from my own bias and not moved far enough out of my own experience, our system as a whole is doing the same thing with significantly more power. When we deconstruct this narrative, we see that it is far more destructive than we thought.

By rehearsing the story that workers are affected by vicarious trauma and focusing key supports there, the story we participate in is that the dominant source of their stress is not the system they are working in (and that we are collectively responsible for), but it is their clients that are toxic to their wellbeing through the sharing of pre-migration traumas, and that this is a result of bad things that other people did to them in other countries.

Figure 13: *The larger systemic story around the focus on vicarious trauma and self-care*



Structurally, we have outsourced the cause of the stress in the workers' lives from any accountability within our own system for the systemic barriers, to the most marginalized members of our system – the clients themselves. Further, we attend to a polite narrative of Canada as a benevolent provider by then saying it is not the clients' fault, but the results of bad actors on the international stage. This is a very convenient story for the system to tell as it allows our collective image of ourselves to remain intact and builds on any xenophobia or racism that

the Canadian public already has to scapegoat actors on the international stage. Just as it is far more palatable for the Canadian consumer to blame international students for a housing crisis (as referenced by one of the phase 2 participants – see previous chapter) the deeper story of government inaction on housing for decades is not explored once a scapegoat is identified. In the same way, as Newcomers' trauma from bad actors around the world gives us a safe scapegoat, it releases us collectively from addressing the barriers created and maintained in our system.

When we combine this analysis with the analysis on self-care as a strategy, the combined story that we rehearse is that clients are the source of the stress in workers' lives, and it is the workers' responsibility to do more to care for themselves. When we add the awareness of differences in citizenship, race and status between the funders, organization leadership, supervisors and workers, a very troubling picture emerges where the system focuses on the needs of those with privilege in Canadian society at the expense of Newcomer women and predominantly Newcomer women of colour.

The concerns raised here about the individualization of systemic problems extend beyond the settlement sector in Canada, and there is a larger conversation in the literature about how systems are increasingly focussing on individual responsibility for larger social barriers. This includes Mitendorf & van Ewijk's (2019) research with social workers navigation of neoliberal contexts; Hamilton's (2014) exploration of how welfare reform has been packaged to the public in a decades long shift from welfare to workfare in Australia and Britain; Cutler, Waine & Brehony's (2007) exploration of the personalization of social services in the UK; Kallinen and Häikiö (2021) critique of the further marginalization of disadvantaged youths' agency in Finland through the focus on individual responsibility for social exclusion and social problems; Berg, Harting & Stronks' (2021) research into the problems with individualisation in public health in

The Netherlands; and, Drury & Dennison's (1999) research into social service employees perceptions of communications with unemployed youth.

While I can see a clear path through this analysis, and a connection to the larger conversation of the individualization of systemic barriers, this is where I need to return to the limitations I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and the scope of this research. In following the social forces at play, there is a significant critique that I believe needs to be made, and, while this was identified by the workers in this organization, and validated by the workers in other agencies in phase 2 of the research, further research on this aspect of systemic discrimination is needed, specific to the settlement sector in Canada.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

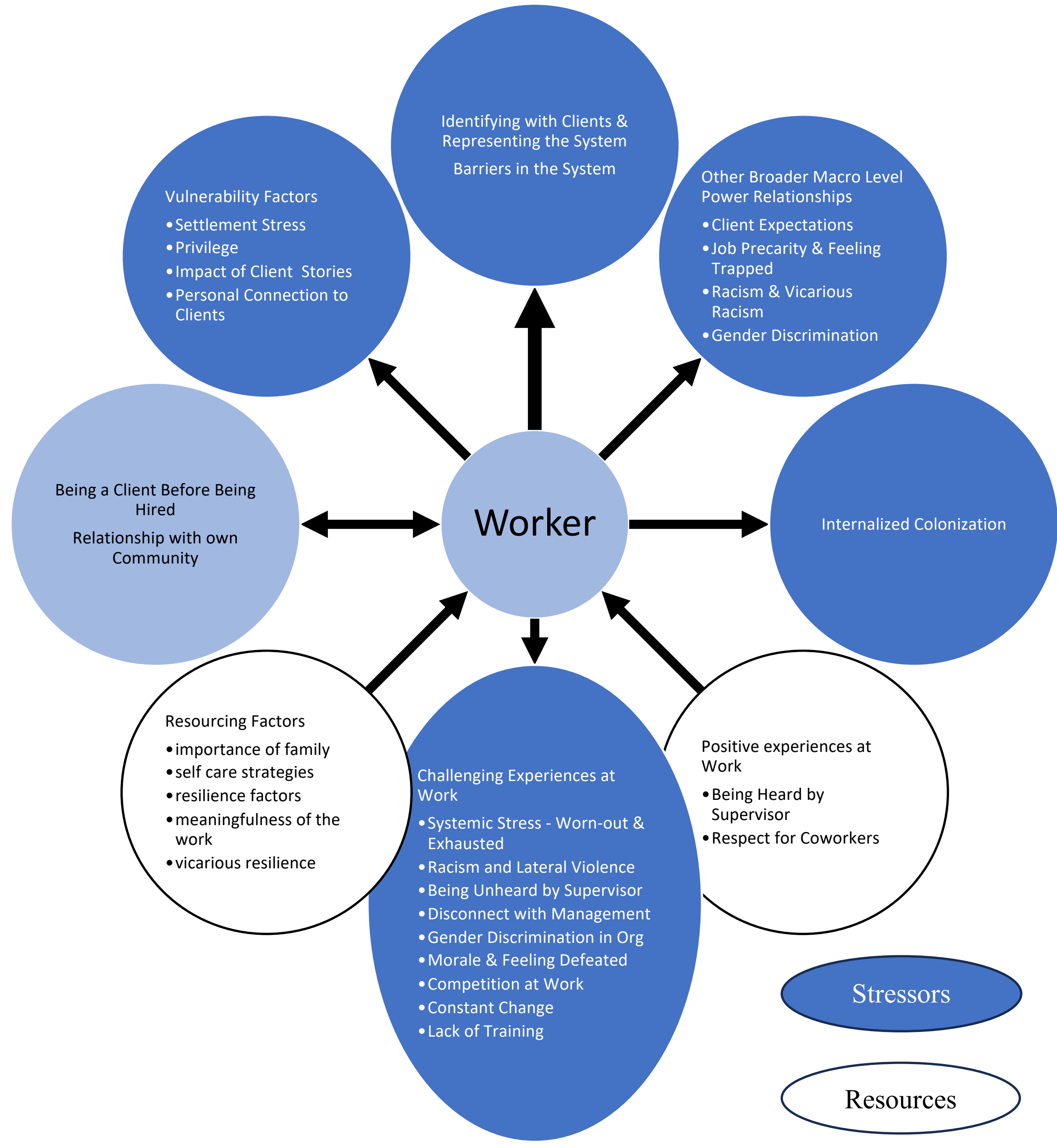
My core research questions were:

1. What are the forces affecting the wellbeing of Newcomer workers in a Canadian settlement sector organization?
2. How can the organization respond in ways that enhance wellbeing for Newcomer staff?

In alignment with CR ontology, my conclusions are primarily concerned with the real social forces acting upon my participants, and my recommendations focus on acts of transformation the participants can do to push back and shape the constructions that are acting upon them, or what the organization can do in altering these social constructions – policies, narratives, relationships that exert forces upon the workers, and engage their own transformation to push back on the system. While these conclusions will be of particular interest to the group of workers in the study, their coworkers, and the organization that employs them, it may also be of interest to other organizations in the settlement sector across Canada for consideration as to their applicability.

Several complex forces act in a multi-layered way to shape workers' wellbeing (see figure 14):

Figure 14: *Eco-map showing the impact on the workers across all the layers*

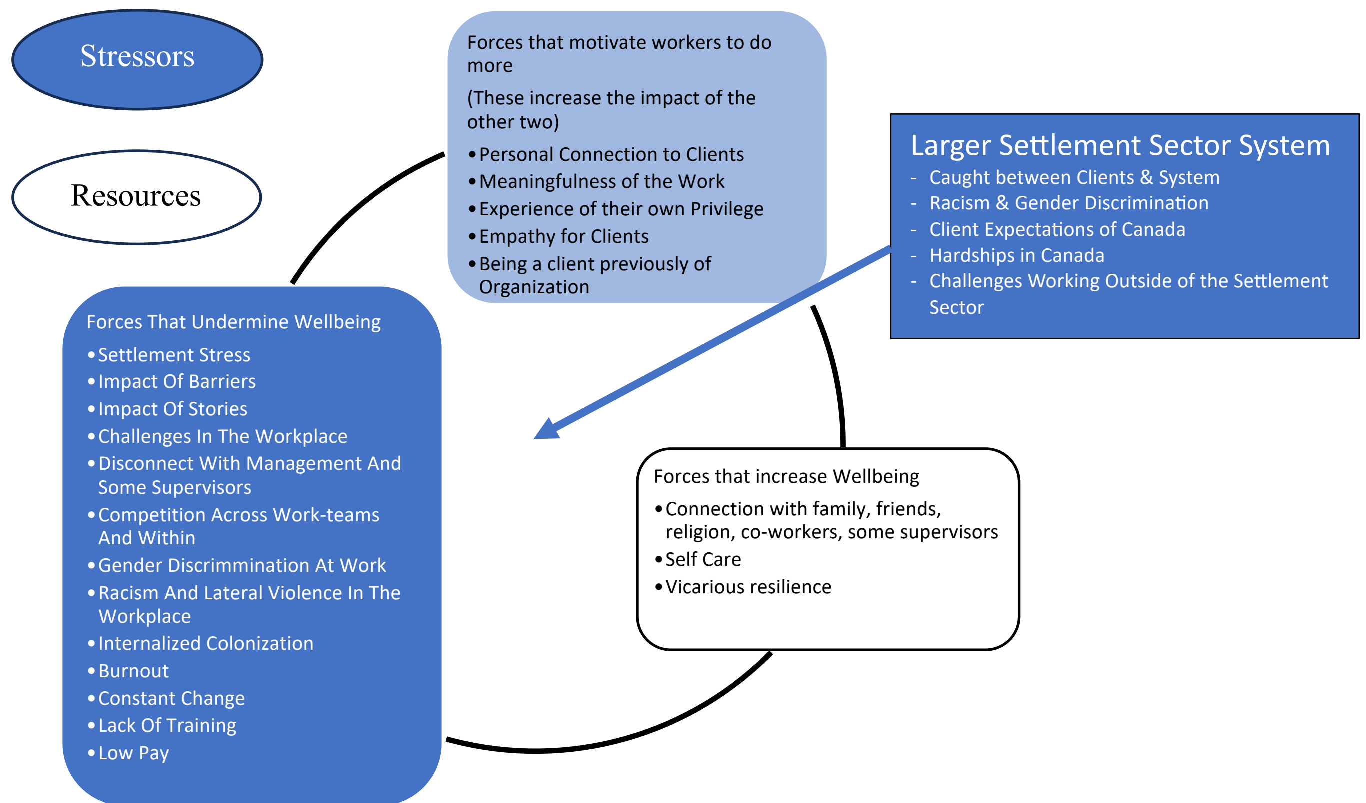


Note: The size and weight of the arrows shows the strength of the impact as identified by the workers, and directionality shows flow of resources to or from the worker.

It is important to remember that all of these forces are acting upon the workers simultaneously and that they are mutually reinforcing (see figure 15). For example, internalized

colonization which the workers in phase 2 referred to restricts their willingness to advocate for themselves or set boundaries with the organization, which exacerbates the challenging experiences at work and the feeling of being caught between the clients and the system. Racism and gender discrimination in Canada further reinforce the experiences of internalized colonization and the stress of all of these forces increase the connections with clients and heighten the vulnerability factors. Indeed, there is a complex web of forces that motivate the workers to continue to do more work in the face of hardships, forces that undermine their wellbeing at home and in the workplace, and forces that the workers engage to manage their stress and increase their wellbeing. All of these forces are encompassed within a larger system that often uses the workers as the scapegoats for systemic barriers and limits the workers' own options for settlement.

Figure 15: *Forces affecting worker wellbeing*



Moving from factors which exert force on the workers, to underlaying forces operating across the system, we see forces of human connection including compassion and community building, engagement with meaning and purpose; mixed with forces towards dehumanizing of workers, clients, supervisors and management, including systemic racism and gender discrimination, reducing people to roles, not acknowledging personal strengths or accomplishments; and forces for survival including competition for scarce resources at the client, worker, team, and organization level and between the levels, resulting in conflicts between clients and workers, between workers themselves, between workers and supervisors/management, between organizations, and between organizations and the Government of Canada. We also see forces at the system level and organization level to resist change and

accountability, and forces at the worker level to reduce conflict. For instance, there is a dominant narrative in the field that locates the source of stress in workers' lives as the pre-migration trauma of the client, and the workers' responsibility for self-care as the main strategy, and, by doing so exerts forces upon the organizations, workers and clients to allocate responsibility to the lower levels of the system and avoid accountability at the higher levels of the system.

Recommendations

Understanding the forces acting upon the workers, there are a number of recommendations that we can make at different levels of the system. While the second half of the research questions privileges recommendations for what an organization can do to positively affect wellbeing for the workers, and I have focussed most of them at this level, I have included recommendations for myself, for the workers, for the organization, and for future research.

My process with the recommendations was to do a preliminary analysis of the findings myself after phase 2, and develop suggested recommendations prior to the focus group in phase 3, where we discussed both the analysis and the findings. Largely the group agreed with my analysis, but they wanted to focus the discussion on the findings. They were clear that they want a good working relationship with their organization and want to have their voices heard, and this includes having a voice in the recommendations. The following recommendations were collaboratively generated during phase 3 of the project, and presented to senior leadership, managers, supervisors and the larger staff of Newcomer workers in separate meetings in phase 4.

Recommendations at my level

I recognize as this part of the project comes to a close, that my work is not finished. While I have completed all of my commitments to my participants, it is now on me to develop

the outcomes of this research into papers for larger distribution. Minimally, I recommend that I develop and submit papers for peer review on the complex web of forces acting upon Newcomer workers' wellbeing in the settlement sector (likely several papers), and that I explore the model I outlined in the discussion chapter connecting experiences of vicarious trauma and acculturation theories. I also am connected with my participants and would like to do follow-up work with them on if and how the recommendations were implemented and what they would like to do, and what needs exist now. I am hopeful that fulfilling my responsibilities to my participants and revisiting this work after the completion of this project, may allow for increased engagement at the worker level. There is also work to do to replicate this study with other organizations in the settlement sector, and build towards a generalizable theory of Newcomer worker wellbeing.

Recommendations at the worker level

While not the purpose of the research, and with the caveat that I do not want to imply that the workers are responsible for cleaning up the systemic stress they experience, I do have recommendations for the workers to consider coming out of this research that may help with their own balance of wellbeing and stress including consciousness raising; empowerment; and caring for self and loved ones.

Within the theme of consciousness raising, to help the workers push back against the dominant narrative that was identified in this research holding workers and clients accountable for the stress the workers face, I recommend that workers continue to reflect and talk with each other about the forces acting upon them collectively that undermine relationships with each other, with their clients, and with their families and communities.

Within the theme of empowerment, the workers in this study identified forces of internalized colonization which encouraged them to say yes when they wanted to say no, and encouraged them to be silent and compliant within the system and the organization. Each worker needs to decide for themselves what relationship they want to have with these forces, and what risks they want to engage. At the same time, I would recommend that workers reflect on these forces and their relationships with these forces and continue to talk with each other and their families and communities about these processes and what they would like to do with them. The workers in Phase 3 agreed with this, and specifically added the need for each of them to choose the battles they are going to fight, and the awareness that you can't fight all of them all of the time, but that that doesn't mean that they are not important.

Within the theme of caring for self and loved ones, the workers identified these key relationships as essential to wellbeing and I recommend that workers give each other the permission to prioritize these relationships. In the workplace this includes fighting for family leave to see extended family overseas, appropriate use of time off for health care needs for self and loved ones, prioritizing breaks at work and connection within and across work teams.

Recommendations at the organization level

Building on the forces identified above at the organization level, there are 10 recommendations that have come out of this study for the organization to consider:

1. Enhance Supervisory Supports

The workers recognize the need for the organization as a whole and the programs they work within to reach the targets set by the funders. The workers are also clear that there are some very positive experiences with some supervisors, but these deteriorate as supervisors become more stressed, more focussed on stats and more competitive across programs. The workers want

enhanced supervisory supports supporting them in their work with clients, debriefing with them, helping them face the barriers in the system.

2. Address the Disconnect between Leadership, Supervisors and Workers

The consensus across participants is that the leadership and many supervisors are outwards (public/funder) facing and the workers are client facing. Workers express that there is little sense of being an organizational team as the organization facing the barriers in the system and would like to know more about how the organization is working to put pressure back on the funders for changes.

3. Create a Culture of Trust and Support

The workers have identified morale as a retention issue, and have identified conflicts between staff and supervisors, between programs, and between workers within a program as detrimental to morale and wellbeing at work. Specifically, this includes:

- Address conflicts within the programs

Participants have identified that there are problematic polarized conflicts between staff based on culture, religion and gender and that complaints about these have gone unaddressed.

- Training on managing personal beliefs in the workplace vs. human rights issues of accessibility of public services free from discrimination on protected grounds

Participants identified that racism and lateral violence is an issue amongst the staff, and are aware of certain groups of clients receiving preferential treatment and privileged access to resources. The participants are asking for training for all staff on human rights rules in Canada and how to manage personal beliefs in the public workplace.

4. Address Competition Within and Between the Teams

The participants identified a growing sense of competition within some programs, where programs are competing against each other, or, workers within programs are being made to compete with each other for who does more work. The workers are asking for supervisors to address favoritism within the teams, and to decrease competition within and across programs, and for managers to give fair attention to all programs under them.

5. Feedback Channels

The participants expressed their perspective that accountability and feedback flows one way (from leadership to the worker) and they lack proper channels to provide feedback (both positive and challenging). The workers are asking for ways to provide feedback without recrimination and would like the opportunity to do 360° evaluations for supervisors and managers.

6. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

The participants shared both positive and challenging experiences with EDI in the organization, and that inclusivity and creating welcoming space for all is vital to wellbeing. They would like the organization to:

- Integrate acceptance of the Human Rights Code of Canada's prohibited grounds for discrimination into the hiring practices so that the organization is hiring for people who agree with and protect these beliefs
- Clarity on policies in the workplace around diversity, removing personal politics from the workplace
- Engage workers' pre-migration experience and expertise into their job roles when able
- Consider needs of LGBTQ+ workers and increase visible inclusion as a workplace strategy

- Training for all staff and management on inclusivity, sexual harassment, working across culture/gender
- Programming for clients on inclusivity and diversity
- Address perception of inequalities based on gender in the workplace (perception that male co-workers are promoted faster, have larger raises; dress code (no jeans in the workplace) is enforced for women, but not men)

7. Increase communication from organization on strategic directions and how organization as a whole is responding to gaps and barriers in the system

The participants' perception is that there is a disconnect between what they are seeing and trying to do with their clients, and what the organization is saying to the funders. This undermines a sense of teambuilding in the organization.

8. Consider policies to support workers who are removed from their families

The participants had a number of suggestions for how a workplace could do this including the possibility of time-off without pay to extend overseas vacations and the possibility of banking vacation time.

9. Encourage the use of sick time/breaks appropriately, review use of sick time for family illness

The participants all talked about pressure to work above and beyond the workday, and to not take breaks or use sick time. They also discussed how hard it is on workers with responsibilities to care for loved ones and requested expansion of sick time to cover needs of loved ones.

10. Undertake a review of workloads and expectations on a regular basis.

Recommendations at the system level

I need to be careful with the scope of this research as with such a small sample, this research is highly relevant to one particular organization, and has been verified by workers at four different agencies in phase 2 as being relevant to their experience as well implying that the outcomes are potentially generalizable, but I am hesitant to make specific recommendations at the system level. More research will need to be done with more workers at different agencies across Canada before we are able to make specific recommendations.

With that caveat about scope, and while recommendations at this level was not the focus of the research question, there are recommendations that may be considered at the system level that flow from the findings and conclusions. The largest theme from the data was that the main source of stress in workers' experiences was the systemic barriers to successful settlement that their clients face. The perception of the workers is that the government is more concerned with showing statistics and success stories of successful settlement to the Canadian public than to engage meaningful change in the system that would support successful settlement for their clients.

At this point, the recommendation that I feel comfortable making is that as there are indications of systemic gaps in the settlement sector in Canada with negative impacts on Newcomers in Canada and Newcomer workers in the system, the Government of Canada through Immigrants, Refugees and Citizenship Canada should undertake research partnerships designed to expand these findings and identify barriers and gaps to successful settlement, and prioritize addressing any that are discovered.

Recommendations for Future Research

Arising out of this research process, there are a number of recommendations for future research.

First, this research was successful at identifying the challenges faced by a particular group of workers within a settlement sector agency at generating understandings for the factors affecting their wellbeing and making specific recommendations at the organization level for change. I recommend that as this study was successful with this group, and there are early indicators of its applicability to settlement sector organizations, that this study be replicated a sufficient number of times at different organizations across Canada to create generalizable findings for Newcomer workers across the settlement sector.

Second, a gap that was identified in my own research process was the impact of lateral violence between Newcomer workers in the settlement sector at this organization, highlighting ingroup conflicts based on race, culture, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation. I recommend that more research be done on this issue specifically across organizations in the settlement sector to identify the scope of the problem, and potential strategies for addressing it.

Reflection on the Limits Encountered in Research Process and the Use of PAR

In the discussion chapter I reflected on my disappointments that the cohesive research group did not materialize in the focus groups as I had hoped, and, at the same time, participants were active in adapting and adding to the interview guides, sharing their experiences in the interviews, analyzing and responding to the aggregate data, strategizing about next steps leading to the action sequence of cycle 1, receiving and analyzing the data from phase 2, and strategizing about the subsequent action steps in phase 3.

Part of the tension for me in this is the inherent conflict between truly integrated PAR and the dissertation process. I would have loved to have started with a cohesive group of interested workers, workshopped with them what they were curious about and what literature we may want to reflect on and explore, collaboratively design the research process and implement it, share the analyzing and interpretation of the data. While I was able to do a version of many of these steps, the process inherent in a dissertation requiring the literature review and methodology to be done as part of the proposal, which needs to be approved prior to the ethics application, and the ethics application requiring prior knowledge of the interview guide; limits the collaborative nature of a PAR dissertation, and challenges anti-oppressive research practices. I am not saying there should not be oversight of dissertations, especially with marginalized groups – just a recognition that the oversight process changes the research process whereby the researcher is more focussed on the needs of the hierarchy within the academic sphere than on the needs of the participants. If this dissertation is successful, what this means is that this process can and should be changed for future cycles with the same group, and for future replications of the research with other groups.

Final Reflection

There is a quote from one of the phase 2 participants that has stayed with me. In response to reading all the participants experiences from phase 1, she said:

> That's a timebomb. That's a volcano waiting to erupt. And that needed to be done way, way, way, [trails off], there has been such great need, but it needs a lot of courage to do so. There is a book – the courage to be hated. I wonder if this is what you are doing.

In family therapy theory, we sometimes talk about type 1 changes (changing surface details) and type 2 changes (changing underlying structures). One way to tell that type 2 change is taking place is that it perturbs the system, and meets with forces of resistance. I believe this participant is saying this research, and the stories the workers told, will likely be met with resistance, and therefore, it is an act of transformation. I also believe that the settlement sector is made up of wonderful people at all levels, and that organizations want ways to help their workers out as well as their clients. I don't expect that all the recommendations will be able to be followed up on immediately, but I do believe that this process has strengthened voice among the participants, and that is meaningful to me.

I have grown significantly through this process. I have become a researcher. I have learned about theories of reality and creating congruence between being, knowing and doing, and I have applied them to my academic life as well as to my work as a clinician. I have learned about anti-oppressive research practices and participatory action research and have worked a PAR project through 2 cycles. I have critically reflected on the roles that I take professionally, and as an ally and outgroup researcher, and I have experienced the continual balancing of role, privilege and power in that process. I have seen this dissertation through to the end and internalized the process of creating congruence between hypotheses, existing understandings, methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations. I have learned about my own neurodivergence and what it takes to focus through a process like this, and I have integrated the essential importance to get beyond my own awareness and bias, and the impacts and missed opportunities that happen when I/we fail to do so.

This was the work I should have done at the beginning in my previous work role – engaging research as praxis leading towards transformation of systems. I spent considerable time

in this program trying to differentiate what it meant to be a researcher versus being a therapist, and the ethics of each approach. This is still a work in progress, and depending on how one does research, these differences can be maximized or minimized. One of the main ethical challenges for me as a researcher was the purpose of the research, and who benefits from it, at whose expense. Engaging anti-oppressive research practices and participatory action research processes helped mitigate that ethical dilemma, and for me it combines the purpose of research with the purpose of community building from a Narrative Therapy perspective. As I continue to explore and grow into this new role as researcher, I will keep engaging these concerns.

Moving forwards, I know that I am changed as a result of this process. Sharing the outcomes of the study, beginning with the leadership of the organization and culminating in talking with the larger staff of Newcomer workers, was a transformative experience for me. Engaging this research process allowed me to stand grounded in my conclusions, in the face of potential conflict, in a way that I had not experienced before. I was able to represent the voices of the workers in a way that engaged the leadership meaningfully and evoked compassion; and, connected the workers with each other and their collective experiences. I had not felt that level of confidence in my own process before. Moving forwards, I know that I will continue to engage research as praxis, leading towards transformation.

A few years ago, I had a transformative moment, where I realized that one of my passions is helping others connect with their passions. I love doing therapy. What I love even more is helping students connect with their insight, wisdom and experience and deepen their understanding of being with their clients in change and growth processes. Having experienced this project has opened my eyes to this on a new level, and I want to continue to build my research experience to the point where I can help others engage their passions in this process too.

At this point, there are no Canadian doctoral programs in Couple and Family Therapy. As a result, there is a poverty of relevant Canadian research to inform students' learning and clinical activities, and there are significant challenges for programs to replace retiring faculty. One of my motivators for undertaking this degree is to be able to position my program at the University of Winnipeg to potentially create a doctoral program. Having had the experiences that I have had throughout this research, strengthens this goal for me. I want to continue to engage my own research; I want to kindle the passions of my students to engage theirs; and, I want my program to grow and help transform the field of Couple and Family Therapy in Canada, raising up my students' voices and enabling them to take leadership roles.

I would like to end by thanking all the participants who worked with me through this project and believed in me enough to share their experiences with the hope of positive change and growth. I would like to thank those in my personal and professional life who have believed in me and were patient with me through this process. And I would like to thank myself for being humble about past mistakes, being open to continue to learn, and being dedicated enough for seeing this through. Finally, I would like to thank whoever is reading this, with the hope that there were meaningful connections made and that this process has helped move you towards greater health and understanding.

Appendix

Initial Semi-Structured Interview Questions

(as submitted to University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board):

It is challenging within a Participant Action Research study with semi-structured interviews to give an exhaustive list of the interview questions ahead of time for two reasons: semi-structured interviews begin with standardized researcher questions and then the conversation follows the participants sharing to some degree prior to returning to the next structured question; and, the participants are viewed as co-researchers within PAR and have input into the questions that will be asked.

To balance the underlying values and assumptions of the research design and the need for ethical accountability and oversight to protect the rights and safety of the participants, the principal researcher will propose these questions at the initial focus group to guide discussions into what to ask participants in the semi-structured interviews. Through consensus building processes, the participants will edit this list and may add some of their own curiosities to be explored. It will be made clear at the focus group, and prior to the semi-structured interviews, and during them that participants have the right to pass on any question without prejudice. We will also review confidentiality about their own participation, and also the need to focus their responses on their experiences of their work and not sharing confidential client information.

These questions will be decided upon by the participants who may also add their own questions of interest:

Grand Tour Questions (General, Typical & Specific)

- How did you come to Canada, and how did you start working with other Immigrants and Refugees? (General)
- How has your work with other Newcomers affected you overall? (General)
- How has the way your work has affected you changed compared to when you started working? (Specific)
- When you think about the work you are doing, what feelings and experiences typically come up? (Typical)

- What has changed in you as a result of the work that you do? What changes have others noticed in you after a good day or a hard day at work? (Specific)
- When you've had a hard day… (Typical)
  - what generally causes it?
  - How do you usually take care of yourself, in healthy and unhealthy ways?
- How do your own experiences as an Immigrant or Refugee affect the work that you do with other Newcomers? (Specific)
- How similar are your clients' experiences to your own? What is similar, what is different? (Specific)
- What is it like for you to be able to use your own experience coming to Canada to help others? (Specific)
- How does your work help you feel healthy and whole? (Specific)
- What are some challenging experiences you have had working with other refugees? (Specific).
- How do these experiences affect other parts of your life in good and bad ways? Relationships? Parenting? Friendships? Community? Spirituality? (Specific)
- What changes have you seen in the people around you as a result of the work they've done, in either hard or meaningful ways? (Specific)
- What helps you manage the hard times at work? (Specific)
- What have you noticed that has helped others at work? (Specific)
- What do other people not understand about the importance of the work you do? (Specific)

- What about your workplace is already helping support you in the work that you do? (Specific)
- What could supervisors and directors do better to help you feel healthier while you do your work? (Specific)

Final Semi-Structured Interview Guide

General Impact

- How did you come to Canada, and how did you start working with other Immigrants and Refugees?
- How has your work with other Newcomers affected you overall?
- How has the way your work has affected you changed compared to when you started working?
- When you think about the work you are doing, what feelings and experiences in you typically come up?
- How have changes in the system affected you?
- What has changed in you as a result of the work that you do?
    - What changes have others noticed in you after a good day or a hard day at work?
- What changes have you seen in the people around you as a result of the work they've done, in either hard or meaningful ways?
- How prepared do you feel each day to face the work that you do?

Challenging

- What are some challenging experiences you have had working with other Newcomers?
    - Why were they Challenging?
    - Are there personal factors that come up for you while you work that you would like to mention? (family, loneliness, loss, trauma?)
- When you've had a hard day…
    - what generally causes it?
    - How do you usually take care of yourself, in healthy and unhealthy ways?

Meaningful

- What clients do you like to work with and why?
- What connects you with your clients? How often do you think about that?

- How do your own experiences as an Immigrant or Refugee affect the work that you do with other Newcomers?
    - How similar are your clients' experiences to your own? What is similar, what is different?
    - What is it like for you to be able to use your own experience coming to Canada to help others?
- When do you feel appreciated for the work that you do in genuine ways?

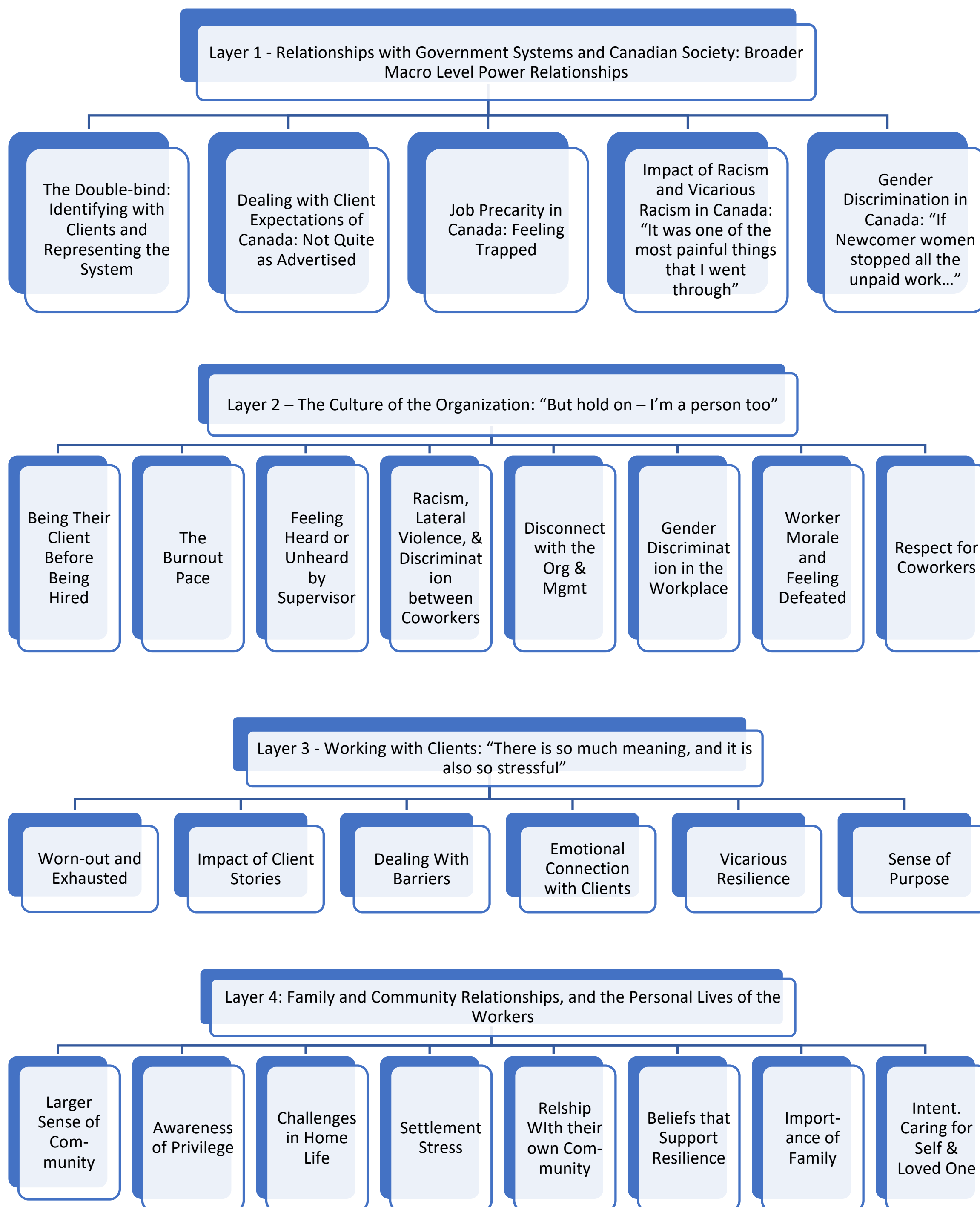
Integration with rest of life

- How do these experiences affect other parts of your life in good and bad ways? Relationships? Parenting? Friendships? Community? Spirituality?
- What do other people not understand about the importance of the work you do?

Wellbeing

- What in life helps keep you sane?
- How does your work help you feel healthy and whole?
    - What helps you manage the difficult times at work?
    - What have you noticed that has helped others at work?
- What about your workplace is already helping support you in the work that you do?
    - What could supervisors and directors do better to help you feel healthier while you do your work?

Full Thematic Network



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